

Current Trends in al-Qaeda and Global Jihad Activity

Yoram Schweitzer

Introduction

In recent years, a serious academic discussion about the al-Qaeda organization (or AQC – al-Qaeda Central) has been underway, one that has also found its way into the popular media. It has focused on whether AQC has ceased functioning as an active organization and turned into an icon only, and whether its role as leader of the global jihad has been assumed by a mass movement run by a network of people, groups, and organizations whose members have undergone a process of self-radicalization.¹ A response to this question may be found in an analysis of the activities of al-Qaeda and its affiliates, but also depends on understanding the concept of struggle according to al-Qaeda and its relationship with its affiliates. Al-Qaeda views itself as the leader of the global jihad movement and as a role model for its affiliates. As such, the organization has sought to stage dramatic and innovative terrorist attacks that pave the way for its collaborators, without insisting on exclusivity for acts undertaken in the name of global jihad. Moreover, al-Qaeda has encouraged independent activity, which is often carried out without its approval or knowledge.

Al-Qaeda, well aware of its limited power and resources, has always viewed its own terrorist acts and the terrorist acts it encourages others to undertake as a tool to launch an historic process whose final objective is restoring Islam to its former primacy and glory. Al-Qaeda does not feel it necessary to carry out many attacks, and prefers to focus on a limited number of showcase attacks. Terrorism, viewed by al-Qaeda as “propaganda in

action,” is the first in a chain reaction meant to enhance its destructive and moral effect and launch a sophisticated, global propaganda system. This system is directed by the organization with the assistance of its production company, al-Sahab, through internet sites and Arab satellite channels headed by al-Jazeera. It is no coincidence that al-Qaeda contributes as many resources and efforts to al-Jazeera as it does to terrorist attacks.

The discussion that follows focuses on the central arenas where al-Qaeda and its global jihad affiliates were active in 2008; an assessment of the expected trends in their activities in coming years; and an examination of the threat they represent to Israel’s security. The terrorism threat to Israel from al-Qaeda and other global jihadists largely depends on the status of these groups vis-à-vis the intensive global system laboring to eliminate them. Despite their centrality in al-Qaeda’s enemy ideology and rhetoric, Israel and the Jews do not top the list of priorities of al-Qaeda or its affiliates, particularly because of the limits of these organizations to operate against an array of enemies deployed on many fronts. To date, not many Israeli or Jewish targets have been attacked.²

Al-Qaeda and their Affiliates: Theaters of Activity

In recent years, al-Qaeda and its affiliates have focused their activities primarily in Iraq and the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as other local arenas.

Iraq

The American-led coalition invasion into Iraq supplied al-Qaeda with a golden opportunity to extricate itself from its difficult position and the pressure exerted on it after the severe blow it and its Taliban sponsors suffered following the 9/11 attacks.

Al-Qaeda did not invest the bulk of its resources or dedicate its most senior commanders to the war in Iraq, and most have remained protected in Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly in the border area between them. However, al-Qaeda commanders have invested significant informational/propaganda efforts to stress the extreme importance of the campaign in Iraq as the central arena for the contest between the Islamic world, led by global jihadists, and the West together with its Arab allies. With the assistance of

recruiting and logistics networks directed by supporters around the world, the struggle in Iraq has become a locus attracting Muslim volunteers worldwide seeking to join the jihad activity there. Moreover, the fighting in Iraq over the past five years has largely drawn the coalition forces' attention away from their initial objectives and depleted the resources – in terms of money, manpower, equipment, and time – allocated to wage a focused war against al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The massive presence of Western forces in Iraq has helped al-Qaeda operate its affiliates in the country against the invaders. The fact that “the distant enemy” (i.e., the United States and its allies) came to a region considered to be holy Muslim ground (*wakf*) in the heart of the Arab Levant gave al-Qaeda home court advantage in attacks. In addition, it helped strengthen its basic narrative: the prosecution of a holy war by means of legitimate “armed military resistance.” Al-Qaeda took advantage of this opportunity to prepare highly skilled cadres with combat experience and train them in terrorist and guerilla warfare for future use in the global jihad. Furthermore, the fighting in Iraq afforded al-Qaeda an opportunity to demonstrate and entrench the act of self-sacrifice to Allah (*istishhadia*) that has become its trademark through intensive use of suicide attackers, most of them from the ranks of the foreign volunteers, who were sent to their targets by al-Qaeda in Iraq³ (figure 1).

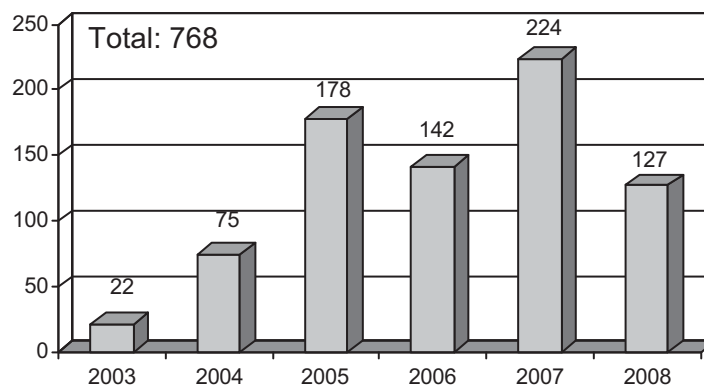


Figure 1. Suicide Attacks in Iraq 2003-2008

Source: Terrorism and Low Intensity Warfare Project database at the Institute for National Security Studies

The fighting in Iraq has provided al-Qaeda's elaborate and effective propaganda machine with a wealth of visual material documenting the terrorist and guerilla activities against the foreign forces. In recent years, these materials have served al-Qaeda in its psychological warfare as it celebrates its heroic narrative of the "Muslim mujahidin" rendering powerful blows against the invading "infidels." There is no doubt that the raw materials photographed during the fighting in Iraq, posted on many internet sites around the world identified with the global jihad, represent one of the concrete achievements of the organization and are likely to serve it in the future.

The removal of Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq did not hurt al-Qaeda, as it had in any case viewed him as one of the heretical Muslim leaders who do not lead their lives according to the laws of Islam. However, the rise of the Shiites to the top of the Iraqi regime and their cooperation with the United States and its allies turned them into a legitimate target of attack. Many Iraqi citizens, particularly those who joined the new regime and the security and police forces, were also placed on al-Qaeda's enemy list in Iraq and massive terrorism was used against them.

Al-Qaeda operatives' murderous activities and provocative conduct in Iraq against the local population have angered many Iraqi citizens. Thus starting in late 2005,⁴ a rift gradually occurred between al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq and the heads of the Sunni tribes there who until then cooperated with them. The revolt of these Sunni tribal leaders, dubbed "the revival of the Anbar movement," was supported and funded by the US and coalition forces that were strengthened by the surge,⁵ and with the help of Iraqi security forces, bore fruit and helped to weaken al-Qaeda. Last year symbolized a further and more advanced stage of al-Qaeda's weakened capabilities in Iraq. Based on more recent assessments submitted by senior American officers and administration personnel, a guarded analysis suggests that the organization is on the brink of collapse in most parts of Iraq.⁶

Another expression of the organization's weakness and the blow rendered to its operatives is the rise in 2008 in al-Qaeda's use of female suicide bombers, the highest in comparison with previous years (figure

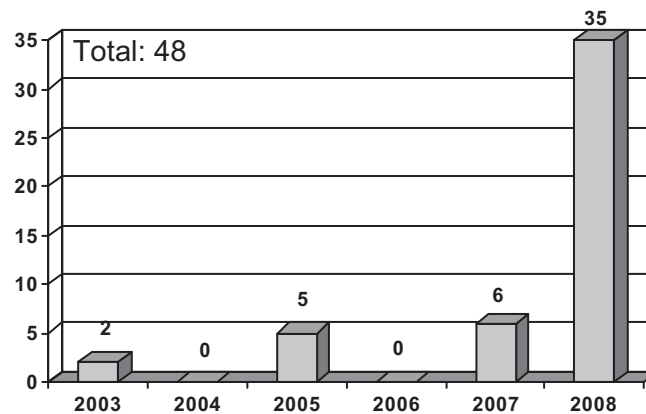


Figure 2. Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq, 2000-2008

Source: Terrorism and Low Intensity Warfare Project database at the Institute for National Security Studies

2). Such a step usually attests to operational difficulties in organizations dispatching suicide missions. In addition, al-Qaeda's declaration of the establishment of Islamic alternatives in Iraq in 2005, supported by AQC, has remained an empty slogan, in part because of the organization's current distress.

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the FATA border region

In recent years al-Qaeda has strengthened its hold on the FATA no man's land and enhanced its infrastructure there. The area is formally under Pakistani sovereignty, but functions largely as an ex-territorial autonomous region with the central government in Islamabad wielding no authority over it, both because of its topography and its unique ethnic composition. As far as is known, this is the area where Bin Laden and most of the senior al-Qaeda operatives are in hiding, along with members of the former Taliban regime who fled there in late 2001. This region serves as a base for the planning of the joint activities of al-Qaeda and the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban.⁷ Since this is presumably the al-Qaeda and Taliban stronghold, the past year saw clashes between Pakistani military forces and Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters. Furthermore, judging that Pakistan has not taken sufficient steps against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the US has carried out aerial attacks there.⁸

Over the last two years the relationship between al-Qaeda and the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban has grown much closer, to the extent of establishment of joint war rooms, joint planning and participation in raids, and joint fighting against Pakistani regular forces.⁹ The most obvious expression of al-Qaeda's influence on the activities of the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban was the upgrading of the terrorist attacks perpetrated by these elements within Afghani and Pakistani cities. The two organizations added suicide bombing to their repertoire and made it into a primary combat tactic. This was particularly obvious in Afghanistan, which until recent years did not suffer from this type of activity, not even during the ten years of warfare against the Soviet military (1979-89), during the civil war that raged until the Taliban took charge, or during the years of Taliban rule. Starting in 2005, with al-Qaeda's assistance and encouragement, Afghanistan was flooded by a wave of dozens of suicide bombings (figure 3), and in some cases it was possible to trace the direct involvement of senior al-Qaeda personnel.¹⁰ The total of 249 suicide bombings in Afghanistan in 2005-2008 is an extraordinarily high number relative to other arenas in the Middle East and around the world, with only Iraq in the same league. Most of the suicide bombers, young Pakistanis recruited at *madrassas*, are joined by a small number of foreign volunteers dispatched by the Taliban, with al-Qaeda's fingerprints all over this activity.

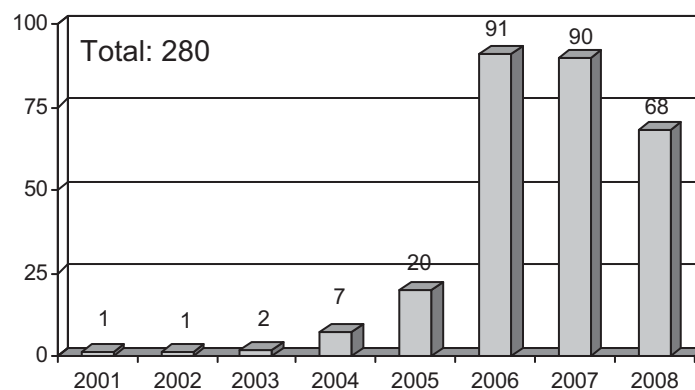


Figure 3. Suicide Bombings in Afghanistan, 2000-2008

Source: Terrorism and Low Intensity Warfare Project database at the Institute for National Security Studies

Pakistan too, which in the past experienced only a small number of sporadic suicide bombings within its borders, has over the last two years seen a sharp increase in the number of suicide attacks carried out under the influence of the association between al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban (figure 4). Al-Qaeda has been directly linked – and took public credit – for the suicide attack that took place at the Danish embassy in Islamabad on June 2, 2008, in which eight people were killed and twenty-seven injured.¹¹ Al-Qaeda had specifically threatened Denmark in response to a cartoon in a Danish newspaper that the organization deemed an insult to Islam and offensive to the prophet Muhammad.¹² Furthermore, al-Qaeda, led by the head of the organization's operational division in Pakistan, Osama al-Kini,¹³ staged a brazen attack at the Marriott Hotel, which killed fifty-four, including five foreigners – among them the Czech ambassador – and injured 266.¹⁴

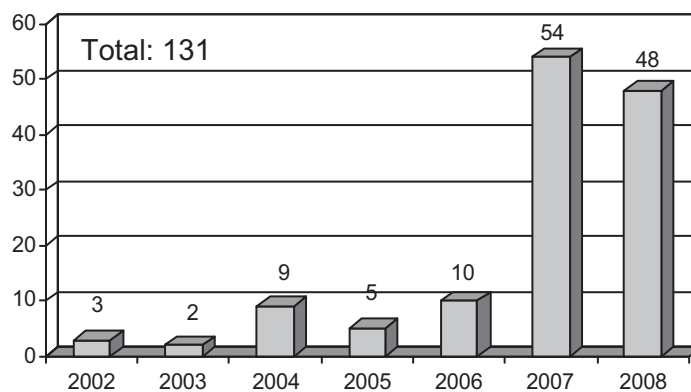


Figure 4. Suicide Bombings in Pakistan, 2000-2008

Source: Terrorism and Low Intensity Warfare Project database at the Institute for National Security Studies

Al-Qaeda Influence on Terrorism in Other Arenas

Al-Qaeda has invested significant efforts in uniting the various jihad movements under a single umbrella organization. This was meant to close ranks among the militant Islamic organizations that identify with the idea of global jihad so as to be better able to plan and coordinate their activities

and promote their joint agenda. This trend is not new, and occurred already when the organization started to launch independent suicide bombings in 1998. That same year al-Qaeda launched the umbrella organization called the International Front for Jihad against the Crusaders and the Jews, and in June 2001, the formal unification between al-Qaeda and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, commanded by Ayman Zawahari, was made public, and Qaedat al-Jihad was founded.

In recent years, al-Qaeda has also established relationships with various umbrella organizations, in particular with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which includes operatives from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Mauritania, and of course al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia (al-Qaeda in Iraq), which includes Iraqi, Kurdish, and Jordanian operatives as well as volunteers from other Muslim countries. By virtue of these alliances and through their reciprocal ties with al-Qaeda,¹⁵ these organizations have upgraded their level of operational activity. This has expanded their scope of activity and the inclusion of strategic, political, and financial targets for attack, such as political leaders, energy targets, infrastructures, tourist areas, and international and foreign military forces, with of course suicide bombing – al-Qaeda's trademark – as the preferred method.

While al-Qaeda's activity in Iraq since the 2003 war is well known, its activity in the Islamic Maghreb has aroused growing interest in recent years because of the rise in volume and quality of operations. Its major though not exclusive locus of activity has been Algeria. Since the local organization announced its unification with al-Qaeda in January 2007,¹⁶ it has upgraded the level of its targets to the most senior echelon of the Algerian regime (the president and prime minister) and the country's institutions (the Supreme Court). Furthermore, it has extended its activity against foreign and UN targets.¹⁷ After the unification, the organization started to stage suicide attacks along the al-Qaeda model. Al-Qaeda had similar influence on the Moroccan branch of the umbrella organization, and it too has intensified its activity in recent years, with several attempts at suicide bombings against targets in the Moroccan regime and security establishment as well as activity against foreigners.¹⁸ Some were realized and some were foiled.¹⁹ Additional terrorist activity was carried out by the umbrella organization in Tunisia (the hostage taking of Austrian

tourists) and Mauritania (a shooting attack against the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott).

Another al-Qaeda theater has been the Arabian Peninsula.²⁰ In Saudi Arabia, authorities succeeded in foiling terrorist activities of the local branch of al-Qaeda by arresting many members of the organization and by launching an aggressive counter-propaganda and reeducation campaign within areas supporting al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Further south, the activity of Islamic Jihad in Yemen (IJY) stood out in particular this year. Even though this organization is not under the direct command of al-Qaeda, it did adopt al-Qaeda's agenda, especially after 2007 when Bin Laden's former secretary became its leader.²¹ Along with attacks against senior governmental targets in Yemen, the organization staged a dramatic suicide attack against the American embassy in Sana'a in September 2008, killing nineteen.²² In his annual security estimate, the head of the CIA noted that global jihad organizations are growing stronger in both Yemen and Saudi Arabia.²³

Africa too is an important arena of activity for al-Qaeda, and the organization, as it is wont to do, is nurturing its prior connections with local organizations and former operatives to help carry out attacks in Kenya, Tanzania, and Somalia. The breakdown of the central government in Somalia has encouraged the growth of local jihad organizations, some of which have carried out suicide bombings against institutional targets including the presidential palace, and foreign targets such as the Ethiopian embassy and UN offices in which twenty-eight people were killed, including a senior in the Somaliland (Somalia's northern provinces) government and UN personnel.²⁴

The Islamic Jihad in Uzbekistan (IJU) is another organization to whom al-Qaeda has grown closer and that has accordingly refined its activity to match the agenda of global jihad. This organization broke away from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) because of internal differences as to whether to focus on the Islamic agenda in Uzbekistan or to dedicate itself to global Islamic activity, and in recent years has operated in the FATA region alongside Taliban and al-Qaeda forces.²⁵ Its operatives have participated in attacks in Uzbekistan, Germany, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. For example, the attack in Afghanistan was committed by a German citizen

of Turkish descent who carried out a suicide bombing against American soldiers.²⁶ Also, a dramatic attack against American targets in Germany, including a military base and a club frequented by American soldiers, was foiled.²⁷ The attack was supposed to be carried out by a terrorist network recruited, trained, and operated from afar by the organization. In Europe, security forces still view terrorist networks directed by al-Qaeda and global jihadists as an acute threat, after the exposure in 2008 of a number of terrorist networks in Belgium, Spain, Germany, and Turkey.²⁸

Al-Qaeda, Global Jihad, and Israel

Activity against Israel and Jews abroad

Al-Qaeda's difficulties in carrying out dramatic and spectacular terrorist attacks against its enemies abroad and its focus on central arenas of battle where it is active has also affected its ability to act against Israel, certainly within Israeli sovereign territory and against secured Israeli targets abroad. On the other hand, attacking Jewish targets throughout the world is easier because of the relative weakness of their defensive measures and because they represent an attractive target for al-Qaeda. Nonetheless, because of its priorities, it seems that al-Qaeda has been forced, at least for now, to leave these targets to its ideological affiliates.

Even when al-Qaeda's mechanism for foreign operations was at the peak of its activity, the organization's attacks were few but particularly painful. Among the most prominent were: the 2002 suicide bombing of the Tunis synagogue that killed fourteen (none of the casualties were members of the Jewish community); suicide attacks on two synagogues in Istanbul that killed twenty-seven, six of whom were Jews (2003); the suicide attack on Israeli tourists at the Paradise Hotel in Kenya, with thirteen dead, three of them Israelis, two of whom were siblings, and a concomitant failed attempt to bring down an Arkia airplane using surface-to-air missiles (2003). In addition, a number of attacks planned, directed, or assisted by al-Qaeda were foiled; most noteworthy of these were the attempts in Australia (2000), Singapore (2001), and Thailand (2002).²⁹

In 2008, there were two attacks against Israeli targets abroad, not by al-Qaeda operatives but through its affiliates. The first attack was carried out by a cell that fired at the Israeli embassy building in Nouakchott,

Mauritania. In the attack five people were wounded, all local citizens and workers. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb took responsibility for the attack.³⁰ The second attack took place in Mumbai and was carried out by Lashkar al-Toiba as part of a wide scale operation directed against local Indian and tourist targets, which included the Chabad House, associated with Israel. The attack ended with the death of over 160 people, among them some thirty foreign citizens, including six Israelis and Jews. To date, it has not been possible to establish al-Qaeda's direct involvement in the operation, but it is known that Lashkar al-Toiba has contact with al-Qaeda and that in the past, its people gave logistical support to the attack on the synagogue in Tunis. Furthermore, the organization has of late expanded its activities and upgraded its targets in accordance with the global jihad agenda.³¹ In recent years Bin Laden and his deputy Ayman Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's most prominent spokesman, launched only intense verbal attacks against Israel and Jews. These attacks have of course been made in the context of Jews belonging to the "Crusader-Jewish pact" against Muslims, and in particular in light of Israel's policy with regard to the Palestinians.³² Because Israel is seen by al-Qaeda as entirely dependent on the United States for its existence, the organization views the weakening and expulsion of the United States from the Middle East as the move that will necessarily bring about the disappearance of the Zionist entity. This is another possible explanation for Israel's relatively low place on the organization's list of terrorist priorities. On the other hand, al-Qaeda understands very well that any terrorist attack carried out against Israel will reap significant propaganda value in terms of the public opinion of the Arab and Muslim world, whose support is especially important in light of the increasing criticism of the organization regarding its attacks that fail to discriminate between civilian, Western, and Arab targets and have caused a large number of Muslim casualties.

Al-Qaeda seeks to encroach on Israel

It seems that through its regional affiliates, al-Qaeda has intensified its efforts to penetrate Israel's borders in order to inflict harm on Israeli citizens. It has also tried to attack Israelis visiting Arab countries that have diplomatic relations with Israel.³³ A few years ago a number of attacks

against Israeli tourists, attributed to global jihadists, were carried out in Jordan and Egypt, and especially in Sinai.

Rockets fired in the past towards Israel from Jordan and Lebanon should be seen in this context, and Lebanon continues to be the arena for global jihadists involved in rocket attacks against Israel. In 2008 too, a number of rockets were fired towards northern Israel from Lebanon; the launches were attributed to the al-Ansar Divisions identified with global jihad.³⁴ During the IDF operation in the Gaza Strip (December 27, 2008 – January 17, 2009), a number of rockets were fired from southern Lebanon towards northern Israel, while others were discovered before being launched.³⁵ At this stage, it is not clear if the attackers were global jihadists, but the threat of continued rocket fire towards Israel remains. Interestingly, Bin Laden, who views Lebanon as a convenient springboard to harm Israel, has violently condemned Hizbollah and Iran, calling them allies in the American-Israeli plot in planning the Second Lebanon War whose purpose was ostensibly to prevent al-Qaeda and its affiliates from approaching Israel from Lebanon's southern border by means of the subsequent ceasefire agreement formulated in UN Security Council Resolution 1701.³⁶ While his notion of a fourfold plot sounds surreal, it reflects his frustration with his affiliates' limitations in attacking Israel from Lebanon, and at the same time clearly expresses his intentions. Another arena for locals identified with the global jihad stream is the Gaza Strip, where there are a number of groups such as the Army of Islam (relying mostly on members of the Dughmouh clan), the Sword of Islam, and the Army of the Believers – al-Qaeda in Palestine. These groups, whose size is unknown or estimated to consist of a few dozen operatives at most, engage in sporadic activity, from firing Qassam rockets and kidnapping foreign citizens to burning schools, harassing internet cafés, and acting as the morality police.³⁷

Al-Qaeda's hope that Hamas' June 2007 takeover of the Gaza Strip would allow its own supporters more convenient access to engage in anti-Israel activity was not fulfilled. Because of its desire to be the sole ruler of the Gaza Strip, Hamas has prevented groups in the Strip identified with global jihad to act against Israel autonomously and without its permission, out of concern that such a situation might embroil it with Israel at a disadvantageous time and place. Speaking to the Knesset Foreign Affairs

and Defense Committee, the head of Israeli intelligence said that while Hamas has enabled al-Qaeda operatives from abroad to enter the Gaza Strip³⁸ and has even allowed groups identified with it to shoot rockets towards Israel from time to time, whenever any of them has challenged its authority, Hamas has not hesitated to use brutal force to suppress the challenge, as happened with the Dughmouh clan.³⁹

In the past year, attempts to band together into cells to carry out attacks were exposed also in the West Bank region and among Israeli Arabs of Bedouin descent identified with global jihad, but these were foiled in time.⁴⁰ The difficulties al-Qaeda has in operating against Israel across Israel's borders stems from the fact that Israel's neighbors, foremost Egypt and Jordan, who are also fighting the growing threat of global jihad against their own regimes and within their sovereign territories, are acting decisively to stop al-Qaeda activity and to protect their citizens and the tourists visiting their countries. Syria and Lebanon are likewise engaged aggressively in attempts to foil global jihadist intentions to operate against Israel within their own territory and areas they control, out of a concern of entering into confrontations with Israel. Even Hamas acts aggressively in the same spirit, and it seems that it will continue this policy into the future as well, unless circumstances change radically.

Conclusion

Loci of global threats

From the vantage point of late 2008, it is clear that despite the ongoing efforts of the international coalition against terrorism to overcome al-Qaeda and its affiliates, these are still far from conceding defeat and may be expected to be the primary threat in terms of international terrorist activity in the years to come. The main threat from terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates stems from their desire to affect the entire system of international relations and to undermine the current world order. To do so, they do not hesitate to carry out mass terrorist attacks of a level unknown in the past against anyone opposed to their worldview and chosen path.

There are a number of critical threat areas with long term significance from al-Qaeda and their cohorts in the coming years:

*Intensified activity in uncontrolled areas in fragile states.*⁴¹ Al-Qaeda and global jihadists are particularly active in places where there are Muslim populations and the central government lacks full control and effective enforcement capabilities. They take advantage of this situation to foment trouble among the local populace and to recruit volunteers into their ranks. It thus appears that in the coming years the central arena of struggle of al-Qaeda and its Taliban partners will likely be in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda is preparing for the intensification of the expected war against it and its Taliban associates on the part of NATO forces, the United States military, and Pakistani forces, reflected in the declarations of senior American officials in the new administration and in the decision to send thousands more American soldiers into the region.⁴² Al-Qaeda is also expected to contribute to the ongoing spate of suicide bombings in Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to undermine the stability of the ruling regimes of these countries.

Activity to undermine the regimes of central Muslim states, primarily Pakistan – a nuclear weapons state. A primary threat coming from al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the border area is that the security situation in Pakistan and its surroundings may deteriorate and ultimately result in the rise to power of radical Islamic elements instead of the current president, Zardari. Such a scenario is liable to allow radical elements access to the country's arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Absorbing new cadres from Iraqi alumni and sending them to the West. Al-Qaeda can be expected to assimilate into its ranks new volunteers from all over the world, and in particular fighters who are veterans of the war in Iraq in order to send them into areas of conflict involving Muslims. At the same time, it will likely train the most suitable new recruits to operate under the cover of their foreign citizenships, European or other, to carry out terrorist attacks abroad, whether under the command of al-Qaeda's dedicated terrorist mechanism abroad or as part of independent global jihad terrorist networks.

Efforts to carry out showcase, mass casualty attacks in a Western country. An attack on that order of magnitude would again place al-Qaeda on the map of international terrorism and serve as model for its affiliates.

Al-Qaeda's success in carrying out a dramatic large scale terrorist attack in the near future is largely dependent on its ability to rehabilitate its special division for terrorist attacks abroad. This group was heavily damaged in recent years by the assassinations and arrests of many of its senior commanders and most experienced veteran operatives. It would seem that al-Qaeda is not going to relinquish the notion of staging such an attack, despite the constraints and pressures applied to it, in order to continue fulfilling its vanguard role. It largely depends on the creation of the suitable operational conditions in one of the arenas where the organization is active. In its annual security estimate, the CIA estimated that al-Qaeda was preparing for a dramatic, spectacular attack.⁴³

Continued efforts to undermine the stability of the "heretical" regimes in Middle Eastern countries to replace them with Muslim regimes ruled by Islamic law. On the basis of the "Zawahiri doctrine," al-Qaeda is expected to continue assisting terrorist acts of global jihadists against the leaders of regimes and central government institutions in the Middle East as well as Africa in order to replace them with regimes that uphold Islamic ritual law. Attaining the rule of one or more primary Muslim countries to establish an Islamic regime is one of the cornerstones of Zawahiri's philosophy expressed in his book, *Knights Serving under the Flag of the Prophet*.

Loci of threats against Israel

As long as these trends remain unrealized, the challenge presented by al-Qaeda and its associates to Israel is not aggravated beyond the challenges from other hostile elements surrounding the country.

A practical change in al-Qaeda's priorities. If al-Qaeda changes its priorities and declares Israel to be the next primary arena for global jihad, allocates it resources and manpower, and find its call is answered by its affiliates, the threat level against Israeli interests is liable to worsen. From the present vantage point, it does not seem that al-Qaeda has such intentions or abilities.

The highest risk to Israeli and Jewish targets is outside the borders of Israel and is linked to the widened circle of attackers. The attack in Mumbai by one of al-Qaeda's affiliates that hitherto had never directly

attacked a target identified with Israel is a further reminder that there is a risk that other organizations from the same ideological stream will join the circle of terrorists attacking Jewish or Israeli targets abroad. It is difficult to estimate how the horrific photographs from Operation Cast Lead together with the venomous anti-Israeli commentary broadcast via propaganda networks, especially Arab and Muslim media, might affect the decision of al-Qaeda leaders, who also joined in these attacks,⁴⁴ to translate this propaganda into action and try to extract revenge from Israelis and Jews. It is possible that al-Qaeda or its affiliates might decide to take advantage of the anti-Israel atmosphere to attack targets identified with Israel in order to earn propaganda points sure to accrue from such actions, and in order to refute claims against them that they are doing nothing to assist the Palestinians other than provide verbal support. Kidnapping of Israelis by factions identified with global jihad, a threat that skyrocketed in the past year,⁴⁵ continues to represent a steady threat because of jihadists' desire to demonstrate their willingness to assist the Palestinians and because of their understanding that such actions would touch a particularly sensitive nerve in Israeli society.

The threat to Israel from global jihadists from across its own borders. This threat is ongoing but is not expected to become more severe unless there are significant changes in Israel's relations with its neighbors, because of the mutual interest of Israel and its neighbors to avoid embroilments between them.

Egypt and Israel see eye-to-eye on the question of the danger posed by the strengthening of global jihadists in Egyptian territory and particularly in the Sinai region. Sinai is not well controlled by Egypt, and therefore the region is prone to trouble. Nonetheless, recently the region has become the focus of more attention on the part of the Egyptian security services and greater vigilance on the part of Israeli intelligence and security services, which repeatedly issue warnings to Israeli citizens to avoid visiting recreational sites in Sinai.

Jordan and Israel also share a common interest in preventing any global jihadist activity within the kingdom and from it against Israel, and cooperate closely in order to foil any such eventuality.

In *Lebanon* there is a danger of escalation by global jihadists who have intensified their activities in both northern and southern Lebanon and who from time to time even launch rockets towards Israel. The ability of the Lebanese military to stop their activities will determine the level of threat that these represent for Israel. Paradoxically, Hizbollah shares Israel's interest in preventing the strengthening of global jihadists in Lebanon and having them engage in activity against Israel, especially if this is liable to lead to an armed conflict with Israel, which is not to Hizbollah's advantage.

Syria too does not allow global jihadists to operate against Israel from its territory, first because Syria does not allow any element to operate from within its borders against Israel lest this embroil Syria in a confrontation, and second because it views the jihadists as a threat to Syria's own regime. In the course of 2008, Islamists carried out a number of severe terrorist attacks against the Syrian regime. Nonetheless, the Syrian regime enabled global jihadists to use its territory as a passageway to the fighting in Iraq, and therefore particular alertness on Israel's part is required lest these elements attempt to operate against it, against Syria's wishes, and especially if the political contacts between Syria and Israel succeed in advance of a final settlement within the next few years.

Despite the hostility and violent clashes between *Hamas* and Israel, Hamas' primary interest is presumably in preventing independent activity against Israel that is outside its own control on the part of al-Qaeda and global jihadists operating in the Gaza Strip. This interest outweighs Hamas' desire to harm Israel, and therefore, unless Hamas-Israel relations suffer a steep deterioration, global jihadist organization in the Gaza Strip, and certainly al-Qaeda itself, will not be granted a free hand in operating against Israel from there.

The threat of a showcase terrorist attack on Israeli territory. Despite the limitations regarding the possibility of al-Qaeda or its affiliates staging a dramatic attack on Israeli sovereign territory, it is clear that such an operation continues to represent a desirable goal on their part. Their ability to realize such intentions depends largely on their ability to receive internal assistance, e.g., from Israeli Arabs, Palestinians entering Israel as laborers or as illegal residents, or as has already happened in the past, through

foreign citizens.⁴⁶ To date Israel's security services have succeeded in foiling these intentions, but obviously there is clear and present danger. In recent years, the initiative to act against Israel has come primarily from local Palestinians, and their contacts were in the main with junior ranks of global jihadists and not with al-Qaeda itself. Should this relationship develop, especially with al-Qaeda's mechanism dedicated to staging attacks abroad, the threat level will of course rise.

In conclusion, it seems that Israel's central security challenge is to identify changes in al-Qaeda's agenda in terms of escalating its intentions to act against Israel, and to identify changes in global jihad factions in neighboring countries as well as changes in the regimes' desires to prevent anti-Israel operations from their territories. Although Israel is not high on al-Qaeda's list of priorities, it must prevent the organization from scoring a dramatic terrorist attack, such as a mass casualty attack on a crowded means of transportation (as in Mombassa in 2002), or a fatal attack on an Israeli or Jewish target abroad, and of course prevent the kidnapping of Israelis abroad. A successful attack of that nature would give al-Qaeda and global jihadists leverage to apply pressure on Israel in light of the country's well known sensitivity to the lives of its citizens.

Notes

The author would like to thank Sean London for his help in gathering materials and data.

- 1 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/weekinreview/08sciolino.html>.
- 2 Yoram Schweitzer, "Is al-Qaeda Closing In?" *Strategic Assessment* 10, no. 1 (2007): 36-42.
- 3 Human Rights Watch, in a report dated March 10, 2005, stated that al-Qaeda in Iraq and its satellite organizations are responsible for the vast majority of these attacks. See <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2005/10/02/iraq-insurgent-groups-responsible-war-crimes>. In his 2007 book, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, Muhammad Hafez supports these findings.
- 4 <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/iraq/20070325-1237-fightingbackinanbar.html>.
- 5 <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/29/world/middleeast/29ramadi.html?hp=&pagewanted=all>.

- 6 <http://www.newsweek.com/id/138085>.
- 7 Claudio Franco, *The Evolution of the Taliban in Pakistan during the February-May 2008 Period*, Nefa Foundation, May 21, 2008.
- 8 http://www.nydailynews.com/news/us_world/2007/08/01/2007-08-01_obama_would_send_troops_to_pakistan_to_h.html.
- 9 Franco, *The Evolution of the Taliban in Pakistan*.
- 10 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/08/AR2009010803110.html>.
- 11 <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/06/03/pakistan.blast>.
- 12 <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24976215>.
- 13 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/09/world/asia/09pstan.html>.
- 14 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7627135.stm.
- 15 <http://memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=IA33207>.
- 16 <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2007/01/200852512187219391.html>.
- 17 <http://wits.nctc.gov/>.
- 18 On April 14, 2007, two suicide terrorists tried to enter the American embassy. When a policeman stationed at the entrance refused to let them enter, they blew themselves up. Both terrorists were killed, and one woman was injured in the attack, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6555177.stm.
- 19 There was a string of attacks in March-April 2007. Two terrorists blew themselves up at an internet café on March 11, 2007. According to the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior, during one of the arrests, on April 10, four terrorists detonated their explosive belts and killed themselves and one of the policemen. Moroccan sources reported that the suicides belonged to a cell headed by the terrorist who blew himself up at the internet café in March, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6544163.stm>.
- 20 <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=2&id=15805/>.
- 21 The current head of the organization is Omad Masir al-Waha'yshi, known by his alias abu-Huriya al-Tzanani, who escaped from jail in Yemen in February 2006. See http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=479.
- 22 <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/09/21/news/ML-Yemen-US-Embassy.php>.
- 23 http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/14/washington/14intel.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=C.I.A.%20Chief%20Says%20Qaeda%20Is%20Extending%20Its%20Reach%20&st=cse.
- 24 <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/oct/30/world/fg-somalia30>.
- 25 <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefaijuoct08.pdf>.
- 26 <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,541714,00.html>.

- 27 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/05/AR2007090500209_2.html.
- 28 <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/1212/p99s01-duts.htm>;
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/11/world/europe/11qaeda.html?scp=1&sq=Spain%20Arrests%208%20It%20Says%20Aided%20a%20Qaeda-Linked%20Cell%20&st=cse>; Reuters via <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/32130593.cms>. In July 2008, in Turkey, there was an attack against the American embassy in Ankara in which three policemen guarding the embassy were killed. Also in Turkey, a number of terrorist cells identified with global jihad were arrested: on April 16, 2008, and again on December 19 and 20, 2008, the authorities arrested over forty global jihadists. In the course of the arrests, it emerged that global jihad activists operate a radical underground society complete with educational centers for young children and teenagers, *sharia* courts, and well-equipped training centers. Jamestown Foundation. *Terrorism Focus*, April 16, 2008, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LJ554974.htm>.
- 29 Yoram Schweitzer and Shaul Shay, "Bin Laden and the Jewish-Israeli Question," in *The Globalization of Terror: The Challenge of Al-Qaida and the Response of the International Community* (New Jersey: Transaction, 2003).
- 30 <http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3501884,00.html>.
- 31 <http://www.ceifit.com/?categoryId=23531&itemId=59802>;
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/08/AR2009010803110.html>.
- 32 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3966817.stm;
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3966817.stm;
<http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/12/29/binladen.message.ap/index.html>;
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7404264.stm.
- 33 [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1193575726.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1193575726.pdf).
- 34 http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/Hebrew/heb_n/html/ipc_008.htm.
- 35 http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/Hebrew/heb_n/html/ipc_008.htm.
- 36 <http://www1.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefabinladen1207.pdf>.
- 37 Reuters, January 12, 2008.
- 38 "The Head of Military Intelligence: Al-Qaeda Operative Entered through the Rafi'ah Breach," *Ynet*, February 26, 2008.
- 39 "Hamas' security forces in confrontation with the Dughmouh clan in the Gaza Strip," website of the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the IICC,

- November 19, 2008, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArt.jhtml?more=1&itemNo=1003623&contrassID=2&subContrassID=21&sbSubContrassID=0>.
- 40 http://www.omeida.co.il/Show_Article.asp?DynamicContentID=19508&MenuID=821&ThreadID=1014010.
- 41 “(Re)building Governance / State Building in Fragile States,” Part I of Research Project by Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute, February 26, 2009. One may also use the term “failed states.”
- 42 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/3527638/Barack-Obama-plans-20000-troop-surge-to-boost-Afghan-effort.html>.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/21/AR2008112103504.html>.
- 43 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/29/AR2008052904116_pf.html.
- 44 <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE50D2T620090114>;
<http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/world/alqaeda+deputy+urges+hamas+to+fight+on/2993867>.
- 45 Michal Shapira, “Senior Official on Anti-terrorism Staff – Do not Travel to Countries Ranked as Risks,” *NGR Maariv*, September 25, 2008.
- 46 Ze’ev Schiff, “Concern in Israel: Al-Qaeda Recruiting Foreign Citizens to Carry Out Attacks in Israel,” *Haaretz*, September 25, 2006.