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Qa`idat al-Jihad

A new name on the road to Palestine

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Over the past month, the remains of al-Qa`idah have begun to issue new electronic pamphlets via the web sites of their supporters, under a new name—“*Qa`idat al-Jihad*” (the Jihad base). While the use of the Internet by radical Islamists is nothing new, under the present circumstances of the global war against terrorism, the Internet has become a vital tool, and obviously an easy one to exploit.

With the exception Abu Zubaydah and Abu Hafs al-Masri, the hard core leadership of al-Qa`idah has not yet been found or killed, and the war in Afghanistan continues. Thus, it would appear to be imperative to them to get their messages out and prove to their supporters and the Muslim world that they are alive, active, and even engaged in reorganizing their ranks and activities. This has led to the establishment of several tens of personal web sites for various Saudi, Egyptian, and Palestinian radical scholars that grant Islamic legitimacy to global Jihad. Furthermore, some of these web sites are freely registered and run from Western cities, from Saudi Arabia, or from Muslim countries in Asia. For the many Al-Qa`idah supporters in the Muslim world and in Muslim communities in the West, these web sites are an important link. They provide a crucial service in keeping the Islamist supporters in touch with the scholars who developed—and provide Islamist religious legitimacy to—ideological and religious messages in support of attacks against Western culture, the United States, Israel and the Jews in general. Two of the major themes here are the Islamic legitimacy of the September 11th attacks in the United States, and the use of suicide terrorism against every possible Western targets all over the world, and not only against Israel.

So far, three announcements have appeared in the main web sites of Al-Qa`idah supporters[1] under the new name of *Qa`idat al-Jihad*—on April 9th, 24th, and 26th 2002. However, the trend has been evident since the previous month, when a unique announcement appeared in the name of Osama bin Laden himself, and signed by his own hand-written signature. While it is not clear whether he actually wrote or signed the electronic document, the signature was the same as had been used by him in previous documents. This document [2], which bears the date of early Muharram 1423 (the third part of March 2002), marked the increasingly intensive use of the Internet by the group



and its followers. It was accompanied by a campaign of messages reacting to the new developments in the Middle East—the new wave of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the Saudi political initiative on Arab relations with Israel; and, only in the third place, the American campaign in Afghanistan.

The first significant point in these electronic messages is the prominence of Arabs and hence of Arab issues, even on websites devoted to non-Arab Muslim matters. What's more, even the pro-Al-Qa`idah Islamist groups active in the non-Arab parts of the Muslim world, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Chechnya, Western China, and Pakistan, use mainly Arabic in their web sites, thus marking the Arab dominance of this global phenomenon. This might explain these groups' perception of the Arab world as the center of the global Islamist Jihad, and the intensive attention to developments in the Arab regions, even while they are fighting for survival in non-Arab regions like Afghanistan.

The Palestinian issue

There are a number of possible triggers for the increasing Internet activity by Al-Qa`idah groups, among them, the Saudi peace plan, the Arab summit in Beirut in March 28th 2002, and the Israeli military campaign against the Palestinian leadership and terrorist groups in April. To these triggers could be added some military successes in the fight against the American and British forces in Afghanistan.

The interest of Al-Qa`idah in the Palestinian issue, as reflected in their messages, started in December 2001, after the appearance of several articles in the Egyptian press attacking bin Laden for ignoring the Palestinians while focusing on Afghanistan. The apologetic reply came in the form of an article titled "Bin Laden and the Palestinian issue," by the Saudi abu Ayman al-Hilali, who has recently emerged as the "official interpreter" of bin Laden.[3] In his article, abu Ayman explained the priorities set by bin Laden, who "serves the Palestinian issue by attacking the American interests, since Israel is one of America's allies in the Muslim world, and there is no distinction between America and Zionism." He asks the Muslim world to be patient till bin Laden is free to move from the present political circumstances to a better one, through the Jihad of the World Islamic Front. He also openly criticized Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad for cooperating with the national Palestinian elements, in the form of those in the Arab world who prefer a national Islamic front to a global one.

A much more thorough analysis appeared in the final chapter of Dr. Ayman Zawahiri's last book, "Knights under the Prophet's banner," published in eleven parts by the Saudi London-based paper *al-Sharq al-Awsat* from 2-12th December 2001. Zawahiri's main theme, which also emphasizes the centrality of the Arab world in Al-Qa`idah's perception, was: "We must seek to move the battlefield to the heart of the Islamic world, which represents the true arena of the battle and the theatre of the major battles in defense of Islam." Furthermore, the World Islamic Front cannot wait for the defeat of the "heretic" Muslim governments, but must attack primarily the Jewish-Crusader alliance, and these attacks should make extensive use of suicide operations.

The Saudi plan and the Israeli military campaign

The Saudi plan discussed and approved at the Arab Summit in Beirut in March 2002 gave bin Laden and his followers the opportunity to kill several birds with one stone, and to turn their ire against the Saudi royal family, the Arab governments, the American support for Israel, and the Arab public support for the Palestinians. The Israeli military campaign against the Palestinian Authority enabled bin Laden to begin a campaign of more direct threats against Israel. In his announcement of late March 2002, bin Laden openly called for “the revolt against the rulers of heresy and killing them; and the killing of the Americans and the Jews, by shooting, stabbing, or even by throwing stones at them.” One of his prominent supporters, the Saudi Sheikh Hamed al-Ali, followed this by a ruling (*Fatwah*) that disqualified the Saudi plan and the Arab approval given it at the Beirut Summit.[4] According to his ruling, “the so-called peace agreements with the Jews are false, corrupted, have no value in the nation of Islam, since they contradict the book of Allah... The Jews that kill Muslims will have no remains. Whoever gives them his hand for peace while they react by shedding the blood of his Muslim brothers, is a coward, an ignorant, has no value towards the brothers of monkeys and pigs.”

The first call by *Qa`idat al-Jihad* from April 9th, was published on the website of “The Platform of Tawhid and Jihad” (*Manbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*) run by the Palestinian Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.[5] Al-Maqdisi was involved in the past in directing Islamist terrorist groups in Jordan under various names—*Bay`at al-Imam, Jaysh Muhammad, Al-Islah wal-Tahaddi*—along with the Islamic Movement for Change, which carried out the terrorist attack in Riyadh in November 1995, in which five American officials were killed.

Interestingly, the document starts by saying that “First of all and above anything else, we should emphasize that Sheikh Osama bin Laden Allah protects him, is safe, enjoys good health, and prepares with his companions the next stage... We wish to tell our Muslim nation that with the blessing of Allah we are preparing for a Jihadi plan to meet the circumstances of the present stage.” It warns the Americans and their Jewish allies by reminding them of their withdrawal from Aden and Somalia; the terrorist attacks in Keand Tanzania; the attack against the USS Cole in Aden; and the September attacks in the United States. It repeats the promise made by bin Laden in one of his videotapes following the September attacks, that “America and its inhabitants cannot dream of peaceful and safe life before the Palestinians are safe.” And warns that Americans will not be safe until the withdrawal of American troops from Saudi Arabia, Muslim prisoners in Cuba are released; and, indeed, not until “the restoration of the Muslim glory and power, when the banner of Tawhid is raised to control the world and direct it, with no resistance.”

The second electronic pamphlet of *Qa`idat al-Jihad* is dated April 24th, and is titled “Announcement of Qa`idat al-Jihad on the wills of the heroes and the legitimacy of the attacks in Washington and New York.”[6] The document is a kind of unsigned organizational *Fatwah*, following the release of the taped will of Ahmad al-Ghamedi, one of the suicide terrorists in the September attacks. The wills are “a message to all the

enemies of this nation that we shall hit their heads with an iron fist, whatever power they own.” The reason for releasing the tape now is “a message to the Islamic nation that the only way to be freed from humiliation is by the sword, since the enemy does not know any other way to do so.”

The main motif in this interesting and detailed document, which seems now to have been circulated more than once, is that the United States and Israel are one entity. Therefore, the legitimacy of suicide operations against Israel and the Jews, widely accepted in the Arab world, covers attacks against the United States. Moreover, in both these cases, this legitimacy includes the killing of innocent civilians. The Islamist basis for this Fatwah and the legitimacy of the September attacks against American civilians is a book published online in October 2001, called “The essence of the new Crusader war,” by a scholar who calls himself Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, after the heroic model for all these groups and indeed for the entire Muslim world.[7] This book was followed by another online book by Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Saleh al-Jarbou`, one of the prominent Saudi scholars who support Al-Qa`idah. His book, titled “The basis for the legitimacy of the destruction that occurred in America,”[8] is so far the most detailed, though probably not the last, Fatwah to religiously justify the September attacks.

The third announcement by *Qa`idat al-Jihad* was published on 26th April, under the title, “Al-Haznawi: why the tape [was released] now.”[9] Among the explanations given by Al-Qa`idah are the following: “The issues of Al-Qa`idah are those of the Islamic nation in Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia, and Chechnya. The main motive of these operations is the defense of the Islamic sacred places, the Haramain and the blessed Al-Aqsa... The recent operations were meant to support the Jihad in Palestine against the Jewish enemy. We said at the time that the operation against the [USS] Cole was the first serious attack in support of the Palestinian uprising, and it would be followed by sister operations. Then came the September 11th blessed operation to support this promise. The attack was against the World Trade Center, the largest financial center supporting the Jews. The Pentagon was the main source of the Jewish military machine on one hand, and its main supporter, on the other. Its name alone terrorizes the Arab leadership.” The announcement ends by taking responsibility for the attack against the Jewish synagogue on the Tunisian Island of Djerba carried out by Nizar Sayf al-Din al-Tunisi. “There are operations we took responsibility for, and others we shall do so at the proper time.”

The flow of announcements, electronic Fatwahs, and books, as well as the incitement against the United States, Western culture, Israel, and the Jews, seems to be endless. The two most recent such declarations were by Mulla Omar and another by Abu Ayman al-Hilali. Mulla Omar, who called himself *Amir al-Mu`minin*, a title reserved in Islam for the Prophet(!) on April 12th published an announcement concerning “the attack against the Muslim Palestinian people.”[10] Omar attacks the Israeli campaign, “armed with American weapons, financed by the United States, and in accordance with American decisions and policies, for the Jewish State, which is in fact part of the greater United States.” He also promises the Palestinians that “the problems planted by the United States and its allies in our country, will not take us far from the Palestinian issue and the Sacred

Mosque... and our American and Jewish enemies will be the losers at the end of this war.”

Yet, the more threatening message came in the form of an analysis of “the Zionist terrorism and the ways to counter it,” by Abu Ayman al-Hilali.[11] This interesting analysis deserves a separate article, and is important not just for its content, but because its author has come to represent in recent months the views of Osama bin Laden and the hard core remnant of the Al-Qa`idah leadership. The main motif here is, as usual, the global conspiracy “shared by America, the House of Zion, and the Arab agents,” to launch a proxy war, this time against the Palestinians, in every possible field—political, ideological, and military—the same type as the American military activity as seen in “occupied Afghanistan.”

The article ends with the question of “How to eliminate the enemy”:

First we have to acknowledge a basic fact, proved by experience and reality, already acknowledged by the enemy, which is that the vital contradiction to the Zionist and American enemy is the doctrine of Jihad and Martyrdom (*Ishtishhad*). Hence, the elimination of the Zionist entity totally can be achieved by:

- Drying its fountains by thorough thinking about the most efficient solution to its agents. They constitute the biggest danger and the main tool for achieving its plans. This solution is the total denial of any national doctrine, unlike the Islamic one, that claims that the Palestinian blood is sacred, even though it is the blood of an infidel agent, who is openly cooperating with the Zionist enemy.
- The killing of every possible enemy soldier, since their military doctrine is to keep to a minimum human losses, the same as the Americans and the Western world does.

In explaining what the nature of the Jihad needed to confront the Zionist or Western enemy, al-Hilali is very direct:

Our solution is organized Jihad that sets at the head of its priorities the attack against American and Zionist interests. It should not just boycott their goods, but explode their headquarters, centers, and industries, and everything that symbolizes them, such as MacDonalD’s etc. We should add to that the killing of Americans and Zionists, and their loyal agents, in order that they will not feel safe anywhere in the Muslim world, and return to their homelands leaving the Muslim countries to their real owners.

There is nothing to add to these explicit words. The only question that might rise here, regarding the Palestinians, is whether the “agents” and “traitors” include the Palestinian national leadership as well. The Islamist radical perception of the “heretic” Arab governments might apply to the Palestinian leadership as well, especially if we look not

only at the deep American involvement in seeking peace in the region, but at the growing American involvement in the internal affairs of the Palestinian Authority and its security forces, as well as the presence of American guards in Palestinian prison in Jericho recently.

Conclusion

The remains of the hard core of Al-Qa`idah, which have not been rooted out, have in fact, seemed in recent weeks to regain their self confidence, and appear to be preparing to launch more attacks in various places over the world. The increased self-confidence is probably a result of some success in attacking the American and British forces in Afghanistan, but it may reflect also their ability to reorganize their infrastructure and leadership, wherever they are, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or elsewhere. They also intend to throw more fuel on the fire of anti-American sentiments all over the Muslim world. An important means for accomplishing this are the very active and dynamic websites of their followers, which are the most efficient way to spread their messages on a daily basis. Some encouragement might also come from the increasing number of Saudi radical Islamic scholars that support them, with no real reaction from the Saudi government.

Yet, the main source of encouragement for Al-Qa`idah might be the recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the popular anti-Israeli demonstrations in the Arab and Muslim world, as well as among Muslim communities in the West. There is a prominent shift in the justification of the global Jihad against the United States, from its presence in Saudi Arabia and the campaign in Afghanistan, to the present American alliance and support for Israel. The attack on the old synagogue in Tunisia, which has so far claimed the lives of eighteen people, mainly German tourists, might be the first in a series of attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets. The German investigation that followed the attack recently led to the arrest of a group belonging to Al-Tawhid, which may be connected to the two leading Palestinian scholars who support Al-Qa`idah—Abu Qutadah (Omar Mahmoud Abu Omar) in London, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in Jordan. The use of the new name—Qa`idat al-Jihad—might also mark a new policy against the “American-Jewish-Israeli entity,” perceived by them as a single united enemy.

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Notes:

1. The main web sites are: www.jehad.net or www.aljihad-online.has.it registered in Italy and Sweden; www.alneda.com registered in Singapore and activated from Malaysia; www.almaqdes.com registered and activated in London; www.aloswa.org registered and activated in Malaysia; www.attawhid.com registered and activated in Warsaw, Poland; www.sahwah.net registered in Mecca, Saudi Arabia; www.erhap.com registered in Mecca, Saudi Arabia; and several other web sites of various Islamist Saudi scholars that give the Wahhabi legitimacy to al-Qa`idah and its followers. Above all is the web site of the main ideological direction of the global Jihad – www.azzam.com -- registered and activated in London, by Azzam Publication.

2. <http://66.78.6.55/~jihad/osama-alquds.htm>
3. www.aloswa.org December 2001.
4. www.h-alali.net Muharram 1423H. First published in mid-April 2002.
5. "A letter from *Qa'idat al-Jihad* to our Muslim nation and its heroic people in Palestine" April 9th, 2002. See on-line in www.almaqdes.com/afghanistan/fatwa/resalah.html
6. www.alneda.com/print.asp?id=566&ty=pr&img=no
7. Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, *Haqiqat al-harb al-Salibiyyah al-Jadidah*, 2nd Edition, Rajab 1422H (October 2001). See on-line in www.alneda.com and other websites mentioned in endnote i.
8. Abd al-Aziz bin Saleh al-Jarbou', *Al-Ta'sil limashru'iyat ma jara liamrika min tadmira*, 8/23/1422H (November 10th 2001). See on-line in www.alneda.com and other websites.
9. *Bayan min Qa'idat al-Jihad: Al-Haznawi: limadha al-sharit al-aan*. See on-line in www.alneda.com/print.asp?id=581&ty=pr
10. *Bayan Amir al-Mu'minin bikhusus ma yata'arad lahu al-Sha'b al-Filastini al-Muslim*, 29 Muharram 1423H, April 12th 2002. See on-line in www.alneda.com/print.asp?id=524&ty=pr
11. Abu Ayman al-Hilali, *Adhwa' hawla al-irhab al-Suhyuni waturuq mukafahatihi*, placed in www.aloswa.org in early May 2002.