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11 The Role of Religion in al-Qaeda's Violence

PIETER NANNINGA

The role of religion in al-Qaeda's violence has been strongly debated since the attacks of 11 September 2001. In public debates, religion has often been assigned an explanatory role. In scholarly literature on al-Qaeda, interpretations have diverged. In a study on suicide attacks from 2005, for example, Robert A. Pape downplays the role of religion in explaining al-Qaeda's violence. 'For al-Qaeda, religion matters', he writes, 'but mainly in the context of national resistance to foreign occupation'.¹ Assaf Moghadam, in contrast, emphasised that al-Qaeda's long-term mission is 'fundamentally religious', namely 'to wage a cosmic struggle against an unholy alliance of Christians and Jews'.² Others have offered variations on these arguments, for example by distinguishing between al-Qaeda's 'almost purely political' immediate objectives and its 'distinctively Islamic' ultimate aims.³

This chapter aims at providing a more nuanced understanding of the role of religion in al-Qaeda's violence by relating the topic to insights from religious studies. In debates on the religious dimension of terrorism, several scholars in this field have argued that religion should not be isolated from other factors, such as politics. Only in particular contexts, they claim, can religion play a certain – though usually not a primary – role in terrorist attacks.⁴ Other scholars, foremost among them William T. Cavanaugh, have gone a step further by arguing that any attempt to attribute an independent role to something called 'religion' in explaining violence is inconsistent, as there is no coherent way to isolate religion from its (alleged) secular counterpart.⁵

Based on the statements of the leaders of 'al-Qaeda Central' – the group around Bin Laden in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the period between 1996 and 2011 – this chapter argues that it is not very fruitful to ask whether religion, as an abstract category, has played a role in al-Qaeda's violence.⁶ Instead, it claims that it is more interesting to examine why the question on the role of religion in jihadist violence has been so prevalent over the last one and a half decades.

'THIS WAR IS FUNDAMENTALLY RELIGIOUS'

Al-Qaeda emerged as a diverse, dynamic and decentralised network of jihad fighters out of the war against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In the mid-1990s, the leaders of the network shifted the focus of their jihad to the West, which they underlined in a statement declaring war on 'the Americans' in 1996. Since that moment, al-Qaeda's war against the West has been presented as a thoroughly religious war. It is a struggle between the 'people of Islam' and the 'Zionist-Crusader alliance and their allies', the statement from 1996 states.⁷ Bin Laden expressed himself even more explicitly about five years later, shortly after al-Qaeda had struck at its enemy on its own soil on 11 September 2001, by claiming that 'this war is fundamentally religious'. It is a conflict between the Muslims and the 'Crusader people of the West', he wrote, and the enmity between them 'is one of faith and doctrine'.⁸

The conflict as presented by al-Qaeda in its statements between 1996 and 2011 is a worldwide religious conflict. According to al-Qaeda's leadership, the worldwide Muslim community (*umma*), spearheaded by its 'jihadist vanguard', is engaged in a struggle with a coalition of enemies, which consists of the Western world and its allies, among whom are the alleged 'treacherous rulers' of the Muslim world. This conflict is not a mere conflict, however. In Bin Laden's words, the current struggle is only one episode of the timeless conflict between 'truth and falsehood' that will continue until Judgement Day.⁹

The current situation in this conflict is deplorable, al-Qaeda's leaders emphasise. The lands of Islam are being occupied by 'infidel forces' and Muslims are being oppressed and humiliated in Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and elsewhere. According to al-Qaeda, Muslims themselves are to blame for this situation. They have deviated from the 'pure Islam' of the first generations of Muslims ('the pious predecessors', *al-salaf al-sāliḥ*), which is the cause of their misery. Bin Laden states: 'We have reached this miserable situation because many of us lack the correct and comprehensive understanding of the religion of Islam'.¹⁰ Therefore, al-Qaeda's leaders argue over and over again, Muslims should return to the correct creed ('*aqīda*) and method (*man-haj*).¹¹ This includes the waging of jihad in the way of God (*fī sabīl Allāh*), which, according to al-Qaeda's statements, is obliged to liberate Muslim lands from the occupation by 'infidel forces'.

Al-Qaeda claims that it does follow the 'pure Islam' of the first generations of Muslims. Its violence is also presented as such: as a continuation of the struggles of the Prophet and his companions. For

example, al-Qaeda's attacks are called 'raids' (*ghazawāt*), just as Muhammad's campaigns in the seventh century. Its suicide attacks are labelled 'martyrdom operations' (*al-'amaliyyāt al-istishhādiyya*), and are thus being related to the classical concept of martyrdom (*istish-hād*), as well as to the martyrs (*shuhadā'*) who fell on the battlefields during the early days of Islam. The execution of these attacks is thoroughly ritualised and, despite the innovative character of these 'martyrdom operations', they are continuously related to contemporaries of Muhammad who 'sought martyrdom' on the battlefields. Al-Qaeda's attacks are presented as acts of 'worship' (*'ibāda*) and as re-enactments of the raids of the Prophet.¹²

Thus, according to al-Qaeda's representations, its struggle is a thoroughly religious struggle. But what, exactly, is the meaning of the term 'religion' in al-Qaeda's discourse? One of the central terms in this respect is the term *'dīn'*. While this term is usually translated as 'religion', al-Qaeda uses it to denote 'God's religion': Islam.¹³ Accordingly, in al-Qaeda's discourse, *dīn* is closely related to *imān* ('faith'), and its opposite is not the 'secular' as it is often perceived in the West, but rather 'unbelief' (*kufr*). This refers to unbelief in God's *dīn*, i.e., Islam, and thus includes both so-called atheists and groups that would be defined as 'religious' in Western discourse, such as Jews and Christians.

In al-Qaeda's representations of the perceived conflict, the precise beliefs of the enemies themselves are not very relevant. For example, while al-Qaeda often refers to the Christian background of its Western adversaries by calling them *'naṣārā'* (a Qur'anic term used for 'Christians') or *'ṣalībiyyūn'* ('crusaders'), it also speaks about the West 'that disbelieves in religion (*dīn*)'.¹⁴ This may sound paradoxical in Western discourse, but, from al-Qaeda's perspective, 'Christians' and 'disbelievers in *dīn*' belong to the same category of unbelievers (*kuffār*), whose common characteristic is that they do not adhere to Islam, or they even oppose it. This places Bin Laden's remark that the conflict is 'fundamentally religious' in a different perspective. It is not a war between different religions or a war that is religious as opposed to a secular war, but rather it is a war between the followers of *dīn*, i.e., Muslims, and *kuffār*.

In this war, al-Qaeda presents itself as the defender of Islam and the *umma*. Its leaders explicitly resist the idea that their struggle has anything to do with politics or terrorism. Regarding politics, they do distinguish between religion and politics (*siyāsa*) in their statements. Whereas the importance of the former is emphasised, the latter is usually denounced. In al-Qaeda's discourse, the field of politics is

predominantly associated with the domain of unbelief, and especially with the West. Alleged Western institutions and concepts such as parliaments and democracy are rejected because they include the upholding of man-made laws and therefore oppose God's sovereignty.¹⁵ Moreover, politics is related to oppression and hypocrisy, both by the West and by its alleged puppet regimes in the Muslim world.

The U.S.-led 'war on terror' is perceived as a prime symbol of Western double standards. Interestingly, al-Qaeda's leaders have not always rejected the labelling of their actions as 'terrorism' (*irhāb*). In several statements, they indicate that it is an obligation to 'terrorise' the enemies (cf. Q. 8:60), which leads Bin Laden to the conclusion that 'our terrorism against America is praised terrorism'.¹⁶ However, the way in which the term 'terrorism' is used by Western leaders is condemned as highly hypocritical. 'Those who maintain that this is a war against terrorism', Bin Laden asked shortly after the 11 September attacks, 'what is this terrorism that they talk about at a time when people of the *umma* have been slaughtered for decades?'¹⁷ About three years later he concluded: 'Destruction is called freedom and democracy, while resistance is terrorism and intolerance'.¹⁸

Thus, although al-Qaeda claims to wage a religious war, the meanings it attributes to the concepts of religion, politics and terrorism diverge from those that are dominant in the West. Religion, politics and terrorism do not have universal, trans-historical meanings. They are cultural constructions that are being negotiated by specific actors – among whom are al-Qaeda's leaders and operatives – in their particular contexts.¹⁹ This has consequences for discussing the role of religion in al-Qaeda's violence.

THE CASE OF 'RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE'

Despite the rhetoric of al-Qaeda's leaders, it is evident that al-Qaeda's violence cannot be solely attributed to something called 'religion'. To understand al-Qaeda's attacks, one should look at the specific backgrounds and motivations of both the organisers and perpetrators in their particular contexts. The question remains, however, whether religion has *contributed* to al-Qaeda's violence.

There is plenty of empirical material that shows that particular constructs of beliefs which actors consider religious can contribute to violence. For instance, my research on the farewell videos of al-Qaeda's suicide bombers demonstrates that al-Qaeda's message of a worldwide religious conflict provided these men with a sense of agency and

empowered them as the alleged followers of pure Islam who defend the *umma* against its enemies.²⁰ However, this is something different than designating al-Qaeda's suicide attacks as 'religious violence' or claiming that religion, as an abstract category, has contributed to these attacks. Attributing a specific role to religion is arbitrary, as a closer look at al-Qaeda's statements illustrates. I will provide two examples.

First, to legitimise their war against the West, al-Qaeda's leaders have frequently emphasised the 'crimes' of the U.S. and European states in the Muslim world. In a letter that was posted online in November 2002, for example, Bin Laden explains to the Americans why al-Qaeda is fighting them. According to Bin Laden, the Americans 'occupy our countries', 'steal our wealth and oil' and 'starved the Muslims of Iraq' by means of their sanctions. They have supported Israel, Russia and India in slaughtering Muslims in Palestine, Chechnya and Kashmir, respectively, as well as collaborated with governments in the Middle East that are oppressing Muslims. In addition, the United States is not ruled according to God's law (*sharī'a*), but it permits usury, intoxicants, gambling and immorality, and exploits women like consumer products. Finally, the Americans are hypocritical: 'Let us not forget one of your major characteristics: your duality in both manner and values; your hypocrisy in both manner and principles. All manners, principles and values have two scales: one for you and one for everybody else'.²¹

Bin Laden thus provides various reasons for al-Qaeda's war against the United States. Seemingly 'religious' arguments are being used side by side with arguments that we could label 'historical', 'political' and 'economic'. To put it more precisely, these 'religious' and 'non-religious' factors are strongly intertwined and cannot be separated consistently. To focus on the case of America's 'occupation' of Muslim lands that Bin Laden refers to in his letter, the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia since the Gulf War of 1990–1991 has been one of al-Qaeda's prime concerns in this respect. The United States is 'plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorising its neighbours and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighbouring Muslim peoples', Bin Laden and his associates wrote as early as 1998.²² Presupposing a Western religious-secular divide, this formulation could lead us to the conclusion that the 'occupation' of Saudi Arabia should be considered a non-religious (i.e., political, economic) argument for al-Qaeda's resistance against the West. This is indeed what Robert A. Pape argues in his analysis of al-Qaeda's suicide attacks. However, from al-Qaeda's perspective, the occupation of the Arabian Peninsula is a thoroughly religious issue. In accordance with

authoritative jurisprudence on the waging of jihad, al-Qaeda argues that the occupation of the lands of Islam by unbelievers makes the waging of jihad an individual duty for each Muslim in order to liberate these Muslim lands.²³ Accordingly, Bin Laden states in his letter to the Americans: 'God, the Almighty, legislated the permission and option to avenge this oppression. Thus, if we are attacked, then we have the right to strike back'. This is 'commanded by our religion', he warns the Americans, so 'do not expect anything for us but jihad, resistance and revenge'.²⁴

The question thus arises whether occupation should be considered a 'religious' legitimation for al-Qaeda's violence or not. Each answer to this question would be arbitrary, as this would presuppose a clear, unambiguous distinction between a 'religious' and a 'secular' sphere. Yet conceptualisations of these spheres differ across place and time and are the product of specific historical and cultural contexts, as we already noticed when discussing al-Qaeda's conceptualisation of religion.²⁵ So, although the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia has definitely contributed to al-Qaeda's violence, any conclusion as to whether something called 'religion' has contributed to its attacks is inconsistent.

Second, this observation is underlined by the meanings that al-Qaeda's leaders have attributed to the attacks themselves.²⁶ As noted above, al-Qaeda's leaders perceive the state of the *umma* as miserable. Central terms characterising the *umma* in their statements are 'weakness' (*wahn*) and 'humiliation' (*dhull*), as well as phrases about the 'honour' (*ird*) and 'dignity' (*karāma*) of Muslims that is being violated. Jihadists, in contrast, are presented as the ones who are ashamed of the fate of the *umma* and restore its honour by revenging the crimes of the enemies. In the words of its leaders, al-Qaeda's attacks are the way 'to honour our *umma*', 'to eradicate the humiliation and unbelief that has overcome the land of Islam' and 'to remove the weakness, feebleness and humiliation which the *umma* is experiencing currently'.²⁷ The perpetrators of al-Qaeda's violence expressed themselves in comparable terms. For instance, one of the 11 September attackers states in his farewell video: 'I take no pleasure in a life of humiliation, and my heart has demanded from me that I live honourably in compliance with my Lord's religion'. Thus, he devoted himself to the jihad, he explains, 'so that I might kill Americans and other enemies of Islam and avenge my brothers' blood'. He avenged the dishonouring of his community, and 'went out to die with honour', as he concludes his statement.²⁸ Al-Qaeda's violence is seen as honourable and, regardless

of its results in numbers of casualties, it is thought to contribute to the restoration of the dignity of the *umma*.

Research on violence has shown that al-Qaeda's emphasis on humiliation, honour and revenge is far from exceptional in this respect.²⁹ Particularly in cultures with a strongly developed sense of honour, public insult and humiliation (i.e., the violation of honour), can result in feelings of shame that, in turn, may fuel violence. In these cases, violence can be experienced as redeeming the honour of the insulted individual or group.

These insights are important when considering the importance of tribal structures and values in the context in which the concept of jihad originated. In seventh-century Arabia, loyalty to the community (*'aṣabiyya*), and especially the tribe, constituted the basis of the social structure. The honour of individuals was strongly related to the kinship group, and when the kinship group was humiliated, revenge was considered crucial to restore its honour. Often violence was seen as the appropriate means to do so. The early Muslims largely adopted these ideas of loyalty, honour and revenge, but primarily applied them to the *umma* rather than to the kinship group. It was now the reputation of the *umma* that had to be protected and, in case of humiliation, revenged.³⁰ This was the context in which the notion of jihad was developed, as a result of which it is closely connected to virtues such as loyalty, honour and revenge in early Islamic sources.³¹ Evidently, these sources cannot be translated one-to-one into the twenty-first century. The honour code of the earliest Muslims has been transformed, redefined and renegotiated throughout the centuries. Yet shame and honour undeniably still play an important role in authoritative sources on jihad, as well as in the regions where many jihadists come from and operate.³²

Just as in the example of occupation, it is impossible to determine whether feelings of humiliation, honour and revenge should be regarded as religious motivations of al-Qaeda's violence or not. In al-Qaeda's discourse, humiliation, honour and revenge are inseparably connected to concepts such as the *umma* and jihad, and thus seen as part of their struggle for Islam. However, presupposing a distinction between religion and the secular, it could also be argued that honour and revenge are tribal values and should therefore be seen as secular motivations. In this case too, any decision would be arbitrary. Rather than maintaining an artificial boundary between 'religious' concepts such as jihad and *umma* and 'tribal' values such as honour and revenge, both could better be seen as part of the cultural repertoire from which jihadists draw to motivate, shape, justify and give meaning to their violence.

Thus, while the alleged occupation of Muslim lands and feelings of humiliation, honour and revenge have definitely contributed to al-Qaeda's violence, it is not very fruitful to ask whether the same is true for the abstract category of 'religion'. Instead, it is more interesting to ask why questions on the role of religion in al-Qaeda's violence have been so prevalent over the last one and a half decade.

THE PREVALENCE OF 'RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE'

Focusing on the West, William T. Cavanaugh has argued that the artificial distinction between religion and the secular has been so often applied to violence because it reconfirms and authorises Western self-definitions as secular, rational and modern in opposition to a religious, fanatical and uncontrolled 'other'. According to Cavanaugh, so-called secular violence is generally associated with Western states and ideals. Religious violence, in contrast, is typically perceived as a product of non-Western and especially Muslim forms of culture. While secular violence is seen as rational, functional and controlled, religious violence is viewed as fanatical and unrestrained. This dichotomy might authorise secular violence in the name of Western nation states that is deemed necessary to contain religious fanatics. Hence, to oversimplify Cavanaugh's well-informed argument, the 'myth of religious violence' is maintained in the West because it works.³³

As we have noticed above, the dichotomy that is being upheld in al-Qaeda's statements is not between secular and religious violence, but rather between the violence of infidels (against Islam) and the violence of al-Qaeda's mujahidin who stand up for their religion. Despite these differences, Cavanaugh's insights can be also applied to al-Qaeda.

In al-Qaeda's statements, the enemies' violence is inherently connected to its alleged unbelief. To focus on al-Qaeda's representations of the West, the latter's lack of *dīn* has resulted in the absence of 'principles and manners'. This explains the alleged hypocrisy of Western Middle East policies. According to al-Qaeda's leaders, Western rhetoric about democracy, human rights and freedom is hollow. Bin Laden states: 'To you, values and principles are something you merely demand from others, not that which you yourself must adhere to'. For example, he claims, 'the freedom and democracy that you call for is for yourselves and for the white race only. As for the rest of the world, you impose upon it your monstrous, destructive policies and governments'.³⁴ Western unbelief has led to policies that are solely

characterised by self-interest and an attitude of materialism, according to al-Qaeda's statements. Westerners aim at earthly gains, as is illustrated by its policies in the Muslim world which includes the stealing of wealth and oil. Moreover, they are attached to earthly life, as a result of which its troops, who have nothing to fight for, are lacking morale, are afraid of death and prefer to bomb from a distance while its forces 'remain safe and sound'.³⁵ Therefore, al-Qaeda's leaders emphasise, the enemies may appear superior because of their technologies and equipment, but once it comes down to morale and faith, they are easily defeated.³⁶ Thus, Western violence in the Muslim world reflects its unbelief: it is hypocritical, cowardly, aimed at material gain and lacking any conviction.

For al-Qaeda, the West serves as an 'other' against which al-Qaeda defines itself. In its statements, the enemies' unbelief is contrasted with the pure faith, method and creed of the mujahidin. Western self-interest is opposed to the attitude of al-Qaeda's fighters, who are being guided by values such as loyalty and honour instead. While the West oppresses Muslims, al-Qaeda's mujahidin are presented as the ones standing up for the *umma*. Their fights are not aimed at self-enrichment and earthly gains, but they are symbols of heroism, honour, manliness and purity. They do not cling to worldly existence, but abandon their earthly positions and possessions to dedicate themselves to the struggle in the way of God. They renounce material life and are willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their religion, which makes them highly motivated and will bring them victory in the end.³⁷

The disbelief of the enemies and its resulting hollowness, hypocrisy and terrorism enables al-Qaeda to present itself as the true followers of Muhammad and its attacks as sanctioned resistance. The distinction between Islam and unbelief serves al-Qaeda's self-definition as the vanguard of the *umma* and legitimises its violence as part of the timeless war between truth and falsehood. The result is a compelling appeal to the Muslim youths al-Qaeda aims at.

Al-Qaeda's message of the humiliated *umma* encompasses broadly shared grievances and anti-Western sentiments among Muslims from all over the world. Al-Qaeda connects these grievances and concerns by presenting them as part of a worldwide religious conflict, which facilitates and invigorates its (potential) supporters to identify with their fellow Muslims, and therefore with al-Qaeda's mujahidin who stand up for their brothers and sisters in need. Besides, al-Qaeda's emphasis on the pure Islam increases its appeal. As we have noticed, al-Qaeda anchors its message in perceived authentic Muslim traditions, which

makes it applicable in every situation regardless of specific cultures, nations or ethnicities.³⁸ At the same time, however, the 'authentic' Islamic traditions are being applied in new situations, and therefore provided with new meanings. The result is a hybrid and dynamic ideology that is distinctly globalised, but nevertheless easily blends with local customs and traditions.³⁹ By claiming and being perceived to be genuinely Islamic, yet at the same time being adapted to modern, local and global contexts, al-Qaeda's message can be attractive for people from divergent backgrounds. It offers young Muslims throughout the world a model to assist their humiliated fellow believers. It gives them a sense of agency and an empowering role as the defenders of *umma* who, just like the Prophet, can revive the glory of Islam. Al-Qaeda's message, in short, offers young people from different regions in the world a way to give meaning to their lives that is experienced as authentically Islamic, but at the same time thoroughly modern, and therefore both empowering and fitting their needs and experiences.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

The prevalence of the question of whether religion has contributed to al-Qaeda's violence is understandable, not in the last place because of al-Qaeda's emphasis on the religious nature of the conflict, which has also reinforced Western perceptions on the issue. However, the question is not the right question, as it assumes a coherence that the concept of religion does not have. Religion does not have a trans-historical essence, but means different things to different observers. For example, while religion is often opposed to the secular in Western discourse, al-Qaeda distinguishes religion, i.e., Islam, from unbelief. What constitutes religion depends on particular historical and cultural contexts. Therefore, it is impossible to consistently distinguish between religious and non-religious violence or to argue that something called 'religion' contributes to, let alone causes violence. Particular beliefs, values and practices that are deemed religious by the actors may fuel violence in specific circumstances. Yet these beliefs, values and practices cannot be consistently labelled 'religious' from an analytical point of view.

Rather than studying the role of religion in violence, we should explore why wars and violence are so often perceived as being religious wars and religious violence. In the case of al-Qaeda, this shows that the opposition between the infidel enemies and the mujahidin served al-Qaeda's self-definition as a group of authentic Muslims who defend the *umma* in the footsteps of the prophet Muhammad. The dichotomy has

reconfirmed and authorised al-Qaeda's alleged superiority over an infidel 'other', and therefore legitimised its violence in the name of the pure Islam of the Prophet and its suffering followers in the twenty-first century.

Endnotes

- 1 Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), 104.
- 2 Assaf Moghadam, 'Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of *Dying to Win*', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29:8 (2006), 707–729 esp. 718. See also Idem, *Globalization of Martyrdom: al-Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008).
- 3 Mark Sedgwick, Al-Qaeda and the Nature of Religious Terrorism, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16:4 (2004), 795–814.
- 4 Cf. R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003²); James W. Jones, *Blood that Cries out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (Lanham; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008²).
- 5 William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 6 The term 'al-Qaeda' is used here to refer to 'al-Qaeda Central' only, and thus excludes al-Qaeda's so-called affiliates or franchises in, among others, the Maghreb, the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq. The period under discussion here runs from al-Qaeda's declaration of war against the Americans in 1996 to Bin Laden's death in 2011.
- 7 Osama bin Laden, *I'lān al-jihād 'alā al-Amrikiyyīn al-muḥtālīn li-Bilād al-Ḥaramayn* ['Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places'], *Al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 23 August 1996, www.tawhed.ws/r?i=1502092b, accessed May 2014.
- 8 Untitled letter by Osama bin Laden, *Al-Jazeera*, 3 November 2001, transl. in Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), 133–138, esp. 134–135.
- 9 Untitled audio Statement by Osama bin Laden, *Al-Jazeera*, 4 January 2004, transl. in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 212–32, esp. 217. See also the statement of an unknown voice-over in a video by al-Qaeda's media group al-Sahāb Media, *Al-qawl qawl al-ṣawārim: ghazwa al-mu'adhin Abū Gharīb al-Makkī* ['The Word is the Word of the Swords: the Raid of the Muezzin Abu Gharib al-Makki'], 4 September 2008, <https://archive.org/details/AsSahab-TheWordIsTheWordOfTheSwords1>, accessed December 2015, 0:20–0:41'.

- 10 Bin Laden, 4 January 2004, transl. in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 227.
- 11 Statement by Ayman al-Zawahiri in al-Saḥāb Media, *Ḥiṣād 7 sanawāt min al-ḥurūb al-ṣalībiyya* ['The Results of Seven Years of the Crusades'], 17 September 2008, <https://archive.org/details/AsSahab-Resultsof7YearsOfTheCrusades>, accessed December 2015, 1:11:08–1:13:13.
- 12 Hans G. Kippenberg, 'Defining the Present Situation of Muslims and Re-enacting the Prophet's Ghazwas', in Idem and Tilman Seidnsticker (eds.), *The 9/11 Handbook: Annotated Translation and Interpretation of the Attackers' Spiritual Manual* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2006) 47–58; Pieter Nanninga, 'The Liminality of "Living Martyrdom": Suicide Bombers' Preparations for Paradise', in Peter Berger and Justin Kroesen (eds.), *Ultimate Ambiguities: Investigating Death and Liminality* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 79–96.
- 13 For a more nuanced discussion on the (multiple) meanings of *dīn*, see L. Gardet, 'Dīn', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill Online, 2012³).
- 14 On the latter, see a statement by a leading al-Qaeda ideologue, the Saudi Attiya Allah, in al-Saḥāb Media, *Ḥiṣād 7 sanawāt*, 35:33–37:25.
- 15 See, for example, Ayman al-Zawahiri, 'Advice to the Community to Reject the Fatwa of Sheikh Bin Baz Authorizing Parliamentary Representation', n.d., transl. in Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, transl. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 192–192.
- 16 Statement by Osama bin Laden in al-Saḥāb Media, *Badr al-Riyāḍ 1* ['The Full Moon of Riyadh 1'], 4 February 2004, https://archive.org/details/moon_BR, accessed December 2015, 19:00–19:08.
- 17 Bin Laden, 3 November 2001, transl. in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 135.
- 18 Video statement by Osama bin Laden, *Risāla ilā al-sha'b al-Amrīkī* ['Message to the American People'], *Al-Jazeera*, 30 October 2004, transl. at www.aljazeera.com/archive/2004/11/200849163336457223.html, accessed December 2015.
- 19 It is important to emphasise that even within al-Qaeda's statements these meanings diverge and are dependent on the historical context of a particular statement, on the individual uttering it and on the audiences that are being addressed.
- 20 Pieter Nanninga, *Jihadism and Suicide Attacks: Al-Qaeda, al-Sahab and the Meaning of Martyrdom*, (PhD Thesis University of Groningen, 2014).
- 21 Untitled statement by Osama bin Laden, 6 October 2002, transl. at www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver, accessed December 2015.
- 22 World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders, *Bayān al-Jabha al-Islāmiyya al-'Alamiyya li-jihād al-yuhūd wa-l-ṣalībiyyīn* ['Statement of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders'], *Al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 23 February 2008, www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/fatw2.htm, accessed December 2015.

- 23 On the concept of jihad, see David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- 24 Statement Bin Laden, 6 October 2002. For a more elaborate legitimization of al-Qaeda's jihad, see World Islamic Front, *Bayān al-Jabha al-Islāmiyya al-'Alamiyya*.
- 25 Cf. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993); and Idem, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
- 26 Cf. Nanninga, *Jihadism and Suicide Attacks*.
- 27 Untitled audio statement by Osama bin Laden, 14 February 2003, transl. excerpts in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 186–206, esp. 195; Statement by Bin Laden in al-Saḥāb Media, *Tadmīr al-mudammira al-amrikiyya Kūl* ['The Destruction of the American Destroyer [USS] Cole 2'], summer 2001, <https://archive.org/details/AsSa-hab-StateOfTheUmmah2>, accessed December 2015, 27:55–28:35; Statement by Mustafa Abu al-Yazid in al-Saḥāb Media, *Jihād wa-istishhād: al-q'aid Abū al-Ḥasan* ['Jihad and Martyrdom: Commander Abu al-Hasan'], 8 July 2008, <https://archive.org/details/Jihad-wa-Esishhad>, accessed December 2015, 3:27–4:44.
- 28 Statement by Ahmad al-Haznawī in al-Saḥāb Media, *Waṣāyā abṭāl ghazawāt Nīw Yūrḳ wa-Wāshintun: Aḥmad al-Haznāwī* ['The Wills of the Heroes of the Raids on New York and Washington: Ahmad al-Haznawī'], 15 April 2002, <https://archive.org/details/Haznawī>, accessed December 2015, 50:27–54:53.
- 29 Cf. Anton Blok, 'Introduction', in Idem, *Honour and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 1–13.
- 30 Timothy Winter, 'Honor', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an 2* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 447–448.
- 31 Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30–36.
- 32 See, for example, Philip Carl Salzman, *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (New York: Humanity Books, 2008).
- 33 Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, esp. 225–230.
- 34 Untitled statement Bin Laden, 6 October 2002.
- 35 It is interesting to note in this respect that the term *dīn* is also used as the opposite of *dunya*, 'world' or 'the domain of material life'. Cf. Gardet, 'Dīn'.
- 36 Cf. Statement by Osama bin Laden in al-Saḥāb Media, *Waṣāyā abṭāl*, 39:59–40:39; Statement by an unknown voice-over in al-Saḥāb Media, *Jihād wa-istishhād*, 0:23–2:59.
- 37 Attiya Allah vividly expressed this mirror imaging by describing the conflict as a conflict 'between truth and falsehood', 'between the people of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and the people of *kufr*', 'between the sons of Islam and the sons of (...) the materialistic and atheistic (*mulḥid*) West who disbelieve in *dīn*' and 'between the pure and oppressed ones who (...) worship God on His earth as He ordered and loves and the unjust despots, the people of excess, shamelessness, immorality and treason'.

Hence, he concludes, 'our concept of war is the loftiest and most just of concepts, because it is based on fear of God, on God's will and on helping his *dīn*'. al-Saḥāb Media, *Ḥiṣād* 7 *sanawāt*, 35:33–37:25.

- 38 Cf. Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 257–287.
- 39 See, for example, David Leheny, 'Terrorism, Social Movements, and International Security: How Al Qaeda Affects Southeast Asia', *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 6:1 (2005) 87–109; and Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'The Local and the Global in Saudi Salafi-Jihadi Discourse', in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), 301–320.
- 40 For a more elaborate version of this argument, see Nanninga, *Jihadism and Suicide Attacks*.