

2. THE NATURE OF THE THREAT

The Global War on Terrorism, as the Bush administration has labeled it, is actually a struggle by governments around the world to deal with a revived radical and violent minority Islamist movement that has taken on greater international dimensions in the twenty-first century than it has previously in history. Throughout the twentieth century, radical groups arose in various Muslim nations seeking to use Islam as a justification for their use of violence against existing governments. These groups failed and seldom had a significant effect in more than one country at a time.

The Afghan War against the Soviets (1980–1988) served as a magnet for disenchanted elements from throughout the Islamic world. After that war, an informal network developed linking these violent radicals in over twenty nations. Subsequent struggles in Bosnia and Chechnya, in which Muslims fought non-Muslims, strengthened the network. By sharing their knowledge and experience, using the greatly expanded international travel and communications systems, these groups strengthened one another. They also shared funding, training, logistics, propaganda, and ideology. This sharing and the use of the new technologies transformed these groups into a global network dedicated to fighting “holy war” against those who do not share their views. Although the meaning of *jihad* in Islam is broader than fighting war, these radicals proclaim themselves as jihadists.

GOALS AT HOME AND IN THE WEST

In most predominately Muslim nations, the goal of these affiliated jihadist groups is to overthrow the existing government and replace it with a nondemocratic regime that would enforce a particular strain of fundamentalist Islam, suppressing individual freedoms and liberties. The

theocracies they would create would resemble the suppressive government inflicted on most of Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban. Some in the movement advocate a multinational theocratic government named a “caliphate,” after earlier Islamic institutions. (The most radical avow their intention to create a global caliphate, forcing non-Muslims to convert to Islam.)

These jihadist groups view most Western governments, most notably the United States, as a barrier to the creation of the caliphates. They see Western governments as supportive of the existing systems in such countries as Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Indonesia. The jihadists also seek to expel non-Muslims and non-Muslim influences from Islamic countries. Thus, they oppose manifestations of globalism, such as the presence of European or American corporations.

In nations in which Muslims are the minority, such as in most of Europe and in the Americas, the jihadists seek to create subcultures that are insulated from the nations and societies in which they exist. They advocate “Islamic rights” and seek to strengthen Muslim institutions. Often they also use their presence in these nations as a base for propaganda, recruitment, fund-raising, and terrorism aimed at influencing the governments.

THE ROLE OF NATIONALISM

Often in the twentieth century, jihadists were involved in nationalist movements and struggles against colonialism. They were usually unsuccessful in affecting the subsequently created national governments. The international jihadist movement is now strengthened by the propaganda value of two ongoing nationalist struggles, in Palestine and in Iraq.

Although the current international jihadist movement has done little to assist the Palestinians, they have used the struggle of their fellow Muslims against Israel as a propaganda centerpiece for recruitment and fund-raising. There has also been some limited exchange of information and other relations between both the secular and “religious” Palestinian resistance groups and some in the international jihadist movement. Were the Palestinians and the government of Israel to reach and implement a comprehensive agreement such as the 2000 Camp David and Taba

proposals, it would have little effect on the international jihadists, although it might somewhat diminish their support in parts of the Muslim world over time.

Although the U.S. invasion of Iraq was generally opposed in the Islamic world, many understood the heinous nature of the Saddam regime and welcomed its end. The ongoing U.S. military presence in Iraq, however, has widely been seen throughout the Islamic world as an unjustified military occupation akin to the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The terrorist movements (both indigenous and foreign) involved in resisting the U.S. military presence have links to the international jihadist movement. Moreover, the movement successfully uses the U.S. occupation as a propaganda tool to recruit adherents and funds.

The fighting in Chechnya against the Russian government is also used for propaganda as an example of non-Muslim military occupation of an Islamic country.

TARGETING THE WEST TO AFFECT THE ISLAMIC WORLD

The jihadist movement uses terrorist attacks on the West, particularly the United States, for a variety of purposes:

- ♦ to influence American and Western opinion to demand abandonment of the U.S./Western presence in Islamic nations and the U.S./Western support of existing Islamic governments.
- ♦ to demonstrate to fellow Muslims that the United States and Western nations are not omnipotent and can be humbled by aggressive jihadist activity.
- ♦ to raise financial donations and new recruits by demonstrating “results” by their jihadist groups.
- ♦ to influence possible adherents in Islamic nations to join them in changing existing governments in those nations, by showing through the success of their attacks that the tide of history is on the side of the jihadists.

To achieve these purposes, the jihadists seek to conduct spectacular attacks, often involving iconic targets or targets that will affect key parts of a nation's economy (e.g., tourism, aviation, oil). The purpose of choosing these targets is to cause the population of the nation attacked to be either sufficiently shocked or put in sufficient economic pain to change its nation's policies vis-à-vis the Islamic world. The jihadists analyze the target nations' systems in detail, looking for vulnerabilities and weaknesses, looking for opportunities to create shock and financial cost.

There is an important question about the motivation of the jihadists: Some believe that they are motivated chiefly by U.S. actions with which they disagree, such as the invasion of Iraq or U.S. support of Israel. Others believe that the jihadists are primarily motivated by something they want to create, their concept of theocratic governments, rather than stopping something that the United States has done.

It is clear that the jihadists successfully employ criticism of U.S. activity as a way of widening their support (join the jihad if you oppose the United States in Iraq). That added support is a major factor in the continued growth in the jihadists' capabilities and threat. Whether or not the United States were in Iraq or Israel in the West Bank, however, the core jihadists would still seek to overthrow existing regimes to create theocracies. They would still target the United States because they believe American support of existing Islamic governments (the al Saud in Saudi Arabia, the Mubarak government in Egypt) makes their goal of replacing those governments harder to achieve.

AL QAEDA AND MORE—MUCH MORE

The group "al Qaeda" was founded in the late 1980s by one of the leaders in the international jihad movement, Osama bin Laden. Although al Qaeda was probably limited to a formal membership only in the hundreds at any one time, it also supported a larger cadre of jihadists in the several thousands. What al Qaeda did uniquely, however, was to assist other jihadist groups with organizational support, training, and financing:

- ♦ In nations where there were preexisting jihadist organizations, it provided the missing elements needed to strengthen them (Uzbekistan).

- ♦ In nations where there were no effective jihadist groups, it helped to create them (the Philippines).
- ♦ Freelance terrorists, such as Khalid Shaikh Muhammad, were able to gain logistical and financial support from al Qaeda and eventually merge their networks into the loose command structure of the organization.
- ♦ When the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) organization was collapsing under effective counterterrorism efforts by the Cairo government, al Qaeda also permitted the EIJ to formally merge with it and made the EIJ leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, the nominal deputy in al Qaeda.
- ♦ To secure a nation-state sanctuary, al Qaeda provided funding and fighters (both its own and those from other jihadist groups) to support the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in its struggles against regional militias.

Thus, al Qaeda, was *primus inter pares* among the jihadist groups. With the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, al Qaeda lost its nation-state sanctuary (as it had earlier when ejected from Sudan in 1996). The U.S. invasion, while effective in driving the Taliban from power in most of Afghanistan, was less successful in destroying its primary target, al Qaeda. Significant U.S. ground forces were not introduced into the al Qaeda base areas until seven weeks into the invasion. The United States then chose to use its newfound Afghan allies to pursue the al Qaeda leadership into the Afghan-Pakistan border area, with limited success. (U.S. leaders defended their limited use of forces against the largely Arab al Qaeda paramilitary by citing the difficulties that the Soviet Red Army had encountered twenty years earlier in attempting to defeat Afghan forces. The two situations were not analogous.)

AL QAEDA AFTER THE AFGHAN INTERVENTION

The result of this limited early use of U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2001 was that most of the al Qaeda leadership and much of its paramilitary

were able to escape immediate capture or death. (There were also reports that Pakistani Air Force flights into Afghanistan during the U.S. invasion assisted in the escape of some al Qaeda elements, or at least al Qaeda-related anti-Indian terrorists along with sympathetic Pakistani military advisers and military intelligence officers.)

Many al Qaeda personnel went to Pakistan, some staying in the mountainous border regions with Afghanistan, and others moving into the metropolitan areas of Karachi and Rawalpindi. Pakistani authorities, in cooperation with U.S. intelligence, subsequently arrested many key figures of al Qaeda (Khalid Shaikh Muhammad, Ramzi bin Al Sheeb) in Pakistani cities in 2002–2004. They have been less successful in finding al Qaeda leaders in the mountainous border areas, where both Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahri, are widely believed to be. They have also had limited success in suppressing remnants of the Taliban, who are also believed to be engaged in transborder operations. (Taliban leader Mullah Omar is also still at large.)

Other al Qaeda leaders fled into Iran, elements of whose government had regularly supported and facilitated the travel of al Qaeda personnel throughout the late 1990s. The Tehran government claims that the al Qaeda personnel who entered the country have either been handed over to authorities in their home countries or are under “house arrest” in Iran. There is, however, some evidence that while in Iran, al Qaeda leaders sanctioned or directed terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia.

“TWO-THIRDS OF THE MANAGERS”

Based on the arrests in Afghanistan and Pakistan, U.S. authorities have repeatedly claimed that “two-thirds of the known al Qaeda managers have been captured or killed.” These statements refer to the current status of the individuals who were believed to be members of al Qaeda’s consultative council, or Shura, in the summer of 2001. The statements appear to be accurate, but they omit two important related elements:

- ♦ The two top leaders of al Qaeda remain at large now more than three years following the 9/11 attacks.

- ♦ Al Qaeda replaces “managers” when they are no longer able to carry out their responsibilities.

The success in eliminating al Qaeda leadership led many terrorism analysts to believe in 2003–2004 that al Qaeda as a terrorist organization was largely out of business. They portrayed the organization as left with only a few aged and sick former leaders, holed up in caves, cut off from the world, and unable to communicate except by occasionally smuggling out audiotapes on long mule rides to Arab media, such as al-Jazeera television reporters.

Following arrests in late summer 2004 in Pakistan and England, some analysts modified their views and suggested that the core al Qaeda organization does still exist as an organization, with a communications network of some sort linking its leaders with cells in Europe and elsewhere. If so, it is an organization with less experienced personnel, who may have greater difficulty communicating and conducting operations than they did prior to the elimination of the Afghan sanctuary. Nonetheless, the arrests in 2004 suggest that it is an organization still capable of planning large-scale terrorist attacks, recruiting personnel to carry them out, and obtaining explosives and other necessary logistics.

Al Qaeda always was, however, a relatively small terrorist group, with an inner core of several hundred and a cadre in the few thousands. Its strength lay in the network it had fostered with other jihadist groups. Whatever the truth is about the strength of al Qaeda today, the network is clearly still vibrant and dangerous.

THE THREAT OF THE HYDRA

With the exception of Chechen, and perhaps some Algerian, terrorist groups, few of the organizations in the jihadist network conducted large and successful terrorist attacks or campaigns prior to 9/11, except al Qaeda. (It was al Qaeda that staged the terrorist attacks in East Africa in 1998 and the attack on the USS *Cole* in Yemen in 2000. Several failed terrorist attacks in 1996–2000 were also attributable to al Qaeda. Personnel who later became key to al Qaeda were involved in the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center. Some analysts also believe that al

Qaeda may have assisted Iranian intelligence in the 1996 attack on the U.S. Air Force facility in Saudi Arabia.)

Following 9/11 and the disruption of al Qaeda, affiliated jihadist groups stepped up their attacks. In the three years following 9/11, these groups successfully carried out twice as many major attacks as they and al Qaeda had in the three years prior to 9/11. Whether this wave of terrorism was part of a preplanned al Qaeda response to a U.S. invasion of Afghanistan or was improvised by al Qaeda or the network, the result was a demonstration that with or without al Qaeda as a terrorist organization, the global jihadist network is still a threat. The connections among the various national groups already existed, thanks to al Qaeda, and are now strengthening.

Were Osama bin Laden to be captured or killed, both al Qaeda and the global jihadist network of which it is a part (although perhaps no longer *primus inter pares*) will continue to operate. Bin Laden is likely to become in death what he had already largely become after 9/11, a symbol that successful jihad can be waged against the United States and its friends.

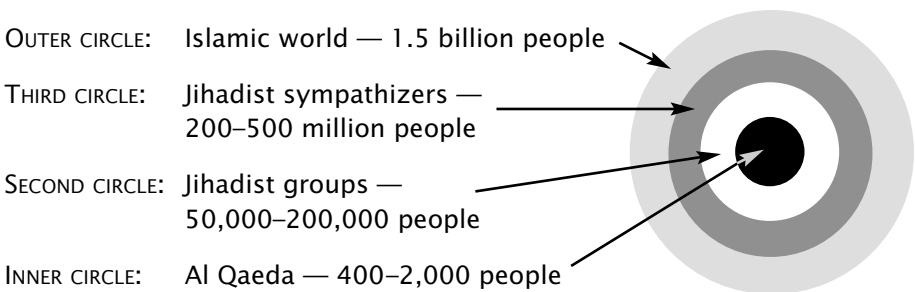
THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF JIHADISM

In thinking about the nature of the jihadist threat, it may be helpful to think of the relationship among distinct groups as four concentric circles (see Figure 2.1):

- ♦ In the smallest, inner circle are the terrorists of the al Qaeda organization, those who have been allowed the “privilege” of pledging their loyalty to the group and its leader. The population of this inner circle is probably in the hundreds.
- ♦ The second circle contains active members and devotees of another dozen or more jihadist groups that are often called “al Qaeda–related.” (Those groups are examined in detail in Chapter 3.) Many, but probably not most, of these individuals are willing to commit terrorist acts personally, and some are willing to die in the process as suicide bombers. This second circle probably contains several tens of thousands of people.

- ♦ The third circle consists of those who identify with the jihadist cause or aspects of its ideology. They may provide moral support, and if called upon, some might facilitate logistical or financial activity in support of a jihadist group. This larger circle includes many who want to see their current government replaced by a different regime that might be less corrupt, more democratic, or more “Islamist.” Among those who want new governments, there is a wide diversity of opinion regarding the model they seek; more democratic may not mean more “Islamist,” and vice versa. This circle may be populated by tens of millions or perhaps as many as a few hundred million, depending upon the criteria (agreement in ideology versus willingness to assist a jihadist group) and the questions asked in polling data.
- ♦ The outer circle is that of the Islamic world, the followers of the Prophet Muhammad both in majority Islamic countries and scattered throughout the world. They number over 1 billion people. Most Muslims are not Arabs. They include 196 million in Indonesia, the nation with the largest Islamic population, 134 million in India, 133 million in China, 130 million in Pakistan and Bangladesh, 65 million in Iran, and 62 million in Turkey. Islam is also the fastest growing religion in the United States and Europe. An extremely small number (tenths of 1 percent) of Muslims are jihadists, although a growing number may be sympathetic to one or more aspects of the jihadist agenda such as the establishment of new governments.

Figure 2.1
The Concentric Circles of Jihadism



If the criteria for jihadist support were the belief that the U.S. military should depart Iraq or the Israeli military should depart the West Bank and Gaza, the majority of Muslims would probably agree. That agreement does not, however, translate into a willingness to support actively jihadist groups except among a small minority.

TARGETING THE RIGHT CIRCLES WITH THE RIGHT STRATEGIES

For the United States and the West in general, the responses we develop to the jihadist movement must distinguish among the components of the problem. To deal effectively with the threat, we must have consensus about the nature of the problem facing us. There should be clarity that the threat is not “terrorism,” or even all terrorist organizations, but rather the jihadist terrorists who seek to hijack Islam and use violence to replace existing governments with nondemocratic theocracies.

The strategy and tactics that we employ to go after the two inner circles involve chiefly law enforcement and intelligence activities, sometimes supported by military measures. (Chapter 6 discusses how to improve these U.S. capabilities.) In addition, the United States must continue to provide intelligence, military, and financial support to other nations that are targeted by these jihadist groups:

- ◆ Within the two inner circles, the United States must give priority to al Qaeda itself, because al Qaeda has focused on the United States as a target more than any other jihadist group has.
- ◆ Priority among the other jihadist groups should be determined based upon their demonstrated capability and willingness to operate in the United States. Additional priority should be given to those groups that have targeted American facilities overseas (such as Jemaah Islamiyah’s attack on the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta). For the other jihadist groups, U.S. activities should largely be in support of friendly governments that are the most likely potential targets of these jihadists. That U.S. assistance may be directly focused on the terrorist groups or more broadly on strengthening the friendly government, such as through trade policies or loans from international financial institutions.

The strategy and tactics that the United States must pursue to affect the third and fourth of the concentric circles go beyond law enforcement and intelligence measures and instead involve policies, values, and our ability to articulate and propagate those values. Here too, U.S. assistance to friendly governments is an important tool, particularly when that assistance is either (a) conditioned upon the friendly government ceasing to do things that create jihadist support (such as indiscriminate police crackdowns and widespread use of torture) or (b) aimed at enabling the friendly government to provide services that gain them increased support vis-à-vis the jihadists (such as offering better schools than the jihadists' so-called madrassas, which teach hatred as the major subject of the curriculum).

In addition to assistance, however, the United States must successfully promote discussion of shared values, including democracy, civil liberties, nonviolence, and protection of noncombatants. Traditional propaganda mechanisms, even updated to include satellite television, are a small part of the solution. U.S. activities in Iraq, as portrayed by many Islamic news media, make it difficult for the U.S. government to successfully promote these values and ideas in the Muslim world. Much of that task will have to be borne by non-governmental organizations, governments other than the United States, and through leaders in the Islamic world. The U.S. government could, however, play a role in stimulating such groups, governments, and individuals to assume these tasks. (The Battle of Ideas is discussed in Chapter 5).

Key to the overall management of the U.S. response to the jihadist threat is an understanding of how U.S. actions affecting one of these four concentric circles impacts the other circles. It may well be, for example, that to defeat a jihadist terrorist group (second circle), the United States might choose to support a government that is widely disliked by its people for its corruption and suppression of civil liberties and democracy (such as Uzbekistan). Doing so, however, may be counterproductive to attempting to gain support in the third and fourth circles within that country. Understanding those trade-offs and making them explicitly and consciously will be key to the overall long-term success in suppressing the jihadists. In general, the long-term interests of the United States will be best served by actively influencing such governments to eliminate the causes of popular unrest, particularly when they involve civil liberties infringements and human rights abuses.

