

ANALYZING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AL QAEDA'S ONLINE  
INFLUENCE OPERATIONS BY MEANS OF PROPAGANDA THEORY

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by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis sought to explore the use of propaganda by al Qaeda through the lenses of established propaganda theorists and theories. Through analyzing former al Qaeda releases and case studies in the context of propaganda theory this thesis established a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of al Qaeda's propaganda. After analyzing the propaganda and case studies it was discovered that the rate of those engaging in attacks based on al Qaeda's online influence operations is insignificant. The concerns that al Qaeda is recruiting numerous individuals to engage in attacks based on its online propaganda operations is not based in reality and is not a threat warranting the discussion it receives.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Since September 11, 2001 counterterrorism has become the dominating force in terms of United States foreign policy as well as a major motivator within the Intelligence Community. It is common knowledge that targeting terrorists groups, and in particular al Qaeda, has lead the United States into two major conflicts in the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan along with a number of smaller (and less publicized) actions throughout the world. The “Global War on Terror” (GWOT) or what is now referred to as Overseas Contingency Operations has dominated the political, military, and international landscape in one way or another for over ten years.

Over the last ten years the phrase “winning the hearts and minds” came back into common use. Individuals could not read an article involving the GWOT without coming across the “winning the hearts and minds” mantra. The idea involved “winning” over the target population from al Qaeda and other like minded groups. It is well known in counterinsurgency operations that the best way to remove an insurgency is to remove the support the group(s) receives from the general population. The above was seen in what was eventually termed the “Sunni Awakening.” The “awakening” occurred when the Sunni population of Iraq reversed its support against al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). As a result, a significant decrease in violence and attacks against American forces occurred.<sup>1</sup> However, this idea of “winning the hearts and minds” is not just limited to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or American forces elsewhere in the world. Al Qaeda as an organization is well aware of the benefits of maintaining and growing their support populations around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Lynch, “Explaining the Awakening: Engagement, Publicity, and the Transformation of Iraqi Sunni Political Attitudes,” *Security Studies* 20, (2011): 36-72.



There is a large amount of information available, in both the public and academic spheres, which centers on al Qaeda. While having an understanding of al Qaeda's past history and other background information is important, it is not the focus of this thesis. Instead, the focal point of this thesis is on al Qaeda's post 9/11 evolution into what they are now (e.g. a flat, non-hierarchical organization with an online focus). Al Qaeda, as an organization and operating body, was not a trend setter in the pre-9/11 years. However, what al Qaeda has displayed through the last few years has been much more creative and innovative than what was seen from it in the past. The organization has borrowed what has worked for other groups and tailored it to fit its needs. Through this, al Qaeda has developed and maintained an influence throughout the jihadi and international community.

Al Qaeda is not the first to use media to deliver its message. For example, Hezbollah has been creating its own media for years to serve its purpose. Hezbollah's al Manar has been operating its own network, website, and other media outlets to deliver its message for decades. Al Manar contains programming that includes fundraising, praise of suicide bombers, actions against Israel, and other propaganda techniques including those targeting children and adolescents.<sup>2</sup> Another technique that al Qaeda borrowed and adjusted was the concept of leaderless resistance. The idea of leaderless resistance got its start from the white supremacist militia movements in the United States. White supremacy groups were suffering numerous setbacks through a combination of legal proceedings and lawsuits. Due to police informants and subsequent arrests the legal actions taken against the white supremacy groups resulted in the loss of property, income and other tangible assets. These setbacks, prompted Louis Beam, a white supremacist, to incorporate the concept of leaderless resistance. Beam was also revolutionary in

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<sup>2</sup> Avi Jorisch, "Al-Manar: Hizbullah TV, 24/7," *Middle East Quarterly* 11, (Winter 2004): 17-31.

the way he used the Internet. He was an early architect in the expansion of the Internet's usefulness in spreading his organization's message to like minded individuals. He began by posting on computer bulletin boards in the 1980s, and later on websites. He recommended "phantom cell networks" and/or "autonomous leaderships units" that could operate completely independent of one another.<sup>3</sup> In using a leaderless approach that delivers its message online, the white supremacy groups were able to stay vocal without the normal risks associated with being visible. By implementing some of the same techniques and avoiding some of the mistakes of the other organizations, al Qaeda has been able to stay vocal even with the numerous setbacks delivered in the form of kinetic operations taken by the United States and its allies against it.

## **1.1 Research Question**

Needless to say al Qaeda is an organization that is well known within the academic and professional settings of intelligence and national security. However, the information surrounding al Qaeda's use of propaganda and how it correlates with the major theories of propaganda is limited. The objective of this thesis is to investigate al Qaeda's use of propaganda and to answer two major questions. First, does al Qaeda follow the parameters set out by the theories of propaganda to wage a successful online propaganda campaign? The propaganda theories used will include, but will not be limited to, the Institute of Propaganda Analysis' (IPA) propaganda analysis, Edward Bernays' ideas on propaganda, public opinion and engineering of consent, among others. It should be noted at this point that a number of the theorists used did not have the actions of terrorist organizations in mind when creating the theories popular in the field of propaganda. However with the previous statement in mind, the techniques, not the actors stay

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*. (New York: Colombia Press, 2006), 113-118.

the same and it is for this reason the theories are relevant for analyzing al Qaeda's propaganda operations.

The second question correlates neatly with the information gleaned from the first question. Are al Qaeda's online propaganda operations successful in radicalizing recruits? Successful recruitment will be defined as individuals engaging in physical acts of terrorism (irrespective of the attack resulting in death/destruction). Throughout this research there will be certain other areas that will be considered in hopes of creating a complete picture of al Qaeda's Internet operations in helping to accomplish its propaganda objectives. Through the propaganda theories mentioned above, this thesis will explore al Qaeda's use of propaganda techniques such as the use of legitimate/respected individuals to relay messages, use of emotional triggers to elicit desired reactions, and the proper use of media to ensure messages are received by the intended targets.

In continuing this line of questioning, the thesis will look into al Qaeda's use of propaganda in the media (conventional and web-based) and if they are able to synchronize its ideas with the concepts proposed in the major theories of propaganda. In other words, through the creation of media outlets, such as as-Sahab, is al Qaeda able to reach its target populations in the way it wants to? Furthermore, does al Qaeda target each specific population separately, or does it use different tools such as video, blogs and/or press releases to reach all of its target populations? What objective(s) is al Qaeda trying to accomplish by targeting each of its populations? The research will look into how successful al Qaeda is/is not in its propaganda operations by examining case studies. By looking at how many have been influenced by al Qaeda's propaganda operations, the research will help shed some light on an area that has seen

much discussion. It is the hope that this discussion will help clear up misconceptions while creating the possibility of responses to al Qaeda's influence operations.

## **2. Al Qaeda and its Use of Propaganda**

This thesis will not provide a detailed history of al Qaeda's organization. However, it is important to know certain details and facts about al Qaeda to properly understand the all encompassing nature of its propaganda objectives. Al Qaeda's direction and objectives are strongly based on the leadership of Osama bin Laden, who was heavily influenced by the writings of Sayyid Qutb (such as *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Quran*). Qutb was a modern architect of anti-Western sentiment who expounded the idea that Western civilization was an enemy of Islam due to that fact the west was the embodiment of evil, with the United States' position of power being the magnification of this evil.<sup>4</sup> Bin Laden, in combination with a student of Qutb known as Abdullah Azzam, created the front runner to al Qaeda. They were responsible for funding the mujahedeen (holy warriors) in the Afghan/Soviet war. The "Bureau of Services" effectively created an avenue of fundraising known as the "golden chain" that went from rich Middle Eastern gulf countries to fighters in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> Once the Soviets pulled out, there was contention between Azzam and bin Laden about the direction of what later became al Qaeda. Azzam desired to stay in Afghanistan and continue fighting until an Islamic government could be established, while bin Laden wanted to take the fight out of Afghanistan and into other parts of the world. With the death of Azzam from an IED (the party responsible for his death is still debated) the direction of al Qaeda fell solely on bin Laden.

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<sup>4</sup> S.P. Huntington, "Al-Qaeda: A Blueprint for International Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century?," *Defence Studies*, 4, 2 (Summer 2004): 229–255.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Moyers, "Brief History of al Qaeda" *Bill Moyers Journal*. accessed April 01, 2012. <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/07272007/alqaeda.html>.

During the early days while bin Laden was developing himself as a leader of jihadi causes, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who had spent almost half his life up to that point waging causes against the Egyptian government, also was building up his jihadist group. Al-Jihad (which also went by the names of Jihad Organization and Islamic Jihad) would later be incorporated into al Qaeda where al-Zawahiri would take his place as the second in command of al Qaeda. Al-Zawahiri and bin Laden both served each other well, filling in the gaps and shortcomings of the other. Bin Laden had the funds and connections, while al-Zawahiri provided direction along with hardened mujahedeen.<sup>6</sup>

Once al Qaeda was established they started making a name for themselves both within the jihadi community and with the various intelligence services throughout the world. Throughout its history al Qaeda has engaged in a number of successful terrorist attacks such as those targeting the two US embassies in Africa, the USS Cole bombing and needless to say the 9/11 attacks. However attacks have never been the sole action in al Qaeda's repertoire. Al Qaeda desires to accomplish a number of objectives and goals that are common within the international jihadist movement including, but not limited to, the reestablishment of the Islamic caliphate, establishment of Shari law, disposal of corrupt Arab governments (especially those aligned with the west), establishment of true Islamic countries, etc. For all of the above to happen al Qaeda needs to take a multipronged approach.

Al Qaeda understands that propaganda is just as effective as having a battalion of holy warriors. Bin Laden was shrewd in his application of propaganda and media manipulation. He stated in 2002, "It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods;

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 121-128.

in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles.” Bin Laden is not the only one to understand the importance of media. Ayman al-Zawahiri declared in 2005 that “more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. We are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our umma.” (Umma/ummah is translated as the whole of the Muslim population).<sup>7</sup>

There can be little doubt that al Qaeda has the best “brand recognition” of any of the international terrorist organizations. Al Qaeda is well known throughout the world and almost all from Americans to Arabs have some level of emotional response when they hear the “al Qaeda” name. As an organization al Qaeda is well aware of its place in the world and they use that place to deliver its messages.

## **2.1 Al Qaeda’s Media Arm as-Sahab**

While there have been numerous setbacks and failures, for al Qaeda, since the 9/11 attacks (which includes the killing of Osama bin Laden), al Qaeda is still considered a threat in many policy makers minds across the world. The reason for this concern is not based solely on kinetic threats, but also, because of its propaganda activities. Like any organization al Qaeda is broken up into smaller groups (i.e. cells or nodes) that are in charge of specific areas. The cell or node that is in charge of al Qaeda’s media is as-Sahab or “the cloud” in English. This node has a number of responsibilities which includes traditional and online media releases along with all other forms of communication that involves those outside of al Qaeda central. The other forms of communication can include such things as transmissions with supporters, which include training videos and messages of various purposes (e.g. martyr videos, successful attacks) that serve to enact a desired action from al Qaeda central. As-Sahab is also responsible for the media that is

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<sup>7</sup> Akil N. Awan, “The Virtual Jihad: An Increasingly Legitimate Form of Warfare,” *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 5 (May 2010): 10-13.

directed at governments throughout the world, citizens of various countries, potential supporters, and even mujahedeen.

In using as-Sahab, al Qaeda's message is able to be seen in a wide array of websites, blogs, online magazines, online books, and chat rooms. Al Qaeda does not have to be limited to traditional modes of communication such as was the case with terrorist organizations in the not too distant past. As-Sahab has a strong online presence for many reasons; many of those reasons are due to the very nature of online activities, which includes international access, anonymity, low costs and limited risk, and limited censorship. In traditional avenues of media (print, television, radio), the message is often times edited by the venue due to a number of factors such as time/space restrictions, professional ethical standards, etc., while within the online domain there are no such restrictions. Needless to say, a terrorist organization that has a graphic or gory video of an IED attack or a beheading knows full well that this material will not be viewed unedited on television. So, by using as-Sahab, al Qaeda is able to ensure that when it wants to release its message-the message is not manipulated by any third parties. An example of al Qaeda's full appreciation of as-Sahab can be seen in the visibility that as-Sahab has taken on in the past few years.

Over the years, as-Sahab has shown a marked improvement in the quality of its video and website production. They have advanced from low level and often times amateurish videos with poor quality websites to having a level of sophistication that any organization would be proud of. Not only has as-Sahab shown an increase in the quality of its product, but also in the quantity. As-Sahab released five times the amount of videos in 2007 as they did in 2005.<sup>8</sup>

An early forerunner of as-Sahab was seen in a-neda. Starting in the late 1990s with al-neda (originally using the website [www.alneda.com](http://www.alneda.com)), al Qaeda made quick use of its online

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Seib, "The Al Qaeda Media Machine," *Military Review* (May-June 2008): 74-80.

capabilities. In 2006, al Qaeda was already active on more than fifty websites; this number did not include supporter websites or other jihadi orientated websites. While the original website (al-neda) has been shut down for years, as-Sahab is able to keep al Qaeda online through a cyber cat and mouse game. They are able to stay online by moving from server to server, changing website names and URLs to avoid detection and even finding loopholes and shortcomings in Web servers. They attach to a legitimate website where they serve as “parasites;” hijacking legitimate websites until they are discovered. By constantly changing locations, al Qaeda’s websites are able to deliver its information to supporters and liked minded individuals who are kept in the loop about the changes through emails, chat rooms and postings or links on other jihadi websites.<sup>9</sup>

Since al Qaeda has suffered further setbacks to its kinetic operations, due to strong US and allied counterterrorism operations, the Internet has become even more important to al Qaeda. It also happened to be that during the last decade, as al Qaeda increased its presence online, the Internet become more important the world over due to the constantly increasing online media saturation. Without the use of media, a terrorist organization’s kinetic operations are limited to only those within the vicinity of the act, causing the impact of the terrorist attack to be severely limited.<sup>10</sup> However, with the use of international media, terrorists’ messages can be transmitted across the world in a small fraction of the time that it would have taken before the Internet. For example during the 9/11 attacks the images of that day were broadcasted all across the world in real time and replayed constantly throughout the following weeks. Nearly as fast as the information on the attacks came out, the information about al Qaeda was also released. The

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<sup>9</sup> Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges*, (Washington, D.C: Institute of Peace Press, 2006), 67-68.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph S. Tuman, *Communicating Terror: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2010), 163.



result being that many who had never heard of al Qaeda or bin Laden now knew who they were, its objectives, goals and even its grievances.

## **2.1 al Qaeda's Message Dissemination**

Al Qaeda ensures that its message is received by using both Internet and non-Internet based media. In reference to conventional forms of media such as newspapers, radio, and television, al Qaeda relies heavily on such venues to project successful attacks, threats and messages to world leaders and citizens of various nations. One such traditional mode of media that al Qaeda relies heavily on is Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera receives the videos/messages from the terrorist organization through its numerous sources and contacts where they then broadcast that message while also passing off al Qaeda's media to other international news venues, such as CNN or the BBC with a requirement for sourcing them as the originator of the media.<sup>11</sup> Due in part to Al Jazeera's almost exclusive access of Islamic extremist material, Al Jazeera has received criticism from a variety of sources. However, Al Jazeera is but one of al Qaeda's sources for information dissemination.

The Internet is a venue that can serve many positive purposes, but it can just as easily service negative ones. This is the case with al Qaeda's online propaganda operations. To operate online, Groups do not need a broadcasting station or high tech equipment that is costly (and easily detected). Users only need an Internet connection with some low cost technologies. Al Qaeda is well aware of the importance of this medium. By using the Internet as its other front, al Qaeda is able to reach groups that would have been impossible to reach just a matter of years ago. With the level of Internet saturation that has taken place in the last decade, there can be little doubt that al Qaeda's potential market has become much larger. It has been estimated by

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<sup>11</sup> Carsten Bockstette, *Jihadist Terrorist Use of Strategic Communication Management Techniques*, Occasional Paper Series 20 (George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2008).

the United Nations that at the end of 2010 there were over two billion people online. Furthermore, 90% of the world has access to a mobile phone network.<sup>12</sup> Even in a state as remote and hostile as Afghanistan, there has been an increase in telecommunications. The country has seen a 77% increase in the last few years which has resulted in Internet services to 80% of the population.<sup>13</sup> While increased access to information is positive, it can prove dangerous when misinformation and propaganda are also spread along the same telecommunication avenues.

Before the advent of the telecommunications industry, information was slow to travel and could not reach large segments of the population. However, in today's information age, information can be translated across populations in a matter of minutes and influence emotions to the point of violent actions. This can be seen in the following case of the Koran burning by Florida pastor Terry Jones; the accidental burning of religious texts at Bagram Airbase and the more recent Egyptian protests at the US Embassy over the supposed anti-Islam movie. These actions have led to riots and protests that have resulted in a number of individuals being killed or injured.

Al Qaeda is fully capable of using incidents that can incite Muslim reactions to its benefit. Al Qaeda has the benefit of the same religion and many cultural similarities of a large segment of the Muslim population. There is even a segment of the Muslim population that holds many of the same opinions and beliefs. While a vast majority of Muslim opinion rejects violence against civilians (including Western civilians), there is a majority that shows an

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<sup>12</sup> International Telecommunication Union (ITU). *The World in 2010*. World Telecommunication Report, Market Information and Statistics Division Telecommunication Development Bureau, Geneva: United Nations, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Maryann Lawlor, "Connectivity Builds Independence in Afghanistan," *SIGNAL Magazine Online* accessed February 24, 2012. [http://www.afcea.org/signal/articles/templates/Signal\\_Article\\_Template.asp?articleid=2571&zoneid=320](http://www.afcea.org/signal/articles/templates/Signal_Article_Template.asp?articleid=2571&zoneid=320).

agreement with al Qaeda's goals such as expelling US forces from Muslim countries and significant numbers approving attacks on military personnel.<sup>14</sup>

In understanding the opinions of large segments of the Muslim world the relevance of the problem of al Qaeda's propaganda operations becomes an issue. It does not take much of a stretch of the imagination to realize that with public opinion in favor of al Qaeda's goals, along with the manipulation of information by al Qaeda, there is a greater likelihood of disenfranchised youth joining al Qaeda's version of jihad. For example, Arid Uka, the perpetrator of the Frankfurt Airport shooting who was responsible for the death of two US servicemen, was motivated to attack US servicemen after being radicalized by jihadi propaganda. According to court testimony, the last straw for Uka was viewing a video clip from the anti-war movie "Redacted" which showed a fictional scene of a teenage Muslim girl being raped by US soldiers.<sup>15</sup> The scene in question was recorded from the movie and uploaded onto YouTube where it was portrayed as non-fiction. The case of Uka is a good example of the process of self radicalization due to jihadi propaganda. Much like other forms of manipulative propaganda, jihadist propaganda is designed to work on strong emotions to render the watcher/listener/reader to act in a specific manner and in the situation of Uka the process worked well for jihadists.

## **2.2 Desired Areas of Enhancement**

While media and al Qaeda's propaganda operations have made the kinetic operations of the organization well known, there are a few areas that might not be so clear. These areas should still be considered significant in addressing terrorism activity. One such target area includes supporters (both active and passive) who give financial support or help to spread the message of

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<sup>14</sup> Steven Kull, et. al. *Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and US Policies*. (World Public Opinion Organization, College Park: University of Maryland, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> David McHugh, "Arid Uka, Frankfurt Airport Shooter, Sentenced to Life," *Huffington Post* accessed February 23, 2012. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/10/arid-uka-frankfurt-sentenced\\_n\\_1267770.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/10/arid-uka-frankfurt-sentenced_n_1267770.html).

jihad (either through the online community or physical community). While the simply spreading the message might not seem very threatening, one must consider that individuals who are unable or unwilling to engage in physical attacks can still motivate others to do so, or in the case of financial support, make it possible for others to engage in attacks.

### **2.3a Recruitment**

As previously mentioned, al Qaeda's use of the Internet for propaganda is well entrenched in websites, blogs, online magazines/books, and chat rooms. In doing so, al Qaeda is able to engage in accomplishing a number of its goals; these goals include, but are not limited to recruitment, fundraising, communication, and ideology projection and the justification of violence.

Recruitment is a key factor in the messages that al Qaeda releases. For an organization that has seen much human capital loss due to a number of factors, such as targeted killings or simply through attrition, there must be a level of recruitment that occurs to replace the ranks. There are a number of videos and other forms of media releases from al Qaeda and its online supporters that call for recruitment. How al Qaeda targets potential recruits depends largely on who is being targeted. Regarding recruits in Western countries there are videos and online publications in English, just as there are videos in Arabic and other languages to target those populations. However, al Qaeda does not only rely on its own resources to help motivate others to join the jihadist cause.

Al Qaeda only has a finite amount of resources it can devote to its online messages, so to counteract this limitation it will use sympathizers and supporters to help spread its recruitment messages through all of the online venues such as blogs, chat rooms and social media. These "Jihobbyists" might never engage in kinetic operations themselves, however due to its use of

propaganda and its active attempts at enraging potential jihadists into action they have become a powerful tool in al Qaeda's recruitment apparatus.<sup>16</sup> Through a mix of propaganda based on truths, half-truths and downright falsifications, al Qaeda is able to use this to motivate individuals that are already vulnerable to recruitment.

In conjunction with propaganda, al Qaeda's use of charismatic leaders and figure-heads (i.e. bin Laden, al-Awlaki) helps legitimize the arguments made through the released online media. For example, using American born Omar Hammami, Anwar al-Awlaki, and Adam Gadahn to specifically target US and western Muslims, al Qaeda is displaying the ability to adapt content to suit the audience. In a way, al Qaeda uses these "Americans" to say to other Americans come join the right side with us. This is not so dissimilar to what was seen by North Korea in using the likes of James Dresnok, who was used by the North Korean regime to persuade Americans to side against the United States. Using the Internet's vast resources, al Qaeda is able to recruit in a manner never before seen. Al Qaeda in a sense reaches into areas that had never been available or open to it.

As an Islamic terrorist organization that has a strong online presence, Al Qaeda has the ability to find recruits throughout the world. To reach as many recruits as possible, al Qaeda by way of as-Sahab uses a number of different formats for its media productions that are available to them. At one point as-Sahab had the capability to release a video about every three days and the ability to release a video relating to recent world events/news cycles in approximately five to seven days.<sup>17</sup> While all of these releases cannot be credited with successful recruitment, they all serve the purpose of maintaining a level of visibility for al Qaeda and show the ability of as-Sahab to stay vocal. In reacting quickly to changing circumstances, al Qaeda is able to act as a

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<sup>16</sup> Jarret Brachman, "Watching the Watchers: Al Qaeda's Bold New Strategy is All About Using Our Own Words and Actions Against Us. And it's Working," *Foreign Policy* 182, (November 2010): 60-70.

<sup>17</sup> IntelCenter, "al-Qaeda Messaging Statistics (QMS)," 2007.

self-appointed vanguard for Muslims across the world. For example, when the Arab Spring was at its height, al Qaeda was quick to respond. In using as-Sahab, the leaders of al Qaeda reminded the Arab world what they have been fighting for years-to throw off the-oppressive regimes (now the target of the protesters).

### **2.3b Recruitment Process**

The process towards engaging a terrorist attack takes a number of forms that were not simply available a decade or so ago. One such recruitment process involves those who actively seek out al Qaeda and become active members of the organization. This was the case with those like Adam Gadahn, who left America to join al Qaeda. There are also those who have contact or affiliation with al Qaeda, but are not full fledged members, such as the Fort Hood shooter Major Hassan, and those who are unknown to the organization but take the banner up themselves such as the lone wolf or small cell groups. Each type of action requires a process of radicalization. The process of choosing to partake in a terrorist attack is not based solely on a fleeting feeling or emotion, but instead must be built within the individual until that individual feels he has no other choice, and therefore must act. There are a number of reasons someone might choose to join a terrorist organization or take it upon himself to engage in a terrorist act on an organization's behalf. In the case of al Qaeda, the reason for an individual joining the ranks of the global Salafist movement will be explored in an effort to explain the steps leading an individual to want to engage in terrorism. There is much discussion about the lower social economic class being more susceptible to criminality and terrorism. While it is certainly true that a number of individuals from less stable environments are in danger of resorting to crime; the focus of this thesis is on those who are considered estranged from their environment/surroundings, lack

control of their life, and exhibit other factors that lead to a level of alienation, as opposed to simply analyzing the social-economic status of individuals.

Individuals who are alienated in their environment (whether real or perceived) is a dangerous situation. Alienation is dangerous due to the fact that these individuals are already susceptible to the radicalization process since they could be considered in the pre-radicalization stage. For example, an individual who is jilted (i.e., alienated) and receives the correct stimulation, which can be created by themselves or come from other source and has the opportunity, is prone to engage in action.<sup>18</sup> There are a number of major factors why an individual might join the cause of international jihad. One factor that seems to play a large role is friendship. The social bonds that are formed play a large factor in one deciding to join the movement or simply staying within the pre-radicalization phase. Friendship bonds that were established before the formal affiliation with Islamic terrorism were responsible for 68% of mujahedeen joining the cause. Furthermore, kinship and worship account for 14% and eight percent.<sup>19</sup> With a total of 90% of joining a terrorist organization accounted for, these three causes can be seen as the major factors in pushing individuals to take that final step in the process of radicalization which often times leads to violence. What needs to be looked at, is if these same factors can be applied to the online environment and in turn produce the entire radicalization process through the Internet.

As was mentioned above there are three main types of individuals that will be discussed in this thesis in regards to recruitment to al Qaeda. They are those who seek out al Qaeda and are active members of the organization, those who have contact/affiliation, but are not full fledged

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<sup>18</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigations Counterterrorism Division, *The Radicalization Process: From Conversion to Jihad*, (FBI Counterterrorism Report May 10, 2006), 3-9.

<sup>19</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004), 99-125.

members, and those who are unknown to the organization, but take up the banner themselves such as the lone wolves or small cell groups. Each of the three types of “recruits” had specific reasons for joining. While their specific reasons are varied, they appear to follow a line of immense dissatisfaction with the way they perceive the world (in particular the Western world).

By internalizing a level of victimization many who purpose terrorist actions have shown a level of alienation. This alienation is the window needed to allow al Qaeda’s ideas in and as a result they are more susceptible to Al Qaeda and other jihadi orientated propaganda. Mass victimization can be used as a recruitment tool for terrorism such as that seen in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict where each side considers the other as the aggressor and themselves as the victim. For example, on the Israeli side, songs such as the “the whole world is against us” and “I do not have any other country” help perpetuate the concept of victimization while on the Palestinian side the creation of Israel is viewed as its “Holocaust,” with the Israeli Independence Day being referred to as Al Nakbah or “the catastrophe.”<sup>20</sup> With each side failing to acknowledge the other side’s victimization while promoting its own, there can be little doubt that this propaganda could leave individuals who internalize these ideas open for further propaganda and possible action.

While many within the larger Muslim community do not internalize a level of victimization, al Qaeda seeks to draw members in who are susceptible to victimization propaganda. Al Qaeda uses examples of weak Arab states, and US/Western involvement in the greater Middle East, along with examples of “atrocities” committed against Muslims (especially

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<sup>20</sup> Edna Erez, “Protracted War, Terrorism and Mass Victimisation: Exploring Victimological/Criminological Concepts and Theories to Address Victimisation in Israel,” *Large Scale Victimisation as a Potential Source of Terrorist Activities*, Uwe Ewald and Ksenija Turkovic (Eds.), IOS Press, 2006: 89-97.



Arab Muslims) as cases of victimization. Al Qaeda's hope is to enrage individuals into action. Al Qaeda propaganda (and all similar jihadist propaganda) seeks to create an "us versus them" mindset in its Muslim target group. By creating these membership categorizations one group is better able to dehumanize the other, therefore decreasing feelings associated with violent action against other human beings.<sup>21</sup> A historical reference to membership categorization would be in the treatment of indigenous populations by European powers at the height of its empires. By viewing Africans, Asians and other groups as less than human, or at the very least less than Europeans, the process of colonization would be much easier to engage in (morally speaking). In using membership categorization along with creating a sense of collective identity, al Qaeda is wielding some powerful tools in its propaganda toolbox.

Through creating a process of membership categorization al Qaeda is able to breakdown a number of emotional barriers of individuals to join al Qaeda's cause. After creating an "us versus them" mentality and intensifying feelings of hatred against the outsiders, al Qaeda is able to manipulate those who have shown a disposition towards jihad. However, simply having websites and videos is not enough for a majority of individuals in choosing to join the jihadi cause. Before the creation of the Internet, Islamic terrorist organizations relied heavily on friendship, kinship, and to an extent worship to entice recruits and members for the organization. Tapping into the alienated young male bracket, the jihadist organization seeks to serve as a form of brotherhood where members could come to depend on each other and in a real sense create a sense of unity within the group, while maintaining the alienation from the outside community.<sup>22</sup> In looking at present day al Qaeda and the importance of the Internet, al Qaeda cannot always

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<sup>21</sup> Pauline Hope Cheong and Jeffrey R. Halverson, "Youths in Violent Extremist Discourse: Mediated Identification and Interventions," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, (2010): 1104-1123.

<sup>22</sup> Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, (1980): 423-453.

depend on face-to-face interaction to create this environment; instead, it has to depend on the online format. By using forums, chat rooms, and social media interaction al Qaeda is able to create the same environment that was seen in the previous generations' radical Mosques and closed rooms. The present online environment creates the friendship and kinship bonds along with the unique environment required for individuals to take the next step in jihad.<sup>23</sup>

The situation with recruitment is not linear in its process, due to the decentralized nature of the present al Qaeda and the constant efforts of US intelligence operations who are working to dismantle al Qaeda. The path to joining al Qaeda is not as simple as contacting a recruiting officer and then traveling to Pakistan or Yemen for training. When Afghanistan was still a safe haven for al Qaeda, training camps could operate with a certain degree of immunity from the outside world. It was estimated that from May of 1996 up to the 9/11 attacks as many as 20,000 individuals took part in training camps run by al Qaeda in Afghanistan. These camps were the same camps that trained all of the hijackers of 9/11 and those who were responsible for the bombing of the USS Cole.<sup>24</sup> However, by using the Internet as its new training platform, al Qaeda is able to forgo the risky behavior of hosting training camps and instead post articles and instructions directly on the Internet. Al Qaeda is wise enough to not only use Arabic language training manuals, but also English manuals, such as what was seen with *Inspire* (online magazine), which was created in large part by the American born al-Awlaki. Al-Awlaki, who until his death, was pivotal in al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) media operations, used all forms of online media and social media to have his messages reach his desired targets.<sup>25</sup> For

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<sup>23</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 114-117.

<sup>24</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, *Terrorist Training Camps*, accessed April 07, 2012  
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/al-qaida-camps.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Seth Jones, "Awlaki's death hits al-Qaeda's social media strategy," *BBC News*, accessed February 28, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-15133575>.

example an article contained within *Inspire* magazine spoke of how to build a bomb in your mother's kitchen.<sup>26</sup> In creating all of these online resources al Qaeda desires to replace what was lost to them after 9/11 and have a one stop shop where individuals can learn whatever they need to stage a successful attack.

### **2.3c Fundraising**

Fundraising is one of the major obstacles that must be overcome to nullify a terrorist organization. While it costs a nation state a vast amount of resources for operations, the funding of a terrorist organization like al Qaeda needs is much smaller. This is especially true for independent small group cells who take up al Qaeda's cause. It was estimated that the entire 9/11 operation cost al Qaeda only between \$400,000-500,000 as compared to the two trillion dollars it cost the United States in the form of loss of infrastructure, a shutdown of the economy, and other factors.<sup>27</sup> According to the Institute of Global Security the property damage alone stood at \$10-13 billion. The previous sentences help to shape the image that even with limited funds, a terrorist organization can inflict damage at a much higher rate than its size would suggest.

One issue that persists to be a problem is charities funneling money to terrorist organizations. North America alone, there have been a number of charities that have been investigated due to possible links to terrorist funding. Some of these charities such as the Global Relief Foundation (GRF) who raised \$20 million in its first ten years of operation was designated a financier of terrorism by the Treasury Department in 2002.<sup>28</sup> While there is no doubt that a

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<sup>26</sup> Gordon Corera, "Inspire Magazine: Who was behind it?," *BBC News*. accessed February 28, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15818278>.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Zelikow, et al. *The 9/11 Commission Report*. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> J. Millard Burr and Robert Collins, *Alms for Jihad Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 268-269.

large amount of the fundraising went to support legitimate aid in the Muslim world, the exact amount given purposely and accidentally to terrorism activities is unknown.

Like many of the other world faiths, alms giving is a main tenet of Islam. It is required that able Muslims give to charity. This can create the opportunity for illicit financial transactions to occur. While the vast majority of the donations go to legitimate sources, this thesis focuses on how al Qaeda and its supporters are able to manipulate this religious requirement to get much needed funds funneled into its organization. Traditionally speaking, terrorism is not a money making operation. Being a fully fledged member of the mujahedeen, they are not able to hold down a steady full time job that offers great benefits, so as a result it is extremely important to ensure a steady flow of funds to maintain the lifestyles' of the mujahedeen and the organization as a whole. While some groups have resorted to kidnappings and other criminal activities to support their organizations, al Qaeda central still depends heavily on the Internet for fundraising. Al Qaeda in Iraq for example was able to maintain its campaigns based in large part of its funds coming in from kidnapping ransoms.<sup>29</sup> However, kidnappings are not only dangerous due to the possibility of being detected by governmental forces, but are also dangerous since they can easily alienate the local populations that support them. This is not a problem for al Qaeda central since a large amount of its focus on fundraising is Internet based.

Al Qaeda and its supporters use the Internet for fundraising in a number of key ways including collecting funds online, telling individuals where to send funds through posts, and even illegal operations such as credit card and Social Security number theft. The most well established mode is through electronic fundraising means, such as asking for funds on websites, blogs and other postings. Websites used by al Qaeda and its supporters that ask for funds

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<sup>29</sup> Bruce Riedel, "The Return of the Knights" al-Qaeda and the Fruits of Middle East Disorder," *Survival* 49, no. 3 (2007): 107-120.

towards the cause use “tried and true” methods that are mentioned in this section, along with innovative means to get around detection. This type of fundraising includes both online funding sources and other means of sending funds such as money transfer systems like Western Union. Al Qaeda even takes part in the traditional hawala system by means of asking for funds to go through a set pathway to the organization. Hawala, which involves transferring money through one hawalader (broker) to another hawalader which is all based on the honor system. This system has been used for centuries throughout the Middle East, Northern Africa, and South Asia. This system has also been used by al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations to receive and send funds. One allure of the hawala system is the lack of legal requirements and its informal nature.<sup>30</sup>

With the ease and availability of the Internet it is no wonder that fundraising through websites is one of al Qaeda’s main undertakings. One such way al Qaeda uses the Internet for fundraising is through posting bank account numbers on websites where individuals can send money. Along with simply posting the account number on one of these websites online, al Qaeda has also used online banking for various purposes, such as transferring funds, collection of funds and even hiding funds from governments.<sup>31</sup> By using such simple techniques al Qaeda was able to collect funds from supporters across the globe without having to leave “the comforts of home”. While such simple means of fundraising still persist, al Qaeda has used more caution due to counterterrorism and anti-money laundering techniques that focuses on financial transactions.

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<sup>30</sup> “Hawalas and Underground Terrorist Financing Mechanism: Informal International Financing Networks that can Serve as a Pipeline of Funds for Terrorist,” Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Trade and Finance of the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs United States Senate, One Hundred Seventh Congress (First Session) November 14, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel S. Saltman, “The Global Jihad Network: Why and How al-Qaeda Uses Computer Technology to Wage Jihad,” *Journal of Global Change and Governance* 1, no. 3, (2008): 2-10.

After 9/11 a number of agencies and departments in the United States started investigating funds being raised for terrorism. The Treasury Department in conjunction with the Justice Department has frozen millions in assets, dissolved a number of charities and in essence made al Qaeda's fundraising much harder. However, this has not stopped al Qaeda's efforts to raise funds online. One technique employed by jihadists is to continue using the Internet as a source of fundraising through the use of online gambling sites. Terrorists appear to suffer from comorbidity in that by definition they are criminals and for them to be able to continue their lives life of crime they commit other crimes in the process. Overall terrorists will commit crimes such as money laundering, theft of credit cards number, and identity theft to stay operational. Terrorists have been known to buy stolen credit card numbers and other bits of personal information from websites. Then, using these same card numbers gamble on legitimate gambling sites for the purpose of using the winnings (which now appear legitimate) to fund operational costs and/or purchase necessary items for jihadi causes. This technique was used by Younis Tsouli who went by the online name of Irhabi 007 (irhabi in English translates as terrorist). By the time Tsouli and his partner were arrested, they had acquired 37,000 credit card numbers and had made \$3.5 million in charges.<sup>32</sup>

While governments across the world are more active in countering funds going to terrorist organizations, there can be little doubt that a significant amount of money is still being received by al Qaeda. In using a diversified approach of internet based fundraising, charities/not-for-profit organizations, corporations/for-profits, trust funds, and even financial institutions, al Qaeda is still able to acquire funds that allow them to continue. Due to the ease of

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Jacobson, "Terrorist Financing and the Internet," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33, (2010): 355.

using the Internet for these purposes, there is a high likelihood that al Qaeda will continue to use the Internet for fundraising.

### **2.3d Communication**

Individuals can argue that for a terrorist organization communication is more important than an act of violence. It is through communication that the wider public learns the grievances, causes and motivations of a particular terrorist organization. Within the field of terrorist communication, terrorist propaganda can be divided into three main areas or categories: propaganda intended for wider publics, propaganda for the terrorists' "constituency," and propaganda intended for members of the terrorist group itself.<sup>33</sup> Each of the three areas above will determine how the communication/propaganda is crafted and tailored to fit the designated population.

By looking at terrorist propaganda for the wider public one is able to determine a multitude of things. For example, al Qaeda is like any other terrorist organization, in that it has a message that it wants to disseminate to the general public that differs from the information they present to its supporters and operatives. Yet, one must further break down the wider public in relation to al Qaeda propaganda. The wider public can be broken down into two major groups, one is non-Muslims and the second group is Muslims. Before continuing, it must be clarified that the second group (Muslims) are different than al Qaeda's "constituency" who also happens to be practicing the faith of Islam. Al Qaeda's constituents are Muslims who share the same ideals and goals as al Qaeda but are not members or active supporters of al Qaeda. The group of the "wider public" of Muslims does not share the same ideals and goals of al Qaeda and its

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<sup>33</sup> Joanne Wright, *Terrorist Propaganda: The Red Army Faction and the Provisional IRA 1968-86* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 75-95, 173-177.

Muslim supporters. This same group of Muslims are those who faithfully practice Islam but do not believe in the militaristic concept of jihad.

In continuing with the previous statements, al Qaeda's propaganda takes two distinctive approaches when addressing the two wider public groups. Regarding the wider audience of the Muslim population there are a few areas that al Qaeda wants to project to this target group. The propaganda and disinformation includes such subjects as the destruction of the apostates (also referred to as the "near enemy"), which in this context stands for fallen Muslims (especially rulers of Arab nations that are not friendly to al Qaeda and its cause), restoring of the Islamic caliphate, and the evils of western society.<sup>34</sup> Al Qaeda's other general target audience population, which includes all non-Muslims (the far enemy) can be broken down into specific subcategories (Western Europe, American, Russian, Indian etc). Each of these subgroups has their own specific cultures and trigger points that al Qaeda attempts to influence. For example, the use of 9/11 to trigger an emotional response would be used for Americans, while the Madrid bombings or the 7/7 attacks would be used for Spain and England, respectively. Al Qaeda and its supporters even know how to use propaganda for specific groups, regions, or cities within these larger categories. The illustration (figure 1) below is a case of a more recent example of

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<sup>34</sup> Steven R. Corman, and Jill S. Schiefelbein, *Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas*, Strategic Communication Report, ASU Consortium for Strategic Communication Report (Phoenix: Arizona State University, 2006).



propaganda that al Qaeda supporters used to target New York City.



**Figure 1: Al Qaeda coming soon again in New York<sup>35</sup>**

The illustration that was released on a website where supporters of al Qaeda are known to frequent shows the New York City skyline and is designed like a slick movie poster. While al Qaeda is severely weakened, and it is highly unlikely that it would be able to strike the United States, the photo is meant to upset New Yorkers and serve as a reminder that an attack can occur at anytime. While pictures and videos are posted frequently on jihadist websites, this particular graphic struck a nerve and was picked up by a number of news centers, blogs and online sources based in New York and even received national coverage.

Al Qaeda's propaganda has targeted western audiences countless times. A few reasons for this focus is to show the fallacies in fighting against al Qaeda and like minded jihadist groups, and to attempt to change public opinion for many reasons (e.g. alter elections, decrease

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Esposito and Aaron Katersky, "FBI, NYPD Investigation Image That Promises Al Qaeda Return to New York," *ABC News* April 3, 2012, accessed May 30, 2012. <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/fbi-nypd-investigating-image-promises-al-qaeda-return/story?id=16061887>.

support for the GWOT and demoralize the public).<sup>36</sup> In doing so, al Qaeda is showing the capability to understand American and Western cultural currents, especially in regard to unpopular and costly wars. While the effectiveness of al Qaeda's propaganda in manipulating the non-Muslim target group cannot be quantitatively evaluated it does provide certain indications that might suggest manipulation has taken place. As Joseph Tuman noted, during the 2004 election runoff between George Bush and John Kerry, Osama bin Laden's speech against Bush could have been one of the contributing factors that helped push undecided voters towards Bush. Tuman stated, "Bush was an unpopular president in 2004, but he was our unpopular president. When bin Laden attacked him, he was attacking us."<sup>37</sup>

By analyzing the propaganda targeting non-western targets such as Russia and India the focus is usually on "hot button" issues. For Russia, the focus is on Chechnya and the other breakaway republics in the Northern Caucasus where there is a larger Muslim population. For India, the focus of the propaganda is on the volatile region of Kashmir, where the ruling Hindu government is in control of areas that have a significant Muslim population. While al Qaeda's main strategic efforts are on the West and in particular the United States, al Qaeda is wise enough to address these areas in the hope of being seen as a vanguard for the Muslim people. By being seen as the vanguard of Muslims, al Qaeda can ensure that it stays relevant regardless of the current perceived threat to Muslims. Furthermore, by being viewed as the vanguard, al Qaeda is able to reap all the benefits associated with being the most recognized jihadist group, the benefits include an increase in recruitment and fundraising.

In exploring al Qaeda's attempts at reaching its support audience, there are a number of sources that show a large online community of al Qaeda supporters and sympathizers. For

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<sup>36</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 183-200.

<sup>37</sup> Tuman, *Communicating Terror*, 160.

example, one al Qaeda affiliated forum that had been shut down had over 80,000 members.<sup>38</sup>

While 80,000 members is a concern at first glance, the reason it has been mentioned is not out of concern that there are potentially 80,000 individuals who will engage in terrorist acts, but instead, show how large and widespread the online community of al Qaeda and like-minded individuals can be. While it might be impossible to determine how large the online community is at any given time, it is even more difficult to determine how many of those individuals will turn to acts of terrorism. As Gabriel Weimann stated, “violent extremists have successfully turned the great virtues of the Internet such as low cost, ease of access, (and in many parts of the world) no or limited regulation, vast potential audience, and fast communication and flow of information into a means to achieve its goals and attract recruits.”<sup>39</sup>

Communication is of the utmost importance to al Qaeda. The organization fully understands that communicating with its support base is extremely important for numerous reasons. Without support that al Qaeda receives, a large number of recruits, fundraising and even relevance would fall to the way side. Al Qaeda is wise enough to understand what happens when an organization loses the respect of its supporters and so it takes steps to prevent this from happening. By using a combination of tactics aimed at support groups, it hopes to not only keep its current supporters, but grow its support base with each passing day.

The last category involving communication is the propaganda intended for members of the terrorist group. Before the Internet became such a helpful tool for terrorist organizations, information still had to pass from leaders to members and vice versa. Now with the technology available to them al Qaeda leaders do not have to risk meeting face to face with other members

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<sup>38</sup> (CTITF), Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. *Report of the Working Group on Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes*, Working Group Report (New York: United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Weimann, Gabriel. *www.terror.net how modern terrorism uses the internet*. Special Report 116 (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2004).

nor does it have to wait long for messages to be spread across the organization. Al Qaeda has been using these new technologies since 1996, which has allowed it to arrange a true international jihad. The isolation of Afghanistan had actually served as an advantage in that it had protected al Qaeda from western retaliation for years while still being able to stay connected.<sup>40</sup>

Through such things as email, fax, and websites, al Qaeda central is able to ensure that the required information released is received and understood by its support base. A common technique used by al Qaeda to communicate with others within the group is to compose an email and save it as a draft without sending it, once it is saved the account information (log-in ID and password) is passed on to the intended party who then can have access to the email. There is speculation that al Qaeda central has used hidden messages in videos, speeches, and other releases to serve as a control to trigger attacks. Furthermore, there has even been talk about al Qaeda central using steganography to embed files within images, emails and even public files located on the Internet. While there might be some low level use of steganography by terrorist organizations and transnational criminal organizations, the evidence in the open source world shows limited information on this subject.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks theories far and wide came out regarding al Qaeda, which included the use of steganography. While many of these arguments have calmed down the lasting effects are still evident. One of these effects is the concern of al Qaeda using steganography across the Internet without the knowledge of the Intelligence Community, while being argued that it will hurt American public safety. While the possibility of al Qaeda using steganography for communication purposes is possible it is also unlikely. While steganography offers a level of privacy that even encryption cannot, its requirements are too much.

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<sup>40</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 158-159.

Communication between members of terrorist organizations must remain anonymous to be effective. It attracts unwanted scrutiny that other, simpler techniques and technology does not. For steganography to work both sender and receiver must have the correct software packets to engage in steganography. While this software is easily available online it also creates another level of suspicion for those eavesdropping, which in turn attracts more unwanted attention. If an intelligence service came across such a file they would simply ask, why this file is being sent from one individual to another with this software and by using tools to detect steganography would determine the purpose was suspicious (furthermore increasing the level of focus on those two individuals). Since showing a pattern of trying to hide information would be enough to raise suspicion the emails/images would have to exist within a normal pattern of conversation, Individuals must also remember that to hide complex communications, such as plans of attack, tactics, maps and the like, requires a large amount of data which can degrade the image to the point of major suspicion and raise other risk factors. It appears that al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations would be much more likely to depend on the tried and true forms of communication which are less suspicious and easily done.<sup>41</sup> While there was much talk and concern about how al Qaeda could attack the United States (especially the first years after the 9/11 attacks), there is little evidence that such creative and outlandish ideas were ever those of al Qaeda. The perceived threat from al Qaeda using steganography could have come from this initial scramble for ways the United States was vulnerable to al Qaeda. Such was the case regarding hidden messages, in that days after the attacks media outlets started carrying stories on al Qaeda's use of steganography. Yet a search of over two billion images on the Internet yielded no images that contained steganography. Furthermore, no images have been reported to contain

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<sup>41</sup> Robert J. Bagnall, "Reversing the Steganography Myth in Terrorist Operations: The Asymmetrical Threat of Simple Intelligence Dissemination Techniques Using Common Tools," SANS Institute, 2002.

terrorist communication within the open source field.<sup>42</sup> While there is the possibility of its use, it is not highly likely, especially when considering how effective simple things such as dead drop emails and private discussion boards are. So in other words, “either al-Qaeda has used or created real good steganographic algorithms, or the claim is probably false.”<sup>43</sup>

### **2.3e Communication for Training Purposes**

One thing that is certain is that email was central in the communication between al-Awlaki and Major Hasan and between official members of al Qaeda. Just like any modern day organization the use of email is common place and serves to help keep members connected like no other form of communication. There can be no doubt that the importance of the Internet and its ability for communication is considered paramount for al Qaeda. Connectedness is considered so important to al Qaeda that during the escape from Afghanistan during the US bombings al Qaeda fighters carried not only their Kalashnikovs but also their laptops.<sup>44</sup> In fact, Abu Musab al-Suri, considered an expert jihadist scholar that served as a strategist for al Qaeda, argues that since the Afghanistan training camps are no longer a reality the training needs to be transferred to the Internet so that “each house of each district in the village of every Muslim” can access “military and ideological training in any language, at anytime, anywhere.”<sup>45</sup> By having a true online training environment al Qaeda will have the capability of training new recruits without the costs and risks associated with a traditional training environment.

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen Lau, “An Analysis of Terrorist Groups’ Potential Use of Electronic Steganography,” SANS Institute, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> J.R. Krenn, “Steganography and Steganalysis” Internet Publication, March 2004. Accessed May 25, 2012. <http://www.krenn.nl/univ/cry/steg/article.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel S. Saltman, “The Global Jihad Network: Why and How al-Qaeda Uses Computer Technology to Wage Jihad,” *Journal of Global Change and Governance* 1, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 2-10.

<sup>45</sup> James J.F. Forest et. al. *Harmony and Disharmony Exploring al-Qa’ida’s Organizational Vulnerabilities*. Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), West Point Military Academy, (West Point: United States Military Academy, 2006).

## **2. PROPAGANDA THEORY**

Propaganda has been used in one manner or another for years and with new technologies come new ways to administer the manipulation. Al Qaeda's use of propaganda should not come as a surprise to anyone who has studied the history of propaganda operations. However to fully understand the specifics of al Qaeda propaganda the reader must have a guide to properly understand all of the techniques and implications associated with the use of propaganda by a non-state entity such as with this particular terrorist organization. To serve as a guide in this particular area of study, the use of well known and respected propaganda theorists and theories will be utilized. The theories and theorists used within this work is by no means an all exclusive list of the available sources in academia. The sources utilized in this work are used to establish a sampling of major ideas within the fields of propaganda to highlight the tactics and techniques of al Qaeda and for a way to analyze the information by means of an analytic process.

A major reason for the use of propaganda is to guide the thought process of individuals or a group of individuals to a desired response. Usually the desired response plays into the hands of the group or individual engaging in the act of propaganda by helping to further its goals i.e. political and/or religious goals. To have a proper understanding of the ideas presented certain definitions must be spelled out to ensure there is an understanding of the terms and its uses in the context of this thesis. Various thoughts come into peoples' minds when they hear propaganda. Terms such as immoral, misinformation, half truths, and party lines, along with outright lies come to mind. However, these are inaccurate definitions in that they are only part of the possible definition of propaganda. To help properly understand the forthcoming definitions, it is important to understand the ideas that create such definitions.

Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell define propaganda as the following "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist." Using this particular definition will help guide the concepts of al Qaeda's use of propaganda. It should be noted that propaganda and persuasion are different in that persuasion seeks to satisfy the needs of both the persuader and the persuadee and the relationship is interactive in nature. Another term that must be understood is informative communication. Informative communication is thought to be truly neutral due to its use of a specific language. The use of the specific language is limited in nature to prevent manipulation. The best way to view propaganda, persuasion and informative communication is that all three are subsets of communication. Communication is the overall class and the information mentioned above are specific categories within the communication class.<sup>46</sup> By having an understanding of the terms used within the field of propaganda analysis, the reader is better able to understand the full meanings of each term and learn that not all terms are interchangeable.

In the study of propaganda, there are two major theoretical approaches, the neutralist school and the moralist school. The neutralists view propaganda as a tool that can be yielded, that requires looking objectively and with a scientific approach and as a result is intrinsically neutral. Some well known practitioners of this line of reasoning include Harold Lasswell, Edward Bernays, Leonard Doob and Philip Taylor. The other side of the propaganda coin is the moralist school. The moralist school makes the argument that propaganda is intrinsically misleading and due to this fact is morally reprehensible and therefore should be avoided. Jacques Ellul, Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman all adhere to the moralist school of

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<sup>46</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* Third Edition, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc, 1999), 1-29.



thought. It should be noted that a large percentage of modern concepts and ideas surrounding propaganda did come out of the postwar climates of the First World War and Second World War. While the wars might have caused resurgence in the discussion, the debate about propaganda has been going on since antiquity. Both Plato and Aristotle had mentioned the concepts of what became propaganda (the word propaganda did not come into existence until much later).<sup>47</sup>

A way to think of the two schools of propaganda in a real life illustration can be seen by using WWII Axis and Allied war posters as an example. A study of the war posters show that the posters included both positive and negative information and contained different levels of accuracies and inaccuracies. In viewing the war posters through the two schools of thought, the neutralists would see it as a useful tool to help keep civilians motivated and helpful towards the war effort, while the moralists would view it as immoral and deceptive to those viewing the posters due to its manipulative nature by tricking them to work harder for a war effort they might not even approve of.

Non-state actors have been using propaganda, much like its nation state counterparts, since its creation. It is known within the academic fields of intelligence and/or national security studies that Hezbollah, the FARC, and others have used many modes of communication to project its objectives to a number of audience groups. However, with this knowledge also comes the realization that a major portion of propaganda theory focuses on state actors. In other words, the theoretical literature is rooted in the use of propaganda by state actors. Other literature focuses on use of propaganda by non-state actors within the fields of industry, the military and political officials. It is potential problematic relating theories designed for studying state actions

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<sup>47</sup> John Brown, "Two Ways of Looking at Propaganda," June 29<sup>th</sup> 2006, Phil Taylor's Web Site, The Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds, UK. June 29, 2006, accessed May 30, 2012. <http://icswww.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=pmt&folder=715&paper=2687>.

to that of a non-state actor such as al Qaeda. However, it could be argued that since propaganda techniques and its uses remain constant, its state-centric theoretical perspective is limited. Yet, theories crafted years before the common use of propaganda by non-state actors are still relevant due to the unchanging nature of man and manipulation. While al Qaeda's message might be different than that of a nation state's message, the emotional responses of the target audiences are the same. The spectrum of human emotions is only so large. One can make the argument that the same techniques used by propagandists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are the same as those used in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and centuries earlier. The propagandist's tools might change and the "receiver" of the propaganda might learn of the message through new means, yet one truth remains. Human nature does not change, and the ability of one group to manipulate another still stands regardless of the type of communicative tools used.

## **2.1 Edward Bernays' Concepts of Propaganda**

In investigating propaganda theories one cannot fail to mention Edward Bernays' *Propaganda*. While Salafist inspired terrorism was not a concern during the writing of *Propaganda*, the text is still relevant due to the constant nature of propaganda and human nature. What is interesting is Bernays shows that propaganda originally had a neutral meaning unlike in today. In fact, the word was first used by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 and in essence referred to the proper teachings of the Catholic Church and did not contain the "disinformation" the reader would consider when thinking of propaganda in the modern sense.<sup>48</sup> The transformation of propaganda into the current negative connotation came about during the First World War. While propaganda had been used before the First World War, it was the advent of mass media that made it possible for the Allies to dehumanize the "barbarism" of the Prussian empire to a large segment of the population. The ability to reach large audiences with one's message in essence

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<sup>48</sup> Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 1928/2005), 9-13.

changed the way governments and businesses operated.<sup>49</sup> It cannot be overstated that Bernays was correct in his assessment that propaganda is neither good nor bad depending on its “merit of the cause urged, and the correctness of the information published.” Looking through Bernays prism regarding propaganda individuals can explore the cases of al Qaeda’s propaganda and the techniques that it uses to fashion its messages.

Bernays devoted a large amount of his book to discussing the role that propaganda plays in democracies. Due to the nature of the Internet, one could make the argument that by design it is a democratic process. The Internet allows individuals from all walks of life and different ideologies to reach out and communicate in a way that was never possible before its invention. Following this line of reasoning, the reader can expect that the capabilities expounded in Bernays’ text, regarding how “mass psychology” and the use of propaganda have a desired effect on individuals, can also work in the same way within cyberspace. The use of mass psychology in practice can be seen taking place in al Qaeda’s propaganda use via its online resources and online communities. Bernays mentions, in his chapter regarding the psychology of public relations, that the group mind does not think in a critical and logical process. Instead, the group mind reacts on “impulses, habits, and emotions” and usually relies on a trusted leader. Considering the previous statement it should become clear that the online community of al Qaeda, that has been inundated with propaganda, (which deliberately works to invoke strong emotions), would consider the likes of bin Laden, al-Awlaki, or even al Zawahiri as trusted leaders. Keeping Bernays’ concept in mind, the information discussed by certain leaders will by default be seen in a more favorable light than if it was coming from one who is not considered a trusted leader.

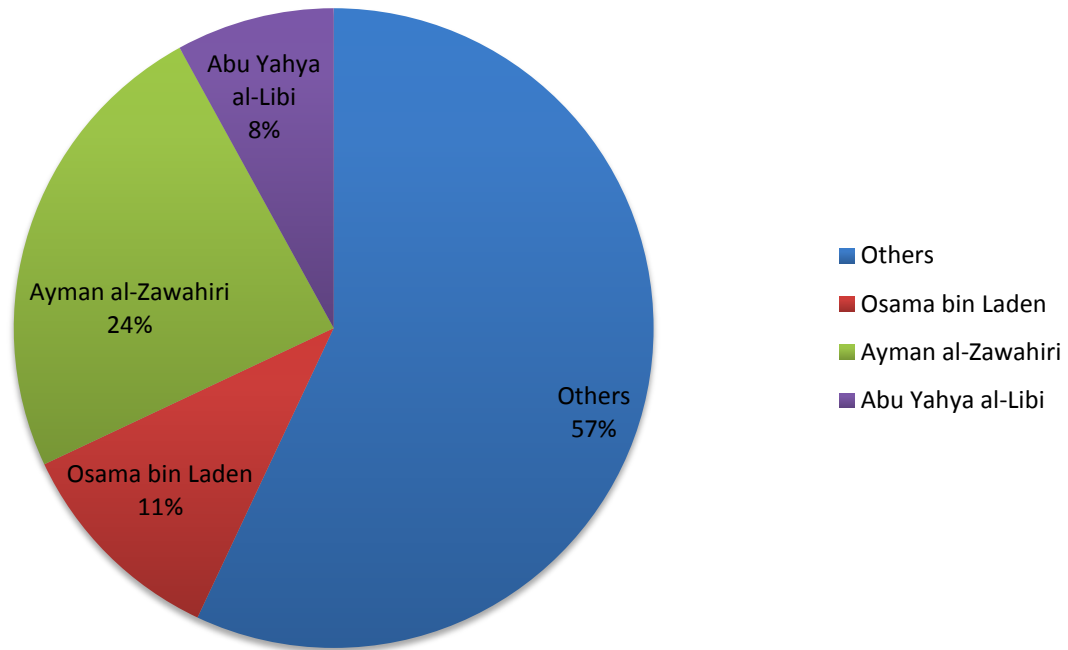
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<sup>49</sup> Bernays, *Propaganda*, 12.

These al Qaeda leaders are all considered respected leaders within the jihadi community and that has been built on a combination of factors ranging from actions, dress, and mannerisms. One particular example of effective use of symbols to communicate trustworthiness as a leader comes from a video in which bin Laden is on horseback. In this video, bin Laden is rushing towards the camera on a stallion. While the use of a horse might remind non-Muslims of American cowboys, the symbol is not lost on many within the Muslim community who are taught the story of Mohammed's ascension into heaven through the means of the stallion *al-Buraq/k*.<sup>50</sup> There can be little doubt that by associating himself with the prophets, bin Laden meant to endear himself to the Muslim world. Even the rate of his appearances post 9/11 added to his level of admiration. Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda central knew that he was a finite commodity and to have him release video and audio recordings on a weekly schedule would have only diminished the power of this image (it should be noted that some say his low level of appearance had more to do with personal security concerns). In releasing messages irregularly, he forced the world and his followers to listen to all he had to say in his messages. Even within the United States when a new message was released from bin Laden, the media would make a point of mentioning it within the 24-hour news cycle. To help further illustrate this point, the following chart demonstrates a breakdown of appearances of al Qaeda central's key figures by means of its main mode of video releases, as-Sahab.

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<sup>50</sup> Tuman, *Communicating Terror*, 207-208.



**Figure 2: Al Qaeda Leadership Appearances on as-Sahab, 2002-2007<sup>51</sup>**

As it clearly can be deciphered the majority of appearances between the years of 2002 and 2007 were “others”, which includes but is not limited to, Adam Gadahn (Azzam the American), Abu Nasir al-Qahtani, Omar al-Faruq and Abu Laith al-Libi. A number of reasons could be put forth to explain the focus on the “others” being the majority of releases. For example, it could be related to operational security, or it could do with a focus on the warzones of Iraq and Afghanistan. Concerning bin Laden, who at the time was a finite commodity, the concepts of economic law of diminishing marginal returns may help to understand why he was not seen on a regular basis. The concept of diminishing returns is that if one area of production is increased and all others are held constant, then at some point the output will start to decrease. To

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<sup>51</sup> See IntelCenter’s al-Qaeda Messaging Statistics (QMS) v3.3, 9 Sep. 2007 for further insight into al Qaeda’s use of as-Sahab and the rate of video/audio appearances.

put the previous terms into a concept that is relevant to propaganda theory, the more bin Laden<sup>52</sup> is seen and heard through releases (especially high rates with a short turn around) the more likely the “audience” will begin to tune him out, it was in al Qaeda’s best interests to have sparingly releases of bin Laden to prevent excessive exposure and marginalization.

## **2.2 Walter Lippmann’s Concepts of Propaganda**

While Bernays’ dealt heavily with what became public relations, others within the field of propaganda looked at how the state and other groups manipulated information for its own ends. Walter Lippmann, like Bernays, was influenced by the great wars of the twentieth century. Lippmann was responsible for a number of books and articles that addressed the process of propaganda and public opinion. Some of his most famous works dealing with aspects of propaganda include *Public Opinion*, *The Phantom Public* and the article “Today and Tomorrow.”

In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann presents the reader with the concept that the world outside and the picture of the world within people’s heads are two different things. To help understand how public opinion developed and how it manipulates, he put forth the following, “the only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event. That is why until we know what others think they know we cannot truly understand their acts.”<sup>53</sup> While the original edition was released in 1922, the significance of the information is still relevant in that Lippmann discusses in great detail in his books about human nature and the process that goes into developing public opinion, all of which remains constant.

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<sup>52</sup> The same can be said for al Zawahiri now that bin Laden is dead.

<sup>53</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922/1961): 3-17.

One constant discussed by Lippmann in regards to the formation of public opinion is that people define first and see later. Each developed culture has set parameters or “stereotypes” that it uses to view objects, people and things. While there can be no doubt that intelligent individuals with a high level of critical thinking skills do not engage in gross generalities, Lippmann argues that the majority of man is not made in that image and instead has to rely on stereotypes that have been created to assist him throughout his life. This image of the world is formed from a combination of our moral codes, social philosophies, and political agitations.

The question of stereotypes being correct or incorrect or even being immoral is irrelevant to the discussion since this is a discussion of reality not morality or ideology. Lippmann offers the example of an individual traveling to Germany who has preconceived notions of what a German “should” look and act like. Upon arriving in Germany, that person would not be looking for examples that counter his idea or stereotypes of Germans, but instead will see (perceived or real) examples of Germans acting and looking just as he assumed. While some individuals might have pre-established stereotypes coming from prior exposures to Germans, Lippmann instead argues that the stereotypes come from one’s own culture which dictates how others act and behave.<sup>54</sup> In relating this to how al Qaeda operates its propaganda operations, the analyst can see that if a culture already has pre-conceived stereotypes that are negative about another population/culture a great deal of the manipulation of propaganda is already accomplished. For example, if Arab Muslims view Americans as immoral and depraved people who want to take Arab lands then it is much easier for al Qaeda to use propaganda that states the United States is involved in Middle East affairs to corrupt good Muslims and steal their land.

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<sup>54</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 112-158.

Lippmann notes that the use of history, especially the use of selective history is a major tool of propagandists. Lippmann's discussion focuses on time confusions and space confusions. In this context, land and space confusions usually deal with how peoples of one culture view events through one pair of lenses while another culture views that same event through a different pair. This has been used throughout history to elicit a response from the common man to support the ruling classes' desires (such as in the form of conquering lands or the justification of actions).

Within the Salafist/Jihadist movements, which al Qaeda is based on, the use of land and space confusions is common. Osama bin Laden and others within al Qaeda have commonly stated that one of the desires of al Qaeda is to restore the Caliphate and regain Muslim lands that have been stolen throughout history. Throughout the post 9/11 periods, releases and even within secret communiqués, the matter of restoring the Caliphate has been one of the main objectives of al Qaeda. Restoring the Caliphate is such an important matter to al Qaeda that there was discussion within al Qaeda, in what became known as the "Abbottabad letters," about changing al Qaeda to "Restoration of the Caliphate Group" (among other names).<sup>55</sup> The significance is that those within the Salafist movement or those who simply believe in the complete power of the Caliphate view that any land once conquered or ruled by Muslims is from that time forward always land that properly belongs to Muslims. As a result the lands conquered by Mohammad, his successors, and the lands conquered by the Ottoman Empire are all rightfully Muslim land in the name of al Qaeda and its supporters. The lands that stretch west from the borderlands of modern day France, all the way down through North Africa, and then eastwards near the border area of Pakistan and India, and even the regions up to the gates of Vienna, are all considered rightfully Muslim lands.

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<sup>55</sup> Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) "Letter 0000009-SOCOM-02012-0000009-HT," No author given, 9/2006-04/2011 (no specific date for Letter 0000009).



Taking the models of land and time confusion into account, the propaganda techniques explored by Lippmann mentions that the geographic, cultural, and population realities of that land are not mentioned. In not mentioning who the rightful owner of the land is or those who have a historical tie to the land it decreases moral and ethical issues associated with taking what is not theirs. For example, in removing the fact that Arabs, historically speaking, developed their ethnicity in what is modern day Middle East and that other peoples were already occupying the lands that were conquered by Mohammad and his successors; al Qaeda is able to discredit the right of the cultures and peoples to live without the threat of being conquered and suffer severe changes to their culture from outside forces. Additionally, al Qaeda uses time confusion in conjunction with land confusion. By al Qaeda simply stating that Muslim lands are always Muslim lands, the organization silences those who lived on the lands before the conquests and those currently living on the lands that are non-Muslim.

Time confusion is a common occurrence in both a historic and current context. Lippmann states that “popular history is a happy hunting ground of time confusions.” Al Qaeda shows use of this technique when it stokes the fire of anger against Christian atrocities committed during the Crusades against Muslims. Quite correctly, Lippmann states, “almost nothing that goes by the name of Historic Rights or Historic Wrongs can be called a truly objective view of the past.” One group can view a specific event in history as just another point in history, where acts were committed by long dead peoples against others that have been equally long dead. While another group of people will remember that same historic event and see and even feel it as a contemporary event that still causes cultural pain for that group.<sup>56</sup> By using space and time confusions, al Qaeda seeks to exploit the victimization of Arab Muslims mentioned earlier to

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<sup>56</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 139-146.

ensure that emotions are aroused in its favor by being viewed as the ones taking up the banner for Muslim justice against the Crusader-Zion alliance.

Lippmann's theory of propaganda and public opinion that interconnect and work well together are the concepts of summarization, generalization, visualization and the use of symbols. All of these concepts are important in that they help the message resonate with the target audience. While this does not always occur naturally within peoples' thought processes, they are excellent techniques used by propagandists to manipulate its target populations.

Summarization and generalization can be thought as mental tools individuals and groups use to create typecasts, which help those particular individuals and groups respond and react to others of different groups or cultures. Summarizing and generalizing helps to establish and maintain stereotypes without creating a "crises of conscience" (crises of conscience will be discussed in greater detail in Harold Lasswell's section). Lippmann explained summarization as the act of taking a large group or culture and shrinking that group to a small manageable population. This act is similar, though devoid of the scientific process, of that taken in surveys by statisticians.<sup>57</sup> The propagandist is depending on the target individual to not have a truly random and independent experience. An example of this is when certain Americans refer to the French as rude when they have never personally meet a Frenchman, or if they have, they based their opinion of the entire French population on their experience with that individual, rude Frenchman. In reality, American culture has already created what a Frenchman is supposed to act and talk like, and that individual is simply using the pre-exposed propaganda experience to fill his or her head with how the French are suppose to be. This process distorts the "exception not the rule" concept in that the exception (rude Frenchman) becomes the rule (all Frenchman are rude).

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<sup>57</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 148-159.

Generalization cannot be separated from summarization, in that it adds to the areas lacking in summarization and fills the necessary holes. Generalization is the continuum of summarization when one of the summarized ideas does not fit the mold; it is rejected and the information that is held on to is only the information that fits into the idea of what it “should be”. In using the example of the American and the Frenchman, the American would meet a friendly Frenchman but would reject that experience in favor of the time he/she met a rude Frenchman. To help further explain this idea the concept of the faith ladder is helpful. The “faith ladder” is the thought process that often times dictates how one comes to a conclusion about certain ideas. When considering a certain view the individual will first consider, “it is *fit* to be true; it would be well if it *were* true; it *might* be true; it *may* be true; it *ought* to be true; it *must* be true; it *shall* be true;” and concluding with “*for me*; that is, I will treat it as if it *were* true so far as my advocacy and actions are concerned” (italics used in original work).<sup>58</sup> This line of reasoning lacks critical thinking and a logical process, which is precisely what helps the propagandist to manipulate individuals. All it takes is an understanding of that individual’s culture, and with the proper use of propaganda techniques the manipulation can take place.

Visualization and use of symbols is a reoccurring theme within many propaganda theories and it also holds true within Lippmann’s concepts. The human mind is not a true recorder, in that when a machine records an object, that object remains fixed, recorded as is, with the correct corresponding information. In the case with the human mind a true recording does not take place. The human mind’s ideas change and fluctuate due to numerous factors, such as, but not limited to age, rate of occurrence of an event, and emotional responses. A prime example of this is when someone remembers a childhood event and watches a video of that event and realizes that the reality of that event is much different than what they remembered. As a result of

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<sup>58</sup> William James, “Reason and Faith”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 24 No 8 (Apr 14, 1927): 197-201.

this, many ideas contained within an individual's head shift from altered memories to realities. In shifting of an individual's ideas of events to memory the ideas can be attached to the individual's own reality and remain cemented as factual.

All of these concepts of visualization can be manipulated to serve a propagandist's objectives. This manipulation can come in the form of using symbols. Symbols are easily recognizable objects that serve to represent large and deeper messages.<sup>59</sup> Take American culture for example, the reader only needs to show the Christian cross, the American flag, or even the McDonald's arch, and the vast majority of Americans will be able to speak in detail as to what they are and what they mean. The reason for this can be two-fold; a symbol may mean that a level of manipulation has already taken place. For example, upon seeing the golden arches of McDonald's a child might think of Ronald McDonald, the play area, tasty food and have a positive response to seeing that symbol. This in turn might elicit a desire to ask his/her parents if they can go eat at McDonalds. Another case of symbolism can be seen in the case of a nation's flag. Due to the cultural makeup of a country and its international image, people both belonging to the country and citizens of other countries could easily have different or even the same thoughts regarding that particular nation. For example, if a country is looked on with favor, the individual from another country might have a favorable response when seeing that country's flag or if that country is not viewed in a positive light the opposite could happen. On the other hand, the citizen of that particular country may have either positive or negative emotions or feelings that are based on that individual's previous exposure and conditioning.

Al Qaeda and the jihadi community are not strangers to the use of symbols and visualization. The use of symbols within the jihadi community (including al Qaeda) uses a number of different symbols that are meant to deliver different messages to both supporters and

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<sup>59</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 159-169.

opponents. In strict Islamic culture, the portrayal of images is frowned upon and even more so within the jihadi community. While pictures of individuals might not be as common, the use of symbols can still be diverse and creative. The color of particular objects makes a large difference, for example, the color black symbolizes jihad, while white (like in other cultures) symbolizes purity and religious authority. Often times when bin Laden was filmed, he was shown wearing white with military fatigues to show a combination of religious authority and military prowess. Water is also a common theme, and when used in conjunction with certain individuals it is meant to present them not only as pure of faith but also having great religious piety. Another example of a symbol, which was attached to the United States, would be the snake, which has the meaning of tyranny and general evilness.<sup>60</sup> Some other common symbols include AK-47s, and the Koran. Not all symbols are images and some include such things as Islamic calligraphy and Koranic recitals. The main point of all of these symbols is to convey a clear message to the viewer and, with a strong cultural connection already established, many of these symbols are able to hit its mark.

The overall theme found throughout Lippmann's model is the weight given to emotions. The use of emotions in propaganda is one of the most important tactics that a propagandist can use. Emotions are a base response to any event or stimulation that arises and it is well understood by different propagandists and propaganda theories. Stereotypes, symbols, and the memory of historic events are based on emotions. Whether emotions are set to play on positive feelings or negative feelings is solely dependent on those who established the responses. While the wrong technique(s) used can result in a blowback that results in an undesired emotional response, the emotional reaction when the correct technique(s) is used outweighs the risks in the

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<sup>60</sup> Combating Terrorism Center, *The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda*, (West Point, Combating Terrorism Center, 2006).

eyes of the propagandist. Without the reaction of emotions, all of the techniques and tactics used by propagandists would be dead in the water. Emotions are much more powerful than using a logical process. Lippmann made it clear that he understood the power of emotions in propaganda and warned that within propaganda, the propagandists will try and use the lowest common denominator of an individual to extract an emotional response from him so that the propagandist can get what he/she desires. In the case of al Qaeda, this support can come in many forms such as financial funds, support, and the recruitment of more mujahedeen.

Lippmann's last key area was what all of the other propaganda techniques rested on: the proper balance of realism and romanticism. Without that proper balance between the two there would be no action. This balancing act relies on having the situation/desired response realistic enough to make identification of the task a reality, but also romantic enough that the propagandist's target group would actually want to do what they were called upon to do. This balance also needs to remain to ensure that it was not so romantic as to seem inconceivable. This balancing act is required in many forms of propaganda, especially when death is a possibility.

During the recruiting cycles of the First and Second World Wars the different national war departments had to ensure that it touched on both realism and romanticism to show potential enlistees that, while it was dangerous, enlisting was the right thing to do. In looking at al Qaeda's recruitment techniques, there is much talk of the glories of jihad, such as eternal paradise and glories associated with fighting as a holy warrior. There are even more outlandish tales that deal with mujahedeen surviving outlandish injuries and overcoming impossible odds. Bin Laden and others also spoke of the hardships of jihad which included such things as being away from family, risk of personal security, and the general hardships of living as an outlaw. All

of these techniques help build up the image of what a mujahedeen is and the requirements needed for an individual to take up the banner of jihad.

### **2.3 Harold Lasswell's Concept of Propaganda**

Harold Lasswell, like some of his peers, set out to separate propaganda from other forms of communication. Many might consider any form of communication to be full of propaganda. Lasswell wanted to make it clear that not all forms of communication are subject to propaganda. Pedagogy, for example, is the transmission of a skill, while education is not only the transmission of a skill, but also the transmission of accepted attitudes. While pedagogy by definition cannot be manipulated in certain instances (e.g. applying the mechanical principles established to build a diesel motor cannot be manipulated; it is either the correct way to build the engine or it is not) there is some variance in education. Lasswell makes clear that certain academic ideas will differ based on geographic location and the type of society or culture it is taught in. While certain facts might coincide, such as who was involved in a specific war, other facts will not, such as why the war started. Another way researchers are able to see if propaganda is contained within attitudinal perspectives is to analyze if the attitude portrayed is “divorced” (removed) from the transmission of a skill.

Besides analyzing the transmission of a skill, Lasswell also examined news in regards to different forms of communication. An interesting piece of knowledge discussed by Lasswell states that some news may be propaganda but not all propaganda is news. Lasswell argues that within the category of news, publicity is news instigated by someone who expects to extract a tangible advantage from the attitudes molded by it.<sup>61</sup> For example, a hand soap company instigated a nationwide news syndicate to do a special report that Americans' hands are very

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<sup>61</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, Ralph D Casey and Bruce Lannes Smith, *Propaganda and Promotional Activities: An Annotated Bibliography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969/1935), 3-7.

filthy; and as a result, there is an increased amount of time a year people are sick, and that the best way to prevent the spread of disease is through regular hand washing. In a similar sense, terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda have been able to use different media channels to have the same publicity effect in numerous Western outlets. A simple Internet search about jihadi or Islamic terrorism, the result will be countless news specials regarding the world of Islamic terrorism with al Qaeda leading the pack.

Lasswell like many of his fellow experts in the field of propaganda wrote in detail about the importance of symbols. Symbols convey messages much better than writing, even within a society or culture that has high literacy rates. A propagandist will use these “sacred symbols” and practices to aim them directly at its target group.<sup>62</sup> An effective way to ensure the propaganda is spread is by using symbols to reach individuals who are true believers. True believers will then in turn spread the message by being a sincere messenger (in the emotional sense) to spread the propagandist’s message. This is seen on a daily occurrence in the online community. Al Qaeda will reach out to its supporters and claim as a good Muslim it is your job to bring more into the fold. This was the case for individuals like Younis Tsouli, Waseem Mughal and Tariq Al-Daour who used social networking websites, blogs, and chat rooms to spread al Qaeda’s message. While these three individuals did not engage in a physical attack themselves they were charged in England with inciting another person to commit an act of terrorism wholly or partly outside the UK contrary to Section 59 (1) Terrorism Act 2000 due to their activities to try and get English and German speaking Muslims to join Jihad.<sup>63</sup> These individuals are excellent examples of how individuals take up a cause as their own; they become

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<sup>62</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I*, (Cambridge: M.I.T Press, 1971), 8-14, 216-223.

<sup>63</sup> Evan Kohlmann, “A Beacon for Extremists: The Ansa al-Mujahideen Web Forum,” *CTC Sentinel* 3 Issue 2 (February 2010): 1-20.



much stronger advocates for the cause than simply relying on the original propagandist's message.

Another reoccurring theme contained within Lasswell's propaganda theory that is found in other theories is the use of emotions. Emotions elicit strong responses, and without using them as a base motivator many propagandists would be out of work. The opposite is often times true regarding using a logical, higher level thought-based argument rooted in reason and critical thinking. Using a logically based argument works very well for those who are not easily swayed by emotions and have a high level of critical thinking; however, this same technique does not work well on the remainder of individuals since most people base their actions on emotions and therefore the reasoning style of persuasion is useless. It is for this precise reason that the target of propaganda usually leans towards those who are less educated (in this context less educated does not only mean those lacking formal education) and who are equally disenfranchised with their situation. Through targeting this population much can be accomplished for the propagandist. Hitler, for example, in chapter six of *Mein Kampf* spoke of propaganda requirements, in that if the propagandist wants to accomplish the goals of propaganda, he or she must reach the lowest mental common denominator.<sup>64</sup> In that way, if a propagandist is able to manipulate a large percentage of the target population the desired result will be that much easier to accomplish.

An effective tool of propaganda is to harness the emotions of others through the use of symbols. If the propagandist wants the full effect of the manipulation to work in his or her favor, then there must be a precise meaning attached to each symbol used. Regardless of the type of symbol used, whether they be "words, intonations, (or) pictures" all must be in line with the true meaning. Lasswell points out that the best symbols can stay in the cultures' psyche for centuries.

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<sup>64</sup> Adolf Hitler, (translated by Ralph Manheim), *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1999).

One such example, as pointed out by Lasswell, involved the culture wide remembrance by Europeans of the Turks having bathtubs full of eyeballs from European war dead.<sup>65</sup> While the truth of the matter is not relevant, what it does illustrate is how a symbol in the form of a war atrocity can stay with a population well beyond the initial occurrence. Regarding al Qaeda's propaganda campaign, the reader only has to think of the constant use of symbols of American atrocities against Muslims, such as the picture of the hooded detainee, which represents Abu Ghraib Prison abuses, or the use of pictures of detainees in orange jumpsuits to represent Guantanamo Bay Prison.

While certain symbols are represented at face value, some symbols have multiple meanings, and their appearance resembles an onion. Peel back the different layers of the symbol and there is another meaning. Al Qaeda plays on each atrocity at face value while also tying in other historical messages. For example, the more recent events of the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq (both in 1991 and in 2003), the Bosnian War, the establishment of Israel, and the Crusades. In layering the propaganda symbols, the propagandist is able to build on pre-existing symbols and ideas that permeate throughout the culture. If these symbols are already established the job of the propagandist is that much easier. Lasswell makes the point that the "psychological task" of a symbol reformer is much more difficult than that of one who plays on pre-established symbols and ideas. In looking at al Qaeda, bin Laden was not the first person to compare the United States to evil entities. As a propagandist, bin Laden's job, was made much easier since before he started presenting the image of America as the devil others had already cleared the trail. In not having to redefine a symbol, the propagandist does not have the arduous task of creating a crisis of conscience, which requires former symbols of respect to be painted in the

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<sup>65</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I*, 82.

opposite light. That is why revolutionists and occupiers in an unfriendly environment struggle to change the symbols to favor its cause.

Lasswell brings up the point that propaganda has the tendency to heighten tensions between groups. He states that localizing and universalizing movements are at odds with each other and the propaganda used is usually to make those differences greater, in essence creating an increase in the “us” versus “them” mindset of the groups. The disaffected elements within a community are receptive towards symbols that can sharpen their attacks and differences against the established order. This is very much the case with al Qaeda deliberately targeting disenfranchised young Muslim populations, especially those living in the West. In using the symbols of drone attacks, Muslim civilian deaths, and Western immorality, al Qaeda seeks to influence those who consider themselves outsiders in the West to come and join the brotherhood of jihad with al Qaeda.

The last area of information from Lasswell regarding propaganda and how it relates to al Qaeda would have to be the use of ambiguity. The use of ambiguity is a helpful technique in many forms of propaganda. For example, in politics this is used quite often, in that the political party not in power will break down the policy of the party in power and speak of all the shortcomings while saying their party’s policy will work and will be more effective, all the while not mentioning anything specific. In avoiding specifics, there is no room for others to bring criticisms and mention shortcomings of their own policy. Lasswell mentions that “concerted action depends on a high level of generality since the persons, practices and phrases of a movement are the polarization points for immense concentrations of private emotions.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, if the opposing party starts talking specifics about what they will do when they are in power, it might go against what the common individual thinks, therefore alienating that

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<sup>66</sup> Lasswell, et. al., *Propaganda and Promotional Activities: An Annotated Bibliography*, 3-7, 13-14.

particular population which might be crucial in the election. However by leaving in ambiguity, the common individual will simply fill in the gaps and agree that something else needs to be done (i.e., whatever they personally think needs to be done).

Al Qaeda uses the technique of ambiguity in a number of ways, most often when speaking of removing “corrupt” Arab leaders (or leaders that side with the West), or in restoring the caliphate and restoring a new order. While there might be discussions of what must be done to remove the Arab rulers and remove the West from Muslim affairs, there are only generalities involving how it will work once established and what it would look like. In doing so, al Qaeda is able to leave the rest to the individual, and therefore not risk alienating potential supporters who agree that the West needs to be removed from the Muslim world and that the current leaders of the Arab world are not the right ones.

## **2.5 Institute for Propaganda Analysis**

The three scholars of propaganda (Bernays, Lippmann, and Lasswell) are not meant to be an extensive list of propaganda theories but instead to show a common pattern found throughout some of the most important and influential thinkers in propaganda. The analysis cannot be complete without examining the ideas of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA). The IPA came out of the conditions surrounding the buildup of conflicts in Europe before the start of the Second World War. It was an organization made up of professional academics and received a large percentage of its funding through Edward A. Filene, who was an American businessman and philanthropist. The main objective of IPA was to analyze and dissect propaganda campaigns of various sources.<sup>67</sup> While the IPA’s research might appear outdated

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<sup>67</sup> Leonard W. Doob, *Public Opinion and Propaganda* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1956), 285-295.

and over simplified by its critics, it had a strong influence on the field of propaganda and its subsequent development.

IPA's major contribution to the field was the ABCs of propaganda analysis or the seven propaganda devices. The seven devices are used to dissect propaganda and show the different ways that the propagandist is trying to influence his or her target(s). The seven devices are listed below with a brief description of each.

1. **Name Calling**- giving the idea a bad label, where it is used to make people reject and condemn the idea without examining the evidence.
2. **Glittering Generality**- associating something with a "virtue word," is used to make people accept and approve the idea or object without examining the evidence.
3. **Transfer**- carries the authority, sanction, and prestige of something respected and revered over something else in order to make the latter acceptable; or it carries authority, sanction, and disapproval to cause people to reject and disapprove something the propagandist would have them reject and disapprove of.
4. **Testimonial**- consists of having some respected or hated person say that a given idea or program or product or person is good or bad.
5. **Plain Folks**- is the method by which a speaker attempts to convince his audience that he and his ideas are good because they are "of the people," and the "plain folks" are represented in the ideas.
6. **Card Stacking**- involves the selection and use of facts or falsehoods, illustrations or distractions, and logical or illogical statements in order to give the best or the worst possible case for an idea, program, person, or product.

7. **Band Wagon**- has as its theme, “Everybody-at least all of *us*-are doing it”; with it, the propagandist attempts to convince people that all members of a group to which they belong are accepting his program and that they *must therefore* follow the crowd and “jump on the band wagon.”<sup>68</sup>

The seven devices invoke images of infomercials, which uses these techniques to varying degrees to get their target to buy what they are selling. While convincing a target population to buy a consumer product will be easier than convincing a target population to commit to joining jihad, the propaganda process remains basically the same. The subsequent section will seek to examine al Qaeda’s propaganda in light of the above theories and to use these theories to determine if its propaganda operations are a success.

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The thesis takes an empirical approach in its application of propaganda theories and the case studies that are presented. In using a qualitative approach, this thesis will seek to understand the propaganda operations of al Qaeda and to determine if these operations are effective at increasing recruitment for its cause. In analyzing open source literature, this thesis will be able to test if the hypothesis that “al Qaeda wages a successful propaganda operation by engaging in propaganda techniques expounded by major theories on propaganda.” Furthermore as a means of testing the effectiveness or success of al Qaeda’s propaganda operations, this thesis will focus on those who have taken part in jihad and their reasons for doing so.

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<sup>68</sup> Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee, *The Fine Art of Propaganda: A Study of Father Coughlin’s Speeches*, (New York: The Institute for Propaganda Analysis, Harcourt, Brace and Company 1939), 22-25.

## 4. CASE STUDIES

When analyzing propaganda it is useful to remember certain information so that a researcher can properly analyze what is being presented and not fall in the trap of emotional responses. To stay detached from the presented propaganda is of great importance. If the researcher cannot stay neutral then the logical thought process is lost. To help stay focused on the task at hand it is important to ask certain questions about the propaganda. Who says what? In what channel? To whom? To what effect? Who initiates a message? What is the content of the messages? With what intentions are messages initiated? In what situations do communications take place? What channels and other assets are available to communicators? What strategies render the assets effective in accomplishing a communicator's purpose? What audiences are reached? With what effects?<sup>69</sup> These questions are designed to get to the root of the propagandist's objectives.

In knowing the answers to the questions above the person analyzing the propaganda can get to the question of what is the propagandist's goal. What is the propagandist trying to accomplish? What has the trend shown? Have the propaganda messages lead the target populations towards or away from the desired goals? What factors have conditioned the direction and magnitude of the trends? There are also projections and alternatives to consider. What is likelihood of future events due to the propaganda? Lastly, what techniques or policies are most likely to optimize the values?<sup>70</sup>

Sometimes it is very hard to understand a propagandist's objectives. Often times, the propagandist(s) are hidden along with their true intentions. In the case of al Qaeda, the

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<sup>69</sup> Harold Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," L. Bryson, editor, *The Communication of Ideas*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1948), 117-130.

<sup>70</sup> Harold Lasswell, Daniel Lerner, and Hans Speier, *Propaganda and Communication in World History: the Symbolic Instruments in Early Times* Volume I (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979), 6-9.

propaganda is rather straight forward due to the clearness of their objectives. However, there might be hidden objectives that are only known within al Qaeda or within the classified sphere. This paper will focus specifically on the open objectives that al Qaeda has made clear to all who will listen.

When exploring al Qaeda's propaganda operations there are a few reoccurring themes and trends that start to appear. Al Qaeda uses symbols in many of its propaganda productions. Some symbols commonly found throughout al Qaeda propaganda is the use of the Koran and certain colors. In particular the color black which is commonly associated with jihad. Another common symbol is weapons (in particular the AK-47). The following are different examples of al Qaeda central and its affiliates' use of symbols.



**Figure 3: al Qaeda in Iraq/ al Qaeda in Mesopotamia (AQI).<sup>71</sup>**

Note in figure 3 the use of the color black, the Koran, an AK-47 and the globe with the Middle East in center representing the global jihadist movement.

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<sup>71</sup> Anti-Defamation League, accessed July 7, 2012. [www.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/al\\_qaeda\\_iraq.asp](http://www.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/al_qaeda_iraq.asp).





**Figure 4: al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).<sup>72</sup>**

In figure 4 the color black again, use of the globe with the focus on Africa to represent the Maghreb. It also contains an AK-47 with a black banner on it.

In al Qaeda central, there are a number of symbols used, such as those associated with as-Sahab, the leaders of al Qaeda, and the movement itself. The following is a sampling of some common image styles used by al Qaeda.

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<sup>72</sup> Anti-Defamation League, accessed July 7, 2012. [www.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/al\\_qaeda\\_maghreb.asp](http://www.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/al_qaeda_maghreb.asp).



**Figure 5: Osama bin Laden and al Zawahri Appearance<sup>73</sup>**

In figure 5, there are a number of symbols that need to be discussed. Some examples of symbols found in this figure include the AK-47, the colors (white and black), the natural background, and the military fatigues. All have specific meanings that are designed to show both bin Laden and al-Zawahri in a positive light. The weapon and fatigues are used to symbolize jihad and the mujahedeen, the white is used to symbolize purity and piety, and the black as mentioned before is the color of jihad. Another symbol that should be considered is the cave acting as a natural background. This could be interpreted as both bin Laden and al-Zawahri are in the “trenches” (so to speak) and are fighting for the cause at the front lines. A parallel to this is

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<sup>73</sup> Saeed Shah, Ayam al-Zawahri takes over al Qaeda leadership McClatchy Newspapers-SF Gate (San Francisco Chronicle online, 6/17/2011, assessed July 7, 2012. <http://www.sfgate.com/world/article/Ayman-al-Zawahri-takes-over-al-Qaeda-leadership-2367908.php#photo-1892439>).

when leaders of nations wear specific attire to project a message. An American example was when President Bush wore a flight suit in the Persian Gulf, which helped portray his role as commander in chief. Another example comes from Vladimir Putin who was photographed bare chested riding a horse; the image desired to show his strength and power. Referring to figure 6 the symbol represents al Qaeda's media arm, as-Sahab (which can be seen in the bottom right corner of figure 5). While it is simply a couple of words written in calligraphy, it too, has its historical meaning. Calligraphy has a long and traditional standing in Islamic culture and in its own right is a form of artwork. Pictured below is an enlarged figure of the symbol.



**Figure 6: As-Sahab logo<sup>74</sup>**

These images can be useful for a number of reasons. Symbols can summarize much more than a “thousand words” and instead capture a whole idea, lifestyle, or culture. To have an instant recognition of a symbol serves a much greater purpose than simply reading written words or listening to spoken words. A symbol is “polysemous” in that all of these meanings, thoughts and feelings are fixed or attached to that symbol to serve the creator’s purpose.<sup>75</sup> Viewers of a well-recognized image are instantly flooded with ideas and thoughts when they see the image.

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<sup>74</sup> SITE intelligence group monitoring service jihadi threat, assessed July 7, 2012.  
<http://news.siteintelgroup.com/component/customproperties/tag/Leaders-Abu%20Yahya%20al-Libi>.

<sup>75</sup> Roland Barthes, (Translated by Stephen Heath), “Rhetoric of the Image” *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 269-274.

While the symbol has a strong foundation in illiterate cultures, it does not discount its strength in a culture with high literacy rates. For example, a company would be much better off to use a well recognizable symbol in a busy subway station than it would a long sentenced advertisement.

In quickly discussing the use of emotion by al Qaeda, the researcher is quick to find many examples ranging from anger to pride. Al Qaeda understands to elicit a response it must pull emotional strings to get strong responses. This emotional response is seen when there is a release that discusses the invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan, non-Muslim Americans being in Saudi Arabia, and the use of Arab resources for western countries. All of the previous examples have been reoccurring themes that bin Laden and al Qaeda have mentioned on a regular basis.<sup>76</sup> This should come as no surprise since a number of these issues are high on the cultural minds of Muslims and in particular Arab Muslims. For example, a 2007 opinion poll showed that in the Middle East, Arabs are more likely to feel that foreign policy concerns are the most important issue facing the Middle East while also viewing economic and religious issues as a source of contention between the West and the Middle East.<sup>77</sup>

In analyzing al Qaeda propaganda operations, this thesis sought to determine answers through the spectrum of the seven propaganda devices of the IPA. This thesis has found the patterns of propaganda necessary for a successful operation which should have shed light on al Qaeda's productiveness. The analysis was similar to that used by IPA when they used the seven propaganda devices to analyze Father Coughlin's speeches. Verified al Qaeda's releases that have been taken from audio and/or video format and transcribed into written words.

Understanding the details of how many of the propaganda devices were present and how often

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<sup>76</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 246-333.

<sup>77</sup> John Zogby (senior advisor), "Arab Views of Leadership, Identity, Institutions and Issues of Concern," Zogby Middle East Opinion Poll 2007 (Zogby International Arab American Institute, 2008).

they were used helped lead the research to the next stage in determining the usefulness of propaganda techniques for the success of al Qaeda.

While the seven devices-name calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card stacking and band waggoning determined the presence of propaganda devices used, another method of analysis will need to be used to determine success. To take the word “success” and have a specific meaning attached to that word requires specific set parameters. For the purpose of this thesis “success” will be understood in a set definition that relates to terrorism. In terrorism there is much discussion about the “propaganda of the deed.” The major concepts of the “new” propaganda of the deed relates much more accurately to what terrorism is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Terrorism in propaganda of the deed is more than an operational technique intended to scare and amaze people through the effects of violence. It also includes a narrative process that involves more than one act with the aim of reinforcing that narrative process. Furthermore, with technological advances the timeline of attack-broadcast has been significantly shortened and as a result of the same technology there is a territorial shift to virtual theaters of action.<sup>78</sup> This new concept of propaganda of the deed helps to explain what a proper definition of success should be when speaking of terrorism. An action does not need to be another 9/11 attack and it does not need to be from a traditional theater used by terrorists in the past. To over simplify success in this situation, success will be defined by determining if al Qaeda was able to motivate individuals to join jihad. Was al Qaeda able to enlist individuals to partake in violence to further its cause, such as those who join a cell, go to a jihadist hotbed or engage in lone wolf operations? The attack(s) do not need to go off without a hitch to verify the success at the recruitment level.

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<sup>78</sup> Neville Bolt, David Betz and Jaz Azari, “Propaganda of the Deed 2008 Understanding the Phenomenon” (London: The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2008), 2.

For the purposes of this thesis, recruitment into jihad is defined as engaging in any form of behavior that has the purpose of assisting al Qaeda and seeks to help further its goals through violence. The definition of recruitment will then include, but not be limited to, lone wolves, small cells, engaging in attacks, and even cases of encouraging others to join (but only in the context of those secondary individuals partaking in violence).

To have definitive proof that propaganda was key in recruiting those who participated in jihad the use of case studies will be presented. The case studies will include individuals who expressed their reasons for joining jihad and if the propaganda they witnessed had an effect on their reasoning. These case studies come primarily from court testimony and online jihadi activity.

#### **4.1 Transcript Case Study #1**

The following are excerpts taken from a transcribed video of bin Laden and a number of his supporters. It was filmed in mid-November and was possibly shot in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The video is set up as taking place at a disabled Sheikh's home where there are some back and forth conversations between bin Laden and the Sheikh. The second "scene" is similar in situation but others are present and ask bin Laden questions relating to the 9/11 attacks. The seven propaganda devices that are discovered within these statements will be highlighted and will have corresponding numbers relating to each device.

Shaykh: (all of the Sheikh's discussion could be considered testimonial (4\*)  
(...inaudible...) You have given us **weapons (2)**, you have given us **hope (2)** and we **thank Allah (2)** for you. We don't want to take much of your time, but this is the arrangement of the **brothers (2)**. **People now are supporting us more, even those ones who did not support us in the past, support us more now(7)**. I did not want to take that much of your time. We praise Allah, we praise Allah. We came from Kabul. We were very pleased to visit. **May Allah bless you both at home and the camp(3)**. We asked the driver to take us, it was a night with a **full moon (2)**, thanks be to Allah. Believe me it is not in the country side. The

elderly...**everybody praises what you did(7)**, the great action you did, which was first and foremost **by the grace of Allah(3)**. **This is the guidance of Allah (3)** and the **blessed fruit of jihad(2)**.

UBL: (all of UBL discussion could be considered testimonial (4\*) (taking partial quotes from the Hadith) “I was ordered to **fight (2)** the people until they say **there is no god but Allah, and his prophet Muhammad(2)**.”

“Some people may ask: why do you want to fight us?”

“There is an association between those who say: **I believe in one god and Muhammad is his prophet and those who don’t (2)** (...*inaudible*...)

“Those who do not follow the true fiqh. The fiqh of Muhammad, the real fiqh. They are just accepting what is being said at face value.”

UBL: Those youth who conducted the operations did not accept any fiqh in the popular terms, but they accepted the fiqh that the prophet Muhammad brought. Those young men (...*inaudible*...) said in deeds, in New York and Washington, speeches that overshadowed all other speeches made everywhere else in the world. The speeches are understood by both Arabs and non-Arabs—even by Chinese. It is above all the media said. Some of them said that in Holland, at one of the centers, **the number of people who accepted Islam during the days that followed the operations were more than the people who accepted Islam in the last eleven years(7)**. I heard someone on Islamic radio who owns a school in America say: “**We don’t have time to keep up with the demands of those who are asking about Islamic books to learn about Islam.**” **This event made people think (about true Islam) which benefited Islam greatly (7)**.

### *Second segment of video*

UBL: Abdallah Azzam, Allah bless his soul, told me not to record anything (...*inaudible*...) so I thought that was a good omen, and Allah will bless us (...*inaudible*...). Abu-Al-Hasan Al-(Masri), who appeared on Al-Jazeera TV a couple of days ago and addressed the Americans saying: “**If you are true men(1)**, come down here and face us.” (...*inaudible*...) He told me a year ago: “I saw in a dream, we were playing a soccer game against the Americans. When our team showed up in the field, they were all pilots!” He said: “So I wondered if that was a soccer game or a pilot game? Our players were pilots.” He (*Abu-Al-Hasan*)(5) didn’t know anything about the operation until he heard it on the radio. He said the game went on and we defeated them. That was a good omen for us.

Shaykh: May Allah be blessed.

Unidentified Man Off Camera:(5) Abd Al Rahman Al-(Ghamri) said he saw a vision, before the operation, a plane crashed into a tall building. He knew nothing about it.

Shaykh: May Allah be blessed!

UBL (reciting a poem):

“I witness that against the **sharp blade(2)** They always faced difficulties and stood together... When the **darkness(2)** comes upon us and we are bit by a **Sharp tooth(2)**, I say...Our homes are flooded with blood and the **tyrant(1)** Is freely wandering in our homes”...And from the battlefield vanished The **brightness of swords and the horses(2)**... And over **weeping sounds(2)** now We hear the beats of drums and rhythm...They are storming his forts And shouting: “We will not stop our raids. Until you free our lands.”<sup>79</sup>

Propaganda Technique	Corresponding Propaganda Technique number	Total Amount Present
Name Calling	1	2
Glittering Generalities	2	14
Transfer	3	3
Testimonial	4	2*
Plain Folks	5	2
Card Stacking	6	0
Band Wagon	7	4

**Table 1: Commonality of Propaganda Devices Example 1**

From the transcript, it can be determined that a number of the IPA’s propaganda devices were used in a matter of a few conversations. This form of propaganda, conversational video, has been used before by al Qaeda. For example, in Joseph Tuman’s *Communicating Terror*, there are photographs of bin Laden, al-Zawahri and others, having a meal at what appears to be a wedding ceremony. In this carefully orchestrated video, the recording appears to be amateurish and to depict a common day in the life of bin Laden in the hopes of portraying him to be indifferent to the war on terror.<sup>80</sup> Also by using the people, location, and events discussed, bin

<sup>79</sup> George Michael, “Messages and Interviews of Osama bin Laden,” Council on Foreign Relations, December 13,2001, accessed July 16, 2012. <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-leaders/messages-interviews-osama-bin-laden/p25267> <http://www.defense.gov/news/dec2001/d20011213ubl.pdf>.

<sup>80</sup> Tuman, *Communicating Terror*, 202-203.



Laden and al Qaeda wanted to show that God was on their side and many people were coming to join them in their righteous cause. The amount of propaganda devices present also helps to point the observer in the right direction as to who the video's target audience is. For example, the sentence about there being much talk about how Muslims are reacting to the attacks and the great pride in the Islamic community that is taking place across the world (e.g., Netherlands, America, Middle East) due to the attacks. Another theme in the first scene is that it seeks to convince Muslims who are on the fence about jihad (especially against the far enemy) to join al Qaeda and pick up the banner (of jihad) in God's name.

#### **4.2 Transcript Case Study #2**

The following is another example of al Qaeda propaganda taken from a video released by as-Sahab in March of 2010. The transcription is of Adam Gadahn's "A Call to Arms" and was obtained by NEFA investigators and is available on NEFA's TerrorWatch. Unlike the first transcription, this transcription will show only a selection of the seven propaganda devices contained within the speech and will not include a tally of the individual devices. The reasoning is to have the reader focus on the language of the transcription and not become sidetracked by the different devices.

The year 2009, the inaugural year of a new administration in Washington, ended in a truly **miserable fashion(1)** for the **Crusader West(1)** and its intelligence organs, who **suffered(1)** a series of **moral and material blows(1)** which culminated in the **bloody deaths of at least 8 CIA operatives(1)** in a **masterfully-planned(2)** and executed **martyrdom operation(2)** inside their clandestine base in Afghanistan. This **crushing blow(1)** came just a few days after the compromising of America's supposedly airtight security in a **valiant attempt(2)(6)** by a **heroic soldier of al-Qaida(2)** to bring down an American airliner over Detroit.

But I would like here to take you back to an earlier event, one whose **hero(2)** wasn't a member of al-Qaida or any other Islamic group, but was in fact, a ranking officer of the United States Army, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, who, this past autumn, opened fire on a group of American soldiers preparing to deploy to

Afghanistan deep within the army's largest domestic base, Fort Hood, Texas. According to official army figures, at least 13 **Crusaders(1)** were killed and more than 30 wounded in this **surprise attack(2)**. Major Nidal Malik Hasan himself was shot, wounded and captured, and has had charges filed against him in a **Crusader military court of inquisition(1)** in preparation for a summary **show trial(1)(3)** whose outcome is not in question.

America may let the **thugs of Blackwater(1)(3)** off the hook, and may give the **depraved guards of Abu Ghraib(1)(3)** and the **homicidal gang-rapists of al-Miqdadiyah slaps on the wrist(1)(3)**, but it goes without saying that such concessions don't extend to **defiant Muslim heroes(2)** like Major Nidal Malik Hasan. The fact is, **the heroic(2)** Fort Hood operation opens up a host of new opportunities for discussion of the **hypocrisy, hubris and less-than wholesome(3)** aspects of the **Western Crusader culture(1)(3)** which **bestows peace prizes on war presidents and condemns Christmas messages from captured American soldiers as cruel(3)**, even as it continues to **torture and humiliate the Muslims and other prisoners in their own custody(3)**. However, in the interest of brevity, I will leave such topics for another day in favor of shining further light on the nature and motivations of the man behind this **historic and trend-setting operation(7)**, our **Mujahid brother(2)(3)** Nidal Malik Hasan - Nahsabuhu Min as-Saaliheen wa La Nuzakeehi Ala Allah: We consider him to be **a righteous man and we don't purify him before Allah(2)(3)**.

The **Mujahid brother(2)(3)** Nidal Hasan has shown us what one **righteous Muslim(2)** with an **assault rifle(2)** can do for **his religion and brothers in faith(7)**, and has reminded us of how much **pride and joy(2)** a single **act of resistance and courage(2)** can instill in the **hearts of Muslims everywhere(7)**. The **Mujahid brother(2)(3)** Nidal Hasan, **by the grace of Allah(2)(3)** and with a single **30-minute battle, single handedly brought the morale of the American military and public to their lowest point in years(6)**. The **Mujahid brother(2)(3)** Nidal Hasan, **lightly armed but with a big heart, a strong will and a confident step, again brought into sharp focus the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of America, and again proved wrong those who claim America cannot be hit where it hurts(2)(3)(6)**. And most significantly, the **Mujahid brother(2)(3)** Nidal Hasan is **a pioneer, a trailblazer(2)** and a **role-model(2)** who has **opened a door, lit a path and shown the way forward for every Muslim who finds himself among the unbelievers and yearns to discharge his duty to Allah and play a part in the defense of Islam and Muslims(3)(5)(7)** against the **savage, heartless and bloody Zionist Crusader assault on our religion, sacred places and homelands(1)(7)**.

Just as significant and just as deserving of contemplation and **emulation(2)** as what the **defiant Mujahid brother(2)(3)** Nidal Hasan did is what he didn't do. **Courageous Brother(2)** Nidal **didn't give the orders of men priority over the orders of Allah, nor did he fear the wrath of men more than the wrath of Allah. Nahsabahu wa Allahu Haseebuh [We reckon him so and Allah is his Reckoner](2)(4)**. And **defiant Brother(2)** Nidal didn't make the youthful mistake he made in joining the American army **an excuse for making the mistake of a lifetime and taking part in the fighting and killing of Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq or anywhere else(4)(6)**. This is why I believe that **defiant Brother(2)** Nidal is the **ideal role-model for every repentant Muslim in the armies of the unbelievers and apostate regimes who, like him, has come to the correct collusion that true Islam isn't in a name or a set of rituals but in fact is in total submission and obedience to Allah and total disobedience to and disassociation from the unbelievers.(1)(2)(4)** When **Brother(2)** Nidal was issued orders which conflicted with Islamic doctrine and values, he resisted them until the last bullet and thereby broke the mold of the mindlessly obedient soldier, a mold preferred and cultivated by the militaries of the world but totally rejected by Islam, which says loudly and clearly: **La Ta'ata Li Makhlooqin Fi Ma'siyat al-Khaaliq - Obedience to a Created Being in Disobedience to the Creator is Impermissible(1)(2)(3)(6)**.

Not only did **defiant Brother(2)** Nidal **break free of the influence(2)** of the **unbelievers(1)** he had grown up and worked with and served under, he also **broke free(2)** of the **evil influence of the anti-Jihad, pro-Crusade Shaykhs and Muftis who attempt to legitimize the killing of Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere using the flimsiest pretexts and excuses imaginable(1)(6)**. **Defiant Brother(2)** Nidal didn't try to **silence his conscience or justify obeying his commanders and remaining in the ranks of the unbelievers with those Shaykhs' scandalous Fatwas which permit the impermissible, prohibit the obligatory and condone the murder of Muslims in the name of fighting terrorism, or in the name of protecting salary and position, or in the name of preserving the good reputation of American Muslims and dispelling any doubts about their patriotism and loyalty to America(1)(2)(6)**. Brother Nidal didn't try to **hide behind(1)** such **ridiculous excuses(1)** because he knew that - however many famous signatures it might carry and whatever **fancy title(1)** it might have - **no Fatwa(3)** in this world can possibly **justify breaking the clear, unambiguous and agreed-upon laws of the Shari'ah(3)(4)**, like the law forbidding the killing of Muslims or the law ordering **loyalty to the unbelievers(1)** and **disloyalty to the believers(1)**, and he knew that on the day of **Judgement, all the Ulama, Mullas, Muftis and Imams of this world put together would be incapable of saving him from divine retribution were he to**

**have blindly followed their permissions and prohibitions in contravention of what he knew - in his heart of hearts and through honest research and careful study - to be Allah's ruling and decree(1)(2)(3)(6).**

I believe that **Brother Nidal(1)** realized that **the insults, accusations, imprisonment, loneliness and other difficulties that one might face during or after one's mission are insignificant when compared to the punishment Allah has threatened(1)(6)** - in numerous places in the Quran and Hadeeth - for those who **abandon compulsory Hijra and Jihad despite them having access to the necessary ways and means(4)**. But at the same time, I believe **Brother Nidal(2)** realized that **Islam neither calls for nor approves of hasty, reckless and poorly planned actions(3)**, and that's **why he acted with caution and took the necessary steps in order to avoid repeating the mistakes others have made in operational and procedural matters(2)(4)**. For example, Brother Nidal didn't - as far as we know - discuss his plans over government-monitored-and controlled telephone and computer systems, nor did he confide his secrets to recent acquaintances - or even long-time acquaintances - whose professed loyalty to Islam and Muslims and apparent eagerness to defend their faith and brethren may or may not be as strong or as genuine as it appears. **Brother Nidal(2)** wasn't taken in by the **provocateurs who infiltrate the Masjids and Muslim communities of America(1)** with hidden microphones in order **to entrap Muslims eager to perform the duty of Jihad(1)**. And Brother Nidal didn't unnecessarily raise his security profile or waste money better spent on the operation itself by traveling abroad to acquire skills and instructions which could easily be acquired at home, or indeed, deduced by using one's own powers of logic and reasoning.

For example, the first thing many people often ask is: 'What weapon should I use in my operation?' But the answer to this question - and it's an important question - is not as difficult as it may seem. The **Mujahid Brother(2)(3)** Nidal Hasan used firearms in his assault on Fort Hood, but the fact is, **today's Mujahid(3)** is no longer limited to bullets and bombs when it comes to his choice of a weapon. As the **blessed operations of September 11<sup>th</sup>(2)(3)** showed, a little imagination and planning and a minimal budget can turn almost anything into a deadly, effective and convenient weapon which can take the **enemy(1)** by surprise and deprive him of sleep for years on end.' Another important and often intimidating stage of preparation for any operation is the targeting phase. When the time came to pick his target, the **Mujahid Brother(2)(3)** Nidal chose carefully, looking for a target with which he was well acquainted, a target which was feasible and a target whose hitting would have a major impact on the **enemy(1)**. In **Brother Nidal's(2)** case, these three important qualities came together in Fort Hood, but as you start to make your plans, you shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that military

bases are the only high-value targets in America and the West. On the contrary, there are countless other strategic places, institutions and installations which, by striking, **the Muslim can do major damage to the Crusader West(1)(2)** and further our global agenda and long-range strategic objectives.

We must look to further undermine the **West's already-struggling economies with carefully timed-and-targeted attacks on symbols of capitalism(4)** which will again **shake consumer confidence and stifle spending**. We must keep in mind how even apparently unsuccessful attacks on Western mass transportation systems can bring major cities to a halt, cost the enemy billions and send his corporations into bankruptcy. We must erode our **cowardly enemy's will to fight by killing and capturing leading Crusaders and Zionists in government, industry and media who talk the talk but don't walk the walk and are only interested in prosecuting their profitable wars as long as it's other people who are in the line of fire and not them(1)(3)(4)**. We should look for targets which **epitomize Western decadence, depravity, immorality and atheism, targets which the enemy and his mouthpieces will have trouble trying to pass off to the conservative Muslim majority as illegitimate targets full of innocent people(1)**.

And finally, we mustn't allow our **lawless enemies(1)** to provoke us with **their evil, sadistic and murderous crimes into crossing the boundaries laid down by Allah and His Prophet or doing anything which may have negative repercussions on the image of the Jihad and reputation of the Mujahideen(1)(2)**.

We must always remember that **our role models aren't our enemies: our role models are the Prophet, His Companions and the righteous and God-fearing Mujahideen(2)(3)**. We must always remember **that we are different(5)** than the **Zionists and Crusaders(1)** with whom we are locked in combat: **We are not outlaws. We are not gangsters. We are not hypocrites. We are not barbarians. We are not opportunists and mercenaries. We are not enemies of freedom and civilization. We are not cowards who wage wars from behind the controls of pilotless aircraft. In other words, everything our enemies are, we are not, and everything we are, they are not. We are people of courage, honor, decency, chivalry and ethics who selflessly sacrifice themselves for the noblest cause on earth, and that is why every Muslim and every Mujahid must continue to take the high road and protect the moral high ground which we have fought so long and hard to secure.(1)(2)(3)(6)(7)**

**My dear brothers in Islam(5):** with America and 25 of its NATO allies beginning to deploy a further 37,000 occupation troops to Afghanistan, and with armed American drones now **violating Islamic airspace and terrorizing Muslim populaces from Miran Shah to Mogadishu, and with the American**

**war president and his rabid British poodle plotting fresh aggression against the Yemen, and with the United States consolidating its cruel treatment of our brothers in Islam at new or newly expanded Muslim-only concentration camps in Illinois, Bagram and elsewhere, it is rapidly becoming clear that this already hot global battle is about to get even hotter(6)(7).<sup>81</sup>**

Propaganda Technique	Corresponding Propaganda Technique number	Total Amount Present
Name Calling	1	38
Glittering Generalities	2	48
Transfer	3	33
Testimonial	4	8
Plain Folks	5	3
Card Stacking	6	11
Band Wagon	7	7

**Table 2: Commonality of Propaganda Devices Example 2**

### **4.3 Cases of Successful Recruitment**

For organizations, to engage in propaganda operations is only part of the equation, because in the case of propaganda the end justifies the means. Is al Qaeda through its propaganda gaining new recruits at a rate to counter attrition? Without convincing individuals to partake in jihad a large percentage of al Qaeda’s propaganda efforts are wasted. So as a guiding light, this research will focus on case studies that show a recruitment success. The focus of the case studies is on those who have decided in their mind that jihad is the path they want to choose for themselves. In doing so, this will help determine the successes or failures of al Qaeda propaganda operations that have been aimed at recruitment. In understanding the motives of these individuals, it will help the research determine if jihadi propaganda is making a difference and to what extent it is visible as a motivator.

To highlight al Qaeda’s role in individuals partaking in jihad the research explored the various individuals who have mentioned jihadi propaganda as their motivator for terrorism. The

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<sup>81</sup> NEFA Foundation, Terror Watch, Adam Gadahn: “A Call to Arms,” 2010, accessed July 28, 2012. [www.nefafoundation.org](http://www.nefafoundation.org).

examples given will reflect the different types of individuals who joined the ranks of jihad. It will include those who waged successful attacks, failed attacks and even those whose attacks never got off the ground. There was an investigation of a spectrum of different individuals who had varying success rates. The purpose of using various examples helped to show the thoughts and feelings of individuals who decided that this was a viable future for them. All of this led to the researcher determining the degree of the propaganda's influence.

#### **4.4 Case Study #1 (Fort Dix attack plot)**

The first case study presented represents individuals who not only failed in their act of terrorism but who were never able to get into the operational stage. The Fort Dix attack plot involved five men who wanted to launch "holy war" on soldiers stationed at Fort Dix in New Jersey. The five men have a colored past in that they did not fit the common image that has been established regarding those who join jihad. The individuals, brothers Dritan, Shain and Eljvir Duka, Mohamed Ibrahim Shnewer and Serdar Tatar are all Muslim immigrants who had been infiltrated by a FBI informant; and as a result, they were all arrested before their plans were able to be fulfilled. During the trial, the prosecutors presented hundreds of taped conversations between the would-be attackers and the FBI informants. After the arrests the FBI found jihadist themed videos on one of the defendant's computer, which included such things as videos of dead American soldiers, and kidnapping victims about to be beheaded.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, there were videos that showed jihadist images all the while a narrative on the video seeks to recruit the watcher into the world of jihad. Al Qaeda was tied into the case due to the fact that the FBI

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<sup>82</sup> Paul Von Zielbauer, "5 Men are Convicted in Plot on Fort Dix" New York Times accessed August 18, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/22/nyregion/23fortdix.html>.

found videos that also contained images of the 9/11 hijackers along with images of bin Laden followed by yet more narrative of the merits of joining jihad.<sup>83</sup>

Assistant US Attorney William Fitzpatrick was quoted as saying that the five plotters' objective was to "defend Islam. Their inspiration was al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. Their intention was to attack the US."<sup>84</sup> The defense attempted to convince the jurors that the actions of the individuals was nothing more than guys being guys and they simply were lured into a trap by the informants. However, the truth remains the same in that the individuals bought and possessed illegal firearms and showed a tendency towards jihad while having no legitimate reason in possessing jihadi paraphernalia.

#### **4.5 Case Study #2 (Bryant Neal Vinas)**

An example of an individual successfully joining al Qaeda that had its origin in propaganda can be seen in Bryant Neal Vinas' case. Vinas is a first generation Hispanic American that had no ties to Islam. As a young adult he converted to Islam and attended a Mosque in New York while visiting jihadist websites. Apparently, between the emotions created by the online propaganda and his disenfranchisement, Vinas wanted to take his radicalization to the next step.<sup>85</sup> In 2007, he claimed he was going to go and learn Arabic and study Islam overseas, but instead went to Pakistan and eventually Afghanistan where he received training and actually assisted in firing a rocket during an attack of a US base in Afghanistan. After his arrest by Pakistani officials in November 2008 in Peshawar, he was eventually charged in the United

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<sup>83</sup> United States District Court District of New Jersey Court Document "Criminal Complaint Magistrate No. 07-M-2046 (JS) United States v. Dritan Duka" accessed August 18, 2012. <http://www.justice.gov/usao/nj/Press/files/pdf/files/Older/DukaDritanComplaint.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> BBC News "US base accused 'plotted jihad' October 20, 2008, accessed August 20, 2012. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7680988.stm>.

<sup>85</sup> William K. Rashbaum and Souad Mekhennet, "L.I Man Helped Al Qaeda then Informed," New York Times July 22, 2009, accessed August 19, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/23/nyregion/23terror.html?\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/23/nyregion/23terror.html?_r=1&hp).



States of conspiracy to murder US citizens, providing information to a terrorist organization, and receiving training from al Qaeda.<sup>86</sup>

#### **4.6 Case Study #3 (Irfan Raja)**

The third case study takes a look at British citizen Irfan Raja. The reasons for choosing Raja over more well known individuals is that his radicalization process was a desired one for al Qaeda and like minded organizations in that he was young single Muslim man, Western citizen, with no criminal record-all of which would decrease suspicions about him as he traveled and planned his attacks. He met four other young men, all living in England, and between them hatched a plan to travel to Pakistan to receive training where they would then travel to Afghanistan to fight against western troops.<sup>87</sup>

On the day that Raja and the others were planning on heading to Pakistan he left a note for his parents telling them of his plan to travel overseas and not to worry about him. Fearing for what he was about to do, his parents were able to convince him to head home. Upon returning home the family contacted the police and, as a result, it was discovered that the men had large amounts of terrorism material stored on CDs and on their computers, such as chat room discussions, jihadist chanting (songs) and texts (including al Qaeda's training manual.)<sup>88</sup> After a few years in prison the men's convictions were overturned by an appeals court. The appellate judges declared that, according to section 57 of the Terrorism Act 2000, possession of terrorism

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<sup>86</sup> Claire Suddath, "Bryant Neal Vinas: An American in Al Qaeda," *TIME U.S.* July 24, 2009, accessed August 19, 2012. <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1912512,00.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Catherine Bott, et al. "The Internet as a Terrorist Tool for Recruitment & Radicalization of Youth," U.S. Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology, Directorate Homeland Security Institute. Arlington April 24 2009.

<sup>88</sup> Duncan Gardham, "British student jailed for terrorism plans," *The Telegraph*, July 27, 2012, accessed August 25, 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1558664/British-students-jailed-for-terrorism-plans.html>.

material alone is not enough to be convicted; there must be direct proof that that material was used to inspire violent extremism.<sup>89</sup>

While the overturn of the convictions is negative for the country's prosecutors, the bigger picture still remains intact. The fact is, based on only Internet interactions, Raja, Aitzaz Zafar, Usman Ahmed Malik, and Akbar Butt were inspired enough to plan a trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan to engage in terrorism, and if it were not for the family of Raja their planned attacks might have happened.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Al Qaeda's operational prowess has been greatly decreased, and due in part to this, it has focused on the online environment. With this shift to online activity many feared that al Qaeda would be able to reach out and convince many to take up the banner of jihad and in essence cause problems for governments across the world. Upon further analysis of the available information the reality of the situation and threats starts to become clear.

There were many reports and articles that related to the constant high level threat of online jihadist activities and the many ways they pose a threat through such things as cyber terrorism, lone wolves attacks, and other forms of operational terrorism. Furthermore, the research and information pointed to these concerns being a legitimate high level threat to western security. However, the level expounded does not seem to match the reality of the situation. Before continuing it might be observed that there is a threat of individuals being radicalized by al Qaeda's online propaganda operations. There is also the threat that those who might not have taken the next step into action are convinced to do just that by what they experience in the online environment. However, with that being said, the concern of armies of holy warriors coming out

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<sup>89</sup> Vikram Dodd, "Appeal Judges Clear Muslims of Terror Charges" *The Guardian*, February 13, 2008, accessed August 25, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/feb/14/uksecurity.ukcrime>.

of the woodwork due to radicalization by al Qaeda's online propaganda operations just does not seem to exist.

In analyzing the case studies of people who committed acts of Islamic terrorism, the number diminishes greatly when removing those who did not have al Qaeda's propaganda operations serving as a radicalization tool. The number of jihadists is further reduced when removing those whose entire process of radicalization was based online, and was devoid of traditional avenues of radicalization (e.g., Mosque, familial ties, friends and other networks). In further breaking down the numbers, the researcher could even separate the success and failure rates of the online-radicalized to an extremely small number.

It should be noted that this by no means suggests that counterterrorism practices should neglect the online presence of groups like al Qaeda, but instead should have a finer point of concentration. Instead of focusing on the threats presented by possible radicalization, focus instead on those who have already shown the first signs of radicalization by concentrating on the individuals in chat rooms and other online communicative environments. Yet, as al Qaeda has learned firsthand, having people discuss the importance of joining jihad and their desire to establish the goals of international jihadist philosophy, and seeing them take that bravado into the tangible environment are two different things. In fact the numbers of individuals who have been completely radicalized online and who have staged a successful terrorist act are minute to say the least. In truth, the numbers of individuals who started the radicalization process in traditional settings and then were convinced to act on their ideas online is still small, especially when considering how large the Muslim population is.

Historically and socially speaking, there will always be certain individuals who will feel disenfranchised within their population. Keeping this idea in mind, the threat from those who

are disenfranchised and join the jihadist movement could possibly be minimized by a multipronged approach. Most importantly, maintaining friendly working relationships with known areas of radicalization such as mosques, Muslim community centers and Islamic student groups, to name a few will help decrease strong feelings of distrust. At the same time, while building trust with the local Muslim community, governments could focus on those who show the most aggressive online behavior, along with those who post/repost violent images while actively seeking others to act on their anger. In doing this, governments could maintain a watchful eye while working on the hearts and minds of their own Muslim citizens. There are examples of leaders of American mosques and law enforcement having a strong relationship. This relationship shows a healthy relationship where both groups work together to prevent radicalization, while also feeling comfortable enough to go to each other in their respected times of need. By fostering this trust much can be done in preventing individuals from getting the anonymity they need to further the jihadist agenda.

In looking at al Qaeda's online propaganda operations as a whole, there are vast amounts of information available for wannabe jihadists. However, even with all the technical information, from tradecraft to bomb making that is available online, al Qaeda's avenues into millions of homes is still very limited. With the constant threat of American and allied counterterrorism forces and the deaths of major players, al Qaeda's propaganda operations are one of only a few areas that al Qaeda can operate freely. Even with this freedom, the threat level appears to be low and successes are far and few between. Truthfully, being able to download tradecraft and receiving actual training in person shows two different success rates. Taking into account the poor tradecraft of many small celled groups and lone wolves, it becomes clear enough that when

you compare those, who have been able to partake in training camps, to individuals who only had online information, major differences stand out in terms of success rates.

## **5.1 Implications**

The initial research questions (Does al Qaeda follow the parameters set out by the theories of propaganda to wage a successful online propaganda campaign? And Are al Qaeda's online propaganda operations successful in radicalizing recruits?) Resulted in outcomes that were not as clear cut as might have been expected. The results emerge to show mixed outcomes in that al Qaeda appears to follow numerous propaganda techniques (use of symbols, emotions, etc.) that have been discussed by theorists as the proper way to wage propaganda operations. However with that said the end result (and the answer to the second question) seems to be a strong negative. Al Qaeda's online propaganda operations do not recruit nearly enough individuals to be considered successful. Furthermore, the hypothesis discussed (al Qaeda wages a successful propaganda operation by engaging in propaganda techniques expounded by major theories on propaganda) appears to be nullified by the research. It would suggest that a follow up study is needed to look into the Internet as a facilitator of jihad, but not necessarily the solution for al Qaeda recruitment.

With America's continued successes in the war against al Qaeda and the steady elimination of known figures of jihad, al Qaeda will continue to become more irrelevant including within the online environment. Simply speaking, al Qaeda will need a large successful operation to regain its former glory. Even if that became a reality, the same persistent problems of online propaganda would exist: How to convince those online to get offline and act? How to increase the success rates of attacks when action takes place? How to stay relevant after all that has happened since 9/11? Also, how to stop the decimation of operational capability, which

greatly hurts the online capabilities? All of these issues and more need to be addressed, and the reality of the situation is that this simply may never happen. The objectives might be out of reach for al Qaeda in its current state. Furthermore, this reality cannot be lost on the franchise groups (especially after the death of al-Awlaki and others). With all of this information taken into account, this burden continues to fall heavier on grassroots jihadists who have shown a repetitive pattern of poor tradecraft, which has resulted in failed operations, infiltration by informants, and very few successful attacks. All of these issues serve as a reminder that al Qaeda's online propaganda cannot stand up against the unfavorable realities. It appears that al Qaeda's online propaganda operations are a frail, but constant, low level threat to security.

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## **CIRRICULUM VITA**

David K. Lyons graduated from the State University of New York at Fredonia with a dual bachelor's degree in Psychology and Criminal Justice in 2008. In 2009, he enrolled in the Intelligence and National Security Studies Program at the University of Texas at El Paso. It was during this time he was selected as an Intelligence Community Center of Academic Excellence (IC CAE) Scholar and took part in numerous training sessions and exercises designed by members of the Intelligence Community. He also took part in Arabic language and cultural immersion training in Jordan during the height of the Arab Spring in 2010-2011. Currently, he is employed by ALATEC Inc. as a Combat Operations Intelligence Analyst working with the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Analysis Center (TRAC) and is an Ensign in the U.S. Navy Reserve as an Intelligence Officer.