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The Culture of Global Jihad: Character, Future Challenges and Recommendations

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Summary

The attitudes, values and beliefs central to the Global Jihadi Movement – its 'culture' – present a variety of threats to Western governments. This culture's belief-based narrative, alternative victory metrics and varied structural manifestations, for example, present multiple strategic and operational challenges. Some Western counter-terrorism approaches – including those of the United States – appear particularly vulnerable, as they might inadvertently exacerbate the threat. Left unaddressed, these challenges will increase in complexity, scope, and possibly, severity. Attacking core features of global jihadi culture, taking steps to safeguard the US public's confidence in the government's counter-terrorism strategy and effectively leveraging Islamist "decision-brokers" are several ways to off-set these challenges.

The Culture of Global Jihad: Character, Future Challenges and Recommendations

By Jeffrey B. Cozzens

Significant future terrorist threats to the West will emanate from the atomised "culture" of global jihad. I define this culture as socially reinforced attitudes, values and beliefs shared by most jihadi Salafis¹ that motivate and shape its violent activism and constitute a "tool box"² for its warfare. This is so because the culture of global jihad is largely asymmetric in comparison to its Western nation-state rivals: there is an absence of a common basis for comparison in its character – not just tactics – which enables this trend to operate and germinate in the face of Western counter strategies. This asymmetry originates largely from the global jihad's belief-based narrative, parallel definitions of victory and non-linear global presence. These characteristics of global jihadi culture will motivate and shape future threats to the West (especially the United States), including: 1) the danger that the global jihadi movement's (GJM)³ complex and insidious character could diminish confidence in Western governments, and 2) the possibility that Western jihadis will increasingly determine that fighting in their Western homelands is as legitimate as fighting in traditional "zones of jihad". Weakening global jihadi culture by undermining its core attitude, values, and beliefs; developing national consensus on the nature and aspirations of the threat; and dealing pragmatically with influential Islamist voices are among the best options for contending with these threats.

Organisation

Part one of this paper explores the nature of global jihadi culture, and discusses why it poses an intrinsic challenge to the West. This discussion centres on its strategic,

- 1 I use the term 'jihadi Salafi' to describe those who follow the ideas and methods of al-Qa'idah. It is used self-descriptively by militants to identify those for whom fighting is an obligatory means to 'defend' the unity (*tawhid*) of God's political and spiritual lordship, which by default mandates fighting against nominally Muslim regimes, repelling non-Muslim factions from 'Islamic' lands, and defending the global Muslim community (*ummah*) through violence without respect to political boundaries.
- 2 See Ann Swidler, 'Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51 (April 1986).
- 3 I define the global jihadi movement as the iconic individuals, social networks and multifaceted supportive structures that incubate, refine, and promote the culture of global jihad.

structural and ideological peculiarities, which cumulatively make the GJM altogether different from the states opposing it. Part two posits potential future challenges enabled by these asymmetric characteristics, with a specific focus on how these might impact the US. Part three offers prescriptive measures to tackle these potential threats. This three-tiered approach is necessary because countering future threats effectively cannot be divorced from understanding their essential qualities.

PART ONE

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE ASYMMETRY OF THE GLOBAL JIHADI THREAT

Future threats from the GJM will not arise in a vacuum. Predicting and countering them begins with understanding three essentials of global jihadi culture and the ways in which these separate the movement from its Western rivals. These critical differences have and will contribute to an environment in the US and UK in which misunderstanding, misdiagnosis, and operational surprise flourish. Future jihadi threats will thrive in this environment like a laboratory incubating pathogens.

The Asymmetry of Belief

The primary source of asymmetry separating—and in some sense, inoculating—the culture of global jihad from Western counter-terrorism efforts is its socially reinforced rational beliefs⁴. These beliefs center on a divine mandate or contract⁵ to fight (and die) in God's path in order to establish Islam and protect God's unity (*tawhid*) in governance and worship in exchange for guidance and blessings for both the individual *mujahid* (the one who 'strives' or fights) and the Muslim community.⁶ They also manifest themselves operationally, impacting the target selection process, for example, and other choices in combat, including suicide tactics.⁷

By contrast, the liberal democratic traditions at the heart of Western counter-terrorism efforts emphasise political objectives, military means subordinate to political ends, and slow-moving bureaucracies designed to regulate and coordinate counter-terrorism efforts. Western governments generally struggle when it comes to approaching the belief-based framework that underpins the GJM.⁸ A primary reason is because realism, the long-dominant model for understanding and contending with the behaviour of nation-states, is poorly suited to understanding and countering non-state threats motivated largely by belief.⁹

4 See Quintan Wiktorowicz and Karl Kaltenthaler, "The Rationality of Radical Islam," *Political Science Quarterly* 121:2 (Summer 2006), 295-319.

5 See David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

6 See Catherine Wessinger's model of Revolutionary Millennialism in Jeffrey Cozzens, "Approaching al-Qaida's Warfare: Function, Culture, and Grand Strategy," in Magnus Ranstorp (ed.), *Mapping Terrorism Research* (London: Routledge, 2007).

7 Mohammed M. Hafez, "Martyrdom Mythology in Iraq: How Jihadists Frame Suicide Terrorism in Videos and Biographies," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 19:1 (April 2007), pp. 95-115.

8 As opposed to the largely unified narrative of the global jihadis, a cacophony of voices from within and without the US and UK offer wildly different approaches to understanding and contending with this aspect of the threat. A cross-section of these voices was witnessed during the 2008 London ITI Conference, for example, which represents one significant focal point for the UK-US discourse on countering global jihadism.

9 See J. Peter Pham, "Rapid Reaction: Religion and Realism After 9/11," *The National Interest online*, 11 September 2007, at: <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=15494>

Victory in Jihadi Culture

The asymmetric, belief-based character of the GJM poses a different conundrum when it comes to understanding how it measures victory. The discourse and the behaviour of global jihadis suggest that there are two tracks of victory to which they aspire: “instrumental” and “expressive.”¹⁰

The movement’s “instrumental” victory metrics—where its strategic political objectives are furthered by militancy—include: expelling Western forces from the Muslim world, toppling marginally Islamic regimes, and eventually, establishing regional Islamic emirates that ultimately congeal into a Caliphate stretching from Southeast Asia to Spain. However, other evidence suggests that alternative “expressive” metrics of victory are also central to the movement. Expressive warfare (and thus expressive victory) derives from a combatant’s identity, belief system and culture rather than *primarily* from war’s political objectives. Both GJM literature and its militants’ behaviour¹¹ evidence the following expressive metrics of victory¹²:

- Ensuring the perpetuity of fighting¹³
- Obeying the individual obligation to fight Islam’s enemies regardless of the apparent outcome of battle¹⁴
- Institutionalising a culture of martyrdom¹⁵
- Pinpointing Islam’s enemies through the refining process of jihad, and thus maintaining its identity¹⁶
- Establishing pride, brotherhood, and unity in the face of threats to the *ummah*¹⁷

- Creating a parity of suffering with Islam’s enemies—especially the Jews and Crusaders¹⁸
- Victory is seen in the maladies afflicting God’s enemies, especially economic recession and natural disasters¹⁹
- Observing miracles and dreams in jihad, which foretell of divine guidance and ultimate victory for the mujahideen²⁰

While documents such as the “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism” are designed to meet the instrumentality of the GJM, they do not contend to a comparable degree with the aforementioned benchmarks, which may be equally, if not more, important to those involved in jihadi activism. This asymmetry in understanding victory sets the stage for multiple potential future challenges.

Structural Asymmetry

The faith-based character of the GJM also creates structural asymmetry. Unlike nation-states, global corporations and many types of formal international networks, the GJM possesses a cultural center of gravity (CoG) that is found wherever its adherents reside²¹. While a unified *ummah* (global Muslim community) is arguably a construct of the Islamist imagination, given the differences within and between Muslim communities, ironically, those who adhere to the ideas of global jihad share similar beliefs, operational tendencies and ambitions. Together, these comprise

10 Christopher Coker, *Waging War Without Warriors* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2002).

11 See the empirical data concerning the importance of martyrdom as a motivating factor in journeying to Iraq and joining al-Qa’idah in Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, “Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records,” West Point CTC (December 2007) at: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTCForeignFighter.19.Dec07.pdf> (accessed 18 June 2008).

12 See Jeffrey Cozzens, “Victory—from the Prism of Jihadi Culture,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, vol. 52 (January 2009).

13 Cozzens, *op. cit.* (2007).

14 Anwar al-Awlaki, “Constants on the Path of Jihad” (n.d., audio lecture series based on the works of Yusuf al-Uyayree) at: http://islambase.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=308&Itemid=120 (accessed 18 June 2008). Available as a transcript (“Mujahid Fe Sabeelillah,” transcriber) at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/2407141/Constants-on-the-Path-of-Jihad> (accessed 18 June 2008). Also see Shaykh Yusuf Al-Uyayree (As-Sabeel, trans.), “Meanings of Victory and Loss in Jihaad” (n.d., n.p.), at: <http://www.maktabah.net/store/images/35/Meanings%20of%20Victory%20and%20Loss%20in%20Jihaad.pdf> (accessed 18 June 2008).

15 Abu Ayman al-Hilali, in Majallat al-Ansar (ed.), “The real story of the raids on New York and Washington,” in “Book commemorates September 11 ‘raid’,” at: http://www.why-war.com/files/qaeda_celebrate_911.txt (downloaded March 2005, in author’s possession).

16 The essay of Sayf-ad-Din Al-Ansari (no title) in in Majallat al-Ansar (ed.), “The real story of the raids on New York and Washington,” in “Book commemorates September 11 ‘raid’,” at: http://www.why-war.com/files/qaeda_celebrate_911.txt (downloaded March 2005, in author’s possession).

17 Abu Ubayd al-Qirshi, “The 11 September Raid: The Impossible Becomes Possible,” in “Book commemorates September 11 ‘raid’,” at: http://www.why-war.com/files/qaeda_celebrate_911.txt (downloaded March 2005, in author’s possession).

18 See, for example, Suleiman Abu Geith, “In the Shadow of Lances,” quoted in MEMRI, “Why We Fight America,” Special Dispatch No. 388 (12 June 2002). Also see Reuven Paz, ‘Yes to WMD: The first Islamist Fatwah on the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction’, PRISM SPECIAL DISPATCHES 1:1 (May 2003), at: <http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM%20Special%20dispatch%20no%201.doc>

Paz found Al-Fahd’s article, *Risalah fi hukm istikhdam aslihat al-damar al-shamel didh al-kuffar*, Rabi’ Awwal 1424H (May 2003) online at: <http://www.al-fhd.com/rsayl/doc/rsayl.damar.doc> (accessed November 2004). Paz notes that the article was also circulated on 23 May 2003 by the The Global Islamic Media Center, at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/abubanan2/message/221>

19 Regarding economic downturns as foreshadowing victory over the Muslims’ enemies, see Al-Uyayree, *op. cit.* (n.d., n.p.). This point about natural disasters was raised on the al-Qa’idah in Iraq-linked *Sout al-Khilafa* (“Voice of the Caliphate”) television broadcast following the U.S. hurricanes in autumn 2005 (See “Move over CBS: Al-Qaeda moves into the News Business,” 27 September 2005, at: <http://mynetjawa.mu.nu/archives/122982.php>, accessed 20 June 2008).

20 For example, see the jihadi literature cited in Hafez, *op. cit.* (2007); also see “Special Reports—Through the eyes of the mujahideen,” *Jane’s Islamic Affairs Analyst* (1 December 2004).

21 The avatars of this CoG come in many forms, from structured insurgent and terrorist networks, such as the ‘core’ al-Qa’idah; to hierarchical administrations, such as those once at work in Anbar Province, Iraq; to Western jihadi cells entirely outside of AQ’s organizational purview, such as the Los Angeles-based 2005 Jama’at al-Islam As-Sahee cell.

its CoG²², which cannot be bombed away, withered with a sanctions regimen, or kept out with border fences. This CoG also transcends ethnic boundaries, as the involvement of converts in the GJM indicates.

Based upon the centrality of a belief that is inextricably associated with one of the three great monotheistic traditions, parallel conceptions of victory, and a cultural, global CoG that emphasises confrontation in order to defend Islam, the GJM is far different from terrorist threats that Western governments have faced previously, and indeed, very different from the governments themselves. These asymmetries will continue to contribute to an environment characterised by misunderstanding, misdiagnosis, and operational subterfuge on the part of the GJM.

22 The global jihad's cultural CoG include the following characteristics: 1) creating a 'parity of suffering' with Islam's enemies; 2) defending Islam wherever one resides; 3) understanding martyrdom as both an operational, communal, and personal boon; 4) internalizing one's obligation to physical jihad to the degree that one supports it logistically or through direct action; 4) believing that the jihadi movement is the apocalyptic 'saved sect' (*al-ta'ifa al-mansoura*) whose constant fighting will usher in the end of time; 5) promoting the notion of 'brotherhood' to establish clear identity boundaries between both nominal Muslims (who fail in their obligation to support the *mujahideen*, or whose actions or statements are believed to take them outside of Islam) and *kuffaar* (unbelievers); and 6) believing that God's sovereignty has a direct impact on the success or failure of jihadi operations, and that he intervenes miraculously on behalf of the *mujahideen* when they display the requisite levels of belief (*iman*).

PART TWO

POTENTIAL FUTURE THREATS

The following section outlines two potential strategic threats to the United States. Both are linked to the asymmetric character of global jihad. These future threats are not necessarily probable, only plausible.

Undermining confidence in the US Government

One of the greatest strategic terrorist threats facing the US is the GJM's potential to undermine the American public's confidence in its government's ability to protect it. Undermining confidence in the US Government is very much ingrained in the GJM's post-9/11 "strategic studies" literature.²³ The writings of Abu Ubeid al-Qurashi (a popular pro-al-Qa'idah online commentator on jihadi strategy) on "fourth generation warfare" are illustrative.²⁴ These trumpet the GJM's asymmetric character as the ultimate means by which to enable another strike on the continental US. Al-Qurashi's logic goes that the movement's asymmetry allows it to overcome US early warning, preventative first strike and deterrence measures in order to attack it, ultimately sapping American's trust in its government and eventually bringing about its demise. Unsurprisingly, the real "fruit" of the attack would be the anticipated growth of draconian, anti-Muslim post-attack security measures that would, according to the GJM, spark domestic strain while simultaneously bolstering al-Qa'idah's global narrative.²⁵ The current atmosphere of often-inconsistent US public discourse on the threat and arguably limited institutional understanding of the GJM could contribute to the gravity of this scenario. The following section details why and how this ominous threat is not entirely out of the question.

First, as in other Western governments, the US government's domestic public discourse on the nature, objectives and methods of the global jihadi threat generally lacks uniformity, and often, critical nuance. Despite pockets of highly qualified government analysts and experts on the threat, their voices and knowledge are often stove-piped, failing to consistently reach and impact senior bureaucrats and lawmakers or guide their interface with the public. The result is often conflicting definitions of the threat itself, inconsistent public messaging, and the generation of sometimes-contradictory approaches about how best to counter it. Examples span from congressional debates and experts selected for testimony, to public terrorism preparedness exercises. While this observation warrants more discussion and evidence than space permits, it is sufficient to note that this situation could enable the GJM to maximise the effect of future surprise attacks by fomenting public anxiety in their wake.

23 Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer of the Norwegian FFI deserve credit for identifying the jihadi 'strategic studies' genre.

24 <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Area=sd&ID=SP34402>

25 This is also the view of Sa'ad al-Faqih, a UK resident listed by the United States for alleged involvement with al-Qa'idah (author's interview, 2005).

Second, future attacks on the continental US could grievously exploit inconsistent official messaging about the threat by circumventing trumped, largely technical anti-terrorism measures. This, in turn, could foster an atmosphere of public consternation and division. What if the US government spends billions of dollars securing its border with Mexico and is attacked multiple times by Canadian or European militants? What if the United States suffers a series of attacks by its own citizens—potentially converts to militant Islam—who are uninhibited by airport screening procedures, ethnic profiling, and do not appear on watch-lists? While technical anti-terrorism measures are necessary to deter certain aspects of the threat, its other manifestations are able to overcome these with relative ease. Indeed, the data indicates that Canada has a more active community of jihadi sympathisers and activists than Mexico—and also one of the largest, most porous borders in the world. Further, it is widely recognised that the most operationally advanced US plot since the 9/11 attacks was the 2005 “JIS” conspiracy, which targeted Jewish-Americans and US military personnel in Los Angeles. This plot was hatched by African-American converts to militant Islam, not immigrants from the Islamic world. The threat is multifaceted, multiethnic and transnational owing to its cultural CoG. While investing billions of taxpayer dollars into biometric scanners and other technical protective measures may ultimately prove worthwhile (if it has not already), it must be remembered that technology cannot trump culture; the latter uses the former. A national security vision and message built upon “Fortress America” ignores the critical asymmetries of the threat, and in the event of attacks like the above, is potentially a catalyst for sewing public discord—especially if combined with inconsistent or ineffective public diplomacy.

Third, public frustration with the government in the wake of an attack would likely increase should the government have previously determined that al-Qa’idah was “defeated”. For instance, were significant numbers of senior al-Qa’idah leaders killed or captured, or the central al-Qa’idah network cut-off from its vital resources, it is possible that an administration would push to declare “victory”. This happened in May 2003, when major combat operations in Iraq were pronounced, “ended.”²⁶ Such an announcement would have a very deleterious effect on public confidence in the face of inevitable post-attack statements from the GJM, in which its own victory metrics would starkly contrast ours.

We simply do not know what a series of attacks as described above—especially those perpetrated by Americans—would mean in terms of domestic public reaction. However, it is conceivable that attacks viewed as utterly defying the logic of US anti-terrorism measures and exposing as premature a declaration of US victory would prompt some sectors of the public to clamor for confrontation with Islam itself—the only meaningful demarcation of the attackers. In such an environment, the voices and statures of some who fail to distinguish between ‘orthodox’ Sunni Muslims and jihadi activists could be amplified. Al-Qa’idah’s single narrative would

then almost certainly receive a boost, as its claim that Islam is under siege is seemingly validated.

‘Covenant of Security’ Violated

A second future threat is that an increasing number of Muslims already sympathetic to jihadi activism might begin to sense that fighting against their Western countries of residence is as theologically permissible as fighting where is “Islam” is being “plainly” threatened: Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, etc. The more widespread the sense that the US government has betrayed its obligations to resident Muslims by violating the “Covenant of Security” (“*aqd aman*”, abbreviated CoS), the greater the potential threat. In this case, the US can learn from the UK’s experience with radical Islam.

What is the CoS and why is it at risk? Omar Bakri Muhammad (OBM), former leader of the now-defunct UK-based al-Muhajiroun (“The Immigrants”), explained the significance of the CoS and its relationship to Islamic militancy in the West in a 2005 interview.²⁷ Drawing from Islamic history and Just War traditions, he rationalised that all Muslims living in the West who: 1) explicitly identify themselves as Muslims; 2) maintain official Western forms of identification; 3) take government benefits; or 4) enter with a work or study visa engage in a “customary covenant” with a Western government.²⁸ According to OBM, this covenant means that they expect to live without fear of arrest, harassment, and undue surveillance (etc.) and will be able to freely practice their religion.²⁹ In turn, these Muslims are not permitted to fight their unbelieving hosts or plunder their assets unless that government violates the contract.³⁰ If one wishes to wage jihad against the Western country of his or her residence, as OBM and his UK-based cadres publicly advocated, then one must enter from abroad clandestinely without entering into a “customary” or assumed contract; conceal their Islamic identities; and ensure that their violence benefits the global Muslim community.³¹ Bakri Muhammad argues (somewhat curiously) that the 9/11 cell fulfilled these stipulations.³² However, this logic does not suggest that Muslims “under contract” are prohibited from providing rhetorical or logistical assistance to foreign jihadis seeking to enter their homeland to commit acts of terrorism.³³

In the eyes of many jihadi activists, including OBM and Ayman al-Zawahiri—commonly viewed as al-Qa’idah’s second-in-command—the covenant of security has been abrogated by both the US and the UK. American and British Muslims must either emigrate or fight, they maintain, unless their presence in these countries is for

26 See <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/20203.htm> (accessed August 2008).

27 See Omar Bakri Muhammad’s interview with Anthony McRoy, “There can be no end to jihad,” *Christianity Today*, 1 February 2005, at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/105/22.0.html>

28 Ibid. Also see Omar Bakri Muhammad, *The World is Divided into Two Camps* (London: Ad-D’awah Publications, 2004), pp 67-70.

29 Bakri Muhammad, *op. cit.* (2004).

30 Ibid. Also see Abu Baseer al-Tartousi, “Covenants and Security in Islam,” at: <http://www.en.altartosi.com/Covenants.htm> (accessed 27 July 2008).

31 See Omar Bakri Muhammad’s interview with Anthony McRoy.

32 Ibid.

33 See David Cohen, “Terror on the Dole,” *Evening Standard*, 20 April 2004.

short-term or tactical purposes. Otherwise, by virtue of paying taxes, voting, and providing other forms of tacit support to these governments that are “at war” with Islam, they risk committing “major” sin that takes them outside the fold of the faith.³⁴ In OBM’s case, this rationale is based upon the view that the condition of Muslims living in Britain has evolved from one of treaty under *Dar al-Amaan* (the abode of security) to *Dar al-Harb* (the abode of war) because of post-9/11 domestic anti-terrorism measures, such as the indefinite detention of extremist preachers like Abu Hamza al-Masri and other terror-linked suspects, and because of the “persecution” of Muslims’ abroad by British forces and their allies.³⁵ More recently, al-Zawahiri cites the difficulties of raising one’s family in the West according to the tenets of the *shari’a*; the atmosphere of “hostility” that prevails in the West towards Islam’s Prophet, Muhammad; and most importantly, the “animosity” demonstrated by the West (especially America) towards Muslims globally.³⁶ These grievances represent only a few ticks on a much longer list that is widely discussed not only by extremists but also by many non-activist British and American Muslims.³⁷ Contrary to the views of some Salafi authors like Abu Baseer al-Tartousi,³⁸ al-Zawahiri argues that the CoS has become an irrelevant concept altogether, and is wholly unenforceable now because countries like the US and UK have no intention of honoring agreements with Muslims.³⁹

Adherence to this “covenant ideology” may explain *in part* why most Western jihadis have traditionally gone abroad for fighting and/or plotting against US and UK interests. Could it be that the interpreted abrogation of this treaty influenced the radicalisation of the 2005 London bombers (some of whom were apparently linked to al-Muhajiroun figures⁴⁰), for example, to the degree that they opted to strike London rather than fight in Afghanistan? Conversely, did belief in an “intact” CoS

34 Ayman al-Zawahiri’s writings on the CoS appear in Ch. 7 of the recently released *Exoneration* (2008) (available from OSC website as GMP20080512342006).

35 See Omar Bakri Muhammad, *The World is Divided into Two Camps*, pp. 67-70. Also, Omar Bakri Muhammad’s comments at the conference, “The role of Muslims nowadays,” as reported by Hannah K. Strange, “British Muslims Called to Take Up Jihad,” *United Press International*, 10 January 2005. Further, see Aatish Taseer’s interview with Islamist activist Hassan Butt, a former member of al-Muhajiroun in Aatish Taseer, “A British Jihadist,” *Prospect*, August 2005, pp 18-24.

36 See al-Zawahiri, *op. cit.* (2008).

37 See, for example, Gregg Krupa, “Rights groups fear feds’ new terror profile,” *The Detroit News* (4 August 2008), at: <http://www.detroitnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080804/METRO/808040380> Other frequently cited grievances also include: promoting policies viewed as detrimental to Muslims around the world, especially in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinian Territories; detention without trial; torture at venues like Abu Ghraib, Iraq, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; banning the *hijab* and *niqab* coverings for women (in the cases of France and Turkey); inappropriate and unnecessary surveillance of Muslim families, community centers, and mosques; general harassment by law enforcement; etc.

38 See Abu Baseer al-Tartousi, “Covenants and Security in Islam,” at: <http://www.en.altartosi.com/Covenants.htm> (accessed 27 July 2008).

39 Ibid.

40 For example, see 25 October 2005 transcript of BBC Radio Four interviews at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/25_10_05_bombings.pdf ; also see “London Bombers Have Ties to United States,” ABC news online, 15 July 2005.

in the very early days of the Iraq War impact the decision-making of UK citizens Asif Hanif and Omar Sharif (both linked to al-Muhajiroun⁴¹) to strike a bar in Israel rather than the Underground? Further, might the perceived abrogation of the CoS be one reason why we see more post-2001 jihadi plots in America and the UK than we did prior to a more stringent post-9/11 law enforcement regimen and before the Iraq War? While there are clearly no scientific answers to these questions, empirical evidence demonstrates that the CoS is a topic of interest within Western extremist communities, much as jihadi Just War theory is to radical Islam *writ large*. Its perceived abrogation could increase the numbers of those willing to participate in violent activism in the US and UK.⁴² And since there are few indications that the grievances noted by many within Western Muslim communities have been addressed to their satisfaction—especially in the view of jihadi activists—this situation warrants monitoring, as do other trends in jihadi ideology.

41 Chris McGreal and Jeevan Vasagar, “Mystery of the last hours of failed suicide bomber found dead in sea,” *The Guardian*, 20 May 2003, at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/may/20/israel>

42 See the websites listed in the footnotes of “Islamist Debate: Are Muslim UK Visa Holders and Muslim UK Citizens Permitted to Carry Out Attacks in Great Britain?”, MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 1821 (23 January 2008) at: <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP182108>

PART THREE

RECOMMENDATIONS

Countering the Core of Jihadi Culture

Contending with the asymmetries of the GJM and many of the challenges it presents hinges in the first instance on undermining the appeal of its global culture within specific local and regional contexts. Apart from jihadi culture there is no militant online activism, no social impetus to conduct suicide operations, and no mystical appeal. It is the bonding agent that holds all components of the movement together.

How should the West attack jihadi culture? Much has been written recently about various counter-radicalisation methods and strategies. While space does not permit a thorough review of these measures, the next section will isolate several integral components of jihadi culture heavily promoted in its propaganda and offer succinct counter-narratives and methods to attack each.

Brotherhood and Unity

As noted, the GJM strongly emphasises brotherhood and unity within the movement, both as metrics of victory and the “promise” of joining its ranks. Constructing viable counter-narratives should begin by developing multi-source empirical data of instances where wonton self-interest, betrayal, racism, etc are obvious and cannot be easily brushed aside as Western conspiracies. Each narrative of forced participation in suicide bombings should be uncovered and examined for utility; every account of promises broken to former mujahideen should be researched; each documented rift between Arabs and Pashtuns, for example, should be comprehensively explored—especially those involving key al-Qa’idah players who have attained near-mythic status—and every large-scale attack against other Sunni Muslim civilians needs to be revisited. Networks of individuals with street credibility in Western Muslim enclaves should then be enlisted to convey these stories over time, complimented by strategic, periodic online bursts of information conveying this factual data. Location depending, tribal networks could be deployed elsewhere. Since at its core, militant Salafi thought centres on the imperative of violently protecting the unity of God and believers, and the special “brotherhood” of those who take this task to heart, logic suggests that this pillar of global jihadi culture should be targeted. The problem in the West is finding individuals willing to undertake this effort who are credible, “untainted” by government handling, and for whom the risks are worthwhile.

Obligation to Violence

The global jihadi movement is also under-girded by a strong narrative of personal obligation to violently confront the *ummah*’s perceived enemies “wherever they are”. Emphasising orthodox Sunni teachings concerning the duties and responsibilities of sanctioned leaders to both declare war and uphold Islamic traditions of *jus in bello* (accepted conduct in warfare) is undoubtedly one important way to counter

this aspect of jihadi culture. However, demonstrating through empirical evidence the reluctance of certain jihadi icons and ideologues to fight, or alternatively, emphasising their personal inconsistencies at odds with their articulated values could also be useful in undermining this cultural component. Indeed, as Quintan Wiktorowicz argues, it is the “cultural brokers” of global jihad—its clerics and ideologues—who articulate and refine doctrines essential to the maintenance of its culture.⁴³

While operationalising this strategy is best left to others, researchers should find evidence of ideologues’ reluctance to risk health and wealth on behalf of the jihad; reticence to join others at the “front” in the spirit of Abdallah Azzam, the scholar-cum-militant icon of the Afghan jihad; substance abuse (including the consumption of alcohol) or other “taboo” behaviors; evidence of back-stabbing or similar violations of “jihadi” social mores, which would cast doubt on a jihadi leader’s cherished role as mediator; and so forth. Where these are uncovered, the case could be made that the jihadi leader is unfit to mentor, mediate, or teach since they cannot be assured of God’s guidance due to sin. While one could make the counter-argument that the importance of perpetual fighting is generally seen to supersede the individual’s shortcomings—an argument often used to explain Muslim deaths in al-Qa’idah-linked attacks—there is no question that the individual’s standing would be denigrated and could suffer permanently depending on the nature of intra-group consultation and sub-leadership.

However, absent credible purveyors of an emotional, evidence-based counter-narrative,⁴⁴ and minus the will to work with (even extreme) Islamists who oppose al-Qa’idah’s methodology, attacking the central cultural tenant of global jihad will fail. Not only does sociological research bolster this argument, but the literature highlighting the value of working with former militants who oppose al-Qa’idah does as well.⁴⁵

Safeguarding public confidence during the “Long War”

A topic about which much could be written, maintaining the public’s confidence in the wake of a future attack—particularly a devastating strike by North American jihadis—necessitates a qualitative boost in the level and uniformity of official discourse on the threat. An official, well-funded and permanent US working group comprising inter-disciplinary and multi-agency experts should be established to annually develop a succinct national policy document that articulates precisely the

43 See Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Suicide Bombings: Do Beliefs Matter?” (September 2004) at: http://www.unc.edu/~kurzman/Soc3264/Wiktorowicz_EXPLAINING_SUICIDE_BOMBINGS.doc (accessed November 2005).

44 On critical components of counter-narratives, see William D. Casebeer and James A. Russell, “Storytelling and Terrorism: Towards a Comprehensive ‘Counter-Narrative Strategy’,” *Strategic Insights*, 5:3 (March 2005).

45 For instance, see Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, “The Unraveling: the jihadist revolt against bin laden,” *The New Republic* (11 June 2008) at: <http://www.tnr.com/politics/story.html?id=702bf6d5-a37a-4e3e-a491-fd72bf6a9da1> (accessed July 2008).

current nature, scope, and objectives of the global jihadi challenge and establishes public messaging guidelines for the entire federal government.

Further, this standing body—perhaps established along the lines of the US Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction⁴⁶—should also contend with critical questions about the threat that bisect the interests of multiple federal agencies and international partners. One such question might be, “How does the GJM define victory, and how can the US coordinate and maximize interagency efforts in 2009 to deprive it of such?” After all, since military and counter-terrorism planning ultimately aims to keep adversaries from winning while protecting a state’s interests, one must ask, how can such planning be effective if an adversary’s perspective of victory remains undefined?

The efforts of such an expert advisory body would centralise and enhance public diplomacy efforts, better preparing the public for potentially difficult times ahead, and more tightly focus the elements of US national power against the GJM. In so doing, it would also likely dispel the dangerous myths that technology and tighter borders will automatically lead to security from global jihadism, and would probably encourage more domestic research on the North American dimensions of the threat. This would be a very useful development for US state and local law enforcement agencies.

Remedying the Perception of a Covenant Violated?

Finally, remedying the perception of a violated CoS is exceptionally difficult. This is because most individuals who hold to this doctrine have already progressed to some extent down the radicalisation continuum (the end of which is militancy) and are looking for loopholes to justify violence. Indeed, domestic counter-terrorism investigations and military involvement overseas are alone sufficient for some to “justify” militant activism.

Perhaps one of the best modes to address this issue is for law enforcement and intelligence agencies to adopt a “hands-off” policy when it comes to influential Islamist “culture brokers” who hold to CoS ideology, but who reject the idea that “trusts” or “customary covenants” may be broken by Muslims. Abu Baseer at-Tartousi, one of the most influential living jihadi authors, according to West Point’s 2006 study, is an example.⁴⁷ While he does not reject the idea of fighting non-Muslim forces abroad, or even attacking countries “at war” with “Islam”, he vigorously upholds the notion that Muslims should not break covenants under any circumstances, and in the manner of a comprehensive Salafi scholar, copiously

references the sacred sources to bolster his case.⁴⁸ The impact of his work on the discourse of extremists online can be found in seconds using a Google search.⁴⁹ While the views of individuals like Abu Baseer are in the main detestable and fuel the radicalisation narrative, it is equally evident that they serve a dual purpose. We should not throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater.

46 See the WMD Commission’s homepage at: <http://www.wmd.gov/index.html> (accessed January 2009).

47 See William McCants (ed), *The Militant Ideology Atlas* (West Point, NY: The United States Military Academy, 2006), at: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/Atlas-ExecutiveReport.pdf>. (accessed September 2008).

48 Abu Baseer al-Tartousi, “Covenants and Security in Islam,” at: <http://www.en.altartosi.com/Covenants.htm> (accessed 27 July 2008).

49 See for example the 18 August 2006 posts of ‘Abuz Zubair’ at: <http://forums.islamicawakening.com/showthread.php?t=651&page=3> (accessed September 2008).

About ICSR

ICSR is a unique partnership of King's College London, the University of Pennsylvania, the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (Israel), and the Regional Centre for Conflict Prevention Amman (Jordan). Its aim is to counter the growth of radicalisation and political violence by bringing together knowledge and leadership. For more information, see www.icsr.info

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