

Identifying and Structuring the Objectives of Terrorists



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August, 2009

This research was supported by the United States Department of Homeland Security through the National Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events (CREATE) under grant No. 2007-ST-061-000001. However, any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Homeland Security.

Abstract

The risk of terrorism is of great concern to many countries and significant resources are spent to counter this threat. A better understanding of the motivation of terrorists and their reasons for selecting certain modes and targets of attack can help improve the decisions to allocate resources in the fight against terrorism. The fundamental question addressed in this paper is: “What do terrorists want?” We take the view that terrorists preferences for actions are based on their values and beliefs. An important missing piece in our knowledge of terrorists’ preferences is an understanding of their values. This paper uses a novel approach to determine these values and state them as objectives, using principles from decision analysis and value-focused thinking. Instead of interviewing decision makers and stakeholders, as would be normal in decision analysis, we extract the values of terrorists by examining their own writings and verbal statements. To illustrate the approach, we extract the values of Al- Qaeda and structure them in terms of strategic, fundamental, and means objectives. These objectives are interrelated through a means-ends network. This information is useful for understanding terrorists’ motivations, intent, and likely actions, as well as for developing policies to counter terrorism at its root causes.

1. Introduction

The attacks on New York, Madrid, and London, along with dozens of foiled attacks in several countries have clearly demonstrated the intent of Islamic terrorist groups to conduct violent attacks on the populations of the Western world. It would be easy to conclude, therefore, that the main objectives of terrorists are to kill large numbers of people in Western countries, to disrupt and destabilize their economies, and instill fear and insecurity in their populations. However, some authors ^(1, 2) have pointed out that the objectives of terrorists are more complex. Terrorists' acts of violence may be done for revenge or as a means to political ends. They may be a way to draw attention to their plight or to recruit followers.

The research reported in this paper is an attempt to identify and structure terrorists' objectives in order to better understand what drives their decisions. We focus on Al-Qaeda as the most visible and prominent terrorist group threatening the Western world. If we understand the fundamental objectives of Al-Qaeda and their means of accomplishing them, we will be in a better position to predict their choices for modes and targets of future attacks as well as other decisions that Al Qaeda's leadership may make.

To identify and structure Al-Qaeda's objectives, we use decision analysis tools ⁽³⁾. In typical decision analysis, objectives are elicited in interviews with decision makers and stakeholders. Since this is obviously not possible in this case, we developed a novel approach to identify and structure Al-Qaeda's objectives from their members' writings, Internet postings, and from the academic literature.

The next section describes the methodology to identify and structure objectives and our approach to implement this methodology through a review of the writings of Al-Qaeda. Section 3 provides an overview of the results of this effort in the form of three sets of objectives (strategic, fundamental, and means objectives) and their interrelationships. Sections 4 through 6 discuss in detail the strategic, fundamental, and means objectives of Al Qaeda and show how each of these three sets of objectives were identified based on specific statements by Al-Qaeda. Section 7 provides conclusions and guidance about how to use these findings.

2. Methodology for Identifying and Structuring Terrorist Objectives

Objectives specify what one hopes to achieve, and hence reflect the values and preferences that guide decisions. Objectives are usually expressed as preferred directions of achievement or desired end states. For example, an expressed objective of the United Nations is to reduce poverty in the world (desired direction: less poverty). One of the World Health Organization's objectives is to eradicate AIDS (desired end-state: No more AIDS cases in the world). A terrorist group's objective may be to kill Westerners (preferred direction: larger number of deaths) or to destroy the US economy (preferred end state: crippled economy).

Objectives can be grouped into three categories: Strategic, fundamental, and means objectives. Strategic objectives provide guidance for all decisions. They serve as the mechanism by which leaders can guide decisions made by different individuals and groups within an organization. As Keeney ⁽⁴⁾ states: "If strategic objectives are not carefully defined and communicated, the guidance is minimal and some separate decisions simply won't make sense in the larger context of the organization's affairs." Fundamental objectives provide guidance for specific decisions that are usually carried out over the medium to long-term. If fundamental objectives are routinely accomplished, this will lead to the eventual achievement of the strategic objectives. Means objectives are the short term, day-to-day actions, which promote the achievement of fundamental and strategic objectives. Some means objectives pertain directly to strategic objectives, but most are a direct means to achieve fundamental objectives.

Decision analysts usually elicit objectives in interviews with decision makers and stakeholders. Keeney ⁽⁴⁾ describes the interview process and the types of questions that decision analysts ask in order to elicit objectives. This process is, of course, not possible without access to terrorist leaders, who are willing to express their objectives honestly. However, there exists a large body of writings by terrorists and their spiritual leaders that can be used as source material for developing a set of objectives for terrorists. These are good sources of information because the statements have likely been reviewed and refined to best describe the terrorist's core feelings and reasons for action. The theologians and strategists of extremist groups are often educated at a much higher level than the rank and file members of the organization and one can assume that their statements have been given a significant amount of thought. We also reviewed web sites and transcripts of publically available audiotapes.

This methodology required no access to classified or sensitive information. Having access to such information, e.g., from interviews with Guantanamo prisoners or from intercepted communications between the leaders of a terrorist organization can enhance our understanding of terrorists' objectives. These sources can provide unprepared and raw access into the mind of the leader regarding how their overall goals will be accomplished. Specific instructions given to a subordinate provide evidence for the shorter-term objectives of the organization and might suggest the exact means desired for achieving either those short-term objectives or fundamental objectives.

With the case study of Al-Qaeda, we relied on books and the internet as our sources. For the internet sources, we used a bookmark tagging system called "del.ici.ous" to systematically categorize various news articles and video clips about Al-Qaeda. As a result of this process, we used 82 tags, and the program ranked the popularity of these tags. The most popular tags concerned top Al-Qaeda leaders, field of operations, speeches, and tactics. Sources were almost always identified with multiple tags. This helped provided the information base we used view which direction the most recent Al-Qaeda messages seemed to be leaning. This method enabled us to remain current and organized with regards to the most recent information available, providing insights into the organization's thinking.

Specific internet sources that we found to be helpful include: Al-Jazeera News, Jane's Information Group, PBS, Liveleak.com, The Wall Street Journal, Globalsecurity.org, CNN.com, Foxnews.com, and Defenselink.com. Many of these sources provided accurate descriptions of Al-Qaeda actions, attack styles and target selections.

3. Overview of Al-Qaeda Objectives

To identify and structure the objectives of Al Qaeda, we found that the most comprehensive resources with regards to determining value statements related to objectives were within the speeches and audio transcripts of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Statements from other terrorist leaders were also useful to augment value determination. However, we believe that when determining an organization's values, it is best to begin by compiling value statements from the line leadership and most influential decision makers. In most cases, the values of Al-Qaeda were determined after compiling lists of stated values from

the sources available. Sources were organized by tags of similar types of documents, similar stated values, and by the individuals making the statements.

After compiling a large list of value-related statements from the sources described above, we expressed each one in terms of an objective, indicated in italics, to provide a common form for these values. Then, we grouped these statements into those related to strategic objectives, fundamental objectives, and means objectives. The means-ends network in Figure 1 provides an overview of the organization and interrelationships of these objectives.

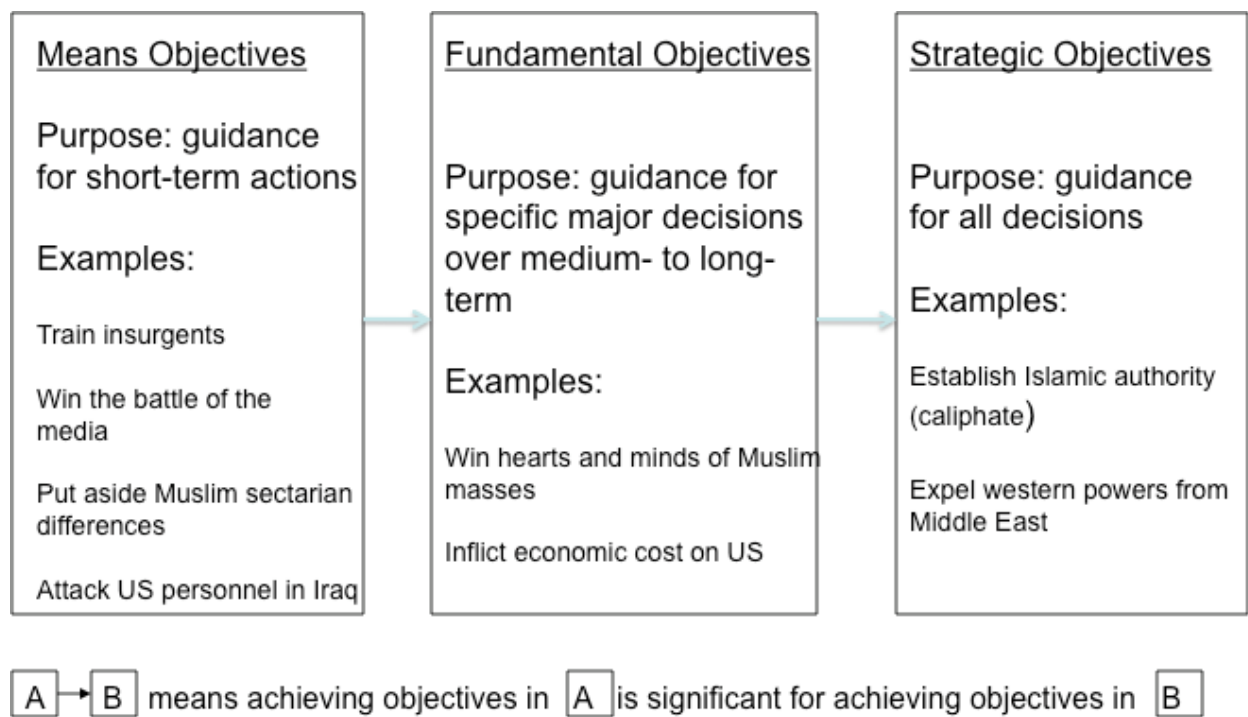


Figure 1: Overview of the Interrelationships among Al Qaeda Objectives

As is often the case, we found only a few strategic objectives, several fundamental objectives and a large number of means objectives. For example, one of Al-Qaeda's strategic objectives is to *inspire and incite Islamic movements and the Muslim masses of the world to attack the enemies of Islam*. However, this will likely not be achieved without first *maintaining support from the Muslim masses*. Therefore, maintaining support from the Muslim masses is a long-term, fundamental objective, because it contributes to achieve a strategic objective. We

have identified twenty-one means objectives of the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization. To better describe how they influence the achievement of fundamental objectives, we have categorized the means objectives into six groups of closely related objectives, as described in Section 6.

4. Strategic Objectives

We identified five strategic objectives of Al-Qaeda that are listed in Table 1. Each strategic objective is discussed here with the main sources that helped us identify and formulate this objective.

Table 1: Strategic Objectives of Al-Qaeda

1) Inspire and incite Islamic movements and the Muslim masses of the world to attack the enemies of Islam.
2) Expel Western Powers from the Middle East.
3) Destroy Israel
4) Establish Islamic religious authority in the Middle East (Caliphate).
5) Extend Islamic authority and religion into new areas of the world

1) *Inspire and incite Islamic movements and the Muslim masses of the world to attack the enemies of Islam.*

Osama Bin Laden⁽⁵⁾ believes that America's actions during the Persian Gulf War were an informal declaration of war on Islam for the following reasons:

- 1) The occupation of the Arabian Peninsula: specifically, using it as a launch pad for other operations within the Middle East.
- 2) The Americans intended to kill countless Iraqis and humiliate them. (This includes deaths that Bin Laden attributes to the blockade, including an increased infant mortality rate, which supposedly killed close to a million Iraqis.)
- 3) The Americans desire to help the Jews while intentionally hurting the Muslim world and contributing to violence in the Levant.

Based on this belief, Bin Laden, on February 23, 1998, made a very clear point that killing the enemies of Islam is a duty that all Muslims should take upon themselves whenever possible.

Specific quotes include:

“All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims. And the ulema throughout Islamic history have agreed unanimously that jihad is an individual duty if the enemy is destroying Muslim territory.”⁽⁵⁾

“We—with God’s help—call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder them of their possessions wherever and whenever they find them.”⁽⁵⁾

2) *Expel Western Powers from the Middle East.*

Al-Qaeda believes that they will not be free to rule over the Middle East with impunity until it is free from all interference from western powers.

“Killing the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can carry it out in any country where it proves possible, in order to liberate Al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy sanctuary [Mecca] from their grip, and to the point that their armies leave all Muslim territory, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.”⁽⁵⁾

3) *Destroy Israel*

The destruction of Israel is clearly a strategic objective. Al-Qaeda has kept this goal on the forefront of their statements to maintain the support of the Muslim masses of the world because it is also a means to unite all of the support that they can gather from the ethnically diverse population of Muslims.

“I would like to assure our people in Palestine that we will expand our jihad there...we will not recognize even one inch for Jews in the land of Palestine as other Muslim leaders have.”⁽⁶⁾

“Palestine cannot be retaken by negotiations and dialogue, but with fire and iron”⁽⁷⁾

“[ignore Palestinian political parties] mired in trickery of the blasphemous democracy, [rely on armed might.]”⁽⁷⁾

Christopher M. Blanchard suggests in his CRS Report for Congress about Al-Qaeda's evolving ideology, that

“Al Qaeda’s operational record seems to indicate that its leaders’ commitment to specific national causes and strategic objectives are rhetorical tools designed to elicit support for their broader ideological agenda of confrontation with the West and puritanical reform in the Islamic world...variations in the intensity and prominence of Bin Laden’s anti-Israeli rhetoric has fueled suggestions that Al Qaeda’s commitment to the Palestinian cause waxes and wanes depending on the network’s need for support – becoming more pronounced during periods when Al Qaeda’s actions have alienated supporters or recently as part of a more outright ideological appeal.”⁽⁸⁾

This suggests that Al-Qaeda is very aware of its need for funding. Since the organization places a high priority on good public relations in order to maximize donations, it is important to realize that it is possible that the destruction of Israel is not an immediate goal. Thus, Al-Qaeda has the strategic objective to destroy Israel partly for the ideological purpose of maintaining a particular front to the world community and the Muslim masses.

4) *Establish Islamic religious authority in the Middle East (Caliphate).*

Instrumental to the long-term strategy of Al-Qaeda is the establishment of a Caliphate, or Islamic religious authority. This establishment would unite the Muslim countries under Muslim religious law or Sharia. This religious law would supersede the law of nations, and would give more power to the extremist belief system. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the chief theologian and ideologue for Al-Qaeda, overtly supports this goal in a letter he wrote to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who at the time was the leader of the Al-Qaeda insurgent forces in Iraq.

“It has always been my belief that the victory of Islam will never take place until a Muslim state is established in the manner of the Prophet in the heart of the Islamic world, specifically in the Levant and Egypt.”⁽⁹⁾

“Just as armies achieve victory only when the infantry occupies territory, the Islamic movement of jihad will not triumph against the world coalition unless it possesses an Islamic base in the heart of the Muslim world. All the means and plans that we have reviewed for mobilizing the nation will be for naught, unless they lead to the establishment of a caliphate in the Muslim world.”⁽¹⁰⁾

5) *Extend Islamic authority and religion into new areas of the world*

Building on the momentum of their expected victories in Iraq and in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda believes that it is critical to support struggles in other regions and spread their faith to non-believers. This was clearly stated by al-Zawahiri:

“it is my humble opinion that Jihad in Iraq requires several incremental goals...The third stage: Extend the Jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq.”⁽¹⁰⁾

Muslim extremists cite the teachings of Abdallah Azzam, among others to support their beliefs regarding the spread of Islam. Azzam is referred to by radicals as “the imam of jihad.” He was a Palestinian religious scholar who was killed in 1989. However, before his death he played a critical role to radical Islam as a principle theoretician, figurehead, and key organizer for Arab participation in the Afghan war during the 1980’s. Western analysts refer to him as “the godfather of jihad,” giving credit to his overwhelming impact on the emergence of the global jihad movement sparked after the Afghan war. ⁽¹¹⁾

“Establishing a Muslim society on an area of land is as necessary for Muslims as water and air, and this territory will exist only through an organized Islamic movement that wages jihad, in actions and words, and makes of combat its goal and defense.”⁽¹²⁾

The writings of Ayman al-Zawahiri provide a consistent flow of anti-western support. His audio clips, video clips, and publications are among the most important examples of Al-Qaeda values and objectives because he is the top tier strategist in the organization.

“As for the battles that are going on in the far flung regions of the Islamic world, such as Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Bosnia, they are just the groundwork and the vanguard for the major battles which have begun in the heart of the Islamic world.”⁽⁹⁾

“I asked God for the men of jihadi media to spread the message of Islam and monotheism to the world and spread real awareness to the people of the nations.”⁽¹³⁾

James L. Payne, in his article titled, *What Do the Terrorists Want?*, states that Al-Qaeda does not seem interested in spreading Islam to the West and specifically to America, because he does not find statements regarding the expansion of the Muslim world. Payne also stated that “If Bin Laden were deeply interested in fundamental Islam as a universal faith to be spread to the

entire world, we would expect him to be extremely hostile towards Turkish leaders because they... 'polluted' the traditional fundamentalist creed."⁽¹⁴⁾

Contrarily, we found many statements referring to an aspiration for a Muslim world, for example:

Ayman al-Zawahiri specifically states that he believes in "extending the jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq."⁽⁹⁾ Turkey is Iraq's neighbor to the north.

"the main target of the jihad and the jihad fighters is to strike against the foundations and the structure of the Western colonial project – what may be called the 'world order'... their defeat means, simply, the cancellation of all forms of nation-statehood, leaving only the natural state accepted by Islam."⁽¹⁵⁾

"We once ruled the world and the day will come when, by god, we will rule the entire world. The day will come when we rule the United States, the day will come when we rule Britain, we will rule the whole world, [and all will live in peace and comfort under our rule] except the Jews... The day will come when the whole world will rid itself of the Jews. . . ."⁽¹⁶⁾

"Thus Muslims can have only one goal: converting the entire humanity to Islam and 'effacing the final traces of all other religions, creeds and ideologies'"⁽¹⁷⁾

Thus, based on these statements, we believe that the expansion of Islam worldwide is one of the strategic objectives of Al-Qaeda.

5. Fundamental Objectives

In order for Al-Qaeda to successfully achieve its strategic objectives, several fundamental objectives must be accomplished. These objectives directly influence the probability for success on the strategic objectives. We have split the fundamental objectives into two groups. The first group consists of objectives related to the growth of the Al-Qaeda organization, and the second group consists of objectives that impact the enemy (the Western world). They are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Fundamental Objectives of Al Qaeda

<p><u>Related to the Growth of Al-Qaeda</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Maintain status as the primary Middle Eastern force to be reckoned with.2) Create homegrown terrorist cells in the US and Western Europe3) Win the Hearts and Minds of the Muslim Masses4) Maximize financial contribution received from supporters5) Recruit new followers <p><u>Related to Military Outcomes</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Attack US targets2) Cause Economic Loss for the US3) Expel the Americans from Iraq4) Kill large numbers of infidels

Fundamental Objectives Related to the Growth of Al-Qaeda

The continued growth of the Al-Qaeda network is critical to the organization. This is especially true considering many of the group's insurgents choose to kill themselves in battle in order to fulfill their duty regarding "defensive jihad." We identified five fundamental objectives related to the growth of the organization.

1) *Maintain status as the primary Middle Eastern force to be reckoned with*

Al-Qaeda intends to dominate the stage of terrorism as both the most powerful and most influential Islamic terrorist organization. In order to keep this position, it must be viewed by Western powers and the Muslim masses as a powerful threat to the West. Successfully

orchestrating attacks on US and western European soil is an effective means to accomplish this objective.

We know from the various attacks that have been prevented, that the threat is real. The intentions of the organization are deliberate to maintain their front as a formidable enemy to the West. A good example of this is the planned attack on Frankfurt, Germany that was prevented in September of 2007. Three men were arrested after being watched for months. German authorities acted when they believed the threat was imminent.

“Federal prosecutor Monika Harms said the three had trained at camps in Pakistan and procured some 700kg (1,500lbs) of chemicals for explosives. She said the accused had sought to target facilities visited by Americans, such as nightclubs, pubs or airports...Media reports said the men were planning attacks against a US military base in Ramstein and Frankfurt airport...The suspects, aged 22, 28 and 29, were alleged to be members of the German cell of a group she named as Islamic Jihad Union. Two of the men were German nationals who had converted to Islam, while the third was a Turkish man. Ms. Harms said the al-Qaeda-linked group had set up the cell last year. ...Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble called the men "very dangerous terrorists". ...They obviously planned these attacks on the orders of an international network, he said.”⁽¹⁸⁾

By successfully executing attacks on western soil, Al-Qaeda gathers support from Muslims and incites fear in their enemy.

2) Create homegrown terrorist cells in the US and Western Europe

The United States and its allies have effectively limited the progress and impact of Al-Qaeda recruitment and training in their traditional format. This directly influences the number of trained terrorists who attend training camps prior to their actions of jihad. US efforts have also significantly prevented funds and weapons from reaching various cells within terrorist organizations. As a result, the strategy of Al-Qaeda has changed to focus more on recruiting members from within “enemy” countries with hopes of having them take the initiative to form cells and execute attacks independent of traditional line leadership direction. These homegrown cells would answer to no one in particular, and may never meet any Al-Qaeda operatives. However, they would be drawn to the ideology projected across the globe by Al-Qaeda on various Internet sites.⁽¹⁹⁾ Terrorist attacks by homegrown cells include the July 7, 2005 London bombing and the March 11, 2004 Madrid bombing.

Al-Qaeda has an entire media wing called “As-Sahab” or “the cloud” which is devoted to producing and distributing information about the organization, complete with video and audio

content of the leaders preaching. “As-Sahab is issuing specially formatted videos from Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri that can be downloaded to cell phones.”⁽²⁰⁾

“Al-Qaeda has been growing more sophisticated in targeting international audiences. Videos are always subtitled in English, and messages this year from bin Laden and al-Zawahiri focusing on Pakistan and Afghanistan have been dubbed in the local languages, Urdu and Pashtu.”⁽²⁰⁾

This electronic method of obtaining followers has several advantages to the organization, and is a way that they can continue to spread their beliefs and recruit new followers despite our best efforts to stall that process. Using people already living in “enemy” countries saves Al-Qaeda money, and allows the organization to continue operating across the globe in areas where traditional terrorist networks no longer exist. Partly to support these homegrown terrorist cells, instructions on tactics and bomb making exist on Al-Qaeda websites.

3) *Win the Hearts and Minds of the Muslim Masses*

Al-Qaeda recognizes that the Muslim masses must support the organization’s actions and ideology in order for the struggle to be won in the terrorists’ favor. This fundamental objective is essentially required in order to achieve each of its strategic objectives and influences all of Al-Qaeda’s actions. For example, it would be impossible to achieve the strategic objective to *inspire and incite Islamic movements and the Muslim masses of the world to attack the enemies of Islam*, if Al-Qaeda had not already won over the hearts and minds of the Muslim masses. Additionally, special consideration should also be given to this objective as Al-Qaeda leaders have repeatedly stressed its significance.

“The strongest weapon which the mujahedeen enjoy—after the help and granting of success by God—is popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq, and the surrounding Muslim countries. So, we must maintain this support as best we can, and we should strive to increase it...therefore, our planning must strive to involve the Muslim masses in the battle, and to bring the mujahed movement to the masses and not conduct the struggle far from them.”⁽²⁰⁾

“A feature in the strategy of maintaining the support of the Muslim masses in Iraq is a deliberate effort to hide information and ideological reasons for fighting the infidels from the Muslim masses. Al-Qaeda believes that the Muslim masses should only be informed of what they can understand in order to prevent confusion.

The mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand, or do not approve,...we must not throw the masses - scant in knowledge- into the sea before we teach them to swim – relying on guidance in that on the saying of the Prophet to Umar bin al-Khattab: ‘lest the people should say that Muhammad used to kill his companions.’”⁽²⁰⁾

4) *Maximize financial contribution received from supporters*

Al-Qaeda’s financial situation has a direct effect on its ability to achieve its other fundamental objectives. Al-Qaeda realizes that maintaining support of the Muslim masses and maintaining its position as the formidable threat in the Middle East influence how much money is donated from wealthy supporters and from the masses at large via Muslim charities. This objective deserves mention by itself however, because it is relevant to many decisions made by the group.

5) *Recruit new followers*

A successful recruitment campaign is important for any organization. The Al-Qaeda strategy heavily relies on the internet to acquire new blood for a fighting insurgency and to create home-grown terror cells. By taking advantage of low education levels, the organization promises wealth and glory to a family of a martyr, and uses inaccurate interpretations of the Koran to convince followers that they have a duty to become jihadists and fight the infidels. Preventing education in Afghanistan by bombing schools leaves the Koran as the only educator. Keeping Muslims unaware of how little exposure they have to a world full of knowledge makes them easy targets for recruitment.

“Praise and blessings upon our Prophet Muhammad, who said: ‘Whoever is killed defending his property is a martyr, whoever is killed defending himself is a martyr, whoever is killed defending his religion is a martyr, and whoever is killed defending his family is a martyr.’”⁽²¹⁾

Fundamental Objectives Related to Military Outcomes

We have identified four fundamental objectives that are placed in a group related to military outcomes that are sought by Al-Qaeda. These objectives are a straightforward means to accomplishing its strategic objectives.

1) *Attack US targets*

Attacking US targets is a fundamental objective of Al-Qaeda as it helps maintain the credibility of the organization while contributing to all of the fundamental objectives related to growth. It would keep American citizens and the American government concerned about the organization's capabilities. In the eyes of the Al-Qaeda strategists, this could help prompt a withdrawal from Middle Eastern affairs.

2) *Cause Economic Loss for the US*

Inflicting economic loss and subsequent hardship on the United States is fundamental to Al-Qaeda. As a result of long-term military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US is spending a significant amount of money on a daily basis. Attacking United States infrastructure, such as power plants and dams, could inflict significant additional economic damage on the economy, further accomplishing this goal.

“We have experience in using guerrilla warfare and attrition to fight tyrannical superpowers, as we, alongside the mujahedeen, bled Russia for ten years, until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw in defeat, thanks be to God. So we are continuing with this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy, God willing—and nothing is too great for God.”⁽²²⁾

“The losses inflicted by that blow (9/11) and its repercussions have reached over a trillion dollars...and for the third consecutive year they have also had a budget deficit. This year it reached a record high, since it is estimated at over 450,000 million dollars (\$450,000,000,000), praise be to God.”⁽²¹⁾

3) *Expel the Americans from Iraq*⁽⁹⁾

Expelling the American troops from Iraq is a high priority objective because the Al-Qaeda leadership seeks to infiltrate the political system to fill the power vacuum after the US presence ceases. Establishing an “all-powerful” caliphate would be easier after the American presence ends, when the democracy can be destroyed. Developing a fundamentalist base in Iraq makes the process of expanding the power of Al-Qaeda much easier.

4) *Kill large numbers of infidels*

Al-Qaeda has the stated intention simply to kill as many westerners and non-believers as possible. Accomplishing this task contributes to achieving other objectives as clearly indicated by this previously stated quote.

“Killing the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can carry it out in any country where it proves possible, in order to liberate Al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy sanctuary [Mecca] from their grip, and to the point that their armies leave all Muslim territory, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.”⁽⁵⁾

Abu Gheith claims that Muslims have the right to kill four million Americans in retaliation, as he claims that the Americans are responsible for four million Muslim deaths. This includes those who supposedly died in Iraq due to the sanctions imposed on the regime of Saddam Hussein.

“The Americans have still not tasted from our hands what we have tasted from theirs, The [number] killed in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were no more than fair exchange for the ones killed in the Al-'Amiriya shelter in Iraq, and are but a tiny part of the exchange for those killed in Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, the Philippines, Bosnia, Kashmir, Chechnya, and Afghanistan.”⁽²³⁾

6. Means Objectives

We identified numerous means objectives, listed in Table 3, by which Al-Qaeda attempts to achieve both strategic and fundamental objectives. While it should be noted that the means objectives of Al-Qaeda are more subject to change than longer-term objectives, it is important from an analytical perspective to attempt to learn about Al-Qaeda's most recent means objectives, because this helps to understand tactical decisions and provides a link to intelligence “on the ground.”

We have organized the means objectives into six categories, where the means objectives within each category contribute towards accomplishing the same fundamental or strategic objectives. The categories are means objectives to establish a caliphate, regarding the future of Al-Qaeda leadership, to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim masses, regarding military

accomplishment, regarding the Internet, and to win the battle of the media. Each of these categories will now be explored in detail.

Table 3: Means Objectives of Al Qaeda

Means Objectives to Establish a Caliphate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Promote Muslims of the world to view themselves as one nation destined to unite and resist anti-Islamic aggression •Provide maximum control to religious authorities
Means Objectives Regarding the Future of Al-Qaeda Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Spread authority into Iraq (Sunni Areas) to fill the power vacuum that will follow the end of the US occupation. •Develop base of operations
Means Objectives to Win the Hearts and Minds of the Muslim Masses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Avoid confusing the masses with information that will be misunderstood. •Put aside their sectarian differences temporarily •Provide services to the masses •Support struggles in Palestine and in countries such as Chechnya, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Somalia, and the Philippines •Exhibit high priority attitude towards the destruction of Israel
Means Objectives Regarding Military Accomplishment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Attack US personnel in Iraq •Train insurgents at training camps
Means Objectives Regarding the Internet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Recruit new insurgents •Execute pro-Islamist campaign on the Internet •Provide tutorials and information about bombmaking and fighting tactics
Means Objectives to Win the Battle of the Media
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Spread rumors and write statements to impose a negative view of Westerners on the Muslim population •Avoid beheading captives and other gruesome methods of killing captives •Highlight the collateral damage caused by the allied forces •Underscore the number of US soldiers killed •Minimize the focus on the collateral damage inflicted on Muslim civilians by insurgent attacks

Means Objectives to Establish a Caliphate

Establishing a Caliphate, or system of religious law across all Islamic countries, is a very important strategic objective of Al-Qaeda, especially because it will provide a foundation for the continued success of the organization. Al-Qaeda seeks to *promote Muslims of the world to view themselves as one nation destined to unite and resist anti-Islamic aggression*. “Bin Laden argued that the Islamic world should see itself as one seamless community and that Muslims were obligated to unite and defend themselves.”⁽⁸⁾ In addition to promoting this view to the Muslim masses, Al-Qaeda desires to *provide maximum control to religious authorities*. Combined, these two objectives work together to promote the eventual creation of a Caliphate.

Means Objectives Regarding the Future of Al-Qaeda Leadership

Al-Qaeda seeks to *spread [their] authority into Iraq (Sunni Areas) to fill the power vacuum that will follow the end of the US occupation*. By having religious leaders in place and a leadership unit ready to seize power upon the departure of the US forces, Al-Qaeda would be in a position to use their power most effectively.⁽⁹⁾ By *developing a base of operations* in the Middle East in this fashion, Al-Qaeda would be able to extend Islamic authority and religion into new areas of the world, and would thus work towards accomplishing one of their strategic objectives.

Means Objectives to Win the Hearts and Minds of the Muslim Masses

As mentioned previously, the support of the Muslim masses is instrumental to the long-term success of Al-Qaeda. Without the support of the masses, they are in danger of a revolt, in which case they would not have the financial backing or the manpower to accomplish their goals. Several means objectives combine in an attempt to accomplish this goal. *Avoid confusing the masses with information that will be misunderstood*. Al-Qaeda deliberately provides followers only with the most relevant and simplified information to prevent confusion.

The mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve, if there is no contravention of Sharia in such avoidance, and as long as there are other options to resort to...⁽⁹⁾

In the same light, Al-Qaeda believes that it should rally the masses to *put aside their sectarian differences temporarily* because the bigger enemy is the infidel. Most Muslims do not fully comprehend the differences between the groups. As a result, Al-Qaeda leadership believes that it should support a temporary merger, even though most learned Muslims staunchly believe in a great difference between Shi'a and Sunni belief systems.

“The only way of repelling the invasion is through the combined efforts of all Muslims, and so the Muslims must ignore what divides them temporarily, since closing their eyes to their differences cannot be worse than ignoring the capital sin that menaces Muslims...”⁽²⁴⁾

Providing services, physical and religious, is a way in which Al-Qaeda attempts to provide support and to gain appreciation by the Islamic population. By *supporting the struggles in both Palestine, and in countries such as Chechnya, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Somalia, and the Philippines*, Al-Qaeda gathers support in areas all over the world. They hope to eventually be powerful enough to unite all of the fighters in these countries in a combined effort.

“O God let your creatures triumph everywhere: in Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya, Kashmir, the Philippines, and Afghanistan. Free our brothers whom the tyrants have jailed, in America, Guantanamo, occupied Palestine, and in Riyadh—everywhere for you are all-powerful.”⁽²¹⁾

By *exhibiting a high priority attitude towards the destruction of Israel* regardless of how imminent an Al-Qaeda based struggle will be, Al-Qaeda wins the support of Muslims whose primary reason for hating the Western world is simply based on the creation of Israel. By claiming that they support the struggle in Palestine, Al-Qaeda protects a base of support that otherwise might not be in favor of Al-Qaeda's actions.

Means Objectives Regarding Military Accomplishment

The objectives of Al-Qaeda in a military sense are straightforward. The United States presence in Iraq provides jihadists across the globe with relatively easy access to American targets. *Attacking US personnel in Iraq* is a high priority. Al-Qaeda views Iraq as the closest battlefield, and easiest way for many extremists to carry out their jihad “duties.” “The nearest field of Jihad today to support our people in Palestine is the Iraqi field.”⁽²⁵⁾ By developing Iraq as

a battleground for all anti-American extremists, Al-Qaeda increases the number of potential fighters available, and makes Iraq a pilgrimage location for jihadists.

Al-Qaeda also desires to *train insurgents at training camps*. The three men who were captured prior to attempting an attack on Frankfurt targets supposedly received training at terrorist camps. A better trained insurgency has a higher probability of success in the field of battle.

Means Objectives Regarding the Internet

The Internet is a tool that Al-Qaeda is using effectively and creatively. Currently, in part because of allied security efforts and military presence, Al-Qaeda is operating a significant amount of their recruitment and communication efforts via the Internet. Video footage of IED explosions, successful attacks on American troops, and videos of Al-Qaeda leaders all are incorporated into Al-Qaeda's Internet effort. *Recruiting new insurgents* is a top priority for Al-Qaeda, and the Internet offers a way to reach a large number of potential followers. By *executing a pro-Islamist campaign on the Internet*, Al-Qaeda seeks to spread its' message to civilian Muslims in addition to boost funding for the organization, and to promote messages mentioned earlier.

Providing tutorials and information about bombmaking and fighting tactics shortens the length of the relationship required between a potential home grown terrorist and a website. If a website immediately provides instructions about possible methods of attack, a radical Muslim in any part of the world could organize a cell or carry out a bombing himself without additional help. This decreases the amount of effort that the Al-Qaeda organization is required to put in to any one attack.

Means Objectives to Win the Battle of the Media

A means objective of critical importance for Al-Qaeda is to win the battle of the media. This refers to the media battle for the hearts and minds of Muslims, for the dissemination of information relevant to committing acts of terror, and against the Western world to attempt and turn western civilians against the idea of aggressively combating Al-Qaeda.

To win the battle of the media means using the media to distribute your viewpoints and your values in a way that has greater influence on people in the Muslim world and those in the

Western world. Rephrased, winning the battle of the media requires using the media to achieve your objectives, better than your enemies use the media to achieve their objectives.

We live in a time with unprecedented access to media of all kinds. Reporting in Iraq and the Middle East can be driven by both sides of the fight, and the media is capable of swaying public opinion.

Al-Qaeda's goals with regards to winning the battle of the media focus on two areas: The media that Al-Qaeda produces and distributes via the Internet and the media that the US produces as it reports on the war. Al-Qaeda's media wing, as discussed above, is dedicated to flooding the Internet with information designed to recruit followers and teach skills. Additionally as-Sahab reports inflated numbers of the collateral damage casualties (non-combatants) inflicted by Western forces. This aims to instill anger towards the Americans and Europeans from within the Muslim population.

“...terrorist operations are planned for maximum media exposure. Unusual targets and mass casualties are ways to generate coverage. But jihadis in Iraq are not content with that approach. For propaganda purposes, they create their own videos of virtually every terrorist attack, often at great risk to themselves and their operations.”⁽²⁶⁾

By filming suicide bombings from a distance, Al-Qaeda supporters have been able to spread their message and encourage followers that they are indeed “making progress” and winning the war against the infidel. Another reason for choosing to disseminate their own information is because many jihadis believe that even news networks such as Al-Jazeera, which in the United States is widely considered to be pro terrorist, is actually a mouthpiece for the west.

“Such reaction is part of the jihadis' general view that mainstream media are controlled by their enemies. Their principle strategy in response is to exploit the Internet, with key strategists sometimes offering detailed advice on how to structure the message.”⁽²⁷⁾

A large element of Al-Qaeda's media battle strategy however is using the American and European media giants to their advantage. This strategy includes Ayman al-Zawahiri's directions to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In a letter to the commander of insurgent forces in Iraq, Zawahiri directed Zarqawi to abstain from slaughtering Americans in gruesome ways because it only alienates moderate muslims who would otherwise be sympathetic to the goals of Al-Qaeda. He suggests killing captives by bullet to avoid unnecessary rise in support against the Al-Qaeda organization.

“I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma. And that however far our capabilities reach, they will never be equal to one thousandth of the capabilities of the Kingdom of Satan that is waging war on us. And we can kill the captives by bullet. That would achieve that which is sought after without exposing ourselves to the questions and answering to doubts. We don’t need this.”⁽⁹⁾

Additionally, an ultimate goal for Al-Qaeda would be to sway American opinion against the continued war on terror, as discussed earlier with the strategic objective of expelling Western powers from the Middle East. If this were to be accomplished, a vital component to ultimately convincing western governments to pull out of the Middle East, would be western civilian population pressure. The media would be critical in creating the drive for this pressure, specifically if it repeatedly underscored the notion that the pros of remaining in the Middle East and combating terrorism did not outweigh the cons.

Following are some specific means related to winning the battle of the media. Much of Al-Qaeda’s campaigning within the population is done to sway the populace against the Western world. Therefore a specific goal of Al-Qaeda is to *spread rumors and write statements to impose a negative view of Westerners on the Muslim population*. By flooding the available media, both print (within Muslim countries) and Internet, with anti-American views, Al-Qaeda hopes to overwhelm the populace with consistent messages which will win their support.

Al-Qaeda realizes that the battle of the media is not only about the media. As mentioned earlier, Ayman al-Zawahiri specifically requested in a letter to Zarqarwi to *avoid beheading captives and other gruesome methods of killing captives*. This was requested to maintain the support of moderate Muslims who overtly reject such behavior and think that it is very wrong and against their beliefs. By *highlighting the collateral damage caused by the allied forces*, Muslim sentiment is pushed against the US. To the same tone, *underscoring the number of US soldiers killed* creates a feeling of victory for the insurgency and insurgency supporters.

Al-Qaeda seeks to *minimize the focus on the collateral damage inflicted on Muslim civilians by insurgent attacks*. Iraqi civilians die frequently because of IEDs intended for coalition troops. Many Muslims consume US media in addition to Muslim sources. Al-Qaeda tries to write off these casualties as “unintentional martyrs,” but an effective western news onslaught against such killings could help swing support away from Al-Qaeda.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, we used a novel approach to identify and structure the values and objectives of terrorists by extracting and organizing value-relevant statements from the writings and public speeches of terrorists. Using Al-Qaeda as an example, we collected value-relevant statements by its leaders in raw form and organized these statements in terms of strategic, fundamental, and means objectives.

The five strategic objectives we identified (Table 1) define the ultimate vision of Al-Qaeda in a natural sequence from gaining a foothold in form of a Caliphate in one nation to destroying Israel and expelling the infidels from the Middle East to expanding the influence of Islam throughout the world. It is important to understand these ultimate strategic objectives. They are likely to be much more stable than the fundamental or means objectives that we identified. Broad and long-term policies to counter Al-Qaeda should be built with recognition of these strategic objectives.

The fundamental objectives are important to understand preferences of Al-Qaeda for specific actions. Much has been made of Al-Qaeda's specific goals to kill a certain number of Westerners or to destroy the US economy. Our research suggests that the fundamental objectives are much more complex. We also recognize that the Al-Qaeda leadership will have to consider tradeoffs between these objectives when considering possible courses of action. Thus, the fundamental objectives are important inputs into assessing what might be called a "terrorist utility function" that reflects their preferences among attack modes and targets. A terrorist utility function, in turn, can be used as an input to assess the likelihood of future terrorist actions.⁽²⁷⁾

The means objectives identify a large range of activities that may be expected from Al-Qaeda in the future, based on its strategic and fundamental objectives. They are relevant for more operational measures against terrorism. For example, knowing the importance that Al-Qaeda places on winning the "war of the media," it may be worthwhile to consider ways to proactively counter their media initiatives.

The research reported in this paper stepped into relatively new territory – identifying and structuring values and objectives indirectly from published writings and statements rather than from interviews, as is common in decision analysis. This approach was necessary, because we could not communicate directly with the terrorists whose objectives we wanted to capture. We

nevertheless think that this indirect approach to identifying and structuring values and objectives provides a first-order idea of what terrorists want and some important insights about how one may counter terrorism on a strategic level.

Almost all of counterterrorism deals with collecting and interpreting bits and pieces of information about the intended actions of terrorists, about suspicions and warnings, about chatter and capabilities. This paper added an additional perspective about what terrorists want: their strategic, fundamental, and means objectives. Analysts should be informed about terrorists objectives and motivations. This should allow them to better interpret specific pieces of information and subsequently make better recommendations about counter terrorism.

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