

The New Global Jihad, 9-11 and the Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Changes in Mindset and Modus Operandi

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The use of weapons of mass destruction considered at one time to be only within the domain of states has now become a serious threat coming from terrorist groups, Al Qaeda and its affiliates in particular. The so called "new terrorists"¹ have embraced the goal of creating mass casualties; the method of self martyrdom that makes reaching these goals more likely; and importantly the ideologies that back them up. In December of 2004 Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, a former leader and trainer of Al-Qaeda published a 1600 page book advocating a new organization of Global Jihad called "the Islamists Global Resistance" and outlined his strategy of Global Jihad. In this document he called for the use of weapons of mass destruction and he criticized Osama bin Laden for not having previously used them. What are these weapons of mass destruction that al-Suri and his new global jihad propose making use of, who are the groups that might make up the Islamists Global Resistance and is it necessary to take seriously this threat? Is there a change in mindset and modus operandi following 9-11 and if so what is it, and what can we do to counter it? This paper explores these questions examining the writings of key global jihadi ideologues as they are interpreted by scholars² of militant Islamist writings and discusses the new global jihadists motivations, willingness, capabilities, and organizational factors regarding the potential use of weapons of mass destruction.

Who makes up the New Global Jihad?

Some have argued that since the U.S. led war in Afghanistan and destruction of Al Qaeda training camps and round-up and killing of many of its leadership, Al Qaeda as an organization no longer exists, but functions more as a movement than a coherent and organized group. In some ways this is true as the Al Qaeda ideology that developed during the Afghani jihad has permeated well beyond the original Al Qaeda group and as a result many groups and individuals have taken on the ideology without necessarily entering into the command and control structure of Al Qaeda. This could be said of the Kashmir groups, Chechen rebels, as well as many others whom have taken aspects of the global jihadists ideology and introduced them into their nationalistic conflicts. Likewise the "open university" of the global jihad has as Reuven Paz terms it "successfully enabled millions of Muslim youngsters to create a new sense of identity – as members of the worldwide Islamic Nation – the Ummah" (Paz, 2005). This sense of Muslim identity and worldwide unity

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could be a positive thing if it did not go hand in hand with an ideology which advocates war against the west, self martyrdom operations and terrorist attacks on civilians, hence drawing many young people – particularly worrisome in Europe into a belief in, and willingness to use terrorism to bring about a “new world order”.

Despite significant set backs in leadership and training capabilities there is strong evidence that Al Qaeda and its affiliate structures do continue to operate. Its leadership and affiliates with technological, financial and ideological support of Al Qaeda central have organized attacks in Riyadh (2003), Istanbul (2003); Casa Blanca (2003); Jakarta (2003)Madrid (2004); London (2005); Sharma Sheikh (2005); Afghanistan (ongoing); and most importantly Iraq (ongoing). As Reuven Paz states “Qa’ida al-Jihad³ is still alive and well, threatening the Western world and Western targets across the globe,” (Paz, 2005).

Willingness & Evidence of the Capabilities to make Use of WMD

There are clear indications on the part of current global jihadi groups of interest in weapons of mass destruction; willingness to use them; and more chillingly evidence of actual capabilities. In 1998 Osama bin Laden avowed his interest in acquiring weapons of mass destruction, speaking of it as a religious duty (TIME, 1998). In December 2002 Abu Shihab al-Kandahari, moderator (at the time) of the an Islamist Internet forum (al-mojahedoon.net) published an article entitled, “Nuclear War is the Solution for the Destruction of the United States” signaling support by the those in the leadership of the global jihad for using nuclear weapons (Paz, 2005). In March 2003 Shamil Basayev leader of the Chechen terrorist group Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs also proclaimed his willingness to use unconventional weapons against the Russians stating “We will, to the extent possible, bomb, blow up, poison, set ablaze, and organize natural gas explosions and fires on everything else on Russian territory... [W]e reserve the right to use chemical and toxic substances and the same poisons against Russia” (these as Basayev states will be used in retaliation for what he claims the Russians are currently using in Chechnya)(Basayev, 2003)⁴. Through out the nineties to the present Al Qaeda as well as Chechen groups⁵ attempted to obtain weapons of mass destruction, particularly chemical and biological through pilferage, state sponsorship, and finally when those means did not work out turning to internal production. During operations in Afghanistan trace amounts of ricin and anthrax were found by coalition forces and Al Qaeda videos were found containing evidence of experiments using an unknown substance against dogs (Hoffman, 2005; Robertson, 2002). In August 2002, the Kurdish Islamist group Ansar al-Islam (a group reportedly with ties to both al-Qaeda and Iran and that was operating with approximately 150 Afghani Arabs) was reported by BBC News as having tested ricin on barnyard animals and possibly also on a human who later died (BBC News, 2002). Likewise, the capture of Khalid Shaykh Mohammad uncovered detailed information about production plans for chemical and biological weapons. According to captured documents of suspected members of al-Qaeda possessed plans, including manufacturing specifications for bio-chemical agents, the requisite materials to manufacture cyanide, and were attempting to producing weaponized anthrax (Gellman, 2003).

Instructions on how to make and encouragements to use biological and chemical weapons also abound particularly on the Internet. In July of 2002 CNN reported that the 11th volume of al Qaeda’s Encyclopedia of Jihad discusses how to construct chemical and biological

weapons. In 2002 the Manchester police seized an undated al-Qaeda military manual, "Declaration of Jihad Against the Country's Tyrants" which included instructions of making poisons including a crude recipe for manufacturing ricin. The manual instructs the reader to "soak...castor-oil plant seeds in about 10 ounces of water, adding two teaspoons of [lye]...." (Bale *et al.*, 2003). In truth these recipes would not produce weaponized ricin, but might produce poisonous ricin-like compounds.

These statements of intent and instructions to carry through with the use of WMD have not remained simple intentions. In Europe thwarted plots to use biological and chemical weapons have been discovered. In January 2003, a reported plot by an Algerian group to use ricin was uncovered in a London apartment. One of this group had attended an Al Qaeda training camp, whereas the others had trained with Chechen rebels in the Pankisi gorge in Georgia. Similarly a group of North African immigrants were discovered plotting to use ricin in March 2003 in Paris. On February 20, 2002, Italian police arrested four Moroccan nationals for allegedly plotting a chemical terrorist attack on the U.S. Embassy in Rome and later arrested further suspects with links to Al Qaeda although this thwarted plot is still not clearly understood (Croddy *et al.*, 2002). The September 2001 explosion at a chemical factory in Toulouse, France carried out by a French Islamist militant of North African descent, while initially covered up now also appears to be caused by an act of sabotage (Schweitzer, 2006). Europe particularly has been the target of these smaller scale, yet serious, thwarted chemical and biological attacks raising concerns about security issues there.

Legitimization & Motivations for the Use of WMD

In terms of opinions from religious clerics, fatwas or religious rulings the first of these in support of WMD was published (according to Paz, 2005) May 21, 2003 by a Saudi opposition cleric Shaykh Naser bin Hamad al Fahd. Al Fahd had already praised the 9-11 attacks. He wrote in support of the use of WMD, "If the Muslims could defeat the infidels only by using these kinds of weapons, it is allowed to use them even if they kill them all, and destroy their crops and cattle." In arguing in behalf of using WMD he takes the position that it is an unfair fight in which the west uses weapons that have the potential to kill many victims via conventional methods (i.e. large scale bombs), weapons that the militant jihadist do not have at their disposal. Therefore it is permissible to use WMD in order to make it a fair fight. He also supports their use even if it necessarily involves the killing of other Muslims. His ruling was reportedly accepted in militant Islamist circles with no dissension (Paz, 2005). The fact of a fatwa in support of the use of WMD is extremely important when one is anticipating the acts of religious terrorist groups as for them this legitimization opens the door to action.

In terms of ideological calls for the use of WMD, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's book - International Islamic Resistance Call - published over the Internet in December 2004 argues extensively for the use of WMD in the fight against the United States, as a means of leveling the playing field. Al-Suri writes, "Hitting the U.S. with WMD was and is still very complicated. Yet, it is possible after all, with Allah's help, and more important than being possible – it is vital," (Paz, 2005). In his arguments Al-Suri takes the usual Islam is under attack point of view and justifies targeting the U.S. because of prior American aggression "towards humanity in general and Muslims in particular," giving examples of America's use of the atomic bomb in WWII and its use of chemical weapons in Korea and Vietnam. He goes on to argue similarly

to al Fahd's fatwa, using the justification that America has attacked Afghanistan and Iraq "with thousands of tons of uranium bombs, leaving thousands of civilians plagued with cancer, and vast areas of land and underground water contaminated with nuclear radiation". He states "Thus I believe now that the American administration has revealed the evil and wickedness of its forces during the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is not a far cry from justice to adopt the slogan, "Dirty bombs for a dirty nation!" (Kohlman, 2005; Musallam, October 2005).

The psychological motivations that support (on an individual and group level) the ideological call and religious justification for the use of WMD vary by region and groups, but in general include concern over human rights abuses in the "Islamic world" particularly those abuses carried out by Western powers (i.e. Israeli, Russian and U.S. led coalition abuses – real and perceived). The actual ones unfortunately are often captured in video and photographic images that are coupled with ideological arguments and then distributed in digital format or broadcast over the Internet to inflame and motivate recruits to action. Likewise past and present humiliations in the Arab world (and beyond) as a result of colonization, the propping up by the west of corrupt and dictatorial regimes, and humiliations due to unemployment and discrimination (this especially a factor amongst first to third generation European Muslim immigrants) can all play into motivations for the use of terrorist methods. In conflict zones direct traumatization, despair and the desire for revenge are also strongly played upon (Speckhard, 2005, 2006; Speckhard & Ahkmedova, 2005).

On the leadership level there is also the motivating factor of intoxication and satisfaction from mega attacks such as 9-11, as well as satisfaction with the political impact of the Madrid bombings, or enjoyment in watching the perceived aggressor nations suffer such as during the London bombings. The Afghan alumni which form a large part of the leadership of the global jihad have also suffered great losses among their family members and colleagues and are likely highly motivated by the desire for revenge. This may be even more so true of the future Iraqi alumni. Likewise, the more the west is perceived as having engaged in crossing the "red lines" into these type of attacks – by killing too many innocents in Iraq - even by conventional means, by poisoning Khattab in Chechnya, by attempting to poison Basayev, the perceived poisoning of school children in Grozny, the belief that depleted uranium poisons thousands of Iraqis, and so on - the more terrorist groups will open their possibilities as well to consider retaliatory attacks on the same or greater scales.

Organizational Factors in Support of and Against the Use of WMD

On the organizational side there are arguments for and against the use of WMD. On the one hand mega-attacks serve to rally the forces and can create huge recruitment potential. Each new mega-attack serves to prove the Al Qaeda ideology of fighting the infidel via an innovative manner that reinforces the heroic mythology of the David against Goliath type battle (Paz, 2005). The stronger the belief that the west and the U.S. in particular must be punished and limited for its aggressions, the more justified the use of WMD becomes in the eyes of terrorists. Likewise the desire to level the playing field by engaging in the use of WMD and the belief that a drawn out battle of attrition punctuated by occasional, but spectacular strikes, is a useful way for the terrorists to undermine the morale and sense of security of westerners also contributes to the desire to use WMD.

The more the groups considering the use of WMD believe in bringing about a “new world order” the more likely they are to be willing to use them. Such believers may even desire to provoke a strong retaliatory response which leads to further polarization between the western powers and increasingly radicalized segments of the “Islamic world”. Indeed global jihadist ideologues (eg. Abu Jandal al-Azdi) have written that America is so predictable in its knee jerk responses that global jihadists should make use of this nature to be easily provoked - because it can make it look as if the Americans are waging a global war against Islam which plays into their goals (Paz, 2005). By contrast, groups that are less grand in their goals and that are trying to gain political concessions, or even political participation within the existing order will be less likely to use WMD.

The most threatening are those extreme global jihadists networks that are ad hoc, gathering and dispersing after one or two attacks, often consuming their core membership in self martyrdom operations, while their leaders escape and reappear elsewhere with a new network to carry on in their mission (Schweitzer, 2006). These forms are more difficult to deter as they don't have serious survivability considerations and even their leaders have very little to lose given that losing ones life as a “martyr” is considered the highest honor and gateway to Paradise.

On the self limiting side, the desire to avoid the killing of Muslims and fear of the consequences for the Muslim world can be a restraining factor. Yet some groups have overcome this obstacle by justifying the jihad at all costs. The 2003 al Fahd fatwa removes this moral barrier by allowing the use of WMD even if it kills Muslims. Likewise the further the target is from the groups own base of operations the less likely the group will fear sullyng its own territory and thereby alienating its own constituency.

We should keep in mind that there was resistance for quite some time to self martyrdom operations and the use of women in them as well, but this resistance over time, with increased religious legitimization and the clear psychologically devastating results of such operations on the enemy (including the clear advantage of using women who pass security barriers with far less difficulty) has worn this resistance down. We may see the same trend over time with the use of WMD. However in the case of self martyrdom operations there are also strong psychological effects on both sides which support its use. On the side of the terrorists there is the motivating factor of witnessing the “martyr” who heroically fears nothing and gives him or herself sacrificially in behalf of the community. This is an extremely moving and strongly religious and idealistic statement enacted in deed. And as with all acts of courage, heroism and martyrdom there is a certain amount of psychological contagion incited by it. On the side of the victims self martyrdom operations proved to be difficult to stop, highly lethal and create a sense of random pervasive danger when victims feel attacked by highly motivated and “death loving” terrorists. Self martyrdom operations also assaults the world views and morale of victims with many beginning to question if their governments are right after all, given that the terrorists are willing to stop at nothing and self martyr in behalf of their political goals. It remains to be seen how the potential and actual use of WMD will play out in the group consciousness of global jihadi groups and their sympathizers.

Logistical constraints are perhaps the strongest limiters at this point in time. The technical expertise and funding for mega-attacks is still not at the point supporting widespread fear of such attacks, yet we must keep in mind that Al Qaeda groups have consistently been creative and found ways around such limiting factors. Stockpiles and technology leaks from countries in possession of such weapons is certainly an area that these groups will seek to exploit. This however may also be a factor that limits the desire to use WMD – Al Qaeda has managed to use unconventional means (i.e. crashing airplanes into buildings) simply by not limiting their imagination for what is possible.

The experiences so far with biological and chemical attacks is that they have been difficult to carry out and have been extremely limited in the casualties caused. For instance the sarin gas poisoning by the Aum Shinrikyo in the Tokyo subway killed only 12 and the anthrax attacks in the U.S. killed only five. Hence they do not currently pose a strong motivational mimicking effect. Yet these attacks caused a huge psychological impact and for this reason may prove worthwhile for groups to pursue. Indeed the Algerian group in London that planned to smear ricin on car door handles to cause random deaths were interested in creating societal panic versus looking for mass casualties. Given that terrorism is essentially psychological warfare (waged by non-state actors to achieve political goals) we may find that groups are strongly attracted to the use of limited biological and chemical or even “dirty bomb” attacks, making use of those methods most available to them which have the least technological and financial barriers but the most psychological impact.

Types of Potential WMD Attacks

There are basically two type of attacks we can expect from global jihadist involving WMD. On the one hand if they overcome their technological and financial barriers we can expect mega attacks and we know that there are those who favor this approach. On the other hand taking too seriously such a threat could turn out to be similar to falling for the lack of a smoking gun in the “nondiscovery” of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Certainly we can expect that terrorists groups will plan and carry out smaller scale biological and chemical attacks probably making use of anthrax and ricin as we have already seen strong evidence for these and even thwarted attacks involving crude non-weaponized ricin. In all cases the psychological impact of such attacks will perhaps be the strongest variable to control – we must not only anticipate and try to fight against the possibility of such attacks but prepare for and aim for the highest levels of psychological resilience in our societies should such attacks occur. The fact that Londoners carried on bravely after the public transportations bombings there was perhaps one of the strongest deterrents to terrorists desiring to cause enduring massive psychological upheaval – their best efforts in that case met with little to no success.

Counter Terrorism Policy

While the heightened anxiety and psychological impact of the use of WMD makes them attractive to terrorist groups and the barriers to feasibility are rapidly being removed we can expect that sooner or later terrorists will likely make use of them. Whether or not we can expect mass casualties as a result is difficult to predict. Biological and chemical attacks seem difficult to carry out and radiological are likely to be limited in their scope, but with global

jihadists anything may be possible. While we have put massive resources into detectors and high tech protections we should keep in mind that the two most deadly terrorist attacks on U.S. soil were with a fertilizer bomb in Oklahoma City (not Al Qaeda related) and low tech air piracy in 9-11. We must be clever and rely heavily on intelligence to detect and predict the adaptations and innovations that global jihadists and Al Qaeda are so adept in using.

The battleground in the “war on terrorism” has presently limited the safe havens global jihadists previously enjoyed. They no longer can have training and laboratory facilities in Afghanistan, the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia or in Iraq and this has thwarted attempts to develop and acquire WMD. However Europe with its large alienated and frustrated Muslim population may prove to be wide open region in which we may see such efforts taking place. Likewise we must consider the availability of stockpiles and technologies. Pakistan, Russia, and Iraq all may prove to be leaking sieves from which methods, materials and equipment may move into the hands of global jihadists making their leap forward suddenly possible. Although we must also strongly state that thus far no weapon of mass destruction: chemical, nuclear or biological is known to have changed hands from a state into the hands of a terrorist network. Even so, we must work through multiple channels – political, intelligence and military to prevent such access particularly emphasizing multinational cooperative threat reduction efforts.

Aggressive counter terrorist actions to hunt down the leaders of global jihadist groups and dismantle their organizational apparatus are definitely necessary. However we must put equal weight into considering the motivational and ideological factors that create sympathy for the global jihadists. We must consider that often terror groups see no alternative means of action and seek justice through terrorism versus seeing the potential of opening action through political channels. In this regard democracy building is essential, but we must also be willing to accept the result of democracies and the political will of voters – such as when Palestine elected the militant HAMAS organization as a way of saying no to corruption but looking in the eyes of many as saying yes to terrorism. Militant Islamists have earned among their own population the reputation of honesty, of fighting for true social justice, lack of corruptness in their dealings, while often at the same time being full scale in behalf of violent actions in behalf of political gains. The more we open channels for these groups to participate honestly in the political process and to work in alternative ways to bring about peaceful visions of social justice we may find terms of compromise with many of them and reduce the numbers of their sympathizers for extreme violence and terrorism. The Arab world in particular has a long history of suppression of democratic participation and we must recognize that when we make our fight against terrorism and we must also honestly and fully support that which feeds democracy and opposes both corruption and terrorism.

We know that in recent years militant religious groups have grown tremendously in numbers from 3% of all terror groups in 1980 to 43% in 1995 (Cronin, 2003). And their lethality has increased extraordinarily as well (Cronin, 2003), largely due to the increased use of self martyrdom operations that came with the embracing of militant jihad. Unless we address the lethal global jihadist ideology and somehow work to discredit it, it may be as Rumsfeld asks in his memo regarding the global war on terrorism, “Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?” In fact this is what Al-Suri argues for – a

long and slow ideological build up relying on the west to continue its aggressive actions (eg. the war in Iraq) to fuel Islamic fury at the west.

As long as the mirror imagery exists between on the one hand the calls for a 'war on terrorism' with few limits on moral and legal barriers (i.e. initiating a pre-emptive war in Iraq, holding inmates without "due process" in Guantanamo bay, engaging in torture lite, etc.) there will likely be an echoing cry for a global jihad which threatens to unite disparate Muslim populations into a united angry mass through a militant religious ideology. The more we can step down from this ideological divide and answer well the criticisms aimed at western policies in ways that do not further inflame Islamic populations, the more likely we can lessen the degree of solidarity in the sympathizers for Al Qaeda and the global jihad. Likewise just as they broadcast and proclaim our mistakes (human rights abuses, soldier misconduct etc.) we must become as clever and "debrand"⁶ the legitimization of the global jihadist ideology by emphasizing, speaking, writing and broadcasting and making use of their mediums (Internet forums, websites, video and photographic images) the ways in which the global jihad is failing to carry out its idealist desire for creating a "new world order". While religion and concern for abuses in the Islamic populations unites global jihadists, what can divide them is pointing out not only in words but in video footage and photographic imagery the massive deaths of innocent Muslims as a result of global jihadist terrorism. This coupled with rhetoric such as "not my Islam" has the potential to create divisions and questions about whether one wants to embrace a movement that has killed hundreds of innocent Muslims in Riyadh (2003) and Istanbul (2003), Chechnya (2000 – to the present), and in Iraq (on a daily basis) and so on. Just as the global jihadists state we must fight them in all ways, we too must be clever, adaptable and discerning in our fight to prevent the worst from occurring.

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¹ There is considerable controversy as to whether or not there is any such thing as “new terrorists”. Martha Crenshaw argues there is not, that terrorists have always sought to inflict mass casualties, that the current global jihadists although diffuse and able to take advantages of globalization still follow a basic organizational structure, and have political goals which in quality are similar to their predecessors (some negotiable and potentially obtainable and others extremely unlikely and non negotiable) and that they do not differ so dramatically in scope from their terrorists predecessors. She names Steve Simon and Daniel Benjamin as the proponents of the opposing view - that there is a new terrorism which is according to them apocalyptic, impossible to negotiate with and desiring to inflict much worse mass casualties than any terror group previously seen.

² In this regard I am extremely grateful to and indebted to the research work of Reuven Paz, founder and director of the Project for Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM), GLORIA Center, The Interdisciplinary Center, Herzeliya for his efforts tracking militant Islamist websites and reporting his interpretations of the key ideologues and their statements regarding global jihad and weapons of mass destruction.

³ Qa’ida al-Jihad and Al Qaeda are terms used interchangeable and refer to the same “organizational structure”

⁴ Chechens have been particularly sensitized to the use by their opponents of poisoning agents (i.e. suspected chemical and biological agents) as warlord and terrorist leader Khattab was killed by means of a poisonous letter; Basayev claims to have received two poisoned socks – one which he tested in a chicken coop and the chicken immediately died. Rumors have abounded among Chechens that the Russians are trying to poison and sterilize the population through various means; and recently an outbreak of mass sociogenic illness occurred in which over a hundred Grozny school children were hospitalized for severe hysterical responses (losing consciousness, seizures, trouble breathing, etc.) all believing they had been poisoned at school by Russians or Ossetians seeking revenge for Beslan. In the same announcement Basayev proclaimed “I officially state that Russian forces are using chemical weapons and poisons against us... That is why we reserve the right to use chemical and toxic substances and the same poisons against Russia,”

⁵Russian sources including M. P. Trebin, PhD, Head of Philosophy Department of the Kharkov Military University who wrote in 2003 *Terrorism in XXI Century*. Minsk: Charvest claims on page 661 regarding negotiations with Al Qaeda to sell nuclear materials, "according to intelligence services reports, a Ukrainian weapon dealer nicknamed "Botov", a former officer in the Soviet Army, who fought in Afghanistan, negotiated with Al-Qaeda several times, about selling nuclear equipment and materials." He goes on to claim in pages 661-662: "...in 1995 a container with Cesium-137 was buried in the ground by militants in Izmailovsky Park in Moscow, and the following remark of

Dudayev was made: "It is just a minor part of what we have." Whether Russian sources are credible in this regard is unknown but if so it appears that both Al Qaeda and the Chechens may have been interested in obtaining WMD and attempted to do so through leaky Russian sources.

⁶ I am indebted to Thelma Gillen of the UK MOD for her brilliant idea of attempting to “debrand” an ideology, much like one might attempt to debrand a trademark.