The Global Radical Islamic Terrorist Network: An Exploration of Structure and Solutions

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"Know the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered" (Tzu, Sixth Century BC/1971, p. 129). Today's western world has a very complex and very illusive enemy in the radical Islamic mujahid terrorist force which has declared jihad on the western world. Per Sun Tzu's advice this paper will seek to understand that enemy with the belief that such an understanding will create a clear path to victory against said enemy.

Terrorism is not new; it has been around for thousands of years. Religion driven terrorism is not new either. Some of the earliest terrorists were the Zealots. The Zealots would target Romans and Greeks and kill them in front of witnesses in order to send a message, which is one of the cornerstones of modern terrorism. Before the 19th century there was little terrorism that was not religiously based. Then the French Revolution occurred, and the new government used the "regime de la terreur", which gave us the word terrorism. The regime killed about 40,000 people, in an attempt to snuff out any subversion towards the new government and to prevent anyone else from getting any subversive thoughts. The French government considered this concept of terrorism to be a positive thing, as it allowed them to deal out "justice" quickly and efficiently. However as the killings went on the word began to gain a negative connotation. The writings of Edmund Burke made the term "terrorism" popular in English for use in demonizing the French. As time went on the world environment began to lend itself more towards terrorism, and it became more and more about sending a message. Carlo Piscane called this the "propaganda of the deed", the ability of terrorism to deliver a message to a group other than the physical target. By the beginning of the 20th century nearly the entire world had seen some form of terrorism. After WWII colonies of the French and British began to use terrorism to attempt to halt colonial activities by the French and British. These new organizations learned to organize their activities to play to audiences across the world using new forms of mass media. At this point state-sponsored terrorism began to grow as governments realized that open war was not always an option, but that terrorist groups could, with funding and support, help to achieve the goals of individual states. Today there are many different forms of terrorism, acting with all manner of goals, from religious domination to freedom, to governmental policy change; and on all different scales from acting in one city to all across the globe (Burgess, 2003).

To truly understand how to stop the radical Islamic terrorist threat, first its structure must be understood, and to understand its structure one must first understand its history. The international radical Islamic terrorist movement is centered around al-Qa'ida, which in Arabic

means "the base" or "the foundation" (Berry, 2001). Al-Qa'ida was formed in 1988 by Usama Bin Laden. Bin Laden was part of the multi-national Islamic group which went to Afghanistan to fight Soviet forces during their cold war occupation of that country. In the 1980's, Bin Laden used his personal wealth to help finance a group known as Maktab al Khidmant, which when translated means "Bureau of Services." This group acted as a recruiting network, finding potential fighters then providing the means, through paperwork and transport to get recruits into the battle zones. In addition to helping this group, Bin Laden also helped to procure weapons and build training centers for mujahedeen fighters (Berry, 2001). Once the soviets were defeated Bin Laden founded al-Qa'ida as a means to create a global Islamic Army which will be referred to as Al-Qa'ida Net (as it is more of a network than a formal army), the purpose of which would be to expel westerners from Muslim countries, destroy Israel, and force Muslim countries to obey strict interpretations of Islam ("Foreign Terrorist Organizations", n.d.).

After the expulsion of the Soviets from Afghanistan, al-Qa'ida moved to Saudi Arabia, however in 1991 as Western forces built up in Saudi Arabia in preparation for Desert Storm Bin Laden and the upper echelons of al-Qa'ida fled to Sudan. By 1992 Bin Laden had concluded that in order to reach the goals which he had defined for his organization it would have to attack America. Bin Laden then began to build his al-Qa'ida Network. Terrorist groups from Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Somalia, and Eritrea joined forces and began collaborating on attacks. Al-Qa'ida built weapons depots and training facility in Sudan, which other Islamic terrorist organizations used. During this time al-Qa'ida also built a fundraising network, which utilized mosques around the world, although primarily in Saudi Arabia; Muslim charities; and corrupt government officials (Berry, 2001).

Al-Qa'ida then began a series of major terrorist attacks which targeted American forces and offices, in addition to some Saudi targets ("Foreign Terrorist Organizations," n.d.). During this time al-Qa'ida broke Sunni, Shia lines and did some amount of collaboration with Iranian government and Hezbollah, both of which are Shia Muslim groups.

Then in May of 1996 Bin Laden and al-Qa'ida were forced to leave to leave Sudan, at which point they moved back to Afghanistan. Although at first there was animosity between al-Qa'ida and the Taliban, which was in the process of taking over Afghanistan at the time. The Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, and Bin Laden came to realize that they shared very compatible views, and the two groups became close allies. The Taliban allowed al-Qa'ida to build training camps and prepare for and coordinate terrorist attacks within Afghanistan, and in turn al-Qa'ida

provided resources and trained solders to the Taliban. Al-Qa'ida also used Afghani state resources and agencies to help coordinate attacks (Berry, 2001).

In August of 1996, Bin Laden, called for all Muslims to attack Americans to force their withdrawal from Muslim countries in his "Declaration of Holy War on the Americans Occupying the Country of the Two Sacred Places." Then on February 23rd, 1998, Bin Laden along with Ayman Zawhiri signed and published a fatwa that announced that according to Islam, it is the personal duty of every Muslim to attack American citizens and soldiers, and their allies ("Foreign Terrorist Organizations," n.d.).

Al-Qa'ida's training camps were designed for the most part to train soldiers for guerilla warfare, only a select few skilled individuals went on to receive specialized terrorist training. It is estimated that in al-Qa'ida's camps as many as 20,000 men received training, training they took to many different places, back to many different organizations.

Due to its goals and history the al-Qa'ida Net, which has at its heart al-Qa'ida but which also includes the rest of the militant radical Islamic movement which could also be thought of as Bin Laden's "Islamic Army", can be best described using network theory. Al-Qa'ida Net is what is known as a directional scale free network. A scale free network is a network in which there is a constant ratio in size between small hubs, which in Al-Qa'ida Net would be something such as a mosque which has a few members contributing money or a deployed operational terrorist cell, and large hubs, such as the al-Qa'ida senior commanders and the commanders of other large militant Islamic groups. This ratio does not change no matter how large the network gets, which allows the network to efficiently grow to any size without any real decrease in effectiveness. In addition to being a basic scale free network, there is a directional aspect to the Al-Qa'ida Net. There is a portion of the global network which has no direction restrictions, this would be the central command of al-Qa'ida proper, where information and other resources flow freely, this region of the network will be called the network core. There is also a part of the network which only inputs into the network core, this would be groups such as mosques and charities around the world, who send money and men into the network, but who do not get much of anything back. And finally there is a portion of the network which only receives things from the network core, this would be individual terror cells and other terrorist organizations who receive supplies and orders from the core, but who would not have much in the area of a response (Stripling, 2007). So that leaves the core to do most of the initial planning and organizing. Once the operation begins the hubs that are carrying out the operation handle everything. This network which is described as Al-Qa'ida Net is

known to exist in over 50 countries ("Foreign Terrorist Organizations", n.d.).

In order to destroy this network there are two methods which can be taken. A random attack plan could be taken, in which nodes in the network were randomly destroyed. This would require an estimated 80% of the nodes in the network to be destroyed for there to be a failure of the network. In addition it should be noted that that 80% would need to be eliminated nearly simultaneously, as the network by design repopulates and redesigns itself when it sustains damage. The other option is to target the most important hubs and destroy them; this method would only require the destruction of about 10-20% of the hubs in the network to result in catastrophic disruption of the network. There are a number of criteria to consider when looking at which hubs to destroy. The first is the amount of connections which a hub is making; the larger a hub is the more critical it is to the network. The second is the average number of connections which the hub experiences to connect to all other elements in the network. Another consideration is what the hub does in the network, which is actually comprised of a number of smaller networks, such as the financing network, which moves money from sources around the world, into the core, the weapons network, which procures weapons and explosives and delivers them to wherever they are necessary, the tactical network, which organizes and runs operations, and so on. So the area with hubs which would are the most critical would be the core, as its hubs are invariably the most connected, and are part of the most sub networks. If enough of these critical hubs were to be destroyed, then a cascading failure could occur in the network, where all hubs would become disconnected from each other as each hub became overloaded with the responsibilities of destroyed hubs, and collapsed (Stripling, 2007).

Although a cascading failure of the network would be a serious blow to the global radical Islamic terrorist movement, it would not guarantee its destruction. To understand why, one must understand the structure of the network's individual cells. Members can form into a cell when they form a small network with other like-minded individuals in their area. This can occur when a group, whether it is a radical Islam college club, or a mosque with a radical mindset exists in an area where a person has their previous network(s) destroyed. This can happen through death of members in the old network, people moving, or whatever else. It should be made clear that the network which has failed is in no way connected to Al-Qa'ida Net, that network would simply be the social associations of the target individual (their family, job, prior religious group, friends, etc...). The endpoint is that that person no longer has a network, and so they then become vulnerable to being sucked into other nearby networks, which can include a radical group in their

area, and the person may begin to buy into the radical Islam which that group is spreading. Association with this group or mosque will allow an individual node (a person) to create a network with other nodes who are actively buying into the message of radical Islam. As this small network gets stronger, these nodes will begin to sever any remaining connections to networks other than the new one which is based on radical Islam. Once this network becomes strong enough, then the group of nodes may begin to seek a hub which can connect them to al-Qa'ida Net, whether they are seeking to be part of al-Qa'ida or not the network which exists as al-Qa'ida Net will be the invariable source of a new hub for the fledgling network. Now even if a cascading failure where to occur, then these small groups of nodes, due to the spread out nature of al-Qa'ida Net, would probably remain undiscovered and would begin to re-hub to each other and rebuild the network (Stripling, 2007).

The general resiliency of the network can be seen through its actions since September 11th. Western intelligence agencies have, in recent years, in conjunction with Indian, Pakistani, and Saudi forces been able to capture a large part of the central leadership of the formal al-Qa'ida, however terrorist attacks have continued ("Transcript of Remarks," 2008). This is a clear demonstration of the resilience of the network. There appears to be little communication from the embattled core, but the outlying operational hubs can still use the network to gain new resources and carry out attacks. The network has rebuilt itself to operate in its new environment and it has continued with its mission

So through an examination of the network behind the modern militant radical Islamic movement, it can be concluded that in order to realistically destroy al-Qa'ida Net, first a cascading network failure must be achieved through the destruction of key hubs. Then the remaining nodes would need to be attached to hubs of safe non-violent networks, to prevent them from seeking out and/or creating new hubs for al-Qa'ida Net. Of course simply killing all members of the network would work, however it would be impossible. In order to target key hubs does however require a detailed network map. To do this a combination of money tracking, human intelligence, and electronic warfare must and are being used to determine the whereabouts and locations of nodes within the global terrorist network ("Testimony of Stuart," 2006). All of this boils down to a need, per Sun Tzu's recommendation to truly understand the enemy.

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