

## **The Failure of Al Qaeda Basing Projects: From Soviet Afghanistan to the Sunni Triangle**

Brian Glyn Williams

“The pious Caliphate will start from Afghanistan.”

--Osama bin Laden

“The Taliban and Bin Laden are pushing to establish their caliphate, and what they call their emirate. This is a total contradiction to what we want.”

--Massoud the Lion of Panjsher. Commander of the Northern Alliance Opposition.

### **Sheberghan Prison-Fortress, Northern Afghanistan, August, 2003.**

As our convoy of armed SUVs arrived in a cloud of dust at the massive gates of this prison for captured foreign jihadi fighters and Taliban volunteers, I sensed the magnitude of what I was doing. General Rashid Dostum, the Northern Alliance Uzbek warlord who had recently shattered the spine of the Taliban, was allowing me unprecedented access to the hundreds of prisoners of war he held in this almost medieval prison in the inaccessible deserts of northern Afghanistan.

As the massive iron doors creaked open and we entered the courtyard of the prison-fortress I was led to one section with the words “Pakistan Block” painted above it indicating that those in this packed cell were Pakistani jihadis. Approaching the bars to the long cell-block which housed hundreds of filthy Pakistani volunteer Taliban fighters, I found myself face to face with a group of bearded militants who stared at me with a mixture of curiosity, fear and hatred.

Approaching them warily I informed them that I came from the USA and was interested in hearing their stories. As none volunteered to assist me, the Uzbek fortress commander had several of them unceremoniously dragged out into the sunlit courtyard for most of the prisoners’ first conversation with a real life American ‘infidel.’<sup>1</sup>

It was to be a meeting of two worlds and it provided me with considerable insight into the *mentalités* of those who answer the call of jihad and leave their homes to wage holy war in other’s lands. It was also to give me insight into the jihadis’ concepts of territoriality, something that we in the West rarely attribute to the ‘nihilistic’ trans-national jihad movement that has been simplistically defined as Al Qaeda.

Commencing my interviews I found that the disheveled prisoners of war spanned the spectrum from Taliban die-hards to rank-and-file Baluchis, Sindhis, and Pashtuns with varying degrees of global vision. Among them I found committed militants who had fought jihad in Kashmir, including one who said he would have killed me if he had the chance, as well as harmless villagers, two of whom claimed they had come to Afghanistan to wage war so they could earn money and prestige needed to obtain wives.

While the prisoners were hardly united in their backgrounds and opinions on such issues as Bin Laden (many of them condemned Al Qaeda’s attack on the USA, thus demonstrating that not all front-line jihad warriors are “Al Qaeda”), all

of them were united in strongly criticizing America for attacking Afghanistan. When I probed them on this, their response was almost unanimous. America, they claimed, was wrong to attack Afghanistan because it was a true Muslim state. The Taliban *Amirate* was *Dar al Islam* (the Abode of Islam) and ruled by the *shariah* (Islamic law). Attacking Afghanistan was a sin and defending it was the duty of all good Muslims.

When I asked them why Pakistani nationals felt compelled to fight and die on behalf of an Afghan state they enlightened me. I was told that the Islamic *Amirate* of Afghanistan was not an *Afghan* state *per se*, it was a pan-Islamic state for all members of the *umma*, the global community of Muslim believers.

I began to understand that many of the prisoners had a world view that, like that of many Evangelical Christians and Orthodox Jews, saw their faith as under siege and in need of a state from which to defend itself (a Muslim 'Israel' as one described it to me).<sup>2</sup> To demonstrate their point (that the 'true believers' needed a Muslim safe haven) the more articulate ones took me on a 'tour' of the threatened frontiers of the *Dar al Islam*. The tour, which was filled with historical references unfamiliar to Westerners, took me to all the well-known hot-spots where Muslims had indeed been victimized by non-Muslims. It included 'stop-overs' in Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia, Palestine, Xingjian Province-China, Kosovo and finally Afghanistan.

When I pointed out that I had been to several of these lands mentioned and that none of them had become sanctuaries for global *jihadi* terrorism like Afghanistan, a Taliban *mullah* admitted this was the case. He also offered an explanation "That is because only the Taliban had unity of purpose with the true believers from throughout the world."

This explanation provided me with something akin to an epiphany when it came to understanding the global Salafite-militant movement's difficulties in finding a base for its pan-Islamic project. As the bearded Pashtun *mullah* indicated, the Taliban *Amirate* of Afghanistan was indeed unique. For in no other 'zone of jihad' where the trans-national jihadi militants had sought to build their state had they had such convergence of interests with their local hosts. Never before had the rootless brotherhood of jihadis known as the Afghan-Arabs, Azzam Brigades, Ansars, or Al Qaeda had such success in grafting their *macro* notions of a global Caliphate to a *micro*-regional ethnic movement.

But for all the uniqueness surrounding the symbiotic nature of the internationalist jihad movement's ties with the Taliban (which stemmed largely from the fact that the Taliban hosts were themselves a uniquely un-rooted, non-Afghan *madrassa* movement inspired by Indian-Pakistani Deobandism), this was of course not the first time the global jihadis attempted to attach themselves to a local host. As will be demonstrated, prior to 1998, the year Bin Laden established the appropriately named 'World Islamic Front', the trans-national jihad movement had attempted to establish jihad bases, *amirates* or *caliphates* in other front-line Muslim regions.

This chapter will follow the 'tour' along the threatened borders of the *Dar al Islam* that was given me by the captured Taliban *mullah* with the aim of analyzing the jihadis' basing successes and failures in these ethnic regions where Islam is perceived to be under threat. This journey over time and space will have

obvious implications for the assertion that if America disengages from Iraq it will become a bastion for macro-scale jihadi terrorism.<sup>3</sup>

But before one can truly understand the basing efforts of Al Qaeda and other ‘fellow travelers’ on the path of jihad, one must have background familiarity with the military state of Mohammad at Mecca, Zengi in Mosul, Saladin in Cairo, Abdullah Azzam in Peshawar, Bin Laden in Jaji, *Amir* Barbaros in Zenica, *Amir* Khattab in Serzhen Yurt, and *Amir* Zarqawi in the Fallujah. For the story of the jihadi efforts to build a house of holy war is an unfolding tale that begins in the deserts of Medieval Arabia and continues today in the wreckage of Baathist Iraq.

### ***Dar al Harb* (Abode of War). Origins of the Jihad State.**

Islamic precedent tells jihadis that Mohammad the Prophet was not only a warrior, he was a sword-bearing state-builder and his holy works are to be imitated. When his community of followers was threatened, Mohammad, went into exile to live with the *Ansars* (Supporters) in Medina. From his exile base in Medina Mohammad built a military-state from which to overthrow the Qureish unbelievers who had exiled him from Mecca. As an ethnic Arab, Bin Laden obviously sees his own struggle against the Saudi ‘hypocrites’ in similar terms.

The idea of a trans-ethnic state devoted to jihad, however, comes from a later period in history, namely the crusades of the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was Zengi the *Atabeg* (Governor) of Mosul, Iraq, who first galvanized the faithful of all races for a counter-Crusade known as jihad. Zengi called upon Muslims of all ethnicities to set aside their differences and imitate the trans-national Crusading orders (such as the Templars and Knights Hospitaller) in waging holy war. While Zengi failed in his ambition to destroy the Crusading threat to Islam, his mission was taken up by his son Nureddin and finally achieved by his governor, Saladin. Leading an army of Arabs, Turks, Circassians, Egyptians, Sudanese, Kipchaks and fellow Kurds, Saladin defeated the Crusaders at the Horns of Hattin in 1187. In so doing Saladin became the quintessential state-building warrior of God.

The paladins of the post-1980s international jihad movement also look with nostalgia to the era of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates in Damascus and Baghdad for inspiration, for these Arab religio-military states expanded the frontiers of Islam. All subsequent Western-imposed borders in the post-Mandate modern Middle East are seen as deliberate efforts on the part of the Western (Christian) victors in World War I to divide the trans-ethnic *umma* formerly ruled from Baghdad. Narrow, territorial nationalisms of the sort espoused by Saddam Hussein, Yaser Arafat, Kemal Ataturk, Basher Assad, and Gamal Nasser are seen as *bidhat* (religiously forbidden innovations) that divide God’s *umma* into *kabiles* (‘tribes’).

The rejection of Western-inspired nationalism (“tribalism”) that began in Hassan al Banna’s Egypt (1920s-1950s) with the founding of the trans-national Muslim Brotherhood flew in the face of Nasserism and Arab nationalism. And it offered an appealing alternative to Western-inspired nationalism. For as any jihadi will tell you, the Arabs can hardly be said to have had success fighting under the banner of nationalism against Shiite Iran (1980-88), the USA (1991),

and Israel (1948, 1967, 1973, 1982). It was not until the 1980s that Arabs finally experienced success on the battlefield, only on this occasion it was not under the narrow flag of Nasserism, Baathism or Pan-Arabism, but in Afghanistan under the black standard of pan-Islamic jihadism.

### **Forging ‘Allah’s Citadel’ in Afghanistan.**

No individual was more influential in reviving the obligation of *jihad* than the Palestinian Sheikh, Abdullah Azzam. Salvation and victory, Azzam preached, lay in the forgotten *fard* (‘obligation,’ often called the ‘sixth pillar’ of Islam) of Muslims to wage holy war to protect the *umma*. And Azzam ultimately called for the creation of an *amirate* (military state) in Afghanistan from which front-line fighters could then launch themselves across the globe in defense of endangered Muslim communities in Palestine and elsewhere.

But Azzam’s project began in Pakistan, a country that had been created in 1948 explicitly as a trans-ethnic state for various Muslim groups living in British India. As scores of Arab jihad volunteers began to arrive in Peshawar, Pakistan, to fight the Soviet invaders of Afghanistan it was clear that Azzam needed to create some sort of structure to organize them. Thus was born the safe-house organization known as *Maktab al Khidmat* (the Services Office) that would institutionalize Islamic holy war and seek to create bases for its ‘jihad-relief’ operations. For these first generation ‘Lions of Islam’ there would be no more returning to the *munafiq* (hypocrite) states they had once known, for the secular rulers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan etc. were declared ‘apostates’ by the extremists in the jihad movement.

In my interviews, the followers of the legendary Afghan *mujahideen* (Afghan resistance guerilla) leader Shah Massoud, spoke with contempt of the Arab jihad ‘tourists’ such as Azzam and Bin Laden. According to these indigenous Tajik freedom fighters, most Arabs were more trouble than they were worth because they had little or no fighting experience. But this did not stop the foreign fighters, subsequently known as Afghan-Arabs, from gaining asymmetric combat experience and developing grand plans for the lands of the Afghans. With the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1988 the Afghan-Arabs proclaimed ‘their’ divine victory and called for the transformation of Afghanistan into a jihad state.<sup>4</sup>

It was with the aim of fulfilling this territorial ambition that Azzam subsequently founded an organization called *Al Qaeda al Jihad* which was to become a sort of *Jihad Internationale*. Azzam’s initial aim was to transform post-Communist Afghanistan into an Iranian-style base for the export of Sunni militancy (this at a time when most Western governments continued to see *Shiite* Islam as the main threat).

But as events were to demonstrate, the unity of purpose that kept the local Afghan *mujahideen* and Arab volunteers together during the Soviet occupation frayed when the Soviets’ 40<sup>th</sup> Limited Contingent withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988/89, as was to be expected. This was to have a profoundly disruptive effect on the Afghan-Arabs’ basing efforts in Afghanistan and to set a pattern that would be duplicated in other ‘zones of jihad’ from Bosnia to Iraq. *For as history*

would repeatedly show, the greatest threat to foreign jihadi basing plans was the indigenous Muslim populations of the lands the extremists settled in. Time and again the local Muslims found their marriage of convenience with the international jihad volunteers to be inconvenient the day their common 'infidel' enemy departed.

### **Setback in Afghanistan.**

While many Afghan-Arabs migrated from Afghanistan to other zones of holy combat after 1988 a large portion stayed on in Afghanistan to continue the battle against the indigenous Afghan Communist government. Their dream was to make Afghanistan a 'Caliphate' and springboard for spreading the Salafite-fundamentalist revolution across Eurasia. Most importantly, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawaheri felt it would be a base from which the jihadi exiles could topple the despotic secular rulers of Egypt.

Among the jihadis' most implacable enemies in this grand basing project were the pro-Communist rapid reaction forces of the fierce Uzbek tribesmen of northern Afghanistan. Led by a bear-like commander named Rashid Dostum, the fiercely secular Uzbek militias fought off several *mujahideen* assaults and propped up Najibullah's Marxist regime for four long years. The fundamentalist Afghan-Pashtun warlords with closest ties to the Arab jihad volunteers, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Rasul Sayyaf, were thus initially denied a victory.

With the eventual fall of the Afghan Communist government in 1992, however, Hekmatyar finally moved on Kabul to seize the capital and institute harsh *shariah* law. At this time there were reports of Afghan-Arabs entering the Afghan capital and attacking Shiite 'heretics' (Hazaras) and veil-less 'Communist' women who lived there. In many ways the foreign, predominately Arab and Pakistani jihadis, attempted to force their Saudi-Wahhabism on the Sufi population of this comparatively urbane city.

Thankfully for the population of Kabul, the moderate Tajik *mujahideen* commander, Massoud the Lion of Panjsher, expelled the Islamist factions and their unruly Arab allies from the capital with General Dostum's help. With the defeat of their fundamentalist Afghan sponsor, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Arab jihadis' basing ambitions in Afghanistan were to be thwarted by local Afghans until they found another suitable Afghan-Pashtun host in the form of the Taliban.

### **From Afghanistan to Kashmir.**

While the local *Sufi* Muslims of the Indian portion of this disputed Himalayan territory, known as Jammu and Kashmir, had been chaffing under Indian rule, the struggle for Kashmiri independence (*Kashmiriyat*) did not assume the aspect of total war until the end of the Afghan conflict. With the expulsion of the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1988/89, thousands of Arab, Afghan and Pakistani volunteer jihadis migrated to the Vale of Kashmir to defend the local Muslims from marauding Hindu *jawans* (security forces). As in other 'zones of jihad', reports of 'infidel' atrocities in Kashmir galvanized many Muslim volunteers to go fight on

others' lands. This gave them an entry into a local Muslim society that was, like Afghanistan, hardly known for its Islamic fanaticism.

In so doing the jihadis revealed their underlying agenda for Kashmir which, like their macro ambitions for Afghanistan, was much greater in scope than local Kashmiris' objectives. The jihadis' ultimate goal was the creation of a foothold in Kashmir that could be used to spearhead the 'liberation' of the Muslim portions of India. According to an Indian intelligence source:

They (the jihadis) look upon Jammu and Kashmir as the gateway to India and repeatedly underline the 'liberation' of J&K would be only the first stage of their jihad against India. According to them, the second stage would be the 'liberation' of Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh and Junagadh in Gujarat, which they look upon as rightly belonging to Pakistan and the third and final stage would be the 'liberation' of the Muslims in the rest of India as a prelude to the formation of an Islamic Caliphate in South Asia.<sup>5</sup>

In the process of waging an increasingly bloody holy war against the 'infidel-Indian occupiers of Kashmir,' the Kashmiri jihadi organizations, such as *Lashkar e Toiba*, sought to forcefully spread their alien form of Salafite-Islam among the easy-going Sufi Muslims of this region. The foreign jihadi groups in Kashmir also attempted to establish bases of operation that resembled Bin Laden's tunnel complex at Jaji and the more famous complex at Zawhar Kili in eastern Afghanistan. One source records the breakup of a jihadi base in the Kashmir as follows:

Hill Kaka was a terrorist enclave that lorded over 100 square km.s of strategic area, which comprised thick jungles and snow-bound ridges at 4,000 meters. It was a hub-where terrorists of all '*tanzeems*' (groups) infiltrating from Pakistan were assembling before being sent off for missions unhindered. Several terrorist organizations, most notably, *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, were jointly using bases for planning, coordinating, transit and safe-keeping of arms...The base was also being used for indoctrination of Kashmiri youth before they were exfiltrated into Kotli and various other terrorist training camps in PoK. The sheer magnitude of terrorist operations at Hill Kaka left the security forces stumped.<sup>6</sup>

But for all the short term success the Pakistani-sponsored jihadi organizations achieved in Kashmir, many ordinary Kashmiris came to detest the foreign jihadi extremists. When *Lashkar e Toiba*, for example, began to call for the 'globalization' of its jihad (and almost drove India and Pakistan to war with its 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament), most local Kashmiris felt they had gone too far.

Jihadi actions, such as the forced closing of cinemas and throwing acid in the faces of local Kashmiri women who did not wear veils, created a further well of resentment that the Indian military exploited. Local Kashmiri moderates were wooed away from the foreign jihadis and India backed up its local security forces by flooding the valley with troops and transforming Jammu and Kashmir into a

militarized security zone. The Indian case demonstrates that an ‘infidel occupier’ can use brute force to thwart the jihadis’ basing ambitions. But only if there is sufficient local resentment against the foreign extremists and unity of purpose with the ‘infidel occupying force.’

### **A Jihad Base in Europe?**

It was in 1992 that a red-bearded jihadi field commander named *Amir* (Commander) Abul Azziz Barbaros led a reconnaissance unit to this European Muslim land that was a veritable *terra incognita* for most Afghan-Arabs.<sup>7</sup> To his dismay, he found Muslim women being systematically abused in Serbian rape camps, burnt mosques, mass graves filled with Muslims, and Christian expulsion of Muslims from a land that had been *Dar al Islam* for 500 years. It was everything a jihadi foot-soldier looked for in a potential holy war zone.<sup>8</sup>

*Amir* Barbaros quickly began to organize the transfer of Afghan-Arab jihadi defenders to Bosnia where they were headquartered near the old Ottoman provincial capital of Travnik and the central Bosnian city of Zenica. These Arab fighters formed the fanatical *Kaatebat al Mujahideen* (Holy Warrior Brigade) which was used by the Bosnian 7<sup>th</sup> Army as a shock unit (in many ways a precursor of Al Qaeda’s *055 International Brigade* deployed by the Taliban against the Northern Alliance). Serbian paramilitaries in the *Bosna Srbska* army soon came to fear this fanatical unit which was known to engage in beheading, suicidal mass assaults, and Afghan-style guerilla warfare.

But for all the fact that the Bosnian army appreciated the Afghan-Arabs’ bravery, they resented the foreign Wahhabi-Salafites’ efforts to purify Bosnian Sufi Islam and their refusal to join the Bosnians’ tactical alliance with the Catholic Croats against the Orthodox Serbs. Once again the rift between moderate local Muslim populations and the foreign volunteers stemmed from the fact that the jihadi fundamentalists had a greater agenda than simply helping local Muslims build a moderate mini-state. As the *Amir* of the Bosnian jihadi volunteers, Commander Barbaros, explained:

I have come out of Bosnia only to tell the Muslims that this time offers us a great opportunity...Allah has opened the way of jihad, we should not waste it...This is a great opportunity now to make Islam enter Europe via jihad. This can only be accomplished through jihad.. If we stop the jihad now we will have lost this opportunity.<sup>9</sup>

Like the Kashmiris and Afghans before them, the secular Muslims of Bosnia were unhappy about the prospect of bearded Salafite-Wahhabis transforming their country into “a staging area and safe haven for terrorists.”<sup>10</sup> As Evan Kohlman states in his insightful work “The friction between the (foreign) mujahideen and local Bosnian Muslim authorities underscored that there were still critical ideological, political, and strategic differences between the two loosely allied forces. In the end, the Bosnians were much less concerned with jihad than fighting for a just peace.”<sup>11</sup> One source claims that when the foreign jihadis began a policy of attacking Croat civilians and ‘infidel’ UN peacekeepers, Bosnian

military commanders even contemplated ‘purging’ the ‘Arab guerillas’ to keep them in line.<sup>12</sup>

Clashes between the moderate Bosnian Muslims (whom I found during my time in the cosmopolitan city of Sarajevo to be nostalgic for Tito, enamored of their plum brandy and soccer, and Europeanized on many levels), and the intolerant jihadi-Salafite Arab vanguard in Europe were headed off by NATO’s intervention in Bosnia in 1995. After the Serbs had been bombed to the negotiating table by NATO, peace was finally signed between the Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs in Dayton, Ohio in 1995.

As a result, the moderate Bosnian government of President Ilija Izetbegovic was finally free to build an ethnically ‘Muslim’ state in the war-blackened portion of Bosnia that had been granted to him at Dayton. This was welcome news for the foreign fighters who had begun to plant roots among the local populations (i.e. they built mosques, married local women, opened Wahhabi-Salafite schools and orphanages, constructed bases etc.). In theory this decimated and embittered Muslim land offered the perfect conditions for the Arab jihadis to infiltrate a local regime and take it over.

But far from creating a fundamentalist beachhead in Bosnia, the Afghan-Arabs were once again to be deprived of their dreamed of base of operations. One of the stipulations of the Dayton Peace Accords called for the departure of all foreign fighters, a proviso the local Bosnian moderates were only too happy to implement.<sup>13</sup> Thousands of Afghan-Arab fighters in Bosnia thus found themselves evicted from the very lands they had shed their blood to defend.

Not surprisingly, many of those Afghan-Arabs involved in the Bosnian jihad grew to resent the West and the Bosnian ‘hypocrites’ for denying them the fruits of ‘their’ victory. One claimed “Look at the infidels. They are thinking of us and then they are laughing because they have their own state. But look at us, the Muslims, we do not even have a state yet but we continue to laugh!”<sup>14</sup>

The militant firebrand Imam Abu Hamza of London – the Al Qaeda talent-spotter who recruited Zacharias Moussaoui – and his followers also expressed their extreme bitterness to me during my visit to the notorious Finsbury Park Mosque in 2002.

“NATO intervened not to protect the Bosnians, whom they had allowed to be massacred to the point of extinction, but to destroy our efforts to build an Islamic state” one of Hamza’s followers explained to me. At that moment I realized that the jihadi militants did not perceive NATO’s military intervention on behalf of the Bosnian Muslims (against *Christian* Serbia) as a humanitarian gesture; rather it was defined as a nefarious ‘Zionist-Crusader attack on Islam’ designed to deprive the jihadis of their *amirate* in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Jihadis Achieve a Victory (of Sorts) in Chechnya.**

Following their defeat in Bosnia, the Chechens’ historic struggle for independence (which lasted from 1994-96 then commenced again from 1999-present) caught the attention of the pan-Islamic jihadi brotherhoods. Although the secessionist Chechen leadership of General Djohar Dudayev (an ex-Soviet air force general who had actually fought *against* the *mujahideen* and Afghan-Arabs

in Afghanistan in the 1980s) was fighting for national self determination, it had no qualms about playing the Islamic card to gain desperately needed foreign support.

This pragmatism on the part of the out-gunned Chechens gave the Arab Salafite-Wahhabis and jihadists an entry into Chechnya, a land of Russified Sufi Muslims who were more inclined to drink vodka than quote the Qur'an in Arabic.

Many of the jihadi fighters who answered the call to wage holy war in Chechnya dreamed not just of fighting, but of building a state where they would not be persecuted. Ayman al Zawahiri, the number two in *Al Qaeda al Jihad*, for example, dreamed of turning the Muslim north Caucasus flank into a "an Islamic republic in the Caucasus, from which they could wage jihad throughout Central Asia."<sup>16</sup> "

Chechnya also beckoned to the jihadis from the historical perspective. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the legendary *Imam* (religious military leader) Shamil had led local highland tribes such as the Avars, Chechens, Kumyks, Dargins and Lezgins in a bloody jihad against the invading Russian Tsars from the snow-capped peaks of the Caucasus. While the reenactment of Shamil's trans-ethnic jihad might have seemed far fetched in light of the Caucasian highlanders' moderate form of Sufi Islam and long experience with Sovietization, there were grounds for hope. Most notably, with the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya in 1996, the most powerful Chechen field commander, Shamil Basayev, had expressed his desire to emulate his 19<sup>th</sup> century namesake and expel the Russians in their entirety from the Muslim Caucasus.

The story of the jihadis' epic volunteer holy war in the Caucasus presents an interesting case study in jihadism's ability to plant roots in areas where the right conditions (foreign 'infidel' occupation, lack of political dialogue, unemployment, deep seated grievances) prevail. The case of Chechnya also demonstrates an interesting point. Namely, open-ended 'infidel' occupation without a corresponding political solution can cause local insurgencies to metastasize. They can morph into trans-regional jihads if there is the right combination of 'infidel' brutality, foreign jihadi funding/volunteerism, and local anger to be exploited by 'jihad entrepreneurs'.

The 'Chechen jihad' began in the first Chechen War for independence (specifically 1995) when a Saudi Afghan-Arab named *Amir* Khattab led a reconnaissance unit to Chechnya to assist his 'Muslim brothers' in their war with the Russian 'infidels.' While few in number, Khattab's wealthy Arabs soon impressed their scrappy Chechen comrades-in-arms with their ability to wage 'holy war' against their former Russian neighbors.

But this marriage between Shamil Basayev's local fighters and foreign jihadis was resented by the vast majority of Chechens who were more an example of *Homo Sovieticus* than *Homo Islamicus*.<sup>17</sup> As in Kashmir, Bosnia, and Afghanistan, the jihadis' dreams of perpetual holy war and the use of others' lands for waging holy war clashed with the indigenous Sufi population's more limited aspirations. As in other 'zones of jihad', the local Muslims (who had jobs, families, homes and dreams) found that jihadi professionals--with visions of 'martyrdom' and harsh Saudi-style Wahhabism--made bad neighbors.

Former Chechen Foreign Minister Ilyas Akhmadov explained to me “We would never have let the foreigners into our lands if the Russians had not attacked us; we were working for recognition from the West...not Saudi Arabia! When the West offered us no assistance, Khattab’s Arabs came to us and we eagerly accepted their help. When the war was over we tried to expel him.”<sup>18</sup>

But unlike the Bosnians, the Chechen moderate leadership was unable to evict Khattab and he was able to hatch his plans for creating a macro-Caliphate for all Caucasian Muslims. By 1997 Khattab and his local Chechen ally, Shamil Basayev, had begun to build jihad training camps in the inaccessible mountains of south-eastern Chechnya (the so-called Kavkaz complex in the vicinity of Serzhen Yurt). As thousands of militants from throughout the Caucasus passed through these camps, the Chechen secular leadership fought to expel the dangerous foreigners and even asked for the Kremlin’s assistance in doing so. But events would show that Russia was more interested in undermining Chechen independence than destroying Khattab’s terrorist bases.

Full scale war between Khattab’s jihadists and the secular-moderate president of Chechnya, Aslan Mashkadov, was actually headed off by the fateful return of Russian Federal forces in the fall of 1999. Russia used a provocative raid into the Russian province of Dagestan by Khattab and Basayev as a pretext to crush Chechen independence. In so doing the Kremlin played into Khattab’s hands and ensured the jihadis’ victory in the region – for Russia’s brutal actions drove the Chechen secular-moderates into a tactical alliance with their former jihadi enemies. This was the exact opposite of the Bosnian model and has obvious parallels to Iraq where former Baathists now operate with the very Islamist militants that were once suppressed by Hussein’s *Mukhabaret*.

While the Russians destroyed Khattab’s base at Serzhen Yurt, Russian excesses (such as their *zachistki* ‘cleansings’ and ‘filtration centers’ like the infamous Chernokozovo prison camp), served as recruitment drives for foreign extremists. And with the help of foreign money, local jihad *cemaats* (‘congregations’ or ‘platoons’) sprang up in the neighboring Russian-Muslim republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, Karachai-Cherkassia, North Ossetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria, to help the Chechens and foreign jihadis fight the Russians. What was once a limited war for Chechen independence has now become a full-blown trans-regional jihad demonstrating that nothing brings aggrieved local Muslims and foreign jihadis together like a brutal ‘infidel’ occupation.

The jihad insurgents in the Caucasus are now fighting not for a Chechen micro-state but for a trans-national *Imamate* that will include all Muslim highlander groups. This can be seen as a clear-cut victory for Khattab and Zawaheri’s macro state-building visions for the Caucasus. It is also a failure for Chechen nationalists such as the recently slain moderate President, Aslan Mashkadov, who had more localized nationalist objectives. The prediction that Chechnya will become ‘an Afghanistan on Europe’s doorstep’ appears to be somewhat exaggerated, due to the fact the Chechens and other highlander Muslims have *not* engaged in Al Qaeda-style terrorism against the West. The fact that Khattab’s jihad has spread from the Chechen incubator across the ex-Soviet north Caucasus flank has dangerous implications for similar spill-over from US-occupied Iraq.<sup>19</sup>

## **The Jihadis Create a Global Base of Operations in Afghanistan.**

As the First Russo-Chechen conflict wound down in 1996, Osama bin Laden found himself under pressure to quit his sanctuary in Hassan al Turabi's Sudan. One of Bin Laden's aids ascribes Turabi's decision to expel Bin Laden from Sudan to the latter's unsettling macro-agenda. He states "Maybe he (Turabi) was afraid Sheikh Osama would take over the leadership of Sudan someday in the future, at his own expense, especially because bin Laden was at that point looking at Sudan as the backbone of the international Islamic movement, as an important extension of the Islamic movement in the Horn of Africa and East Africa in general."<sup>20</sup> A Sudanese official claimed that Bin Laden was warned "You are practicing power of state within a state within our state so you have to go out." Sudanese who lived near him "prayed he would leave."<sup>21</sup>

Bin Laden's search for a base was to be temporary, however, for Al Qaeda's *Amir* returned to Afghanistan, a land that lay far beyond the reach of the Western powers. And Bin Laden settled in Afghanistan's south-eastern districts at a most fortuitous juncture in history. As he and his entourage returned to their old jihad stomping grounds near Zahwar Kili, the Deobandi Taliban was sweeping through the land crushing the very Afghan ethnic *mujahideen* commanders that had deprived Al Qaeda of its base in 1992.

As the Taliban overwhelmed three fourths of Afghanistan in the following years, bin Laden made a tactical alliance with the Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar. As with *Amir* Khattab in Chechnya or *Amir* Barbaros in Bosnia, *Amir* bin Laden's agenda, however, far exceeded the local ambitions of his largely illiterate Taliban tribal hosts. In Bin Laden's master plan, Afghanistan would serve as a launching pad for a Eurasian war of conquest that would sweep through the weak ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia and into Russia and Inner China.<sup>22</sup>

As Bin Laden set about building his training camp archipelago in eastern Afghanistan, the Taliban Amirate became the 'Bekaa Valley' of Sunni Islamic extremists. According to James Dunnigan:

...for seven years, al Qaeda had a place to set up shop. This included training camps, support activities and a safe place for terrorists to rest up between missions. The support activities included a forged document operation that had a store front outlet, in plain sight. The training camps were out in the hills, but many senior al Qaeda officials hung out in Kabul and other cities. Bin Laden understood how effective a base was to the success of a world wide terrorism campaign against the West.<sup>23</sup>

Bin Laden worked to protect and secure his Afghan investment as he had previously done in northern Sudan. This meant involving himself in the Taliban's struggle to overcome Dostum's Uzbeks and Massoud's Tajiks in the north of Afghanistan. Beginning in 1998 bin Laden had organized an Islamic Foreign Legion made up of jihadis from across the globe to provide a military backbone for the Pashtun-Taliban. The local Taliban appreciated his contributions and the

Al Qaeda 055 'Ansar' (Supporter) fighters increasingly formed the cutting edge of the Taliban sword.

At this time Al Qaeda was granted control over bases in Mazar-i Sharif and Kunduz (northern Afghanistan) and training camps such as Darunta, Khaldan, Farouq, Tarnak Farms, Badr, Rishkor, and Ansar in eastern Afghanistan to support extremist groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and *Harket ul Mujahideen*.

In the process, Bin Laden succeeded in gaining a degree of influence over the local Muslims that had never been achieved by other jihadi organizations in Indian Kashmir, Bosnia, Sudan, or Chechnya. By 2000 the Taliban's reclusive leader, Mullah Omar, increasingly listened to bin Laden's counsel on such issues as the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and the need to extend the Taliban revolution to other lands. The Al Qaeda 'parasite' was increasingly controlling the actions of its 'host' and far from being a 'state sponsor of terrorism'; the Taliban had become a 'state sponsored by terrorism.'<sup>24</sup>

Thus for the first time a local Muslim movement began to view the world through the internationalist lenses of jihadism. By 2000 the Taliban were openly offering moral support to the Chechen resistance, sponsoring IMU raids into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, running training camps for Kashmiri jihadi groups, and granting Al Qaeda control over further facilities in eastern Afghanistan despite the international outcry.

But not all Pashtun-Talibs accepted Al Qaeda's growing influence. Many non-Kandahari moderates in the Taliban *Shura* (Council) decried the 'Arabization' over their movement.<sup>25</sup> While the foreigners "were men with a vision that didn't recognize borders but sought to unite all Muslim countries under the banner of radical Islam" the Pashtun Taliban's agenda was originally more localized and many wanted to return to these roots.<sup>26</sup> The new macro-scale of Mullah Omar's dangerous foreign policy clearly unsettled many moderate Talibs and Pashtun nationalists, especially those local Talibs who were not from the Pakistani Deobandi *madrassas*.

One moderate Taliban *mullah* expressed the more limited objectives of many Taliban when he proclaimed "The Pakistanis and the Arabs built mosques, talked about all Muslims everywhere coming together. It wasn't Afghanistan anymore. My thinking was that they would destroy my country."<sup>27</sup> And even some Taliban hawks "advocated the mass expulsion of Afghan Arabs who had become a local and international liability."<sup>28</sup> Bin Laden had a bitter enemy in the hawkish Taliban Foreign Minister, Wakil Muttawakil, who fought to prevent Al Qaeda from hijacking the Taliban and forcing it into confrontation with the West. One Taliban official claimed that 80% of the Taliban leadership were opposed to Bin Laden's presence in Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> Such distrust of Al Qaeda was not limited to the Taliban leadership, Ahmed Rashid points out the Afghan-Arabs' "arrogant behavior" also antagonized the local Pashtun population much as it had in Sudan.<sup>30</sup>

But the Taliban moderates' and hawks' efforts to expel Bin Laden from Mullah Omar's inner circle were in vain, for the Saudi exile's strange hold on the 'Commander of the Faithful' had become too firm. With the conquest of Massoud's Northern Alliance capital in 2000 by Taliban troops whose core was

made up of hardened Al Qaeda 055 fighters, Bin Laden's influence over Mullah Omar soared to new heights. It is difficult to predict whether the Taliban would have been further subsumed into Bin Laden's global Al Qaeda project or whether the hawks and moderates would have expelled him. By 9/11 the point was moot. By overstepping himself and attacking the USA (without the Taliban's approval), Bin Laden provided the Northern Alliance with a superpower sponsor to help it rid Afghanistan of Al Qaeda *and* its Taliban host.

### **The Destruction of Bin Laden's Base.**

Within three weeks of the so-called 'Holy Tuesday' strike on America, Central Command had begun to put the pieces in place to 'drain the swamp of terrorism' in Afghanistan. For his part, bin Laden, the target of Centcom's feverish activities actually seemed to relish the impending military confrontation with the US in defense of his jihad bastion.

But there were ethnic forces operating in Afghanistan (in addition to the large number of Taliban dissidents) that had always been opposed to Al Qaeda's basing efforts on their lands. These elements were to be the American-led Coalition's secret weapon against Bin Laden. By October 2001 the Americans had arrived on the ground in Afghanistan in the form of US Army Green Beret A-Teams and CIA paramilitaries to support these anti-Taliban ethnic fighters.

In particular the elite US fighters were to exploit America's greatest asset in Afghanistan, the unbridled hatred of Al Qaeda by Dostum's Taliban-killing Uzbek horsemen. In so doing, the American A-Teams and their proxy 'hoofs on the ground' allies would bring down the Taliban regime while leaving a minimal US 'footprint' (a vastly different model to Operation Iraqi Freedom).

In 2003 and 2005 I lived with the Northern Alliance Uzbek warlord General Dostum and, over the course of several weeks, coaxed the story of his spectacular horse-mounted military campaign against the Taliban from him. Dostum recalled "When we heard about the attacks on the USA we knew the Americans would finally come to help us rid the land of the foreign filth who'd tried making our lands their own. For us it was a long awaited opportunity to fight alongside Americans to free our country from the terrorists who'd killed our women in public and slaughtered scores of our people...We hated them for what they did to our homeland more than the Americans did."<sup>31</sup>

Riding alongside a 12 man American special force team led by Captain Mark Nutsch and two CIA officers (David Tyson and RJ aka 'Baba Jan'), General Dostum's riders poured out of the Hindu Kush and attacked Taliban-occupied Mazar i Sharif on November 9, 2001. With close air support rendered by the American air forces, Dostum's cavalry took this vital city on the following day and the Taliban house of cards began to crumble. By the following week the Taliban were on the run across the country and the glorious 'Caliphate' envisioned by Bin Laden was no more. With the destruction of his bases and killing of his military chief (Muhammed Atef, aka 'Abu Hafs') and hundreds of his 055 Ansar fighters, Bin Laden had been deprived of his state within-a-state within two months of 9/11.

In seeking to understand the underlying reasons for Bin Laden's stunning reversal, Oliver Roy writes "The international agenda of Bin Laden simply had no appeal in Afghanistan. He probably did not expect the sudden collapse of his Taliban allies or the thirst for revenge of the non-Pashtuns, for ethnic issues were always downplayed by Bin Laden, who renounced his ethnic and national background to fight for a universalistic cause."<sup>32</sup> As events would later demonstrate, even the Pashtuns had become dissatisfied with the arrogant foreign fighters in their lands. Hundreds of Taliban *Lashkar* (local militia) leaders defected to the Northern Alliance or joined Karzai's 'Southern Alliance' to wipe out the foreign jihadis who had lorded it over them for so long.

And Bin Laden's Al Qaeda was not the only jihad group to suffer serious disruption in the following months. By the end of 2002 the international jihad movement's fortunes had ebbed to their lowest point. In Chechnya, the Russians 'martyred' the jihadi *Amir* Khattab and disrupted his 'Chechen-Arab' network; in Pakistan President Musharraf closed the jihadi bases in Pakistani Azat Kashmir and began to clamp down on the Inter-Services Intelligence and the Kashmiri jihad groups it had sponsored; in Afghanistan IMU leader Juma Namangani was killed in a US air strike and his fighters scattered; in the distant Philippines the extremist Abu Sayyaf jihad group lost its bases in Mindanao and Basilan to US-backed Philippine forces; in the Pankisi Gorge, a lawless region in Georgia abutting Chechnya, Georgian security forces destroyed a base used by foreign jihadis entering Chechnya; and across Eurasia from Yemen to Inner China the trans-national jihadis were put on the defensive and rolled back.

By the end of 2002 George Bush was able to triumphantly welcome the new president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, to Washington and to lay the foundation for the implementation of a fateful military campaign code-named Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was this US-led military campaign to remove Saddam Hussein, the Baathist dictator of Iraq, that would boost jihadism's flagging fortunes. The unexpected destruction of their secular-nationalist enemy, Hussein, was to give the jihadis the opportunity to move from the periphery of the *Dar al Islam* to its symbolic heart, Baghdad.

### **New Bases in The Sunni Triangle, Waziristan, and the Pashtun Belt.**

As the US-led Coalition invaded Afghanistan in 2001 a Jordanian-Palestinian jihadi commander who went by the *laqab* (nom de guerre) of Abu Musab al Zarqawi evacuated his independent *Jund al Sham* (Army of the Levant) group from Herat, Afghanistan to a lawless enclave in Iraqi Kurdistan near the town of Halabja. This area, which lay beyond Baghdad's reach in the Kurdish north, was controlled by a Taliban-style Kurdish extremist group known as *Ansar al Islam* that sought to overthrow Saddam Hussein's 'secular apostate' regime.<sup>33</sup>

But *Ansar al Islam* was not a parochial tribal group with a local vision like that of the Taliban's Pashtun tribesmen. On the contrary, its exiled leader, Mullah Krekar, was a universalist who claimed "Ansar al Islam is neither regional nor ethnic. It is based on the laws of Islam and is preparing jihad. Its goal is the return of the Caliphate..."<sup>34</sup> As such, Mullah Krekar was more than willing to offer

Zarqawi's band of jihadi refugees sanctuary when they came under surveillance (including arrest) by Hussein's security forces in 2001-2002.

Zarqawi's group may have subsequently been confined to the periphery of the Arab world waging jihad against the local infidel nationalists (i.e. the *Peshmerga* Kurdish parties and Hussein's Baathist regime) had the Americans not done part of their work for them by toppling Hussein's 'secular-infidel regime' in April 2003.

As the Sunni-dominated Baathist Party was atomized by the US, Sunnis in conservative tribal towns such as Baquba, Samarra, Ramadi and Fallujah, united with ex-Baathist 'Saddam Fedayeen' to wage guerilla war against the invaders. This provided Zarqawi, whose bases in the Halabja *Ansar al Islam* enclave were destroyed in April 2003, with an unexpected entry into the heart of Baathist Iraq, the Sunni Triangle. According to Bin Laden's 'Defense Minister' Seif al Adl (who was influential in uniting Al Qaeda with Zarqawi's independent group) "Al Qaeda's lieunants were convinced that the United States was bound to miscalculate and invade Iraq and overthrow its government, and that they must play a leading role in resisting the American invaders. Here was Al Qaeda's 'historic opportunity'...to establish the long-awaited Islamic state in the region and end (Baathist) decline, defeat and injustice; all along Zarqawi's goal was to reach the Sunni-dominated region and establish a foothold there."<sup>35</sup>

With funding from the same Wahhabi-Salafite charities that had sponsored Khattab, Barbaros, and Bin Laden, Zarqawi began to draw foreign recruits from such places as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon to wage a jihad against the US-led Coalition in Iraq. By 2004 Zarqawi's men had also found a new base for their operations in the Sunni stronghold of Fallujah. When the US Marines subsequently took Fallujah after a bloody siege, Zarqawi's fighter-terrorists scattered throughout the towns of the Sunni Triangle and western Anbar Province. There they began to extend their influence over the local Sunni insurgents.

As in Chechnya, resistance to the US-led occupation was increasingly expressed as a jihad, not a war of national liberation. This provided Zarqawi with what Bin Laden called 'his Golden Opportunity.' The 'jihadification' of the Iraqi resistance meant that many ex-Baathist security formations (such as the 'Special Republican Guard' or the '1920 Revolution Brigade' now known as the Army of Muhammad) began to cooperate with Zarqawi's fundamentalist fighters.<sup>36</sup> One US counter-terrorism officer described the increasingly radical resistance that appeared at this time as "an insurgency hijacked by a terrorist campaign."<sup>37</sup>

By the spring of 2005, Zarqawi's influence in central Iraq reached new heights and the Jordanian terrorist had, remarkably enough, become the most visible face of the Iraqi insurgency. In the process his jihadis took control of cities on the Syrian border, such as Tal Afar, in order to open the jihad route for volunteers from the Levant. His fighters also symbolically staked their claim to Hussein's former capital of Baghdad by lining its main streets with black jihad banners. Most alarmingly Zarqawi demonstrated his wider ambitions by striking at US targets in Jordan via a series of bombing of American-owned hotels.

As with many other jihadi exiles, Zarqawi, who once went by the nom de guerre of "Al Gharib" (the Stranger), retained an interest in striking at his own

country. This was not unusual as Zarqawi, like many other jihad exiles, was at war with the country that had imprisoned him, for fifteen years of his life. In many cases the only residual linkage a second generation jihadi has to his home place is his *laqab*, as seen with such jihadi *kunyas* (nick-names) as Abu Hafs “Al Urdani” (the Jordanian), Seif ed Din “Al Turki” (The Turk), Abu Faraj “Al Libi” (The Libyan) Azzam “Al Amriki” (Adam Ghadan the American), Abu Hamza “Al Masri” (the Egyptian) or Abu Musab “Al Zarqawi” (the Man from the town of Zarqa).

This shedding of one’s former identity and homeland has been likened to joining the French Foreign Legion, and its tradition of *anonymat* that gives some members a chance to start their lives over as legionnaires with new names, new identities, and troubled pasts left behind. The comparison is apt, with one major difference: those who join the Foreign Legion do not seek to use this multi-ethnic force to destroy their former homelands.

The sense of disconnect with his natal land and extra-territoriality demonstrated by Zarqawi is certainly a hallmark of the larger jihad movement and it was not surprising that he targeted his own countrymen. It was clear that Zarqawi intended to use his safe haven in Iraq as springboard not just for dismantling secular Iraq, but destroying neighboring ‘infidel-imposed apostate regimes’ including the Hashemite dynasty in his homeland of Jordan.

At this time Zarqawi’s jihad group, initially known as *Tawhid wal Jihad* (Unity and Holy War), belatedly declared its allegiance to Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda and renamed itself ‘Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.’<sup>38</sup> Ironically the White House’s 2002 warnings that Hussein’s Baathist Iraq harbored Al Qaeda had by this time become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Iraq was now clearly a full-blown jihad incubator that gave extremists from all the surrounding lands ‘hands on’ training on how to kill thousands of Americans with IEDs, car bombs, and sniper rifles. Porter Goss, the Bush-appointed head of the CIA, presciently warned that “Those jihadists who survive will leave Iraq experienced and focused on acts of urban terrorism. They represent a potential pool of contacts to build transnational terrorist cells.”<sup>39</sup>

But for all the fact that Zarqawi had achieved stunning success in galvanizing jihad in secular-Baathist Iraq and the surrounding regions, he faced the same problems with the locals in Iraq that had bedeviled his jihadi counterparts in Sudan, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Bosnia. This stemmed in part from the fact that the vast majority of the Iraqi insurgents/terrorists thought locally and acted locally. This was best demonstrated by the fact that many of the insurgents still fought under the Iraqi flag not the black international jihad standard and the websites of Iraqi resistance groups continued to feature a stylized map of Iraq.

There is nothing unusual in this localism. In his seminal analysis, Robert Pape points out that “What motivates them (terrorists) primarily is independent, local issues. At its core its is about political control of territory.” According to this source a full 95% of terrorist acts are “motivated by the presence of foreign combat troops.”<sup>40</sup> In the Iraqi theater of operations most jihadi groups are motivated by the objective of expelling the latest crop of “foreign invaders of the Iraqi homeland” not attacking the West.<sup>41</sup>

Zarqawi by contrast announced “I am global and no land is my country” and clearly saw Iraq as a springboard for his trans-regional movement which has been described as AQ2 (Al Qaeda Two). Zarqawi was actually at war with the very idea of secular Iraqi ethno-nationalism of the sort espoused by most ex-Baathist insurgents. Zarqawi even launched a terror campaign against Iraqi Shiites with the aim of destroying any hopes for a unified *Iraqi* action on Arab nationalist grounds (of the sort demonstrated by the willing participation of Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites in Hussein’s war against Iran).

As a result Tim McGirk wrote in 2006 “Cracks in Al Qaeda’s alliance with Iraqi groups became more pronounced after the December 15, 2005 elections (in which Iraqi Sunni militants participated). Al Zarqawi saw the poll as a detour from his goal of turning Iraq into a base from which Al Qaeda could spread terrorism throughout the Middle East and Europe. Many Sunni groups have a narrower focus: ridding Iraq of occupation forces.”<sup>42</sup>

Examples of tension between Zarqawi’s foreign terrorists and the locals not surprisingly soon began to emerge, even in Fallujah. One report claimed “People in Fallujah, known as the city of mosques, have chafed at the stern brand of Islam that the newcomers brought with them. The non-Iraqi Arabs berated women who did not cover themselves head-to-toe in black--very rare in Iraq--and violently opposed local customs rooted in the town’s more mystical (Sufi) religious tradition.” In one case in Fallujah, a Sufi “man killed a Kuwaiti because he said he could not pray at the grave of an ancestor (a Sufi tradition that has been attacked by fundamentalist in the Gulf states as ‘un-Islamic’).”<sup>43</sup>

When the Americans and Iraqi Army re-took the Syrian border town of Tal Afar from Zarqawi’s fighters in 2005 the villagers thanked them and spoke of a reign of terror by the foreign jihadi fundamentalists.<sup>44</sup> Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar Province fought back against Zarqawi’s jihadis when they executed members of their clan for ‘collaboration’ with the American ‘infidels.’ On several occasions Iraqi insurgents also guarded voting stations against Al Qaeda attacks so that Sunnis could safely participate in elections.

The divisions between Zarqawi’s jihadi extremists (the majority of whom were Saudis who subscribe to the universalistic Wahhabi or Salafite creeds) and the local insurgents were exploited to their fullest in June 2006 by US intelligence services.<sup>45</sup> With the help of Baathist insurgents who had become increasingly disenchanted with Zarqawi’s viciousness, the Americans were able to pin point his position and kill him in a targeted bombing raid.<sup>46</sup>

It remains to be seen how successful ‘Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia’s’ *Amir* has been in co-opting local Iraqi Sunni extremists to his international vision. But one suspects that his hate-filled message will have little resonance with most Sunni Iraqis. As Kenneth Pollack aptly points out “the vast majority of the population doesn’t like Al Qaeda in the country and even the Sunnis aren’t thrilled with them.”<sup>47</sup>

If history is any indicator, the Iraqi people, and specifically the Sunni portion that utilized then betrayed Zarqawi, will have a say in whether or not their lands are transformed into a global base for jihadi terrorism. Needless to say, if Al Qaeda was expelled from its sanctuary in Turabi’s fundamentalist Sudan and threatened with expulsion from Taliban Afghanistan, there is a strong

possibility the comparatively secularized Iraqis will similarly reject plans for turning their homeland into a jihad 'Caliphate' for foreign Wahhabis and Salafites.<sup>48</sup>

While it is difficult to predict the future for jihadi basing projects in the Sunni Triangle, the examples from other 'zones of jihad' such as Bosnia and Chechnya offer some useful precedents. Recent jihadi history confirms two salient points about the relationship between foreign fighters with macro-visions and local Muslim insurgents who are more interested in fighting for regional objectives (such as the right to self-determination or to address historical grievances).

First, the longer foreign jihadis fight shoulder to shoulder with regional Muslim fighters against a common enemy the deeper the inroads they make into the local political-religious-military culture (i.e. convergence of interest of the sort seen in the North Caucasus, Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, and in the recent borrowing of Al Qaeda tactics and rhetoric by Iraqi extremists in Ansar al Sunnah). And most worryingly, the 'collateral damage' fall-out that inevitably comes from waging war against local Muslims (i.e. jihadi public relations 'victories' such as Haditha, Abu Ghraib, the Russian filtration camp at Chernokzovo, the massacre of Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica etc.) become recruitment bonanzas for jihadi terrorists among both foreign and local Muslims.

Second, when 'infidel' occupations come to an end, the overlooked differences between foreign Salafite-jihadis and local Muslims (such as their macro or micro state building goals or local Sufism as opposed to Salafi-Wahhabi universalism) become more obvious and usually lead to military conflict between the locals and the outsiders. In essence, the common enemy brings together strange bed fellows (Baathist and Saudi Wahhabis for example); remove that 'infidel' enemy and the unity between the foreign extremists and locals frays.

The warning from acting Afghan Prime Minister Ahmad Ahmadzai to Afghan-Arabs in 1995 "We thank them for their cooperation with us in fighting the Soviet Union. Now that the Soviet Union is defeated...please go home to your countries" mirror the warnings of the Chechen President Mashkadov and Bosnian President Izetbegovic.<sup>49</sup> These leaders similarly called on the foreign fighters to decamp from their lands when the war was over. Failure on the part of the foreign jihadi volunteers to do so leads to conflict with locals.

While some Iraqi extremists may be expected to expand their vision and partake in global terrorism against the 'Distant Enemy' (the West), history indicates that dire predictions that Iraq will automatically become a base of global terrorism if the USA departs, seem to be overblown.<sup>50</sup> This is in part due to the fact that Kurdish leaders such as Talabani and Barzani and Shiite leaders such as Moqtada al Sadr and Ayatollah Sistani will certainly prevent their lands from being used by their Sunni Al Qaeda enemies.

*But it also stems from the fact that xenophobic Sunni tribal leaders, ex-Baathists, and Iraqi nationalists can also be expected to move against the Salafite-Wahhabi outsiders should the Americans withdraw their forces.* It is hardly a forgone conclusion that the foreign fighters (who represent no more than 5% of the Iraqi insurgents) will be successful in subsuming the local Iraqi Sunnis' regional territorial objectives into their global terrorist project.<sup>51</sup>

But the Chechen example would seem to indicate that a prolonged US occupation runs the risk of facilitating the jihadis' aims by transforming local POI insurgents (i.e. in US Army terms, "Pissed Off Iraqis") into globe-trotting Al Qaeda terrorists. The secret to winning to the war against the global terrorists in Iraq lies in recognizing the 'cost-benefit' tipping point where military operations cease to be a successful means for preventing Iraq from becoming a terrorist safe haven and instead become a call for action for would-be-jihadis.<sup>52</sup>

As for AQ1, the first generation of Bin Laden's jihadists, the mounting differences between the Taliban and 'Araban' (Arab fighters) that emerged prior to 9/11 appear to have been glossed over by their common goal of regaining power in Afghanistan and re-establishing 'God's rule on earth.' The two movements have merged into one terrorist-insurgent movement based in Pakistan.

Although hundreds of foreign Ansar and Al Qaeda fighters were killed in Operation Enduring Freedom, many more evaded Coalition forces and escaped over the mountains at Tora Bora and Shah i Kot into Pakistan's untamed Pashtun tribal agencies. While those who ended up in Pakistan's cities soon found themselves compromised (key AQ players such as Abu Zubeida, Khaled Sheikh Muhammad, Abu Faraj al Libi, and Ramzi bin al Shihb were arrested in Karachi by Pakistani security forces), those jihadis in the uncontrollable Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) found safe haven with the local Pashtuns.

According to one source "Local pro-Taliban tribes arranged for their accommodation. Within a few months, these foreign fighters not only received residential status in the tribal areas, but in places such as South Waziristan they established proper bases to not only fight in Afghanistan but also to restore their communications for global operations. By mid-2002, displaced foreigners had largely revived themselves and were ready for global operations."<sup>53</sup> Al Qaeda's surviving leadership thus appear to have taken advantage of the Pashtuns' tradition of *melmastia* (honor duty to protect guests) to establish a fall-back sanctuary in the NWFP agencies of Waziristan in particular.

Although many Taliban moderates and *Lashkar* leaders remaining in Afghanistan have gone over to the Karzai government, the increasingly radicalized 'die-hard Talibs' in Pakistan have commenced a guerilla war against Karzai in the south Afghan-Pashtun provinces of Uruzgan, Kandahar and Helmand. And by 2004 it was apparent that the foreign AQ jihadis were adding a terrorist element to this mounting insurgency (as best demonstrated by the rising use of Iraqi-style suicide and car bombers in Afghanistan).

While Pakistani security forces have launched full-scale invasions of Taliban-AQ bases in the NWFP in an effort to flush out the foreign fighters, they have had mixed results. More Pakistani soldiers have died in these incursions into this hostile tribal zone than Coalition troops in neighboring Afghanistan. And most tellingly, Al Qaeda's top leaders, Ayman al Zawaheri and Bin Laden, feel comfortable enough in their new sanctuary on the Pak-Afghan border to issue death threats against both Karzai and Musharaff. While Bin Laden has lost much of his infrastructure and followers in the destruction of his Afghan base, he continues to play an important role as 'chief incitor' for homegrown terrorism from New Delhi to London.

But for all his success in avoiding capture and instigating global terrorism, it is clear that Bin Laden has been relegated to the role of jihadi icon by the US-Pakistani counter-terrorism campaign. Bin Laden is clearly living on the periphery of the main struggle. For as important as the battle for Pakistan and Afghanistan is, the great 'clash of civilizations' that Bin Laden planned for Afghanistan is ironically enough now taking place in the failed state of Iraq. The front-line of the global jihad is no longer to be found on the frontiers among such obscure ethnic groups as the Pashtuns, Chechens, Kashmiris, and Bosniaks, it is in the streets of Mosul, Baquba, Ramadi, Samarra, Fallujah and Baghdad.

Thus the jihadists' battle for an *Al Qaeda al Jihad*, a Base for Holy War, goes on. It will continue for as long as the Middle East and greater Muslim world continue to produce roaming warrior-terrorists who believe that carving out shariah-states with a Kalashnikov is God's will...Or until those Muslims who have always opposed them let the jihadis know that killing as a form of worship and constructing grim, Taliban-style theocracies do not represent their Islamic beliefs or political aspirations.

## NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> For photographs of Dostum's prison and the Taliban prisoners I interviewed please see my website at: [brianglynwilliams.com](http://brianglynwilliams.com) (under Field Research, "Afghanistan 2003").

<sup>2</sup> In this respect I found their beliefs to be similar to other fundamentalist movements that reject man-made states, even those of their homeland (many ultra-Orthodox Jews reject the state of Israel, Aum Shinrikyo rejected Japan, and Evangelical Christian extremists in America have established compounds in the USA and havens in places like Jonestown, Guyana, as a response to the American 'Sodom and Gomorah' around them).

<sup>3</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the key fighters and ethnic grievances of the Muslim groups involved in this tour, such as the Chechens, Bosnians, Kashmiris, Afghans etc. and their ties to jihad *amirs* (commanders) see: Brian Glyn Williams. "'Jihad and Ethnicity in Post Communist Eurasia. On the Trail of Trans-national Islamic Holy Warriors in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Chechnya and Kosovo". *Journal of Ethnopolitics*. vol 2, no 3-4, March/June 2003. available under Publications at: [brianglynwilliams.com](http://brianglynwilliams.com)

<sup>4</sup> After the withdrawal of the Soviets the Communist-Afghan government of President Najibullah stayed in power until 1992.

<sup>5</sup> B. Raman. "Al Qaeda Empire in Pakistan." *South Asia Analysis Group*. Nov. 26, 2002. The Pakistani ISI obviously hoped to use the jihadi auxiliaries to expel the Indians and annex Kashmir.

<sup>6</sup> "Hill Kaka. A Military or a Political Failure." *Kashmiri Sentinel*. June, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Evan Kohlman. *Al Qaida's Jihad in Europe*. New York; Berg. 2003. page 15-19.

<sup>8</sup> It should be stressed that the foreign jihadis rarely identified with the 'tribal' goals of the Muslim ethnic groups they came to assist in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechnya or Iraq.

<sup>9</sup> Evan Kohlman. *Al Qaida's Jihad in Europe*. New York; 2004. p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Josh Meyers. "Bosnia Seen as Hospitable Base and Sanctuary for Terrorists." *Los Angeles Times*. Oct. 7, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Evan Kohlman. p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Evan Kohlman. p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> The Bosnian government subsequently helped the US arrest Arabs in Bosnia with ties to Al Qaeda.

<sup>14</sup> Evan Kohlman. op. cit. page 165.

- 
- <sup>15</sup> Author's interview with Abu Hamza al Masri and other leaders at Finnsbury Park Mosque, London. August 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> Zawaheri never actually made it to Chechnya although it should be stated that in Dagestan local Wahhabi militants had carved out a Shariah-zone in the middle of the republic (the so-called Kadar Zone) which many extremists felt would serve as a springboard for conquering the rest of Dagestan and the Caucasus. Lawrence Wright. "The Man Behind Bin Laden." *New Yorker*. Sept. 16, 2002.
- <sup>17</sup> Khassan Baiev, a Chechen doctor summed up the Chechens' position on the foreign fundamentalists in his country as follows "These so called Wahhabis were beginning to cause problems in Chechnya. They claimed our Chechen traditions contradicted the Koran... We welcomed the humanitarian aid we received from the Middle Eastern countries, but we did not like it when they told us our Islam was not true Islam." *The Oath. A Surgeon Under Fire*. New York; Walker Company. 2003. page 213. This book is a must read for anyone who wants to understand Chechnya's role in the war on terrorism.
- <sup>18</sup> Author's interviews with the Chechen Foreign Minister held at Harvard University in 2003 and 2004.
- <sup>19</sup> Brian Glyn Williams. "Shattering the Al Qaeda-Chechen Myth" (part I and II). *Jamestown Foundation. Chechnya Weekly*. Vol. 4. Issue 40. (November 6, 2003) and Vol. 4, Issue 35. (October 2, 2003). available at: [brianglynwilliams.com](http://brianglynwilliams.com)
- <sup>20</sup> Fawaz Gerges. *The Far Enemy. Why Jihad Went Global*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. 2006. page 236.
- <sup>21</sup> Peter Bergen. *The Osama Bin Laden I Know*. New York; Free Press. 2006. page 125 and 135.
- <sup>22</sup> See for example Ahmed Rashid. *Jihad. The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. 2001.
- <sup>23</sup> James Dunnigan. "Al Qaeda without Al Qaeda." *Dirty Little Secrets*. Oct. 18, 2004.
- <sup>24</sup> Rohan Gunaratna. *Inside Al Qaeda. Global Network of Terror*. London, Hust. 2002. pages 40 and 50.
- Ahmed Rashid. *Taliban. Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. New Haven, Yale Univ. Press. 2000. page 139-140.
- <sup>25</sup> R. R. Sikoev. *Taliby. Religiozno-Politicheskii Potret*. Moscow; Iv Ran. 2002. p. 144.
- <sup>26</sup> Kathy Gannon. *I is for Infidel. From Holy War to Holy Terror, 18 Years Inside Afghanistan*. New York; Public Affairs. 2005. p. 38.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 62.
- <sup>28</sup> Fawaz Gerges. *The Far Enemy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2006. page 194.
- <sup>29</sup> Peter Bergen. *The Osama Bin Laden I Know*. New York; Free Press. 2006. page 233.
- <sup>30</sup> Ahmed Rashid. *The Taliban*. op cit. page 139.
- <sup>31</sup> Author's interview with General Rashid Dostum. Mazar i Sharif, Afghanistan. August, 2003.
- <sup>32</sup> Oliver Roy. *Globalized Islam. The Search for the New Ummah*. New York; Columbia Univ. Press. 2004. page 56.
- <sup>33</sup> Zarqawi rejected Al Qaeda's overtures while in Afghanistan and was not a member of Bin Laden's organization. In 2006 the CIA and a bi-partisan Senate Intelligence Committee found that Saddam Hussein "did not have a relationship, harbor, or turn a blind eye toward Zarqawi and his associates," prior to or during the US-invasion of Iraq. The White House's 2003 claims that Zarqawi, Al Qaeda and the Hussein's Baathist regime were all one and the same glossed over key differences in these three groups. Creating a nuanced understanding of these regional ethnic, political, and terrorist organizations and understanding their differences is key to providing reliable intelligence for the War on Terror. "Report. No Proof of Qaeda-Saddam Link." Sept. 8, 2006. [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com).
- <sup>34</sup> Jean Charles Brisard. *Zarqawi. The New Face of Al Qaeda*. New York; Other Press. 2005. p. 114.
- <sup>35</sup> Fawaz Gerges. *The Far Enemy*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. 2006. page 252.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Stephen Ulph. "The Salafization of the Iraq Conflict." *Terrorism Monitor*. vol. 2, issue 18. Oct. 2005. There has been a trend in the Middle East for national identity to increasingly give way to Islamic identity. This trend is visible in Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Iran, Lebanon and was accelerated in Iraq by the invasion and dismantling of the Baathist-nationalist party.
- <sup>38</sup> There have been other regional Al Qaedas as well, namely Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and Al Qaeda in Turkey (El Kaida al Turka). The localized names should not confuse the reader, in all three cases the Al Qaeda groups have been committed to destroying their infidel 'host' state.
- <sup>39</sup> David Morgan. "Conflict Feeds International Terror-CIA" *Reuters*. Feb. 16, 2005.

- 
- <sup>40</sup> In his work *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. Random House. 2005. Robert Pape emphatically states “The taproot of suicide terrorism is nationalism” not religion. See also Scott Shane. “Fighting Locally, Fighting Globally.” *New York Times. The Week in Review*. July 16, 2006.
- <sup>41</sup> It should be noted that Iraqi insurgents used terrorism against the British occupation forces in the 1920s. It should also be pointed out that Westerners have made little effort to delineate between globalist jihadis and local-irredentist jihadis.
- <sup>42</sup> Tim McGirk. “A Rebel Crackup?” *Time*. January 30, 2006.
- <sup>43</sup> Karl Vick. “Insurgent Alliance Is Fraying In Fallujah; Locals, Fearing Invasion, Turn Against Foreign Arabs.” *The Washington Post*. Oct 13, 2004.
- <sup>44</sup> Oliver Poole. “Iraqis in former rebel stronghold now cheer American soldiers.” *Telegraph*. Dec. 19, 2005.
- <sup>45</sup> Murad al Shishani. “The Salafi-Jihadi Movement of Iraq.” *Terrorism Monitor*. Vol. 3, Issue 23.
- <sup>46</sup> Bill Powell. “How They Killed Him.” *Time*. June 19, 2006 page 34.
- <sup>47</sup> The author’s discussion with Ken Pollack (one of the most influential voices in Washington calling for the invasion of Iraq) on *National Public Radio*. Monday July 3, 2006. “Talk of the Nation.”
- <sup>48</sup> Iraqis have had a strong tradition of resisting foreign rule that goes back to the British occupation and of the 1920s earlier attacks on the Ottomans in World War I. This tradition in part explains the resistance to the US-led occupation and certainly would apply to Jordanian, Saudi, Syrian, Kuwaiti jihadis who seek to control the Iraqis’ destiny.
- <sup>49</sup> Peter Bergen. *The Osama I Know*. page 105.
- <sup>50</sup> The example of Hamas’ localized anti-Israeli terrorism demonstrates that even insurgent-terrorists with an Islamist agenda can reject the path of global Salafite jihadism.
- <sup>51</sup> Moderate Sunni insurgent groups such as the 1920 Revolution Brigades and the Army of Muhammad have already expressed interest in opening discussions with the US-backed Iraqi government. History indicates that his process would accelerate if the American ‘occupiers’ depart rather than further Al Qaeda infiltration. Traditionally jihad has been a reaction to foreign ‘infidel’ invasion. “Some Insurgent Groups are asking Iraq for Negotiations.” *New York Times*. June 27, 2006. p. 1.
- <sup>52</sup> Many military experts involved in stemming the flow of foreign fighters in Iraq feel that the ‘tipping point’ was been reached when the horrific photos of the US abuses at Abu Ghraib Prison were circulated around Iraq and the greater Middle East.
- <sup>53</sup> Syed Shazad. “Song and Dance on the Terror Trail.” *Asia Times*. Oct 14, 2005