

## **Chapter 3 – CURRENT TRENDS IN AL QAEDA AND GLOBAL MILITANT JIHAD ACTIVITY**

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### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, a serious academic discussion about the al Qaeda organization (or AQC – al Qaeda Central) has been underway, one that has also found its way into the popular media. It has focused on whether AQC has ceased functioning as an active organization and turned into an icon only, and whether its role as leader of the global militant jihad has been assumed by a mass movement run by a network of people, groups, and organizations whose members have undergone a process of self-radicalization. A response to this question may be found in an analysis of the activities of al Qaeda and its affiliates, but also depends on understanding the concept of struggle according to al Qaeda and its relationship with its affiliates. Al Qaeda views itself as the leader of the global militant jihad movement and as a role model for its affiliates. As such, the organization has sought to stage dramatic and innovative terrorist attacks that would pave the way for its collaborators without insisting on exclusivity for acts undertaken in the name of global militant jihad. Moreover, al Qaeda has encouraged independent activity, which is often carried out without its approval or knowledge.

Al Qaeda, well-aware of its limited power and resources, has always viewed its own terrorist acts, and the terrorist acts it encourages others to undertake, as a tool to launch an historic process whose final objective is restoring Islam to its former primacy and glory. Al Qaeda does not feel it necessary to carry out many attacks, and prefers to focus on a limited number of showcase attacks. Terrorism, viewed by al Qaeda as “propaganda by the Deed” is the first in a chain reaction meant to enhance its destructive and moral effect and launch a sophisticated, global propaganda system. This system is directed by the organization with the assistance of its production company, al-Sahab, through internet sites and Arab satellite channels, primarily al Jazeera. It is no coincidence that al Qaeda contributes as many resources and efforts to mounting these productions as it does to mounting terrorist attacks.

The discussion that follows focuses on the central arenas where al Qaeda and its global militant jihad affiliates were active in 2008; an assessment of the expected trends in their activities in coming years; and an examination of the threat they represent.

### **3.2 AL QAEDA AND THEIR AFFILIATES: THEATERS OF ACTIVITY**

In recent years, al Qaeda and its affiliates have focused their activities primarily in Iraq and the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as other local arenas.

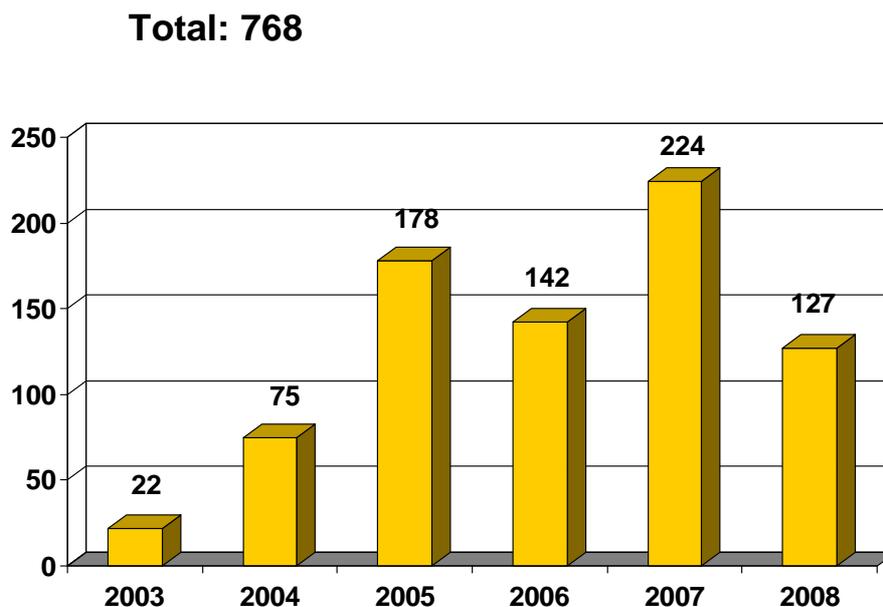
#### **3.2.1 Iraq**

The American-led coalition invasion into Iraq supplied al Qaeda with a golden opportunity to extricate itself from its difficult position and the pressure exerted on it after the severe blow it and its Taliban sponsors suffered following the 9/11 attacks.

AlfQaeda did not invest the bulk of its resources or dedicate its most senior commanders to the war in Iraq, and most have remained protected in Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly in the border area between them.

However, al Qaeda commanders have invested significant informational/propaganda efforts to stress the extreme importance of the campaign in Iraq as the central arena for the contest between the Islamic world, led by global militant jihadists, and the West together with its Arab allies. With the assistance of recruiting and logistics networks directed by supporters around the world, the struggle in Iraq has become a locus attracting Muslim volunteers worldwide seeking to join the militant jihad activity there. Moreover, the fighting in Iraq over the past five years has largely drawn the coalition forces' attention away from their initial objectives and depleted the resources – in terms of money, manpower, equipment, and time – allocated to wage a focused war against al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The massive presence of Western forces in Iraq has helped al Qaeda operate its affiliates in the country against the invaders. The fact that “the distant enemy” (i.e., the United States and its allies) came to a region considered to be holy Muslim ground (*wakf*) in the heart of the Arab Levant gave al Qaeda “home court advantage” in attacks. In addition, it helped strengthen its basic narrative: the prosecution of a holy war by means of legitimate “armed military resistance”. Al Qaeda took advantage of this opportunity to prepare highly skilled cadres with combat experience and train them in terrorist and guerrilla warfare for future use in the global militant jihad. Furthermore, the fighting in Iraq afforded al Qaeda an opportunity to demonstrate and entrench the act of self-sacrifice in the path of God (*istishhadia*) that has become its trademark through intensive use of suicide attackers, most of them from the ranks of the foreign volunteers, who were sent to their targets by al Qaeda in Iraq (Figure 3-1).



**Figure 3-1: Suicide Attacks in Iraq 2003 – 2008.**  
(Source: Terrorism and Low Intensity Warfare Project  
database at the Institute for National Security Studies)

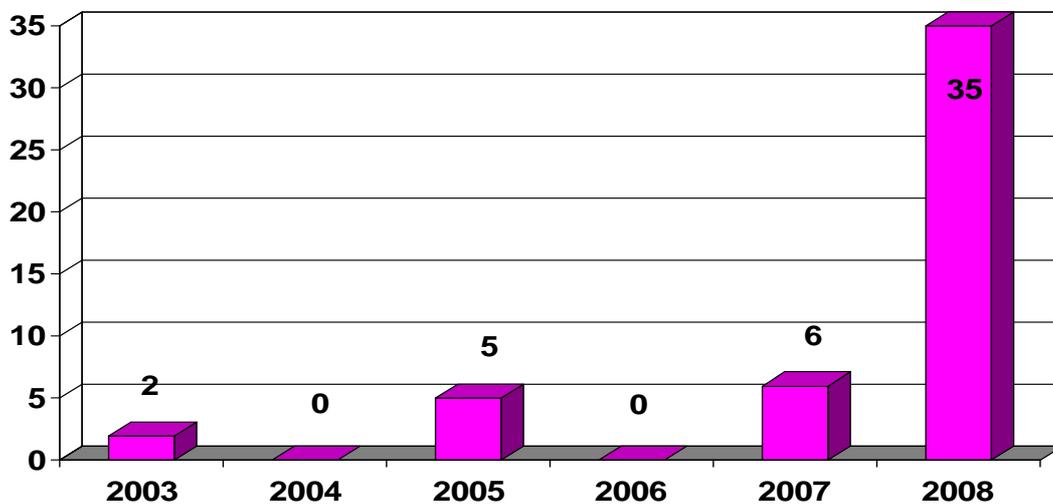
The fighting in Iraq has provided al Qaeda’s elaborate and effective propaganda machine with a wealth of visual material documenting the terrorist and guerrilla activities against the foreign forces. In recent years, these materials have served al Qaeda in its psychological warfare as it celebrates a heroic narrative of the “Muslim mujahidin” rendering powerful blows against the invading “infidels”. There is no doubt that the raw materials photographed during the fighting in Iraq, posted on many internet sites around the world identified with the global militant jihad, represent one of the concrete achievements of the organization and are likely to serve it in the future.

The removal of Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq did not hurt al Qaeda, as it had viewed him as one of the heretical Muslim leaders who do not lead their lives according to the laws of Islam. However, the rise of the Shiites to the top of the Iraqi regime and their cooperation with the United States and its allies turned the Shia into a legitimate target of attacks. Many Iraqi citizens, particularly those who joined the new regime and the security and police forces, were also placed on al Qaeda’s enemy list in Iraq and many acts of terrorism targeted them.

Al Qaeda operatives’ murderous activities and provocative conduct in Iraq against the local population have angered many Iraqi citizens. Thus starting at the end of 2005, a rift gradually occurred between al Qaeda operatives in Iraq and the heads of the Sunni tribes there who, until then, cooperated with them. The revolt of these Sunni tribal leaders dubbed “the revival of the Anbar movement” and supported and funded by the US and coalition forces that were strengthened by the surge, and aided by Iraqi security forces, bore fruit and helped to weaken al Qaeda. 2007 symbolized a further and more advanced stage of al Qaeda’s weakened capabilities in Iraq. Based on assessments submitted 2008 this year by senior American officers and administration personnel, a guarded analysis suggests that the organization is on the brink of collapse in most parts of Iraq.

Another sign of the organization’s weakness and the blow rendered to its operatives is the rise in 2008 in al Qaeda’s use of female suicide bombers, the highest in comparison with previous years (Figure 3-2). Such a step usually attests to operational difficulties in organizations dispatching suicide missions. In addition, al Qaeda’s declaration of the establishment of Islamic Caliphate in Iraq in 2005, supported by the AQC, has remained an empty slogan, in part because of the organization’s current distress.

**Total: 48**



**Figure 3-2: Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq, 2000 – 2008.**  
(Source: Terrorism and Low Intensity Warfare Project database at the Institute for National Security Studies)

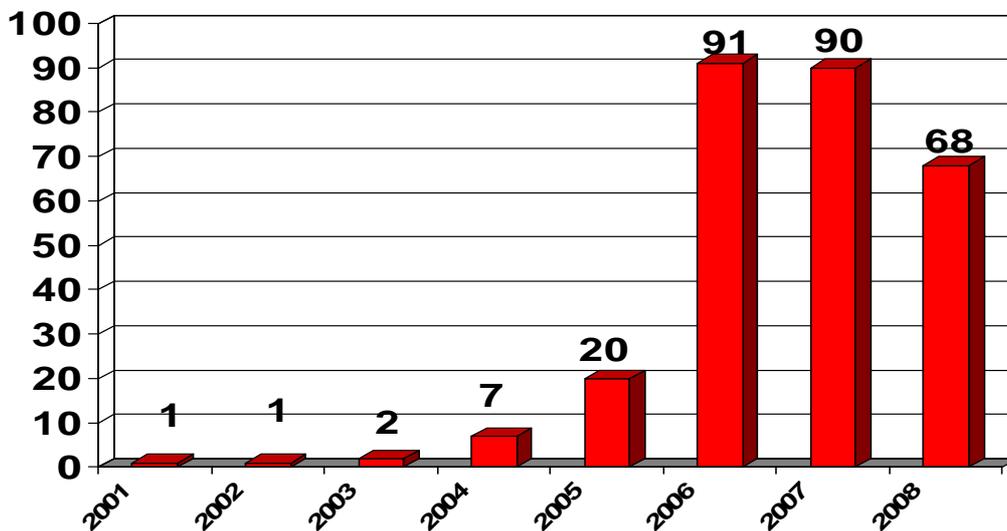
**3.2.2 Afghanistan, Pakistan and the FATA Border Region**

In recent years al Qaeda has strengthened its hold on the FATA “no man’s land” and enhanced its infrastructure there. The area is formally under Pakistani sovereignty, but functions largely as an ex-territorial autonomous region with the central government in Islamabad wielding no authority over it, both because of its topography and its unique ethnic composition. The evidence thus far points to the fact

that this is the area where bin Laden and most of the senior al Qaeda operatives are in hiding, along with members of the former Taliban regime who fled there in late 2001. This region serves as a base for the planning of the joint activities of al Qaeda and the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban. Since this is presumably the al Qaeda and Taliban stronghold, the past year saw clashes between Pakistani military forces and Taliban and al Qaeda fighters. Furthermore, since the prevailing opinion was that Pakistan has not taken sufficient steps against al Qaeda and the Taliban, the US has carried out aerial attacks there.

Over the last two years the relationship between al Qaeda and the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban has grown much closer, to the extent of establishment of joint war rooms, joint planning and participation in raids, and joint fighting against Pakistani regular forces. The most obvious manifestation of al Qaeda's influence on the activities of the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban was the upgrading, in both number and intensity, of the terrorist attacks perpetrated by these elements within Afghani and Pakistani cities. The two Taliban organizations added suicide bombing to their repertoire and made it a primary combat tactic. This was particularly obvious in Afghanistan which, until recent years, did not suffer from this type of activity, not even during the ten years of warfare against the Soviet military (1979 – 1989), the subsequent civil war that raged until the Taliban took charge, or during the years of Taliban rule. Starting in 2005, with al Qaeda's assistance and encouragement, Afghanistan was flooded by a wave of dozens of suicide bombings (Figure 3-3), in some cases due to the direct involvement of senior al Qaeda personnel. The total of 249 suicide bombings in Afghanistan over the past three years is an extraordinarily high number, relative to other arenas in the Middle East and around the world, with only Iraq in the same league. Most of the suicide bombers, young Pakistanis recruited at *madrassas*, are joined by a small number of foreign volunteers dispatched by the Taliban, with al Qaeda's fingerprints all over this activity.

**Total: 280**

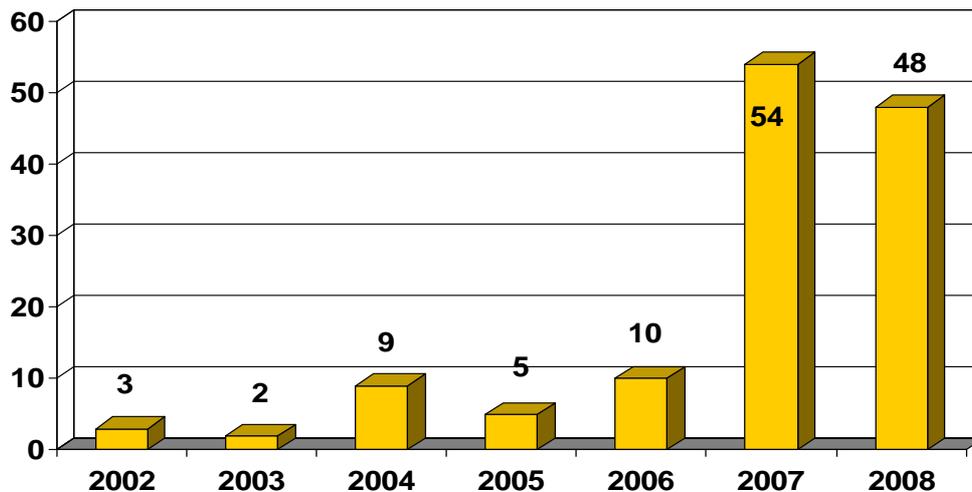


**Figure 3-3: Suicide Bombings in Afghanistan, 2000 – 2008.**  
(Source: Terrorism and Low Intensity Warfare Project  
database at the Institute for National Security Studies)

Likewise, Pakistan, which in the past experienced only a small number of sporadic suicide bombings within its borders, has over the last two years seen a sharp increase in the number of suicide attacks carried out under the influence of the association between al Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban (Figure 3-4). Al Qaeda has been directly linked – and took public credit – for the suicide attack that took place at the

Danish embassy in Islamabad on June 2, 2008, in which eight people were killed and twenty-seven injured. Al Qaeda had specifically threatened Denmark, in response to a cartoon in a Danish newspaper that the organization deemed an insult to Islam and an offensive portrayal of the prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, al Qaeda, led by the head of the organization’s operational division in Pakistan, Osama al-Kini, staged a brazen attack at the Marriott Hotel, which killed fifty-four, including five foreigners – among them the Czech Ambassador – and injured two hundred and sixty-six.

**Total: 131**



**Figure 3-4: Suicide Bombings in Pakistan, 2000 – 2008.**  
 (Source: Terrorism and Low Intensity Warfare Project database at the Institute for National Security Studies)

### **3.3 AL QAEDA INFLUENCE ON TERRORISM IN OTHER ARENAS**

Al Qaeda has invested significant efforts in uniting the various militant jihad movements under a single umbrella organization. This was meant to close ranks among the militant Islamic organizations that identify with the idea of global militant jihad so as to be better able to plan and coordinate their activities and promote their joint agenda. This unification trend is not new, with precedents in 1998 when the organization started to launch independent suicide bombings. That same year, al Qaeda launched the umbrella organization called the International Front for Jihad against the Crusaders and the Jews, and in June 2001, the formal unification between al Qaeda and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, commanded by Ayman Zawahari, was made public, and Qaedat al-Jihad was founded.

In recent years, al Qaeda has also established relationships with other umbrella organizations, in particular with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which includes operatives from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Mauritania, and of course al Qaeda in Mesopotamia (al Qaeda in Iraq), which includes Iraqi, Kurdish, and Jordanian operatives as well as volunteers from other Muslim countries. By virtue of these alliances, and through their ties with al Qaeda their reciprocal relationships, these organizations have upgraded their level of operational activity. This has expanded their scope of activity and the inclusion of strategic, political, and financial targets for attack, such as political leaders, energy targets, infrastructures and tourist areas, international and foreign military forces, with, of course, suicide bombing – al Qaeda’s trademark – as the preferred method.

While al Qaeda's activity in Iraq since the 2003 war is well known, its activity in the Islamic Maghreb has aroused growing interest in recent years because of the rise in volume and quality of operations. Its major, though not exclusive locus of activity has been Algeria. Since the organization announced in January 2007 the unification between it and al Qaeda, it has upgraded the level of its targets to the most senior echelon of the Algerian regime (the president and prime minister) and the country's institutions (the Supreme Court). Furthermore, it has extended its activity against foreign and UN targets. After the unification, the organization started to stage suicide attacks along the al Qaeda model. Al Qaeda had similar influence on the Moroccan branch of the umbrella organization, and it, too, has intensified its activity in recent years, with several attempts at suicide bombings against targets in the Moroccan regime and security establishment as well as activity against foreigners. Some were successfully executed and some were foiled. Additional terrorist activity was carried out by the umbrella organization in Tunisia (the hostage taking of Austrian tourists) and Mauritania (a shooting attack against the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott).

Another al Qaeda theater has been the Arabian Peninsula. In Saudi Arabia, authorities succeeded in foiling terrorist activities of the local branch of al Qaeda by arresting many members of the organization and by launching an aggressive counter-propaganda and re-education campaign within areas supporting al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Further south, the activity this year of the Islamic Jihad in Yemen (IJY) stood out in particular. Even though this organization is not under the direct command of al Qaeda, it did adopt al Qaeda's agenda, especially after 2007 when bin Laden's former secretary became its leader. Along with attacks against senior governmental targets in Yemen, the organization staged a dramatic suicide attack against the American embassy in Sana'a in September 2008, killing nineteen. In his annual security estimate, the head of the CIA noted that global militant jihad organizations are growing stronger in both Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Africa, too, is an important arena of activity for al Qaeda, and the organization, as it is wont to do, is nurturing its prior connections with local organizations and past operatives to help carry out attacks in Kenya, Tanzania, and Somalia. The breakdown of the central government in Somalia has encouraged the growth of local militant jihad organizations, some of which have carried out suicide bombings against institutional targets including the presidential palace, and foreign targets such as the Ethiopian embassy and UN offices in which twenty-eight people were killed, including a senior in the Somaliland (Somalia's northern provinces) government and UN personnel.

The Islamic Jihad in Uzbekistan (IJU) is another organization to whom al Qaeda has grown closer and that has accordingly refined its activity to match the agenda of global militant jihad. This organization broke away from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) because of internal differences as to whether to focus on the Islamic agenda in Uzbekistan or to dedicate itself to global Islamic activity, and in recent years has operated in the FATA region alongside Taliban and al Qaeda forces. Its operatives have participated in attacks in Uzbekistan, Germany, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. For example, the Afghanistan attack which occurred on March 3, 2008 in the Sabari district in the eastern Afghan province of Khost was committed by a German citizen of Turkish descent who carried out a suicide bombing against American soldiers. Also, a dramatic attack against American targets in Germany, including a military base and a club frequented by American soldiers, was foiled. The attack was supposed to be carried out by a terrorist network recruited, trained, and operated from afar by the organization. In Europe, security forces still view terrorist networks directed by al Qaeda and global militant jihadists as an acute threat, after the exposure in 2008 of a number of terrorist networks in Belgium, Spain, Germany, and Turkey.

### **3.4 AL QAEDA, GLOBAL MILITANT JIHAD AND ISRAEL**

#### **3.4.1 Loci of Threats Against Israel**

It is difficult to assess how the horrific photographs from Operation Cast Lead, Israel's 2008 – 09 Gaza incursion, together with the venomous anti-Israeli commentary broadcast via propaganda networks,

especially Arab and Muslim media, might affect the decision of al Qaeda leaders, some of whom also joined in these attacks, to translate this propaganda into action and try to extract revenge from Israelis and Jews. It is possible that al Qaeda or its affiliates might decide to take advantage of the anti-Israel atmosphere to attack targets identified with Israel as well as earn propaganda points sure to accrue from such actions, and in order to refute claims against them that they are doing nothing to assist the Palestinians other than provide verbal support. Kidnapping of Israelis by factions identified with global militant jihad, a threat that skyrocketed in the past year, continues to represent a steady threat because of militant jihadists' desire to demonstrate their willingness to assist the Palestinians and because of their understanding that such actions would touch a particularly sensitive nerve in Israeli society.

### **3.4.2 Al Qaeda Seeks to Encroach on Israel**

It seems that through its regional affiliates, al Qaeda has intensified its efforts to penetrate Israel's borders in order to inflict harm on Israeli citizens. It has also tried to attack Israelis visiting Arab countries that have diplomatic relations with Israel. A few years ago a number of attacks against Israeli tourists, attributed to global militant jihadists, were carried out in Jordan and Egypt, and especially in Sinai.

Previous rockets firings in the past from Jordan and Lebanon towards Israel should be seen in this context. Lebanon continues to be the arena for global militant jihadists involved in rocket attacks against Israel. In 2008 too, a number of rockets were fired towards northern Israel from Lebanon; the launches were attributed to the al-Ansar Divisions which identifies itself with the global militant jihad. Also during the IDF operation in the Gaza Strip (December 27, 2008 – January 17, 2009), a number of rockets were fired from southern Lebanon towards northern Israel while others were discovered before being launched. At this stage, it is not clear if the attackers were global militant jihadists, but the threat of continued rocket fire towards Israel remains. Interestingly, bin Laden, who views Lebanon as a convenient springboard to harm Israel, has violently condemned Hizbollah and Iran, calling them allies in a American-Israeli plot in planning the Second Lebanon War. The purpose of this war, according to bin Laden, was ostensibly to prevent al Qaeda and its affiliates from approaching Israel from Lebanon's southern border by means of the subsequent ceasefire agreement formulated in UN Security Council Resolution 1701. While his notion of a fourfold plot sounds surreal, it reflects his frustration with al Qaeda's affiliates' limitations in attacking Israel from Lebanon, and at the same time clearly expresses his intentions. Another arena for locals identified with the global militant jihad stream is the Gaza Strip, where there are a number of groups such as the Army of Islam (relying mostly on members of the Dughmouh clan), the Sword of Islam, and the Army of the Believers – al Qaeda in Palestine. These groups, whose size is unknown or estimated to consist of a few dozen operatives at most, engage in sporadic terrorist activity. In addition to firing Qassam rockets, these activities include kidnapping foreign citizens, burning schools, harassing internet cafés, and acting as morality police.

Al Qaeda's hope that Hamas' June 2007 takeover of the Gaza Strip would allow its own supporters more convenient access to engage in anti-Israel activity was not fulfilled. Because of its desire to be the sole ruler of the Gaza Strip, Hamas has prevented groups in the Strip identified with the global militant jihad to act against Israel autonomously and without its permission, out of concern that such a situation might embroil it with Israel at a disadvantageous time and place. Speaking to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, the head of Israeli intelligence said that while Hamas has enabled al Qaeda operatives from abroad to enter the Gaza Strip and has even allowed groups identified with it to shoot rockets towards Israel from time to time, whenever any of them has challenged its authority, Hamas has not hesitated to use brutal force to suppress the challenge, as happened with the Dughmouh clan.

In the past year, attempts to band together into cells to carry out attacks were exposed in the West Bank region and among Israeli Arabs of Bedouin descent identified with global militant jihad, but these were foiled in time. The difficulties al Qaeda has in operating against Israel across Israel's borders stems from the fact that Israel's neighbors, foremost Egypt and Jordan, who are also fighting the growing threat of

global militant jihad against their own regimes and within their sovereign territories, are acting decisively to stop al Qaeda activity and to protect their citizens and the tourists visiting their countries. Syria and Lebanon are, likewise, engaged aggressively in attempts to foil global militant jihadist intentions to operate against Israel within their own territory and areas they control, out of a concern of entering into confrontations with Israel. Even Hamas acts aggressively in the same spirit, and it seems that it will continue this policy in the future, unless circumstances radically change.

### **3.4.3 The Threat to Israel from Global Militant Jihadists from Across its Own Borders**

This threat is ongoing but is not expected to become more severe unless there are significant changes in Israel's relations with its neighbors, because of the mutual interest of Israel and its neighbors to avoid embroilments between them.

Egypt and Israel see eye-to-eye on the question of the danger posed by the strengthening of global militant jihadists in Egyptian territory and particularly in the Sinai region. Sinai is not well controlled by Egypt, and therefore the region is prone to trouble. Nonetheless, recently the region has become the focus of more attention on the part of the Egyptian security services and greater vigilance on the part of Israeli intelligence and security services, which repeatedly issue warnings to Israeli citizens to avoid visiting recreational sites in Sinai.

*Jordan* and Israel also share a common interest in preventing any global militant jihadist activity within the kingdom and from Jordan against Israel, and cooperate closely in order to foil any such eventuality.

In *Lebanon* there is a danger of escalation by global militant jihadists who have intensified their activities in both northern and southern Lebanon and who, from time to time, even launch rockets towards Israel. The ability of the Lebanese military to stop their activities will determine the level of threat that these represent for Israel. Paradoxically, Hizbollah shares Israel's interest in preventing the strengthening of global militant jihadists in Lebanon and having them engage in activity against Israel, especially if this is liable to lead to an armed conflict with Israel, which is not to Hizbollah's advantage.

*Syria*, too, does not allow global militant jihadists to operate against Israel from its territory, first because Syria does not allow any element to operate from within its borders against Israel lest this embroil Syria in a confrontation, and second because it views the militant jihadists as a threat to Syria's own regime. In the course of 2008, Islamists carried out a number of severe terrorist attacks against the Syrian regime. Nonetheless, the Syrian regime enabled global militant jihadists to use its territory as a passageway to the fighting in Iraq, and therefore particular alertness on Israel's part is required lest these elements attempt to operate against it, against Syria's wishes. Should political contacts between Syria and Israel progress over the next few years, it becomes virtually certain that these factions will launch attacks, hoping to provoke the sort of reaction from Israel that would completely destabilize talks with Syria.

Despite the hostility and violent clashes between Hamas and Israel, Hamas' primary interest is presumably in preventing independent activity against Israel on the part of al Qaeda and global militant jihadists operating in the Gaza Strip that is outside Hamas' own control. This interest outweighs Hamas' desire to harm Israel, and therefore, unless Hamas-Israel relations suffer a steep deterioration, global militant jihadist organization in the Gaza Strip, and certainly al Qaeda itself, will not be granted a free hand in operating against Israel from there.

### **3.4.4 The Threat of a Showcase Terrorist Attack on Israeli Territory**

Despite the limitations regarding the possibility of al Qaeda or its affiliates staging a dramatic attack on Israeli sovereign territory, it is clear that such an operation continues to represent a desirable goal on their

part. Their ability to realize such intentions depends largely on their ability to receive internal assistance, (e.g., from Israeli Arabs, Palestinians entering Israel as laborers or as illegal residents), or as has already happened in the past, through foreign citizens. To date Israel's security services have succeeded in foiling these intentions, but obviously there is clear and present danger. In recent years, the initiative to act against Israel has come primarily from local Palestinians, and their contacts were mainly in the junior ranks of global militant jihadists and not with al Qaeda itself. Should this relationship develop, especially with al Qaeda's mechanism dedicated to staging attacks abroad, the threat level will, of course, rise.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

#### **3.5.1 Loci of Global Threats**

From the vantage point of late 2008, it is clear that despite the ongoing efforts of the international coalition against terrorism to overcome al Qaeda and its affiliates, these are still far from conceding defeat and may be expected to be the primary threat in terms of international terrorist activity in the years to come. The main threat from terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda and its affiliates stems from their desire to affect the entire system of international relations and to undermine the current world order. To do so, they do not hesitate in carrying out mass terrorist attacks of a level unknown in the past against anyone opposed to their worldview and chosen path.

There are a number of critical threat areas with long-term significance from al Qaeda and their cohorts in the coming years.

#### **3.5.2 Intensified Activity in Uncontrolled Areas in Fragile States**

Al Qaeda and global militant jihadists are particularly active in places where there are Muslim populations and the central government lacks full control and effective enforcement capabilities. Al Qaeda takes advantage of this situation to foment trouble among the local populace and to recruit volunteers into their ranks. It thus appears that in the coming years the central arena of struggle of al Qaeda and its Taliban partners will likely be in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Al Qaeda is preparing for the intensification of the expected war against it and its Taliban associates on the part of NATO forces, the United States military, and Pakistani forces, as reflected in the declarations of senior American officials in the new administration and in the decision to send thousands more American soldiers into the region. Al Qaeda is also expected to contribute to the ongoing spate of suicide bombings in Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to undermine the stability of the ruling regimes of these countries.

#### **3.5.3 Activity to Undermine the Regimes of Central Muslim States, Primarily Pakistan – A Nuclear Weapons State**

A primary threat coming from al Qaeda and its affiliates in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the border area is that the security situation in Pakistan and its surroundings may deteriorate and ultimately result in the rise to power of radical Islamic elements instead of the current president, Zardari. Such a scenario is liable to allow radical elements access to the country's arsenal of nuclear weapons.

#### **3.5.4 Absorbing New Cadres and Sending Them to the West**

Al Qaeda can be expected to assimilate into its ranks new volunteers from all over the world, and in particular fighters who are veterans of the war in Iraq in order to insert them into areas of conflict involving Muslims. At the same time, it will likely train the most suitable new recruits to operate under the cover of their foreign citizenships, European or other, to carry out terrorist attacks abroad, whether under the command of al Qaeda's dedicated terrorist mechanism abroad or as part of independent global militant jihad terrorist networks.

### **3.5.5 Efforts to Carry Out Showcase, Mass-Casualty Attacks in a Western Country**

An attack on that order of magnitude would again place al Qaeda on the map of international terrorism and serve as model for its affiliates. Al Qaeda's success in carrying out a dramatic large scale terrorist attack in the near future is largely dependent on its ability to rehabilitate its special division for terrorist attacks abroad. This group was heavily damaged in recent years by the assassinations and arrests of many of its senior commanders and most experienced veteran operatives. It would seem that al Qaeda is not going to relinquish the notion of staging such attacks, despite the constraints and pressures applied to it, in order to continue fulfilling its vanguard role. It largely depends on the creation of the suitable operational conditions in one of the arenas where the organization is active. In its annual security estimate, the CIA estimated that al Qaeda was preparing for a dramatic, spectacular attack.

### **3.5.6 Continued Efforts to Undermine the Stability of the "Heretical" Regimes in Middle Eastern Countries to Replace Them with Muslim Regimes Ruled by Islamic Law**

On the basis of the "Zawahiri doctrine", al Qaeda is expected to continue assisting terrorist acts of global militant jihadists against the leaders of regimes and central government institutions in the Middle East as well as Africa in order to replace them with regimes that uphold Islamic ritual law. Attaining the rule of one or more primary Muslim countries in order to establish an Islamic regime is one of the cornerstones of Zawahiri's philosophy expressed in his book, *Knights Serving Under the Flag of the Prophet*. Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and North African countries have all been potential candidates.

Al Qaeda and its Salafi-jihadist militant affiliates will, in the foreseeable future, continue to present multiple threats, on multiple fronts, to the west, its allies, and to prospects of a more moderate global order. Of all the threats they present, none is more pressing for most nations in the world, and for members of all religions numbered among AQ's multiplying enemies, than terrorism that could inflict a catastrophe on the human race: unconventional, and, especially, nuclear terrorism. AQ and its affiliates, then, must be met with a general mobilization of forces that are determined to curb and defeat it. Victory in this struggle it is more important to the world's safety today than ever in the past.