

Chapter 6 – READING THEIR LIPS: THE CREDIBILITY OF MILITANT JIHADI WEB SITES AS ‘SOFT POWER’ IN THE WAR OF THE MINDS

Reuven Paz

Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center
The Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM)
ISRAEL

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years the term ‘Soft Power’ has been widely used in relation to the war of minds within the global war against global [militant jihadi] terrorism. Soft Power is the ability to achieve your goals by attracting and persuading others to adopt them. It differs from ‘hard power’ – the ability to use economic and military steps and might to impose your will. Both hard and soft power are important in the war against terrorism, but attraction is much cheaper than coercion, and an asset that needs to be nurtured and exercised. Attraction, by both sides, depends on credibility. However, contrary to the use of soft power in the context of the war against the militant jihadis, few scholars deal with the other side – the goals and credibility of the soft power of the jihadi militants. Most security services, intelligence communities, and most other experts, tend to occupy themselves with the militant jihadi hard power – terrorism.

The credibility of information obtained from open sources has always been an issue for intelligence and security communities. Intelligence communities – some of which served totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany or Stalinist Soviet Union – were often known as ‘masters of disinformation.’ Western intelligence communities and security services have not always granted much more credibility to open sources than the KGB and its former Eastern block sister services. Not only were Western agencies well aware of the complicated relations between intelligence and the media, but they frequently utilized the media for psychological warfare. Hence they, too, were suspicious of the credibility of open sources, as well as of the tricky process of distinguishing between information and disinformation.

6.2 MILITANT JIHADI SOFT POWER

The culture of militant global jihad is a young phenomenon in the Islamic world, which thus far is advocated only by a small minority of Muslim groups, movements, scholars, and individual sympathizers. However, various factors have widened the rank and file of supporters and sympathizers of this culture. These include the extensive use of terrorist tactics, primarily suicide-martyrdom operations; the insurgency in Iraq; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; growing anti-American and anti-Western sentiment; social and economic frustrations among Muslims; and growing multi-national integration between Muslim communities in the West or in regions of conflict in the Muslim world. Global militant jihad is deeply rooted in interpretations of the earliest sources of Islam and Islamic history, and adheres to the strictest doctrines of Salafist scholars; it is primarily a doctrinal development that requires legitimacy on the part of clerics and scholars, in the form of interpretations, rulings, and preaching. It embodies the Islamists’ struggle to revive the Islamic civilization through global united solidarity and brotherhood on the one hand, and the demonization of whomever the current version of the “eternal enemy” is, on the other. Most importantly, however, this process takes place publicly. Since we deal with movements and groups that are persecuted everywhere, and since they have no access to formal media, the Internet is their only alternative, and they use it in the most efficient way they can.

In the past decade the “global war on terrorism” and the exceedingly easy access to Islamic and Islamist media through the Internet, have produced a synergy that has affected the attitude towards open sources of

information. The highly intensive and efficient use of the Internet by Islamic movements and groups in general, and the wide scope of Islamist terrorist groups in particular, provide us with an extremely wide range of information, information that also affects intelligence communities. In addition, the Western media relies on information from the militant jihadi web sites as well, and thus provides them with an enormous exposure. Yet it seems that Western intelligence and security services have still a long way to go before they can fully rely on the information available in militant jihadi web sites. Two main obstacles stand in their way of exploiting the information available on these web sites:

- First, the global militant jihadi phenomenon is relatively new and unfamiliar to many Western analysts. The number of Western analysts who can fully understand this phenomenon is still quite small, even though there are many so-called “experts” on terrorism. Furthermore, it is a very dynamic phenomenon and controversial even among the various militant jihadi groups themselves. It is admittedly very difficult to understand the differences, disputes, argumentations, and mindset of the militant jihadis in all their complexities. The modern militant jihad movement is an “ideological umbrella” than to a homogeneous movement, which makes swimming in this deep ocean a challenging task. The dynamic nature of the militant jihadi phenomenon is also a function of the militant jihadists’ “relationship” with the “enemy” – whose definition is flexible – and a response to its “aggressive nature”, especially since 2001. In the eyes of most of the militant jihadis, theirs is a struggle within an asymmetric war of self-defence.
- Secondly, despite its global nature and aspirations, the militant jihadi phenomenon developed within the Arab world and is being exported to the larger Muslim world. The militant jihad is, therefore, almost entirely conducted in Arabic, and its content is intimately tied to the socio-political context of the Arab world. The American and Western occupation of Iraq and the militant jihadi insurgency that followed increase the importance of the Arab element in this phenomenon. Likewise, most of the supporters of global militant jihad groups involved in various forms of terrorism among Muslim communities in the West are Arabs or of Arab origin. Most Western intelligence and security analysts are still unable to read the information in the original Arabic language, and lack the knowledge, insights, and tools required to analyze Islamist radical groups and their mindset.

6.3 MILITANT JIHADI USE OF THE INTERNET: THE OPEN UNIVERSITY FOR MILITANT JIHADI STUDIES

There are several main reasons why militant jihadi movements, groups, clerics, and scholars, turned the Internet into their main, and sometimes only, soft power vehicle for propaganda, indoctrination, publicity, and teaching of their messages. Besides the known advantages of this medium of communication, several additional factors should be noted:

- Most Arab and Muslim countries face jihadist extremist opposition groups that are oppressed and persecuted, rendering the Internet their only alternative to spread their messages. Most extremist citizens or groups are prevented from freely publishing books and newspapers, or from giving open lectures. Moreover, in most Arab and Muslim countries these elements have no access to the traditional means of Islamic religious indoctrination, such as mosques, Friday sermons, religious universities and colleges, or religious ceremonies.
- The nature of militant jihadist ideology and doctrines, as well as a core militant jihadi mission is to create a transnational global solidarity and brotherhood within the entire Muslim nation (*Ummah*). To that end, the Internet is currently the best means to promote this goal cheaply and rapidly, while reaching the broadest possible audience. The Internet is the best means available to these groups to create and consolidate a spectrum of doctrines, new interpretations, and a multitude of new groups, but also to create an image of a large volume of activity. In addition, the Internet is intensively surfed and read by the global media. Every militant jihadi event or message is instantly exposed to the world, circulated by news agencies, and cited in Muslim countries whose populations may not read Arabic.

- The past decade has witnessed a rise in the significance and weight given to this medium in the eyes of militant jihadis, due to a number of highly important events, including the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent “global war on terrorism”; the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and militant jihadi terrorist operations all over the globe. These events reinforce the image of a global clash of religions and civilizations; the sense among large segments of the Muslim public that they face “a war against Islam” disguised under the cover of fighting global terrorism; and the rise of militant jihadi terrorism as a global strategic factor in the West. The dynamic of the mutual relationship between the militant jihadi groups that use the Internet and the global media is growing.
- The first strategic priority the global militant jihadi doctrines is to target the Arab and Muslim youth – the largest, most educated – and, in terms of the Internet – most connected segment of Muslim societies. Besides, the use of the Internet for various goals and the access to it in many Arab and Muslim countries are growing rapidly, alongside growing developments in education for many of these audiences, including females.
- These groups are, above all, targeting their own societies and not Western regimes and their citizens. The Internet may be used to intimidate the Western public, given their wide exposure to the global media and the huge effect that exposure has upon the sense of security in the West. Militant jihadis know that the widely circulated video clips of beheaded and executed foreigners and Muslims in Iraq, Pakistan, or Afghanistan terrorize Western audiences. Even so, the main reason why militant jihadis circulate these clips, photos, audio material, books, articles, or military manuals, is to **indoctrinate** their own Arab and Muslim audiences; plant feelings of pride, a sense of belonging, and a new identity in their minds; and recruit their support. The Internet provides, by far, the best means to achieve the desired goal of virtual **nation-building** of the Muslim nation – *Ummah* – an aspiration anchored in the doctrines of the militant jihadi-Salafi currents. In other words, the Internet is the global Open University for Militant Jihad Studies.

One of the documents of indoctrination published in 2003, and recently re-circulated by the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) talks about the nature of the university of global militant jihad. The author, using the pseudonym Ahmad al-Wathiq bi-Allah, then deputy director of GIMF, presents al Qaeda as an “organization, state, and university”: “Since the operation of USS Cole [November 2000] and the glorious events of Manhattan [September 2001] until the present events of this blessed month, [Ramadan 2005] hundreds of Muslims from all over the world join this global militant jihadi university, in which they study all the studies of the jihad, its rules and disciplines ... This is a non-central university, with no geographic borders, which has its presence everywhere and each person zealous for his religion and nation can join it ... This university has its own presidency, whose role is to incite, guide, indoctrinate, and encourage the awareness of the Mujahidin. Its presidency is the leadership of the Mujahidin headed by Osama bin Laden ... The university includes several faculties, among them electronic militant jihad, martyrdom, and the technology of side bombs and car bombs.”

The article bears propagandist overtones, but it clearly summarizes the indoctrinative nature of global militant jihad, and thus, the center of gravity of this phenomenon, i.e., the Muslim audience. If this is the main audience then there is almost no room for disinformation. An intensive reading of these web sites, and especially of the most radical 15 – 25 militant jihadi forums and dozens of message groups, reveals a highly serious approach and attitude of their participants, i.e., those who are targeted by this global indoctrination. In some Muslim communities in the West, but especially in the Arab world, we can assess the growing role of this indoctrination in the increasing willingness to support, justify, and volunteer to join militant jihadi terrorist groups. Since 2001, these militant jihadi web sites have gradually replaced the institution of the madrassa as a tool for the recruitment of the first generation of militant jihadis in the 1980 – 90s. The Internet, in fact, has become **one global madrassa**.

Another example of a publication by GIMF – an analysis of the global strategy of al Qaeda – is even more lucid. Under the title “Al-Qaeda’s War is Economic not Military”, the author, a Saudi scholar and supporter of global militant jihad, analyzes the significant role that indoctrination plays in the global movement:

“We should direct some of these efforts to other targets that could serve another goal, namely to promote the glory of the Muslims, especially among the youth, who are swimming in the oceans of pleasures and lust. Those youth are in fact unused petrol, while many efforts are dedicated to confront those clerics who are selling their minds to the dictatorships, and who are useless too. These moral attacks would have a tremendous impact on the souls of the defeated youth.

Many idle youth were motivated to join the [militant] jihad by photos or videos such as of the USS Cole, or Badr al-Riyadh, or by watching the crash of the planes into the high buildings of Manhattan. Those youth, even though they were not fully aware of the impact of the attacks upon them, turned their minds and bodies towards the [militant] jihad. Here comes the role of indoctrination and developing the thinking of these people. It is a mistake to leave these youth with their superficial understanding of the nature of the war.

Whoever listens to the calls of Osama bin Laden senses in his words his care for the indoctrination of the supporters of the [militant] jihadi current, like for example in the Gulf States, in order to target the oil fields. Bin Laden could direct the Mujahidin through personal secret messages. However, he wanted the indoctrination to be public, in order that the crowds of people, who wait for his speeches through the TV channels or the Internet, would internalize his targets and follow them. If these messages would be clandestine and then the oil fields would be attacked, the masses of sympathizers might not approve it and might even turn to the opposite side and withdraw their support. Public statements by the Sheikh or the many videos of the Mujahidin can avoid such a negative impact of such an attack.”

The huge number of new interpretations, doctrines, and debates with other Islamic Sunni groups or scholars – Salafis, Brotherhood, Wahhabi reformists, and others, innovations in the terrorist *modi operandi*, and their widespread public presence on the Internet, brought about two contradictory developments. The first was a tendency for militant jihadis – scholars or laymen supporters – to view the swell of opinions and intellectual dialogue as a current or movement in the process of consolidation, with the unifying goal, doctrines, and means of Tawhid. The other represented the emergence of a growing number of internal debates emerging either against a background of intensive, controversial terrorist/Jihadi activity, or as the result of external pressures by Islamic establishments and institutions, governments, or parts of Muslim societies.

Since September 11th, 2001, this contradiction has been present in the public opinion of many a Muslim public, and even government. On the one hand there was a growing anti-American sentiment, which emerged as a result of events in Iraq. It led to the support of many Islamic scholars, Arab officials, and a majority of the Muslim public for the jihad in Iraq. This was in addition to negative sentiment related to Israel and Palestine, which was a traditional axiom. On the other hand many innocent elements of Arab and Muslim populations suffered from indiscriminate terrorism on the part of some militant jihadis, which received total legitimacy from most of the militant jihadi-Salafi scholars.

The emergence of the Internet as “the open university for militant jihad studies”, with dozens of thousands of students, inflamed two significant processes:

- The emergence of a militant jihadi community with growing signs of solidarity and brotherhood. This community was extensively encouraged to take part in the debates, as the “virtual jihad” became a legitimate branch of the “militant jihadi war for minds”.
- The emergence of a set of militant jihadi “Internet scholars” whose main target was to indoctrinate the militant jihadi-Salafis, direct them, and consolidate the militant jihadi current.

Both groups of scholars and “students” developed a strong belief in an apocalyptic future, which effectively “hotwires” the militant jihadi-Salafi arena. This continuously stokes expectations of the defeat of the United

States in Iraq; the fall of the U.S. as an empire in the same fashion as the Afghan defeat of the Soviet Union and contribution to its subsequent fall; support for new spectacular terrorist attacks on American soil; terrorist attacks in Europe against countries that take part in the fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, support Israel, or are supposedly “oppressing” the Muslim communities in Europe by imposing new laws (the veil, immigration, limiting civil rights in the name of the “war against terrorism”, outlawing Muslim charities, or by publishing anti-Muslim cartoons); the use of WMD; the collapse of Arab and Muslim apostate governments; the establishment of Shari’ah-ruled Islamic states, and so on and so forth. Through this hotwiring of the sense of an apocalypse, and the growth in the number of militant jihadi groups, scholars, supporters and sympathizers, self-radicalized youth, and laymen whose knowledge of Islam is poor, the arena is broadened and inflamed with debates, competitions, and an appeal to basic desires.

In the past years, the development of a growing number of topics under public debate within the militant jihadi-Salafi current has been prominent. During 2007, one of the most significant controversial topics among Jihadi-Salafi scholars and groups has been the existence of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), the state declared in the al-Anbar area controlled by al Qaeda and its affiliates. Another ongoing debate is over the killing of Muslims in general, and innocent ones in particular. The phenomenon of debates over “sacred and untouchable topics” including serious militant jihadi-Salafi scholars started about two years ago. The latter likely exploited the fact that the killing of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in June 2006 created a new situation in Iraq, which is still the most significant model of militant jihadi struggle. Zarqawi became a model-myth that paved the way to the establishment of the ISI. However, the absence of his authoritarian personality from the scene opened the door to increasing criticism over some of his violent doctrines and further inner debates.

Of note here is the diversity of the origins of the militant jihadi-Salafi current, the flexibility of its development, and the transition from a very marginal Islamic trend to the frontline of the face of Islam, primarily in the Western societies. Many in the West now view Islam as a religion whose ideology is supposed to be moderate and peaceful, but which in fact is moving towards the most extremist and violent end of the spectrum, making a clash inevitable.

6.4 THE DOCTRINAL SOURCES OF MILITANT JIHADI-SALAFISM

The doctrinal sources require a separate presentation. Nevertheless, their diversity is part of the issue at stake. They include three different branches, whose connection to classical, pure, political, or reformist Salafism can be scrutinized:

Egypt, through the more extremist parts of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood – mainly Sayyid Qutb and Abd al-Qader bin Abd al-Aziz (a.k.a. Dr. Fadl), Egyptian exiles in Saudi Arabia – and the self radicalized fathers of the Egyptian Jihad and Gama`at Islamiyyah – the Palestinian Saleh Sariyyah, the Engineers Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj and Shukri Ibrahim, and in a later period the physician Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Saudi Arabia, through its modern Wahhabi Tawhid led by the prominent Sheikh Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz and a huge class of his disciples, created among other issues, the “Movement of Awakening” (*Harakat al-Sahwah*), led by the two “twin” Sheikh Salman al-Awdah and Safar al-Hawali. During the 1990s, they were legitimized by two other classes of Neo-Wahhabi scholars. Some were older clerics, such as Muhammad bin `Uthaymin, Abd al-Aziz bin Jarbou`, or Saleh al-Fawzan; and younger ones, who in part participated in the Jihad in Afghanistan, such as Ahmad al-Khaledi, Naser al-Fahd, Yousef al-Uyeri, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, Abu Jandal al-Azdi, and many others.

Palestine, led by the “Palestinian Trio” of Abdallah Azzam, Omar Abu Omar ‘Abu Qutadah’ and, above all, Issam al-Burqawi ‘Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’. The latter is the spiritual father of the fusion between the Wahhabi Tawhid and the violent Takfiri Jihad. This branch consists primarily of Jordanian-Palestinians, such as Abu Omar Seyf or Abu Anas al-Shami, whose role has been

significant in both Chechnya and Iraq. They were an inspiration to a new generation of militant jihadi clerics who graduated from Saudi Islamic universities.

The most important element of this militant jihadi “texture” of principles and doctrines is that they lost any sign or traces of the original reformist Salafism. They turned the militant jihad into a dynamic that claims to purify the Muslim society through the actions of a small elitist fighting group and by claiming to attempt to follow the exact steps of the Prophet and his companions – the “Pious Generation” (*Al-Salaf al-Saleh*). Being a militant jihadi-Salafi means, above all, creating the “best” approximation of the first ideal generation of Muslims, primarily in the militant dimension. However, this created another greenhouse of militant jihadi doctrines – the principle of *Takfir* (ex-communication) of every infidel whatsoever, but also of every Muslim who does not follow the militant jihadi-Salafi doctrines. There is a kind of a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary touch to it all, with the signs of the destruction of the “old society”, while building the new type of Muslims and Muslim society. It very much has the flavor of “New Soviet Society”, and “Soviet Man”. Such a society is bound to remain in a permanent state of war with a diverse group of enemies. These enemies are an ever growing list of “others”, all of whom do not approve of the present-day militant jihadi doctrines. This takfiri element comes primarily from the teachings of Abdallah Azzam, but also from the original Wahhabi zealotry, which dominates the Saudi sources of militant jihadi-Salafism and many of the militant jihadi scholars and terrorists.

The apostasy of the rest of the Muslim society, in militant jihadi eyes, created a situation in which, in the short time between 1995 and 2005, the definition of the “enemy” of Islam and the “true believers” was widened to include even the vast majority of the Muslim society. Doctrines used to develop some of the ideas of militant jihadi-Salafism, such as the social justice of Sayyid Qutb, were neglected in favor of the “magic touch” of violent jihad. The Takfiri element of the militant jihadi-Salafis is the primary source of diversity and controversy between those who support the search for unity/Tawhid and those who support the purification of society from apostate elements, even by killing innocent Muslims, or Shi’is, Sufis, Yazidis, or Sunni Muslims whose sole sin is being employed by companies that provide services to Americans in Iraq or the Iraqi and Afghan governments.

During 2005 – 2006, there were several instances of harsh criticism of Zarqawi himself, his anti-Shi`ah policy, and his violent and extremist *Takfir*. Some of this criticism came from leading scholars of al Qaeda and global militant jihad, such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Basir al-Tartousi in London, and Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi, Zarqawi’s mentor in Jordan. In the case of the latter (currently imprisoned) individual, the criticism was made in public. However, Zarqawi and his followers in Iraq enjoyed such prestige and popularity as to receive full support in militant jihadi forums, based on the principle that “the Mujahidin in the field know best how they should act”. It was almost like the Islamic principle of “*Allahu A`lam*” – Allah knows best – and in this case – “the Mujahidin know best”. The so-called but respected “Saloon scholars”, were asked politely to keep silent and respect the wishes and strategy of the fighters in the field. The killing of Zarqawi in June 2006 did not change the strategy of al Qaeda in Iraq substantially, especially in terms of anti-Shi`ah actions, the terrible violence against civilians, and the continued espousing of the principle of *Takfir*.

However, despite the success of Zarqawi’s violent anti-Shi`ah policy and operations and its ongoing application by his successors, there appears to be a decline in the religious position, prestige, and legitimacy of this policy. The shift from “Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers” to the “Islamic State in Iraq” in October 2006 increased the anonymity of the present leadership of the Iraqi al Qaeda on the one hand, and the independence of other militant jihadi insurgent groups, on the other. Zarqawi’s successor “Abu Hamza al-Muhajir” is in fact totally anonymous, the same as the “Imam” of the ISI, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. His prestige, if at all, comes from his so-called Qurayshi-Hashemite origin. The other prominent “Amir al-Mu`minin” – Mulla Omar in Afghanistan – is not regarded as a serious religious cleric or scholar, despite his success or that of his commanders since early 2006 in leading the Taliban and supporters of al Qaeda into a growing insurgency in Afghanistan, using the same *modus*

operandi as the Iraqi al Qaeda. For the vast majority of supporters of global militant jihad on the net, Mullah Omar is more a symbol of the sense of the militant jihadi apocalypse, similar to Osama bin Laden, who still owes his loyalty to Omar.

In the absence of dominant personalities such as Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, and due to the anonymity of his successors who refrain from any public appearances, some of the other militant jihadi or Islamic groups of the Sunni insurgency allowed criticism of al Qaeda or even entering into clashes with its members, which were followed by retaliatory violent attacks by al Qaeda. The position of al Qaeda as the leading force of the militant jihadi insurgency has been challenged and the attempt to impose the ISI upon all Iraqi Sunni militant jihadis, has, thus far, failed.

The absence of dominant scholars such as the late Saudi Yousef al-Uyeri, the Jordanian Abu Omar Seyf, or the Saudi Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, who are all dead, and the Saudi Abu Jandal al-Azdi, the Jordanian/Palestinian Abu Qutada, and the Jordanian/Palestinian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi, who are or were for a long time imprisoned, created a big vacuum. This vacuum opens the door for increasing public criticism and debates within the militant jihadi-Salafists on the one hand, as well as making them more vulnerable to outside criticism and attacks by Saudi Salafists and affiliated scholars, on the other.

6.5 TOWARDS MILITANT JIHADI-SALAFI PLURALISM?

These debates and criticism find fertile ground in the virtual jihad on the net. It should be noted that supervisors of the various militant jihadi forums do nothing to block or hide them, allowing the development of a sense of greater **pluralism** among the community of the E-Jihad and a kind of “**virtual democracy**” within this growing community. This sense of pluralism also enables the emergence of “semi-parties” of pro- and anti- positions on very significant issues crucial for the militant jihadi global arena: the ISI, Sunni-Shi`ah conflict, Iran, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, Sheikh Yousef al-Qaradawi, suicide bombings outside of Iraq or against civilian Muslims, Saudi Arabia, extremist *Takfir*, other trends of Salafism, and the authority of Islamist scholars, including militant jihadi-Salafi ones.

It is hard to say if there is a direct hand behind this “pluralism” – is it a result of the growing use of the Internet, or of the “competition” between different militant jihadi forums, which want to serve as greenhouses for broad platforms for militant jihadi ideas?. In some cases it might also be the result of confusion and a lack of a clear position on the part of the web supervisors themselves. From a few cases of supervisors and webmasters who were arrested – such as the Moroccan Younis al-Tsouli in London (Irhabi 007), or the Tunisian Mohamed Ben El Hadi Messahel (Tunisian Admirer of the two sheikhs – *Muhibb al-Shaykhayn al-Tunisi*, who was sentenced in March 2007 in Morocco to 12 years in prison for a terrorist plot) – we can see that their religious knowledge was poor. They were mainly devoted to the cause, self-radicalized, and proud to be militant jihadis, but had a poor understanding of militant jihadi doctrines. However, Saudi webmasters such as the late Yousef al-Uyeri or the one referred to as “*Al-Muhtasib*”, who was recently released from a two year prison term in Saudi Arabia, were serious Islamic scholars, even though they had no formal Islamic education. It is difficult to say if this phenomenon is harmful for the Mujahidin in the long-run, or not.

Furthermore, from reading between the lines of some posts in militant jihadi forums, we can come to the conclusion that many of these supervisors know each other, if not in person, at least through email links. We can view personal comments or greetings that demonstrate a level of familiarity, beyond mere affiliation, brotherhood or solidarity. Hence, it appears there could be a guiding hand behind the policy of pluralism. It is obvious that, at least in the field of publishing statements, declarations, video and audiotapes, and other material of a propagandistic nature, a well-organized order has emerged, manifesting an absence of competition or rivalry, but rather respect for each other, and cooperation under the leadership of the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). This order might also be a result of the fact that

there is a growing awareness of the importance of this mission in the militant jihadi “war of the minds”, and its recognized legitimacy as an integral part of militant jihad.

It seems that effective and easy use of the E-Jihad helps in creating a kind of “militant jihadi virtual state” that is open to a pluralistic views and positions within the joint militant jihadi mission of *Tawhid*.

6.6 INTERNET MILITANT JIHADI SCHOLARS

Against the above-mentioned background, there is also the evolving phenomenon of “Internet militant jihadi scholars” who appear by their real names or pseudonyms, but gain a growing respect from their virtual audience. This is also a new phenomenon which seems to exert more influence upon the “laymen” supporters of global militant jihad.

As mentioned above, the E-Jihad, or the ever-so widespread use of the Internet by militant jihadis and their sympathizers, seems to create a process of pluralism, which results in an increasing number of topics being debated, even those of a “sacred cow” nature, within a framework that is seeking maximal doctrinal unity. However, this pluralism has so far remained “within the family”, and has not been causing splits or gaps in the ideological umbrella of the militant jihadi-Salafi current. This may well go on for as long as the fight looks promising and successful, driven by the characteristic sense of the apocalypse.

6.7 CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, global militant jihad must use open indoctrination in order to sustain and broaden its audience in general, especially for its younger generations. Open indoctrination is incompatible with disinformation. Therefore, even though we should be selective and careful in our selection of which information on militant jihadi web sites we follow, once we have established the authenticity of a militant jihadi web site, we can be reasonably certain that the words we read “from their lips” are credible. Such an authenticity may be established by information provided by material from arrested webmasters or the content and details of debates over these sites. The militant jihadist instigators cannot allow themselves to mislead the “Solid Base” – *Al-Qaeda al-Sulbah* – the base of the future pioneering militant jihadi generations. Furthermore, we should understand the role in the militant jihad played by the present ideological umbrella. This role is not merely one of terrorism but, and perhaps more importantly so, as a crucial pillar in building the current solidarity among Arabs and Muslims, as well as in the nation-building process of the future Muslim Caliphate. In April 1988, Dr. Abdallah Azzam, the spiritual father of modern global militant jihad, wrote so very clearly in the article in which he established the idea of al Qaeda (*Al-Qa'idah al-Sulbah*):

“The Islamic society cannot be established without an Islamic movement that undergoes the fire of tests. Its members need to mature in the fire of trials. This movement will represent the spark that ignites the potential of the nation. It will carry out a long Jihad in which the Islamic movement will provide the leadership, and the spiritual guidance. The long Jihad will bring people’s qualities to the fore and highlight their potentials. It will define their positions and have their leaders assume their roles, to direct the march and channel it ...

Possession of arms by the group of believers before having undergone this long educating training and indoctrination – *Tarbiyyah* – is forbidden, because those carrying arms could turn into bandits that might threaten people’s security and do not let them live in peace.”

Militant jihadi terrorism in Muslim lands and against Muslims is one of the “Achilles heels” of al Qaeda and global militant jihad and a good reason for criticism, sometimes by militant jihadi scholars. Since the bombings in London and Amman in 2005 and due to the murderous attacks against Shi’i civilians in Iraq, there is growing debate and criticism between two schools within al Qaeda or global militant jihad.

These two schools are centered around, on one hand older scholars such as Abu Basir al-Tartousi and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi, and on the other hand the group of Saudi militant jihadi-Salafi scholars, who fully support what we may call the “Zarqawi doctrine” – the indiscriminate violence against everyone who does not support the militant jihadi-Salafi ideas. The “Zarqawi doctrine” is quite similar to the Algerian Takfir of the 1990s; hence, the debate between Al-Omar and Al-Libi on the Algerian background is significant. It is also important since Iran and the Shi’a were “upgraded” to the status of “top enemies” by the successors of Zarqawi in Iraq who are backed by Arabian militant jihadi-Salafi scholars, such as the Kuwaiti Hamed al-Ali and several “Internet scholars” such the present ideologue of al Qaeda, Abu Yahya al-Libi.

The question of what the position is of the old central leadership of “mainstream al Qaeda”, especially Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the “Amir” of the Islamic State in Iraq, who is anonymous to the militant jihadi audience, seems so far to follow the “Zarqawi doctrine”. On 8 July 2007, in his last videotaped speech on the militant jihadi Internet, he even threatened the Iranian government – the “Persian dogs” as he called them – and gave Iran an ultimatum of two months to withdraw its support from the Iraqi Shi’is, and “to stop interfering directly and indirectly in the affairs of the Iraqi State of Islam”. His call was aimed at “all Sunnis, and the Salafi-militant jihadist youths in particular in all parts of the world, to get ready for this war and make the preparations for it. I ask you not to spare any effort once our instructions are given to you.” Abu Omar was talking as a self-appointed “Amir” of an entire Islamic Caliphate in all parts of the Muslim world, not just the Islamic state in Iraq. This was the first time that such pretentiousness was manifested by a leader recognized by al Qaeda, and raises another question as to the control of “mainstream al Qaeda” over the militant jihadi insurgency in Iraq, or in other regions such as the Maghreb, Lebanon, or Somalia.

Al-Baghdadi has recently diverged from past speeches about the Iraqi Shi’as, trying to distinguish between the Shi’a leadership and the public. In the meantime, we are witnessing a growing use of indiscriminate suicide bombings and attacks against Muslims in other parts of the Muslim world, in Algeria, Somalia, Pakistan, and most recently in Libya. Algeria has traditionally been a model for Arab movements, both nationalist and Islamist, and several of the leading militant jihadi-Salafi scholars (Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, Abu Qutadah al-Filastini, Abu Basir al-Tartousi) were deeply involved with its militant jihadi groups and their internal conflicts and debates. It seems that, out of all the militant jihadi insurgencies and terrorism, Algeria is still held as a model, and supporters of al Qaeda proudly point to the renewed militant jihad there as a great achievement. On 8 August 2007, a member of a militant jihadi forum posted a statement issued by the al Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, in which the group claimed responsibility for attacking a patrol of the Algerian police in northeast Algeria. A 13-minute and 27-second video, which is part of the “Under the Shadow of the Swords” series, was provided and showed the attackers without masks, as well as the terrain, the equipment used, and the equipment gained. One of the striking things about this video was the self-confidence shown by the Algerian group. The Algerian model is also important when viewed against the background of the recent failure of al Qaeda and global militant jihad to find a model similar to Algeria and gain a foothold in Palestine. Hamas is not only a “thorn” in the face of al Qaeda’s ambitions, but is also criticized a lot by al Qaeda’s scholars for many of its “sins”. One of the harshest critics was Abu Yahya al-Libi himself, in a long videotape in April 2007.

In the past two years, Abu Yahya al-Libi has played a significant role not only in defending and promoting the positions of al Qaeda and global militant jihad, but also as one of the “theologians” of global militant jihad responding to attacks by opposing Muslim clerics. The fact that he belongs to the first generation of al Qaeda members grants him more influence with the supporters of global militant jihad, especially through the Internet. In the two years since his escape from prison, he joined the ranks of the militant jihadi-Salafi scholars that advocate the “Total Jihad” – the focus on permanent violent jihad in every region of conflict between Muslims and “infidels”. The extent of his formal Islamic education is not at all clear. Nevertheless, his readers on the Internet do not pay attention to his academic credentials, but only at the bottom line of his conclusions – the legitimacy for the “total Takfiri Militant Jihad”, where the rules of engagement permit any action that promotes the militant jihadi target, or “catch as much as you can and do not miss any opportunity to fight”.

However, it should be noted that for those who try to understand the mindset of the militant jihadi scholars through their indoctrination over the Internet, Abu Yahya al-Libi and his colleagues make it an easier task than the ambivalent and double-language writings of their scholar counterparts, especially the Saudis. The role of the “Internet scholars”, either well-known ones who appear by their real names, or those who hide in militant jihadi forums behind pseudonyms, is to back and legitimize the extreme positions which their audience wants to hear. Such writings are an integral part of what has recently become a legitimate branch of militant jihad – the militant jihadi propaganda underpinning a sense of identity and belonging to a growing number of “students” in the Open University for Militant Jihad Studies. Zealot scholars like Al-Libi, model topics like Algeria, or numerous videotapes from Iraq or elsewhere, are part of a system that hotwires the imagination of radicalized youth, who can join militant jihad from home. They are no longer regarded as dodgers from jihad or *Mutaqa`idin*, the term first coined by Sayyid Qutb for those who do not join the military jihad. The “total jihad” of al-Libi, including that in Muslim countries and against Muslim “apostates”, enables them to channel their emotions of frustration, personal or social stress, hatred, and fears, into a legitimate jihad, religiously approved by real or false scholars.

The long-term jihad, which the West – and indeed much of the world – is currently facing, uses the Internet to provide both militant jihadists and the rest of the world a wide spectrum of diversified information. Western intelligence and security analysts can learn a great deal about modern militant jihad by reading the lips of jihadi clerics, scholars, operatives, commanders, leaders, as well as the response of their growing audience. Improving their ability to do so, and above all in the original language, must be a priority.