



Core Al-Qaida in 2008: A Review

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Ronald Sandee
Director of Analysis and Research
The NEFA Foundation



[Over the past decade, Ron Sandee held a variety of positions within the Dutch Ministry of Defense, most recently acting as Senior Analyst in the Counter Terrorism branch of the Dutch Defense Intelligence Service's Counter Intelligence Department. In 2006, Ron moved to the U.S. and joined the NEFA Foundation as Director of Analysis and Research..]

Introduction

Delivering the Intelligence Community's annual threat assessment in February 2009, Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair noted that, "In Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), al-Qa'ida lost significant parts of its command structure since 2008 in a succession of blows as damaging to the group as any since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001."¹ A few months earlier, then-CIA Director Michael Hayden had also addressed the significant developments impacting core Al-Qaida: "In the past year alone, a number of senior al-Qa'ida leaders who have sought refuge in the tribal areas have died, either by violence or natural causes. These include a chief of external operations, a senior commander who plotted attacks against the coalition in Afghanistan, a seasoned explosives expert and trainer, a veteran combat leader, and a senior operational planner."²

This NEFA Foundation Special Report examines, in depth, the notable losses that Al-Qaida suffered in 2008, its efforts to repulse ideological attacks by respected voices in the extremist community, and assesses the organization's ability to carry out attacks against the West.

Al-Qaida's Strategy

Soon after the Taliban government fell in Afghanistan, Al-Qaida had to make a strategic decision to approach the Coalition head-on in Afghanistan or retreat. After battles in Tora Bora and Shahikot (Operation Anaconda), Al-Qaida leadership made a strategic decision not to fight the Coalition, but to retreat to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area and reorganize. They decided to focus on training, on recruiting fighters with specialized expertise, and to begin limited guerrilla warfare. After roughly two years, core Al-Qaida developed a successful strategy, as they were able to adjust to the

¹ Testimony of Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2009, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/DNI_blair_02122009.pdf

² Transcript of Remarks by Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael Hayden at the Atlantic Council, November 13, 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/speeches-testimony/speeches-testimony-archive-2008/directors-remarks-at-the-atlantic-council.html>

realities on the ground. In short, Al-Qaida went stealth and began operating a covert organization in Pakistan's tribal areas where it set up training camps and formed coalitions with the local tribes.

Now, as Bruce Hoffman and Seth Jones wrote in *The National Interest*, at age 20, "Al-Qaeda has been effective as a force multiplier by improving the capacity of insurgent groups." This includes helping indigenous insurgents make more sophisticated improvised explosive devices, instructing them in fund-raising techniques to create an income stream from the international jihad philanthropic community, and conducting more effective information operations using the internet and a range of media outlets."³ In 2005, Al-Qaida was able to convince the Taliban to accept the use of suicide bombing as a strategic weapon.⁴ Instrumental in this achievement was Mullah Mehmood Allah Haq Yar.⁵

Mullah Omar sent Haq Yar to northern Iraq in 2003 to train Ansar al-Islam fighters and returned to Afghanistan-Pakistan in 2004.⁶ Upon his return, Haq Yar was assigned to a special council of Taliban commanders, and Mullah Omar directed him to shepherd all foreign fighters. He is an expert in guerrilla warfare and gained a great deal of applicable knowledge in the Iraqi theater. In an interview with *The Asia Times*, Haq Yar said that Al-Qaida has a significant role in supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁷

In 2007 and 2008, Taliban and Al-Qaida leaders emphasized in video messages and interviews that there is no difference between them. In an interview with the NEFA Foundation, a few days before he was killed by Coalition forces, Mullah Dadullah said: "We and Al-Qaida are as one. If we are preparing attacks, then it is likewise the work of Al-Qaida, and if Al-Qaida is doing so, then this is also our project, too."⁸ In August 2008, Maulvi Omar, the senior spokesman for the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), said in an interview with NEFA that "there is no difference." He continued,

"The formation of the Taliban and Al-Qaida was based on an ideology. Today, the Taliban and Al-Qaida have become an ideology. Whoever works in these organizations, they fight against infidel cruelty. Both are fighting for the supremacy of Allah and his Kalma. However, those fighting in foreign countries are called, Al-Qaida, while those fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan are called Taliban. In fact, both are the name of one ideology. The aim and objectives of both the organizations are the same."⁹

³ Bruce Hoffman and Seth Jones, "Cell Phones in the Hindu Kush," *The National Interest*, June 24, 2008, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=18388>

⁴ Annual Report MIVD 2005, p.24 (in Dutch).

⁵ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Taliban Lay Plans for Islamic Intifada," *Asia Times*, October 6, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HJ06Df01.html

⁶ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Osama Adds Weight to Afghan Resistance," *Asia Times*, September 11, 2004, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/F111Ag01.html

⁷ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Taliban Lay Plans for Islamic Intifada," *Asia Times*, October 6, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HJ06Df01.html

⁸ Interview with Mullah Dadullah, May 10, 2007, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-intvu.html>

⁹ Interview with Maulvi Omar, August 29, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-intvu.html>

In a video documentary to commemorate the ‘martyrdom’ of Sheikh Abu al-Hasan al-Saidi, also known as Shakirullah, a senior Al-Qaida commander, Abu al-Hasan said:

“There are those who claim that al-Qa’ida works separately from the Taliban. This is a lie and a false accusation. On the contrary, we and the Taliban are inseparable and are a single entity...our commander Sheikh Usama has pledged allegiance to the commander of the faithful Mullah Muhammad Umar and the Muslims are as one against those other than them.”¹⁰

Also notable is the transition to the use of more effective IEDs, especially as the VBIEDs became more powerful. This is partly due to technology transfers from Iraq and partly due to state-sponsored help. It has been assessed that the elite Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force delivered small arms and the knowledge necessary to build IEDs with higher penetration capabilities to Jihadi groups in the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater and likely to Al-Qaida as well.

It is also assessed that Al-Qaida’s numbers are kept constant and are still in the high hundreds.

Changes in the Leadership

Al-Qaida suffered greatly in 2008. The organization lost over ten of its senior and mid-level operatives, including three leaders of its external operations units. Of the leaders killed, most were first generation Jihadis from Egypt, such as Abu Ubaidah al-Masri, Abu Jihad al-Masri, Abu al-Hasan al-Saidi, and Khalid Habib. Other notable Al-Qaida leaders who were killed in 2008 were the Algerian Abu Suleiman and the Libyan Abu Laith.

2008 also saw the rise of Mustafa Abu Yazid, also known as Sheikh Saeed al-Masri. He ascended through the ranks of the organization and became even more prominent in 2008. Sheikh Saeed al-Masri has been Al-Qaida’s paymaster since the early 1990s, and became a member of the Shura Council in 1988.¹¹ He was in charge of the organization’s finances while they were in Sudan, and he also was involved in the financing of the 9/11 attacks although he was initially against the attacks.¹²

In late May 2007, Mustafa Ahmed Muhammad Uthman Abu al-Yazid was named the overall leader of Al-Qaida’s activities in Afghanistan.¹³ In the following months, he became more important to the organization as troubles in the Tribal Areas in Pakistan arose between the Uzbeks - mainly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the

¹⁰ As-Sahab video, Commander Abu al-Hasan, Jihad and Martyrdom (2008).

¹¹ Mohamed al Shafey, “Sheikh Said: Al Qaeda’s Financier,” *As-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 29, 2008, <http://aawsat.com/english/print.asp?artid=id13885>

¹² Evan F. Kohlmann, Dossier: Shaykh Mustafa Abu Yazid (a.k.a. “Shaykh Saeed”), The NEFA Foundation, June 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefayazid0608.pdf>; The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 268.

¹³ Michael Scheuer, “Al-Qaeda’s New Leader in Afghanistan: A Profile of Abu al-Yazid,” *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 4, Issue 21, July 3, 2007, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4276&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=240&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4276&tx_ttnews[backPid]=240&no_cache=1)

largest group of foreign fighters in the area - and local tribes affiliated with the Pakistani Taliban. It is believed that Mustafa Abu al-Yazid (a.k.a. Sheikh Saeed al-Masri) handed over responsibility for operations in Afghanistan to Khalid Habib, while al-Yazid became a high-level mediator and coordinator between the Afghan Taliban, the Uzbeks, the Pakistani Taliban, different Jihadi groups, and Al-Qaida, as he is known to be a popular and well-liked person, among these groups, who is able to reconcile conflicts. He is also fluent in Pashtu and has strong ties with the Afghans.¹⁴

The External Operations Unit

As mentioned above, at least three leaders of Al-Qaida's external operations or terror operations outside the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater died or were killed in the last year. Abu Ubaidah al-Masri was reported to have died of natural causes in December 2007. According to information that only became available in April 2008, he died of Hepatitis.¹⁵ Abu Ubaidah al-Masri was described as chief of external operations for the first time in October 2007.¹⁶ He took over operations from Hamza Rabi'a, who was killed in December 2005.

Abu Ubaidah al-Masri was originally from the Sharqia governorate in the Nile Delta in Egypt, but is said to have held a Sudanese passport. His real name may be Abdul Hamid.¹⁷ Prior to his rise to the chief of external operations position in charge of Al-Qaida's operations in the Kunar Province of Afghanistan, he was a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Chechnya.¹⁸ Abu Ubaidah Al-Masri was responsible for orchestrating the 2006 transatlantic aircraft plot,¹⁹ and, in July 2007, had been named *Amir-al-Khuruji* after the storming of the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid), in Islamabad.²⁰ As *Amir-al-Khuruji*, his main task was to create a new organization in the cities in Pakistan to fight the Pakistani government in a bid to start a revolt in the country.²¹

He lost two fingers either during combat operations or from an accident with explosives. Al-Masri spent some time in the United Kingdom, and in 1995, he surfaced in Munich, Germany requesting asylum under an alias. The German authorities rejected his asylum request in 1999 and jailed him pending deportation. Prior to his deportation, al-

¹⁴ Mohamed al Shafey, "Sheikh Said: Al Qaeda's Financier," *As-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 29, 2008, <http://aawsat.com/english/print.asp?artid=id13885>

¹⁵ "Al-Qaeda Leader al-Masri 'Dead,'" *BBC News*, April 9, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7339324.stm

¹⁶ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Pakistan in New Taliban Peace Process," *Asia Times*, October 30, 2007, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/IJ30Df02.html

¹⁷ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "US, Pakistan Mission on Target," *Asia Times*, October 29, 2008, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JJ29Df01.html

¹⁸ Sebastian Rotella, "Dangerous, Endangered: A Look Inside Al Qaeda," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 02, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/world/fg-ubaida2>

¹⁹ Mark Mazzetti, "Qaeda is Seen as Restoring Leadership," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/02/world/middleeast/02qaeda.html>

²⁰ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "US, Pakistan Mission on Target," *Asia Times*, October 29, 2008, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JJ29Df01.html

²¹ Syed Saleem Shahzad, Al-Qaeda sets sight on the next battlefield, Revolt in Pakistan's Tribal Areas, Part 2, *Asia Times*, February 12, 2008; http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JB12Df01.html

Masri was released. He was described as in his mid-50s, 5 foot 7, muscular and tanned, with graying black hair and a graying beard. Al-Masri was close to Ayman al-Zawahiri.²²

Al-Masri's successor, Abu Sulaiman al-Jaziri, was killed on May 14, 2008 by a rocket fired from a drone. The target of the attack in Damadola was reportedly Ayman al-Zawahiri, but he was not at the scene.²³ Abu Sulaiman al-Jaziri was a first-generation Jihadi and was given the honorary title of Sheikh. Missing his right hand from the wrist down, he was a well known person in Peshawar. He owned a house in the Hayatabad quarter, where Usama bin Laden had stayed in 1986. And he was Al-Qaida's ringleader in Peshawar before ascending to the external operations unit.²⁵ In 1995, he fought in Bosnia with the 'El Mudžahid' unit, while the Bosnian intelligence service, AID, was looking for him in connection with a 1997 terrorist attack in Mostar.²⁶

Abu Sulaiman was succeeded by another 'old hand' in Jihadi circles, Abu Jihad al-Masri.²⁷ Abu Jihad's real name was Mohammad Hasan Khalil al-Hakim. Although he was described as Al-Qaida's propaganda chief, it is believed that Abu Jihad took over the External Operations Unit in May 2008. He was killed by a missile strike in the early hours of October 31, 2008.²⁸

Before becoming Al-Qaida's head of External Operations, Abu Jihad was generally seen as the person in charge of media and propaganda for the organization.²⁹ Abu Jihad joined the al-Gamaa al-Islamiya in 1979. He was born in the south of Egypt, in the Aswan, and one of his aliases might have been Abu Jihad al-Aswani. In the late 1980s, he fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan. In the late 1990s, he likely stayed in the United Kingdom, but left the country after 9/11 to settle in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan.³⁰ In August 2006, Abu Jihad published a book titled The Myth of Delusion: Exposing the American Intelligence.³¹ The central thesis of the book was 'to demonstrate that U.S. power is limited and can be defeated.'³² This book, reported to be a Jihadist handbook, might have catapulted Abu Jihad into the higher ranks of Al-Qaida.

²² Sebastian Rotella, "Dangerous, Endangered: A Look Inside Al Qaeda," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 02, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/world/fg-ubaida2>; Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda Adds Muscle to the Taliban's Fight," *Asia Times*, April 19, 2008, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JD19Df01.html

²³ Anwarullah Khan, "12 Killed in Drone Attack on Damadola," *Dawn*, May 15, 2008, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/05/15/top5.htm>

²⁵ Walter Mayr, "Handsclag mit dem Teufel," *Der Spiegel*, July 7, 2008, pp. 103-108.

²⁶ E. Mrkonja, "Talibanima Čosić pobjegao u Iran," *San*, September 11, 2007, <http://www.san.be/index.php?is=226>

²⁷ "Al-Qaeda Propaganda Chief Killed in Pakistan Strike: Official," *Agence France Presse*, November 1, 2008, <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hFRj05wy4-L2HckvAXmlqSQKJ-yO>

²⁸ "US Missile Attack Kills Major Al-Qaeda Operative," *The News*, November 19, 2008, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/updates.asp?id=60468>

²⁹ Rewards for Justice: Abu Jihad al Masri, http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/index.cfm?page=abu_jihad

³⁰ Brian Fishman, "Al-Qa'ida's Spymaster Analyzes the U.S. Intelligence Community," Combatting Terrorism Center, West Point, November 6, 2006, <http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/pdf/MythofDelusion.pdf>

³¹ <http://threatswatch.org/docshow.php?media=myth-of-delusion>

³² Brian Fishman, "Al-Qa'ida's Spymaster Analyzes the U.S. Intelligence Community," Combat Terrorism Center, West Point, November 6, 2006, <http://ctc.usma.edu/publications/pdf/MythofDelusion.pdf> p.3.

Abu Zubair al-Masri was holding an operational meeting with four others, including Abu Nasr al-Masri and Rashid Rauf, in the highly protected compound of local Taliban commander, Maulvi Khaliq Noor, in the village of Ali Khel, when two missiles fired from a drone hit pre-dawn on November 22, 2008. Abu Zubair al-Masri was an explosives expert and considered to be high-up in the Al-Qaida pecking order.³³ He actually might have been Abu Jihad al-Masri's replacement as head of the External Operations Unit after the latter's death the month before. Abu Zubair was close to both Usama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. The killing of Rashid Rauf was considered a bonus, as he was not the intended target. Rauf, who was of dual British and Pakistani nationality, was arrested in Pakistan in August 2006, and is believed to have been one of the masterminds behind the 2006 Transatlantic aircraft plot - a plot to blow up airliners traveling from London to the United States and Canada. He escaped from police custody in December 2007. Rauf was married to a relative of Maulana Masood Azhar, the leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammad.³⁴

Other Senior Leaders Killed in 2008

The first Al-Qaida leader to die in 2008 was senior commander Abu Laith al-Libi, who was killed by rockets fired from a drone in Mir Ali on January 29, 2008. In the first years after 9/11, al-Libi held back from getting involved with Al-Qaida, as he was also the Emir of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and did not want to have permanent ties to Al-Qaida. He pledged his Bayat (allegiance) to Usama bin Laden with concern for the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater only, holding open his options to return his attentions to the North-African theater. Abu Laith was one of the most experienced Jihadi commanders and was involved in operations in Eastern Afghanistan and in the training of new recruits. He was also an important link in joint operations between foreign fighters and the Taliban.³⁵

Following Abu Laith's death, Al-Qaida released at least three statements commenting on his "martyrdom". On January 31, 2008, the al-Fajr Media Center released a statement, followed by a video announcement by Mustafa Abu Yazid on February 6, 2008, and on February 27, 2008 Ayman al-Zawahiri spoke about the loss of Abu Laith al-

³³ Tom Coghlan, Michael Evans, and Catherine Philp, "Top al-Qaeda Terrorist Abu Zubair al-Masri 'Was Missile Target in Bush Campaign for Favourable Legacy,'" *The Times*, November 25, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article5225966.ece and "Rashid Rauf among Five Killed in US Attack," *Dawn*, November 23, 2008, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/23/top4.htm> and Richard Norton-Taylor, Jason Burke, and Jo Adetunji, "Whitehall Kept in Dark over Strike that may have Killed British Fugitive," *The Guardian*, November 24, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/nov/24/rashid-rauf-attack-islamabad-mi5> and Ismail Khan and Jane Perlez, "Airstrike Kills Qaeda-Linked Militant in Pakistan," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/23/world/asia/23rauf.html>

³⁴ "Rashid Rauf Among Five Killed in North Waziristan Drone Strike," *The Daily Times*, November 23, 2008, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\11\23\story_23-11-2008_pg1_9 and Tariq Saeed, "Drone Attacks Continue Despite Strong Protest" and Rashid Rauf, Abu Zubair al-Masri among 5 Dead in New Missile Strikes," *Pakistan Observer*, November 23, 2008, <http://pakobserver.net/200811/23/news/topstories02.asp> and Saeed Shah, "Rauf did not Die in US Attack, Say Fugitive's Family," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/25/rashid-rauf-british-terror-suspect> and "Rashid Rauf among Five Killed in US Attack," *Dawn*, November 23, 2008, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/11/23/top4.htm>

³⁵ Ian Black, Haroon Siddique, "Top al-Qaida Leader 'Killed' in Afghanistan," *The Guardian*, January 31, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jan/31/usa.afghanistan>

Libi.³⁶ In February 2009, as-Sahab released a documentary series titled, "In the Winds of Paradise," commemorating the "martyrdom" of Abu Laith al-Libi a year prior.

Another serious hit for Al-Qaida was the death of the Egyptian Midhat Mursi al-Sayid, also known as Abu Khabab. Although it was reported on January 13, 2006 that Abu Khabab was killed after missiles were fired at a compound in Damadola, in Bajaur, he was actually only killed on July 28, 2008, in Azam Warsak, South Waziristan. Educated in Egypt as a chemical engineer, Abu Khabab went to Afghanistan in the late 1980s and ran the Darunta training camp in Afghanistan in the 1990s. He was Al-Qaida's main explosives expert and was likely the person who built the bombs that destroyed the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad in December 1995.³⁷ In May 1999, Al-Qaida started a WMD program codenamed al-Zabadi or "curdled milk", which Abu Khabab headed.³⁸ Before he was killed, Abu Khabab was training Western recruits for chemical attacks in the West, probably in his lab in Barmal.³⁹ After his death, his duties were seemingly assumed by his deputy Abu Bashir Yemeni. Also killed with Abu Khabab were Sheikh Abu Mohammed Ibrahim Bin Abu al-Faraj al-Masri, Dr. Abdelwahab al-Masri, and Dr. Abu Isam al-Masri, according to a statement by Mustafa Abu Yazid on July 20, 2008.⁴⁰

In September 2008, two veteran Mujahidin who fought against the Russians in Afghanistan, Abu Ubaydh al-Tunisi and Abu Wafa al-Saudi, were killed by U.S. Predators.⁴¹ On September 2, a Predator killed four to ten persons linked to Abu Wafa al-Saudi. Two days later, Abu Wafa al-Saudi himself was killed. Abu Wafa was known as an Al-Qaida commander and logistician; he was also responsible for taking care of the families of the Mujahidin during the Mujahidin's absence.⁴² Abu Ubaydh al-Tunisi, seen

³⁶ "Al-Fajr Media Center: Martyrdom of the Mujahid Commander Shaykh Abu Laith al-Liby, May Allah Accept Him Among the Martyrs," January 31, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefaabulaith0208.pdf>, Transcript of Shaykh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid Video Recording Produced by the As-Sahab Media Foundation: "Light and Fire: An Announcement to the Ummah," Released February 6, 2008, <http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/alyazid0208.pdf>, "Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri: An Elegy to the Martyred Commander Abu Laith al-Libi." Released on: February 27, 2008, <http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefazawahiri0208.pdf>

³⁷ Omar Nasiri, "Inside the Jihad: My Life with al Qaeda, a Spy's Story," (New York 2006) pp. 223-227.

³⁸ Alan Cullison and Andrew Higgins, "Computer in Kabul Holds Chilling Memos," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 2001 and Dan Darling, "Al Qaeda's Mad Scientist, The Significance of Abu Khabab's Death," *The Weekly Standard*, January 19, 2006,

<http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/006/602zqghe.asp?pg=2>

³⁹ Josh Meyer, "Al Qaeda is Said to Focus Again on WMD," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/feb/03/world/fg-khabab3>

⁴⁰ "Al-Qaida Announces 'Martyrdom' of Shaykh Abu Khabab al-Masri," July 30, 2008,

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefaqaidaabukhabab0808.pdf> ;

Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri: "In Lamentation of a Group of Heroes", August 24, 2008;

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefazawahiri0808-2.pdf>

⁴¹ Anwar Iqbal, "Drone Strikes Killed High-Value Targets, US Tells Pakistan," *Dawn*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/2009/02/09/top4.htm> and E. Mrkonja, "Talibanima Čosić pobjegao u Iran," *San*, September, 11, 2007, <http://www.san.ba/index.php?id=226>

⁴² Eldin Hadzovic, "B-H: Al-Qa'ida Member Recounts Experiences," *Dani*, February 8, 2008 and Anwar Iqbal, "Drone Strikes Killed High-Value Targets, US Tells Pakistan," *Dawn*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/2009/02/09/top4.htm>,

as a High Value Target, was probably killed on September 17, when a group of militants was delivering rockets to a camp near the Afghan border.⁴³

Missiles fired from a drone hit a Madrassa complex owned by veteran Taliban leader Jalaluddin Haqqani and killed at least four Al-Qaida operatives on September 8, 2008. The four killed were Abu Musa from Saudi-Arabia, Abu Qasim from Egypt, Abu Hamza from Saudi Arabia, and Abu Haris from Syria.⁴⁴ Abu Haris was an experienced fighter who fought against the Soviets in the 1980s and had been active for years in different parts of Afghanistan. In the second half of 2007, Abu Haris created the Jaish al-Mahdi. The organization consisted of roughly 250 Arabs and Afghans who were involved in the fighting in the province Helmand in Afghanistan.⁴⁵ In 2008, Abu Haris took over the command for the Al-Qaida operations in the Tribal Areas in Pakistan.⁴⁶ Abu Hamza, who was killed in the same attack as Abu Haris, was Al-Qaida's ringleader in Peshawar. Abu Hamza was an explosives expert who originated from Saudi-Arabia.⁴⁷

On October 16, 2008, a missile fired by a U.S. drone hit a Toyota station wagon in the village of Taparghai in South Waziristan. In the car was Egyptian Khalid Habib, Al-Qaida's head of operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴⁸ Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair described Habib as "al-Qa'ida's military chief and the fourth man in its chain of command."⁴⁹ Habib assumed responsibility for the operations in Pakistan from Abu Ubaidah al-Masri, and from Mustafa Abu Yazid, the role as head of operations for Afghanistan, making him one of Al-Qaida's de facto top five leaders and the head of the military operations of the organization.⁵⁰ Khalid Habib had relocated to

⁴³ Anwar Iqbal, "Drone Strikes Killed High-Value Targets, US Tells Pakistan," *Dawn*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/2009/02/09/top4.htm>

⁴⁴ "Guard: Al Qaeda Chief in Pakistan Killed," *CNN*, September 9, 2008; <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/09/09/pakistan.alqaeda.killed/index.html>; Jenny Percival, "Al-Qaida Leaders Killed in Suspected US Missile Strike in Pakistan," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2008; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/10/usa.pakistan>; Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda Sets Sight on the Next Battlefield, Revolt in Pakistan's Tribal Areas," Part 2, *Asia Times*, February 12, 2008; http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JB12Df01.html

⁴⁵ Waliullah Rahmani, "Al-Qaeda Uses Jaish al-Mahdi to Gain Control over Helmand Province," *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 4, Issue 34, October 24, 2007; [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4492&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=240&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4492&tx_ttnews[backPid]=240&no_cache=1)

⁴⁶ "Guard: Al Qaeda Chief in Pakistan Killed," *CNN*, September 9, 2008; <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/09/09/pakistan.alqaeda.killed/index.html>; Jenny Percival, "Al-Qaida Leaders Killed in Suspected US Missile Strike in Pakistan," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2008; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/10/usa.pakistan>

⁴⁷ Jenny Percival, "Al-Qaida Leaders Killed in Suspected US Missile Strike in Pakistan," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2008; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/10/usa.pakistan>

⁴⁸ "Qaeda Chief Operations in Tribal Region Khalid Habib Killed in Strike: US," *The Nation*, October 18, 2008, <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Politics/18-Oct-2008/Qaeda-chief-operations-in-tribal-region-Khalid-Habib-killed-in-strike-US> and Pir Zubair Shah, "U.S. Strike is Said to Kill Qaeda Figure in Pakistan," *The New York Times*, October 18, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/18/world/asia/18pstan.html>

⁴⁹ Testimony of Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2009, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/DNI_blair_02122009.pdf

⁵⁰ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda Adds Muscle to the Taliban's Fight," *Asia Times*, April 19, 2008, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JD19Df01.html and Syed Saleem Shahzad, "US, Pakistan Mission on Target," *Asia Times*, October 29, 2008, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JJ29Df01.html

Taparghai to avoid missile attacks. The main task for Habib was to continue the coordination between Al-Qaida, the various Pakistani militant groups, and the Jihadi groups in Pakistan and fight the current Pakistani government. He was known in the village as “Zalfay”, which means “long hair” in Pashtu.⁵¹

Habib came to Afghanistan in the late 1980s or early 1990s and then moved with Al-Qaida leadership to Sudan. After 9/11, Habib was fighting on the Kandahar front line near the airport. He was fighting with Sayf al-Adl and a group of other experienced Jihadis, including his (later) deputy Abu al-Hasan.⁵² He was commanding a tank and his tank was struck by two missiles; one was a direct hit. Shrapnel hit Habib in the head, paralyzing the left side of his body.⁵³ It was Abu al-Hasan who brought him to safety.⁵⁴ It took Habib four months to recover. He had nearly a full recovery except for a slight effect in his left hand. He was transferred to a training camp, near the Afghan-Pakistani border, in 2003.⁵⁵ In November 2004, Khalid Habib was put in charge of Al-Qaida operations in the southeastern provinces of Afghanistan.⁵⁶ On October 31, 2008, a drone attack near Mir Ali in North Waziristan should have killed Abu Akash al-Iraqi (also known as Abdur Rehman), Haji Akasha Khan, and Iraqi Malang.⁵⁷ Abu Akash (or Abu Akasha) was described as the Al-Qaida ringleader in Mir Ali, but some doubt there was a direct link with core Al-Qaida.⁵⁸ Abu Akash was operating in North Waziristan for many years, having come from Afghanistan in 2002; he moved around with a small group of well-armed bodyguards.⁵⁹ Abu Akash played a key role in the training of foreign fighters in Waziristan. The training of new recruits is the responsibility of Arabs; Abu Akash looked after the Uzbeks and Tajiks, while Abu Nasir trained the Chinese, Uighurs, and Pakistanis. Abu Hanifah who runs a training camp and base in Mir Ali trains the Turks, Kurds, and Bosnians.⁶⁰ Two weeks after the attack, information surfaced that Abu Akash left the building before the missile hit the house in the village Asori, where he was rumored to have been staying, and that he had taken up his normal routine.⁶¹

⁵¹ Pir Zubair Shah, “U.S. Strike is Said to Kill Qaeda Figure in Pakistan,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/18/world/asia/18pstan.html>

⁵² Video of as-Sahab, Commander Abu al-Hasan, Jihad and Martyrdom (2008)

⁵³ Ayn al-Haqiqah, “The al-Qa’ida Organization Writes a Letter to the Iraq People,” www.alfjr.com, March 5, 2003 (The letter was written by Sayf al-Adl).

⁵⁴ As-Sahab Video of Commander Abu al-Hasan, Jihad and Martyrdom (2008)

⁵⁵ Ayn al-Haqiqah, “The al-Qa’ida Organization Writes a Letter to the Iraq People,” www.alfjr.com, March 5, 2003 (The letter was written by Sayf al-Adl).

⁵⁶ “Al Qaeda Reportedly Appoints Commanders for Afghanistan,” *Pakistan Tribune*, November 12, 2004, <http://www.paktribune.com/news/print.php?id=125112>

⁵⁷ “US Double Blow Kills 21 in Waziristan,” *Dawn*, November 1, 2008.

⁵⁸ “US Strikes on Pakistani Villages,” *BBC News*, October 31, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7702679.stm and Syed Saleem Shahzad, “US Division Doesn’t Add Up,” *Asia Times*, November 4, 2008, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JK04Df01.html

⁵⁹ “U.S. Strikes Said to Kill Militant Leader,” *CBS News*, October 31, 2008, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/10/31/terror/main4560925.shtml?source=RSSattr=HOME_4560925 and “US Strikes’ on Pakistani Villages,” *BBC News*, October 31, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7702679.stm

⁶⁰ Syed Saleem Shahzad, “The Pakistani Road to German Terror,” *Asia Times*, September 7, 2007, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/II07Df03.html

⁶¹ “Pakistan: Militant ‘Survived Drone Attack,’” *AKI*, November 13, 2008, <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Security/?id=3.0.2704109663#>

A son of Abu Akash was killed with Hamza Rabia in a November 30, 2005 missile attack on Asori. Abu Akash is reported to be fluent in Pashtu, is an explosives expert, and is involved in cross-border attacks. Abu Akash was not only the ringleader for Al-Qaida in Mir Ali, but also responsible for its financial affairs in the region. He stated in a video released in April 2008 that the Jihad against the United States would continue in the region.⁶²

Abdullah Azzam Al-Saudi, described as a senior commander of Al-Qaida and “involved in recruiting and training of fighters”, was killed (along with four others) when missiles fired from a Predator drone hit him in a house in Bannu on November 19, 2008.⁶³ Although not much is known about Abdullah Azzam, it has been established that he was an important coordinator and liaison between the Al-Qaida senior command and the Afghan Taliban and the TTP in the northwest of Pakistan.⁶⁴ Azzam was a key figure in facilitating the External Operations Unit of Al-Qaida. He also acted as a recruiter and trainer for Al-Qaida.⁶⁵ He was said to be close to Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁶⁶

On January 1, 2009, the successor of Khalid Habib, or Al-Qaida’s commander in chief for Pakistan, was killed along with his close associate and lieutenant. Until then, Fahid Mohammed Ally Msalam was the Chief of Operations in Pakistan,⁶⁷ a role he filled in 2007. Msalam was also known as Usama al-Kini. He and his lieutenant Sheikh Ahmed Salim Swedan were old Al-Qaida hands. The two, both from Kenya, were members of Al-Qaida’s Africa cell that blew up the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Msalam is believed to be responsible for the Marriott Hotel bombing in Islamabad in September 2008, and a key link in the coordination between Al-Qaida and Pakistani militants. He is also believed to have been involved in more attacks inside Pakistan, including a failed suicide attack on Benazir Bhutto in 2007 and the suicide attack on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad. After the 9/11 attacks, Msalam became head of Al-Qaida’s operations in the Zabul province in Afghanistan.⁶⁸

⁶² “US Double Blow Kills 21 in Waziristan,” *Dawn*, November 1, 2008.

⁶³ “US Missile Attack Kills Major Al-Qaeda Operative,” *The News*, November 19, 2008, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/updates.asp?id=60468>

⁶⁴ Isambard Wilkinson, “Al-Qaeda Leader Racially Abuses Barack Obama,” *The Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/3483479/Al-Qaeda-leader-rationally-abuses-Barack-Obama.html>

⁶⁵ Bill Roggio, “Senior al Qaeda Leader Targeted in Airstrike in Bannu, Pakistan,” *The Long War Journal*, November 19, 2008, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/11/senior_al_qaeda_lead_3.php

⁶⁶ Isambard Wilkinson, “Al-Qaeda Leader Racially Abuses Barack Obama,” *The Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/3483479/Al-Qaeda-leader-rationally-abuses-Barack-Obama.html>

⁶⁷ Testimony of Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2009, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/DNI_blair_02122009.pdf

⁶⁸ Testimony of Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2009, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/DNI_blair_02122009.pdf and Zahid Hussain, Usama al-Kini, “Head of al-Qaeda in Pakistan, Killed by US Military,” *The Times*, January 9, 2009, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5479455.ece> and Saeed Shah and Haroon Siddique, “Al-Qaida Chief Killed in Pakistan, US Claims,” *The Guardian*, January 10, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/10/al-qaida-pakistan-us> and Joby

The U.S. had been hunting for Msalam for some time. A Predator fired missiles on a camp run by Afghan commander Zangeer on August 12, 2008. Between 20 and 25 fighters associated with Msalam and Maulvi Nazir were killed in the attack in Baghar, near Angoor Adda.⁶⁹ On August 30, 2008, a Predator strike hit a house in the Korzai area of South Waziristan killing four persons including two Canadians of Arab origin. The four were subordinates of Msalam.⁷⁰

Other Attacks on Al-Qaida in 2008

Predator drone attacks in Pakistan killed and wounded many Al-Qaida's fighters in 2008. Adam Gadahn was possibly wounded during an attack on Mir Ali late in January 2008. It was known that Adam Gadahn was also in Mir Ali at the time of the attack, which killed senior commander Abu Laith al-Libi.⁷¹ There were few signs of Gadahn until sources in the Tribal Areas reported that he was well and traveling with a Taliban unit.⁷² On October 4, Gadahn released his first statement since January.⁷³

In other attacks, Al-Qaida trainees were killed on February 27 and on March 16.⁷⁴ After a drone attack on August 20, local associates of Al-Qaida and foreign fighters were killed. Al-Qaida facilitator, Haji Yacoub, was injured in the attack. On August 31, a Predator killed several Al-Qaida operatives, including two prominent Al-Qaida paramilitary commanders, and on September 11, between 10 and 15 militants associated with Al-Qaida facilitator Qari Imran's training camp were killed.⁷⁵

Al-Qaida Operations

Al-Qaida's operational capability was limited in 2008. The pressure was on the External Operations Unit and with the termination of three to four chiefs in one year, the planning for complex operations abroad came under pressure. The two operations that bear the hallmark of Al-Qaida were the attack on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad on June 2 and the attack on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad on September 20.

The suicide attack on the Danish Embassy was claimed by Al-Qaida on June 3, when Mustafa Abu Yazid released a communique:⁷⁶ "One of the courageous heroes

Warrick, "Jan. 1 Attack by CIA Killed Two Leaders of Al-Qaeda," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/08/AR2009010803110.html>

⁶⁹ Anwar Iqbal, "Drone Strikes Killed High-Value Targets, US Tells Pakistan," *Dawn*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/2009/02/09/top4.htm> and "Al-Qaeda vs Predator," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, December 19, 2008

⁷⁰ Anwar Iqbal, "Drone Strikes Killed High-Value Targets, US Tells Pakistan," *Dawn*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/2009/02/09/top4.htm> and "Two Canadians Killed in Wana Missile Attack," *Dawn*, August 31, 2008, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/08/31/top3.htm>

⁷¹ "American al-Qaeda Leader Also Killed?" *The News*, February 7, 2008, http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?id=12798

⁷² Confidential Source

⁷³ Video from American Al-Qaida Spokesman Adam Gadahn, NEFA Foundation, October 4, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefagadahn1008.pdf>

⁷⁴ Anwar Iqbal, "Drone Strikes Killed High-Value Targets, US Tells Pakistan," *Dawn*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/2009/02/09/top4.htm>

⁷⁵ Anwar Iqbal, "Drone Strikes Killed High-Value Targets, US Tells Pakistan," *Dawn*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.dawn.com/2009/02/09/top4.htm>

⁷⁶ "Al-Qaida Claims Suicide Attack on Danish Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan," NEFA Foundation, June 3, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefadenmarkpakistan0608.pdf>

from Al-Qaida executed a martyrdom operation on the morning of Monday June 2, 2008 targeting the Danish Embassy in Islamabad..." Abu Yazid goes on "this operation also provides the major role being played by Pakistani mujahideen, who participated in preparing this operation."⁷⁷ The suicide bomber was a young Saudi national named Kamaal Saleem Atiyyah al-Fudli al-Hadhli, also known as Abu Ghareeb al-Makki. He declared in his videotaped 'martyrdom' testament that this would not be last attack on Danish targets.⁷⁸ Abu Ghareeb came to the Pakistan-Afghanistan theater around December 2007 together with his cousin Abu Jihad al-Hadhli and Sin Hamad al-Sari, also known as Ikrama al-Najdi. The latter was killed in Afghanistan in September 2008.⁷⁹

The bombing of the Islamabad Marriott hotel on September 20, 2008 had all the hallmarks of an Al-Qaida attack. The attack was a joint venture between core Al-Qaida and affiliated Pakistani Jihadi groups. On the evening of September, 20 a very powerful VBIED filled with explosives detonated in front of the hotel killing over fifty persons and leaving more than 250 wounded.

The attack on the Marriott in Islamabad and the earlier attack on the Danish Embassy were believed to be planned by Fahid Mohammed Ally Msalam, also known as Usama al-Kini. He was Al-Qaida's commander for operations in Pakistan and responsible for operations like the one perpetrated against the Marriott Hotel, in which at least forty persons were killed and 250 more wounded.⁸⁰

Theological Disputes

Theologically, Al-Qaida came under attack in late 2007. First, on September 14, 2007, influential Saudi Sheikh Salman al-Awdah delivered an address to Usama bin Laden live on television. The address, in the form of a letter titled, "A Ramadan Letter to Osama bin Laden," attacked the Al-Qaida leader for the innocent lives that have been lost. Al-Awdah stated: "Are you happy to meet Allah with this heavy burden on your shoulders? It is a weighty burden indeed – at least hundreds of thousands of innocent people, if not millions."⁸¹

Al-Awdah's critical letter was followed in November 2007 by a series of articles published in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Masri al-Youm* and the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Jarida*. The articles were parts of a book written by Sayid Imam Sharif, better known in radical Islamic circles as Dr. Fadl. Dr. Fadl was a onetime Emir of the Islamic Jihad and its chief ideologue. In 1988, he wrote The Essential Guide for Preparation which became one of the most important works for jihadis.⁸² In the early 1990s, he wrote another book titled The Compendium of the Pursuit of Divine Knowledge. "The 'Compendium' gave Al

⁷⁷ "Al-Qaida Claims Suicide Attack on Danish Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan," NEFA Foundation, June 3, 2008,

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefadenmarkpakistan0608.pdf>

⁷⁸ Video-Recorded "Martyrdom" Will of "Abu Ghareeb al-Makki," (a.k.a. Kamaal al-Hadhli), (October 2008), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-prop.html#nefaabughareeb0608>

⁷⁹ Report: "Martyrdom of Sari Bin Hamad al-Sari in Afghanistan," September 12, 2008;

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefasarialsariafghan0908.pdf>

⁸⁰ Carlotta Gall, "Bombing at Hotel in Pakistan Kills at Least 40," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/21/world/asia/21islamabad.html>

⁸¹ Sheikh Salman al-Awdah, Ramadan Letter to Osama bin Laden, delivered on September 14, 2007, http://www.islamtoday.com/showme2.cfm?cat_id=29&sub_cat_id=1521

⁸² Lawrence Wright, "A Reporter at Large: The Rebellion Within," *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/06/02/080602fa_fact_wright

Qaeda and its allies a warrant to murder all who stood in their way”, according to Lawrence Wright.⁸³

The first sentences of the November 2007 book published by Dr. Fadl, Tarshid al-amal al-jihadi fi Misr wa al-alam or Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World are in keeping with the critique of Salman al-Awdah. It reads “...nothing that invokes the anger of God and His wrath like the unwarranted spilling of blood...” In short, Dr. Fadl reinterprets the meaning of Jihad in ways which explicitly forbid declarations of Takfir and the killing of non-Muslims in Muslim countries or members of other Muslim sects.⁸⁴

Ted Gistaro, U.S. National Intelligence Officer for Transnational Threats, said on August 12, 2008 that “Al-Qaeda senior leaders in 2008 have devoted nearly half their airtime to defending the group’s legitimacy.”⁸⁵ The Al-Qaida leadership made an extensive effort to especially discredit the reinterpretation of the Jihad, by Dr. Fadl.

Ayman al-Zawahiri was especially perturbed by this take on the subject; to him, it was a personal condemnation, as Dr. Fadl can be described as his mentor. In early 2008, he started a counter offensive. In early March 2008, Zawahiri published a book titled The Exoneration: A Treatise Exonerating of the Nation of the Pen and the Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak.⁸⁶ Zawahiri claims that Dr. Fadl’s book “serves the Crusaders, Zionists and infidel Arab leaders”, but contrary to what Zawahiri said it also “undermined the entire intellectual framework” of the Jihadi’s.⁸⁷ On October 24, the Pakistani newspaper *The News* reported that Usama bin Laden is writing a book to respond to the “negative propaganda and insufficient information” about Al-Qaida.⁸⁸ Another Al-Qaida leader who was used in the P.R. fight against Dr. Fadl was Abu Yahya al-Libi. On March 3, 2008, he released a video, “I am not a deceiver, nor will I allow someone else to deceive me. ”

After Zawahiri wrote his complaints against Dr. Fadl, Al-Qaida’s leadership started to alter their focus. In statements released on March 19, 20, and 23, Bin Laden and Zawahiri attempted to shift to the struggle in “Palestine” and to the Danish cartoons. On March 19, a Bin Laden audio recording was released aimed especially at Europe. Bin Laden said to the Europeans:

⁸³ Lawrence Wright, “A Reporter at Large: The Rebellion Within,” *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/06/02/080602fa_fact_wright

⁸⁴ Dr. Fadl’s Review of Jihad, <http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2007/11/dr-fadls-review.html>

⁸⁵ Remarks by Ted Gistaro, National Intelligence Officer for Transnational Threats, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC, August 12, 2008, http://www.dni.gov/speeches/20080812_speech.pdf

⁸⁶ Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, The Exoneration: A Treatise Exonerating of the Nation of the Pen and the Sword of the Denigrating Charge of Being Irresolute and Weak, March 2008, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Zawahiri_Exoneration_ciaosc.pdf

⁸⁷ Abdul Hameed Bakier, “Al-Qaeda’s al-Zawahiri Repudiates Dr. Fadl’s ‘Rationalization of Jihad’,” *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 5, Issue 17, April 20, 2008, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4891](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4891) and Lawrence Wright, “The Rebellion Within,” *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/06/02/080602fa_fact_wright

⁸⁸ “Bin Laden to Come up with Book on al-Qaeda,” *The News*, October 24, 2008, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/update.asp?id=58469>

"If there is no check on the freedom of your words, then let your hearts be open to the freedom of our actions. And it is amazing and to make light of others that you talk about tolerance and peace at a time when your soldiers perpetrate murder even against the weak and oppressed in our countries. Then came your publishing of these drawings, which came in the framework of a new Crusade..."⁸⁹

The next day, on March 20, another Bin Laden audio recording was released: "I address you today regarding the siege laid upon Gaza and how to liberate it and the rest of Palestine from the hands of the Zionist enemy."⁹⁰ In the message, Bin Laden claims that the two enemies, the Christians and the Jews, "did not take it from us through negotiations and dialogues, but with iron and fire. And this is the way to reclaim it – iron shall only yield to iron. But first the people of the Levant (Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria) should go to Iraq to become Mujahidin and only then they can march to Jerusalem to liberate Palestine and the al-Aqsa Mosque."⁹¹

On March 23, Zawahiri turned his focus on Gaza. He said "Hence, O' Muslims, today is your day. Attack the interests of the Jews and the Americans and all of those taking part in the offensive against the Muslims. Select your targets, collect the appropriate funds, assemble your equipment, plan [your attacks] accurately, and then charge towards your targets...There is no place today for those who claim that the battlefield with the Jews is limited to Palestine...Let us hit their interests everywhere, as they hit our interests everywhere."⁹²

Since Al-Qaida was pushed ideologically to a defensive posture, the organization's leadership sought to embrace a populist strategic orientation, which seeks to focus on four main points popular within the Muslim communities: 1) Al-Qaida in Iraq should shift its violence from Shiite civilians to Shiite militias; 2) Increase attacks against Jewish targets and, in the longer term, try to attack Jewish targets inside Israel; 3) Kill all those associated with the Danish cartoons in Europe; and 4) Muslim radicals in Egypt should prepare and seize the opportunity in the event of President Hosni Mubarak's death.⁹³

Although Al-Qaida leadership attempted to refocus the attention they were once again forced into a defensive posture, when, in December 2008, Dr. Fadl published his latest book, the Denunciation of the Exoneration. Again, this publication was serialized in the newspaper *al-Masri al-Youm*. The first part was named 'The Lies of Zawahiri. Dr. Fadl alleges that Zawahiri was a Sudanese agent in the first half of the 1990s and he invokes the curse of Allah unto Zawahiri. Dr. Fadl also exposed Zawahiri's mistrust of Bin Laden: "Zawahiri accused Osama bin Laden of being an agent of Saudi intelligence

⁸⁹ Usama Bin Laden, "May Our Mothers Be Bereaved...If We Fail To Help our Prophet," March 19, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefabinladen0308.pdf>

⁹⁰ Usama Bin Laden, "The Way for the Salvation of Palestine," March 20, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefabinladen0308-2.pdf>

⁹¹ Usama Bin Laden, "The Way for the Salvation of Palestine," March 20, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefabinladen0308-2.pdf>

⁹² Ayman al-Zawahiri, "A Call to Help Our People in Gaza," March 23, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefazawahiri0308.pdf>

⁹³ International Research Center, "Zawahiri Tries to Clear Name, Explain Strategy," April 21, 2008, <http://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/zawahiri.pdf>

working among the Islamic movements when Osama bin Laden didn't support them with money in 1995. Zawahiri thinks everyone is a traitor like him."⁹⁴

Conclusions

The change of government in Pakistan created an opportunity for the U.S. to alter its strategy to hunt down Al-Qaida in the Tribal Areas. The early summer '08 drone attacks killed a large number of high and mid-level Al-Qaida commanders; however it is assessed that there are still high hundreds of core Al-Qaida members. The increased number of attacks forced senior leaders to move to different places, and some have left the Tribal Areas.⁹⁵

With the pressure from the Pakistani army mounting in the Tribal Areas, "old rivalries could well-emerge" and "resentments against foreigners revive."⁹⁶ In early 2008, tensions between the Uzbek jihadis and the pro-government Wazir tribe exploded in Waziristan. It led to hostilities between the Wazir tribe and foreign fighters, with dozens killed on both sides. Tensions also rose between the Wazir tribe and Mehsud tribe, who protected the Uzbeks.⁹⁷ The two dominant tribes in Waziristan might have had issues concerning the Uzbeks before, but both keep supporting the Jihad in Afghanistan. In the short term, the bond between the Pashtun tribes and the foreigners, including Al-Qaida, seems firm and it should not be expected that Al-Qaida will be "expelled" from the Tribal Areas.⁹⁸

The current Pakistani government has any number of reasons to try to expel Al-Qaida from their soil. Al-Qaida was behind the murder of presidential candidate Benazir Bhutto and was responsible for the attacks on the Danish Embassy and the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad in 2008. Foreign fighters brought suicide attacks to the standard repertoire of radical Islamic groups in Pakistan and their experience with guerrilla warfare, newly developed IEDs, and urban warfare techniques make fighting against the tribes, foreign fighters, and Jihadi groups more difficult than ever before.

Al-Qaida was hit hard in 2008 and they lost a substantial number of higher and middle cadre leaders, which took its toll. As then-CIA Director Michael Hayden assessed in November 2008,

⁹⁴ <http://www.jihadica.com/category/aq-leadership/zawahiri-aq-leadership/page/2/>

⁹⁵ Tom Coghlan, Michael Evans, and Catherine Philp, "Top al-Qaeda Terrorist Abu Zubair al-Masri 'was Missile Target in Bush Campaign for Favourable Legacy,'" *The Times*, November 25, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_america/article5225966.ece

⁹⁶ Richard Barrett, "Seven Years After 9/11: Al-Qaida's Strengths and Vulnerabilities," September 2008, p. 10, <http://www.icsr.info/files/ICSR%20Richard%20Barret%20Paper.pdf>

⁹⁷ "Nine Pro-Govt Militants Slain in Waziristan," *Dawn*, January 8, 2008, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/01/08/top1.htm>

⁹⁸ Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair stated in February 2009 that "If forced to vacate the FATA and locate elsewhere, the group would be vulnerable to US or host-country security crackdowns as well as local resistance, and probably would be forced to adopt an even more dispersed, clandestine structure, making training and operational coordination more difficult. Without access to its FATA safehaven, al-Qa'ida also undoubtedly would have greater difficulty supporting the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan." See: Testimony of Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2009, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/DNI_blair_02122009.pdf

“Those losses are significant. These men were decision-makers, commanders, experienced and committed fighters at the center of planning attacks, not only in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but against Europe and the United States. When we and our allies take terrorists like this off the battlefield, there's a real psychological effect, as well. Those that remain are feeling some heat, and they're not happy about it.”⁹⁹

It is getting more difficult for organizational-Al-Qaida to fill the gaps, as they need middle-aged men with years of experience to lead the often also middle-aged and experienced fighters. Young charismatic men are not an ideal option for Al-Qaida, as they are not experienced or mature enough to be ready to assume a leadership role, nor will they be perceived well by the Tribal leaders and older fighters. Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair recently addressed this point when delivering the Intelligence Community's annual threat assessment, commenting that, because of the loss of leaders “in quick succession”, “in some cases the group has had to promote more junior figures considerably less skilled and respected than the individuals they are replacing.”¹⁰⁰

The organization is also having problems with communications; since U.S. drone attacks increased, leaders have had to spread out making it more difficult to coordinate plots and operations.

But even with all its slew of problems, Al-Qaida remains the main threat to the West. Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair stated in February 2009,

“We have had limited visibility into European plotting, but we assess that al-Qa'ida is continuing to plan attacks in Europe and the West. Al-Qa'ida has used Europe as a launching point for external operations against the Homeland on several occasions since 9/11, and we believe that the group continues to view Europe as a viable launching point. Al-Qa'ida most recently targeted Denmark and the UK, and we assess these countries remain viable targets.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Transcript of Remarks by Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael Hayden at the Atlantic Council, November 13, 2008,
<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/speeches-testimony/speeches-testimony-archive-2008/directors-remarks-at-the-atlantic-council.html>

¹⁰⁰ Testimony of Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2009,
http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/DNI_blair_02122009.pdf

¹⁰¹ Testimony of Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2009,
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