



The Next Generation of Jihad. New leaders are following a new strategy

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In the past year, we have seen the battlefield deaths of such prominent terrorists as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, and Shamil Basayev and Abu Hafs al-Urdani in Chechnya, as well as a host of less publicized kills and captures. While the death of any prominent terrorist is a victory for the United States and its allies, CIA director General Michael Hayden has acknowledged that al Qaeda's loss of veteran leadership since 9/11 "has been mitigated by the group's 'deep bench' of lower-ranking personnel capable of stepping up to assume leadership responsibilities." As they learn from their predecessors' mistakes, these new leaders may be even more lethal; they are already perceptibly changing jihadist strategy.

Though they represent disparate communities, the new terrorist leaders are employing similar strategies. First, they are more aware of their international image than their predecessors. While they seek to strike fear into their enemies, they also wish to appear reasonable to their constituents and the larger Muslim population. The Taliban engaged in massacres and Zarqawi distributed videos showing the beheading of captives, but the new leaders minimize overt acts of brutality that could undermine public support. Second, the new jihadists consider management of civil society more than their predecessors did. They do not wish to preside over failed states. The Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in Somalia, for example, actually succeeded in modestly raising the country's stan-

dard of living during its rule. Third, these new leaders have exploited advanced communications technologies to improve their outreach and forge broader alliances.

This article will examine four prominent figures representing this new generation: Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys in Somalia, Abu Ayyub al-Masri in Iraq, Faqir Mohammed in Pakistan, and Aris Sumarsono (also known as Zulkarnaen) in Indonesia.

On June 5, 2006, the militant ICU seized Mogadishu and over the next few months consolidated control over much of Somalia. However, as the ICU moved on Baidoa, the last bastion of the UN-recognized transitional federal government, Ethiopian forces swept through the country, forcing the ICU from Mogadishu and other major cities. The Ethiopian government had been concerned about the ICU's rise because its predecessor and major component, al-Ittihad al-Islamiya (AIAI), had sponsored Islamic separatist groups in the Ethiopian border province of Ogaden.

But the Ethiopian intervention hardly signals the end of the ICU. The UN's Monitoring Group on Somalia warned in late 2006 that "the ICU is fully capable of turning Somalia into what is currently an Iraq-type scenario, replete with roadside and suicide bombers, assassinations, and other forms of terrorist and insurgent-type activities." That assessment is proving accurate, as the ICU appears to be gaining strength in its fight against the Ethiopians.

A prominent leader of the ICU-led insurgency--and its titular commander--is Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys. As a 42-year-old Somali army colonel fighting in the 1977 war against Ethiopia, he won a medal for bravery. Aweys then worked to establish himself as a respected religious figure and also a political leader with considerable clout in Islamic extremist circles. In 1991, Aweys cofounded and led AIAI, which sought to create an Islamic state in the Horn of Africa. Then, starting in 2006, he served as head of the ICU's consultative council. In this capacity, he shaped the ICU's policies, which brought a strict version of *sharia* (Islamic law) to Somalia--but in a manner that was more consistent with economic growth and civil society than previous jihadist attempts at imposing Islamic law.

As the ICU gained power, Aweys pursued the three new jihadist strategies. First, he committed himself to winning over rather than alienating the Somali population. He sought to harness Islam, Somali nationalism, and Somalis' distaste for the warlords' rule. The ICU portrayed itself as the only major faction in Somalia that upheld Islamic ideals. "The Somalia people are a homogenous people having the same culture, same language, same religion, same sect also," Aweys told *Newsweek* in a rare interview. "The only system they can accept to choose is Islam; no one can force them to take another." He exploited Somali nationalism by describing the Ethiopian government's support for the transitional government as

meddling in Somali affairs. And he positioned the ICU as an alternative to the chaos and corruption of the warlords' rule. His emphasis on stability and rule-of-law won the sympathy of the Somali business community, among others.

Second, Aweys ensured that the ICU minded its international image. It sought to diminish initial comparisons with the Taliban through restraint. Upon taking Kabul, the Taliban ransacked a UN compound, captured the former Afghan president sheltering inside, and emasculated and hanged him. Widespread massacres also marked the Taliban's conquest of Mazar-i Sharif. In contrast, the ICU kept its subjugation relatively bloodless. As it captured strategic Somali cities, there would often be little if any bloodshed; they often allowed the warlords who had earlier controlled the cities to escape.

Finally, the ICU worked to establish a broad-based jihadist coalition. A military intelligence source has confirmed a 2002 nongovernmental Partners International Foundation report that found sixteen operational terrorist training camps in Somalia. In 2006, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia reported, "Foreign volunteers (fighters) have also been arriving in considerable numbers to give added military strength to the ICU. . . . Importantly, foreign volunteers also provide training in guerilla warfare and special topics or techniques." One senior ICU leader, Sheikh Hassan "Turki" Abdullah Hersi, openly admitted foreign involvement in So-

malia during a speech to supporters after the seizure of Kismayo. "Brothers in Islam," he said, "we came from Mogadishu, and we have thousands of fighters, some are Somalis and others are from the Muslim world."

When U.S. Forces killed Zarqawi on June 7, 2006, many officials and analysts thought that al Qaeda in Iraq was in deep trouble. Iraqi national security advisor Mowaffak al-Rubaie, for example, said, "Al Qaeda is on the run now in Iraq, and this is the beginning of the end of al Qaeda in Iraq." But Zarqawi's successor, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, has proven such statements hollow: he has been a far more capable leader than Zarqawi, helping to repair the terrorist group's damaged reputation and form broader alliances with other Iraqi insurgent factions.

Al-Masri's effectiveness is highlighted by a comparison to his predecessor. It is true that Zarqawi captured the imagination of many people throughout the Middle East, but he was also a ruthless killer. His videotapes showed the beheadings not only of Westerners but also of Iraqis. Such brutality turned many Iraqis against al Qaeda in Iraq and opened a rift between Zarqawi's foreign fighters and Iraqi insurgents. This fact was not lost on al Qaeda's central leadership, as evidenced by a letter that bin Laden deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri sent Zarqawi in July 2005 that urged him to curtail his brutal tactics. "Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim population who love and support you will never find palat-

able--also--are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages," Zawahiri implored. "You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughterers." (Zawahiri's objection to Zarqawi's actions was more strategic than moral: he implored Zarqawi to simply shoot his captives.)

Al-Masri has taken al Qaeda in Iraq in a different direction. On one hand, he has worked to build a coalition of insurgent groups and has sought to incorporate Iraqi tribes under his banner. In essence, he is trying to "Iraqify" al Qaeda. On the other hand, he has reached out to a broader range of jihadist groups. In an audiotape released just after the November 7, 2006 U.S. elections, al-Masri urged a more united front to destabilize the Iraqi government. He urged other jihadists to "take care of our Sunni kinsfolk" and to "leniently call for the good and preach against evil especially since the infidel Ba'th Party had confused the people vis-à-vis their religion." Although al Qaeda has been weakened over the past year as a number of tribal leaders have organized to oppose the terrorist group, we do not attribute these changes to al-Masri's leadership.

Al-Masri's strategy is designed to accomplish two of the new generation of jihadists' objectives. He now avoids alienating Iraqi civil society to the extent that Zarqawi did, while working to create a larger jihadist front.

Pakistan is central to Qaeda's war against the West, as the terror group largely relocated to Pakistan after the 2001 U.S. military occupation of Afghanistan. Al Qaeda made strategic gains in Pakistan thereafter, notably the September 2006 Waziristan accord and the March 2007 Bajaur accord. Those accords essentially ceded two major regions of Pakistan to the Taliban and al Qaeda, providing that the Pakistani military would no longer carry out ground or air attacks in Waziristan and Bajaur.

The main beneficiary of the Bajaur accord has been Faqir Mohammed, who became a jihadist in 1993 under the tutelage of Maulana Sufi Mohammad, an active leader in Jamat-e-Islami, a Pakistani movement allegedly linked to terrorist groups. Thereafter, Faqir Mohammed fought in Afghanistan with the Taliban.

Although Mohammed continued to fight in Afghanistan even after the Taliban's fall, he also established a base in Pakistan. A strategic marriage allowed Mohammed to establish himself in the Mamoond tribe in the North-West Frontier Province's Bajaur district. This enabled him to provide al Qaeda with a local safe haven. In January 2005, U.S. intelligence fingered Mohammed's house in Bajaur as al Qaeda's winter headquarters.

Mohammed's role is important. He controls a strategic area from which his forces stage cross-border raids on NATO forces in Afghanistan. The new jihadist leaders increas-

ingly focus on establishing Islamic "emirates" to serve as stepping stones toward a greater caliphate. Figures such as Faqir Mohammed are central to this strategy because they provide a link between al Qaeda and local tribes. They can mitigate ethnic tensions, which otherwise might undercut al Qaeda's effectiveness.

Also consistent with the new jihadist strategy, Mohammed has not sought to overturn the tribes' civil society in Pakistan. Instead, he works within the existing tribal structure, trying to carve out a place for al Qaeda within it. This approach is more likely to engender long-term success than past jihadist efforts to completely remake the societies in which they operated.

Another new generation jihadist leader is located in Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Muslim population. Aris Sumarsono, also known as Zulkarnaen, was born in 1963 in central Java. He became Jemaah Islamiya's chief of military operations in February 2004 after the arrest of his predecessor, and now sits on al Qaeda's main decision-making council. He is well-connected, with access to thousands of potential operatives, and cultivates an image of humility and self-restraint that many Southeast Asian Muslims find appealing.

After developing an expertise in sabotage during more than a decade in Afghanistan, Zulkarnaen returned to Southeast Asia in the 1990s. He helped establish training camps in areas of the Philippines

controlled by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front similar to those that existed under the Taliban in Afghanistan. It was in one such Philippines camp that Mohammed Sidique Khan, a participant in the July 7, 2005 London transportation system attacks, learned bomb-making.

Today, some analysts consider Zulkarnaen to be Indonesia's most dangerous terrorist. He is suspected in several major attacks. He allegedly helped prepare the explosives used in the 2002 Bali disco bombing which killed 202 people, including eighty-eight Australians, and is also a suspect in the August 5, 2003 car bomb attack on the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta.

Beneath Zulkarnaen's quiet demeanor is a devotee to violent international jihad. Zulkarnaen's connections, expertise, and ability to adopt a uniquely Javanese persona make him a formidable opponent.

The upcoming generation of terrorist leaders is not amateur. They have formal military training. Their pragmatism tempers their tendency to romanticize brutality. They no longer assume that Muslims will flock to a strict *sharia* state and, consequently, also tap into nationalist sentiments, even while striving toward a goal that would mean an end to the nation-state. Nevertheless, despite their strategic embrace of national identity, the new jihadist leaders recognize the importance of transnational links and alliances.

The strategic characteristics of these new jihadist leaders fit well with the direction that al Qaeda's central leadership is taking. Local al Qaeda leaders and affiliated groups have managed to maintain semiautonomous control over their individual organizations while still reporting to the central leadership. A senior military intelligence officer described this as "al Qaeda federalism," in which strong local leaders are "held accountable to a strong central leadership."

Meanwhile, the central al Qaeda organization can sense that some of its long-term goals may be within reach for the first time. Al Qaeda has long sought to reestablish the caliphate. Now, the terrorist group's growing regional strength makes the caliphate seem like a more reasonable goal since the Islamic emirates that are currently taking shape could form the basis of an eventual caliphate.

As a new generation of jihadist leaders shifts tactics in pursuit of a long-term vision, U.S. and Western officials counter the threat with disjointed, short-term strategies. The assumptions long held by Western

counterterrorism officials about expansionist terrorist groups may no longer be true. With jihadists devoting greater attention to image, to managing civil society, and to broadening their outreach, states that fall to the jihadists may no longer fail.

In order to counter al Qaeda's new generation, Western officials should concentrate on twin goals. First, they should prevent terrorist safe havens from arising in the first place. This goal was endorsed by the 9/11 Commission, but the above-mentioned safe havens that have emerged in Waziristan and Bajaur show that it is not being met. Second, they need to prove that the United States and its allies are as adept at building a stable civil society as are the jihadists. A large number of Somali citizens looked favorably upon the ICU when it gained power because it provided an alternative to the chaos that had prevailed before. Yet, after supporting a military intervention to topple the ICU, Washington has failed to provide the aid needed to allow Somalia's transitional federal government to thrive. Our current course is not a recipe for success.

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