

## AL QAEDA'S RADICAL IDEOLOGY

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of the article is to illustrate the ideological aspect of al Qaeda that constitutes the pillar of the organization based on a distinct interpretation of the Quran and a biased understanding of the meaning of Jihad. The functional method of al Qaeda is not simplistic or unsystematic, aimed at a particular target or focused on specific country or region. The creation of such a transnational organization could not have been revealed without political ideology with its manifesto and the mechanism to spread its messages all over the world. It will not be correct to put al Qaeda among the category of the classical terror groups, as the writer has shown in the article as a comparison. Moreover, it is not similar to any categories of political Islam movements since the distinction between Jihad and waging war has always been differentiated in the context of Political Islam. Whereas al Qaeda declares enemies in the house of Islam as well to countries, people, and institutions that differ from their own created ideology. This distorted ideology has spread all over the world and become an enemy to Islam itself, which harmed the reputation of Islam as a religion. Attention on the ideologic context of al Qaeda has not been researched well, unknown to the majority of the experts. Instead, the attention at most has been put on its ground actions, security concerns and counter-terrorism.*

**Keywords:** *al Qaeda, political Islam, global jihad, Middle East, terrorism.*

### INTRODUCTION

The radical Islamic ideology and the violence derived from it have brought great attention not only to the politicians or experts in the field but also to the huge audience called the international arena. Interestingly, “Global Radical Islamic Movements” become more understandable and logical when viewed not as an outcome of classical terrorism but could be more accurate in paying attention to the ideology hidden behind the violence. In relation, there are two distinct notions regarding the base of the threat, in which the one accepts al Qaeda as a classical terrorist group that causes violence and killings directed towards innocent people, and the second stresses the ideological threat of the organization and its spread throughout not only in the Arabic world but also in the Muslim world and among the Muslim population living in Western countries. Nevertheless, although al Qaeda is tracked among the terrorist groups and it contains violence in its responding strategy, the threat stems more to the Arab nations and to world security from its ideology and its actions such as creating networks and spreading radicalism, which is aimed to unite the Muslim world under one shelter and control it.

In the first part of the article, the writer will remark the definitions of the classical understanding of terrorism, how al Qaeda could be relevant to that explanation and the notion of a political philosopher, Michael Walzer (2004), where he explains the terrorism of the radicals as a method to fight the enemy, as long as the enemy is configured and the victims are generalized, under its understanding. In other words, terror is not violence per se but a war tactic. Moreover, the writer will cite other Islamic radical organizations, such as Hamas, whose action and violence focus on local causes against one specific enemy. In addition, its radical views are not seen as a threat to the international system. Armenian

terrorist group ASALA, where its expressive terrorism and its core goal was to gain attention. Yet, in the case of al Qaeda, the threat comes not only from the attacks and the violence but from the fear of the emergence of Islamic threat as a rivalry to the existing Muslim nations and the West. For instance, David Kilcullen (2009:12) notes the seriousness of the advancement of al Qaeda from the local to the global level and its outcomes in world terrorism and counter-terrorism issues. The second part of the article will focus on the rationale of al Qaeda in announcing radical jihad against the near and far enemy and their motivation in spreading radicalism both in the domestic region (Arabic peninsula) and in the foreign stadium (The West), which shows the essential threat from al Qaeda comes from its ideology but not only through the terrorist attacks against appointed targets.

### **Violence or Ideology?**

The term ideology has become known in politics since the outbreak of the French Revolution amid the formation of nations and the notion of establishing ideologies such as Nationalism, Socialism, Liberalism and so forth. The essentiality of ideology has been important in shaping the societies and political factions based on particular ideas, beliefs that determine perspectives to interpret social and political realities (New World Encyclopedia contributors, 2018). In other words, ideology is the backbone of any organization that its purpose is to implement change in society. In terms of al Qaeda, its ideology has been based on global agenda; to establish a global jihadi movement, by using terms from Islamic historical narratives such as re-establishing the Kahlifate and beliefs taken from Quran that are mostly misinterpreted by the ideologues of al Qaeda members. Thus, the ideas and beliefs of al Qaeda are an attempt to de-form the Muslim World, by imposing an ideology based on conservative Salafi norms with takfiri methods which contain terrorizing and enslavement of the societies in the Muslim world under its set of rules and lifestyle. Thus, al Qaeda's ideology has been intended to distort the social and political realities of the Muslim World by an ideology composed of hidden goals in the name of Islam.

The classical understanding of terrorism among experts is described as an attack by a group of people against innocents. For example, William Safire (1968:719) mentions "...persuasion by fear; the intimidation of society by a small group, using as its weapon that society's repugnance at the murder of innocents." Similarly, the Oxford Dictionary (2009) gives the core understanding to the term as "...life-threatening actions perpetrated by politically motivated self-appointed sub-state groups." As written above, the act of violence is stressed as the main point. This explanation draws the attention only to the bombings and the casualties done by al Qaeda, such as the destruction of World Trade Center (WTC) and the attack on the Pentagon with a total of 3000 death in 2001 of the ten bombs on four trains explosions in Madrid and Spain, killing 200 people and injuring few thousands, according to an article "Major Terrorist Acts Suspected of or Inspired by al-Qaeda" (2010).

However, in terms of Islamic groups, such as al Qaeda, the reality is more than just provocation against any government or group of people for the following reasons. First, from Walzer's explanation, civilians are not seen as innocents but as subjects in the battle. As bin Laden explains, the reason for generalizing the United States Government with its population as an enemy is because the US citizen

pays taxes and the American soldier being a citizen, represents its government (Lawrence, 2005:165). In other words, al Qaeda considers the entire population of its opponent as an enemy and an object for an attack. Furthermore, as Barack Mendelsohn (2005:23) puts it, “Al Qaeda’s ideology not only challenges the sovereignty of specific states but also brings under attack some of the principles and institutions of the Islamic States (IS). Al Qaeda rejects the authority of states to recognize other states, especially when it comes to a Muslim land.” Thus, al Qaeda is not a group of terrorists who attack the innocents in this manner but a transnational organization that works to establish an Islamic caliphate.

To reveal the ideological importance of the issue, the writer will argue the case with another terrorist group known as the Armenian Secret Army For The Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), where its goal was to gain attention worldwide from the superpowers to act in favour of the Armenian question. Thereby, its attacks were aimed against Turkish politicians and people who denied the reality of the Armenian Genocide, according to MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, “Armenian Secret ARMY for the Liberation of Armenia” (2007). Evidently, the threat of the Armenian terrorist group had no intentions to create an Armenian nation that unites the Middle East under one territory or urges the Armenian diaspora to start a battle against Turkey’s allies. In contrast, al Qaeda’s ideological threat comes from its call for armed Jihad against the West and works to awaken the Muslim population to start insurgencies around the world by altering its operations more on an international basis with ideological motives derived from Qutb (Burke, 2003-2004:13).

Thus, its strategy consists of several points, including practicing core Islam, overthrowing Arab regimes that al Qaeda considers as not Islamic, evacuating crusaders and non-believers from the Arabic Peninsula, establishing an Islamic Caliphate worldwide through connections of other radical Islamic groups (2010:7). Furthermore, examining another Islamic radical movement such as Hamas, it becomes clear that its threat is not from its ideology and not directed towards shifting the world order as Hamas’s intention focuses on the Jewish State and Zionism and fights under the name of Islam to liberate the territory and establish Islamic country (Post, 2007:176). Hence, al Qaeda is not a simply terrorist group fighting for resistance, but a radical Islamic organization with its ideology and calls the Muslims around the globe to unite under its shelter.

Second, although the journalist, Jason Burke (2003-2004:6) accepts al Qaeda as a group of fighters against the invaders during the war in Afghanistan and considers al Qaeda as an ordinary resistance group fighting under the name of Islam against the Soviets, and it has no cells or networks. The real threat was the establishment of radical Islam and its core disputes with the Arab Muslim nations in issues such as on what basis should The Islamic world be constituted and who has the credibility to reign it, as Rohan Gunaratna (2005) puts it “Al Qaeda is a jihad organization with a global reach”. In keeping its original mandate, its principal aim was to inspire and incite Islamic movements and the Muslim masses worldwide to attack those who threaten Islam and Muslims.

In addition, in an interview with bin Laden (1997), bin Laden accuses the Saudi regime and considers it not Islamic due to its correlation with the US and other western countries. Moreover, Jeffrey

Haynes (2010:182) reveals the connection al Qaeda has had since the 1990s in Eritrea, Somalia, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and mentions the creation of the radical Islamist understanding of the organization. As a result, according to Karam (2010) in Reuters cites as “Saudi Arabia’s arrests of 113 al Qaeda-linked militants, including two suicide bomb teams, shows that the jihadi threat to the world’s top oil exporter has not disappeared...” Furthermore, al Qaeda’s threat comes more from its circulation of ideology by the use of technology and internet. Abdel Bari Atwan (2007:4-7) mentions the importance of the internet in al Qaeda’s strategy and the existence of 4,500 jihadi websites which bring ideologically similar people together and advocate the believers to join the Jihad and free the Muslim nation from unbelievers. Thus, the threat is not only the violence caused by the terrorist group but from its ideology of spreading radical Islamic views among Muslims.

Considering the threat issue, al Qaeda does not only use the internet to spread its extremist views but also functions, and it is very active in the regions. It settles as a core threat, not in terms of the existence of the supported fighters, but because of the emergence of the ideological threat. As Rohan Gunaratna (2005) puts it, “Today, al Qaeda’s real power is the disparate groups it had trained, financed, armed and most importantly ideologized. The al Qaeda network (al Qaeda group and its associated groups) and ideologically affiliated cells comprise the al Qaeda movement.” Why Kilcullen (2009) argues the importance of counter-insurgency instead of counter-terrorism? Because al Qaeda is well developed within the society and its ideology is strong, although the journalist mentions the inefficiency of al Qaeda in dominating the region.

### **Ideological Battle: Muslim World Atacked by Radical Ideology**

In this part, the writer argues against the notion that al Qaeda’s actions are merely against the foreign existence in the Arabic Peninsula, and it does not follow any intentions to take over and change the political and social situation in the Muslim world (Hegghammer, 2006:41). Even so, al Qaeda’s passive existence in terms of violation in the Muslim world and Arabic countries does not mean that the threat is directed only towards foreign objects, and the clash between the radicals and existing governments is not evident. The real threat is against the existing political and religious structure as an obstacle in uniting the Ummah (Kilcullen, 2009:16).

Although al Qaeda has arranged several casualties in the Arabic peninsula towards American and Western objects and explained its enmity towards the existence of the Western influence in the region, its refusal of the American occupation of Saudi’s wealth and so forth. Al Qaeda’s real threat emerges from its resistance towards the current regimes as Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner (2003:4) note, “the Jihadis charged the Saudis and other regimes in the Muslim world with un-Islamic behaviour and thus apostasy, and called for a jihad to remove them.” Al Qaeda threatens the Saudi Government by asking to leave the country (Chaliand and Blin, 2007:224). Similarly, the radicals of al Qaeda were in disagreement with the Saudi regime due to the different vision of their ideology in terms of ruling the Islamic world, and al Qaeda showed its opposition and its willingness to change the vision of Islam within the Arabic peninsula (Post, 2007:197). Furthermore, in an interview with bin Laden

(1996), bin Laden accuses the Saudi regime of reproducing the vision of the American foreign policy towards the Islamic issues and its inability to protect the Muslim rights in Palestine and Iraq. As a result, al Qaeda is actively imposing its war against the regime by using the internet and take the battle to ideological field by propaganda (Atwan, 2007:138), as the Syrian Presidents puts it "...Al Qaeda's extremist ideology is now attracting increased support, expanding its networks among a new generation of supporters ... in the Sunni Muslim world (al Assad cited in Haynes, 2010). Thus the ideas and statements mentioned above show the emergence of the cold war between the Muslims and the threat originating from al Qaeda's ideology.

In addition, it is worth mentioning the steps taken or implied against the radical al Qaeda threat, which shows the concern of the scholars and experts of the ideological threat spread by the radicals. For example, King Abdullah II of Jordan arranged a get-together session with Muslim scholars and invited them to condemn the ideology imposed by radical movements (Amman Message cited in David Kilcullen, 2009). Moreover, David Kilcullen (2009) reveals the extraordinary reality of al Qaeda as not being a traditional terrorist movement, but a global uprising that calls the Muslim world to unite and establish the caliphate and emphasizes the importance of dealing with al Qaeda on the basis of counter-insurgency, rather than counter-terrorism. Furthermore, Saudi authorities have started an anti-radicalization campaign aimed to educate the public and protect the population from the radical ideology (Boucek, 2008). Thus, although the purpose of this article is to show the threat of al Qaeda, the notions cited by scholars and experts about how to defeat al Qaeda helps to understand the emergence of the threat from its ideology but not only from the imposed violence.

Moreover, al Qaeda's ability to spread its ideology puts the international order in danger in dealing with radical movements around the world that are correlated as Rohan Gunaratna (2005) indicates that although al Qaeda was partially ineffective after the American invasion, the threat of Global Jihad is still active and has its connections with regional and global affiliates. For instance, the linkage between al Qaeda and the Southeast Asian radical terrorist movement, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), is based on the ideology of uniting the Muslim world under one core Islamic unity and the faithful relations between the leaders of al Qaeda and the JI indicates the strong impact of the ideology in these types of terrorist groups. As a result, the mutual worldview between al Qaeda and JI on the ground led them to be engaged in terrorist operations such as hijacking attempts in Bangkok. Thus, these actions mentioned above show the importance of radical ideology and its threat to the international system in terms of the impact of uniting organizations from different regions.

### **The West Attacked by Radical Ideology**

According to the articles, "Threat Video in Spain Flat Rubble" (2004) and "Al-Qaeda Claims London Bombings" (2015), the West has been attacked in recent years by terrorist blasts, and the attention was merely on the violence al Qaeda was engaged as being a message for the Western countries to withdraw from Afghanistan and other Muslim countries. However, further research shows that the threat stems from al Qaeda in the Western front is more than just an act of violation aimed to draw

attention upon the radical terrorist. However, al Qaeda's intention has two dimensions. First, to awaken the Muslim diaspora and involve them in the uniting caliphate project, which will oppose the crusaders. Second, to show its hatred towards the Western civilization and a message that al Qaeda is capable of defeating the most powerful nation. Hence, the threat is not only from the terrorist attacks but also from the attempt of radical groups to radicalize the Muslim population in Europe, which can create several casualties within the countries they live (Farmer, 2007:185). Moreover, al Qaeda's ideology is in harmony with Samuel Huntington's findings (cited in Haynes, 2010:185) as radical Islam is the next threat to the international order. In addition, Sayyid Qutb implies the impossibility of Islam and the West to adapt and live in peace (Farmer, 2007:86).

The strategy of radical Islamists in targeting the Muslim population has its extraordinary methods such as using the mosques, internet, associations and appoint scholars to spread the core idea of radicalism to create extremism and enmity (Kilcullen, 2009) and (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). Moreover, al Qaeda has its own standing in advocating to embrace radicalization and participate in the battle against the infidels and its allies (Kilcullen, 2009:246). For example, the encouraging object of the Madrid Bombings is related to the Islamic Cultural Centre known as Mosque 30, which spreads radical thoughts and its capability of uniting same-minded people to organize crime (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). Similarly, radicals have created a ghetto in London in Beeston's Mosque and the surrounding community, and Jihad was an essential issue to learn and discuss. Furthermore, in the United States, radical NGO's are becoming an imminent danger in spreading works of radical thinkers, organizing gatherings, classes for youths to learn the radical vision, and so forth

Hence, whether this vision has its success or not, it is evident from the examples above that the real threat is emerging from the ideology and those advocating in learning and practicing radicalism. As a result, the Western Muslim population has started to be more active in demanding their rights in practicing Islam under proper conditions and demanding from the European Governments' creation of schoolgirls, ritually slaughtered meat, the battle over wearing the headscarves and so forth. It resulted in increased radicalization in Europe that is al Qaeda's most important tactic to challenge international counter-terrorism (Farmer, 2007). Thus, the core threat that comes from the radicals is the creation of a radical Islamic identity in different regions of the world, rather than the attacks appointed to targets.

It is worth mentioning the anti-radicalization efforts started by European countries, which shows the importance of the threat emerging from the active radical groups within the society, as Dutch officials see the threat not only in terms of security but the will of the radicals to isolate the Muslim population for its surroundings which can result in demographic problems (Vision, 2008). Another aspect related to sustaining radicalization is brought by David Kilcullen (2009), where counter-terrorism has seen inefficient in dealing with al Qaeda, because al Qaeda organization uses its ideology, and mingles with the tribes that operate. Thus, al Qaeda is not a classical terrorist group or separatist movement, but a globalized radical organization with its ideology and supporters in different regions.

As a result, in dealing with such an organization, the authorities should challenge the ideology and inform society about the radicals' harmful and unacceptable manners.

The second issue is the enmity of al Qaeda towards the United States not only for being the occupying force within the Muslim world per se but because radical Islam ideologically finds itself incompatible with the Western culture and accepts the West as an opponent (Farmer, 2007). Due to this phenomenon, the priority of the radical ideology in this battle gives the notion that radical al Qaeda is not a terrorist movement that fights the United States only. It is occupying the Muslim lands as Jason Burke mentions about al Qaeda being far from ideology and clash of civilization statement and its battle is political, due to the existence of the foreign influence in the Arabic peninsula (Burke, 2003-2004:21-23).

However, for the reason that the United States is the pioneer of the West and al Qaeda is creating an ideology that opposes the Western values and becoming its core enemy and the battle is not territorial or meant to violate the enemy per se, but ideological (Huntington, 1996) and (Haynes, 2010). For example, bin Laden puts it "...the battle is not between the al-Qaeda organization and the global crusaders. Rather, the battle is between Muslims-the people of Islam-and the global crusaders" (Lawrence, 2005:108). Moreover, the policy of the Bush administration in generalizing the terror issue with Islam and its inability in establishing good relations with the Muslim and Arab world and seeing Islam as an enemy (Kellner, 2002:21-24), further emphasizes that the battle is between civilizations and the threat is emerging from the ideology as radical Islam is advocating of facing new enemies in the international system.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article has shown that the violence is not only the threat coming from al Qaeda but its ideology that aims to give a new understanding of Islam and al Qaeda's willingness to implement the created ideology into action. Moreover, this article has revealed the nature of the radical Islamic ideology that al Qaeda offered with a comparison to liberation movements such as radical Islamic Hamas and the Armenian ASALA, where the former, although emerged from similar Islamic roots. Its intention is focused on fighting the Zionism and the nation of Israel in the Middle East. The latter has an expressive attitude and its target is appointed towards the Turkish diplomats and urges the international arena to pay attention to the Armenian question. In terms of al Qaeda, the paper showed the uniqueness of its ideology and the hidden message that confronts the West in general and the Muslim government in particular. Furthermore, this article emphasized the ideological threat of al Qaeda by showing the importance of using networks and technology in its tactics in order to spread the visions of radical scholars and educate the youth to make them involved in the Muslim unity idea. However, there is the notion that al Qaeda is not an organization with networks and influential abilities, and its intention is more focused on fighting foreign armies.

Furthermore, the article also stressed the emergence of the ideology of radical Islam in the international scene and its threat is directed especially towards Saudi Arabia's ruling family as being accused of not practicing Islam under desired circumstances and, most importantly, unaccepted, because of its relations with Islam's most popular enemy the United States. Thus, this implies that al Qaeda is not only a threat to the United States objects in the Arabic Peninsula but also to the ruling family due to its aim of establishing the caliphate under a radicalized version. Moreover, al Qaeda's threat to the West again is not only to cause violence and try to defeat the enemy but also its aim to awaken the Muslim population living in the Western countries and invite them to join the uniting mission through its networks and cells that have the impact in developing the radicalization of the Muslim diaspora. Hence, the threat is the emergence of the radical ideology within the West through al Qaeda's active participation. In this regard, the threat of al Qaeda towards the West intended to generate the clash between the Islam world and the Western values, which is a challenge to international security.

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