



NEWPORT PAPERS

A Series of Point Papers
from the Naval War College and the
Navy Warfare Development Command
For Senior Leadership
In Response to Critical Issues

Strategy / CONOPS / Doctrine / Decision

United States Naval War College
Navy Warfare Development Command
Newport, Rhode Island

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Newport Paper: 08**ENEMY OBJECTIVES**

Purpose: To analyze enemy objectives as formulated by Usama bin Laden and *Al Qaeda*.

Background: Usama bin Laden (UBL) and *Al Qaeda* are not mindless terrorists. They have a set of goals and objectives that have been clearly articulated in UBL's *fatwas* (edicts) of 1996 and 1998 and in numerous interviews with him since 1993. Their goals and objectives have been designed to have broad-based appeal in the Arab and Islamic worlds. UBL and *Al Qaeda* have managed to create a nexus between those who hate America for *what it is*—such as the fundamentalists who view it as an immoral, materialistic, and anti-Islamic nation—and those who despise it *for what it does*—such as mainstream Muslims, secularists, nationalists, intellectuals, and media. During the Gulf crisis of 1990-1991, Saddam Hussein formulated an approach that linked nationalist and religious motifs. While his strategy resonated with some, it was ultimately unsuccessful since Saddam was perceived as a hypocrite. Whether consciously or unconsciously, UBL has followed a similar strategy. But UBL's strategy resonates more effectively among the masses of people in the region who have had ten years of becoming more acquainted with the world's only superpower. In contrast with Saddam Hussein, UBL is seen as heroic and pious by many. More importantly, he is seen as successful against America, whereas Saddam was not.

Discussion: UBL and *Al Qaeda* have five main objectives. They are a combination of primary and secondary, narrow and broad, and near-, medium-, and long-term objectives.

1. Remove U.S. forces from the Arabian peninsula and totally eliminate the American presence in the Middle East. These are the principal near-term goals of UBL and *Al Qaeda*. Both as a citizen of Saudi Arabia (although an Islamic fundamentalist would not refer to himself as a citizen of *Saudi Arabia*) and as a Muslim, UBL sees the U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia specifically and in the region generally as humiliating and sacrilegious. When the rulers of his country called upon outside powers to defend their land, they essentially acknowledged that they had squandered billions of dollars on defense. A Muslim ruler who cannot defend that part of the Islamic community over which he holds sway forfeits his legitimacy. And the presence of "infidels" on the land of the "two holy mosques" is blasphemous. Not since the time of the Prophet Muhammad when the "infidels" were expelled from the holy land has it been defiled in such a manner. In the words of the February 1998 "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for *Jihad* against the Jews and the Crusaders," an edict which appeared under UBL's signature:

For more than seven years the United States is occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of its territories, Arabia, plundering its riches, overwhelming its rulers, humiliating its people, threatening its neighbors, and using its bases in the peninsula as a spearhead to fight against the neighboring Islamic peoples.¹

2. Extend support to Muslim groups worldwide that are fighting oppressive and un/non-Islamic systems (in, for instance, Algeria, Bosnia, Egypt, Kosovo, Chechnya, Kashmir, Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Uzbekistan). Another near-term objective of UBL and *Al Qaeda* is to provide support to other militant Islamic fundamentalists that share their goals. Muslims fighting oppression everywhere are regarded as worthy of material support (i.e., logistics, funds, training, etc.). Some of the members of Islamic fundamentalist organizations in the above-named countries have received training in *Al Qaeda* camps in Afghanistan. *Al Qaeda* operatives and veterans of the Afghan war against the Soviets have also returned to their countries to help organize or lead anti-government groups; Algerian veterans of the Afghan war, for instance, were in the forefront of the insurrectionary war and horrendous acts of terror by Islamists over the course of the 1990s.

3. Free the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and ultimately bring about the return of Palestine to the Islamic Umma (community). Israeli control of *Al Aqsa* Mosque and of the holy land is an affront to all Muslims. Contrary to the perceptions of some observers, UBL did not come to the longer-term Palestinian issue late in the game or merely in an opportunistic manner. He genuinely believes that the "Zionist entity"—which is the fundamentalist code for Israel—is illegitimate. The portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a struggle in which a powerful Israel is supported unswervingly by America resonates with Arabs from all walks of life. Like most other fundamentalists, UBL believes that the Muslim world will not ultimately reconcile itself to the loss of Palestine as it did to the loss of *Al Andalus* (i.e., Spain) to the infidels. In UBL's own words:

Let the whole world know that we shall never accept that the tragedy of Andalusia would be repeated in Palestine. We cannot accept that Palestine will become Jewish.²

4. Save the Arab countries from the threat of disintegration at the hands of the "Zionist-Crusader" conspiracy. The presence of U.S. forces on Muslim lands and of the "Zionist entity" in the heart of the Islamic world is perceived as promoting the "Zionist-Crusader" goal of breaking up the most important and most powerful Arab states—UBL specifically names Egypt, Iraq, and Arabia—into little "statelets" that are easier to dominate and control. This is a nationalist message that has been articulated by secular

¹ As quoted in Bernard Lewis, "License to Kill: Usama bin Laden's Declaration of Jihad," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 6, November/December 1998, p. 14.

² As quoted in Tom Mashberg, "History is key to bin Laden's loathing of U.S.," *Boston Herald*, October 14, 2001, p. 8.

Arab politicians, thinkers, and leaders since the beginning of the conflict with Israel. The Arab fear of "balkanization," however, was heightened in the 1970s and 1980s when Israel provided support to secessionist minorities within the Arab world—to the Maronite Christians in Lebanon and to the Kurds in Iraq. The fear of "balkanization" was articulated as well by Saddam Hussein during the 1980s and 1990s and has been picked up by UBL.

5. Overthrow the "taghut"(oppressive rulers) in Muslim societies and establish Islamic states. This goal, which is the preeminent long-term goal, or the end-result of all the others, has not been articulated as well or as often by UBL. It is not clear why this is so. However, a number of possible reasons could play a role. First, UBL may not have a clear idea of what this goal should be; naturally he calls for the overthrow of "apostate" regimes and the setting up of an Islamic state where the *Sharia*, the divine law, is the sole source of legislation. Apart from that he does not say much more. Second, UBL is a lay person, he has no religious education or training. Third, it may be that UBL has focused on near-term objectives for tactical reasons. UBL has, until recently, avoided verbal or military assaults against Arab governments because he presumably did not want them to side with the United States in the current conflict or to take active counter-terrorist measures against fundamentalist groups within their respective societies. Arab governments, however, have not enthusiastically sided with the United States in the current war. Furthermore, some Arab governments have used the current crisis to intensify their campaigns against Islamic groups. Not surprisingly, UBL has stepped up his verbal assaults on those governments.

Actions/Recommendations: It is imperative that U.S. policymakers understand fully the goals of UBL and *Al Qaeda*. If U.S. strategy for the war on terror is to be successful, the nation's leaders must know what it is that our enemies want to accomplish.