University of Cincinnati

Terrorism Awareness

Post Osama bin Laden World—What Does it Really Mean?

Term Paper

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Certification Statement

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Signed: John T. Morris
Abstract

Osama bin Laden became a household name on September 11, 2001; though this was not his entry into the world of murder in the name of the Muslim world by any stretch. ¹Osama bin Muhammad bin Awad bin Laden is born in Riyadh. He is 17th of 52 children sired by Muhammad Bin Laden--Saudi Arabia’s wealthiest construction magnate. On May 2, 2011 his role ended as he was taken out by members of the Navy’s elite Seal Team Six. This paper will look at his past efforts, reaching back to ²December 29, 1992 which is the first bombing in Aden, Yemen that US Intelligence has linked to bin Laden and his associates; and then will attempt to put into perspective the changes that will occur in a post-bin Laden world. What will the short and near term focus of terrorists operating under the Al Qaeda “brand” be; what effect will the recent uprisings associated with the Arab Spring in many Muslim countries have on the overall terrorism environment; and finally, how will the US position adjust with respect to military operations in Afghanistan, and neighboring Pakistan.

¹http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/etc/cron.html
²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden
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Background

To put into context Osama bin Laden’s rise to the “top” of the terrorism world, it is first key to provide some degree of background - this starting with his birth; born in Riyadh. He is 17th of 52 children sired by Muhammad Bin Laden--Saudi Arabia's wealthiest construction magnate. He left Saudi Arabia in 1979 after graduating from King Abdul Aziz University in Jiddah with a degree in civil engineering. His first stop in his ascension to the ultimate top of the “most wanted” list was as a member of the Afghan resistance, where he operated on the Pakistani border from 1980-86, leveraging his wealth, connections and his early leadership traits to raise funds as well as providing logistical and humanitarian aid to the mujahedeen in their battles against the Soviets. From 1986-89 he ascended to a more direct and prominent role as a guerilla commander; where it is reported he fought in numerous battles against Soviet forces, including the battle of Jalalabad, which ultimately led to the Soviets withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The Afghan war kept bin Laden occupied until 1989, where in the wake of the Soviets battered and bloodied departure he broadened his effort to spread his holy war, or jihad to free other “occupied” Muslim lands. Through 1988 he answered to Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, the leader of “The Office of Services”, a paramilitary group of mujahideen. (Zalman) These unorganized guerrilla warriors were viewed as outlaws by their Soviet enemy and as "freedom fighters" by the Reagan Administration in the U.S., which supported the ‘enemy of its enemy,’ the Soviet Union. He broke from Azzam in 1988 and formed al Qaeda (the Base), with a “mission statement” that reads in part as
“3 The overthrow of the godless regimes and their replacement with an Islamic regime”.

This comes in the introduction of the “al Qaeda Manual” that was found in a search of an al Qaeda members home in England, and is referenced simply to put into context what appears to be the organizational rationale for all that has come since their inception.

Ironically, bin Laden fought the Soviet occupiers with US backing from the CIA who provided training, military equipment and funding. To a degree it could be argued that the US helped to create al Qaeda, or at least the conditions present in Afghanistan that allowed the “brand” that has since reshaped the world. “4 He franchised the idea of terrorism directed at America and the franchises are now in every corner of the Muslim world,” said Milt Bearden, the CIA station chief in Pakistan from 1986-1989 when the agency covertly backed the "mujahideen" in Afghanistan in their fight to oust Soviet forces.

5Following the withdrawal of the Soviets, it is reported that bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia and worked in the family construction business. Additionally it is thought that his efforts to help Islamic veterans of the Afghan war, that formed into loosely affiliated groups of experienced soldiers who became the basis for his support in franchises in Bosnia, Chechnya, Somalia, and the Philippines. Throughout this period he was building additional financial support, as well as expanding his following of like-minded jihadists.

3 http://www.disastercenter.com/terror/Al_Qaeda_Manual_PRESENTATION.htm
5 http://www.infoplease.com/spot/osamabinladen.html
In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. This led to the formation of a 34 nation coalition that was formed to militarily expel Iraq from Kuwait. The war began with the bombing campaign that was launched on January 17, 1991; and the ground war that began on February 23, 1991. The buildup to this action resulted in US troops being stationed in Saudi Arabia; and as the birthplace of Islam, bin Laden was inflamed, and vocally railed against the Saudi government. These actions resulted in his expulsion from Saudi Arabia, and likely served as the trigger for his tight focus on anti-US activity that culminated in the attacks of September 11, 2001; and finally his death on the May 1, 2011. (Blanchard) Bin Laden issued a declaration of jihad against the United States in 1996 that signaled his emergence as an internationally recognizable figure and offered a full account of his main critiques of an enemy he described as the "alliance of Jews, Christians, and their agents." Adopting the sensitive historical and religious imagery of Islamic resistance to the European Crusades, Bin Laden condemned the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, criticized the international sanctions regime on Iraq, and voiced his opposition to U.S. support for Israel.

To know what to possibly expect in a post bin Laden landscape, it is instructive to look at the history of actions attributed to bin Laden and al Qaeda. These actions included multiple fatwahs against American forces stationed in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Somalia; these orders called for attacks on troops in these countries. It has been determined that there were three attacks against US interest prior to 1999: February 1993 - World Trade Center bombing, killing 6 persons and injuring over 1,000; June 1996 - Bomb attack in Saudi Arabia, killing 19 U.S. soldiers; and in August 1998 - U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, resulting in 224 deaths.
It is also said that “on October 3 and 4, 1993, in Mogadishu, Somalia, persons who had been trained by al Qaeda (and by trainers trained by al Qaeda) participated in an attack on United States military personnel serving in Somalia as part of Operation Restore Hope, which attack resulted in the killing of 18 United States Army personnel”

Additional attacks are attributed to his organization, and the fatwahs against Westerners, and especially the U.S. On January 3, 2000, an attack on the USS The Sullivans, a U.S. navy destroyer, failed when the alleged attack boat sank in the port of Aden, Yemen.

The next major attack was directly against the U.S. Navy in Aden, Yemen where on October 12, 2000, the U.S. Navy destroyer USS Cole was attacked by an explosive-packed boat that rammed the ship during a refueling stop. This low tech, but highly successful attack killed 17 sailors, and wounded another 39. It also crippled a $1 billion ship, and resulted in a significant change of the rules of engagement that stymied any meaningful action that could have easily thwarted the attack.

And then on September 11, 2001 the attacks on the New York, Washington D.C., and what was likely a failed attack on another high value target resulted in the crash of the fourth airlines in Pennsylvania; with nearly 3,000 people killed including 343 firefighters that were lost in the collapse of the North and South towers of the World Trade Center.

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6 http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/readings/indictment.html
Literature Review

Clearly much of this discussion throughout this paper is purely conjecture; and is a compilation of multiple sources. As of this writing bin Laden’s death is just two months in the past, and the story continues to unfold. There are a number of questions that are posed at the beginning of this paper, and the answers in some cases change daily as new analysis is developed and published.

The military strategy continues to unfold in a post bi Laden environment. It becomes challenging to justify further involvement in Afghanistan. From Senator Richard Luger, the top Republican of the Foreign Relation Committee during hearings on Afghanistan-

“With al-Qaida largely displaced from the country but franchised in other locations, Afghanistan does not carry a strategic value that justifies 100,000 American troops and a $100 billion per year cost, given current fiscal restraints,”

General Martin Dempsey who has been selected as Admiral Michael Mullen’s replacement as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told a military think tank in London that military leaders are still gauging the likely impact on al-Qaida’s capability and future threat; and that Bin Laden’s killing last month was "a great moment in terms of taking the leadership of al-Qaida and creating difficulties for that organization," he

7 http://www.startribune.com/world/122939088.html
goes further to say that he and others haven’t "yet come to understand what his particular demise might mean, and might mean for the future".
Discussion

With these attacks, and others that failed or were otherwise thwarted, it becomes quite clear that bin Laden was the linchpin of AQ terrorism. His death has left a potential power vacuum; with a few standouts for his possible successor; but maybe the real question is whether a successor is even relevant in what now has become the “Arab Spring”.

Elliot Abrams writes “The timing of Osama bin Laden’s death is perfect, coming during the Arab Spring. Al Qaeda’s message that violence, terrorism and extremism are the only answer for Arabs seeking dignity and hope is being rejected each day in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and throughout the Arab lands.

Al Qaeda and its view of the world are being pushed aside in favor of demands for new governments, free elections, freedom of speech and assembly and an end to corruption. Bin Laden’s death weakens Al Qaeda and Salafi movements further by taking away their most powerful symbol”.

If this ultimately is the new reality, then the proffered new leadership of AQ that might be found in the likes of Ayman al-Zawahiri bin Laden’s old deputy, who appears to be the most likely successor is installed, may be extremely challenged to foment the same unifying leadership vision. Bin Laden was the ideological, spiritual and operational center, the very "brand" of AQ. Al-Zawahiri is clearly not the unifying voice which bin Laden was for his many years as the leader of AQ; and is not considered universally accepted.
On April 30, 2009, the US State Department reported that Zawahiri had now emerged as al-Qaeda's operational and strategic commander and that Osama bin Laden was now only the ideological figurehead of the organization. After the May 2, 2011 death of Osama bin Laden, however, a senior U.S. intelligence official was quoted as saying intelligence gathered in the raid showed that bin Laden remained deeply involved in planning: “This compound (where bin Laden was killed) in Abbottabad was an active command-and-control center for Al Qaeda’s leader. He was active in operational planning and in driving tactical decisions within Al Qaeda.”

Following the death of bin Laden, former Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism Juan Zarate said Zawahiri would “clearly assume the mantle of leadership” of al-Qaeda. But a senior U.S. administration official said that although al-Zawahiri is likely to be al-Qaeda’s next leader, his authority is not "universally accepted" among al-Qaeda’s followers, particularly in the Gulf region. Zarate said Zawahiri is more controversial and less charismatic than bin Laden

Clearly his death has an effect, again really somewhat unknown on the U.S. Military involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and as an offshoot to the Arab Spring uprisings that now has us involved in what is essentially a three theater war. Even in the Cold War, we were not likely capable of prosecuting targets, or defending against attacks from that wide of a “front. There is no doubt that our military is stretched too far, and this third engagement is troublesome.

Iraq is somewhat more clear-cut as troop withdrawal has been ongoing; on Wikipedia it reports that “On August 19, 2010, the 4th Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division was the last US combat brigade to withdraw from Iraq. About 50,000 US troops will remain in the country in an advisory capacity. According to the US, they will help to train Iraqi forces in a new mission dubbed by the US as "Operation New Dawn," which

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayman_al-Zawahiri#Emergence_as_al-Qaeda.27s_chief_commander

will run until the end of 2011. The mission that ended August 19, 2010 was dubbed by the US as “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” at a projected cost of more than $900 billion and 4,415 US troops killed in action”. With that said reports recently have allude to an extension of troops beyond the advertised December 31, 2011 deadline; with Defense Secretary Robert Gates staing “In terms of a future strategic relationship beyond 2011, I would say that initiative clearly needs to come from the Iraqis. We are open to discussing it.” He then added, “We will stand by and be ready to have that discussion if and when they want to raise it with us.”

Current plans in Afghanistan are much less clear, as support within the US Government, and the public continues to erode. Though discussion is ongoing, concrete plans delineating a withdrawal timeline have not been published as of 5 January, 2011. The military is clear that a withdrawal must not jeopardize the hard won progress that has been made to date. An associated press article by Baldor and Jelinek posted on 2 June, 2011 had these points from senior leadership:

Adm. Mike Mullen warned that while no one knows yet how deep the initial cut will be, it must not erode the gains troops have made.

The No. 2 U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. David Rodriguez, said there should not be a drawdown so rapid that it outpaces the abilities of Afghan soldiers and police to handle security. If that happens, the Taliban could regain a foothold, Rodriguez said.
Some lawmakers have suggested that the killing of Osama bin Laden last month should result in a more rapid end to the U.S. involvement in the protracted war.

President Barack Obama has said that the drawdown of troops will begin in July. Obama is likely to announce his decision late this month about the size of that initial withdrawal. Military officials also expect a forecast for further drawdowns over the next several months.

Beyond the national security effects, this issue will be a talking point on both sides of the Presidential Campaign, with elections some seventeen months out. The general public is understandably weary after a nearly ten-year long war that has cost a staggering $1.283 trillion for military operations, base security, reconstruction, foreign aid, embassy costs, and veterans’ health care for the three operations initiated since the 9/11 attacks” as reported in a March 2011 Congressional Research Service report.

Action in Libya has drawn severe criticism of the Obama administration, with a non-binding resolution passed on 3 June, 2011 that stated that the president “failed to provide a compelling rationale for military involvement in the North African country.” As this latest engagement is simply too new, it is not possible to draw meaningful conclusions as to the US policy and direction in that country and what further involvement may play out with other instability associated with the Arab Spring.

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Conclusion

Osama bin Laden is dead and his brand of terrorism and Islamic radicalism is suffering from a loss of relevance. The answer to who will succeed him is unclear, with a number of possible candidates talked about; though that successor may find himself in the cross-hairs of the U.S. Special Forces. Our Nation is divided by the human and financial costs of wars that have gone on in answer to the horrific September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States; and sadly I believe many have either forgotten what happened that day; were too young to personally relate; or our simply opposed on political grounds and feel that the cost of the war on terror is not worth fighting; if it is not fought here and abroad, terror will revisit us.

For the public safety community it is incumbent upon us to continue our preparedness activities, which must be focused on an “all hazards” environment; we must have the tools in the toolbox, and maintain our skills, and we must do this with all of our potential local, state and federal partners. These same skills will ensure that we are prepared regardless of the calamity that befalls the communities that we are sworn to protect.

Funding will continue to present a significant challenge, with dwindling budgets at the local, state and federal levels. Though it had recently appeared that the economy was emerging from the “Great Recession”; some economist are now discussing a
possible double dip, with a second potential recession, that will by extension further erode financial support of public safety programs.

From a purely parochial view, DoD, and by extension DoD F&ES is under severe scrutiny to reduce cost, and 11 several articles were found that discussed another round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) actions that could be on the horizon that would serve to reduce the number of DoD bases to better align with current and projected force-structure. These potential cuts, as well as reduced budgets at remaining bases will impact availability of DoD F&ES both on the base, and outside the fence to respond to potential acts of terrorism, as well as the more likely natural disasters.

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