

AMERICA'S WORST NIGHTMARE? OSAMA BIN LADEN AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

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PIR CENTER NONPROLIFERATION AND ARMS CONTROL HOTLINE

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Abridged version. Full version will be published in Yaderny Kontrol Journal

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Introduction

In 2001, Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet stated in front of Congress that: "Osama bin Laden and his network (al Qaida) are the nation's most immediate and serious transnational threat." He specified that this assessment was primarily based on bin Laden's interest in weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In this paper I try to evaluate the likelihood of bin Laden's WMD offensive against the United States.

The importance of an accurate assessment lies in the fact that if real, the threat would require a significant transformation of national security strategy. Further, the perceived threat is one of the arguments presented by the US government for building a national missile defense (NMD), a decision that is currently a source of tension between the U.S. and the rest of the world.

My assessment is based on an analysis of bin Laden's WMD capability in combination with the possible motivation to inflict mass casualties. Capability is evaluated in terms of actual possession of WMD agents and the means to deliver them. Financial resources needed to acquire such capability are also examined.

In evaluation of bin Laden's motivation to use WMD, an analysis of his belief system is used to assess whether inflicting mass casualties would be consistent with his goals.

My research draws from books, newspaper articles, online databases, televised interviews, Congressional testimonies and trial transcripts. The open source nature of my analysis is this paper's greatest limitation. Many citations are based on anonymous "intelligence sources" and some of the available information is conflicting. In such cases I tried to verify the dubious claims by other sources and when unsuccessful, I excluded the information to preserve reliability.

The first part of my paper provides the necessary background information on Osama bin Laden and his network. This section points out the origins of his radicalization, the formation of the network and its involvement in terrorist activities.

The second part concentrates on the available information about bin Laden's attempts to acquire WMD. Attention is also devoted to his financial resources in connection to WMD possession and means of delivery.

In the third part, possible motivation for acquisition and use of WMD is analyzed. An attempt is made to differentiate between bin Laden's often quoted fundamentalist thoughts and his actual actions and objectives. This is important in order to determine his readiness to inflict mass casualties.

The fourth part focuses on past attempts to deal with the threat posed by bin Laden and provides policy recommendations.

Background

Early Youth

Osama bin Laden comes from a high profile Saudi family. His father Mohammed Awad bin Laden came to Saudi Arabia from Hadramout (South Yemen) as a poor manual worker, but later managed to start a successful construction business. His performance and loyalty helped him to establish a close relationship with the royal family. During a financial crisis he paid the wages of all civil servants in the kingdom for six months. King Faisal then issued a decree that all construction projects should go to bin Laden. For a brief period, he was also named the minister for public works. He died when Osama was 13 years old.

Osama bin Laden grew up and attended primary and secondary school in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia. Upon graduation in 1973 he left for Beirut for "rest and recreation." At that time, the Lebanese capital was an exciting westernized city, and bin Laden fully enjoyed its pleasures. He drank in bars and was involved in at least three fights over a prostitute.

In 1975 he started studying civil engineering (some sources say public administration) at the King Abdul Aziz University in Jiddah. The events that took place in Lebanon that year began a debate among Muslim scholars about the civil war being God's punishment for the corruption of Beirut. Through contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood at the University, bin Laden transformed into a hard line Islamist. It is likely that the self-imposed guilt of his Beirut life style contributed to the radicalization process. Frustrated with his lack of status in the family and being overshadowed by his elder half-brother Salim, Osama eagerly looked for a purpose.

Afghanistan

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 provided bin Laden with an opportunity. He went there for a month on an exploratory trip that apparently made quite an impression on him. Upon

his return he set up recruiting offices around the world, financed the transportation of some 10,000 Muslim warriors from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen and Algeria to Afghanistan. He set up training facilities, brought in experts on guerilla warfare, sabotage and covert operations, paid for training of troops and provided them with modern equipment. The United States also supported these troops by the CIA's Operation Cyclone, a \$500 million per-year campaign to help the guerillas fight the Soviet Union. It is estimated that a significant quantity of high tech American weapons, including "Stinger" ground-to-air heat-seeking missiles made their way into the mujahedeen's arsenal. Some sources even suggest the US emissaries met directly with bin Laden, and that it was bin Laden, acting on advice from his friends in Saudi intelligence, who first suggested the mujahedeen should be given Stingers. The majority of them are reported to still be in their possession.

The guerillas were quite successful. What had begun as a fragmented army of tribal warriors ended up being a modern army capable of defeating a superpower. The departing Soviet troops left behind an Afghanistan with a huge arsenal of sophisticated weapons (including Scud B missiles) and thousands of experienced Islamic warriors from a variety of countries. This Afghan episode is quite significant as it enabled bin Laden to experience a triumphant Jihad. "One day in Afghanistan was like one thousand days of praying in an ordinary mosque," he later said. It also provided bin Laden with contacts to Muslim fighters from a variety of countries, fighters who are very dedicated to him. Most of them returned to their home countries to fight against western -influenced governments in favor of Islamic regimes.

Post Afghan War Period

Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia as a popular figure. He received many invitations from mosques to speak about his adventures. 250,000 audiotapes of his speeches were produced and sold in shops and market stalls. These tapes also included bin Laden's feelings about the Saudi Arabia he found upon return. He spoke furiously of American imperialism in the Middle East and of the American support of Israel. After these statements he was instructed by the Saudi regime to stop his public speeches and was banned from traveling. His relationship with the royal family finally reached a critical point during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Bin Laden prepared a plan to defend the kingdom against potentially invading Iraqi forces. He even offered to bring in the Arab mujahedeen to defend the kingdom. While he was waiting for response, he found out that the Americans were coming. This moment is seen as the turning point toward his radical Anti-American orientation.

In 1994 his Saudi citizenship was revoked and bin Laden moved to Sudan, where he worked closely with the local government to provide jobs for the Afghan Veterans. However, the Sudanese government was not able to resist the ongoing US sanctions and as a sign of good will, asked bin Laden to depart. In May 1996 he moved to Afghanistan, leaving behind him a network of Afghan Veterans and several successful factories and corporations (i.e. a factory to process goatskins, a construction company, a bank, a sunflower plantation, and an import-export operation). Several major companies in Sudan are linked to him, and are believed to be doing double-duty as logistics support for his network.

The Network

On August 23, 1996, two months before having to leave Sudan, bin Laden first stated his *fatwa* (a religiously sanctioned opinion on religious or civil matters), which stated that it was an individual duty of every Muslims to kill American military personnel abroad.

On May 28, 1998 Osama bin Laden announced the formation of an international *Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders*, an umbrella organization for groups that perceive the western democracies - and first and foremost the United States - as their primary ideological rival. For them this contest is a zero-sum game. Their violent activity is directed against an existing world order in which Islam is in a position of inferiority. They deny the legitimacy of the "secular" regimes ruling Islamic countries. The ultimate goal is to defeat of the United States in the same manner that the Soviet Union had been defeated in Afghanistan. Several Islamic movements had joined this organization, among them the notorious Egyptian al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and the Egyptian al-Jihad.

The Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders is probably nothing more than a loose alliance of Islamic terrorist groups. Another much more frequently used term for bin Laden's support group is al Qaida (The Base). The relationship between the two organizations is unclear. The name al Qaida dates back to 1988 and supposedly originated from the term used in reference to one of bin Laden's guesthouses, where all the mujahedeen that came to Afghanistan were required to register. These records later provided bin Laden with extensive contacts to Islamic warriors around the world. While al Qaida is often cited as his own terrorist group, which belongs to the broader alliance, it's interesting to note that bin Laden himself has never publicly used the term. Further, al Qaida does not have any known organizational structure or insignia and some of its alleged members are also associated with other terrorist organization (i.e. Ayman Al Zawahiri, the leader of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya). These indicators suggest that al Qaida and the Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders may be the same umbrella organization. This would mean that bin Laden is not directly associated with any particular terrorist group.

Osama bin Laden has declared a "holy war against the United States and its followers." He urged Islamic governments to perform the duty of "armed *jihad* against the enemies of Islam." The justification refers to "occupation of the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples." The other reason stated is the support of Israel. His second *fatwa* (1998) states that "the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies - civilian and military - is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."

Terrorist Activity

Although Osama bin Laden's name is being linked to most terrorist attacks executed in the recent years against the U.S. interests around the world, his direct involvement is difficult to prove. On the one hand he expresses support and praise for acts of terror, referring to them as righteous and just acts, while at the same time disavowing all responsibility for their execution. This kind of double talk is characteristic for state sponsors of terrorism. In this respect, bin Laden is a unique phenomenon of international terrorism. His strategy is similar to that of state sponsors, but bin Laden enjoys some significant advantages over them. While state sponsors can be pressured by a combination of economic sanctions, political isolation and military force, he is not permanently tied to any territory and does not have political constituents, which makes it very difficult to coerce him. Bin Laden represents a new type of supporter of terrorism - the wealthy individual who places his extensive resources at the disposal of terrorist organizations. The alliance of such an individual with a group of trained and experienced fighters, steeped in Islamic indoctrination, is potentially deadly; especially when these fighters are veterans of a victorious religious war. This combination of wealth and extremism gives the Afghan Veteran's

association a place among the most dangerous organizations on the stage of international terrorism today.

The U.S. State Department currently links Osama bin Laden to many recent terrorist activities, among them the attacks in Riyadh (November 95) and Dhahran (June 96) that left about 30 people dead, including 24 Americans. He is also implicated in the attacks on a Yemenite hotel (December 92) that injured several tourists; the assassination attempt on Egyptian president Mubarak in Ethiopia (June 95); the World Trade Center bombing (February 93) that killed 3 and injured hundreds; and the Somali attack on American forces that left hundreds wounded. The most notorious is the bombing of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam (August 98), which killed over 300 people and injured many more. Most recently, the investigation of the USS Cole bombing in Yemen (November 2000) is also pointing to bin Laden.

Although Osama bin Laden has been suspected of involvement in all of the terrorist attacks mentioned above, it's interesting to note that no one has, until recently, been able to produce incontrovertible proof that he was anything more than an inspiration for the perpetrators. Only several days after the embassy bombings, the testimony of bin Laden's close associate Mohammed Sadiq Odeh provided the intelligence community with the description of bin Laden's international network that finally brought some evidence of the extent of bin Laden's activities. The trial of bin Laden's associates, which is now taking place in New York revealed even more information about the organizational dimensions of al Qaida. The prosecution's key witness Jamal Ahmad al-Fadl, was a part of the network for several years before he defected with \$110,000 of bin Laden's assets.

Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Terrorists may be attracted to the idea of possessing WMD for two principal reasons: to inflict mass casualties or to use them for blackmail purposes.

In order to successfully use WMD for mass destruction, terrorists must acquire the weapons and the means to deliver them. Another necessary component for this utilization of WMD is the psychological readiness to kill thousands of people.

In the case of using WMD as a threat, the traditional deterrence principle applies (*deterrence = credibility x capability*). If either capability or credibility is missing, the threat will be ineffective. In order to be successful, terrorists must convince the general audience that they have acquired WMD and that they are ready to use them.

WMD Capability

As has been mentioned above, WMD capability is one logical element necessary to launch a mass casualty attack. I define WMD capability as the possession of nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological weapons along with the means to deliver them, or the financial resources needed to acquire the above.

Financial Resources

Due to the fact that Osama bin Laden's wealth is a much-discussed topic, many opposing estimates of his assets can be found. The figures range from less than \$100 million to more than \$5 billion.

Besides the money bin Laden inherited from his father, he is believed to receive continuous funding from his few remaining friends in the Saudi government as well as many Arab businessmen and senior politicians from Kuwait and Qatar. He is also the owner of many different businesses around the world, among them the Sudanese Gum Arabic Company Limited, which produces over 80% of world supply of this product. Most of his money is deposited in accounts under non-Arab names in Western Europe and it is also hidden among the funds of several charitable organizations such as the *Muslim World League* (M.W.L.), the *International Islamic Relief Organization* (I.I.R.O.) and Islamic cultural centers in Europe, such as the center in Milan. Most importantly, bin Laden is believed to benefit from the drug trade in Afghanistan, the world's leading exporter of heroin. He is understood to have helped the Taliban arrange money-laundering facilities through the Russian and Chechen Mafia. In exchange he is taking a cut of between 2 and 10 percent from all Afghan drug sales (\$133-\$1,000 million a year).

Regardless of the exact figure deposited in bin Laden's accounts, it seems safe to conclude that his resources are large enough to enable him to acquire WMD capability.

WMD Possession

Bin Laden's possession of WMD is generally considered to be a given. Plenty of evidence exists that his group has actively sought nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The intelligence community believes that some of these attempts were successful. This has been demonstrated on several occasions, when bin Laden's WMD threats were taken very seriously. The only missing link to having 100% confidence about al Qaida's capabilities is actual WMD use. Bin Laden is deliberately vague when asked whether WMD are in his arsenal and under what circumstances he would use it. "We cannot confirm or deny whether we possess such weapons or not," he says.

Nuclear and Radiological Weapons

Bin Laden's attempts to acquire WMD capability began around the year 1991.

It is interesting to note that his initial attempts concentrated on the nuclear weapons option, which is generally considered to be the terrorists' least likely weapon of choice.

Bin Laden's original plan was to build his own tactical nuke. His emissaries have conducted several missions to Europe in an attempt to bring back enriched uranium. He also recruited a group of five nuclear scientists from Turkmenistan, one of which used to work on the atomic reactor of Iraq before it was destroyed by Israel in 1981. At the recent trial in New York, the government witness Jamal Ahmed Fadl testified that he was ordered in 1993 by one of bin Laden's top lieutenants to buy uranium from a former Sudanese military officer named Allah Abdel Mobruk. Fadl said an associate of Mobruk had offered to sell some uranium for \$1.5 million. At one point, he said, the associate showed bin Laden's agents a bag containing a two to three-foot cylinder that purportedly contained uranium, along with documents saying the material came from South Africa. Fadl said he didn't know whether the sale had been completed.

Bin Laden has reportedly also made attempts to obtain ready-made nuclear warheads from Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, and the Ukraine; they were to be dismantled and used to build small tactical "suitcase" bombs. It is unlikely however, that bin Laden would try to bring in warheads for dismantlement if the fissile material was their only contribution. Due to the size of warhead, it would be more logical to import the fissile material itself. But it seems equally unlikely that he would want a working missile - the sophisticated technology needed to launch it is not presently within his reach.

Perhaps of most concern is the allegation that al Qaida succeeded in obtaining a nuclear “suitcase bomb”. This small tactical nuclear weapon is a source of much controversy. The Russian leadership denies the existence of such weapons, but some officials are in opposition of such statements. Reports emerging from Israel and Russia suggest that bin Laden gave his contacts in the Chechen mafia several million dollars in cash and heroin with a street value of more than \$500 million - in exchange the Chechens launched an all-out campaign to obtain 'nuclear suitcase' bombs for al Qaida. Some sources claim, that since bin Laden represents an important contact for the Chechens in the drug trade, it is unlikely that they would accept the money without having 100% confidence that the suitcase nuke exists and that they can obtain it. One source even suggest that bin Laden obtained several of the nuclear suitcase bombs in the autumn of 1998 and transferred them into storage in the Taliban's main secure complex near Kandahar. The same source also claims that the weapons have not yet been used, because they are still programmed with a Soviet-era coding system that requires a signal from Moscow before detonation is possible. Another source confirms this information and even specifies that the number of tactical nuclear weapons acquired by bin Laden is close to 20.

Despite these claims al Qaida's overall nuclear capability is low. The most likely use of the current arsenal is a nuclear-enriched conventional explosion that would disperse radiological material. Such an attack would not cause mass casualties, but would involve great costs in decontamination of the area surrounding the explosion.

Chemical and Biological Weapons (CBW)

CBW is generally considered to be a more likely choice for terrorists than nuclear weapons. They are easier to obtain since many CW precursors are of dual use and can be purchased on the open market; biological toxins are also easily obtainable from culture collections around the world.

However, the likelihood of terrorist use of CBW is still fairly low since it would present a significant risk to terrorists themselves, resulting from toxic nature of the materials being handled. And even though Islamic fundamentalists demonstrate their willingness to die during delivering their weapons, it does not necessarily mean that they would be equally willing to die during their production.

The U.S. intelligence community is convinced that the al Qaida organization has already acquired both chemical and biological capability.

a) Biological:

The network's members have allegedly purchased pedals of anthrax from an East Asian country for \$3,695 and the lethal viral agent botulinum from a laboratory in the Czech Republic for \$7,500 a sample. Representatives of the Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines, which has close links to al Qaida, are also understood to have obtained anthrax from an Indonesian pharmaceutical company. Plague and anthrax viruses have also been bought from arms dealers in Kazakhstan.

b) Chemical:

It remains unspecified in open sources, what kinds of chemical weapons are at bin Laden's disposal. On the other hand, it has been confirmed by the intelligence community that al Qaida does posses chemical agents. The government reactions to bin Laden's threats with chemical weapons also confirm that they are real. An attack against bin Laden that was supposed to take

place during his son's wedding in January 2001 was reportedly aborted because of bin Laden's threat to retaliate with chemical weapons against US military bases in the Gulf. Perhaps even more alarming than the chemical weapons capability is the fact that bin Laden actually knew about the operation in advance.

Weapons Delivery

The acquisition of WMD is not the only element necessary for their successful use. Most WMD require sophisticated methods of delivery in order to produce mass casualties. Even though bin Laden has apparently succeeded in obtaining WMD, delivering them may still be his major weakness. While intelligence sources admit the presence of WMD in bin Laden's arsenal, they do not have evidence that he has succeeded in their "weaponization." The problem with delivery can be overcome through either recruiting independent scientists or by receiving state support. The first option is definitely within bin Laden's reach. He has already used his vast financial resources to recruit Russian scientist and Special Forces members to help him decode and use the suitcase bombs. The second option is also relevant. The Iraqi intelligence service has repeatedly offered assistance to bin Laden, along with giving him a list of desired targets (among them Radio Free Europe in Prague). Bin Laden has also been offered asylum and has been given a collection of blank Yemeni diplomatic passports as a sign of good faith. But bin Laden's envoys reportedly did not give much thought to this offer and were content to request Iraq to help them obtain chemical and biological weapons, expressing readiness to use them against US troops and interests. The Iraqis have extensive WMD research experience and they are alleged to have chemical weapons stockpiles in Sudan. If bin Laden is in fact receiving their assistance, the "weaponization" of CBW by his network is only a matter of time.

As of today, al Qaida has most likely not acquired a full-scale capability that would allow them to cause mass casualties. A small or medium scale attack using WMD is thus a more likely scenario for the near future. However, the psychological effects of such attack should not be underestimated. If al Qaida were able to provide evidence of their capabilities through actual WMD use, it would probably have devastating impact on the public psyche.

Motivation

Most advocates of the inevitability of WMD use by non-state actors point to the escalating trends in international terrorism. While the number of incidents is steadily declining, the number of casualties is increasing. But contrary to popular belief, not all groups seek to achieve mass casualties. The motivation of a terrorist group to use WMD is closely associated with its goals. Nationalist and separatist terrorist groups have political goals and a constituency. Their general goal is to attract public attention to their cause and to get a place at the negotiating table. They are therefore not likely to resort to WMD, because mass casualties would be counterproductive to their goals. Widespread attention would certainly be attracted, but public opinion would likely turn against them and afflicted states would severely retaliate as opposed to evaluating the merit of the group's grievances. Small or medium scale violence therefore seems to be a more productive choice for political terrorists.

Conversely, religious groups are considered to possess the motivation required for resorting to WMD. They are generally not interested in negotiations and their only real constituency is "God". Their unconditional beliefs are thought to provide them with the means necessary for a complete dehumanization of their enemy, an essential step before launching a mass casualty attack. In the case of Islamic fundamentalist groups, the institution of martyrdom is yet another

strengthening factor that arms the perpetrators with the motivation to sacrifice their life and thus decreases the fear of capture or retaliation.

Based on these observations it seems crucial to determine the nature of bin Laden's belief system in order to assess the extent of his motivation to use WMD. Content analysis of his statements as well as the use of *fatwas* (religious rulings) seems to point to religious motivation. Bin Laden declares his struggle against the United States to be a *jihad*, or holy war. He has also repeatedly used God's name to justify his activities. The transition from the military targeting called for in the first *fatwa* to the civilian targeting in the later one could be seen as another step toward religiously defensible dehumanization of enemy. Bin Laden has also repeatedly declared that he considers his efforts to obtain WMD to be legitimate. "We don't consider it a crime if we tried to have nuclear, chemical, biological weapons. If I have indeed acquired these weapons, then I thank God for enabling me to do so," he said in an interview for the Time magazine in 1998. Further, in 1999, Osama bin Laden started publicizing draft copies of his book, in which he sets out his vision of the future. Sources in Pakistan who claim to have seen copies report that it bears the title "America and the Third World War," and consists of a lengthy exhortation to Muslims to rise up and destroy the United States.

But despite all these indications, it is not exactly accurate to simply label bin Laden as a religious fanatic. The goals that he has set for himself are of a primarily political nature. He wants to run the Americans out of the Middle East, to overthrow the western-influenced Arab governments and to establish an international organization or government uniting all Muslims supporting the rule of the "Khalifa". The means bin Laden uses to achieve his goals also cast some doubt about the absolute nature of his religious devotion. He established an unprecedented Shiite-Sunni connection, when members of his organization received training from Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite group that operates in Lebanon. He has also extensively collaborated with Saddam Hussein's secular regime in Iraq. This type of pragmatic alliance building is hardly characteristic for typical Islamic radicals.

The problem with categorizing the nature of Osama bin Laden's motivation lies in the fact that Islam is a *political religion*: it awakes no distinction between religion and state, and covers every aspect of life. It may be thus more appropriate to examine individual factors outside of the traditional bipolar framework.

The institution of martyrdom characteristic for most Islamic fundamentalists does not apply in the case of bin Laden. His cautious planning, hesitance to accept responsibility for acts of violence and extensive security arrangements are all indicators of his desire to live. The use of WMD would probably shift the public opinion toward a massive retaliation regardless of the costs of such an operation. Bin Laden knows he would not escape alive and his willingness to take the risk is questionable.

Even though bin Laden does not strive for political power, he does have a constituency. Many people in the region have named their sons Osama, he is a romantically popular figure. The use of WMD would generate bad press even in the Muslim world and bin Laden knows this. His ambiguous answers about possession of WMD are also consistent with this explanation. On one hand he likes the idea of generating fear among the American public while on the other hand he tries to avoid bad press.

Another important factor is the psychological dimension of experiencing a victorious war. Some theories suggest that people fight because it is psychologically rewarding. The mujahedeen have won what they perceived to be a just war against the Soviets. One must take into account the

complexity of returning to normal life after such experience. From this perspective, the mujahedeen's reorientation towards a new enemy is not surprising. Further, it is important to consider this perspective in assessing possible interest in WMD. The use of conventional weapons has a different rewarding power than WMD. Successful WMD use may be gratifying for a scientist who has successfully overcome the technical difficulties of such attack. Not so for a guerilla fighter who has experienced tremendous success with conventional weapons. This success is likely to enhance conservative tendencies in terms of weapons selection.

The CIA's assessment is based on the assumption that bin Laden will do anything to defeat the United States. But that may not necessarily be the case, since realization of bin Laden's goals may be life threatening to network itself, as the legitimacy of their very existence would be jeopardized. Bin Laden and his men want to fight; the experience from the Afghan war is apparently addictive. After unsuccessfully attempting to get involved in fighting Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War, they turned against America. In the hypothetical event of winning even this struggle, finding the next enemy would be difficult. The process of fighting is more important to al Qaida than an overall victory; their desire to escalate is therefore debatable.

Based on these findings I conclude that bin Laden does not possess the motivation to inflict mass casualties.

Countering the Threat

Past Efforts to Deal with bin Laden

Even though Osama bin Laden was already a living legend, the U.S. government had not identified him to be a major problem until the investigation of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Since then, the intelligence community has invested a lot of effort to try to eliminate this problem.

Diplomatic Efforts

At first, the US government used the traditional diplomatic approach. Sanctions were imposed on Sudan and Afghanistan for sheltering bin Laden. While the Sudanese government was not able to withstand the pressure and in 1996 asked bin Laden to leave, Afghanistan still refuses to give in. Despite the occasional Pakistani report that the Taliban has agreed to turn bin Laden over in exchange for international recognition, he is still in Afghanistan. The fact that bin Laden has recently married his oldest daughter to the Taliban's leader Mullah Muhammad Omar makes his expulsion from Afghanistan even less likely. Since he is now related to the Pushtun elite by blood, he is protected by the "Pushtunwali" (dominant code of behavior among the Pushtun tribes). In this context, the international recognition of Taliban is irrelevant. Summed up in the words of Omar: "Even if half of Afghanistan were destroyed, we would not hand [bin Laden] over".

Assassination

Several attempts have also been made to eliminate bin Laden completely. Since the U.S. intelligence community is forbidden from participating in assassinations by the executive order 12333, it's not surprising that no evidence of their involvement in these attempts exists. It cannot be ruled out however, that the operation against bin Laden that took place in November 1998 did not involve American technology and finance in concert with Saudi manpower. The attack

involved an assassin called Siddiq Ahmed who was paid \$267,000 to poison bin Laden. The operation failed as the target survived an acute kidney failure.

Attack on Logistics

The CIA has also tried many disruptive tactics, ranging from hacking into bin Laden's accounts and deleting and shifting funds to jamming and blocking al Qaida's cellular and satellite phones. President Clinton signed an executive order freezing any American assets owned by bin Laden and experts visited the offices of the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network to study his holdings. While these efforts did not make bin Laden's life easier, they have not significantly decreased his operational capability.

Military Retaliation

Several days after the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania the U.S. launched the "Operation Infinite Reach", a Tomahawk cruise missile attack against a number of facilities associated with bin Laden's network. The targets included six training camps belonging to his organization and the al-Shifa pharmaceuticals factory in Khartoum, which the intelligence sources suspected of producing VX nerve gas for bin Laden. The operation was a failure for two principal reasons. First, the evidence of al-Shifa's involvement in chemical weapons production was weak; the fact that the whole country of Sudan was dependent on this plant for antibiotics also undermined the legitimacy of the attack. Second, bin Laden escaped unharmed. Just before the attack, bin Laden had been warned that America was tracking him via his phone (allegedly by supporters working for Pakistani intelligence), he switched it off and escaped from the camp.

Extradition

From the perspective of law enforcement bin Laden should be arrested and brought to justice. Even though a Manuel Noriega style "snatch" operation had been planned and US secret agencies and rapid intervention teams such as the Delta Force and the Green Berets were ready to strike, president Clinton decided not to peruse this option due to the risks involved. The danger of such operation was clearly demonstrated by an incident from 1986, when three elite battalions of Soviet commandos fought their way into Zhawar Kili, the same area where bin Laden's training camps were located in 1998. In a ferocious battle that lasted three weeks, several hundred Soviet troops were killed.

Heroes Program

The "Heroes Program" has been established by the State Department in 1984 in a desperate attempt to combat terrorist attacks in Beirut. This rewards scheme offered a up to \$500,000 along with an offer of American citizenship, the change of identity and placement in the federal witness protection program, in exchange for information leading to capture and conviction of designated terrorists. Information was printed on matchboxes and leaflets in 15 languages and was distributed around the world. The program had not produced any results, until it yielded in the capture of Ramzi Yousef in 1996. Similar campaign has been conducted in an attempt to capture bin Laden, except the reward money had been boosted to \$5 million.

Measures for the U.S. to Consider

Based on the list of attempts that have been made to deal with bin Laden, it seems like there is not much the U.S. government has not tried. However, the previous attempts show signs of incoherent planning and strategy that rests on some dubious premises.

Above all it is important to realize that the problem goes beyond the scope of one person. By concentrating their efforts solely on Osama bin Laden, the U.S. has transformed him into a hero in the eyes of the Muslim world. And even though his elimination is desirable, it represents only the first step in countering the "Afghan Alumni" phenomenon. The United States should adopt a more consistent and pro-active approach.

This comprehensive strategy should incorporate some of the measures already undertaken, such as the disruptive attacks on al Qaida's logistics and funds. It should also incorporate preemptive strikes against the network's training camps and assassinations of key members. Such measures are controversial, but they may represent the only way to take the network apart. Besides serving as punishment, assassinations can create tension among heirs. Even though bin Laden has designated Ayman Al Zawahiri and Muhammad Atef as his successors (bin Laden's son Muhammad is also in the picture), a rivalry between them could possibly arise upon bin Laden's demise. Going a step further in order to really cripple the network's command, the designated successors should be eliminated as well.

Besides offensive tactics, better defensive measures should also be emphasized. The stress on symbolic value in the network's target selection is clear. This consistent pattern makes it easier to identify potential targets and to prevent attacks by increasing their protection.

On the level of states, increased cooperation should be underlined. In the fight against terrorism, the main source of crucial information is human intelligence (HUMINT). Obtaining HUMINT is very difficult and the effective cooperation and intelligence sharing is therefore essential.

The U.S. government should also reevaluate the systemic causes of al Qaida's terrorist attacks. The value of keeping U.S. troops in the region should be reviewed and their exposure should be limited to a necessary minimum.

Another step at the political level should involve the de-emphasis of the role Islam plays in bin Laden's motivations. By simply assuming a more favorable approach toward Islam through separating criminals from the general population could alienate al Qaida from the Muslim people. The inconsistency between the positive approach toward the population and the negative approach toward terrorist groups creates a psychological trait called cognitive dissonance, which causes the need to eliminate this inconsistency. The people are likely to have a tendency to distance themselves from the problem of terrorism and may actually become actively involved in tackling it.

Conclusion

Osama bin Laden and his network represent a threat that the U.S. does not currently know how to counter. The risk assessment presented by George Tenet in Congress is based on vulnerability rather than a prudent evaluation of motivations and capabilities.

Bin Laden and his network do possess WMD agents and the financial resources that could result in their weaponization. But despite the often-cited radical rhetoric, bin Laden and his network lack the motivation to inflict mass casualties. Their attack with WMD cannot be completely ruled out, but if it does occur, it will not take the form of a full-scale attack that would cause

mass destruction. The most likely scenario for the near future seems to be a small scale chemical weapons attack against U.S. targets in the Middle Eastern region. But even such assault could create significant psychological damages.

The U.S. government's plan to counter the threat by deploying national missile defense is inadequate. Instead, a comprehensive strategy that would incorporate preemptive and defensive military measures, increased international cooperation, as well as evaluation of systemic causes, needs to be adopted.

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