

Pscrutineer

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Who's The Leader of The Club That's Made for You and Me?

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) at 20:08 by Pstanley

Al Sahwa contributors [recently discussed](#) how best to model Al Qaeda.

In a recent speech in Australia, Rohan Gunaratna [described](#) the relationship between “core al Qaeda” and the “30-40 associated groups.” He maintains that the associated groups receive four things from Al Qaeda Central Leadership (AQCL).

1. Training
2. Weapons
3. Finance
4. Ideology

Gunaratna states that an important part of that ideology is the concept that the “local jihad” is not enough. The affiliates must join in attacks against the United States and its allies. I believe that AQCL leaves the local actions in the hands of its affiliates, but that “international targets,” that is, strikes against the West, are subject to control by AQCL. Perhaps “control” is too strong a word, maybe more like “advice and guidance.” In my model, AQCL issues tasks to an affiliate or allied group, based on AQCL’s target assessment, as well as AQCL’s assessment of their affiliate’s qualities.

The recent operation to assassinate Danish Cartoonist Kurt Westergaard is a prime example of this relationship. As Josh McLaughlin’s [analysis](#) noted, Danish security had the perpetrator under surveillance prior to the attack because of his ties to al Shabaab and al Qaeda. In light of this information, David Headley’s reconnaissance in Copenhagen must be examined in closer detail.

Headley traveled to Copenhagen at the behest of Lashkar-e-Toiba, who ran the training camp he attended. LeT is quite [close](#) to AQCL, in terms of both geography and personnel. Headley’s American passport seems to have come in handy for trips to other countries as well. He stands accused of conducting surveillance in Bombay to support the spectacular terrorist attack there in 2008.

According to the Times [report](#) on the Mickey Mouse Project, Headley originally travelled to Copenhagen with a truck bombing of the Jyllands-Posten building in mind, but:

Court papers said that Mr Headley told FBI agents that he went to Denmark in January and July this year to carry out surveillance on the newspaper’s offices in Copenhagen and Århus “in preparation for an attack to be carried out by persons associated with Kashmiri and Individual A”. Between the trips he allegedly met Individual A in Pakistan.

“Mr Headley stated that he proposed that the operation against the newspaper be reduced from attacking the entire building in Copenhagen to killing the paper’s cultural editor, Flemming Rose, and the cartoonist who drew the cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad with a bomb in his turban, Kurt Westergaard, whom Headley felt was directly responsible for the cartoons,” court papers said.

The less ambitious attack is in fact what followed. The clear link between the reconnaissance by the LeT and the attack by a member of a different al Qaeda affiliate illustrates the nature of al Qaeda's global (as opposed to local) operations. This goes to the heart of al Sahwa's recent franchise v. conglomerate debate.

Josh McLaughlin's proposed model is much closer to the mark than the conventional wisdom of al Qaeda's as a franchise. Still, one must be careful about applying the model; exceptions inevitably crop up in a complex operating environment. Two possible exceptions to the "conglomerate" model come to mind immediately, both from the 1990s: Algeria and the Philippines.

In the early '90s, Afghan Arabs returning to Algeria formed [Groupe Islamique Armè](#) (GIA). AQCL withdrew their support from GIA, but not because GIA refused to carry out attacks outside Algeria. [Far from it](#). The root cause was that GIA became involved in many civilian massacres, in some cases wiping out whole villages. These massacres damaged GIA's reputation, and bin Laden expressed his concerns about this. shifted support to a new group GIA splinter, Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC). The GSPC [included](#) many veterans of the Afghan conflict. One could make a case that the GSPC was established as a franchise in GIA's stead. The Algerian government has continued to make substantial progress against Islamist insurgency. The GSPC is now defunct. Its holdouts have folded into Al Qaeda in Maghreb, which seem more heavily Tuareg than Arab.

I will expand on the Philippines situation in an update this evening.

Update:

AQCL, or what was to become AQCL, also altered the order of preexisting extremist movements in the Philippines in the early 1990s. An Afghan war veteran named Abdurajak Janajalani established Abu Sayyaf by recruiting disgruntled members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) who did not care for that organization's more accommodating line with Manila. A whole decade earlier, however, many members of the MNLF who wished for a more Islamist line formed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Thus, Abu Sayyaf was established in parallel with MILF.

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1. [Abdulmutallab's Friends « Pscrutineer](#) said,

31/01/2010 at [03:53](#)

[...] it would show that Abdulmutallab's attempt was not organic to AQAP. In Thursday's post, I stated, "I believe that AQCL leaves the local actions in the hands of its affiliates, but [...]"

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