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Terrorism is not dead

Bouchaib Silm*

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While American politicians and their allies have been promoting the idea of a near defeat of terrorism since the war on terror was launched post-September 11, this could not be further from the truth. Indeed, terrorists have been regrouping and are preparing for bigger attacks. Recently, four major events have taken place, all of which could be linked to al Qaeda and underscored a certain resilience in terrorist ranks:

Firstly, On October 17, Abu Musaab Azzarqawi issued a statement of loyalty of his group - Attawhid wal Jihad - to Osama bin Laden. The group has also adopted a new name – Qaedat al Jihad fi biladi rrafidain (Jihad’s base in the land of the two rivers). Terrorism experts, especially those studying the developments in Iraq, were shocked and could not understand the rationale behind this development. The belief that Western intelligence has shared is that Azzarqawi has only two options. Either he continues to fight in Fallujah (which will certainly secure an American victory) or, under pressure from the war in Fallujah, declare his leadership of the Mujahideen. The second option will put him in complete isolation as al Qaeda is still strong and will deny him any claim to that leadership mantle. As a result, the Americans believed they will not only get him, but also create more differences and disputes among the terrorist groups with the hope of ultimately defeating al Qaeda itself. The reality is however more disturbing; none of these predictions have come true. Instead, Azzarqawi has gained more support and is recognized and protected by al Qaeda’s cells and followers. In the last issue of the al Qaeda online magazine *al Battar*, there was a warm welcome of Azzarqawi’s initiative. Three articles discussed the affiliation and called Azzarqawi the leader who has succeeded in bringing good news to the Muslim Ummah (community) in the month of Ramadan (fasting month), and who has also succeeded to remind the Ummah of its past glories.

Secondly, intelligence analysis has not been totally accurate in expecting a new leadership within al Qaeda. It is Ayman Azzawahiri and not Abu Musaab Azzarqawi who is al Qaeda’s potential leader in the event of Osama’s absence. Ayman Azzawahiri will become the key man in al Qaeda for the planning and the monitoring of operations. This may explain Azzawahiri’s repeated video appearances in the last few months. Azzawahiri believes that al Qaeda and its allies should play a massive role in the war in Iraq. He is also believed to be the mastermind of the recent Taba attack in Egypt, on October 7, 2004, that targeted three important tourist areas visited by Israeli tourists. The operation left 35 dead and 159 injured. Azzawahiri has also adopted the strategy of “big and surprising operations” and he is trying to duplicate the September 11 operations to gain more public support for al Qaeda. In a sign supporting Azzawahiri’s position as a potential successor to Osama, some al Qaeda websites

posted the pictures of the three men - Osama, Azzawahri and Azarqawi -- in a hierarchical level. With Osama in the middle, Azzawahiri is positioned to his right, which is more preferred, and Azzarqawi to his left.

Third, On October 30, just four days ahead of the US presidential election, Al Jazeera TV broadcast the first videotape of Osama in three years. Gesturing at the camera with a finger to stress his point, and with a neutral brown background, Osama wore a white head covering and white tunic under a light brown cloak. Gone were his usual camouflage fatigues. Reading from a sheet of paper, his voice was strong and he appeared in fair health. The video suggests that al Qaeda is still strong and has escaped destruction, or even regrouping. What may support this argument is the fact that since September 11, 2001 Osama and Azzawahiri have both succeeded to send 24 audio and videotapes and were able to reach a huge audience through the media. In the videotape, the way Osama spoke to the American people was different from the message he sent in 1998 when he issued the fatwa to support the killing of the "Crusaders and the Jews". His change in attire and language, and the absence of references to military elements in the background suggest that Osama sought to portray himself not as an outlawed terrorist on the run but as the secure and legitimate leader of a global challenge to US supremacy.. Osama reminded the Americans that "despite the fact that we are into the fourth year after September 11, President Bush is still misleading you and hiding the real reason from you, which means that the reasons to repeat what happened remain."

Fourth, by the beginning of October, a new online jihadist magazine dedicated to women, called Al Khansa, was launched. The magazine's introduction states that it was an initiative of two al Qaeda members in Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz al Muqrin and Eisa Saad Muhammad, both of whom were killed in a recent confrontation with Saudi police. While one may wonder about the seriousness of involving women in future terrorist operations, the introduction adds: "Our objective is the martyrdom in the name of God..... We will stand with our weapons at our hands, Our children with us and the book of God (the Quran) and the teaching of his Prophet are our guidance, our husband and children's blood are sacrifices to please our God and to seek his satisfaction."

The magazine includes several topics such as keeping fitness, handling injuries, educating children and obstacles facing women in carrying out Jihad. Al Khansa derives its name from the famous poet who came to the Prophet Muhammad, converted to Islam and recited some of her poetry which the Prophet praised. She was present with her four sons at the Battle of Al-Qadisiyah between the Muslims and Persians. She even encouraged them to participate in the battle, and when told later of the death of her four sons, she said: "Praise to Allah, who honoured me by their death." The choice of the name for the new magazine suggests the seriousness of involving women in future terrorist attacks. Traditionally, participation in war is considered a man's domain. However, this belief may change. The first female suicide in the Arab world took place on January 28, 2001 when the Palestinian, Wafa' Idriss, blew herself up in a camp in Ramallah. The operation killed one Israeli and injured 140. The renowned Egyptian scholar, Sheikh Yusuf al Qardawi wrote in his website that "the Fuqaha [Muslim scholars] have agreed that when the enemy entered a Muslim land, Jihad becomes a compulsory duty for everyone. The woman participates [in Jihad] without asking her husband's permission and the son without asking his father's permission". Qardawi added that "the Ulama have decided that a woman is required, in the jihad of self defence, to participate side by side with man".

The bad news for those who have been expecting a near defeat of terrorism is that they will have to deal with a new type of terrorism, one which is still in its infancy but already has designed its objectives. One may wonder if there is a need for such a magazine, and for women in jihad. Right now, the jihadist magazines are focused on men. But with the birth of Al Khansa, there will be a huge audience added to the current male-dominated readership.

In making a pitch for all women to participate in its mission, Al Khansa says: “Dear Sister Mujahidat, we have started our journey for the case of Allah and no power will disturb this journey or stop it. A large number of women may well be waiting for the chance to carry out suicide attacks.” The future of terrorism looks set to be different if the involvement of women increases significantly.

* Bouchaib Silm is a Research Analyst with the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University.