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The Death of Osama Bin Laden: An Analysis

Professor Rohan Gunaratna

Now that Osama Bin Laden is dead, the big question to ask is whether global terrorism will die with him. What did Bin Laden leave behind?

This article is a reprint from RSIS Commentaries and was published on 3 May 2011.

Website of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) listing Osama Bin Laden as deceased. Screenshot taken on 3 May 2011 from <http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/topten>

Osama Bin Laden influenced the contemporary wave of global terrorism more than any other terrorist figure. While his own group Al Qaeda spearheaded the most devastating attacks, Bin Laden built a global terror network by bringing together like-minded groups from conflict zones in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Both operationally and ideologically, Al Qaeda influenced insurgent and terrorist groups and spawned a movement

that will outlive its founder and leader.

For three decades straddling two centuries, Bin Laden played a significant role in globalizing terrorism. In the Muslim world, he played the most decisive role in spreading the tactic of suicide terrorism. Having conducted mass fatality attacks against the United States (US), Bin Laden provoked the US, its allies and friends to intervene in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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Bin Laden's Ideology

Although puritanical in his belief, Bin Laden also harnessed modern communications platforms to politicize, radicalize and mobilize millions of supporters and sympathizers. Most importantly, he crafted an ideology of deep hatred against the West. He could communicate complex messages in simple words. Speaking softly with a Quran in one hand and an AK47 in the other, he built mass appeal across the Muslim world.

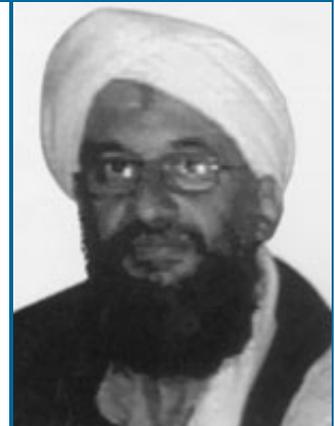
As the unofficial representative of the Saudi kingdom, Bin Laden travelled to Pakistan in 1980 to support the decade-long anti-Soviet multinational Afghan mujahidin campaign. Having distinguished himself as the leader of the Arab mujahidin, Bin Laden drew support from a cadre of participants and supporters that fought in Muslim conflict zones. After a dispute with the Saudi regime over basing US troops in Saudi Arabia, he directed terrorist attacks against the country. However, his prime target was the US. To fight US-supported Muslim regimes, Bin Laden created a dozen camps for training young Muslim fighters in Sudan from 1991 to 1996 and in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.

After Al Qaeda's deadly attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, Bin Laden directed most of his firepower in the global south, mostly in the Muslim world. Riding on the success of 9/11, Al Qaeda inspired and instigated two dozen groups it had ideologized trained and financed to emulate Al Qaeda tactics. With the increasing difficulty of attacking the US, Europe and Australia, Al Qaeda attacked Western targets in the global south. However, more Muslims have been killed, maimed and injured in Al Qaeda-directed and inspired operations and in conflict zones. In the face of criticism, Bin Laden and his fellow ideologues argued that if a good Muslim got killed by accident, he would go to heaven.

Bin Laden's Influence in Southeast Asia

Among the terrorist groups in Southeast Asia trained and financed by Al Qaeda was the Jemaah

Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri was said to have been appointed by Osama Bin Laden as his successor. (Undated file photograph from the Federal Bureau of Investigation http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists)



Islamiyah (JI). Led by Abubakar Ba'asyir, an Indonesian radical cleric, JI killed 202 innocent people, including 88 Australians, in Bali on October 12, 2002. Almost all the JI leaders who planned and prepared the Bali attack as well as the dozen other attacks staged in Indonesia were indoctrinated and trained by Al Qaeda. After the Bali attack, the Australian government built an offshore counter terrorism capacity in Indonesia and in the Philippines to fight Al Qaeda-associated groups such as JI and the Abu Sayyaf Group. As JI was particularly close to Al Qaeda, both Bin Laden and his associates threatened Australia for its role that gave a significant capacity to governments in the region to fight terrorism.

The threat posed by Al Qaeda and its associated groups is likely to persist. Bin Laden called for the creation of Islamic states wherever Muslims lived. Furthermore, his attack invited retaliation from the Western world. As the Western governments reacted rather than responded to the threat of terrorism, especially the US invasion of Iraq, more Muslims were radicalized than ever. In addition to sustaining two dozen groups, Bin Laden has crafted an ideology that finds resonance in the Muslim world, especially in conflict zones. As there are conflicts in more than a dozen Muslim countries where Al Qaeda's message finds resonance, the threat of ideological extremism and terrorism will continue.

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Bin Laden's Successor?

Bin Laden appointed Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian medical doctor as his successor. The former leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, al-Zawahiri was head of the information committee of Al Qaeda. His book, *The Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, formed the blueprint for Al Qaeda strategy. His wife and two children were killed in the US bombing of the Tora Bora Mountains. Although hardworking and bright, al-Zawahiri lacks the global charisma and appeal of Bin Laden. Although Al Qaeda is likely to seek revenge on Pakistan and the US for killing its leader, its strategy and tactics are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Bin Laden will remain a hero for his followers and supporters. He will be memorialized and a few groups will carry out attacks in his name.

Bin Laden became such a prominent figure because of his ability and willingness to work together with disparate leaders and groups from different parts of the world. His key strength was to mount a few spectacular attacks, mobilize like-minded groups to join him and to galvanize public support for a sustained campaign.

Contrary to popular belief, he was not only a spiritual leader. He was an operational leader that actively planned and prepared attacks. He worked very closely with Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. However, after 9/11, the security environment forced him to play a low-profile role. Nonetheless, through the release of audio and video tapes, he played a vital role in shaping the threat environment.

Although Bin Laden is dead, he has unleashed a potent ideology that will continue to politicize, radicalize and mobilize a tiny segment of the global Muslim population. It was important for the US and Pakistani forces to kill or capture him. It was the least they could do for a terrorist leader who had inflicted so much suffering and pain among tens of thousands of civilians and security forces personnel. His death has sent a powerful message that he was a mortal and that God was not on his side.

GLOBAL PATHFINDER II

The ICPVTR Terrorism Database – Global Pathfinder - is a one-stop repository for information on the current and emerging terrorist threat. The database focuses on terrorism and political violence in the Asia-Pacific region – comprising of Southeast Asia, North Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Oceania.

Global Pathfinder is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles of terrorist groups, key terrorist personalities, terrorist and counter-terrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps . It also contains specific details and analyses of significant terrorist attacks in the form of terrorist attack profiles.

In addition to providing the latest information on terrorist attacks and pronouncements, Global Pathfinder also includes over a hundred terrorist training manuals, counter terrorism legislations and conventions, analytical papers on terrorist ideologies, commentaries on terrorist trends and patterns, transcripts of landmark cases, interviews with terrorists as well as photographs from different conflict zones across the world. Further, Global Pathfinder also has a huge collection of jihadi websites, the contents of which are routinely translated and analyzed by our analysts. This analysis helps develop an understanding of the developments in the ideological spectrum and trajectory of the terrorist threat, in both in tactical as well as strategic space.

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Spreading the Jihadi Virus

Maria A. Ressa*

In the past ten years, the Al Qaeda has evolved into a social movement that continues to attract new groups and recruits. This article provides some insights as to how social networks could contribute to the spread of jihadi ideology.

A version of this commentary is also available at the CNN website:

<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/05/03/bin.laden.southeast.asia/index.html?hpt=C1>

**Maria A. Ressa is CNN's former Jakarta bureau chief and author of "Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al-Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia." She worked as a journalist in Southeast Asia for 25 years. She is the author-in-residence at the International Centre for Political Violence & Terrorism Research.*

Social networks spread what they're seeded with. I know first-hand. For the past six years, I've experimented with how social networks – both physical and virtual – spread a message and motivate action. As head of the largest converged newsroom in the Philippines, I led a team of about 1,000 journalists to use traditional broadcasting (90% of Filipinos get their information from television news) to push more Filipinos towards new media and mobile phone technology. In a nation with endemic corruption and weak institutions, I wanted to see if old and new media together can help push social change.

The Internet and mobile phones created a participatory culture and energized Filipinos. We spread and amplified our message through social media. We looked at how social networks and collective intelligence (the wisdom of crowds) can be used by journalists to help change behavior. Over 4 years of fine-tuning our election campaign and citizen journalism program, we realized that the way to motivate people to action is not intellectually but emotionally.

We verified the Three Degrees of Influence Rule that numerous academic studies have defined. Everything we say or do ripples through our social

network, creating an impact on our friends (one degree), our friends' friends (two degrees), and even our friend's friend's friend's (three degrees). For example, if you're feeling lonely, there's a 54% chance your friend will feel lonely; a 25% chance your friend's friend will feel lonely; and a 15% chance your friend's friend's friend will feel lonely. Emotions like happiness and hope, as well as smoking, sexual diseases as well as obesity can be traced and spread through social networks.

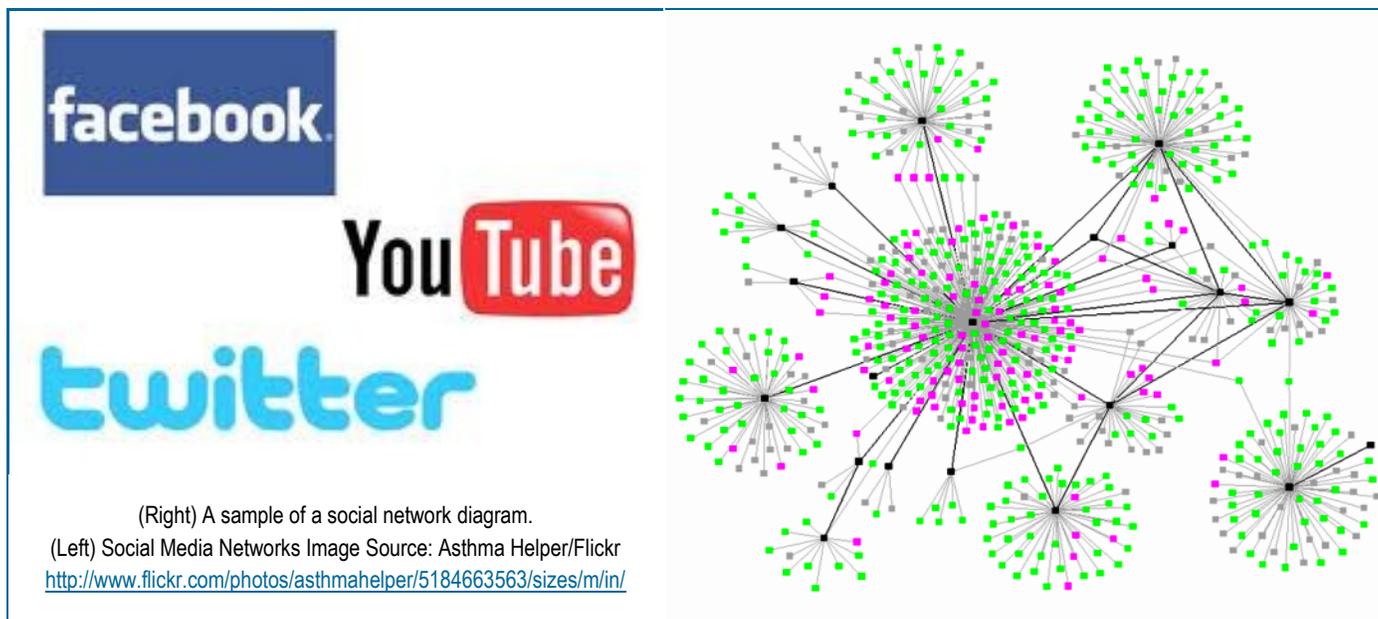
We showed how these findings translate into online social networks like Facebook and Twitter: We experimented with seeding our election advocacy programs with hope and empowerment. By focusing on changing two specific types of behavior, we created a community and succeeded in inspiring action. At the end of our campaign, focus-group-discussions and surveys like Pulse Asia showed our nation was at its most hopeful since the surveys began: 53% optimistic, 11% pessimistic.

Social Networks and Terrorism

If social networks can spread hope, then why not the volatile mix that leads to terrorism – anger, fear, hatred, religious fervor? Studies of social networks of Al Qaeda and its Southeast

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(Right) A sample of a social network diagram.

(Left) Social Media Networks Image Source: Asthma Helper/Flickr
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/astmahelper/5184663563/sizes/m/in/>

Asian arm, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), show it does – spreading violent jihadi sentiment like a virus.

Both Al Qaeda and JI attracted members using a top-down centralized command as well as bottom-up initiative to spread their virulent ideology and carry out attacks using an evolving network of family and friends.

In Wikileaks' just-released classified documents of Guantanamo Bay prisoners, 9/11's architect and "Al Qaeda Chief of External Military Operations," Khalid Shaikh Mohammed (KSM), had 6 nephews in Al Qaeda as well as a brother who died fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan and another who "helped establish the Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait."

KSM's JI counterpart and "representative in Southeast Asia" is Indonesian Riduan Isamuddin, better known as Hambali. According to the documents, his brother worked for both JI and Al Qaeda and his wife was arrested along with him on 11 August 2003. Hambali and KSM met in Afghanistan in the late 1980's, according to the documents. A CNN investigation I led was the first to link the two together in the mid-1990's in the Philippines - a foiled plot to bomb US airplanes flying from Southeast Asia.

These men form large hubs in the jihadi network, showing the inordinate influence they had, recruit-

ing family and friends for the terror cells and plots they created. KSM crisscrossed the globe planning attacks, but he knew Southeast Asia (and Hambali) well, showing the importance JI played in the Al Qaeda network: a parallel 9/11 plot, another 9/11 style attack, and a chemical-biological initiative.

In the early stages of planning for 9/11, the documents say there was a "Manila portion" which was a version of the foiled plot in the mid-1990's. Using Yemeni and Saudi suicide bombers, they would hijack eleven planes flying from Southeast Asian cities bound for the United States and detonate their explosives mid-air. According to several of his leaders, Osama Bin Laden cancelled that part of the plan in the middle of 2000.

There was a second 9/11 style attack planned for 2002 involving Al Qaeda operative Zacarias Mousaoui and JI members who swore ba'yat to Bin Laden. The "West Coast Airliners Plot" was to be carried out by Mousaoui and at least four Malaysian suicide bombers who were told to hijack planes "using two separate shoe bombs" with one plane to be "flown into the 'tallest building in California'" (Liberty Tower).

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Al Qaeda's chemical/biological weapons program was headed by a Malaysian JI member brought into Al Qaeda by Hambali – US-educated Yazid Sufaat. Intelligence documents from the Philippines showed a plan to move this group to Southeast Asia.

Al Qaeda and JI operated the same way: they hijacked disparate groups; trained and funded them - infecting them with the jihadi virus that targeted both their governments and the United States.

After 9/11 triggered a fierce reaction from law enforcement agencies around the world, both groups were affected the same way: their centralized command structures collapsed and their operational capabilities were degraded. Still, the old networks remain and continue to spread the jihadi virus. Cells carry out attacks without central coordination - smaller, more ad-hoc and less "professional."

Last year, Indonesians discovered a training camp set up in Aceh by JI leader Dulmatin (who had spent years training militants in the southern Philippines) and its former emir, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who now heads what analysts say is a more effective (and perhaps more dangerous) group called Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT). "The organizational structure of these terrorists," says Ansyad M'bai, the chief of Indonesia's National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), "originally formed from the core members of JI, which broke into smaller units. Now there's a reunification. They're bound by the same ideology."

He says since the crackdown began in 2002 (after the Bali bombings which killed more than 200 people); police have arrested more than 600 members of JI and its affiliate groups. About 500 have been tried and sentenced.

"JI has morphed because of the severe pressure from the security forces: new organizations have emerged, and existing organizations have been infected by JI," says Rohan Gunaratna, author of *Inside Al Qaeda* and the head of Singapore's International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research. "JI mutants have become more violent and more active," he adds.

Last month, police arrested at least 20 people after they found a 150-kilogram bomb buried under a gas pipeline about 100 meters from a church. It was set to go off on Easter weekend. Police said the terrorists planned to film the explosion and the devastation it caused. A week earlier, a suicide bomber killed himself inside a police mosque that injured 30 people. This comes after last month's series of attempted "book bombings" – bombs planted inside book covers - targeting public figures and officials.

Police foiled the Easter bombings largely because they arrested suspects of the March "book bombings." That was when they discovered the network was planning more attacks.

"This is the same group using different names," says M'bai. "This can be seen through the nature of bombs, the style of assembly of the explosives, the nature of the explosives they use. This is the same group."

The social network behind the Aceh camp as well as the recent arrests show distinct nodes – leaders like Noordin Top (killed in a police raid in 2009) and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (now in prison awaiting trial) who created complex webs recruiting family and friends, examples of the Three Degrees of Influence Rule.

Social Media and Jihad

Ten years after 9/11, the link between JI and Al Qaeda continues. In January, Pakistani police arrested JI leader Umar Patek, the brother-in-law of Dulmatin (who helped Ba'asyir set up the Aceh training camp in 2010). Dulmatin and Patek were in the southern Philippines from 2003 until at least 2007. Patek and his Filipino wife were in Pakistan on their way to fight in Afghanistan. Indonesia's defense minister said Patek wanted to meet with Bin Laden. The couple was arrested after police trailed a known Al-Qaeda operative in Abbotabad, the same town where Bin Laden was killed this week.

JI, like Al Qaeda, has long faced an internal battle over the use of violence against civilians, particularly Muslims. The tactics we are seeing now were al-

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ways part of its arsenal – small cells carrying out assassination plots, small scale bombings and attacks (in 1999 JI planned to assassinate then Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri as well as other officials of her political party). What we are seeing today is a necessary evolution – and a reaction to the success of sustained law enforcement efforts which have curbed the networks' ability to carry out large-scale attacks.

However, there are added complications to the decentralized evolution of these terror networks: the Internet and mobile phone technology. More jihadi content is spreading faster in the virtual world, and police are finding online technical manuals on assassination techniques and bomb-making in terrorist safe houses.

“More people are buying into the ideology of JI and its associated groups,” says Gunaratna. “More individuals are politicized, radicalized and mobilized, and a very small number of them will continue to carry out attacks.”

Add to this mix the potent amplifying effect of social media. In mid-April, a jihadist prepared a 23-page guide to “effectively post” on Facebook. (Indonesia is the second largest Facebook nation in the world; the Philippines ranks sixth globally).

What seems clear is that in both the virtual and real worlds, the jihadi virus is spreading into more moderate and mainstream communities. Which brings us back to where we started: social networks spread what they are seeded with. Our experiments in the Philippines proved virtual and real world social networks can effectively spread a message and emotions to motivate action.

The jihadi virus is here to stay. The question now is how to track its mutations and vaccinate the public against it.

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The CTTA: Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis is now open for contributions from researchers and practitioners in the field of terrorism research, security, and other related fields.

Topical areas of interest are terrorism and political violence, terrorism and organized crime, homeland security, religion and violence, internal conflicts and terrorism, and all other areas of security broadly defined.

Article length could be anywhere between 800 to 1500 words. Submissions must be made before the 15th of every month for editing purposes and for inclusion in the next month's edition.

Electronic copies of the articles (MS Word format) may be submitted to the editors at the following addresses: isarabinda@ntu.edu.sg

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The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) is a specialist centre within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

ICPVTR conducts research, training, and outreach programs aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and at mitigating its effects on the international system. The Centre seeks to integrate academic theory with practical knowledge, which is essential for a complete and comprehensive understanding of threats from politically-motivated groups.

The Centre is staffed by academic specialists, religious scholars, as well as personnel from the law enforcement, military and intelligence agencies, among others. The Centre is culturally and linguistically diverse, comprising of functional and regional analysts as well as Muslim religious scholars from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.

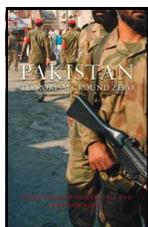
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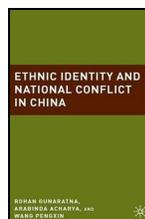
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- **Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero** (Reaktion Books, 2011) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna and Mr. Khuram Iqbal



- **International Aviation and Terrorism: Evolving Threats, Evolving Security** (Routledge 2009) by Dr. John Harrison



- **Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China** (Palgrave Macmillan 22 June 2010) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Dr. Arabinda Acharya and Mr. Wang Pengxin



- **Targeting Terrorist Financing: International Cooperation and New Regimes** (Routledge 2009) by Dr. Arabinda Acharya