

Bin Laden from Commander-in-Chief to Chief Executive Officer

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Introduction

For a number of years now the fight against terrorism has dominated the Western security agenda. Because of its catastrophic character, especially al-Qaeda's religious terrorism plays a key role in this struggle. In May 2005, however, the American administration claimed it was reconsidering the fight against terrorism. The strategy of *decapitation* had robbed al-Qaeda of its most important ringleaders, but it had not paralyzed the organization, as had been hoped. The campaign of resistance against the American occupation of Iraq and the attacks in London of July 7 2005 are still attributed to al-Qaeda-affiliated terror groups. The latter attack showed once again that the network has had to drastically change its *modus operandi*.

Flexibility is usually considered as one of al-Qaeda's most important weapons. This flexibility largely derives from a way of organizing in which border-crossing contacts within transnational networks of sympathizers enables religious fanatics to carry out large-scale strikes anywhere in the world². The transnational character of this terror movement forces those who are trying to fight it to an international cooperation fraught with difficulties. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly apparent that al-Qaeda has managed extremely well to adapt to the changing situation since the beginning of the *War on Terror* as well as the American-British invasion of Iraq.

In spite of the fact that the relation between flexibility and the manner of organizing is deemed to be so important, the analysis of this phenomenon in studies on terrorism does not progress beyond making superficial comparisons between al-Qaeda and types of network from the world of business³. The present article attempts to break through that superficiality. Precisely by providing more insight into the reason for becoming more flexible in the world of business and the ensuing organizational aspects, will it become possible to better assess al-Qaeda's organizational form for its strengths and weaknesses.

The article sets out to present the framework for analysis. The second part projects the existing knowledge about al-Qaeda on this framework, shedding new light on the management and organization design of the terror network. Gradually, it will become clear that al-Qaeda has changed its character since 11 September 2001 as a result of the American *War on terror*, but also, more directly, the success of 9/11. On the one hand, the central organization seems to have weakened in the battle, but, at the same time, Bin Laden's appeal on the Muslim population in the Middle East seems to have become stronger⁴.

The focal point of attention is the position of al-Qaeda's central organization in the extensive Islamic-fundamentalist (Islamist, for short) terror network. Not only the management within the organization is discussed, but also the way in which Bin Laden tries, and partially succeeds, to bend the broader organization to his will.

Theory: flexibility

The attention for flexibility is not new. For more than 25 years now, the concept has played an important part within the management sciences, resulting in, broadly speaking, three approaches. The general approach considers flexibility as a specific quality that an organization must have in order to be able to adapt to its changing environment and to stimulate innovation. The functional approach is directed at specific parts of the organization, such as the introduction of flexible work contracts, flexible production systems or flexible information systems. The actor approach assumes that personal qualities or certain interested parties in the organization influence flexibility. Table 1 elucidates the distinctions between the above-mentioned approaches by presenting a number of definitions and descriptions of flexibility.

<p>General approach</p> <p>Flexibility means an ability to adapt aspects of the organization rapidly in the face of new opportunities or threats in the environment. (Birkinshaw & Hagström 2000:5)⁵</p> <p>Organizations that move quickly are flexible. (Ashkenas et al.1995:8)⁶</p>
<p>Functional approach</p> <p>The flexibility and speed offered by advanced manufacturing technologies (AMT), when properly implemented, allow firms to design and commercialize new generations and variants of products faster than ever before. (Lei et al. 1996: 515)⁷</p> <p>The use of externalized workers adds needed flexibility to work arrangements and complements the stability provided by the internalized workforce. (Davis-Blake & Uzzi 1993: 218)⁸</p>
<p>Actor approach</p> <p>The only kind of strategy that makes sense in the face of unpredictable change is to become adaptive. Success will be determined by leadership's competence in making a particular set of choices within sense-and-respond model's framework. (Haeckel 1999: xvii)⁹</p> <p>The values of the elite inner circle are more important than those of the executive director or of the entire staff in predicting innovation. (Hage & Dewar 1973: 287)¹⁰</p>

Table 1: Three approaches of flexibility

On the basis of an extensive literature survey, in which these different definitions have been incorporated, Volberda¹¹ constructed a model in which flexibility is seen as the interaction between the management's ability to steer and the controllability of the organization (see figure 1). On the one hand, the management must have the dynamic capabilities to act adequately and timely on change, opportunities or threats in the environment. On the other, the organization must have the necessary structural, cultural and technological characteristics to support these capabilities. He emphasizes that neither may dominate the other. The interaction must be in balance, in other words, a management with many dynamic capabilities cannot weigh up to too rigid an organizational structure and vice versa. Moreover, creating a balance in the interaction implies dealing with duality. The management, for instance, can only decide to become active in new markets or to expand the product folio when it has created the necessary organizational conditions for it. Although words like market and product folio may seem out of place for a terrorist organization, al-Qaeda faces a similar challenge when it wants to decide, for instance, to establish new alliances with other Islamist groups or new ways of conducting attacks or propaganda.

The following two sections will deal with the concrete steps business organizations have taken on their way towards more flexibility. The managerial task and the organization design task of Volberda's model are used as a guideline.

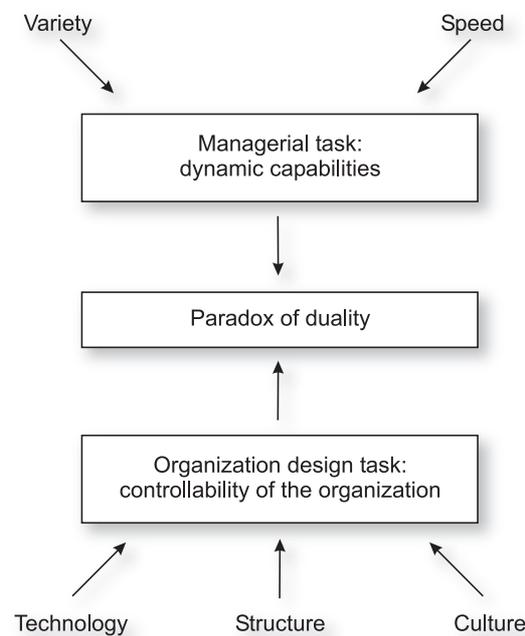


Figure 1 : Organizational flexibility (Volberda 1999)

The managerial task

It has always been the task of the management to react timely and adequately on changes in the environment and thus keep the organization on the right track. However, the globalization of the economy in combination with rapid changes in information and communication technology has led to such drastic changes in the competitive environment (the strategic environment) that traditional management capabilities have proven to be increasingly inadequate. The expanding possibilities of information and communication systems seem to have blurred borders and timelines and the need to react faster has become more and more pressing. Organizations must be able to anticipate adequately on the wishes of their clients and end users anywhere in the world. A consequence of this is that they are forced to introduce new products and applications on the market at an increasing rate. At the same time, the traditionally large-scale producers have to deliver tailor-made products more and more and they have to design their distribution networks in such a way that they can support the rapid service to customers all over the world. On top of that, market sectors become increasingly inter-related. Where in the past telephony was still a separate sector, it now finds itself positioned on the intersection of telecommunication, computer technology and even photography.

All these developments have caused control, which originally was rather reactive, to become increasingly proactive. Much more than in the past, managers invest in a broad knowledge basis. After all, organizations are much more capable of exploiting sudden product opportunities when they can dispose of range of expertise¹². The increase in the absorption capability is seen as a way to stimulate proactivity. In this context Cohen & Levinthal (1990: 128) state that, 'the ability of a firm to recognize the value of new, external information, assimilate it and apply it to commercial ends is critical to its innovative capabilities'¹³. In other words, picking up signals from the company's environment and successfully transforming them into new opportunities for the organization is a managerial capability that is of crucial importance in the turbulence of the present-day competitive environment. Furthermore, the management must have the will and the courage to learn and experiment. Top-level managers who cling too much to old thinking patterns and routines obstruct the necessary learning processes and thus limit the development of new capabilities (Volberda 1999).

The shift in managerial capabilities has also led to a change in the role of the management. The large vertically oriented bureaucracies of the past, where control was based on cost reduction and retaining control, will not do anymore¹⁴. Nowadays, it is all about the development and optimal utilization of dynamic core competencies and exploiting frontline knowledge¹⁵. The ability to quickly attract and cut off competencies largely determines the adaptability of organizations. Traditional, bureaucratically minded managers are not suitable for this. They work too much from fixed relationships, contacts,

structures and procedures, as instruments to control all their problems¹⁶. This rigid, often top-down, control causes problems in an environment that is continually changing. In the modern diversified and fragmented markets top-level managers simply do not command the necessary knowledge and multi-disciplinary expertise to adopt a dominant position in the process of strategy formulation¹⁷. Apart from that, their lofty position, far removed from the frontline, causes a lack of necessary fine-tuning to anticipate adequately and timely on local and urgent customer wishes. Rather than an omnipotent strategy guru, the present-day competitive environment requires a top-level manager who can facilitate, integrate and inspire¹⁸.

The facilitation is directed at enhancing bottom-up processes, whereby the top management sets the rules by which frontline managers can put to use their up-to-date knowledge of the market and expertise much more easily and directly for the general benefit of the organization. The integrator role is a result of the increased importance of cooperation. Single-handedly surrounding a competitor, gaining a market share, fighting brands and pressurizing suppliers, are examples of the conventional concept of entrepreneuring (i.e., business is war)¹⁹. This concept is losing more and more ground. Nowadays it is believed that companies can only be successful together with other companies²⁰. Partner companies join forces to develop the necessary competencies in mutual cooperation. In this way, organizations, in reacting on the unpredictable environment, can not only share the risks but also get a better view of them²¹. The top manager adopts the role of integrator to share knowledge and to keep the many subsidiaries and partners together and in tune with each other. The inspirer role emphasizes the ideological task that has increasingly become a managerial responsibility. In order to reach concord within the globally operating networks, propagating the overall *raison d'être* of the organization (i.e., an organizational objective with which the employees and partner companies can identify and to which they can devote themselves) has become a core managerial task. In this context Ghoshal and Bartlett speak of the *Beyond Strategy to Purpose* trend²². The comparison with al-Qaeda's changing leadership role is obvious, but in order to make it complete it is necessary to discuss the organization-design task.

The organization-design task

As has been indicated above, the management task and the organization-design task cannot be separated. The need to be flexible in the top management will have consequences one way or the other for the design of the organization. The impact of the flexibility urge for the organization-design task is therefore the main issue in this section, taking as a starting point the integral design method. It is a method that considers the

structure, technology and culture as separate sub-systems of an organization, but that at the same time assumes that the sub-systems influence each other and should be in tune with each other²³.

The need to be flexible has had a drastic impact on the organizational structure. In the first place flattening has been an important strategy for improving the reaction speed of organizations. For the steeper the structure, the slower and inaccurate the two-sided information flow between the top and the work floor (Volberda 1999). In this context many organizations have begun to cut out intermediate layers and organize themselves much more around large, relatively autonomous organizational components. Not only did the large vertically oriented bureaucracies of the past become increasingly difficult to control because of their vertical structures, also the internal complexity of these organizations began to play its part. The focus on cost reduction and retaining control had ensured that the organizations had over time begun to expand into cluttered giants. All sorts of activities, not belonging to the original “core business” of the organization, were added to the managerial process. The call for more transparency and becoming more “lean and mean”, induced companies to outsource or even cut off non-core activities²⁴.

The advantage of this strategy of the cobbler-sticking-to-his-last is that organizations can exploit their core competencies to the full and become better and better at it. But the specialization that is the result of this makes organizations rigid and more dependent on others²⁵. Where organizations in the past completely controlled their value chain, from raw material to final product, they nowadays choose for cooperation in the guise of strategic alliances with suppliers and clients. The thinking of organizations in terms of individual value chains has been replaced by thinking in common value chains²⁶. A telling example in this context is the network Toyota have built up with their suppliers. Their main purpose is the continuous improvement of the balance between costs and quality²⁷. Learning is central in this strategy. That is why Toyota are determined to enter into intensive, long-term relations with their suppliers. By investing in these relations the partners change from producers of basic half-finished products into sources of knowledge that can stimulate Toyota’s innovation process.

Next to vertical cooperation within the traditional company column, a key role is played by horizontal cooperation when it comes to improving competitive capabilities. De Man, Van der Zee & Geurts (2000) state that horizontal network organizations are characterized by an organic structure, which enables a fast build-up and build-down of relations between companies. On the one hand, this makes customization possible, on the other, it allows companies to develop themselves in many more directions than in the past when they were bound by the limitations of their own trade or industry. In other words, by cooperating organizations can exchange and combine geographic,

market and technological knowledge much more easily. Depending on the demand for their specific knowledge, partners can join or leave the network. In any case, combining the problem-specific knowledge ensures synergetic effects, which gives the organizations a competitive edge. Microsoft's X-Box is an example of a horizontal network. In the beginning of 2000, Microsoft began to penetrate the game computer market with the introduction of the X-Box. The central question asked by many at the time was how Microsoft managed to produce and market 1.5 million game computers per year, without having their own factories. The answer of Microsoft to this question is still valid today, namely cooperation. Philips provides the DVD drive, Intel the microprocessor, NVIDIA the graphic chip, Micron Technology the memory chip and Western Digital the hard disk. Subsequently, Flextronic takes care of the assembly²⁸. Although Microsoft are the leading partner in the network, the contribution to the actual product is limited to the operating software and the marketing.

In order to guarantee the effectiveness of these horizontal and vertical networks intra- and inter-organizational linking mechanisms are becoming indispensable, as products and knowledge are increasingly rarely based on one specific organization, business unit or functional department²⁹. Therefore, organizations are much more consciously active in developing capabilities to cross the traditional borders. Project work by means of task groups or multi-disciplinary teams plays a key role in this³⁰. Many R&D projects split up the newly-to-be-developed product into several subsystems and partial systems³¹. This allows the employment of a specialized team that can even consist of experts from different organizations. This splitting up gives the various project groups the opportunity to develop their own subsystems relatively independently of each other. Eventually, integration methods, such as project planning, hierarchic coordination, previously established rules and ICT support help integrate the partial systems into an aggregate³².

Apart from structure, technology has an impact on flexibilization, in that information systems support the flattening process described above. The coordination role of the manager and the staff specialist is increasingly taken over by electronic information systems, which makes all sorts of functions and management levels obsolete. Moreover, systems such as these also help to streamline internal management, which again leads to fewer functions. A good example of this is electronic banking, where the client is actively involved in processing his own transactions, at the expense of formal functions in the financial institutions.

Technology is also pivotal in the striving for customization. Market segmentation is becoming increasingly important for organizations in their ambition to meet the individualization processes in society. Traditional strategies, mainly based on mass production, yield a great advantage of scale. The ensuing low costs, make it possible to compete on price. But in the present-day competitive environment this is not sufficient anymore.

Apart from offering a low price, organizations must also produce a product of high quality and at the same time meet the wishes of several customer groups (Ghoshal & Bartlett 1997). “Mass-production philosophy” is replaced by a “mass-customization philosophy”. Griffin & Elbert define “mass-customization” as follows, ‘Although companies produce in large volumes, each unit features the unique variations and options the customer prefers’³³. Mass-customization has become possible due to an extreme automation of the production process. The integration of programmable micro-electronics in the production design (CAD), the planning and control of production (CAM) and the introduction of robot technology in the production process itself have generated a flexible system that can produce a range of products with a minimum of manual interventions. (Volberda 1999) So, technology has made it possible to retain the advantages of mass production while producing customized products for several customer groups.

Technology is not only used for organizational integration methods, such as project groups, it is also used to facilitate intra- and inter-organizational fine-tuning³⁴. Information and communication technology (ICT) blurs territorial, time and organizational borders, and for some it even drives cooperation³⁵. The introduction of electronic information systems, such as e-mail, electronic conferencing and groupware has been an enormous stimulant for coordination within companies, but also for fine-tuning and transactions between organizations. In addition to this, communication networks, such as the Internet and Extranet, have contributed to a better fine-tuning between primary processes of the customer and the supplier in order to guarantee timely delivery of raw materials and parts. The Internet has even played a crucial role in spawning entire new ‘e-business’ concepts, such as *amazon.com*, *easyjet.com* and *Dell’s Direct Model*³⁶.

In the previous section it was argued that flexibilization is partly determined by the ideological role of the top level management. In this context, Pettigrew states that the management of an organization does not only create the rational and tangible aspects of an organization, such as structure and technology, but also the symbols, ideologies, language, beliefs, rituals and myths³⁷. The question that remains now is what soft aspects are aimed for in the context of flexibilization of organizations.

To use Hofstede’s words, the present-day competitive environment demands a mental software geared at cooperation³⁸. Organizations must be able to gain an advantage from the multitude of customers, suppliers, competitors and other parties in their environment. This implies a collective awareness, in which creativity, improvisation and learning capabilities are central, so for employees who can receive and give feedback, are prepared to discuss mistakes, are able to actively process information and, on top of all that, are willing to look beyond department or organization borders³⁹. It takes specific organizational qualities to bring up these qualities in people. Thus, there is a requirement for a varied employee potential, consisting of co-workers of various educational

levels, different experience and ages. Bureaucracy must be limited by pushing back written and unwritten rules. To do this, participation and delegation are much more useful control concepts than the traditional top-down decision making and control.

The proposed formation of network, combined with the above-mentioned decentralization, also entails some risks, for organizations become less transparent and controllable for the management, which may create fragmentation and 'islandization'⁴⁰. *Ahold* got a first-hand experience of this in the form a bookkeeping scandal in one of their own subsidiaries, *US Foodservice*, in the USA⁴¹. Therefore, Bartlett & Ghoshal (1991) are of the opinion that in the 21st century organizations can only be successful if the management manages to create a culture of mutual 'individual commitment', on the one hand, and 'shared vision'⁴², on the other. In the former, the individual partners, business units and departments are motivated by giving them room for own initiative; in the latter, the management disseminates a shared vision in order to reach a like-mindedness within the varied mix of partners and subsidiaries.

In this section a short analysis has been presented of the steps business organizations have made on the road to a greater flexibility. In the following these steps are set alongside the al-Qaeda terrorist organization and its way of operating.

al-Qaeda

al-Qaeda was founded during the Afghan struggle against the Soviet Union. The organization's aim was recruitment and the financing of the struggle. After the retreat of the Soviet troops a lengthy civil war followed between the various *mujahideen* factions, in which al-Qaeda supported the Taliban, a fundamentalist movement from south-western Afghanistan. Meanwhile a more important objective became the fight against the West. The American invasion of Iraq, in response to Iraq's occupation of Kuwait and the use of military bases in Saudi Arabia, formed the occasion for a new *jihad*. The objective was to remove Americans and other Westerners, including Israel, from the *dar-al-islam*.

Between 1991 and 2001, Western presence in the Middle East was relatively limited. Israel was, and is, a complete civilization in an area that before had belonged to Islamic states. In Saudi Arabia there were a few American bases and Western tourists were all over the place, as were Western business people. In the eyes of Muslim fundamentalists the tourists threatened public morals, but so did Western television and it penetrated deeper. Exhausting raw material, in particular oil, Western economic interests kept in power regimes that had proven their incompetence for a long time, while their populations profited too little. al-Qaeda and its supporters faced an ungodly alliance of corrupt Middle Eastern governments and their distant Western allies. It made the strategic choice first and foremost to deal with the distant enemy by attacking his *heartland*⁴³.

Other groups, incidentally, attacked tourists while a military struggle was waged on the periphery of the *dar-el-islam* in Bosnia, Chechnya and the Sudan. In Algeria fundamentalist fought a Western-oriented government.

al-Qaeda's organizational design task

Because of Bin Laden's background he is regularly referred to as "terrorism's CEO"⁴⁴. A comparison that is not entirely unjustified, in view of the way he controls al-Qaeda. The ideological leadership shows remarkable parallels to the current control principles in the world of business. Civilian companies, too, try to give guidance to and keep together their often network-like constellations through ideological leadership. Apart from that, data found in the computers of incarcerated al-Qaeda members show that Osama has structured his organization as a modern company.

Above all, al-Qaeda's structure is based on core competencies and thinking in value systems. The "business units" form the strategic heart of the organization, they need each other and their tasks are so crucial to the organization that they are not left to external parties. The four main units have functional competencies: military religious-legal, financial and media. At the top is Osama bin Laden himself, assisted by a consultative body. Figure 2 represents this structure.

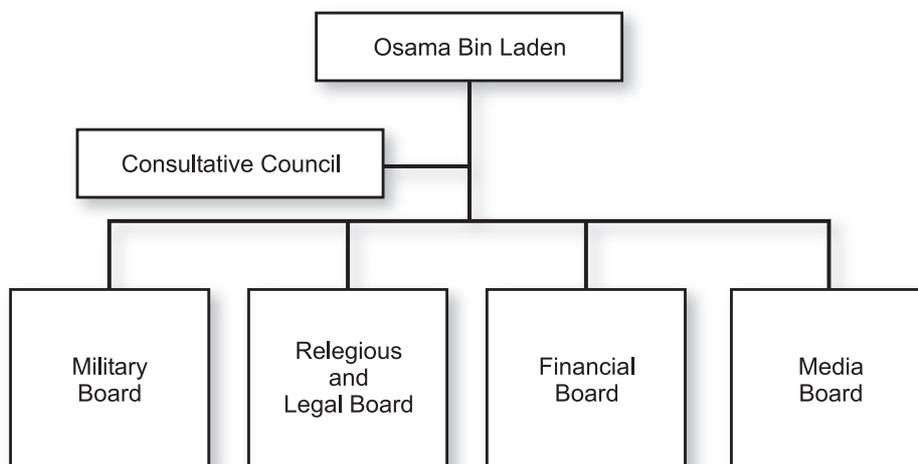


Figure 2: al-Qaeda's organizational structure

Each of the four directorates has a well-defined function. The task of the financial directorate is to provide the multi-million al-Qaeda company with the resources to carry out its other tasks. This function comprises fundraising (the original function of Bin

Laden's organization during the war against the Soviet Union), control and expenditure. Under the financial directorate there is a layered chain of parties that, in legal or illegal manner, are involved in raising and diverting money flows.

The military directorate is responsible for education and training of the warriors - those who are going to commit attacks as the "regular units" that fought shoulder to shoulder with the Taliban in the Afghan civil war and who more than three years after the American attack on Afghanistan are still offering resistance in some of the more inaccessible regions, particular in the South along the border with Pakistan. It also guards its own installations, for instance, the training camps. The military directorate is also responsible for the execution of the attacks, including planning and preparation. The attackers are managed by this directorate.

Of equal importance is the media directorate. Brian Jenkin's dictum that, 'Terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening and not a lot of people dead' still applies, in spite of the obvious readiness to make great numbers of victims. Recruitment of new fighters, fundraising and mobilization of their own support group are dependent on media coverage, not to mention the fear effect among Americans and more in general Western populations. The media directorate ensures that attacks are claimed and the reasons for them are explained, so that they do not remain without consequences. The directorate makes sure that al-Qaeda's demands reach the public and it maintains the communication with the support group.

Bin Laden's video messages are, however, also equally the responsibility of his religious-legal directorate. The term religious-legal refers to the Islamic law of obligations, the *fiqh*, which determines which regulations and recommendations, prohibitions and condemnations are applicable in a particular situation⁴⁵. The directorate that does these things has authority regarding internal discipline and the rules that (have to) apply in an Islamic society, but it has probably also a say in the permissibility of attacks, including *targeting*. The motivation of the battle and the specific military operations fall within its competence. They are often given the form of a formal religious-legal pronouncement, a *fatwa*. This was the case, for instance, with the declaration of war by the World Islamic Front in 1998.

Organizational changes since 9/11

The *War on Terror* has seriously undermined the capabilities of al-Qaeda's central organization. This is best seen with respect to the military directorate. The more or less regular forces that al-Qaeda fielded in the Afghan civil war as a support for the Taliban have ceased to exist. Small groups of fighters are still active in a limited guerrilla against the Americans and Karzai regime they support. The fight in Iraq is outside al-Qaeda's con-

trol. It is conducted by local commanders, complemented by Al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian, who is sometimes associated with al-Qaeda, but whose position in or with respect to the central organization is unclear. Besides, up to 9/11 2001 al-Qaeda attacks were planned and coordinated by this directorate. This has been possible only to a limited extent since then. Also outside Iraq most attacks are committed by local groups. The central organization has hardly any authority over the composition, way of operating and targeting, as they are frequently set up ad hoc and often as a reaction to local circumstances.

The London attacks on July 7 2005 clearly show these changes. In the first instance, there was “al-Qaeda’s signature”: multiple simultaneous explosions (one was delayed). Place and time were picked for maximum publicity effect, namely, London during the British hosting of the G8 summit. The attacks were claimed by a group calling itself *Secret Organization for al-Qaeda’s Jihad in Europe*. The British intelligence services have since uncovered that the London bombers were trained by al-Qaeda in Pakistan or Afghanistan. They may also have received orders at that time, but there is no evidence of this or of active involvement by al-Qaeda’s central organization in the execution of the attacks. In a videotaped statement on Al Jazeera on August 4, al-Qaeda, by mouth of the second in command Ayman al Zawahiri, expressed its approval of the attacks, but did not claim any responsibility.

The perpetrators were British Muslims who seemed fully integrated. In the words of the intelligence services, they were ‘blank pages’. What is most disconcerting from the perspective of the security agencies responsible for preventing such attacks, is that the attackers seem to be self-recruited. They can be linked to al-Qaeda through travels and training, but establishing the link before attacks occur, requires attentiveness and extensive monitoring even of (seemingly) innocent travelers who were previously indistinguishable from other Western nationals who share only the Muslim faith. Nor are the suspects of the second series of attacks, on July 21 2005, demonstrably linked to al-Qaeda. Incidentally, in this case the attackers were immigrants. Their attacks mimicked the attacks of July 7, as if wanting to say that tighter security measures since then were no obstacle. (The attacks failed due to faulty detonators.) Moreover, both attacks strongly resembled those of March 11 2004 in Madrid, with multiple explosions at a sensitive place and time, just a few days before a general election. The perpetrators in Madrid, however, have been linked to al-Qaeda, though indirectly. The message of July 7 is more disquieting: the enemy is among us, not as a recognizable other, but invisible and elusive.

The new situation has great advantages for a terrorist organization. As direct communication between central organization and associated groups is minimal, the chance of being tracked down by terrorist hunters has proportionally been reduced. Conversely, the tracing of the central organization does not immediately lead to the discovery of

other battle groups. The initiative lies with local groups that can quickly anticipate on changing circumstances. This makes it easier for them to escape repression and attack when an opportunity offers itself, for instance, because a target object is temporarily less well guarded. At the same time al-Qaeda's core is unburdened so that it can concentrate on its own continued existence, more ambitious operations on the long term, and – possibly its most important task – propaganda.

The terror network around al-Qaeda has become a flatter organization since 9/11 out of necessity. In effect the central organization has become severed from most of its affiliated groups. The position of the pre- 9/11 central organization is already unclear; it seems that Bin Laden had little effective control over most of the affiliated local groups. Since the attack central control has become even more difficult. Through horizontal tuning and cooperation with like-minded groups al-Qaeda has adapted itself to the new situation.

Bruce Hoffman distinguishes four levels within al-Qaeda, beginning with the 'professional cadre', followed by 'trained amateurs', then 'local walk-ins' and, finally, 'like-minded insurgents, guerrillas and terrorists'⁴⁶. The former two groups belong to al-Qaeda, the latter are associated with it but they do not actually make up part of the organization. Rather, they belong to other organizations in the network surrounding al-Qaeda. In view of the long history of Islamic fundamentalism, it is not surprising that some of these have existed for longer than al-Qaeda. As described above, al-Qaeda came into existence during the Afghan war against the Soviet Union as a shelter for *mujahideen* and as a link in the financial network, in which also the American Central Intelligence Agency was involved. In various Islamic countries there had been local movements of all sorts since the interbellum (and the establishment of European protectorates in the Middle East), whose common objective was advancing the Islamization of the social order.

Up to a certain extent this network has been formalized as the *World Islamic Front*, that in February 1998 declared a 'jihad against the Zionists and the crusaders' (or in other translations 'against the Jews and the crusaders')⁴⁷. Bin Laden signed the declaration and Ayman al Zawahiri, who is often called al-Qaeda's second man, but who on this occasion acted on behalf of the *Jihad Group in Egypt*, and by representatives of an *Egyptian Islamic Group*, a *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan* and a *Jihad Movement in Bangladesh*. The Front is an alliance of like-minded groups. The importance of their common declaration lies in the first place in their agreement on targets and priorities. Secondly, the Front declares in the form of a fatwa, a religious-legal pronouncement, that *jihad* in the given situation is an individual duty for every Muslim. It is in fact a call for a general insurgency, which makes its own position that of an organized vanguard. At the same time, this call places rivaling groups in an awkward position: they have to choose between joining, which increases al-Qaeda's authority, or rejection, which makes

them lose credibility.

What this makes clear is that the characterization of the system surrounding al-Qaeda as a network is doubtful. The field within which the organization exists is defined by sympathy with regard to the *jihad*. But within that field there are other rivaling groups beside al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups. Moreover, the number of players keeps changing whenever individuals organize for battle. New nuclei form themselves, also under the influence of the *fatwa*, but al-Qaeda is not in contact with each of them, nor are all the nuclei in contact with other nuclei.

The functioning of al-Qaeda and the alliance surrounding it is mainly supported by information and communication technology. The call of the World Islamic Front is mainly effective insofar as it is disseminated by modern media, in particular the Internet. (This is the organizational role of technology; al-Qaeda's use of technology in an operational sense is left out of consideration here.) Insofar as like-minded groups and new nuclei make contact with al-Qaeda, they do so through the Internet. When expedient, al-Qaeda can send its people to the affiliated groups, either with the general purpose of teaching them how to organize better and operate more effectively, or with specific intentions. But these contacts are vulnerable to anti-terror measures: persons can be traced much more easily than a single electronic message in a constant stream of communications.

Experience shows that messages through the Internet or via other relevant media channels for the target group, for instance, the news channel Al Jazeera, can do the job. For the communication with affiliated terrorist groups the Internet is of great importance. It also plays a major role in the dissemination of propaganda, where continuously changing websites, but, in particular, discussion forums and chatrooms, are used. A large section of the (supposed) support group has hardly any access to the Internet. The governments control the regular media in most Islamic countries and they will not transmit al-Qaeda's propaganda. That is why satellite channels like Al Jazeera, which are freer to broadcast news that they consider important, including Osama bin Laden's video messages, are so vital. The increasing reach of these channels has certainly contributed to the success of al-Qaeda's appeal to all Muslims everywhere to take up arms. Except for Iraq, they may yet be only small groups, enjoying the support of not more than a small percentage of the population, but from al-Qaeda's point of view the expansion of jihad to almost all countries in the Muslim world is pure gain. From Morocco to the Philippines, from Chechnya to Indonesia, armed groups have embraced Bin Laden. In various Western countries, especially in Europe, moreover, local (not always well-organized) "battle groups" have been established.

The cultural aspect of the organization is related to the management style. For its own professional cadre al-Qaeda uses a hierarchical organization. Those whom Hoffman

calls trained amateurs, such as “shoebomber” Richard Reid and Ahmed Rassem, who wanted to commit an attack at Los Angeles airport, are also managed along the hierarchical line, but their assignment is relatively free; al-Qaeda invests in their training and a modest starter capital or basic equipment and then sends them on their way with some guidance as to the location where or the target against which they will have to strike. Once they have been sent out, contact with the central organization and thus influence over their further operations is minimal.

Affiliated local organizations are equally free from hierarchical control. Often they have their own, usually local targets and their own history. Their own identity obstructs a reduction to just a local branch under the authority of the central organization, but they may be prepared to exchange expertise and are interested in financial and technological support. In return they give support, also frequently in the form of specific expertise, for operations conducted by the central organization, and they can sometimes be persuaded to carry out specific operations on certain moments falling within al-Qaeda’s strategy. Their role is somewhere in between that of an ally and subsidiary organization. al-Qaeda has some authority, but still depends on exchange and negotiation.

al-Qaeda’s influence on new groups seems greater at first sight. On the other hand, these groups often have a weak organization and are often manned by inexperienced individuals. They also lack the support groups of the more established organizations. They are an unknown entity, often literally so: they have hardly any contacts with other organizations. E-mail and the Internet allow them to get an idea of the objectives and style of operating of like-minded groups. In how far they actually internalize these lessons, however, remains an unanswered question. Attempts to make contact with other organizations often result in discovery by anti-terrorist fighters. Their lack of contacts and organizational stability are the greatest obstacles from al-Qaeda’s point of view. Management is all but impossible. Therefore, Bin Laden exerts most influence by means of general appeals, dissemination of his ideology and the inspiration of his own example.

al-Qaeda’s management task

The management task was given substance differently in the early days of its existence than is now the case, with the attacks of September 11 2001 on the World Trade Centre and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as the major turning points. Initially, the al-Qaeda leadership had a strongly facilitating role. The fight against the Russian troops in Afghanistan was supported with financial and personnel resources. After the second Gulf War (1990), al-Qaeda changed focus by taking up the armed struggle against Western powers, which often had extensive interests in the Middle East. From

the Islamist perspective, this is not really a big change, as the Soviet Union and the West belonged to the same civilization, rooted in Christianity and essentially godless.

At the same time the facilitating role shifted gradually in the direction of a managing one, as the planning, preparation and execution of the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centre shows. The period since its establishment up to the attacks in the USA was consciously used by al-Qaeda to learn and to experiment. Attacks like those on the USS Cole and the American Embassies in Tanzania and Nairobi, relatively on the sidelines, were used to test the enemies out and to improve its way of operating. Eventually, this led to an extremely successful attack, from al-Qaeda's perspective.

After September 11 2001, the situation changed. The USA intervened against al-Qaeda's Afghan base of operations and eighteen months later against Saddam Hussein. In Afghanistan and Iraq, and incidentally also in Kuwait, large numbers of Western military, Americans and their allies, remained. At the same time, the military bases in Saudi Arabia were closed. In this country attacks were mainly carried out against the homes of Western specialists. In Afghanistan the Taliban refuse to give up their resistance. The battle in Iraq, however, holds the greatest attraction for al-Qaeda sympathizers. Apart from actively taking part in local resistance, terror in the home countries of America's allies has become an important activity for fundamentalist groups, with the Madrid attacks on March 11 2004 as their main feat of arms.

The main change in al-Qaeda's strategic environment is the much shorter distance towards the Western armed forces, which previously were the 'distant enemy'. On the one hand, this increases the possibility to employ new recruits against these forces, in particular against their support services and their local allies, in places which are more easily accessible and with less preparation. On the other hand, the shorter reaction time of the opponent requires stricter precautions. The fight against the military occupation force in Iraq requires a different *modus operandi* than the attacks in the West itself or even attacks on specific military targets (such as USS Cole). This adaptation is even harder because of the difficult communication with the al-Qaeda leadership who, presumably since late 2002 have been hiding out in the Afghan-Pakistan border area. The way in which al-Qaeda has reacted to the loss of a secure home base, on the one hand, and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, on the other, is characteristic for this terrorist organization. Since the beginning of the large-scale insurgency in Iraq the leadership of al-Qaeda, in the person of Osama bin Laden, has gone an alternative path to reach its objective. He often shows himself in civilian clothes and seldom wears military gear anymore. Where in the past he projected the image of the warrior, now that al-Qaeda is not directly involved in acts of war at the most important front, he acts out the role of statesman. Instead of commander-in-chief Bin Laden is now an advisor and spiritual leader. *Fatwas* and pious words were already part of his repertoire in the 1990s; the

military jargon, however, is gradually disappearing. Concurrent with the development of an Islamist strategic discourse⁴⁸ political analyses of supposed weakness of the Western opponents have acquired a more prominent position in Bin Laden's video messages.

This shift marks the changeover from direct management to ideology and inspiration. It can be explained, in Max Weber's terms, as a changeover from rational-legal to charismatic exertion of power⁴⁹. Bin Laden's authority over affiliated groups, however, has always been a product of charisma; the rational management only applied to al-Qaeda's own central organization. The change of style in the charismatic leadership is equally important, therefore. He has already earned his own spurs as a heroic warrior and he now calculates that his target group needs a guiding great leader.

Nevertheless, there is a disadvantage to Osama bin Laden's new management role. Also without direct interference of the leadership, the fighters in Iraq serve the objectives of the organization. The same holds good for the local terrorist groups in Western societies. Their attacks are directed against the same Western powers and contribute to the perception of a global war between them and the powers of Islam. al-Qaeda does not have to be involved in every attack to be able to claim that it has called for one and inspired it. The problem for al-Qaeda is the variety of operations in various locations and to bring in line the required flexibility because of the continuous concerted hunt of anti-terrorist fighters. In the late nineties al-Qaeda acquired the reputation of being the main representative of the armed struggle of Islam against the West. The Pentagon and WTC attacks confirmed this reputation. When, however, the attention moves to battlefields where al-Qaeda can exert little influence, other groups can come to the fore. One risk is that such a local group, chastened by battle, gains authority at the expense of al-Qaeda. Another, greater, risk is that local battle groups allow local considerations to prevail over the interest of the common struggle on many fronts of the global *jihad* that al-Qaeda propagates in word and deed.

Conclusion

The war on terror has undoubtedly caused great harm to al-Qaeda. The hunt for the organization and its leaders has also demonstrated its resilience, something of which many organizations are probably envious. In a very natural fashion al-Qaeda brings into practice a great number of flexibility concepts that are striven for in the world of business.

After the invasion of Afghanistan al-Qaeda's central organization has lost much of its control. The four main directorates can to a much lesser extent leave their mark on the organization and its way of operating. For the military directorate it has become virtually impossible to direct and manage the armed struggle. The financial directorate probably

still commands large reserves, but it finds it hard to transfer them to those who need them. The media directorate is hampered by counter-terror measures whenever it tries to propagate its message. Besides, it is faced with the difficulty of having to respond reactively, to exploit attacks and other setbacks for the Americans as propaganda without knowing about specific actions beforehand. The task for the religious-legal directorate is to test operations against the *fiqh*. Because it has no control over associated groups and for security reasons it is limited in communicating with them, al-Qaeda cannot very well test actions beforehand. What is left to them is to distance themselves from an attack afterwards. This, however, will affect the enthusiasm of sympathizers to take up weapons themselves.

Even though al-Qaeda has lost much strength on these points, it has gained on others. Instead of operations under the authority of the central organization, there has been an increase in attacks carried out by associated groups in various Muslim and Western countries, where Bin Laden's *jihad* often finds a willing ear among young immigrants. The expansion of the struggle to almost all countries of the Middle East and northern Africa, to Southeast Asia and most of all to Europe, can be seen as a great success for al-Qaeda.

With a strategic ingenuity and preparedness to change, that can serve as an example for many a top-level executive, Osama bin Laden has exchanged the role of Commander-in-Chief for that of a modern-day inspired Chief Executive Officer, who stresses like-mindedness and manages his organization on the basis of a common ideology. Apart from that he has given enough room to the organization to change. Through horizontal tuning, cooperation with like-minded groups and decentralization al-Qaeda has adapted itself to these new circumstances. This has given the local groups the initiative to anticipate quickly to changing circumstances. Furthermore, it gives them more chances to escape repression and to strike whenever an opportunity presents itself.

Therefore, the American administration rightly asks itself whether the decapitation strategy against al-Qaeda is still the correct one. It seems more obvious to choose a strategy that attacks al-Qaeda where it is the weakest. Above all, the diversity of groups and parties within the al-Qaeda network offers the possibility to stimulate mutual division and to break the strength of the common ideology. In that way the threat of assimilation that is there for every ideological organization⁵⁰ can be given a hand, as it were. On the other hand, mistakes, clumsiness or atrocities of affiliated groups can be exploited to drive a wedge between al-Qaeda and the population.

Notes

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