

# Anatomy of al-Qaida

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# Abstract

This paper looks at al-Qaida and the nearly decade of war through concepts offered by a scientific paradigm called complexity theory. The networks, organization and ideology of al-Qaida in this paper are described in terms of complex adaptive systems, emergent networks with localized behavior. How Al-Qaida in the face of adversity of being one of the most hunted organizations, networks and ideology across the world show a remarkable talent for not only surviving, but also thriving under nearly a decade of war. This paper is in an effort to understand the adaptation and resilience al-Qaida has shown during the last decade, as it today has more members, a global reach and an ideological experience it lacked ten years ago.

*Keywords:* al-Qaida, militant Islam, complexity theory, networks, complex adaptive system

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# 1 1. Introduction

Despite nearly a decade of open and covert warfare, police inquires, and countless arrests and deaths, al-Qaida remain strong, elusive and ruthlessly powerful. The forces of globalization acting like a type of central nervous system on which al-Qaida can project it's single narrative in a way that carries enduring resonance, with a logic that thousand of Muslims share all over the world (Ranstorp 2007 p. 2).

## 1.1 Research Design

Francis Pisani describes al-Qaida as a “particularly complex organization, halfway between a sect and a medieval military order. It is a networks of networks” (Ranstorp 2007 p. 2) The thought of al-Qaida as a organic system attracted my attention when I saw that they mimicked the theoretical description of certain theories in the field of complexity theory. Organic in the sense that al-Qaida inherently carries the capability to perform in the same way under different conditions, in a way that ensures their survival. This includes the creation of new, features and patterns in their environment, different from anything seen previously. A few of the hallmark, novel features never seen previously were that suicide pilots and passenger aircraft, creates a makeshift cruise missiles. Or in Europe where networked terrorist cells have been replaced by self-initiated cells, performing seemingly random terrorist attacks, still bearing the hallmarks of al-Qaida. In turn causing more grief, hatred and resentment throughout already turbulent societies, on which the values of al-Qaida arguably thrive. There has always been a debate how al-Qaida is to be best understood, or described but the many labels produced reveals a certain uncertainty. Words like nodes, links, evolution and franchising are thrown around in the confusion whether al-Qaida a social movement, a dark network, even the conceptual idea of a “mother ship” or “networks of networks” have been put forward (Ranstorp 2007 p. 2).

Keywords: Links, Complexity Theory, Information, Complex Adaptive Systems, al-Qaida.

## 1.2 Research Question

My wish to model al-Qaida after that of complex theory is because I want to create something that will lessen the uncertainty of what al-Qaida is, as an effort to that understand them better. This uncertainty regarding al-Qaida and their pervasive presence in the world pursues me to ask the question “How have al-Qaida changed over time?” and can I use the field of complexity theory to validate my findings?

## 1.3 Method

From a traditional scientific perspective we need models to deal with reality, better models can give both scientists and the public firmer grasp of the complexities encountered in daily life. Economics, biology and politics are among the areas that benefit from predictive models. There is however a catch, it would seem that the most successful models are those whose limitations are explicitly visible (Cilliers 2008 p 12). There is an uncertainty but also excitement in using a theory that remains under researched and has yet to fully develop it's own, conceptual language.

My research question being investigative in nature, make this quite a straightforward case study about al-Qaida. The method of doing a case study is especially valuable when you want to expand the validity of your chosen theory, or refine it's mechanisms. (Bjereld, Demker, Hinnfors 2002 p. 86). This is especially valuable from the point of view of complexity theory since it is primarily works with elements and links on an, holistic, aggregated, macro-level (ibid). It is understandable that a descriptive case study of something as complex as al-Qaida have it's own, methodological problems, however the problems are very discernible. Indeed, if I where to make a complete description of al-Qaida it would be as large and complex as al-Qaida is in itself.

## 1.4 Theory

Dealing with a theory that marks itself as something "complex" creates a certain feeling of dread in the organized, categorizing mind of an academic. As such I find it useful to distinguish between certain words in the English language. The distinction between "complex" and "simple, many systems or occurrences can appear simple, an leaf for example, but on closer examination reveal remarkable complexity. A modern car engine, can for an academic that is not mechanically gifted appear somewhat frightening in it's complexity, but it can be described fairly simply around the concept of controlled detonation. There is also the meaning of the words "complex" and "complicated". Imagine a system that has a great many parts, like a computer or an ocean liner. Despite the fact that they consist of great many parts, they can be clinically and completely described down to its individual parts (Cilliers 2008 p. 1). There is no doubt that such a system is indeed complicated. However, in a complex system there is the interaction between its many (or few) different components, and the interaction between the system and it's environment that is of interest. Neither do these interactions appear to be fixed, but shift and change, more often than not as a result of self-organization that corresponds to a sequence in time – making it a complex adaptive system.

We have always lived in a world of change, and as such a clear description of the world around us is never easy. Being part of the world, make us do things that we do not fully understand. We can make medicine out of many different components, without fully explaining either the end effects, or side effects, we can undertake complex peace processes in war-torn societies, and throughout we can store, retrieve and send out endless bits of information. The habitual method of science and description is that if something is too complex (or complicated) to be grasped as a whole, it is divided into governable pieces, which can be analyzed separately and then assembled again, much like a malfunctioning car engine (Cilliers 2008 p. 2). But within organic complex adaptive systems it is not the sum of its components that make it tick, but the interconnections, or relationships between these components, elements or nodes that matter. The process of disassembling the system in order to understand it merely destroys what it seeks to understand.

This paper will focus on the subdivision of complexity theory that deals with "living" systems. A more in-depth study of al-Qaida and complexity theory is beyond the scope of this paper. What I can do is to make general remarks about the conditions for complex behavior, and describe the dynamic of al-Qaida as a complex, adaptive system that can interact, adapt and learn towards their environment. For the sake of understanding I will list a description of the characteristics of a complex adaptive system (Cilliers 2008 p. 3).

(I) Generally speaking, complex system consists of a large number of elements, or nodes, and in order to make up a complex system, the elements have to interact, and do so dynamically over time. These links within the system are involved in a constant exchange of information both from within and outside the system.

(II) This interaction of information is structurally arranged in such a way that any element in the system can influence, and is influenced by others, but what is interesting and very important is that a number of sparsely connected elements, can perform the same function as that of a richly connected element. Another important characteristic is that the interactions can take a non-linear as well as a linear form, this describes how small causes can have large effects and vice versa.

(III) Another important characteristic to explain is the range of the interactions and the way information can be suppressed, or altered in any way (Cilliers 2008 p. 4). For example, the elements in a complex network usually interact primarily with those around them. In large networks this results in groups, assemblies or aggregates with a “local determination” with their own local “discourse” (Cilliers 2008 p. 121).

(IV) Inherent in the interactions there are feedback loops that allow for any activity to feed back onto itself. This can occur at any stage, either direct or after a number of intervening stages. The nature of the feedback loops can be both negative or positive, or in other words be stimulating, enhancing, or detracting, inhibiting (Cilliers 2008 p. 4).

(V) As complex systems mostly interact with their environment they function as open systems, and by that exist an inherently interesting methodological notion since the interaction appears with no definitive, clear lines. Instead of borders becoming a characteristic part of the system, it is instead usually the purpose of the description of the system that determines the scope, the outlines and the borders not the system itself. This process is called framing (Cilliers 2008 p 4), and is usually influenced by the observer.

(VI) Generally speaking about complex adaptive systems, they usually operate under conditions that are far removed from equilibrium, meaning that in order to maintain the system and ensure it’s survival it needs to be a constant flow of energy to it. In other words, equilibrium and entropy means death of the system (ibid).

(VII) Complex adaptive systems do evolve through time, and as such it is very important to look towards the history since it’s past is co-responsible for the present behavior of the system. Ignoring the dimension of time in an analysis of a

complex adaptive system makes it naturally incomplete since it's at most a "synchronic snapshot of a diachronic process." (Cilliers 2008 p. 122).

## 1.5 Sources

Perhaps the most accurate description of the problems concerning sources and al-Qaida do Bruce Lawrence stand for in the book *Messages to the World*:

"Although Osama bin Laden enjoys global notoriety (and a considerable virtual presence), the primary material has often been surprisingly difficult to track down, and has been obtained from numerous different sources. "(2005 p. IX)

On a paper with a limited scope, and many to be considered a hard subject I became limited to secondary sources that has been analyzed ex post facto. Al-Qaida as a study object is hard in that sense it does not easily yield to the collection of any unique source materials such as interviews or correspondence. Therefore the main sources on which this paper is based comes from books and articles on the subject that are relevant to the paper.

## 1.6 Disposition

My paper has several parts. In the first part I will describe certain reflections of central concerns regarding al-Qaida and Islamic society and how Islamic thinkers have confronted these reflections. In the second part I will describe the existence of al-Qaida, the organization and it's affiliates In the third part I will argue that al-Qaida is not like an complex adaptive system, nor that an analogy serves as an adequate explanation. My argument is that al-Qaida is a complex adaptive system and by examining al-Qaida and it's history through the lens of complexity theory has allowed me to generate insight far beyond traditional views.

## 2 Beyond Classical Islam

”Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice, not because of the danger of complete annihilation which is hanging over its head – this being just a symptom and not the real disease – but because humanity is devoid of those vital values which are necessary not only for its healthy development but also for its real progress. Even the Western world realizes that Western civilization is unable to present any healthy values for the guidance of mankind. It knows that it does not possess anything, which will satisfy its own conscience and justify its existence. Sayyid Qutb (Qutb 2000)

It is important to note that as we move beyond classical Islam, the mainstream, mainly Sunni form of literature has been devoted much to the repetition of medieval scholars (Cook, 2010 p. 508). Ever since the western, modern ideas came into contact with the Islamic world, the more fundamentalist structures of Islam perceived wrongdoings are indeed everywhere.

”European countries are nothing but wrongs ... the duty of journalists to forbid wrong with the tongue, the status of cafés where there is no backgammon, card-playing or liquor ... the ethics of car-parking ... the sale of photographs of woman to physical contact between males and females in crowded buses, posters advertising dirty films ... and music on the radio and television; but his most insistent concern is the un-Islamic practice of shaving beards.” (Cook 2010 p. 510)

The fear of western ideas that make their appearance take both the form of overt social control to the subconscious (Cook 2010 p. 510). Within certain limits, there are foundations in Islam that when matched with liberal values create grating effects which have not been lost on contemporary Muslim writers who are seen as the philosophical founding fathers of the ideas behind al-Qaida. These effects come to life when people bring up these Islamic foundations to tell people what to believe and how to live, whereas liberalism within certain limits is about allowing people to work their family values, their lifestyles on their own. Being critical of what Sayyid Qutb sees as the excessive freedom in the west, he notes that the jahili societies in today’s world see wrongs in the world as something to be private, personal matters of which none has the right to interfere.

”you tell people ’this is wrong!’, and they respond: ’On the contrary, it’s not wrong; it used to be wrong in the past, but the world ”evolves”, society ”progresses”, and attitudes vary.” (Cook 2010 p. 510).

In the western world, the society is a fabric made up of values that people are free, nobody having any authority over anybody else, or any right to interfere in their lives. Indeed, many would regard any interference in their lives of others as a form of violence. As there is a sense of conflict with the liberal society in viewing every individual as a free agent.

Which in a sense is at the opposite of Islamic society. Islamic society on the other hand stresses the importance of the Umma, a unified, single whole. The perpetrator that wrongs himself by not speaking up if he sees someone drinking wine, gambling or bad mouthing religion does not only damage to himself, but to the society as a whole. They view the whole of society as a boat, and their reaction is akin and as natural as any group that discoverer that some individuals are about to go drill holes in the hull. The conflict lie in that individualism and democracy, does not derelict the duty of by people, often young men, breaking up dance parties and being met by police in riot gear (Cook 2010 p. 515). Indeed it is noted that these grievances act as a conduit in spreading Islamic and not liberal values (Cook 2010 p. 515). When the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996 they created such a system where Islamic values hold sway over everything in society: education, the economy, politics, intellectual life and culture.

Sunni communities around the world are enormously diverse and outright confusing with many shades of grey in their system of belief. (Cook 2010 p. 552). There is no singular defining moment or country that sets the Muslim agenda, to the contrast of Shia community that is relatively closely tied to Iran.

Sunni, Islamic regimes as Sudan and Afghanistan are very marginal to the intellectual Muslim life, in Michael Cook's view understanding of these new changes will not come from the mountains of the Hindu Kush (Cook 2010 p. 552). The only other is Saudi-Arabia which is viewed by many Islamic activists with suspicion. Indeed, the history and doctrine of Sunni values towards the major grievances towards the west show no clear and unequivocal evolution. Cook describes how in the Sunni world has a very difficult time to provide convincing Islamic solutions to problems posed by the values of the modern world. Firstly is the fact that the Sunni intellectual and scholastic heritage rests on ascetic and traditionalist foundations. Secondly it that such heritage has found itself increasingly marginalized by political and social change (Cook 2010 p. 555). Indeed, many influential Sunni scholars make a point by insisting that their thoughts do not contain any kind of innovation, in line with the fact that the Sunni tradition carry a inherent fear of doctrinal innovation (ibid).

As for answers to the changing Arab world, the words of Michael Cook seems to be interesting. "Among the Sunnis ... new thinking – and in a new world there has to be some – cannot easily take place within the framework of the scholastic heritage; instead the locus of intellectual creativity of necessity shifts outside it." (Cook 2010 p. 555). Al-Qaida can be viewed as one of many new conceptions of

a systematic and organized propagation of Islamic values, both within and outside the Islamic community, and most notably so in the west (Cook 2010 p. 515).

One of the most significant markers in the movement that is al-Qaida is the fact that they seem to have emerged as a reaction towards societies secularization and modernity processes (Lindgren 2009 p. 74). On the outer fringe of this reaction we have violent groups such as al-Qaida, in which they view not modernity itself as something negative but the emergence, and the evolution modern values. The values that are under critique by which militant Muslims use to grace holy war blurs with insurrection and terrorism. Indeed there are no Jewish or Christian parallels to this link between holy war and forbidding wrong (Cook 2010 p. 582). “Founded on the axiom that each and every legal competent Muslim possesses an executive power of the law of God” (Cook 2010 p. 583). This duty, of an unusual character that is an integral part of the Muslim scholastic tradition make a rather large potential of violence and subversion. The uniqueness of this Islamic doctrine and al-Qaida can partially be understood against this backdrop. “In Islam, of course, the sovereignty of God means that it is no longer admissible for every man to be a king but as Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 543/1148) put it, individuals (ahad al-nas) act as God’s deputies (nuwwab Allah) in forbidding wrong.

### 3 Al-Qaida

”We talk about the bin Laden organization, but it is really a bin Laden alliance. It is unusual to find Palestinians and Yemenis, Sudanese and East Asians in the same alliance. He is the glue between groups that have little in common with each other, for instances the Kashmiris and Egypt’s Islamic Jihad.” (Bergen 2002 p. 199).

Al-Qaida was born out of and has always been associated with other Islamic groups in an effort to further its own agenda since the late 1980’s. The first, serious attempt began in the mid-1990s with the purpose of building an ”Islamic Army”. But there were plenty of other, similar predators in the jungle, organizations that saw it as their holy duty to return nations all over the world toward Islamic reign; Palestine, Bokhara, Lebanon, Chad, Eritrea, Somalia, the Philippines, Burma, Southern Yemen, Tashkent and Andalusia. The problem was that al-Qaida had no ideology on which they could create an organization that would separate them from the other jihadi organizations that also based their wars on the perceived global conspiracy to destroy Islam (Farrall 2011, Cook 2007 p. 146). This first attempt failed in its infancy and by the time the group fled from Sudan to Afghanistan in 1996, after mounting pressure from the international community, al-Qaida was a shell of an organization (Farrall 2011). Deciding for a jihad, against the far enemy the United States of America in 1996, it gained little attention towards attracting Islamist militants and fostering a lasting unity. Even though this newly created World Islamic Front faxed its declaration to the journalist Abdel Bari Atwan at the Arabic-language newspaper al-Quds al-Arabi in London, written by signatories, announcing on February 23, 1998:

”Ever since God made the Arabian Peninsula flat, created desert in it and surrounded it with seas, it has never suffered such a calamity as these Crusader hordes that have spread through it like locusts, consuming its wealth and destroying its fertility. All this at a time when nations have joined forces against the Muslims as if fighting over a bowl of food. When the matter is this grave and support is scarce, we must discuss the current events and agree collectively on how to best settle the issue. (Usama bin Laden quoted in Lawrence 2005 p. 59)”

It was a declaration along the lines of a fatwa, an issue of authoritative legal opinion calling for a jihad against the Jews and Crusaders. The four signatories were the Egyptian born physician named Ayman al-Zawahiri who at the age 14 joined the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Becoming a student and follower of the Egyptian Islamic scholar Sayyid Qutb, he joined the Islamic Jihad in 1979 and when Anwar Sadat on October 1981 was assassinated by members of Islamic

Jihad he was one of hundreds who were rounded up and thrown in jail. During the 1980's he traveled to Afghanistan to participate in the resistance against the Soviet invasion, where he met Usama bin Laden. Abu Yasir Rif'ai Ahmad Taha, represented at the time the organization al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya. The third signatory was Sheikh Mir Hamza, then secretary general of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan, a religious political party associated with a particular Sunni-movement. The fourth and last signatory was Maulana Fazlur, in 2005 he was the leader of the opposition in Pakistans national assembly, head of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam and secretary-general of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal which is a six-party religious alliance (Lawrence 2005 p. 59).

This unification of various Islamic groups from a handful of nations was a part of al-Zawahiri's vision, with the intention of creating a globalized and far reaching jihad, in accordance with the evolving al-Qaida ideology (Atwan 2006 72) In this declaration the signatories proclaims three well acknowledged and commonly agreed facts about the American, and the Judeo-Crusader alliance against Islam. Firstly that America has occupied the holiest of Islamic lands, secondly that Americans are bent on causing the same horrific massacres again, as if the vicious wars and sanctions against Iraq isn't enough. Thirdly that they seek to reduce the Arabic states around Israel "into paper mini-states whose weakness and disunity will guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal Crusader occupation of the Peninsula." (Lawrence 2005 p. 60). Lawrence speculates that Usama bin Laden needed the four signatories to silence the criticism that bin Laden did not have the necessary religious qualifications to interpret the Qur'an and authoritative legal opinion (2005 p. 58). Indeed, the declaration cites, as many modern day radicals, Muwaffaq al-Din ibn Qudama, a Islamic scholar who enumerated situations where jihad becomes compulsory (Lawrence 2005 p. 60).

Within days of this declaration the rank and file of the Egyptian organizations al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad refused this new allegiance and opposed it. Taha published a retraction within a week and he was replaced in the al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya shura (Sageman 2004 p. 47). Al-Zawahiri also faced fierce resistance from Islamic Jihad for his signature on the declaration, because it meant a definitive shift in priorities from the "near" enemy being Israel and the Egyptian state, towards the "far" enemy. At a general meeting that year in Qandahar he was criticized and many left the organization, including his own, loyal brother Mohammed who saw the priorities against Egypt as far more important than those against USA (Sageman 2004 p. 47). Threatening to resign, he was allowed to stay on as leader of the Islamic Jihad.

The only real success al-Qaida enjoyed during the last decade leading up to 9/11 was the merger with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, but it came with the price of many leaving the organization (Farrall 2011). However, with the near simultaneous bombings of the U.S embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam the seventh of August 1998, the attack became a milestone for al-Qaida in several ways. Firstly Usama bin Laden and al-Qaida was propelled to stardom because the U.S response to the embassy attacks were fifty or so Tomahawk cruise missiles, the strikes

“made bin Laden “a symbol for the whole Islamic world. Against all those outside powers who were trying to crush Muslims. He is the courageous one who raised his voice against them. He’s a hero to us, but it is America that first made him a hero.” (Bergen 2002 p. 129).

Secondly, al-Qaida as an organization had previously only supported attacks to force a withdrawal of the perceived enemies of Islam on Muslim soil. It had shifted from defensive operations on what it considered to be Muslim lands, towards offensive operations on enemy territory. It also marks the beginning of al-Qaida starting to become a more decentralized network, with a wave of terrorist activities surging across the globe the following years. Operations became more decentralized, they were planned and executed with more local autonomy. The initiative to undertake an operation, the selection of targets and the details of the operation was subject to the local organization. al-Qaida through links provided certain logistics, some financial support and training (Sageman 2004 p. 48). Until it lost its sanctuary in Afghanistan al-Qaida remained an organized, powerful backer of operations all over the world. The successful bombings of the U.S embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam brought massive carnage and fame, the USS Cole bombing in 2001 showed that a little dinghy could take out a large United States missile destroyer, and the 9/11 operation which has a place of its own, unique by the fact that it was in its entirety funded by al-Qaida. In a sense the years around 9/11 constitutes the apogee of al-Qaida as an organization, the operation electrified and unified other Islamist groups under its strategic leadership (Farrall 2011). From a certain perspective the success of the 9/11 backfired on the organization, their refuge in Afghanistan disappeared with the invasion of Afghanistan by U.S military forces. Al-Qaida as an organization was dislocated, its leadership escaped towards the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, training camps became deserted and the pressure from all over the world greatly reduced the means of communication between various elements in the organization (Sageman 2004 p. 52). At the same time bin Laden called for Muslims everywhere to answer the call for a defensive jihad not just in Afghanistan, but in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, the subcontinent and even as far as Indonesia, to him and the leadership of al-Qaida countries such as Australia, Germany and even Japan were a part of the Crusaders (Sageman 2004 p. 52). And the Umma answered, with franchising.



## 4 Al-Qaida: The Franchise

### 4.1 Al-Qaida in Iraq

There is evidence that al-Qaida was present in Iraq before the invasion of 2003, what is known though is that in the run-up towards the war thousands of Arabs arrived from different countries to support the Arab state of Iraq against the invaders (Atwan 2006 p. 187). One of the most famous men of the organization al-Qaida in Iraq was undoubtedly the Jordanian Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. He was a young man that developed a turnaround interest in radical Islam in the late eighties, after a violent life as a petty criminal with a tendency for extreme violence. Arriving too late to participate in any actual fighting against the Soviet army, he received his military-style training in the Afghanistan camps and helped overthrow the pro-Soviet regime of Najibullah. Returning to Jordan as a veteran of the Afghanistan wars he set about to mobilize other young men and acquire arms, finding like-minded companions, being a part of a flourishing jihad trend (Atwan 2006 p. 190). This took a sudden turn of the unexpected when in July 1994, Jordanian security forces found several caches of weapons and explosives, in what appeared to be preparations for overthrowing the Jordanian regime. Finding al-Zarqawi guilty of the crimes, he was placed in Suwaqah prison, eighty-five kilometers south of Amman. This, many sources say, was the crucible that formed al-Zarqawi as a Islamist militant leader. Engaged in lengthy theological and ideological discussions with the other Islamists, he earned their respect and admiration as he embarked on learning the entire Quran by heart, as well for his confrontational approach to authority, his physical strength and toughness (Atwan 2006 p. 191). He succeeded in building up a network, and a following comprising some of the most hardened criminals in Jordan, creating with his offering of Islamic direction a pool of Jihadis with a tough criminal edge (Atwan 2006 p. 191). In 1999, al-Zarqawi was released as Jordan's new king, Abdullah II granted a general amnesty. Being blacklisted and constantly harassed by the security services in Jordan, he decided to return to the mountains of Afghanistan. There he visited al-Qaida training camps but did not pledge his allegiance to bin Laden, instead biding his time in Herat. Soon after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, in October of 2001, al-Zarqawi and his men fled to Iran via Pakistan. This man, seemingly carried his own initiative, as if he was in search of a mission (Atwan 2006 p. 2006). He had never been a prominent member of al-Qaida, preferring his own organization instead. Forced to leave Iran in the spring of 2002, he crossed into Iraqi Kurdistan, arriving at Ansar al-Islam (Atman 2006 p. 194). Al-Zarqawi, believing that an American invasion of Iraq was inevitable began establishing support networks in the now infamous Sunni triangle, and met

in March 2003 with Muhammad Ibrahim Makkawi, military strategist of al-Qaida to outline how al-Qaida could assist with funneling al-Qaida operatives into Iraq (Atwan 2006 p. 194). In the autumn the same year, al-Zarqawi and his intuition had made him effectively the emir of the foreign Jihadis in Iraq. But it was not without disturbing the equilibrium, fanning the flames of resistance. According to Abdel Bari Atwan the resistance gained footing on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May and by the second of July had begun organizing into several different factions along secular and religious fault lines. As the insurgency in Iraq progressed al-Zarqawi negotiated with the core of the al-Qaida leadership for nearly a year when they finally declared their alliance on 28 December 2004, some months before he had announced that he his group where now know as al-Qaida in the Land of the Two Rivers (Atwan 2006 p. 200) and al Zarqawi was to be it's emir. From the beginning al-Zarqawi realized that he had to brake up the links, the connections between USA and her allies and supporters. The Madrid train bombing was such an example that showed how a terrorist attack could sway the domestic public opinion, causing the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. Al-Qaida in Iraq, led by al-Zarqawi started to commit atrocities such as assassinations, kidnappings and repeated suicide bombings as a way to manipulate Iraq's Sunni population, which was their powerbase. Playing on thought of defensive Jihad against the outside invaders and the great historic schism and conflict between Sunni and Shia branches of Islam, al-Zarqawi wrote to bin Laden in a letter dated 15 June 2004, where he pictures them as "the lurking serpent". Writing "they can inflict more damage on the Umma, than the Americans", "These people who have added to their heresy and atheism [sic] with political cunning and a burning zeal to seize upon the crisis of governance and the balance of power in the state ... whose new lines they are trying to establish through their political organizations in collaboration with their secret allies, the Americans ... they have been a sect of treachery and betrayal through all history and all ages" (Atwan 2006 p. 201).

With the blessing from al-Zawahiri and bin Laden al-Zarqawi enjoyed a new legitimacy and status. The image of al-Qaida as a globalized and networked organization had after the two years after 9/11 somewhat vanished. The war in Afghanistan had seriously hampered it's capacity to carry out operations and had it's senior leadership on the run, but with a new, lawful Islamic jihad by al-Qaida in Iraq under a high-profile, magnetic and terrifying leader the organization drew new breath (Atwan 2006 p. 202). During this time al-Qaida's leadership intensified their efforts to consolidate and bolster al-Qaida's legitimacy and ideology. They based their ideological and legitimate actions from something that can be traced back to the older roots of Islam and the story of the goldsmith of Marv (Cook 2010 p. 4). The takfiri-thought justifies attacking corrupt regimes in Muslim lands, all framed in the context of a defensive jihad, which was reinforced by the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (Farrall 2011). In May 2005 with his organization under the al-Qaida banner he declared that "collateral killing" (of Muslims) is justified under dharura [overriding necessity]" (Atwan 2006 p. 202). It is interesting because it is in Iraq that the hybrid ideology and manhaj that

emerged from make little distinction between the local enemies and the global ones, meaning that the local group affiliated with al-Qaida actually could merge without abandoning their own agenda, and yet broadening their focus (Farrall 2011). During this time al-Zarqawi, with a ferocious and bloody reputation brought new psychological terror to al-Qaida's operations in Iraq. Indeed, a week before the elections on 30 January 2005, al-Zarqawi appeared on Islamist websites, denouncing democracy, considering it to be heresy. His arguments were based on beliefs many Islamists share, the fact that the legislative authority in a democracy comes from representatives from the people and those representatives are to be obeyed, not Allah, which is "the very essence of heresy, polytheism and error". Democracy, also allows for freedom of religion –including conversion to which al-Zarqawi states "if a Muslim apostatizes from Islam to heresy, he should be killed" (Atwan 2006 p. 2008). Demanding the establishment of a Salafi Islamic state (Atwan 2006 p. 2007), they created a simple system of law based on a particularly severe and decontextualized form of Sharia that was alien to the Iraqi population (Kilcullen 2010 p. 152). It included simple rules like:

"if you smoke we'll cut your fingers off; if you're a woman and you push your headscarf back behind your hairline we'll throw acid in your face; if you fail to give us your daughter in marriage we'll cut your head off; if we think you're a spy we'll skin you alive in public; if you're a tribal leader who refuses to cooperate with us we'll bake your seven year old son alive in an oven" (Kilcullen 2010 p. 153).

The fact is that people supported al-Qaida in Iraq and that their control where perceived as a lesser evil than the Sunni deaths quads and their representation of metaphysical chaos and oblivion. While al-Qaida in Iraq gained more skills fighting the foreign invaders, the sectarian violence spiraled out of control. The mounting savagery and the indiscriminate killing of civilians mixed with more legitimate targets to a point where several Islamist hardliners spoke out against the level of violence, especially against other Muslims and the shias. al-Zarqawi again appeared on several websites, his response was that their critique was a lure "into the path of Satan to drive a wedge into the ranks of the mujahedin" (Atwan 2006 p. 2009 )

In April 2006, al-Zarqawi was in effect denoted by bin Laden as he urged his man in Iraq to restrict himself to military activities. There is a consensus in Islamic law that somewhat correlates with international law, in that there must be a sense of proportion between the means that the Jihadis are using, the mission at hand and the means of the enemy. Traditional Islamic law always calls for the clear distinction between military, and civilian targets (Lindgren 2009 p. 65). His death gave a sense of relief for al-Zawahiri and the ranks of al-Qaida since they viewed him has have gone too far off the reservation with the attacks on Western-owned hotels in Jordan on 9 November 2005, and other atrocities he directed decimated al-Qaida's appeal and reputation (Atwan 2006 p. 216). But as it where, al-Zarqawis control was very brittle, as they where incapable above anything else

than cutting your head off, as a result the people turned on the organization in an instant when their reign of terror was broken (Kilcullen 2010 p. 153).

## 4.2 Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks on USA, the Saudi-intelligence service a survey, from a sample of educated Saudis age twenty-five to forty-one 95% supported bin Ladens cause. By the same token, CNN did a poll in the Saudi-kingdom that showed how Usama bin Ladens popularity exceeded that of King Fahd (Atwan 2006 p. 146). Indeed, the potential for dissent is rife in a unequal social system where the education system largely focus on Wahhabism

Al-Qaida's presence in the Kingdom have been relatively late addition, since May 2003 according to some officials, and in a statement by bin Laden on 16 December 2004: " Let it be known that the mujahedin in the Land of the Holy Mosques [Saudi Arabia] have not yet started the fight against the government. If they start they will undoubtedly begin with the head of the kafir, the rulers of Riyadh, that is" (Atwan 2006 p. 147). Saudi Arabia has always been one of the most effective recruiting grounds for al-Qaida,

As al-Qaeda fled the mounting pressure in Afghanistan in December 2001 preparations for new branch of al-Qaida on the Arabian peninsula was already well under way. Saudi Arabia had always had a history of providing for a refuge for fleeing mujahedin. Economic contributions to the jihad and violent sermons from Salafi scholars condemning the West for it wrongs flowed freely and the Kingdom thought of itself as being safe from the terrorism and killing, instead it was a breeding pool of mujahidin's (Sageman 2004 p. 53) Since the leaders of AQAP already was sworn members of al-Qaida there was no need to pledge a bayat, or allegiance to bin Laden, indeed the organization was established on his direct orders. Answering only to the senior al-Qaeda leadership, they still exercised a regional authority (Farrall 2011). As branch of al-Qaida the newly formed organization was proven late 2002 when the senior al-Qaida leadership asked for AQAP to execute a attack on U.S. interests in the region. The bombings in Riyadh May 12, 2003 shattered the sense of security in the Kingdom. There are many reasons why Saudi Arabia is a key country for al-Qaida. With Mecca and Medina it is the very birthplace of Islam and the hearth of the Umma and it's oil reserves that are crucial for the rest of the world. The ultimate aim for al-Qaida in the Arabian peninsula is to bring the downfall of the regime and the house of Saud, being inextricably linked to the overriding ambition to defeat America AQAP's strategy has changed with the presentation of historical opportunities and advantages (Atwan 2006 p. 173).

### 4.3 Al-Qaida in Europe

Al-Qaida, ever since its formation have maintained a presence within the community of thirty two million Muslims living in Europe. Although it was a hidden existence up to the Madrid Bombings of 2004, Europeans quickly found that they were no longer sheltered from the violence of Islamic terrorism. The July 7 bombings of London, the brutal and public assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, and the formless, violent protests against the Danish cartoon depictions of Prophet Muhammad. These grievances created according to Peter Bergen ideal circumstances on which al-Qaida thrives in a post 9/11 world (Atwan 2006 p. 219).

During the 1990, or even before many individuals with links to al-Qaida arrived in Europe and settled. This early, first generation global Islamic terrorists formed the basis from which an extremely elaborate and complex network of cells evolved and expanded throughout Europe. Among the first generation was Abu Musab al-Suri, al-Qaida strategist and ideologue who was among the very first to imagine, and creating the ideological movement of al-Qaida in a post 9/11 world (Atwan 2006 p. 226).

<http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/03/09/schuster.column/> Retrieved 2011-08-04). Believed to be the key architect behind the strategic imperative of local, self-initiated cells with little or no contact with the general al-Qaida organization, creating a loose network of elusive and diverse cells all over Europe. Through their shared agenda under a common cause and banner, they gain their motivation, expertise and contacts with the links and nodes of the Internet. Cells might belong to several other interdependent organizations that share an affiliation with al-Qaida based on similar theological and political beliefs. and even though he is under arrest, whereabouts unknown, he still continues to influence the world of Islamic terrorism, his statements about attacking western interests all over the world live on, widely available on the internet. Other men such as the Syrian Abu Dahbda, former leader of the group responsible for the 2004 Madrid bombings and Abu Qatada, hailed in the media as “al-Qaida’s spiritual leader in Europe” (Atwan 2006 p. 231).

Abdel Bari Atwan determines in his book *The Secret History of al-Qai'da* that al-Qaida’s presence in Europe is more towards an ideological centre of gravity rather than organizational. It is his belief that this process is organic in nature and stems from Islamic individuals with experience from the wars in Afghanistan and Bosnia that share similar teleological and political aspirations (Atwan 2006 p. 233). These individuals are often well established and may belong to various different militant, Islamist groups that have their own local agenda but with overarching goals that coincide with al-Qaida’s. The most active group in Europe

that wish to affiliate itself with al-Qaida is the often-disaffected Muslim immigrant youths that struggle with serious cultural identity issues. Through the social networks of today's society they become radicalized in mosques, prisons, through personal contacts or through the internet. In many cases these homegrown, spontaneous elements simply put up their own cells and execute attacks autonomously, with nothing that outwardly difference them against thousands of other similar individuals (Atwan 2006 p. 247). These first generation individuals with experience from the Afghanistan and Bosnian wars, military know-how, or strategic ideology that reside in Europe are immensely influential and valuable to the homegrown kind. Marc Sageman studied the Muslim Diaspora in Europe and found several crucial elements that induced involvement in terrorist activities. One of the elements that transform these Muslims towards the path of violence is the moral outrage from the treatment and discrimination of the Islamic community and Muslims. These grievances evokes anger, reactive outrage and alienation, creating isolation these men and women turn almost automatically turn them towards their likeminded peers (Strozier, Terman, Jones 2010 p. 27). The London bombers are such an example of how independent youths from an alienated immigrant community participated in a network of secretive links that eventually led to al-Qaida (Atwan 2006 p.247). In Europe al-Qaida has gone from an organization, to become a global network, loosely linked by ideology and broad, guiding principles.



# The Pattern which Connects

In this section I wish to describe al-Qaida in terms of several characteristics of a complex adaptive system already outlined in the theory section of this paper.

Al-Qaida neatly appears to share the characteristics of an organic system, to the point where one can argue that they are an organic system that have naturally been inclined towards complexity and adaptation. al-Qaida has during the last decade branched out and is associated with a number of different militant Islamist groups all over the world.

- (I) It has evolved to consist of a large number of *elements*, or *nodes* that interact dynamically through *links*, even if specific nodes have limited significance such as the depleted senior leadership of al-Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan, al-Qaida continues to be in constant exchange of information both from within and outside.
- (II) It has shown that these interactions can be both *linear* as well as *non-linear* and *asymmetrical*. The small cause of some obscure artists in Scandinavia publishing pictures that portrayed Prophet Muhammed as a cartoon is such an example that created large effects and serious grievances in the Middle East. The reverse of large causes, and small effects are also true.
- (III) The elements or nodes in a complex adaptive system interact dynamically. This crisis that the cartoons set off between the western world and the Islamic world and the autonomous attacks of violence that the cartoons perturbed is an example of the *dynamic* links between the al-Qaida leadership and the Umma. Grievances that al-Qaida feed upon and is an example of the *dynamics* of asymmetrical and non-linear links.
- (IV) It is also an example of a situation that is far removed from the tranquility of equilibrium. Beginning with the embassy bombings of 1998 and the subsequent response from the U.S, the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq, the Muhammed caricatures as well as any other grievance increased the *flow* of energy towards al-Qaida, further removing it from *equilibrium*, increasing its flow of energy. There are also the overall grating effects that emerge when liberal values are matched with the foundations of Islam.
- (V) Complex adaptive systems have histories. It is here that the Sunni scholastic tradition carries significant negative value for al-Qaida as a complex adaptive system, and it shows the importance of history. From the Sunni scholastic tradition of which al-Qaida draws its theoretical principles and ideology there simply are no evolution. As such has a very difficult time in producing Islamic solutions and alternatives to the emergence and processes of modernity and secularization. As a complex adaptive system, al-Qaida has arguably evolved through time and needs to continue to do so to ensure its survival, yet in the system they carry an inherent fear of religious adaptation. It cannot change, according to the rights and wrongs

of sunni-islamic thought. The nature of al-Qaida is that it sees itself as the vanguard locked in a constant, and continuing process of fighting the infidels until the Word of God is raised to the highest, the one thing that is not subject to adaptation.

- (VI) Complex systems such as al-Qaida are open systems, but the interactions have a fairly short range. The global network of al-Qaida is linked but sustain interdependent jihads with local determination in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, South/Central Asia, Europe, Each region has in turn different takes on regional issues and their environment. In Europe, al-Qaida can be linked to around thirty interdependent Islamic groups and movements such as the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) (Atwan 2006 p. 226). Every movement in turn compromises of linked but separate cells, each with their own local flavor. These patterns of nodes exists at all levels of analysis, wether it be local, district, national, regional, global. Adaption and evolution, both from the outside and inside occurs across and within all levels and regions (Kilcullen p. 199). There is emergence and it's boundaries can be very hard to assess, especially on the individual level (Sageman 2004 p. 151).
- (VII) Inherent in the links and interactions that make up al-Qaida and it's affiliates are the nature of the feedback loops and they are very important. Such an example of a negative feedback loop and it's importance for the system is shown in the dealings of al-Zarqawi and al-Qaida in Iraq. Al-Qaidas need for constant energy to change, evolve and survive is a constant process, and it is defined not by it's origins or it's goals, but what it is doing. Reinforcement of that kind becomes evident in the positive reactions that al-Qaida received from Muslims all over the world in connection with the 1998 embassy bombings and subsequent missile attacks by the U.S. The presence of these functions becomes very clear with al-Qaida in Iraq under al-Zarqawi, when the sectarian violence went into overdrive. The presence of feedback loops within the system and it's links allowed for several Islamist hardlines to speak out against increasing indiscriminate killings and mounting savagery. There was a dislocation between al-Qaida in Iraq's origins and goals when the group evolved into banditry and indiscriminate killing. Which alienated the senior al-Qaeda leadership, and made them withdrew their support for al-Zarqawis operations in Iraq.

These characteristics should make it clear that it is possible to describe al-Qaida through complexity theory. Al-Qaida and it's sentiments are a complex adaptive system that have taken their form in society from already existing elements, such as grievances, individuals, weapons, and infrastructure, and linked them all together, to create new patterns, new patterns of interaction. Ever since the destruction of it's base in Afghanistan, al-Qaida have been putting this concept I have outlined in this thesis to the test and done it well. They have moved from an organization towards a virtual state spanning the globe. They have become a complex adaptive system that practice adaptation and evolution across time, very much like music. A flow of information, repetitive, with a modulation that corresponds to a sequence in time. Conventional means of defeating them with one optimal solution have proven to be inconclusive.



## 5 Conclusion

This essay as a central theme, it is that our knowledge of al-Qaida and the things they represent is never static, but always evolving. We can never know more than a fraction about the complex environment in which al-Qaida operates, in part because of the observer effect. Our attempts to understand and deal with the environment irrevocably changes it, and because it evolves so rapidly over time, if we had full knowledge of our environment it would immediately be out of date. What remains true is that despite nearly a decade of war, al-Qaida remains different today from when it carried out it's hallmark attacks. I have shown that al-Qaida in it's most general sense is a aggregate of independent, but interrelated elements that compromises a unifying whole. Al-Qaida in that sense is a system of interdependent parts, inputs, processes and outputs, which exists in a pattern of relationships that define the extent of the system, working together for the whole overarching theory of raising the word of God the highest. I have identified two discerning lines during my work and I will describe them here shortly. Firstly that the grievances are still there in the Muslim community, there are simply to many failed causes, to many people removed from equilibrium to ever during the foreseeable future to abandon al-Qaidas successful tactic of innovation and adaption. Yet the ideological foundation on which al-Qaida rests find itself stuck in the in ancient islamic writings that deals little or nothing with evolving human values. It remains to be seen what that increasing marginalization in society does to al-Qaida. Evolving human values may be the very thing that dislocates al-Qaida on a systematic level, something that a decade of open and covert warfare arguably has not done.



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