IDC HERZLIYA
Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy
IPS Institute for Policy and Strategy
כנס הרצליה
HERZLIYA CONFERENCE
The Twelfth Annual Herzliya Conference כנס הרצליה השנתי השנים עשר
HERZLIYA 2012 הרצליה
The Balance of Israel's National Security מאזן החוסן והביטחון הלאומי

Islamic Leadership Paradigms

Author: Dr. Shmuel Bar

Working Paper - The 12th Herzliya Conference

January 2012

Preface

Any intelligence or policy-oriented analysis of an Islamic group, whether it be a state-based or non-state actor, an adversary or ally in the war on terrorism, should take fully into account the social, cultural, religious, and political elements that that group's leadership uses to establish its authority and legitimacy to rule.

An analysis should focus on a variety of factors. These should include leadership styles and the various claims made by a leadership to establish its rule, historical and contemporary models of both "good" and "bad" leadership, the social and cultural sources that shape a group's acceptance of a higher authority, and the influence of all these factors on a group's organizational and command-and-control structures. Such factors influence in important ways the current and future direction and performance of a particular Islamic group, as well as the long-term cohesion of that group in times of crisis.

Understanding the sources, modes and structures of authority within a particular Muslim group is essential to Western efforts to formulate policies towards those groups. The areas that may benefit from such a study include:

a. Intelligence "hermeneutics"– an understanding of the leader-follower relationship can contribute to the interpretation of incoming intelligence relating to the leadership of an Islamic organization. Written and oral communications must be read in the context of the type of authority that the leader represents. An understanding of this aspect will contribute to early identification of leadership difficulties that may be exploited.

b. Collection planning – a clear understanding of paradigms of leadership can contribute to planning of collection through deductive thinking regarding the presumed role and place of the leadership. This is similar to classic military assumptions regarding the position of the battlefield commander according to the military doctrine of that army.

c. Deterrence and forced compliance– The leader-follower relationship can contribute to deterrence in two ways: the question whether we trying to deter a single leader who has total control over

his group or are we trying to deter a consultation leadership is critical for direction of deterrent messages to a given address; identification of the sources of authority of the leader over the reference group in general and the leadership cadre in particular can support actions that can deter the leader by threatening the sustainability of his rule.

d. Contingency planning – the struggle with terrorism is replete with surprises for both sides. Comprehensive planning should take into account unexpected successes which have to be exploited in a very short time. A good understanding of the leadership paradigm can support decisions regarding actions towards an Islamic leader when the opportunity arises – decapitation, arrest with an attempt towards co-option, covert as against overt action, subversion within the organization.

e. Strategic planning - the analysis of authority within the Islamic world is also essential for any longer-term political effort aimed at political transformation and nation building. It is essential for planning of regime change and regime building in Muslim countries.

The elements that should be incorporated into any analysis of the sources, modes and structures of authority within the contemporary Islamic world include, *inter alia*, the following: following:

a. Islamic jurisprudence and religious doctrine concerning the Muslim obligation of obedience towards "he who is in authority" (*wali al-Amer*), oaths of allegiance (*baya'*) etc.

b. Historic cases and models of command that may be taken up by Islamist leaderships as models of emulation—for example, that of "The Rightly Guided Caliphs."

c. Traditional paradigms of leadership in different Muslim societies.

d. Non-Islamic models that have been imported into the Muslim world and naturalized there—for example, the idea of the absolute leader, which arose in the context of Western fascism, and was introduced into Arab political thought through the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

e. Social analysis of elite and sectarian interaction that affects the leadership.

f. Sect or sector-specific paradigms of authority (for example, Shiite paradigms.)

The following is a summary of a project performed by Gamzu Research through the Institute for Policy and Strategy in Herzliya for Department of Defense/OSD/ Office of Net Assessment. The summary serves as an abstract of a number of research papers and round table protocols, which have been submitted and is meant to present the key findings of the project on the above issues.

Traditional Models of Authority

The Prophet Muhammad was not only a religious figure but also a political leader, a judge, an administrator and a military leader at the same time. A clear distinction between religion and politics began with the Abbasid Caliphate (750 AC). The religious sphere became dominated by the official *'ulama* while the rulers dominated the political sphere (*Siyasa)*. But this was not an absolute separation. The two types of leadership were interdependent: the Abbasid rulers, who came into power as a result of a revolt against the Umayyads, needed the legitimacy that the *'ulama* could provide them, as the authoritative interpreters of divine law; by prohibiting rebellion against a Muslim ruler as a violation of a Qur'anic duty to "obey Allah and his Prophet and those in authority (*wali al-amr*) and as leading to *fitna* (civil war), they held the key to acceptance of the new Caliphate. In return, the *'ulama* received the physical protection of the regime, social, political and economic status and the stable social order needed for Islam to flourish. However, the Caliph – Umayyad, Abbasid or Ottoman – was first and foremost an Islamic ruler, who perceived his legitimacy to rule as deriving from Islam.

The rise of the secular Muslim state did not however cut the tie between the state and the 'ulama and in most Muslim states[1] religion (*din*) and state (*dawla*) remained intertwined; the *'ulama* remained part of the fabric of the state, influencing it from inside. Despite the secular character of the modern regimes, most of them saw the need – like the early Caliphs before them – to bring the *'ulama* under the state's control, and limit their autonomy. Modern Muslim states enacted reforms in the religious establishment, turning the *'ulama* into its employees, a part of its bureaucracy. By giving them the authority to control religious and social institutions such as the *Madrasa* and the *Jami'a*, the *'ulama* created a social and cultural space with political relevancy that restricted the power of the state.

The *Bay'a* can be seen as the cornerstone of traditional Islamic authority and it continues to play a role in modern paradigms. *Bay'a* is usually translated as an "oath of allegiance" however it can be defined better as a mutual pledge. It comprises of three intertwined features: sanctity; reciprocity; and authority.

In the Qur'an, *bay'a* with the Prophet in his capacity as the representative of Allah, equals *bay'a* with Allah and acceptance of Islam and disobedience equals apostasy; This is the foundation of *bay'a* and the source of its sanctity. Reciprocity of the *bay'a* as reflected in the Qur'an means not only salvation but also membership in the community, with the rights that it conferred. This membership and the rights attached to it were the Prophet's side of the transaction, and he received obedience in return. The classical *bayŶah* ritual is very personal, even physical. This concerns consultation, proclamation, and especially the final handshake (*musafahah bi-l-Þaiday*) between an expert delegation ("men of resolution and contract") and a newly elected leader or jihadist group members and an emir. According to the classical ritual, a secondary pledge of allegiance is afterwards supposed to be taken by the Muslim populace in front of their respective Imam in the mosque. However, this is not the election itself, but a mere confirmation of the decision that has been taken by the "men of resolution and contract".

In the *Hadith*, Qur'an commentaries and early creed declarations, emphasis is placed on sanctity and authority, whereas reciprocity is marginal. The association between *bay'a* given to power holders and *bay'a* given to Allah is retained. Obedience is presented as part and parcel of faith. However, unlike the Qur'an, a limit is put to obedience in the form of the *hadith* "no obedience is due to a created one, if it leads to disobedience of the Creator" and "obey…as far as you can"; but no *hadith* explicitly justifies

[1] Except for Turkey and Indonesia.

rebellion against a leader to whom a *bay'a* has been given. In respect to reciprocit, some prophetic traditions remind the rulers of their responsibility towards their subject and their duty to lead in the right and just path.

After the Prophet, another concept of *bay'a* evolved, in which the transaction was not anymore obedience in return for salvation and membership, but obedience in return for justice. Since the caliph could not promise divine reward as the Prophet had, the caliph's part of the contract changed. His commitment was not any more to promise salvation, but to adhere to the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. *Bay'a* remained a transaction but of a different kind

Rebels, too, exchanged pledges with their followers. Rebels of course do not think of themselves as rebels, but as restorers of justice and the true values and as such emulated the Prophet and the caliphs, and exchanged *bay'a* with their own followers. Change of leadership always entailed a *bay'a*, regardless of the manner of accession, as the *bay'a* conferred legitimacy on the leader. Hence we see that the evolving contexts and contents of *bay'a* throughout Islamic history reflect the flexibility of the institution.

Contemporary Islamic movements and regimes continue to use the model of the *bay'a* to cement the relationship between the individual leader and his followers. However, despite the development of regimes with purported collective authority, no "collective" *bay'a* has evolved and no model of a bay'a to a collective leadership has evolved. It is always an act of individual loyalty to the individual leader. This can be seen even in a non-Islamic regimes such as the Syrian Ba'ath in which public figures gave their *bay'a* to the President. Liberals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used concepts such as *bay'a* and *shura* entirely outside of their original contexts to state that Islam predates modern democracy. Hence, *bay'a* becomes an election and the *shura* becomes a parliament. This was entirely the work of those importing outside (British and French) influence to create the tenets of modern Islam.

Breaking a *bay'a* is sometimes seen as tantamount to apostasy. There are traditions, which stipulate that obedience to a *bay'a* has precedence over any other consideration (such as the prohibition to kill other Muslims) and an individual is exempt from any personal accountability for his actions in such a case.

Contemporary Models of Authority

At first glance, the primary existing sources, modes and structures of authority in the Muslim world include the following:

a. Prophetic authority, based on the model of the Prophet Muhammad, the Shiite *Imamiya* doctrine, or of Sunni Mahdism, all of which are characterized by the belief in the infallibility of the leader. The Iranian notion of the "Supreme Leader" (*rahbar*), for example, may be classified in this type.

b. Scholarly authority, which derives from the assumption that lay Muslims lack the knowledge and acumen to understand the law of God and therefore must accept the authority of a scholar to interpret it. Such models of leadership in which scholars play the role of "Philosopher Kings" include Khomeinist doctrine of *velayat-i-faqih* and contemporary Sunnite alternatives such as that of the rule by the consultative assembly ("*shuraocracy*").

c. Caliphate authority, based on traditions of appointment of a leader (the Caliph) by the "group that unbinds and binds" (*ahl al-hal wa al-'aqd*) in society and the acceptance of that leaders authority from that stage on.

d. Military authority, based on the definition of a state of jihad and the accordance of authority to the military commander (*amir*) of the *mujahidin*.

e. Tribal authority of a Sheikh, based on tribal paradigms and traditions (*'urf*) and consensus between sectors in society on the basis of balances of power.

f. Consultative authority, as exemplified in the Muslim Brotherhood and based on the concept of a religious "guide" (*Murshid*) as a leader subject to consultation (shura). It is noteworthy that the title of Murshid accorded to prominent leaders of the contemporary Muslim Brotherhood derives both from the Sufi traditions and to the Western fascist concept of a pure and absolute leader (*Fűhrer, Duce*).

g. Sufi models of authority, based on the expectation that the "guide" (*Murshid*) will lead his disciples to spiritual perfection.

h. Coalitional authority, as in the case of warlordships.

i. Hereditary models of authority, based on traditional conceptions of nobility and lineage.

j. "Virtual" leadership which appears in the Internet but is not physically connected with the followers.

In all the above cases, it behooves the observer to differentiate between Sunni and Shiite models. This is not to say that there is not a great deal of commonality between the two, however, the weight of different sources of legitimacy in each sect is different. Another distinction that should be made is between those societies which are fundamentally tribal and those which have been urbanized to the extent that traditional tribal or family leadership is subordinated to other forms of identification. National traditions of leadership and autocratic authority also play an important role in modern Muslim leadership paradigms; the Iranian *rahbar* is sometimes described as no more than a "turbaned Shah", whereas the absence of one authoritarian leader in the Jihadi movement which derives from the Wahhabi and Qutubi movements can be attributed to the weight of consultation in their respective tribal and ideological backgrounds.

Sunni Models

The rise of the secular Muslim state did not cut the tie between the state and the 'ulama and in most Muslim states[2] religion (*din*) and state (*dawla*) remained intertwined; the *'ulama* remained part of the fabric of the state, influencing it from inside. Despite the secular character of the modern regimes, most of them saw the need – like the early Caliphs before them – to bring the *'ulama* under the state's control, and limit their autonomy. Modern Muslim states enacted reforms in the religious establishment, turning the *'ulama* into its employees, a part of its bureaucracy. By giving them the authority to control religious and social institutions such as the *Madrasa* and the *Jami'a*, the *'ulama* created a social and cultural space with political relevancy that restricted the power of the state.

However, this very co-option of the *'ulama* resulted in the decline of their religious prestige and consequently of their readiness to give a seal of approval to the state's "non-Islamic" policies (e.g. al-Azhar's approval of Sadat's peace accords with Israel in 1978-9; the Saudi establishment's *'ulama*'s consent to allow the deployment of foreign coalition troops during the first Gulf War in 1991). The weakening of the religious establishment also led to the emergence of non-establishment 'ulama who

[2] Except for Turkey and Indonesia.

called for a radical political, religious and socio-economic agenda. This originally inward looking agenda became externalized as the non-establishment ‘ulama found in the conflict with the West a cause celébre and a rallying cry.

Thus both the regimes and the establishment *‘ulama* found themselves challenged. It was the latter though which found themselves between Scylla and Charybdis; support of the regimes became more and more untenable as the Islamic legitimacy of those regimes came into question, while joining the non-establishment ‘ulama in their populist attacks on the regimes’ policies would result in the loss of their privileged status. The upshot of this dilemma has been in many Muslim countries a radicalization of the religious establishments towards issues relating to the West and Israel and jurisprudence of jihad, while maintaining a conservative stance towards the regimes themselves.

In the light of the above, the highest ideal of radical Islamist authority, that is, with the strongest attraction, is that of a leader-scholar figure who combines the qualities of a fighter and an Islamic scholar; the “mujahid” trait being seen as emulating Muhammad himself. In modern times, the popular jihad ideologue Abdallah Azzam is such an example. In practice, the scholarly erudition of the potential leader does not suffice, but he has to rely on a mechanism for mobilization of popular support. In many ways the reliance on popular support is based upon Western notions of freedom of participation and electoral politics. The West helped to import these models all over and these new movements took advantage of them and adapted them. This “popularism” can sometimes compensate for a lesser level of religious learning. Such leaders do not even claim to be great Islamic scholars, however, they present themselves ad dedicated to Islam and subordinating themselves to “Allah’s Law” as interpreted by scholars (conveniently their own “court scholars”). A prime example is that of Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi who formed his crude anti-Shiite ideology and adherence to the permissibility of killing other Muslims in the course of Jihad against infidels, and surrounded himself with “scholars” (some in their 20’s and 30’s) who formulated his ideas and gave them religious credibility.

A salient case study of Islamic leadership is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is dominated by a model of leadership based on a long standing coalition between the royal family, elite families and tribal leaders and the religious scholars of the Wahhabi movement. However, in the last decades, a new leadership has arisen which challenges this coalition. This is the **Sahwa (awakening) movement**. This is a group of *'ulama*, previously from the Saudi religious establishment, who have been calling since the 1990s for reform inside the political and religious framework of the Saudi-Wahhabi state. They wish to change the structure of power inside the kingdom by establishing a body of *'ulama*, namely themselves, which will obligate the king to take their advice, adhere more strictly to the Islamic values as they perceive them, and be subject to their criticism. They do believe that the ruler is *wali al-amr*, which means that he should be obeyed. However, they maintain that he must listen to them more carefully, since they aspire to turn into the second ruling institution in Saudi Arabia and force the leader to take their counsel and advice.

The Muslim Brotherhood Paradigm

Unlike its Jihadi offshoot, the Muslim Brotherhood has developed a sophisticated concept of leadership. This concept was constructed by its founder, Hasan al-Banna and has evolved since according to the developments in the organizations political situation. The basis for leadership, according to the Muslim Brotherhood paradigm, remains the *bay’ah*. The use of the *bay’a* in the MB was initiated by Hasan al-Banna himself, the formula being: “let us exchange pledges with Allah (*fa-li-nubāyiʿ allāh ʿalā…*) that we shall be soldiers in the service of the Call to Islam (*daʿwa*), for the life of the homeland and the glory of the [Islamic] community depend upon [this call]”. This however, as can be seen from its wording and the fact that all the members of the group (seven, including al-Banna) took the oath. One may see here that

al-Bannā employed the *bayʿa* to bind his supporters not to himself, but to the cause, which is akin to an oath of allegiance in the Western tradition rather than to the traditional Islamic *bayʿa*s of leaders. Later, the bay'a indeed became the formula for new recruits joining the movement; however, there did not seem to be a regular formula for it. This changed in 1935 with the adoption of "the Law of the Muslim Brothers Association" (*Qānūn Jamʿiyyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*) which contained a formula of the pledge – *bayʿa* - to be taken by new Brothers. This *bayʿa* tied the members to the leader, whereas their dedication to the cause was subsumed under their obedience to him. In it, the member of the movement committed himself to place absolute trust in him, to listen and obey whether willingly or not, until Allah will make His call triumphant and restore Islam to its glory". This wording is taken from a famous hadith that describes the Prophet exchanging pledges with his followers an indication of the attempt by al-Bannā to emulate the Prophet.

The use of the *bayʿa* continued to develop in the movement as it grew. It seems that there were different types of bay'a corresponding to the different levels of membership in the movement. "Supporters" were not bound by a *bayʿa* at all. The "affiliated" apparently pledged themselves to the Brothers by the general *bayʿa*. This called for "exchanging a pledge with Allah" and taking an oath before Him, to be faithful to the cause (*daʿwa*) and invest efforts in order to implement it, to fulfill the conditions of membership, trust the leadership and listen and obey "whether willingly or not". The Brothers must renew this *bayʿa* when a new General Guide assumes office, as well as upon attending a "Battalion" meeting and joining a "Family".

As the organization of the movement evolved into a "cellular" (family) system, the need for total secrecy and hence obedience epitomized by the bay'a grew. The "activist" or *mujahid* who participated in one of the sub-organizations of the Society had to renew his *bayʿa* – this time with clearer stipulations for complete and unquestioning obedience. This was based on al-Banna's *Risālat al-Taʿālīm* which listed ten elements: 1) understanding (*fahm*), which includes twenty rules concerning the correct Islamic creed; 2) dedication to the cause (*ikhlās*); 3) work (*ʿamal*), which includes endeavor towards reform of one's self, family and society, and the reestablishment of the caliphate, according to the spirit and the law of Islam; 4) *jihād*, which means the spread of the ideology (*daʿwa*) by all possible means, from lectures and publications to fighting; 5) sacrifice (*tadhiya*), of time, means and even life, for without sacrifice no jihād is effective; 6) obedience (*Tāʿa*), which increases as the *daʿwa* advances through its phases (preaching, constructing, operating), so that the members who take part in the third phase are committed to total obedience and loyalty; 7) perseverance (*thabāt*)); 8) devotion (*tajarrud*) to the ideology; 9) brotherliness (*ukhuwwa*), which means love and solidarity between the Brothers on the basis of their common beliefs; 10) trust (*thiqa*), by which is meant respect of and total obedience to the leader as though he were the father, teacher (*shaykh*) and commander, all at once.

In al-Banna's concept of leadership, the leader or commander (*al-qa`id*) is part of the organization's message (the *da'wah*) and there is no *da'wah* without leadership (*qiyadah*). The strength of the organization, its effectiveness and ability to reach its goals depend on the mutual confidence between the leader and the soldiers. The *Ikhwani* leader, al-Banna said, should be to his soldier a father (for the emotional bonds); an instructor (for the teaching of scientific matters); a (*sufi*) sheikh (for his spiritual cultivation) as well as a his commander.

This concept of authority and discipline was basically a function of al-Banna's personality and leadership qualities: He was highly charismatic and exceptionally eloquent; had an image of absolute sincerity, selflessness and unlimited commitment to the cause and to the organization; conducted highly personalized relationships with his disciples and MB members; and inspired almost unlimited veneration. Al-Banna's disappearance created a leadership crisis that has never really been resolved to these days. His successors as General Guide were non-charismatic figures, and more often than not they were not the

ones who wielded power. Charismatic, innovative figures rising up the ranks found their way out. Hence, real power in the MB has been in the hands of organizational types, whose source of authority, whether they were General Guide or not, was bureaucratic- the institutional positions they held, their networks within the movement and their organizational record. In the absence of the charismatic figure of the founder, his successors have complemented the pledge of allegiance to the organization and its leadership (*bay'ah*) as a source of their authority and of organizational unity by maintaining an authoritarian discipline, rigid hierarchy and zealous preservation of the movement's doctrine. Consequently they opposed ideological and organizational change, placed the organization's unity as the highest priority, and rejected ideological pluralism as a risk to that unity and to the organization's very survival. MB leaders regard their role as one of control- ensuring members' loyalty to the organization and to its doctrine- rather than as one of leadership in the sense of embracing change and navigating the movement through it (Indeed, the title of the heads of the MB national branches outside Egypt is "Controller General"). Young talents who could be leaders for change are suppressed or find their way out, and thus this kind of leaders perpetuates itself.

Jihadi Paradigms

Jihadist theorists and outside analysts have advanced three main leadership paradigms. These are:

a. **The 'Salafi' paradigm** - this is exemplified by emulation of the traditional leadership paradigm of the Ummah in the days of the "Salaf" or the forefathers. In this context, the biography of the Prophet (the 'sirah') and, to a lesser extent, the actions of early Muslim leaders provide a leadership model that can and should be emulated.

b. **The leadership of scholars** – this paradigm differs from the former in that it stipulates as a prerequisite of leadership extensive religious scholarship. This model draws from the Muslim Brotherhood model and is the Sunni equivalent of the Shiite Khomeinist "wilayal al-Faqih". This paradigm has evolved with the rise of a class of radical, independent scholars and even layman without clear scholarly credentials, who purport to represent obedience to the fundamentals of religion and compete for the leadership of the common folk with the establishment religious authorities. This process started with jihadist movements in the 1960s, when radical offshoots of the Muslim Brothers, such as Egyptian *al-Jihad* or the *Syrian al-Tali'a al-Muqatila*, tried to create militant scholar-leader networks. But this idea, i.e. trying to appear authoritative in ideological and religious matters, is being pushed forward much more professionally and effectively today.

c. **Virtual leadership** - Since 9/11, traditional group structures (personal and hierarchical) have become difficult to maintain. Virtual leadership is one of the solutions offered by Jihadi strategists. Via the internet, Global Jihad shall run under a common ideological umbrella and use the possibilities offered by the World Wide Web.

d. '**Leaderless jihad**' -espoused by the jihadist theorist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, and analyzed from an outside perspective by Marc Sageman in his book *Leaderless Jihad*, this paradigm asserts that jihadist networks function without strong leaders. The resulting analytical focus is on the radicalization of individuals, the dynamics of small groups, and the cumulative effects of decentralized networks.

e. **The 'management of savage**ry' – proposed by Abu Bakr Naji's in his 2004 work *The Management of Savagery.* This paradigm offers an interpretation that combines elements of the 'orientalist' paradigm with the 'leaderless jihad' of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri. Though not concerned explicitly with leadership paradigms, Abu Bakr Naji describes a movement that attempts to reap the benefits of decentralized networks in the service of a unifying vision articulated by strong leaders.

f. **The "original" al- Qa'ida** - the origins of Bin Laden as such are not necessarily Wahhabi. He grew up in Saudi Arabia, but being a Yemenite it would not be surprising (though there is not much evidence) that his religious origins could be Shafi'i. His being a Yemenite is important, since he never belonged to Saudi official elite/establishment, despite the fact that his family became very wealthy. As a high school and university student, his speeches were influenced by the ideological worldview that had been developed by Sayiid Qutb (the Qutbiyya movement). Unlike Hasan al-Banna, who stressed the necessity to have religious and political guidance, Qutb did not specify who exactly should be the ruler. Hence, the concepts of leadership held by al-Qa'ida are varied and contradictory. On one hand there are leaders who personify the model of scholarly authority along with Jihadi leadership, such as 'Abdallah 'Azzam and Ayman al-Zawahiri, whereas, on the other hand, we find Ossama Bin Laden himself who is not a "religious leader" per se; he never really took religious studies (his lack of Islamic erudition is evident in his speeches), and his first major was civil engineering. He is a group leader, but not really a caliph or *amir* or a supreme leader with an undefined authority and under him regional leaders who are competing with one another in terms of authority, autonomy and beliefs. Bin Laden has created a model totally different from that of the Saudi establishment. Just like the leader of the Assassins, he has become mythological, people do not see him, do not know where he is, but still regard him as their undisputed leader.

The *bayÝah* plays an even greater role in Jihadi movements than in the traditional leadership and Muslim Brotherhood paradigms. However, there is no clear definition of the rights and duties of the Amir and the members, or the relationship between Amir, members and organizations. At times, different jihad organizations in the same country fight each other over the pledge of allegiance. If a member wants to leave an organization, he may be excommunicated. In addition, the Amir or a consultative council (*shura*) can also expel a member and thus abrogate the *bay'a* (which, as mentioned above, is essentially reciprocal). However, criticism has been leveled in the Jihadi movement against "long range" or indirect leadership cemented by a *bay'a*. For example, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri points out that the leadership of the Syrian Muslim Brothers in the 1980's went into exile in Baghdad and Amman and lost touch with the strategic and tactical reality in Syria. Nevertheless it continued to issue unsuitable military and political directives to the local leadership in Syria, which was bound by practical interests and *bay'a* to obey, thus leading to strategic mistakes.[3] Jihadi thinkers offer three possible solutions:

a. Implementation of the traditional concept of *bay'a* which creates a strict hierarchy within a group and loyalty of each level to the level above it.

b. Abolishing the *bay'a* with human leaders altogether and building upon a "contract with Allah".

c. Creating a middle-way: the "virtual bayah" via the internet

[3] Al-Suri says he experienced this first-hand as member of the Syrian *al-TaliÝah al-Muqatilah* (Fighting Vanguard). He claims that exiled leaderships lose touch with the local reality. Al-Suri , *GIRC,* Part 1, Chapter 7.

Shiite Models

The traditional Shiite model of leadership left political leadership to the Imam. In his absence, traditional Shiite doctrine did not present a comprehensive theory of leadership. The Shiite concept of "*wilaya*"(loyalty) is traditionally set aside for "*wilayat al-Imam*" (loyalty to the Imam). At the same time, the Shiite custom of adopting a senior cleric as a "model of emulation" (*marja' taqlid*). One of the characteristics of the Shiite Muslim world is pluralism of religious authority. A Shiite believer is entitled to choose a figure of religious authority, follow his rulings and turn to him with any questions pertaining to Islamic law. Sometimes, the believer chooses a religious authority who is not affiliated with his country of residence or national identity. For example, an Iraqi or Lebanese believer can choose an Iranian religious authority, or vice versa. However, due to reasons of national affinity, convenience and accessibility (the ability to communicate in the same language, the possibility of direct access to the religious authority), most Shiites prefer to choose a local religious authority from their own country and sometimes even one who lives nearby.

In addition, there is no organized system in Shiite Islam that evaluates, ordains and ranks religious sages. A person who studies at one of the prominent Shiite centers of learning (and particularly in Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran) is likely to receive various titles, depending on the type and length of study. An extended period of study in Islamic law bestows upon the student the formal title of *mujtahid* – someone who is authorized to interpret Islamic law in a way that obligates the believers. When a scholar reaches the level that entitles him to authorize others as *mujtahidun,* he receives, through broad yet informal recognition, the title of *ayatollah*. The highest rank is *ayatollah 'uzma* (Grand Ayatollah), which is also considered a source of emulation (*marja' taqlid*) for his followers. However, the entire process of bestowing authority is amorphous and based on the success of the religious sage to create for himself a wide community of believers, or an image of himself as someone who enjoys such support. Sometimes, a person who calls himself (and is called by his supporters) *ayatollah 'uzma* is not defined as such by others. Usually, there are more than ten religious sages in the Shiite world who receive this title.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979) introduced a new outlook into the Shiite world, inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini argued in his concept of *velayat e-faqih* that it was not necessary to wait for the return of the hidden imam and that in his absence, scholars should take the reins of government. This would be compatible with the model the Prophet Muhammad himself established: a combination of religious and political leader at one and the same time. Khomeini rejected any separation between religion and state, saying that "Islam is political or is nothing at all." Khomeini placed himself at the top of the pyramid as *wali faqih* [supreme jurist], also bearing the title of "the leader" (*rahbar* in Farsi). And indeed, Shiite believers outside of Iran also began to regard the Iranian *wali faqih* – Ayatollah Khomeini and subsequently his successor Khamene'i – as the stand-in for the hidden imam. However, since 'Ali and the imams are defined as "infallible" and capable of direct knowledge of Allah's will, the attribution of such qualities to contemporary leaders, who are mortal human beings, is problematic. This is controversial even in Iran itself, and all the more so outside of Iran. This issue became even more problematic following the death of Khomeini (in 1989), who enjoyed a status of holiness among a large part of the public in Iran, and the appointment of Khamene'i to the role of leader (and *wali faqih*). His lack of charisma and dubious scholarly credentials enabled other scholars in Iran and throughout the Shiite world, including Lebanon, to free themselves from the "shadow" of Khomeini and present themselves as an alternative Islamic authority to the Iranian leader.

To combat this trend, Iranian surrogates such as Hizballah stress in their ideological literature the absolute fidelity to the Iranian leader. The loyalty to the leader is presented in classical Shiite terms: The leader is

the successor of ‘Ali and the surrogate for the Imam al-Mahdi. Therefore, loyalty to Khomeini in the past and to Khamene’i today is the natural continuation of the loyalty (*wilaya*) to ‘Ali that is required as an institutional basis for Shi’ism and for which Shi’ism finds support in the Koran itself.[4] Moreover, the obedience to the *wali faqih* is a continuation of obedience to Allah. This is because: “Obedience to the *wali faqih* is the driving force of the life and activity of the resistance [Hizballah] and the factor that gives it strength and security. If not for this obedience, the movement would not have achieved its holiness, would not have mobilized the holy fighters [*mujahidin*] and would not have reached the banks of victory.[5] Furthermore the current Rahbar is referred to as the *wali amr al-Muslimim* – that is, the leader of **all** Muslims.

Grand Ayatollah Sayyid 'Ali al-Sistani, who is currently considered to be the most important leader of the Shiites in Iraq, on the other hand, rules out the concept of *wilayat al-faqih* and substitutes it with the concept of *wilayat al-hisba*, which means that the task of the leader is to ensure that the daily life of the citizens continues on a regular basis according to religious law and practices. The *faqih*, therefore, according to Sistani cannot and must not interfere with politics, and should leave the political arena to the politicians. Under duress or any existential threat to the community, the *faqih* may declare a jihad. However, that right to announce jihad belongs solely to the Hidden Imam who may confer that right to the *faqih*,

Another noteworthy model of Shiite leadership is that of the leader of Hizballah, Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah. Like Khamene'i, who has appointed himself above the Iranian establishment, so has Nasrallah become the actual supervisor of all events in Lebanon without having to deal with matters of representation of other religious and sectarian factions within the Lebanese state. He has thus carried out the perception of *wilayat al-faqih* in a country that is not even governed by a *faqih*. However, in contrast to Iran, where the Supreme Leader can rule without a high degree of public exposure, the case of the leader of Hizballah, Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah in the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon War is quite illuminating. Nassrallah built his leadership in accordance with a modern Arab model. The necessity to go underground has weakened his legitimacy and has damaged the organization's achievements in recent elections. Nasrallah has been regarded, even among the Shiite community, as a "Hidden Imam" due to the fact that he has hardly been seen in public events. Furthermore, while Nasrallah praises martyrdom (*istishhad*) he nevertheless refrains from going out publicly fearing he might be assassinated and become a *shahid* himself, which makes his moral grounds to send others to "martyrdom" operations much weaker.

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[4] Al-Bayan, June 2004.

5 *Baqiyyat Allah*, Volume 125, February 2002.

Virtual Leadership

Virtual leadership can be defined as leadership by a person who the follower has never met directly or even viewed through the traditional mass media, however, he commands the loyalty of the follower. The most obvious area for development of this model of leadership is the internet. Islam seems to be more susceptible to virtual leadership than the Western world, where attachment is through someone “you can see”. In Islam, leaders are based on hearsay and are intangible. There is no proof of their existence per se. A perfect example is Bin Laden who has practically become a virtual leader. Another example relates to the first intifada, when the main method of communication vis-à-vis the population was pamphlets. At an early stage, the Israelis grasped the importance of this tool and counter-pamphlets were used. It was enough to put out pamphlets with various discrepancies to raise concern and suspicion, and it proved to be an effective way to discredit the Palestinian leadership. Nowadays, the web has become a very powerful tool for de-legitimization. We can locate the relevant websites; create clone websites that confuse the Islamists with mixed messages, etc.

Over the last decade, Islam has entered the digital age. The internet-hype also concerns the giving of *fatwa*s. Via the internet, more and more websites offer *fatwa*-services. These compete with traditional *fatwa*-institutions such as the Egyptian Dar al-Ifta', which has doubled the number of *fatwa*s it issues per day to 1,000 and runs a telephone-hotline. Some researchers claim that the phenomenon of digital religious guidance can be a force for change and reform ot Islamic theology. In addition, since the 1980s the phenomenon of "tele-imams" has spread across the Arab and Muslim world, first on national television and later on also on satellite channels and the internet. Online *fatwa*s and digital religious propaganda have also experienced a surge in the Salafi-Jihad scene. While there was just a handful of websites in the late 1990s, their number has already increased to more than 4,000 websites, chat-rooms, forums and blogs by 2006.

Online-ideologues seem to have influenced the radicalization-processes of several Jihadi-terrorists. It is the moral superiority virtual leaders claim in regards to representing the "right Islam" that elevates them, in extreme cases, into the position of "big brothers" over fellow Muslim brethren. These leaders' quest is to reform what they perceive as the rotten Islamic system. Radical virtual leaders present themselves with an air of "infallibility" by virtue of proximity to "genuine" Islamic law and, thus, the prototypical Muslim community in early Islam. But why does virtual leadership work especially well for Sunni Islam? The motive and motivation of virtual leaders, so they claim, is the reestablishment of the prototypical form of governance under Muhammad. While official regime *'ulama* have nowadays mostly lost their credibility, radical laymen and scholars who call for the purification of Islam have assumed their places. They are mostly invisible, untouchable and have no personal contact to their target audience. Their pulpit is the internet.

The **virtual *bayÝah*** ritual is a written proclamation via the internet. The classical ritual (consultation (*shura*) - proclamation (*mubayaÝ ah*) - final handshake (*musafahah*)) has been drastically shortened. While the primary electorate commission (“men of resolution and contract”) is missing, the secondary electorate-pool and those qualified to pledge allegiance and proclaim has been drastically enlarged. An undefined number of Muslims can “proclaim” directly via the internet by a simple blog entry stating “I pledge allegiance” (ubayiÝ). Consultation and final handshake are probably supposed to be included into the written proclamation.

The internet however does not only play a role in creating virtual leadership, but also in challenging leadership in general and empowering the followers of the movement, A prime example of this is the

appearance in recent years of a "virtual" Muslim Brotherhood" which consists of independent bloggers, affiliated in the "real" world with the Muslim Brotherhood. While many blogs are managed by the actual leadership and play a role (as described above) of cementing its authority, others seem to be a reaction to the conservative, authoritarian nature of the movement's leadership. The latter sought to take advantage of the internet to open up and flatten the movement. By criticizing the MB's leadership and the organizational culture described above and calling for change, they triggered debates among MB members and others on these issues and to a certain extent broke down the psychological barrier that had prevented the movement's members from criticizing the organization and the secrecy that has been the bedrock of the Brotherhood since its establishment. The bloggers' long-term impact on the movement and its leadership model is hard to predict, however. While they create noises, which certainly annoy the Muslim Brotherhood leaders, it is far from certain that they can seriously undermine them or bring about real change, ideological or organizational, in the movement.

The roots of the popularity of the phenomenon of virtual leadership can be found in traditional Sunni-Muslim power structures. The tradition of relying on the opinion of somebody other than the worldly ruler, the caliph, for religious matters, namely scholars (*'ulama*), is a cornerstone concept of the classical Sunni Islamic balance of powers. This brought with it the development of two separate spaces and authorities, one for political-administrative matters and one for religious matters. Though less empowered with factual authority, early scholars or religious authorities developed an trustworthy standing among Muslim populaces, while rulers and dynasties after the Islamic Golden Age frequently found themselves under criticism for luxury, opulence and corruption of the "true" Islamic mores. The beginnings of the practice of *fatwa* clearly demonstrate this.

One of the more detailed descriptions of the virtual leadership of Jihad can be found in Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's book on "Global Islamic Resistance". According to Abu Mus'ab al-Suri. Radical Islamists take the Islamic legal justifications for terror attacks directly from the internet, create "virtual Islamic states", take "virtual pledges of allegiance" and give "virtual consultation" to followers in the real world. The hybridization of command structures, which are real as much as they are virtual, leads to vivid discussions among radicals. Internet-based discourses around Islamic leadership and cyber-authority evolve.

Radical Islamist activists are adapting classical Islamic mechanisms of decision-making to the virtual space. Classical Islamic legal rules are being stretched to the utmost to exploit them for radical purposes. This also concerns classical rules that deal with Islamic authority and leadership such as *bay'a*, *istifta'* and *shura*. For example, a very important argument to justify the virtual *bay'a* (pledge of allegiance) is that "in a specific period and under certain circumstances the *bay'a* may be sort of concealed *(nau' min al-khafa').*[6] This secrecy is not comparable to the classical condition, which allows a certain measure of ignorance (*jahala*) about a leader. It is rather intentionally created and caused by the security situation of Islamist radicals. Such details may sound punctilious, but they are central to the justification of virtual leadership - as much as they are important for its refutation by moderates.

Over the last years the virtual *bayŶah* has developed among radical Islamists as an alternative means to gather followers via the internet. The virtual ritual is very different from the classical one (see also above). Yet it is supposed to be a viable alternative and to have the same binding character. The main differences are the following:

a. Virtual leadership is a command network with numerous manifestations. They complement each other in a complicated way, yet the network is easy to infiltrate if its threads are known. From the preceding research, we can conclude that some of the forms include:

, retrieved April 16, 2009. www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=304962[6] "*Bay'a 'abr al-Internet!!!*" (Pledge of allegiance via the Internet!!!),

b. The *intermediate-manipulative form of virtual leadership*: The upload of an Islamic legal tractate or a fatwa requires an intermediary. An intermediary-virtual leader may stay in the background and use texts of others to serve his goals. He can be a programmer, a blogger, chatter or a webmaster who creates an internet platform and may remain anonymous. Together with other ideologues or jurisprudents, who create Islamic legal and ideological substructures, he is a part of the virtual-leadership command.

c. The *fictive form of virtual leadership*: A real life activist or radical network may create a *fictive virtual character or entity*. In the name of the fictive character or entity, directives, orders and propaganda are being issued. A whole personal cult may be created around the virtual jihad hero who only exists on the internet. Abu Omar al-Baghdadi may be such a character. Also the "virtual state", i.e. Islamic State of Iraq may be glorified. It does not matter if it only exists in the virtual space as long as it motivates followers.

d. The *direct-personal form of virtual leadership*: a *real person* such as an influential radical jurisprudent creates an internet platform such as a blog or website under his own name. Through the virtual presence he/she acts as an intermediary, ideologue, propagandist and commander with his "brand name'. An example is the Palestinian-Jordanian jurisprudent Muhammad al-Maqdisis.

e. The *posthumous form of virtual leadership*: A dead authority such as Ibn Taymiyyah can exercise as much power and influence as a living person. Opinions and directives of classical jurisprudents are used to justify violence. They require an intermediary who uploads the opinion of the classical jurisprudent on a website, a blog, or a forum. Often, a modern ideologue quotes the classical authority as central Islamic legal argument. Thus, the classical directive is embedded into a modern political context uploaded by a fictional and explained by a real character.

f. The *textual-discursive form of virtual leadership*: The Islamic text itself has a certain power. It is an interpretation of divinely revealed law. Accordingly, the text itself has *textual-discursive* power and is a form of *virtual leadership*. Radical Islamist discourses contain evidence from the Sharia, i.e. pieces of text from the Qur'an, the Sunnah. A virtual command may be issued on the basis of shariatic evidence. This means authority of the text, not of the person. However, the text needs an intermediary who uploads it.

2. Characteristics of virtual leaders

An attempt to create such a figure virtually was the proclamation of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as Emir of the Islamic State of Iraq.

The virtual leader claims to be "unknown" (*majhul*) and known (*maa'ruf*) at the same time. If some people know him and testify to this, the mass of people does not need to know him. This is his big deficit. At the same time, he behaves like a Big Brother who watches every step of over his fellow Muslims. He assumes the role of an Islamic "Grand Inquisiteur" in the tradition of Dostoyevsky. But this creates doubts in the minds of modern Muslims. They do not live in an anachronistic parallel world, but in the 21st century. Not everything can be justified Islamic legally. It is clear that the security situation does not allow the virtual leader to show up openly and that it forces him to remain anonymous. But this is a political issue. Many Muslims may turn away from virtual leadership if they understand that radicals themselves have caused this situation.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

The Islamic legal justification is the weakest link in the construction of virtual leadership. It should be monitored, researched and, perhaps, invalidated. Western scholars can take part in Islamic legal discussions as much as Muslim scholars participate in secular political discussions. Moderate Muslim scholars who refute the Islamic legal reasoning should be encouraged. Even radical leaders over whom the authorities have some leverage can be employed in this manner. A salient case of use of higher religious authority to erode a leader's authority is that of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi who was widely acknowledged as the mentor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The Jordanians freed him from jail to let him speak out against Al-Zarqawi's killing of fellow Muslims, and then returned him to jail. Similarly we find the use by the Saudis of "Awakening" scholars to counter the religious legitimacy of attacks inside Saudi Arabia and the "retraction" of the idea of "takfir" by the leaders of the Gama'a h Islamiya of Egypt from the Egyptian jails. It is interesting however that all these cases deal with rejection of attacks on other Muslims (which can be relatively easily proven) and not terrorism against non-Muslims.

In typical populist models of leadership, a leader is admired for his aura of success and his impunity from the punishing hand of the enemy. Failing leaders lose much of their charisma and legitimacy among their followers. However, what constitutes failure? In Jihadi organizations, leaders will often link their success or failure to the success or failure of the enemy to eliminate them. Once the goal of the enemy is perceived as to eliminate a given leader, even the most catastrophic results of a conflict are presented as a "victory" as the enemy has not eliminated the leader. The question arises therefore, whether the goal of "bringing bin Laden to justice" or destroying the al-Qaeda leadership should be the declared goal of the struggle against htat organization. The definition of goals of the state vis-à-vis the terrorist leadership plays a role in the ability of that leadership to project its success, and hence to bolster its legitimacy.

Actions that achieve the effect of diminishing this aura are significant in dealing with such leaders. The very fact that the state retaliates, demonstrating a high level of intelligence helps achieve this goal. In the final analysis, even if failure and humiliation of a leader does not turn his followers against his creed, it opens the door for challenge of his leadership from inside his organization or ideological milieu and that, in itself, weakens the organization.

Having said that, in organizations which are not involved in an active military struggle, moral and financial corruption is also a crucial factor to a leader's image. It is always possible to see how an Islamic leader is publicly presented as a modest person, who wears modest clothes and eat simple and not expensive food. Hamas's Gaza-based leadership has witnessed an immense blow to its unpretentious image, which had helped the organization win the 2006 elections based upon promises to fight against corruption and govern decently and transparently.

The question whether it is preferable to kill (openly and with fanfare), arrest (also openly or secretly) Jihadi leaders has been debated widely in policy circles. It has been argues that the US has largely turned Bin Laden into a hero by the manhunt against him and the fact that he has not as yet been apprehended. The arguments are as follows:

<u>Killing leaders:</u>

a. Pro – removes a capable and usually centralist individual, demonstrates the "long arm" and intelligence dominance of the state, destroys the myth of that the leader's reliance on God and his mythical capability to escape danger. Despite the claims against the way that the US showed the dead bodies of killed leaders, these actions have a deterrent effect towards their successors.

While killing a leader may not bring his movement to give up its arms (Hasan al-Banna was assassinated and the MB exists until this very day) it opens possibilities to manipulate the successor leadership and to take advantage of the interregnum.

b. Con – the leader becomes a martyr, the need for retaliatory terrorism with damage commensurate with the act that is being retaliated, the potential for the rise of an even more capable leader or state control over the organization. If the death of the leader is not clearly proven, in certain cultural segments or organizations this may turn the leader into a "hidden Imam" model (for example: Imam Mussa Sader in Lebanon).

Arrest of leaders

a. Pro – arrest – as opposed to killing – of leaders can serve the state in achieving intelligence, disinformation (as long as the arrest is not publicized and the arrested leader has no contact with the outside world), manipulation of the leader to issue orders which serve the state and possible accommodation with the leader. Examples of beneficial results of arrest include: the PKK leader Ocalan, the Egyptian Gama'ah Islamiya's recanting of their takfir doctrine towards the regime, the arrest of Abu Qatada by the British which was used to send disinformation to his followers which helped wreak confusion among his followers.

b. Con - the arrested leader is no longer perceived as an authority since all his statements are seen as being under duress, his disappearance allows for new forces to emerge and to run the organization in his stead, the fact that he is in custody encourages hostage taking situations.

The issue of leadership should also be addressed through the lenses of the legitimacy of the system itself. For comparison, one may look at the US elections in 2000. Ater a legal dispute regarding the results of the elections, the Supreme Court decided in favor of Bush's victory. Once that happened, the entire system accepted the verdict unanimously. The system triumphed because everybody shares the perception that the system's legitimacy and survival are more important than the individual is. Similarly, the deposal of President Richard Nixon and his pardon by his successor represented the importance of maintaining the system.

In comparison, while in Islam, there are theoretical provisions for removal of a leader from office, there are almost no historical precedents for such moves except for acts of violence and rebellion inside the organizational-institutional framework. For example, although the Wahhabis claim that a leader who does not fulfill his obligations to the entire community should be removed from office, in fact there is no formal mechanism that can oust that leader. Because there is no formal mechanism for removing a leader from office everyone does whatever he wants and instead of solving domestic problems peacefully more often than not those who oppose the leadership and support a harsher ideological line simply leave the organization and establish a new one, more radical than the previous one (during the 1950s and 1960s Sayyid Qutb expressed his dissatisfaction from the policies and decisions taken by the MB leadership, which despite the Nasser regime's oppression avoided clashes with the latter; those who adopted Qutb's worldview withdrew from the MB and founded much more radicalized Jihadi organizations). The Islamic Republic of Iran, on the other hand, created a legitimate mechanism for replacing an unworthy Supreme Leader. Furthermore, when Rafsanjani was nominated Head of the Experts Council in 2007 he declared that the Council will examine whether or not the Khamene'i was still fit for the office of the Supreme Leader. Despite the fact that eventually it did not happen there still is a defined constitutional mechanism that is capable of doing so.