



AL-QAEDA, THE PROMOTER OF THE NEW ISLAMIST TERRORISM

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Abstract: *THIS ARTICLE PRESENTS A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF ONE OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS IN THE WORLD, AL-QAEDA. THUS, THE MOST IMPORTANT IDEOLOGICAL, ORGANIZATIONAL OR LOGISTICAL ELEMENTS ARE HIGHLIGHTED, FROM THE BEGINNINGS OF THE GROUP UNTIL NOW, FOLLOWING THE WAY IN WHICH AL-QAEDA HAS CHANGED AND IMPLEMENTED NEW KEY TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GLOBAL TERRORIST PHENOMENON. IT ALSO PRESENTS THE EVOLUTION, THE OPERATION OF THE GROUP AND THE GROUP'S ACTIVITIES IN THE LAST YEARS, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DECREASE OF ITS CAPABILITIES AS A RESULT OF THE MEASURES TAKEN GLOBALLY LIMITED TO THE FIGHT AGAINST THE TERRORIST PHENOMENON. THE POTENTIAL FOR REACTIVATION OF THE GROUP SHOULD BE NOTED, AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE INCREASE OF RADICAL MILITANCY IN THE ISLAMIC SPACE.*

Keywords: *TERRORISM, AL-QAEDA, JIHAD, TERRORIST ATTACK, WAHHABISM*

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INTRODUCTION

Al-Qaeda is the terrorist group that has redefined the term terror. The name Al-Qaeda is now synonymous with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States of America, which represented a turning point and a major impact for all mankind.

The origin of the name Al-Qaeda, in translation "base", has long been unknown, its interpretations have been based on the assumption that it refers to a database associated with Arab veterans in Afghanistan, or is associated with a secret base, the alleged headquarters of Osama bin Laden. Al-Qaeda's name has long been mythical, with members of the group avoiding using it until



the fateful events of September 11, 2001, preferring instead to use the term "society" within the organization.

The name Al-Qaeda was adopted at the initiative of Abdullah Azzam, one of the founding members of the organization, also considered the spiritual father of the group. Out of a desire to strengthen the army of Arab volunteers whose bases were laid in the fight against the Soviet army in Afghanistan, Abdullah Azzam laid the foundations of a larger mission, considered great, with the aim of reconquering the Muslim world. To achieve his goal, Abdullah Azzam needed a warrior and a permanent vanguard who knew how to guide the ummah. This unit, meant to fulfill the great goal of recapturing the Muslim world, was called al-Qaeda al-Sulbah, in translation "solid foundation". In a 1988 editorial written under the same title, Abdullah Azzam considered that:

"... every principle needs an avant-garde that will take it further and, entering society, at the same time, needs to accept heavy tasks and enormous sacrifices. No ideology, whether in heaven or on earth, can do without this avant-garde that gives everything it has to ensure its victory. It carries the banner along a difficult and endless road, until the moment when it concretely reaches its destination, because Allah wants it to succeed. It is al-Qaeda al-Sulbah that is this vanguard for the separate society..." (Chaliand & Blin, 2018, p. 292).

The origin of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda has its roots in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, a catalyst for both a fierce civil war and the formation of a resistance against a foreign power on Afghan and Muslim soil, which created the premises for a so-called war of defense of Islam. As a result, in 1988 in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abdullah Azzam set up the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda to recruit fighters and raise funds for the Afghan resistance during the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, al-Qaeda began to support the struggles of Muslims around the world, which was present in the midst of the fiercest conflicts waged by Muslims. (De Toledo & Mikhael, 2018, p. 10).

In the year the organization was founded, Osama bin Laden issued a statement under the motto "Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders," calling on Muslims around the world to call on both Americans and also their supporters, called "Satan's helpers." In addition to launching this call, Osama bin Laden set out four important goals that Al-Qaeda was to achieve, namely: a return to pure and authentic Islam (the one practiced by the seventh-century prophet Muhammad in order to restore the glory of Muslims), the overthrow of regimes considered by Al-Qaeda to be non-Islamic, the expulsion of Westerners from the territory of Muslim states (Westerners being seen as invaders, people who "corrupt" Muslims) and, last but not least, the establishment of a worldwide pan-Islamic caliphate, a goal that could only be achieved if all Muslims, along with Islamic militant networks, work together (Haynes, 2005, pp.181-182).

Shortly after the founding of Al-Qaeda on November 24, 1989, Abdullah Azzam lost his life in a car explosion. The attack was blamed by some members of the organization on Osama bin Laden, who considered Azzam uncomfortable, and others believed that the responsibility for the attack lay with Arab secret services who wanted to end the spread of terrorism internationally. As a result of this event, Osama bin Laden takes over the leadership of the terrorist group with the freedom to develop its project of unhindered international terror (Chaliand & Blin, p.273).

AL-QAEDA'S IDEOLOGY

Al-Qaeda's ideology can be considered complex, being inspired by the writings of the Islamic author Sayyid Qutb. The book "Milestones", along with other writings by the author and theorist of the Muslim Brotherhood, was a source of inspiration for Muslims around the world, and influenced the evolution of jihadist thinking and gave Islamist terrorist groups revolutionary legitimacy. Sayyid



Qutb promoted the idea of an avant-garde of right-wing Muslims, the Islamist model for establishing "true Islamic states", implementing Sharia and ridding the Muslim world of any foreign influence:

"There must first be a kind of avant-garde that assumes this role and walks on the path of its fulfillment, passing through the vast ocean of jahiliyyah that encompassed all mankind ..." (Raetchi, 2019, p. 125).

Osama Bin Laden identified with the ideas promoted by jihadist authors and ideologues and tried through his actions to materialize the Muslim avant-garde, by establishing a new Islamic state, modeled after Sharia, which would unite all territories inhabited by Muslims around the world. Thus, members and supporters of Al-Qaeda are led by faith, based on an ideology that promotes holy war, jihad against the West, unbelieving Muslims and non-Islamic leaders. The basic sources of the organization's ideology can be considered Wahhabism and the ideas promoted by the ideologue Sayyid Qutub (Peptan C., Peptan A. & Sirbu, 2020, pp. 103-105).

Wahhabism, a Puritan interpretation of Islam, has its roots in the ideas of the Sunni reformer Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, with two important principles, namely opposition to worshipping "false idols" (including those who practice Sufism, followers of Sufism being known for worshipping local saints) and the fight against the Shiites, because they worship Ali's descendants (Haynes, p. 182).

Members and supporters of this terrorist group viewed the holy war, jihad, as a struggle against three main enemies: Westerners, non-Muslim leaders, and "apostate" Muslims.

AL-QAEDA'S PLAN FOR THE WORLD ISLAMIC CALIPHATE

Famous journalist Fouad Hussein is known worldwide for his meticulous documentation and knowledge of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group. The journalist managed to contact the leaders of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda from around the world and to obtain an interview behind bars, from the dreaded terrorist Abu Mussab al Zarqawi, but also from Saifal-Adl. Based on statements and journalistic investigations, Fouad Hussein identified the seven phases of the terror network, namely the Al-Qaeda plan to establish the World Islamic Caliphate, which are described below (Von Yassin, 2005).

The first step, suggestively called "the awakening", is the 2000-2003 stage, which includes the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 until the fall of Baghdad in 2003. At this stage, Al-Qaeda wanted to challenge the West to open the gates of a war against the Islamic world, this threat being used to awaken Muslims around the world, the group's message being thus easier to spread.

The second step, or the "opening of the eyes", is equivalent to the period 2003-2006, in which the mobilization of the awakened Muslims will go against the West, realizing the conspiracy set up by them. At this stage, they wanted to recruit new members and organize a network so that Iraq could become a global center of action.

The third step, entitled "getting up and standing", was scheduled to take place in 2007-2010, and aimed at the Syrian space, but also the preparation of terrorist attacks on Turkey, Israel in the hope of gaining international notoriety.

The fourth step, scheduled for 2010-2013, targeted attacks on Arab governments hated by Al-Qaeda, but also attacks on oil suppliers and the United States economy, using cyber terrorism.

Step five was planned for the period 2013-2016, when it was considered that the Caliphate or an Islamic state could be declared. At this point, Al-Qaeda hopes that by this time the Islamic State will be able to create a new world order.

In the sixth step, starting in 2016, Al-Qaeda hopes that there will be a period of total confrontation. In the hope that the Caliphate will be declared at that time, the Islamic army will be able to start the "fight between believers and unbelievers", mentioned countless times by Osama bin Laden.



The final step, the seventh step, entitled "The Way of the Believers", was the "final victory" that should end by 2020, with the success of the caliphate. For this moment, Al-Qaeda predicted that the fear instilled in people of other religions would lead to the victory of "a billion and a half Muslims", this moment representing, in fact, the success of the caliphate (Von Yassin, 2005).

A careful analysis of the activity of Al-Qaeda shows that some of the objectives set by the group have been achieved, the cruelty of the orchestrated attacks giving it the recognition of being one of the most important terrorist groups that history has known, while another part has, fortunately, remained at the stage of claimed objectives, without being put into practice so far.

AL-QAEDA'S EVOLUTION

The 21st century was the time when Al-Qaeda expanded its activity worldwide, establishing branches and associating with countless terrorist organizations from all over the world, thus starting a global jihad, their main targets being, in principle, the western states, especially the United States of America, which have led, over time, the fight against the terrorist phenomenon, and implicitly against the terrorist group Al-Qaeda.

Thus, in 2004, Al-Qaeda established Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the group being led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The origins of this group date back to the early 1990s in Jordan, where al-Zarqawi led the group Bayat al-Imam, which later became Al-Qaeda in Iraq. AQI coagulated the insurgent movement in Iraq, fighting both the Iraqi authorities and the international coalition forces that invaded Iraq in 2003 (Kirdar, 2011, p. 1). This subsidiary was significantly affected in terms of operational capabilities with the death of leader al-Zarqawi in 2006, and despite the fact that the group's operational activity was reduced, it was still able to carry out major terrorist attacks (Kirdar, 2011).

In 2007, Al-Qaeda established the Al-Qaeda branch in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which enjoyed global media exposure and managed to attract countless recruits from all over the world, but, despite this, (AQIM) has maintained its indigenous leadership, unlike other franchises of Al-Qaeda (Filiu, 2009, p. 2). The subsidiary has enjoyed significant success in Algeria and Northern Sahara, where most state entities have been an easy target for the terrorist group, given the low response potential of government forces in the region.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is a subsidiary of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda that was founded in 2009, following the merger of Al-Qaeda branches in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Headquartered in Yemen, where it has claimed countless terrorist attacks targeting both Yemeni civilians and Westerners, the branch has been suspected of involvement during the terrorist attacks on the French satirical publication Charlie Hebdo (Standford University, n.d.). The group's activity in Yemen has occupied a large part of the south-east of the country, which has control over several ports and central banks in Yemen. The terrorist group was significantly destabilized in 2020, when leader Qasim Al-Raymi was killed by US forces (Standford University, n.d.).

Al Shabaab is an Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist group, formally joining Al-Qaeda in 2012. Al Shabaab has been active mainly in Somalia and Ethiopia. Suffering many ideological and organizational transformations over time, it has become a nationalist organization, a true hybrid movement that has embraced transnational terrorism, joining Al-Qaeda in the fight against Western states (Wise, 2011, p. 1).

In 2014, Zawahiri, the Al-Qaeda leader, announced the creation of a new Al-Qaeda affiliate, this time on the territory of the Indian subcontinent (AQSI), the new terrorist group being led by Asim Umar. The group aimed to expand operational activity in the South Asian region, acting mainly against the governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh, where it confirmed its ability to accommodate in any geographical area, promoting the jihadist movement globally (The Soufan Center, 2019).



Al-Qaeda, along with its subsidiaries and affiliated terrorist organizations, has approached the jihadist movement from two perspectives, that of internal jihad and external jihad (also known as global jihad). Al-Qaeda's success in Afghanistan, in the fight against the Soviet army, delighted the entire Muslim world, with countless terrorist organizations being set up throughout the Muslim world, marking the beginning of an internal jihad. Terrorist organizations have carried out terrorist attacks on domestic territory, most of them with the aim of overthrowing local secular regimes, with the intention of setting up an Islamic caliphate in their place; thus, internal jihad has taken place in all nations with Muslim populations, especially in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, but also in Southeast Asia (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010, p. 1048).

Despite the fact that Al-Qaeda has focused its attention on internal jihad for decades, it has failed to remove many of the secular local regimes in Muslim countries, which have managed to survive despite security instability, many of which have received support from some Western states. This led to a paradigm shift within the terrorist organization, with Al-Qaeda moving to external jihad (global jihad), targeting Western states, especially the United States, which had military forces located in the Middle East (Gunaratna & Oreg, pp. 1050).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Since its inception, the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda has had a strict and clear hierarchical structure, consisting of: Amir (also known as the general leader who had direct responsibility for the activities of Al-Qaeda, both internally as well as externally, being involved in operational, strategic planning), deputy (similar characteristics to the amir), secretary (the person responsible for performing secretarial tasks), the board of command (the most important decision-making body of the terrorist organization, led by the amir, its members being responsible for planning and overseeing the entire activity of the organization), the military committee (the body responsible for the operational and military activity of Al-Qaeda), the media committee (the body that deals with the organization's propaganda) etc. All these elements of the leadership structure have made Al-Qaeda a true military institution, very well organized, which has made it difficult for the international coalition to fight for its destructuring (Gunaratna & Oreg, pp. 1054-1063).

MODUS OPERANDI

Given the strict organization of the terrorist group, Al-Qaeda has acted with the same meticulousness in planning and carrying out terrorist attacks. To fulfill its grand plan in seven steps, namely the establishment of the World Islamic Caliphate, Al-Qaeda created a real network of terror, developing and financing a series of affiliated terrorist groups, which acted under the group's umbrella.

During 2014, the Al-Malahem media committee of the Al-Qaeda organization in the Arabian Peninsula published a series of video lectures on military strategy and fighting methods. These eight lectures were given by a senior official of the organization, Nasr bin Ali al-Ansi. In order to make lectures accessible and easy to distribute, they were summarized in a written document (ICT, n.d., p.2).

According to this material, Al-Qaeda supports the conduct of a war of patience, of attrition, in order to undermine the security and stability of the enemy and to destroy the enemy both materially and mentally, in an indirect strategy. In terms of direct strategy, sensitive targets are pursued in order to send a message to the enemy. Al-Qaeda's actions are meant to create a strong sense of fear in the enemy, to constantly feel like a "hunted animal". As it can be seen, Al-Qaeda prefers indirect carnage in order to spread deep feelings of fright and terror at the expense of material loss. In order to animate the group's fighters, Al-Qaeda constantly reminded them of the great goal that leads them to battle (ICT, p. 3).



Also, part of Al-Qaeda's strategy was carried out under the saying “conquer the mind and soul”, in order to gain as many supporters and recruits as possible through its propaganda. In this regard, the Al-Qaeda media committee has tried to use social media and the media space to spread the message of jihad in an easy and fast way.

As *modus operandi*, it has undergone several transformations over time. Thus, the early terrorist attacks of the organization were very well organized, being carefully planned before they were carried out, being subjected to detailed reviews by the leaders of the organization to be sure of the success of the terrorist attack. In this regard, Al-Qaeda recruits were involved in thorough training, the organization relying mainly on experienced recruits (war veterans). Suicide bombers were frequently used in terrorist attacks, most of which were aimed at Western, Jewish or Shiite minority targets, and were characterized by a high degree of spectacle for public attention (Kindt et al., 2009, p. 31). The second stage that characterized the way in which Al-Qaeda carried out its terrorist activity was marked by the virulent activity of Al-Qaeda's alliances and franchises around the world, joined by other terrorist cells, smaller or larger, but also lone wolves, some of whom are sympathizers of the terrorist group. This stage can be characterized by the involvement of autonomous terrorist groups, the attacks being no longer planned only by Al-Qaeda's leaders, the decisions being decentralized, the terrorist attacks being planned less meticulously than in the first stage, many of them being spontaneous, using unsophisticated tools, aiming, however, at the installation of fear and terror among the public and less at the provocation of mass victims (Kindt et al., p.33).

Benefiting from advanced technology and specialized personnel, Al-Qaeda has become a follower of cyber terrorism, a form of action that does not cause human losses among its followers, which does not require the arrangement of a long-term plan, but which brings consistent operational benefits. In a short video posted in 2015, Al-Qaeda announced the establishment of a new subsidiary, under the name of Al-Qaeda Electronic, led by Yahya al Nemr. It seeks involvement in forms circumscribed to cyber warfare, thus beginning the era of cyber jihad. The branch has been involved in carrying out cyber attacks on relatively obscure targets, not attacking notable targets, such as government agencies or multinational corporations (Liu, 2015, pp. 4-7).

AL-QAEDA, IN RECENT TIMES

Over the past decade, the measures taken to limit the fight against terrorism have significantly diminished Al-Qaeda's operational capabilities, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the terrorist group has been primarily virulent. However, Al-Qaeda has managed to reorganize and further carry out terrorist attacks, its ideology attracting countless followers. In recent years, Al-Qaeda, along with its affiliated groups, has intensified its presence in various states affected by both significant security problems and poor governance, poverty and authoritarianism. One of these states is Yemen, where, according to UN reports, Al-Qaeda has launched terrorist attacks on Yemeni security forces, but also on civilians, these terrorist attacks further destabilizing this region crushed by the civil war that debuted in 2014 (Intensified Al-Qaeda and ISIL activity in Yemen 'deeply worrying', says UN Human Rights Office, 2019). In the context of the civil war, Yemeni authorities are forced to fight on several fronts, both against the terrorist group Al-Qaeda and its allies, and against the Houthi rebels and ISIS. This was a great advantage for Al-Qaeda, which always managed to regain its powers and establish new relations with local tribes, the current security and humanitarian context leading to increased levels of radicalization in the region, citizens being mobilized and encouraged to fight against their own government. Al-Qaeda is currently operating in the provinces of Sanaa, Al-Jawf, Marib and Saada, where the terrorist group has managed to gain important territories, in these provinces existing a fierce battle for power between Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, such as ISIS. Over time, the terrorist organization ISIS has had significant operational successes in the region, which is why several



Al-Qaeda recruits have chosen to join it (Raghavan, 2020). Thus, we can say that Al-Qaeda's future in this region is uncertain, given that the group is facing an exodus of its own recruits, but also because of the killing and arrest of several important leaders of the group, in February 2021, the UN confirming the arrest of Khalid Batarfi, who became the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2020 (Cruickshank, 2021).

In East Africa, Al-Qaeda operates through its affiliate, Al-Shabaab, the collaboration between the two terrorist groups beginning since 2012. Over time, Al-Shabaab has launched countless terrorist attacks on Somali government and Somali armed forces targets, but also against innocent civilians. In recent years, the terrorist group has intensified attacks on the military bases of the Somali armed forces and the international coalition involved in the peace process in the region, killing more than 12 soldiers in February 2020, the group capturing a significant amount of military supplies (Somalia : Al-Shabab fighters attack military bases, 2020).

Al-Shabaab is still a real threat to regional and even international security, the group being particularly active, stepping up its efforts to carry out terrorist attacks in several countries in the region. In March 2021, Al-Shabaab's leader launched a call to mobilize both his group and the population, with Ahmed Diriye calling for terrorist attacks on American and French interests in Djibouti, saying the plan was "the most important objective of his followers "(Al-Shabaab calls for attacks on US, French interests in Djibouti, 2021).

In recent years, Al-Qaeda's activity in the Middle East has been reduced, but this may change at any time. In 2020, the United States and the Afghan Taliban signed a peace agreement committing the US to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021, provided that the Taliban abide by its agreement (Maizland, 2020). In this context, the security situation in the region may take on new dimensions, with Al-Qaeda having the opportunity to reorganize and carry out new violent terrorist attacks. In fact, according to recent reports, the Afghan Taliban continued to maintain close ties with Al-Qaeda, despite the existence of the current peace agreement with the US, Al-Qaeda starting to train again in Afghanistan (De Luce, Dilanian & Yusufzai, 2021). Thus, the alliance between the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda is a major threat to regional security, giving Al-Qaeda a chance to play an important role in the region again.

Recent developments in global security issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which Al-Qaeda has called "the wrath of God on the West" and "the soldier of Allah" (Meek, 2020), have given the terrorist group a chance to reorganize and attract new recruits, with Al-Qaeda stepping up its online presence. In this sense, Al-Qaeda has become known for exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic, used by Al-Qaeda terrorists in the form of a "biological weapon", in order to spread conspiracy theories, through which they will sow fear and terror and through which people will lose confidence in governments (Groups associated with al-Qaeda, ISIS spread conspiracy theories about COVID-19: UN report, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the underfunding of security and the restriction of the mobility of the international coalition engaged in the fight against terrorism, but also of humanitarian aid, these aspects creating a fertile environment for the development of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda.

CONCLUSION

Al-Qaeda is a globally representative terrorist network, especially in geographical areas marked by instability, conflict and social or economic turmoil. Promoting global jihad, Al-Qaeda has orchestrated countless terrorist attacks with a high impact, altering the global security situation, which has led to the response of the international community, thus starting a global fight against the scourge of terrorism (Mărcău and Ciorei, 2013, pp. 1-11). Despite this, Al-Qaeda continues its operational



activity, carrying out terrorist attacks of varying degrees of intensity, being involved in countless violent terrorist attacks worldwide, both against the civilian population and against regional or international governmental or military targets, Western capabilities still being the main target of the terrorist organization.

The terrorist attacks planned and carried out by Al-Qaeda have confirmed, if necessary, the danger of the global terrorist spread, even if it is still perceived differently at the societal level, depending on the level of culture or the characteristics of political or social life, as the phenomenon has not been given an interpretation that satisfies the diversity of the actors who analyze it (Peptan, 2019, pp. 126-142). In this context, although humanity now seems to be more concerned with managing other security threats, the leaders of the world's great chancellors must not weaken their vigilance in monitoring and keeping terrorist groups under control.



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