Chapter 1

Inspiring Hate:
AQAP’s Inspire Publication

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ABSTRACT

Although Usama bin Laden is dead, the radical ideology that underscored his actions and those of his followers continues to live in his written and spoken communiqués, as well as those of other leaders of the jihadist movement. Of interest to this investigation is the internet publication Inspire, produced by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). At the core of these documents are the identity constructions of Self and Other. Previous research of terrorist writings highlights the centrality of Self and Other framing in advocacy for violence. Employing computational linguistic analyses, this investigation explored the identity frames published in Inspire. Results indicate that characterizations of the Self are as the victim of oppression by the Other, countered by frames of morality, purity, spirituality, and honor. Comparatively, the Other is framed as the actor towards the Self, engaging in aggressive, militaristic, and oppressive behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Osama bin Laden is dead. In 2011, Al-Qaeda’s infamous leader was killed during a United States Navy SEALS covert raid on his lair compound in Abbottabad Pakistan (Barrett, 2013). Characterized as U.S. enemy number one in the aftermath of the horrifying terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, bin Laden had been avoiding U.S. led international efforts to capture or kill him. In the years preceding and following the attacks of 9/11, bin Laden published scores of materials outlining his ideology for violent jihad against non-Muslim entities and the West. Though he is now dead, the radical ideology that underscored his actions and those of his followers continues to live on in his many written and spoken communiqués. Other prominent al-Qaeda leaders of the jihadist movement, including Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Abu Basir, and Anwar al-Awalaki likewise took up the pen, along with the gun, to express their support and interpretation of jihadism for their fellow violence-minded brethren. There is universal agreement

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among counter-terrorism experts that al-Qaeda is the premier global jihadist terror organization and that the writings of Usama bin-Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Basir, and Anwar al-Awalaki are broadly representative of jihadist thought and ideology (Phares, 2005; The 9/11 Commission Report, 2003).

The act of publishing and speaking publicly has been described by Zawahiri and other members of al-Qaeda to be of critical importance to their struggle (Corman & Schieflbein, 2006; Kellner, 2004; Michael, 2009; Seib, 2008; Weismann, 2004; Weismann & Winn, 1994). Of particular noteworthiness is the internet dissemination of these various writings in the jihadist publication Inspire, which is reportedly produced by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and published by Al-Malahem media, its public relations/media division (Gartenstein-Ross, August 20, 2012). Inspire is described as an Open Source Jihad magazine that is designed to promote domestic homegrown terrorism among primarily a Western non-Arabic speaking population. Western governments also are ostensibly part of the intended audience with the hope that Muslim populations in Western countries will become targets of governmental reprisals and thereby fuel open front attacks in Western democracies. The principal author and founder of the magazine was purportedly a Pakistani-American expatriate named Samir Khan, an online blogger who previously published terrorist propaganda material in his magazine “Jihad Recollections” before moving to Yemen and aligning himself with al-Qaeda. In fact, the October 2010 issue of Inspire included an article by Khan, entitled “I Am Proud to be a Traitor to America.” (Public Intelligence, 2013).

Although Anwar al-Awalaki and Samir Kahn were both killed in a 2011 U.S. drone strike, their writings continue to exist as potentially influential and motivational sources for U.S. and other Western individuals with a pro al-Qaeda and jihadist orientation. Central to these documents are the identity characterizations of self and other constructed in the writings of these individuals. According to Phares (2005), these materials are at the heart of a broader communication strategy to mislead a Western audience of the group’s true nature and purpose by constructing a positive “false identity” so to attract and recruit new apostles to the cause.

Scholars of conflict have long acknowledged the centrality of identity construction and self-characterization to conflict dynamics (Brown, 1977; Brummons, Putnam, Gray, Hanke, Lewicki, & Wiethoff, 2008; Cupach & Canary, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1988, Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). In fact, several such scholars have contended that identity construction of self and other is often the sine qua non of most conflict interaction (Brown, 1977; Brown & Levinson, 1978; Gray, 2003; Donohue, 2012, Rothman, 1997) and is at the core of intractable conflicts (Ellis, 2006; Gray, 2003; Northrup, 1989; Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003). Research of the communiqués and writings of terrorist organizations highlights the singular importance of self and other frame characterization in advocacy for violence. Recent research into the language of genocide has found that characterization of self and other is central to message campaigns that incite acts of violence against a specific target group (Donohue, 2012; Stanton, 2004). It is the case that the principal function of such media forms and propaganda campaigns is the creation of a positive and robust frame characterization of the Self, or in-group, along with a negative characterization of the Other, or out-group (Schlenker, & Weigold, 1989; Tajfel, 1982). Rogan (2010) posited framing theory to be a meaningful lens by which to understand how groups create a narrative about the issues surrounding their cause, including the creation of an identity of themselves and their enemy, so to justify their violent actions.

The interest of this investigation is the identification of the thematic narratives that spokespersons of al-Qaeda use to frame the characterizations of self and other as manifested in texts published in Inspire and disseminated for consumption by Western, English-speaking audiences. The paper begins with a review of framing theory as couched within conflict interaction in general and terrorism specifically.
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