

Fear and Loathing in Waziristan: Al Qaeda Propaganda

Matthew Orris

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the myth that Al Qaeda is a far more superior practitioner of the war of ideas because it has proven that it knows far less about the “American street” than supposedly the U.S. does about the “Arab street.” This is highlighted by Al Qaeda’s use of an American convert to be their voice to the U.S. The question that is open to interpretation is of what use is such a person at all to Al Qaeda given that it is doubtful that he is able to gather any significant following amongst Muslims in the Arab world and is considered nothing more than a “bloated buffoon” in the United States?

Al Qaeda’s use of Adam Gadahn is little more than an opportunistic publicity stunt designed to garner as much media exposure as possible because the spokesman is an American. So who is this Adam Gadahn? He is not a mystery. He is not an enigma. Rather Adam Yahiyeh Gadahn is really Adam Pearlman born in Oregon and raised in Orange County, California. Phil Pearlman (Adam’s father) was a 1960’s radical who suffered an identity crisis (much like Adam) that resulted in the change of the Pearlman surname to “Gadahn”.

To understand the message one must understand the messenger and his motivations. The scientific community has yet to create a standard profile of a “typical” terrorist because there is doubt that a single arch-type exists.¹ However, when terrorism is viewed with other serial predatory crimes (murder, rape, sexual assault) the common thread shared by the perpetrators is exhaustive dreaming and planning of executing such an event and those engrossed in such mental exercises are prone in their late teens/early twenties to escalate from fantasy to reality.² Adam Gadahn’s own history paints a life of failure, wanting to be important while surrounding himself with violent images and messages.³ Gadahn’s own writings described having a

¹ Hudson, Rex. A. “The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who becomes a Terrorist and why?” *Federal Research Division, Library of Congress*, September 1999. <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/frd.html> (accessed on March 18, 2000).

² Douglas, John. *The Anatomy of Motive*. (New York: Scribner, 1999) p. 36.

³ In his late teens Adam Gadahn became immersed in the Death Metal music scene and writing articles for local fanzines with titles like “Xenocide.” He also attempted to form a one-man band (Aphasia) that apparently went nowhere. (Khatchadourian, Raffi. “Azzam The American: The making of an Al-Qaeda homegrown”, *The New Yorker*, January 22, 2007.)

“yawning emptiness” and seeking ways “to fill that void”⁴ by turning away from Death Metal to studying Islam at the Islamic Society of Orange County where he fell in with a group of young fundamentalists.

Historical Precedent

Al Qaeda’s message of surrender-now-or-suffer-the-consequences is not new, and has been a staple ploy in intimidation tactics from the common extortionist to criminal syndicates. Al Qaeda understands that people can be converted from one faith to another if given the choice between conversion and extermination. To make such a choice remotely palatable Al Qaeda is keen to highlight that Islam is a monotheistic faith and “shares” the base tenets of Christianity and Judaism.

The reason commentators on Gadhafi have had such a hard time finding a true historical precedent of an American traitor becoming the public relations face for the enemy is because there is none. He is no William Joyce⁵ in style, demeanor, or following. He is not a Paul Ferdinand⁶, or Tokyo Rose⁷. He is unlike most traitors to this country who as a rule seem to shy away from the limelight and are content to spend their days toiling away for their new masters (such as John Walker Lindh). Al Qaeda has attempted to talk directly to America on several occasions, but with no serious impact.⁸

Conceivably this video, a fusion of ideology and propagandist appeal, was an attempt to imitate the U.S. Declaration of Independence in the sense that it is a list of grievances⁹ for the world to hear to justify their design to wage war – again. What Al Qaeda has produced is not nearly as effective or memorable because the Declaration of Independence says that man has rights given

⁴ Spencer, Robert. “The New Face of Al Qaeda”, *FrontPageMagazine.com*, June 1, 2004. <http://frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=380494BC-F557-4C5B-9CFF-F9D0E43ED3F1> (accessed April 23, 2008).

⁵ William Joyce, (aka Lord Haw-Haw) was born in New York of an Irish father and an English mother but when he was only three the family moved to Ireland and later to England. He has been dismissed by many as a comical, almost pathetic, figure but was accepted, at first, far more readily than Gadhafi ever will. He excelled at boxing, swimming and fencing and was involved in many street battles of the “British Fascisti Ltd” (a movement based on the Italian movement) before joining the British Union of Fascists where he became Director of Propaganda. During his heyday Joyce, who had fled to Nazi Germany in 1939, had almost as many listeners as the BBC – and he caused alarm with his tales of a Fifth Column in Britain. But after the Battle of Britain and the invasion of Russia, his popularity quickly waned. He was tried for treason and executed in January 1946.

⁶ Paul Ferdinand was a French journalist and Nazi sympathizer who had published an anti-semitic book, *La Guerre juive (The Jewish War)*. He worked for Radio-Stuttgart where he made propaganda broadcasts into France promoting the Nazi regime. He was arrested after the fall of Nazi Germany and executed for treason in 1945.

⁷ Iva Ikuko (aka Tokyo Rose) was a U.S. national caught up in wartime Japan who performed propaganda with more or less a gun at her head, and who served a light sentence after World War II (amazing considering the sentiment at the time) and was later pardoned by President Gerald Ford.

⁸ During the 2004 Presidential elections Osama bin Laden had sent a video message to America telling the people that they should tell their leaders to stop the war. In September 2007 Osama bin Laden released a videotape in which he urged all Americans to convert to Islam (it was likely theological in nature, and not a direct recruiting pitch), while back in May 2007, Al Qaeda’s deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri released a videotape in which he praised former Nation of Islam leader Malcolm X and urged African Americans not to fight for “racist” America in Iraq and to convert to Islam.

⁹ Taylor, Philip M. *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day*. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003) p. 136.

by “God”, while Al Qaeda claims that man has no rights and must submit to “God’s” will as dictated by their self appointed clique.

Amazingly enough, Gadahn is just employing the tactic used by most of the leading Islamist thinkers and leaders of the twentieth century – relying on conspiracy theories to excuse the continuing cultural and economic backwardness of Islamic countries. Unfortunately, he has chosen a tactic that works, because the prevalence of such theories are popular in much of the world, especially the Middle East (though the West is far from immune) where an individual or group can take refuge from failure or feelings of inadequacy by delving into fantasies of vast conspiracies (usually Jewish directed) and not have to undertake any true introspection or accept fault.

Techniques of Persuasion

The propaganda work of Adam Gadahn is an example of a rhetorical strategy of advancing an ideology under as many flags as possible in an attempt to appeal to as many anti-American, anti-Israeli and anti-Western constituents as possible. And unlike the Jacques Ellul theory that the propagandist “cannot be a believer,”¹⁰ Adam Gadahn is a propagandist who believes his own propaganda because the message is what defines him. Without the Al Qaeda message he loses all fame and slinks back into insignificance. Al Qaeda’s videos are designed to frame their terrorist attacks as a response to Western aggression. That Al Qaeda has chosen to tailor its message to appeasement-minded Westerners is not surprising, but for people to think that Al Qaeda can be appeased is of course nothing short of amazing.

The video of January 6, 2008 is a series of short video messages, reminiscent of a public service announcement (PSA) ad or an infomercial. Each subset of the longer video can be pitched to a particular audience. The general target audience sought was a motley collection of those whose disdain and hate for the United States would make them predisposed to seeing America as the enemy and could find common cause to sympathize with Al Qaeda’ anti-American message. Al Qaeda uses the ideology of disparate anti-American groups as a springboard to further their myth that Al Qaeda’s actions are merely *reactions* to U.S. foreign policy. Al Qaeda’s war with the U.S. is composed of two elements – physical and moral.¹¹ Al Qaeda appreciates that they lack the ability to defeat the U.S. in a physical fight, so the majority of their effort is on the moral plane, to sap the will of American people and break the social cohesion between the people and their government. The enemy is not fighting for the traditional physical key terrain; rather they are fighting for the key cognitive domain.

As an American it is likely that Adam Gadahn is familiar with the techniques of rhetoric put forth by Aristotle (*ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*) because he uses these techniques in his messages, but uses them poorly.

Ethos: He attempts to prove his authority to speak on the subject of religious conversions and the moral justifications used by Al Qaeda to wage war against the West by simply being a

¹⁰ Ellul, Jaques. *Propaganda: The Information of men’s Attitudes*. (New York: Random House, 1965) p. 196.

¹¹ Hanle, Donald. *Terrorism: The Newest Face of Warfare*. (New York: Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1989) p. 30

member of Al Qaeda, uttering a statement in Arabic and use of theological words not common in everyday conversation. Adam Gadahn attempts to prove his legitimacy to the American audience that he is an important member of Al Qaeda and can issue commands to other Jihadis with his short message to his “brothers” in the Palestine Authority.¹²

Logos: His whole approach at persuasion is built around the premise that by trying to appear intelligent, articulate and a reasonable thinker people will perceive as such. This is attempted by refraining from the typical bombastic approach, full of images of decapitation and rivers of blood, that has become a cliché of Islamist rhetoric. Gadahn also quotes liberally from the Bible to reinforce his claims that he is a well-versed religious thinker.

Pathos: His appeal to the audience’s emotions is his strongest point and he knows this. Gadahn is constantly evoking, or attempting to, fear of attack, yearning for peace, and a desire that he assumes all must feel of getting even with those who have lead this nation into conflict with “peaceful” Al Qaeda. His emotional appeal appears to be focused on those in his audience who suffer from *anomie*;¹³ those that lack the acceptable means of achieving their cultural goals and are prone to delinquency, crime and self-destructive behavior.

He understands that Western logic is based upon the law of contradiction, if two things contradict, then at least one of them must be either wrong or false. But Islamic logic, as outlined by the Koran¹⁴, clearly states that two things that contradict can both be true. It is this duality of logic that Al Qaeda uses to lull the uneducated in the U.S. into believing that the enemy is not really Al Qaeda but their own government. Duality allows the ease of deceit, to hide ones true intention with layers of interpretations for escape if ever questioned.

¹² “At this point, I issue an urgent call to our Mujahadeen brothers in Muslim Palestine...They should be in full readiness to receive the crusader arch-killer Bush in his visit to Muslim Palestine... They should receive him not with roses and applause, but with bombs and booby-traps.” Adam Gadahn quoted in the transcripts of the Al Qaeda video, “American Al Qaeda operative Adam Gadahn calls on Mujahideen to receive Bush in the Middle East with Bombs and tears up his passport.” MEMRI, January 6, 2008, http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/1649.htm (accessed April 16, 2008).

¹³ This term was introduced in 1897 by Emile Durkheim, who theorized that a particular type of suicide was the result of the breakdown of social standards that people need to regulate their behavior, to which I would argue that those desiring to join nihilistic-messianic death cults like Al Qaeda definitely fall into this category.

¹⁴ The Koran is in fact two books; the Koran of Mecca (early) and the Koran of Medina (later). The logic put forth from the Koran needs to be seen in light of the contradictions inside of it. These contradictions are resolved generally through what is called abrogation, meaning that the later verse supersedes the earlier one. Since the Koran is considered to be directly from Allah, it therefore is perfect, so no verse, early or later, can be seen as a mistake or an improvement. Which means all verses in the Koran are correct. For example, verse 73:10 (Mecca) states, “And have patience with what they [unbelievers] say, and leave them with noble (dignity).” University of Southern California. Translations of the Qur'an, Chapter 73: Al-Muzzammil. <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/073.qmt.html#073.010> (accessed on May 17, 2007). Such a verse speaks of religious tolerance and acceptance. However, verse 8:12 (Medina) has moved from tolerance to intolerance, “Remember thy Lord inspired the angels (with the message): ‘I am with you: give firmness to the Believers: I will instill terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their fingertips off them.’” University of Southern California. Translations of the Qur'an, Chapter 8: Al-Anfal. <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/008.qmt.html#008.012> (accessed on May 17, 2007).

Adam Gadahn is trolling for the easily manipulated, hence his constant overtures towards conversion and that Al Qaeda does not wish to fight “you” just the leadership of the U.S., and that he is “genuinely” concerned about his listeners mortal soul and wishes to save them from eternal damnation by showing them the “way.”¹⁵ Yet his demeanor suggests he is someone who enjoys spouting rhetoric in an attempt to sound intelligent, but his constant habit of referring to the desktop computer/teleprompter to read his lines shatters the illusion that he is a master of the topic. His attempts at classic rhetoric fail because his style is that of a sullen, angst-ridden young man who fancies himself as religious scholar, terrorist mastermind and someone that has sway over the American psyche.

The types of propaganda he employs with his rhetoric are conversionary and divisive. Through conversionary propaganda he is attempting to change the emotional or practical allegiances of individuals in his audience from one group to another (i.e. abandon the West and join Al Qaeda). While divisive propaganda is designed to split apart the component subgroups, and in a democracy there are many, to reduce the effectiveness of the group considered as a single united front (i.e. to make American Muslims think of themselves as only Muslims; or to make Americans think they are victims of a Neo-Con/Zionist/Capitalist conspiracy).

The stylistic quality that Gadahn employs in his propaganda is “scapegoating”, “race-baiting” (or in this case religious-baiting), and the reliance on the Goebbels technique of the “big lie.”¹⁶ The Al Qaeda mantra is that all “true” Muslims categorically refuse to accept any Western morals or beliefs and that American meplexes, those concepts that Americans supposedly inertly believe in (democracy, human rights, and freedom) are the work of Satan (or Zionists) meant to lead people astray from God.

Who is He Addressing?

Adam Gadahn is trying to spread Al Qaeda’s ideology beyond the more traditional means of printed literature that comprises 90%¹⁷ of their effort and is relying on direct video appeal to fortify within the community before moving beyond.¹⁸ It is likely that his primary audience appears to be those who have recently converted, or are thinking of converting to Islam. Religious converts are playing an increasingly influential role in Islamic militant networks, because converts are often times more prone to radicalization because they desire to prove to their new co-religionists that they really are faithful via extreme fanaticism. Al Qaeda has

¹⁵ “... This is literally playing with fire – a fire from which there is no escape should one die in unbelief. This is why today, anyone truly wanting to know and worship the one God, and save himself from the punishment of the Fire, has no choice but to believe in this final, unaltered, and abrogating message – the Koran ...” Adam Gadahn quoted in the transcripts of the Al Qaeda video, “American Al Qaeda operative Adam Gadahn calls on Mujahedeen to receive Bush in the Middle East with Bombs and tears up his passport.” MEMRI, January 6, 2008, http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/1649.htm (accessed April 16, 2008).

¹⁶ The Big Lie is basically that if something is told often enough and with enough conviction it will eventually be accepted as truth because the propagandist assumes that the audience will not make the effort to expose any falsehoods present and not jeopardize the credibility of the message.

¹⁷ Kimmage, Daniel. “The Al Qaeda Media Nexus”, Radio Free Europe, March 2008, p.19.

¹⁸ Ellul, Jaques. *Propaganda: The Information of men’s Attitudes*. (New York: Random House, 1965) p. 194.

recognized this and understands the operational and cultural value of having those that can operate inside other cultures and do not attract much scrutiny.¹⁹

He is focused on those young impressionable converts to Islam susceptible to the calls of radicalism by using two devices. One, playing on the adolescent psychology of isolated and vulnerable boys locked into the typical adolescent struggle of trying to find their adult identity and future. Secondly, maintaining the constant barrage that Islam is under constant and unrelenting attack by outside forces and needs to be defended by all “true” Muslims.

It is debatable whether or not Gadahn had intended to engage in the methodology of self-generated persuasion called “self-imagining” in which people imagine adopting a line of reasoning.²⁰ Or if he is just exercising a monologue to an already receptive audience in which the act of imagining is not that hard of a sell. The reason to think the later is due to his rather simplistic persuasion devices used and his message hinges on believing in conspiracy theories.²¹ Gadahn’s likely alternate audiences are those who have an axe to grind against the U.S. as this would explain the laying out an often-muddled litany of justifications, which he hopes will have wide appeal, and is the classic use of the “granfaloon tactic.”²²

His message is simple; his audience should blame all of their problems, failures, frustrations and fears on rich white American business owners, Neo-Cons, bible-thumpers, President Bush and “the Jews.” And that once the audience realizes that they are all victims of an evil American and Jewish program designed to victimize the world and that by converting can they then destroy the evil U.S. and the Zionist entity and tackle global warming.

By appealing to such a wide array of justifications Gadahn hopes to keep the audience distracted long enough from Al Qaeda’s rationale that it is their right to kill all who oppose them and that the U.S. is at the top of their hit list because the U.S. constitutes the single greatest threat to them globally. Therefore it is absolutely imperative that attacking Americans is thus seen as an act of “self defense” by claiming that the U.S. response to Al Qaeda’s actions is peddled as “America’s

¹⁹ Michael Taarnby, a terrorism researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies quoted in Whitlock, Craig. “Converts To Islam Move Up In Cells: Arrests in Europe Illuminate Shift”, *Washington Post*, September 15, 2007.

²⁰ Pratkanis, Anthony and Elliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*. (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2001) p. 168.

²¹ “... It’s this group of militant fanatics which has taken nuclear-armed America to the brink, and is hoping to push it over the edge as soon as possible, in order to hasten the seven-year tribulation period, the Rapture, the Second Coming, and Armageddon, not necessarily in that order. It’s this group of fanatics that is playing with fire, and fiddling with the destiny of the entire world.” Adam Gadahn quoted in the transcripts of the Al Qaeda video, “American Al Qaeda operative Adam Gadahn calls on Mujahedeen to receive Bush in the Middle East with Bombs and tears up his passport.” MEMRI, January 6, 2008, http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/1649.htm (accessed April 16, 2008).

²² The granfaloon tactic is taking an inconsequential fact, such as a favorite sports team and turning it into a significant factor of uniting people, and was coined by writer Kurt Vonnegut, and appears in Messrs. Pratkanis and Aronson book *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*. (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2001) p. 168.

war against Islam”²³ and is done by employing the political-grievance aspect of neo-Marxist themed social justice against an imperialist foe wrapped in a shroud of Muslim piety.

This is done in the hopes that it will spark in those who are prone to appeasement the “Oslo Syndrome.” This syndrome, coined by American psychiatrist, historian and author Dr. Kenneth Levin who is currently a clinical instructor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, is that people who feel under siege often end up internalizing the hatred against themselves and deluding themselves about the intentions of their enemies.²⁴ Even though Dr. Levin was referring to Israel and the state of siege her people feel, his idea can be exported to a wider field to places like Europe, Thailand, India, America, anywhere on the globe under the threat of terrorist violence. This lack of control over a seemingly out of control situation has led many in the West to embrace delusions of control – that if only they gave their attackers more “respect”, concessions, foreign aid and so forth, then the Islamists would see that the West really is friendly and all can live in peace. Although history has shown time and again that appeasement does not bring about a cessation of hostilities, but actually leads to an escalation of violence, there is always a new generation willing to give “peace” one more chance.

A disturbing trend is the growing willingness of fringe groups to work together in a disjointed manner because they share common enemies in the U.S. government and “the Jews.” The radical left and it’s associated “peace movements” are increasingly finding themselves in agreement with Islamists and neo-Nazis, that capitalism in general and the U.S. in particular are oppressive and that the GWOT, especially OIF, is designed to benefit only Israel and “international Jewry.”²⁵ One can reasonably infer that he is also directing his conversation at an assumed sympathetic U.S. audience made up of members of both the far-Left and far-Right who despise Israel and believe that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are part of some shadowy “Zionist/Neo-Con” conspiracy.²⁶

²³ Mekhennet, Souad and Michael Moss. “A New Face of Jihad Vows Attacks on U.S.” *New York Times*. March 16, 2007.

²⁴ “They are eager to feel some control over a painful situation which is, in reality, out of their control. Chronically abused children - more specifically those subjected to parental abuse - typically blame themselves for their victimization because to do so supports a fantasy that if they reform, if they become ‘good,’ their parents will treat them differently. To look at their predicament more realistically would force them to accept their helplessness to change their terrible circumstances, and children, and adults as well, prefer to fend off acknowledging such bitter realities.” Glazov, Jamie “The Oslo Syndrome.” *FreeRepublic.com*, November 24, 2005, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1527881/posts> (accessed March 12, 2006).

²⁵ White supremacists and neo-Nazis like David Duke were quick to add support to the anti-Israel, Jewish conspiracy theories spouted publicly by various peace activists in the summer of 2005. Various neo- Nazi websites since that time have posted glowing op-ed piece of why these “peace movements” are right. [In August 2005 neo-Nazis around the country praised Cindy Sheehan for her public statements such as, “My first born was murdered. Am I angry? Yes, he was killed for a PNAC (Project for a New American Century) neo-con agenda to benefit Israel. My son joined the Army to protect America, not Israel.” The current anti-war movement is popular with the American Nationalist Union, the National Socialist Movement, and at racist websites like www.stormfront.org, www.altermedia.info, www.davidduke.com. Orris, Matthew. “You’ve Got Hate: Web Based Terror,” *Small Wars Journal*, Volume 8, May 2007 <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/swjmag/v8/orris-swjvol8-excerpt.pdf>

²⁶ A cursory check of the websites and comment pages of www.davidduke.com; www.stormfront.org; www.dailykos.com, www.moveon.org , www.democraticunderground.com are replete with such musings and further links to sites that promise to “expose” such conspiracies.

Unintended Consequences

Beyond the standard Al Qaeda message the January 2008 video in particular (but is present in all earlier video releases and even the most recent one of October 2008) was an admission that they have serious problems in their marketing department and is an extended cry for help in which Gadahn (on behalf of Al Qaeda) is simply grasping for ideological straws. For an organization that is trumpeted by many commentators as being media savvy Al Qaeda has proven the opposite, that even with an American talking-head, they are clueless about the “American street.” Using Gadahn, a person who possesses extremely low telegenics and is the embodiment of the stereotypical “fat, nerdy, loser” is clear indication that Al Qaeda just does not “get” that appearance is as much about ethos as words.²⁷ Though Gadahn’s proclamations will garner some interest in the 24-hour news cycle it is more due to novelty than of substance as his message will resonate or push a button of a few on the fringe. Al Qaeda is learning as Goebbels had in World War II that Americans, indoctrinated with their own cultural myths²⁸, have proven singularly unimpressed by big talk²⁹ by “small potatoes.”

According to a Radio Liberty report of March 2008, “Al Qaeda represents a mere fraction of total jihadist media production, its main MPDE (marketing, production, distribution entity) Al Sahab, is a relative minor player”³⁰ and this might account for why Gadahn’s video had the look and feel of a very cheap, community access cable show taped with a camcorder in someone’s basement. If Al Qaeda hopes to appeal to “Generation Xers” (and subsequent generations) they need to step up their production quality because currently their videos look like the proverbial amateur hour, while their propaganda is totally obvious and “propaganda that looks like propaganda is third-rate propaganda.”³¹ His message is likely not to inspire or motivated anyone other than those who already hold such views. And again, there is a huge difference to someone joining the “Allah Akbar” Jihadi chorus to actually volunteering to become cannon fodder because Gadahn thinks it’s such a great idea.

Countering the Message

Adam Gadahn is benefiting from the path blazed decades earlier by Marxists in the West who have perpetuated a culture of self-loathing fueled by post-modernism and multiculturalism which has suppressed the rational analysis of Islamism as being an ideology that promotes religious and gender apartheid. Inevitably, as Goya pointed out, “The Sleep of Reason brings forth Monsters”

²⁷ Choosing clothing that has no cultural connection to main line Americans other than being “odd” and foreign is an example of this lack of understanding. Or the implication of the Al Qaeda/Al Sabah coffee mug is a potential sign, though subtle, that they lack cultural confidence because they ape the small frivolous furnishings of their avowed enemy.

²⁸ Typical American myths are of self-reliance, rugged individualism, never backing down from a threat, freedom to decide their destiny, politics and religion are a matter of personal choice not of threats.

²⁹ Even a cursory check of www.youtube.com shows that his videos are virtual unknowns. For example his most famous video of 2007 was only viewed 7,530 times (as of April 20, 2008) which was steamrolled by a spoof of the same video [“American traitor and al Qaeda mouthpiece Adam Gadahn melts down on camera while shooting his latest vlog.” Hosted at www.spike.com/video/adam-gadahns/2860739] or “American Al Qaeda Sings” (<http://es.youtube.com/watch?v=1EvrE1xF8LQ&NR=1>) which has been viewed 14,700 (as of April 20, 2008).

³⁰ Kimmage, Daniel. “The Al Qaeda Media Nexus,” *Radio Free Europe*, March 2008, p.21.

³¹ Rhodes, Anthony and Victor Margolin. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion: World War II*, (Secaucus: Wellfleet Press, 1987) p. 119.

and the most hideous of those monsters is the spread of Al Qaeda's ideology which relies on the techniques of demonization, oversimplification, symbolic transfer, and appeal to fear. To counter Al Qaeda's message the U.S. must be as prone to avoiding pitting Islam against Christianity or Judaism because arguing religion is a lost cause and plays into the hands of Al Qaeda. Instead the focus should be how Al Qaeda is at war with most Muslims.

For all the self-righteous posturing and claims to moral and divine justification used by Al Qaeda, Gadahn wisely neglects to mention that Al Qaeda's enemies are not just the U.S. or Israel, but rather the entire world. Al Qaeda does not only find it justifiable to wage war against Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Zoroastrians, or any other religion, but to wage war against their fellow Muslims – Shi'as, Druze, and any Sunni that does not tow the Al Qaeda line. Attempting to downplay the aggressive nature of Al Qaeda's interpretation of the Koran, from which they derive their core legitimacy, are those who try to assign the causes of terrorism based upon their own social biases, which results in feminists blaming "patriarchy", Socialists blaming "capitalism" or "poverty", while anti-Americans will just blame "America" for all. These are obviously grounded more in ideology and are not honest evaluations.³² Such advocates would rather continue grinding an axe against men, the wealthy, America or whoever it is they hate than have to deal with an issue that they have no control over. And contrary to the claims made by Al Qaeda that if America were to abandon its foreign policy and presence in the Middle East they in turn would end their Jihad are false because Al Qaeda's Jihad proceeds from reasons inside Islam, and not as a reaction to outside forces. Various outside factors are used as a pretext for recruitment and rationales to explain and justify killing and to force their enemies in the West to focus on the West's greatest weakness – doubt. Doubt in her own institutions and right to exist.

Discredit the Messengers to Discredit the Message

Gadahn's style of rhetoric and reasoning are not particularly well formulated and are little more than the statements of a sophomoric self-styled religious scholar whose reasoning is very specious and whose ideas are unsound in their theology and politics and could be picked apart without employing anything in the way of nuanced denominational apologetics. His delivery is authoritative and his demeanor confident with just a hint of moral indignation. But it's all silly because he (and Osama bin Laden) lack the moral authority and legitimacy to command any Muslim to do anything militarily or religiously because they lack Muslim scholar credentials – they are not theologians, or even graduates of any one of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence.³³ Furthermore, the Koran is a complex document and it is doubtful that a young,

³² A review of various protests held by various "progressive" and "peace" movements, which can be found at <http://www.zombietime.com> perhaps, best illustrates this point.

³³ The four schools of *fiqh*, or religious law, within Sunni Islam are as follows:

Shafi'i Madhab - This school is named after its founder, Imām ash-Shafi', and obeys four primary sources of jurisprudence, the Koran, Sunnah, Ijma (consensus, essentially past rulings) and Qiyas (analogy).

Maliki Madhab: Is mostly followed in North and Western Africa, and differs from the three other schools of law mainly in the sources it uses for rulings because it uses a fifth source, the practice of the people of Medina, Saudi Arabia. Hanbali Madhab: This school of jurisprudence is predominant among Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula, started by the students of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal in the 9th Century.

Hanafi Madhab: This is the oldest of the four schools of jurisprudence and is generally regarded as the most liberal as it puts the most emphasis on human reason. The Hanafi school also has the most followers among the four major Sunni schools, and is predominant among the Sunnis of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the most of the Indian subcontinent, China, Southeast Asia, Iraq, Turkey, Albania, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

foreign speaking convert could have learned the intricacies of a book whose obscure texts and deeper meanings of many words and whole passages still, after all of these centuries, elude true Koranic scholars.

For Al Qaeda to claim that they have answered the multitude of theological questions within the Sunni community, let alone their authority to impose their interpretation of Sharia law on behalf of the global Muslim community is equally farcical because Sharia law is not a specified and permanent legal code, but rather a system of how mankind should adapt and behave to appease their God. This system is based on local interpretation of the Koran, Hadith, Ijma (consensus), Qiyas (reasoning by analogy) and precedents set by earlier generations within each particular Muslim nation, and not on the whim of a single Saudi Arabian.

Another route of critique is of Al Qaeda's consistent harping of sexual rewards in the afterlife as an inducement for disillusioned or disenfranchised youth to join the "righteous" cause of returning to the purity of the religion and fighting against the forces of vice. However, for an ideology that sees itself as the vanguard of morality and piety they are obsessed with sex as a recruiting tool. The concept of the martyr's paradise is the stuff of an adolescent boy's sexual fantasy and not what one would expect from those boasting of their hyper-morality.³⁴

If the U.S. government decided to specifically address Adam Gadahn than it would end up doing as media consultant Mr. Chuck DeCarro said was what Al Qaeda desires, granting the official confirmation that Gadahn and his utterances the global prestige and elevating him to the level of a world leader. The fact that this is already done on the behalf of Osama bin Laden is egregious enough, but to do the same for a low level "cheerleader" is beyond unconscionable. Let Gadahn (and those like him) remain in obscurity, though monitored, and leave it to those in the private sector to discredit them, mostly through ridicule. Depicting Al Qaeda members as terrorist masterminds or "shadow warriors" only fuels their egos, their mystique and recruitment appeal. Instead they should be depicted as clowns, as violent adolescents acting out or as lecherous pederasts as indicated by the Taliban's infamous "rule 19" which instructs that Taliban fighters must not take young boys "without facial hair" into their homes.³⁵

³⁴ Chapter 56 verses 12- 39 of the Koran: "They shall recline on jeweled couches face to face, and there shall wait on them immortal youths with bowls and ewers and a cup of purest wine (that will neither pain their heads nor take away their reason); with fruits of their own choice and flesh of fowls that they relish. And theirs shall be the dark-eyed *houris*, chaste as hidden pearls: a guerdon for their deeds... We created the *houris* and made them virgins, loving companions for those on the right hand..." It is common that in Arabic the plural word *Abkarun* means virgins, though some Muslims claim that it is a mistranslation, and instead of virgins they are angels. Surah 55 verses 72-74, Dawood translates the Arabic word "*hur*" as "virgins", and the context is that virgin is the appropriate translation: "Dark-eyed virgins sheltered in their tents (which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?) whom neither man nor jinn will have touched before." The word *hur* occurs four times in the Koran and is usually translated as a "maiden with dark eyes". There is some debate about the number and who is eligible for these virgins, but in the Islamic Traditions that we find the seventy-two virgins in heaven specified: in a Hadith collected by Al-Tirmidhi (circa. 890) in the *Book of Sunan* (volume IV, chapters on The Features of Paradise, chapter 21, About the Smallest Reward for the People of Paradise, (Hadith 2687). This is also quoted by Ibn Kathir (circa. 1370) in his Koranic commentary (Tafsir) of Surah Al-Rahman (55), verse 72: "The Prophet Muhammad was heard saying: 'The smallest reward for the people of paradise is an abode where there are 80,000 servants and seventy-two wives, over which stands a dome decorated.'"

³⁵ Straziuso, Jason. "30 Rules of the Taliban Proclaimed." *The Boston Globe*, December 10, 2006.

To effectively discredit the messenger focus on the stable of Jihadi propaganda – the all-encompassing belief in international plots. Or, in other words, conspiracy, and is key to understanding the politics and the propaganda of the Middle East and needs to be harnessed.³⁶ Merely suggesting that Gadahn is part of the Zionist conspiracy and a Mossad/CIA agent whose purpose is to corrupt “true” Jihadi warriors would limit his already miniscule influence.³⁷ Encouragement via a whisper campaign that Gadahn is part of the “Zionist conspiracy” allows the maximum use of Jihadi paranoia and Arabic xenophobia with minimum effort. Al Qaeda then will have to spend time answering why should an American convert give commands to Arabs to fight and die? Why isn't he, Gadahn, fighting the Crusader-Zionist forces? Why does he have a cushy job while Arabs and “true” Muslims are the ones sent off to do the fighting? The more time Al Qaeda spends justifying their bona fides means less time they can concentrate on propaganda and recruitment.

So What

A person such as Gadahn is unable to fulfill the purpose of their masters because he is such an uninspiring person. His mere presence does more to defeat Al Qaeda's message than bolster it because his attempts at persuasion are clumsy and unsophisticated. And when coupled with an utter lack of telegenics means that Al Qaeda's message is instantly discredited because of the messenger they have chosen to transmit it has no credibility with the larger market.

The status of Gadahn³⁸ is unimportant in the larger scheme because he is unimportant. This lack of concern of where he is or even his status even amongst blog sites further highlights his

³⁶ “...Whoever hopes to understand the Middle East must recognize the distorting lens of conspiracy theories, understand them, make allowance for them, and perhaps even plan around them. Conspiracism [the belief in international plots or conspiracies] provides a key to understanding the political culture of the Middle East.” As Pipes in his brilliant work says, “although grand conspiracy theories surfaced in the Middle East only in the late nineteenth century, their subject matter ranges much farther; indeed it often extends right back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. More broadly, conspiracy theorists reinterpret the whole sweep of Islamic history, plundering medieval texts to locate instances of conspiracy, especially on the part of Christians and Jews.” Pipes, Daniel. *The Hidden Hand: The Middle East Fears of Conspiracy*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998).

³⁷ This is small sample of paranoid responses one can find at www.youtube.com regarding Adam Gadahn.

http://es.youtube.com/watch?v=THQov_mvVYU (accessed April 24, 2008).

“Osama bin Laden, Adam Gadan and Al Qaeda all working for the CIA, Each happening is a big lie al-Qaeda brings American army to the Middle East, Adam Gadan Working for CIA and his mission to distort the image of Islam and creating an atmosphere of hostility against Islam and the Arabs, these lies become exposed now.” - Panoramapedsi

“Adam Gadahn is none other than Adam Pearlman, the grandson of former Anti-Defamation League Board member. Pearlman used to write Neo-Zionist articles which used to bash Islam and Muslims. He even beat-up some Muslims in a Mosque. He is a Mossad, CIA, or some type of agent. A fake Muslim out to deceive the ignorant.” - salafiboy
“This kid looks like a CIA propaganda agent. I don't know if I trust the legitimacy of this man's claims. It's just not consistent with what Osama Bin Laden has said in the videos they've released. How are they both working for the same organization of international terrorists.” - WarCrime911

“Gadahn is a joke. He can't possibly be real. His looks like some high schooler with a camcorder searing old sheets and letting his hyperactive imagination. No one really things he's for real, do they?” - bruin03

³⁸ As of early October 2008 he appears to be alive and is shown in an Al Qaeda video in which Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Mustafa Abu al-Yazid threaten the Pakistani ISI, military and government. The fact that Gadahn is the only one of the persons speaking on the video that is not accompanied with a graphic showing his name or the

diminished status and potential (if any) legacy. He is just a narcissist that was able to find a vehicle that would promote and feed his insatiable appetite for notoriety and ego gratification. He had failed at all other endeavors to become famous and popular through heavy-metal music, a writer and commentator of such music. But in Islam, particularly a very violent and twisted form of this religion he found something that would allow him to pursue his own selfish agenda. His mentors were more than willing to allow this convert to indulge in his juvenile fantasies of being an “inter-national terrorist” because they felt that Gadahn would be able to assist in their propaganda efforts. They assumed wrong, because Gadahn is not promoting Islam or even protecting it from any sort of imagined attack – rather he is simply promoting himself and his sad little fantasy world, and is more than happy to stand on the corpses of his “mujahedeen brothers” if it can buy a few more seconds of the limelight.

In the End

Adam Gadahn is an uneducated misfit who will never produce anything in the way of learned, profound or controversial theology, and for all the references he makes to the Bible he would have been best served to have read Proverbs 13:3.³⁹ He'll never sit at a negotiation table. He lacks connections to money, power and doesn't exude charisma or anything that suggests leadership material. The fact that of all the main foreign fighters in Al Qaeda, Gadahn is the only one that has not been given a “combatant” role indicates that for all his bluster Al Qaeda does not consider him a leader, a warrior, or even worthy to be a martyr of their cause. Eventually his novelty will wear off and will be seen by Al Qaeda as more of a public relations liability than an asset, and when that time comes, he will be quietly “retired” in some dingy apartment in Karachi. Or even better, Al Qaeda will parse him over to a third country such as Pakistan or Afghanistan for some future concession.

Major Matthew Orris, U.S. Army, is assigned to USASOC at Fort Bragg, NC. He received a MS from the National Defense Intelligence College. He has served in various command and staff positions in both conventional and Special Forces units in the continental United States, Germany, Kosovo, Colombia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

message “May Allah preserve him” only reinforces the notion that Gadahn is unimportant and is only used for “shock” value.

³⁹ “He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.” Proverbs 13:3, *The Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments*, American Bible Society (New York: ABS, 1946) p. 556.

[SWJ Magazine](#) and [Small Wars Journal](#) are published by Small Wars Journal LLC.

COPYRIGHT © 2008 by Small Wars Journal LLC.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use.
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – Non-Commercial –
Share Alike 3.0 [License](#) per our [Terms of Use](#). We are in this together.

No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on
your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.

Contact: comment@smallwarsjournal.com

Visit www.smallwarsjournal.com

Cover Price: Your call. [Support SWJ here.](#)