

# UNDERSTANDING

# THE ENEMY

## EDITOR'S NOTE

*This article is based upon a lecture made to the students and cadre of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. The views herein expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Department of Defense or any other U.S. government agency.*

BY DR. SEBASTIAN L. GORKA

The four key points of my article are simple: First, if you want to understand the enemy, read what they say.

Second, we must understand al-Qaeda, not as something that was created by Osama bin Laden simply on the foundations of the Arab mujahedeen movement. Rather, it is the product of decades of ideological evolution that started with the Muslim Brotherhood. You could even argue that it is, in fact, the product of centuries

I am afraid of al-Qaeda's *soft jihadi* colleagues, those who will not use violence — organizations such as The Muslim Brotherhood — that use legal tools, economic tools and lawfare as a weapon to undermine our constitutional order. That is by far the more difficult threat for us to deal with because our national-security establishment does not date back to the founding of Islam by Mohammed.

*Jahiliyyah* simply means a state of pagan dis-

## “If you want to understand the

of ideological and conceptual distillation, going back 1,000 years, to ideologues such as Ibn Taymiyyah. But this discussion will focus on 20th-century developments. The point is that you must be able to place al-Qaeda in the context of that larger ideological flow.

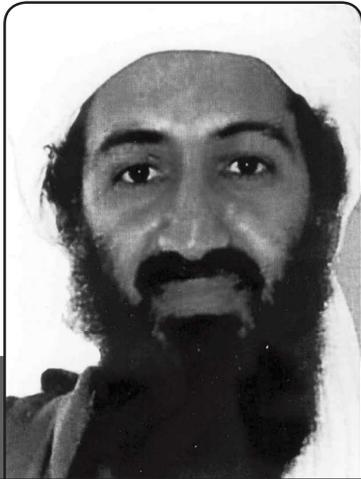
Third, and this is hard for the special operations community and for people who like the lethal stuff — hunting people down, chasing high-value targets — we must stop obsessing over violent jihad, which is al-Qaeda's lethal form of warfare. I have built my career on studying this foe, on understanding and explaining it.

Finally, AQ does not keep me awake at night any longer. I am not afraid of another 9/11.

belief. The term was originally used to describe the tribes living around Mecca that worshipped many gods. Mohammed's mission was to remove *Jahiliyyah*, the lack of knowledge of the oneness of God, from the Arabian peninsula.

Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, took the ancient concept of *Jahiliyyah* and redefined it noting, “Today, 20th Century Islam suffers from *Jahiliyyah*, from confusion, from not understanding the oneness of Allah — that he is supreme — and it is the job of true Muslims to remove that state of pagan ignorance from not only the Middle East but the whole world.” Why?

Because for Qutb, it is not simply a question of unfaithful Arab leaders in the Middle East but also a



**MINDSET** Former al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden (left) and current al-Qaeda leader, Ayman Al-Zawahiri (center). FBI photos. Sayyid Qutb (right) an Egyptian writer and educator whose writings are the theoretical basis for many radical Islamic groups of today. Library of Congress photo.

question of the West culturally and politically invading the Middle East, putting what he saw as puppets onto the thrones of Arab nations. What Islam needs, according to Qutb, is an enlightened vanguard. This is interesting, because he clearly took concepts such as the vanguard from communist ideology. It is that ironic absorption of Western concepts — that otherwise would be deemed heretical and anathema — into the jihadists' new religiously-framed ideology, that makes Islamism a *hybrid totalitarianism*.

*Muslim Lands*, which was approved by the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia. His key ideas include the mythical theme of failure and rebirth in Islam. Failure happens in Islam because Muslims have lost their way. Muslims have strayed from the path of true Islam, and Allah's recompense is that they will be unsuccessful as long as they remain untrue, according to Azzam. In order to be powerful again, they must return to the true path; they must return to the essence of Islam.

## enemy, read what they say.”

Concepts key to Qutb's dozens of books include the idea of global social justice being possible only through Islam. The books suggest Islam's mission is to free all men from the tyranny of other men. It is a global and universal mission. What does that mean? It means that humankind must be “liberated” from political systems run by human beings and from laws created by human beings.

In other words, Qutb believes human kind must be liberated from systems such as our own here in the United States, with its man-made laws. Democracy is run, as Abraham Lincoln told us, “by the people, for the people.” Democracy therefore cannot be *sharia*-compliant.

Dr. Abdullah Zaam took Qutb's ideas further in his monograph-length fatwa: *The Defense of*

In *The Defense of Muslim Lands*, Azzam defines jihad as a devotional act that is obligatory. That is the last and most important aspect of Azzam's work. Azzam says jihad does not have to be declared by a *caliph*, or head of state to give the faithful permission to fight the enemy. Azzam goes even further to say that jihad is an individual obligation. Azzam added that it is not necessary to ask your father or your husband. Waging jihad is a right and a necessity.

You do not need clerical approval; you do not need a leader to say, “Now I declare holy war.” You must do it even if you are a slave and your master forbids it.

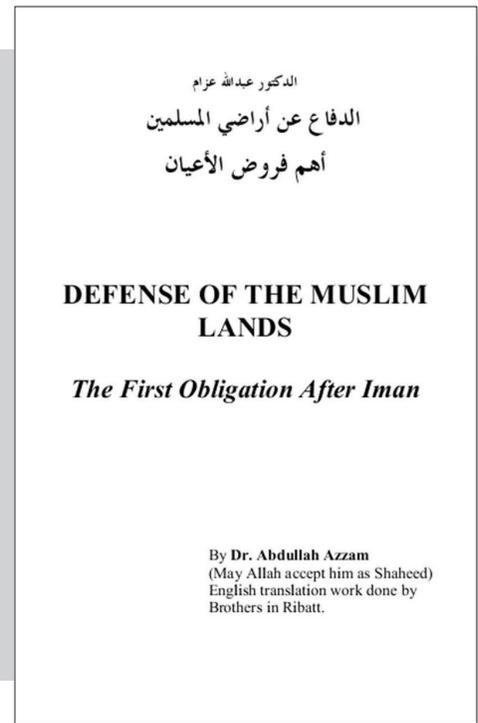
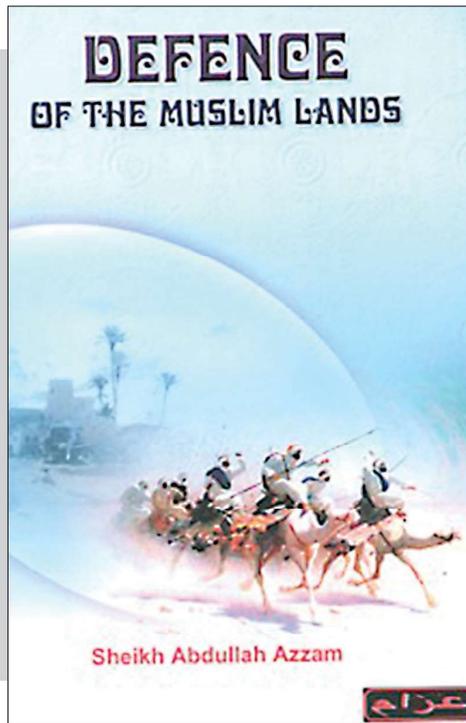
You must do it if you are poor or if you are rich. It is a universal and individual obligation.

BOOKS IN THIS ARTICLE

» *Defense of the Muslim Lands* by Sheikh Abdullah Azzam. Original publication shown left, English translation shown center-left. English translation by Brothers in Ribatt. A PDF version of the translation is available for download at various websites online. *Editor's note: Always use caution when downloading material off the internet, be sure to check website for authenticity and safety.*

» *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* by Ayman al-Zawahiri; English translation by Laura Mansfield, shown on center-right, Published by LULU, July 17, 2006, 362 pages. ISBN-10: 1847288804. Used books are available online from various sellers.

» *The Quranic Concept of War* by Brigadier S.K. Malik; 1979 version shown on far right, republished in 1986 by Himalayan Books. ISBN-10: 8170020204. Used books are available online from various sellers.



**Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner***

The most well-known jihadist thinker among the ones we are discussing is the head of al-Qaeda — Ayman al-Zawahiri, whose formative years in Egypt were shaped by the Muslim Brotherhood's fight against the secularist Egyptian system, against leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser. In the book, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, which is less of a fatwa and more of a memoir, Al-Zawahiri explains that it does not matter how one becomes radicalized or how one was influenced. He goes on to add that whether an individual is living comfortably in London, Berlin or Minnesota — as a Muslim, he is responsible to conduct jihad. Without a caliphate or Muslim super-state, there cannot be victory. At the end of his book, al-Zawahiri states, "In our means, methods and resources we must combine patience with infliction of mass casualties and the best method to do this is suicide attacks" ... "This confrontation with Islam's enemies must be to the last drop of blood."

**Brigadier S.K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War***

We now move from the most famous jihadi thinker to a person most people have never heard of: S.K. Malik, a general officer in the Pakistani

Army, wrote a very important book, *The Quranic Concept of War*.

Let me summarize why this man's importance to anyone fighting al-Qaeda. Imagine walking into a bookstore and seeing a book written by a U.S. general with a foreword by a member of the Supreme Court of the United States and the preface by none other than President Obama. It's probably an important book, correct? Well, that is *The Quranic Concept of War*. It was written by a serving general, with a foreword by the advocate general of Pakistan and a preface by none other than General Zia Haq, who was not only the commander of the Pakistani army but also Pakistan's president from 1977 to 1988. You may not have heard of Malik, but just think about the people who endorsed his book: a person who represents supreme justice in Pakistan and the individual who is the head of state and supreme commander. So it is an important book. The preface by the advocate general is 13 pages long and is almost as important as the rest of the book. Let us look at some of the concepts in the preface and the concepts of Gen. Malik.

This is the only modern book authored by a Muslim that deals with war at the strategic level and combines military theory with divine theological explanation. This is not von Clausewitz.

## His Own Words

A Translation of the Writings  
of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri



by Laura Mansfield

## The Quranic Concept of War



Brigadier S. K. MALIK

1979

WAJIDALIS LAHORE PAKISTAN

This is not the “art of war” in any Western sense. It is non-Western and very Sun Tzu. He observes that peace is simply the preparation for war and is vastly more important than the activity of fighting. What you do in peacetime to prepare is more important than the lethal, violent actions of shooting people and blowing things up.

For Gen. Malik, his patrons and his acolytes, jihad is clearly a holy war for both sides of the engagement. When jihadist say they are fighting a holy war, the conventional wisdom in the West is just to say that is their distortion. But if our enemy is aiming at our faith system, if they are aiming at our souls, it is a de facto a holy war on our side, as well, because our faith is what the enemy has chosen to destroy.

### Conclusion

What are we to conclude from all of this? Why are these four jihadi strategists so important? Here is the take home: *Al-Qaeda is just a small part of a much larger and older movement.*

That movement has a plan to destroy our system using *all* means from the list given by Malik, not just violence. That includes political and economic warfare and very sophisticated and fast information operations. The conflict that we are in now is potentially more deadly and more danger-

ous than the Cold War. Not only is the enemy totalitarian, he is not a secular, godless totalitarian like Hitler or Stalin, because this totalitarian ideology believes it has god on its side.

The sad truth is that we seem to be going backward. Take just these three quotes from the 9/11 Commission report published more than seven years ago:

*Our enemy “is sophisticated, patient, disciplined and lethal.”*

*“[T]he institutions charged with protecting our national security did not understand how grave this threat could be, and did not adjust their policies, plans and practices to deter or defeat it.”*

*“In short, the United States has to help defeat an ideology, not just a group of people.” SW*

### Notes

1. For more details, see the author’s testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Sub-Committee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, 22 June 2011, concerning the first 10 years of the war on terror and the way ahead, at [www.cengnet/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=:item&id=483:ten-years-on-theevolution-of-the-terrorist-threat&Itemid=150](http://www.cengnet/index.php?option=com_k2&view=:item&id=483:ten-years-on-theevolution-of-the-terrorist-threat&Itemid=150) (The video of the hearing is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfmN86S1QKY>).