

# **Ayman al-Zawahiri, A Mythic Figure or Fringe Leader within the Islamist Political Movement: Highlighting the 2006 Writings of Egyptian Journalist Gamal Abdal-Rahim**

by

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Ayman al-Zawahiri, the name has been forever linked to al-Qaida and the malady of Islamist militancy. Even today it is debatable whether Zawahiri is Usama Bin Ladin's deputy or the roles are reversed. Zawahiri's legacy has taken on mythic proportions, some of which he has sought to create as he would evolve from an unsure and shy teenager, to a man who puts on the appearance of clerical certainty in his many videos and speeches released to the media. To understand this avowed adversary of the United States it is useful to delve occasionally into Egyptian and Arabic sources, which provide depth in understanding this enemy. Egyptian investigative journalist Gamal Abdal-Rahim has written over five Arabic books on the Islamist militant movement to include a biography of former al-Qaida in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. His books are what is being read by Arab counter-terrorism specialists and should be highlighted to American military readers. Abdal-Rahim's 2006 book is a 301-page biography of Ayman al-Zawahiri and what makes the work interesting is its look into Egyptian court records that feature Zawahiri or mention him during the tribunal proceedings. It deconstructs the al-Qaida ideologue and weaves together a portrait of not only Zawahiri but the personalities and associates that have shaped his evolution to being among the most wanted men in the world. More importantly, by delving into the mind of Zawahiri, his theories and worldview, we can begin the process of discrediting his ideology using Islamic counter-argument, and market his ideas as pseudo-intellectual and narrow. This can be accomplished by demystifying the man. This review essay will not cover the entire biography of Zawahiri, as there is much written about this man in the English language recommended are Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower*, and Montassir al-Zayat's *Road to al-Qaida, the story of al-Qaida's Right Hand Man*. This review essay will highlight portions of Abdal-Rahim's work not usually found in English language sources.

## **Zawahiri's Marital Life**

Zawahiri first wife was killed in an airstrike during Operation Enduring Freedom, her short biography is featured and creates a multitude of questions in the drive to understanding Zawahiri. His late wife was Azza Anwar Nuwair, a graduate of Cairo University in 1977, where she earned a B.A. in Philosophy. One has to wonder if her studies in philosophy influenced Zawahiri, or whether her delving into different philosophers was just merely an exercise in touting the superiority of Islamist radical thought? She was the daughter of an attorney who specialized in business law. Azza's mother Nabila Othman Jalal, worked as mid-level inspector

at the Ministry of Social Welfare. It is in University that Azza became obsessed with religious orthodoxy and began to wear the *hejab* (the encompassing head covering), she was student from 1973 to 1977, a time that saw the rise of Islamist radical groups in Egyptian university campuses, who were tolerated by Sadat as a counterweight to leftists and Nasserists determined to overthrow the Egyptian leader.

Azza and Zawahiri have five children the last one Khadijah, he had before his departure to Afghanistan in 1986. When Egyptian question Zawahiri's relatives living in Egypt, they portray a different mythology, a genius who could have been a millionaire and went to heal the Afghans and evolved into a defender of Islam. This is the view held by his maternal uncle. Of note, is that Zawahiri apparently remarried in September 2002 the widow of al-Qaida operative Tariq Anwar Saeed Ahmed, who was killed in an airstrike in November 2001. It is unclear, but it seems Zawahiri practices polygamy and typically marries women who were previously married or who are relatives of jihadists condemned to death. The book highlights Umayyah Ahmed Hassan, whose brother Sherief was condemned to death in the case known as the Returnees from Afghanistan. Another of Zawahiri's wives is Umm Abdel-Rahman who was the widow of Ahmed Najar, who was executed in 2000 after being tried in the case known as Returnees from Albania.

### **Zawahiri's Islamist Militant Psychosis**

Psychosis is defined as a mental state involving a loss of contact with reality. However, Zawahiri can arguably be classified as a rational psychotic, whose ideas were formulated over decades and whose rational delusions are still evolving. To deconstruct his psychosis, it is important to examine his evolution from upper middle class medical student, successful doctor to a man who has chosen the life of caves and extremism. The trial and execution of Sayyid Qutb was a pivotal event in the formation of Zawahiri's intellectual development and framed his political thought. He read Qutb in the ninth grade and was influenced by his two works "In the Shade of the Quran," and "Milestones Along the Road." His first analytical attempt at understanding the *Quran* (the Islamic book of divine revelation) came through Qutb and has shaped his views ever since. This is unfortunate as one can spend a lifetime studying the diverse commentaries on the Quran, and typically learned clerics delve into various and competing interpretations found in Islam's fourteen century history. Zawahiri was obsessed with Qutb's view on *tawheed* (monotheism) which not only defined the struggle between Muslims and non-Muslims, but was an ideological struggle as to who possesses sovereignty, God or man? It is the *shariah* (Islamic Law) or the man-made laws of secularism, materialism, communism, democracy, there is no middle road. In essence, Zawahiri's argument is a self-defeating struggle of the creator versus the created and who will reign supreme?

Zawahiri began exploring these ideas at a unique moment in Middle Eastern history, Qutb's ideas and execution would have gone unnoticed, were it not for the 1967 Six-Day War that discredited Arab nationalism and Nasserism. This led to an upsurge in a movement to a return to Islam in order to explain the utter humiliation of five Arab armies. Cairo and major Egyptian cities saw political demonstration and college campuses saw mass demonstrations. This was a perfect environment for the establishment of clandestine cells which germinated under the last three years of Gamal Abdel-Nasser. When Nasser died in September 1970, another crisis emerged that favored Islamist radicals was the initial political weakness of Anwar Sadat. Named vice-president in 1968, Sadat was considered a political non-entity, many underestimated him and initially he was considered a temporary place-holder until a more powerful member of the Revolutionary Command Council took over. The author highlights Sadat's efforts to counter Nasserists, pan-Arabists and leftists was to grant amnesty to the Muslim Brotherhood. Thousands who were jailed by Nasser were released to counter leftists and Nasserists on the street. Sadat released members of the Muslim Brotherhood in two phases in 1971 and again in 1975. Upon this mass release, the Muslim Brotherhood immediately established a presence in university campuses, and tactically looked to dominate the student unions of universities in Cairo, Alexandria, and Assuit. Every college had an Emir (leader), who met weekly with his membership. Once the university student unions were on their way towards being organized, the released Muslim Brotherhood members set about organizing and galvanizing unions and guilds. Initially they published anti-Nasserist pamphlets and booklets like *Sawt al-Haq* (Voice of the Truth) and *Gamaa al-Islamiyah* (this name meaning the Islamic Group was initially used for journal before it became a violent Islamist militant movement on campus).

### **Islamist Militant Groups Congeal in Egyptian Campuses**

In this climate, starting in 1967, and with Sadat's release of Muslim Brotherhood members, several virile Islamist militant groups emerged:

- **Saleh Sirriyah Group:** A Palestinian who stimulated the Military Technical College incident. This incident occurred in 1975, and involved cadets in the Military Technical College attempting a failed military coup.
- **Zawahiri's Group:** Established in 1967, and initially led by Ismail Tantawi, its membership increased in 1975, the year Zawahiri took day to day charge of the group. This included Essam al-Qamari, Imam al-Sherief, and Abdul-Hakeem Sharqawi. They favored a rapid and swift military coup but favored a long-term program of cultivating cells within the officer corps and military units. These units would then provide access to armories.

- Saeed (Southern Egypt) Group: The largest group as far as membership, included students from Asuit, al-Minia, Souhaj, Qina, Aswan. They disagreed with the Muslim Brotherhood approach of working with the Egyptian government. They took the name Gamaa al-Islamiyah (The Islamic Group), which was the name of the anti-Nasserist magazine published by the Muslim Brotherhood soon after their release from Nasser's jails by Sadat. It was led by Karam Zohdy and they wanted forced enforcement of Islamic law and the prevention of vice as a means of block by block social control of Egyptian cities and villages. They attempted a populist approach of organizing demonstration and converted criticism of Nasser and directed towards Sadat. This group would be active in agitating against Sadat's decision to grant asylum to the Shah of Iran, and Sadat's overtures towards Israel that led to the Camp David Accords. Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, the blind cleric, would be the spiritual leader of this group.
- Salem Rahal Group: A Palestinian, Salem Rahal, attempted to re-establish a group around those who were released from prison and were implicated in the Military Technical College. This group would not have been noticed were it not for one of its members Mohammed Abdel-Salam Faraj who would be the main ideologue of the group. Faraj would propose the Far Enemy and Near Enemy dialectic, written in his booklet, "The Missing Obligation." In 1979, Rahal was arrested and detained for three months in Cairo's Citadel Prison and was deported to Jordan. Faraj was also arrested.
- *Takfir wal Hijrah* (Condemn and Excommunicate): Created in prisons in 1969 and became active upon the release of its leader Shukri Mustafa in 1971. By 1977, it claimed over 1,000 released Islamist radical prisoners. This was the most potent group, and in 1977 Shukri Mustafa was executed for his murder of Islamic cleric Sheikh al-Dahabi, the former Minister of Religious Endowments.
- Cairo/Bahriah Group: Muhammad Abdel-Salam Faraj reconstituted this group from the remnants of Salem Rahal's group. Upon his release from prison, he graduated from engineering school and took a job on campus. He married a woman whose brother was active in jihadist cadres. This group attracted Abood and Tarek al-Zummar.

### **1979: Islamist Militant Groups Unify and Attempt Direct Action**

The Camp David Peace Accords with Israel and the asylum of the Shah of Iran galvanized these groups and mosques began attacking the Sadat regime. The climate in 1979, led to the first attempts to coalesce these groups into a larger movement. Abdel-Salam Faraj's group and Zohdy's Cairo Group merged into *Tanzeem al-Jihad* (The Jihad Group). These groups ran clandestine military training camps in caves, hills and desert areas throughout Egypt. This merger all drew momentum towards the 1981 Sadat assassination. The year 1981 saw these

merged and radicalized groups shift towards action and although the assassination of Sadat in October 1981 overshadows events to include:

- The Zawiyah al-Hamra incident, in which Coptic Christians and Islamists fought raging battles in Upper Egypt under the sanction of the blind cleric Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman.
- The September Mass-Detentions, here Sadat's security apparatus rounded up 1,556 Islamists and political agitators. The book breaks them down as:

469	Takfir al-Hijrah
330	Gamaa al-Islamiyah
100	Muslim Brotherhood
259	Islamist inciters' against Coptic Christians
107	Coptic leaders and enforcers
57	Directly involved in the Zawiyah al-Hamra incident
12	Egyptian Communists and so-called Soviet agents

It is important to view the formation of these radical cells, the release of Islamist militants under Sadat, the merger of these cells, all leading to the culminating act of the killing of Sadat. This is now most Egyptian counter-terrorism professionals view this, as the Sadat Assassination Trials reconstructed the events leading to what many in the country call *haadith al-manasah* (the reviewing stand incident), a way of referring to Sadat's assassination, as he was killed in his reviewing stand while viewing a military parade. When jihadist groups coalesced in 1979, there would evolve strategic, methodological and ideological differences, beginning with the tactics of the Sadat assassination. Zawahiri and Essam al-Qamari disagreed on the Southern Egyptian network assaulting government buildings after the Sadat assassination. They argued it was impromptu, unplanned, uncoordinated and caused great losses in Tanzeem personnel. Zawahiri also argued that the blind cleric Omar Abdel-Rahman should not be leader of the unified Tanzeem, the Cairo faction wanted the charismatic Abood al-Zummar because of his leadership experience as a field grade military intelligence officer. Karam Zohdy and Najeh Ibrahim opposed this debate between a cleric or military man leading, because the blind cleric is a graduate of al-Azhar the matter was not subject to debate. The two sides could never reconcile and Tanzeem al-Jihad splintered into a violent minority led by al-Zummar. These details offered in the book provides information that jihadist groups do disagree and are not monolithic and tracing these differences offers opportunities for counter-terrorism specialists.

### **Aftermath of the Sadat Assassination**

Zawahiri, according to investigators, knew about the Sadat assassination at nine that morning of October 6, 1981, but was unsure whether to take the report seriously and he likely treated it as a rumor. No doubt he may have heard planning for the event, but treated it as fantasy, at the time Zawahiri preferred to cultivate cells in the armed forces and engage in a planned military coup, mirroring the 1952 Revolution that toppled the Egyptian monarchy. In addition, the planning for Sadat's murder was hastily conceived, as the assassin 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Khalid Islambooli, only learned that he would be part of the October 6<sup>th</sup> military parade on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, when he was ordered to take part in the rehearsal. This left the conspirators a little over one week to plot the assassination and a general uprising. The book discusses the psychology of Sadat's assassin, and although he was part of a clandestine Islamist militant cell, and hated Sadat's policies, it was the detention of his older brother Muhammad Islambooli that drove him to seize the opportunity to undertake the assassination. Zawahiri was arrested because of his association with Abood al-Zummar, and was assigned as defendant 113 (the number indicates his association with the main conspirators and assassins) and given a three year sentence for possession of weapons without a license. The Sadat trials were divided into two:

- 24 comprising the assassins and conspirators, led by Lieutenant Islambooli. Five were executed, two by firing squad (the officers) and three were hanged (the enlisted) on April 15, 1982.
- 178 who were ideologically linked to Tanzeem al-Jihad and sanctioned the action, they were led by Mohammed Shawki Islambooli (older brother of the assassin) and Zawahiri.

Zawahiri upon serving his three year sentence departed Egypt in 1985, joining his younger brother Muhammad, who was in Saudi Arabia since 1976 and was part of the exiled elements of jihadists and Islamists who were granted asylum from Nasser's purges. A few of those released in Sadat's amnesties, departed for Saudi Arabia, and among those who completed light sentences like Zawahiri after the Sadat assassination departed for Saudi Arabia as well.

### **Zawahiri Attempts to Reconstitute Tanzeem al-Jihad in Afghanistan**

Zawahiri's first foray into the Soviet-Afghan War was in 1986 as part of a medical humanitarian mission sponsored by the Kuwaiti Red Crescent to treat refugees in Pakistan. He saw in Afghanistan a chance to reconstitute the Egyptian jihadist movement decimated by the round-ups, trials and incarcerations that were the result of the Sadat assassination. Zawahiri envisioned unmolested camps in Afghanistan in which Arab jihadists could train in urban warfare, psychological warfare, weapons and explosives training. The Egyptians that coalesced around Zawahiri in Afghanistan to reconstitute what is known as Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) reads today like a who's who of al-Qaida luminaries, they include:

- Ameen al-Rashidi aka Abu Ubaydah al-Panshiri, who organized East African cells and drowned in a ferry accident in Tanzania.
- Sobhi Abdul-Aziz Abu Sunah aka Abu Hafis al-Masri, the al-Qaida operations chief and among the key sub-architects of 9-11. He was killed in a U.S. airstrike in 2001.
- Dr. Said Imam al-Sherief, who in 2007 called Zawahiri and Usama Bin Ladin hypocrites. His denunciation has been cause for concern for Zawahiri.
- Ahmed Salamah Mabrook, who was extradited to Egypt from Azerbaijan as part of “Returnees from Albania” Trials, Egyptian jihadists who fought in the Balkans.

The first external Tanzeem al-Jihad group (it is called external to differentiate it from the Tanzeem al-Jihad in Egypt) was formed in 1987 and Said Imam al-Sherief was selected as the emir (leader) of the group. Zawahiri however was the brains and organizer of the group. Once the cell was formed and key leaders selected, they began the process of growing the membership. In 1984, the first batch, some would proceed to Pakistan and form a network in the Soviet-Afghan War. Until the arrival of Zawahiri the Egyptian militants in Pakistan were a disorganized rabble, and upon his arrival in 1986 to 1988, all Egyptians wanting any part of the Soviet-Afghan War had to be processed by Zawahiri’s group. Talaat Fouad Qasim represented the blind cleric (Omar Abdel-Rahman) group in Afghanistan. Zawahiri cajoled him into a unity of effort with Tanzeem (external). In 1992, using Pakistani clerics, built a consensus ruling on the status of the blind cleric, proposing his removal as leader of the Egyptian jihadist scene due to his constant imprisonment and blindness. Talaat Fouad Qasim took the proposed ruling to Egypt to elicit an endorsement from jailed members of Tanzeem in Egypt. He failed, however Zawahiri would again attempt to unify Tanzeem in Sudan, this time with the help of Usama Bin Ladin. The argument was that the blind cleric now faced life imprisonment in the United States. This 1995 effort failed what came of this effort was the impossibility for Zawahiri’s group to unify with Gamaa al-Islamiyah. Zawahiri would go his own way with Usama Bin Ladin abandoning any hope of unifying the Egyptian Islamist militant groups as was done in 1979. In 1998, Zawahiri publicly criticized Gamaa al-Islamiyah rejecting its cease fire with the Egyptian government. He hoped to split the Egyptian internal Islamist militant scene between those who worked to uphold the cease fire and those who wanted a resumption of violence. In 1999, the blind cleric issued a communiqué endorsing the cease-fire and Zawahiri countered with his own communiqué rejecting it. Then in 2000, through his lawyer, the blind cleric issued a statement withdrawing support for the cease-fire with the Egyptian government. The United States keeping Omar Abdel-Rahman in prison has been useful, as it continued the source of division. Had he been executed or when he dies this major source of division among Egyptian Islamist militant groups will be a non-issue and should be pondered by counter-terrorism specialists.

### **Zawahiri’s Selection of Members for Tanzeem (External) in Afghanistan**

The book postulates an interesting view on how Zawahiri and his colleagues selected members. It was not enough to be observant in prayers and orthopraxy. The observance of potential recruits of Islamic rituals was only the first screening that occurs latently. Once the person is observed for a time, and is seen as observant, the second phase begins, this includes a discussion of select texts. If he is someone who debates or is a thinker, questioning the works, they move on to another recruit. He must be utterly convinced of Tanzeem ideology of takfir, jihad only then after such vetting the third phase of military training commences.

Tanzeem established several military training camps by the late 1980s. As Egyptians were released from jail, particularly those given light sentences in the Sadat cases, some were given the option of reintegrating into Tanzeem in Pakistan. Usama Bin Ladin financed the external Tanzeem project and expanded the Egyptian Islamic Jihad camps. Tharwat Shihata, was an Islamist radical lawyer, whose specialty was facilitating the transfer of prisoners released from Egypt and sending them to Saudi Arabia, a mid-way point, and finally to Afghanistan. Assisting him was Naim Abdel-Fatah. Mosques, like the al-Fath Mosque on Ramses Square was a collection point for jihadist candidates to Afghanistan via Saudi Arabia and Turkey. It is through Zawahiri's efforts to reconstitute Tanzeem al-Jihad externally (outside Egypt), that he likely became more involved with Usama Bin Ladin. Among the Tanzeem personnel who were released from Egyptian custody and reintegrated into Tanzeem in Afghanistan are Abdullah Hesham and Abdul-Ghafur Farhat, who both operated in Afghanistan and went onto to earn a 10 year and 15 year sentence in absentia for their fighting and organizing efforts in the Balkans, as part of the Returnees from Albania Trials. Among the camps operated for the benefit of Tanzeem and Maktab al-Khidmat and represented a graduated approach for each potential recruit were:

- Usama Bin Ladin's villas (aka Camp Sabrah) in Peshawar, that processed arriving jihadists and gave them basic exercise, Islamist militant indoctrination and basic weapons familiarization.
- Camp Badr in Afghanistan that focused on topography, heavy weapons training, and urban tactics.
- Camp Qadisiyah in Afghanistan contained mock ups of buildings (seen in al-Qaida videos), of note is the exercise scenarios designed around the buildings, that included storming police stations, taking control of government offices, hostage taking and demolitions training.

There is no reason to believe more than one of these camps existed and were shared with Afghan mujahideen training to fight the Soviets.



## **1989: Post-Soviet Afghan War Problems**

Withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan was a dilemma for Arab-Afghans, they simply did not plan for the eventual exit of the Soviets and therefore faced vicious disagreements over the strategic course of the movement. This manifested itself in the dispute between Sheikh Abdullah Azzam and Zawahiri. Azzam wanted to keep the movement in Afghanistan and establish a al-Qaida al-Sulba (firm foundation) from which to take the fight to Islamic Soviet Republics and Palestine. Zawahiri was fixated in amalgamating as much of the movement into his Tanzeem al-Jihad group. In 1989, the crisis came to ahead with the assassination of Azzam in November and the start of what would be the dispersal of the Arab jihadist component in Afghanistan. Tanzeem al-Jihad saw it divide into:

- Those wanting to return to Egypt and who would succumb to the Egyptian security apparatus after attempts and conspiracies to commit terrorist attacks and assassinations within Egypt. This group is better known in the Arab world by the trial that involved hundreds of Egyptians who fought in Afghanistan and are labeled, “Returnees from Albania.”
- Another group headed to Yemen to take advantage of a thriving jihadist presence and to take part in the proxy wars against Marxist Yemen.
- Small group received asylum in European countries.
- Pockets travelled to Somalia, Chechnya, and Bosnia. These Egyptians would be called the “Returnees from Albania,” based on the trials as a result of extraditions from the Balkans beginning in 1998.
- One small group went to African nations like Burundi, Congo, Chad, Uganda, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Kenya. The late Abu Ubydah al-Panshiri would attempt to stitch together these cells into an al-Qaida network in Africa.
- Zawahiri would depart Afghanistan in 1993 for Sudan.

## **The Returnees from Afghanistan: Whirlwind Unleashed?**

Upon the return of Egyptian veterans of the Soviet Afghan War to Egypt, they immediately set about putting their combat skills into practice. Among the operations conducted were:

- The attempted assassination of Rifaat Mahjoub, the speaker of the Egyptian Parliament.

- December 1992 raid on an armory using military uniforms and rented trucks.

In 1992, the Alexandria Military Tribunal convened to adjudicate 26 Arab-Afghans, this would be the first group known as the Returnees from Afghanistan. Eight were sentenced to death, five fled and were convicted in absentia, and 17 were handed long prison sentences. The Talaa Fath (Open Conquest) Trials exposed the Egyptian Islamist movement which was energized by Soviet-Afghan veterans conducting sectarian attacks against Coptic Christians. This trial along with the Returnees from Afghanistan trial changed the attitude of the Egyptian government which now braced for a long war of attrition with Tanzeem al-Jihad, Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Gamma al-Islamiyah.

Splits and cracks in Tanzeem al-Jihad began in 1992-1993, while Zawahiri was in Sudan. The divisive issue was the groups leader Said Imam (aka Dr. Fadl) refusing to move from Pakistan to Sudan, part of his obstinacy was due largely to Zawahiri mischaracterizing his written work and ideology Imam was espousing. Of note, in 2007, Imam has become a vociferous critic of Zawahiri, Bin Ladin and al-Qaida, his use of Islamist language and Islamic argument has been a source of concern for the al-Qaida Senior Leadership. Abu Ubyadah al-Panshiri attempted to resolve the dispute, and the effort failed leading to Imam's resignation as leader of Tanzeem al-Jihad. Zawahiri effectively took control of the organization in 1993 and received his bayaa (allegiance oath) from members as leader in Sudan. Of note, Zawahiri was reluctant to become leader and recommended Abu Ubyadah al-Panshiri, who declined, preferring to be an operational leader.

Zawahiri was under pressure from the membership to inaugurate his assumption of leadership with an operation against Egyptian government. They argued that the 800 Tanzeem members languishing in Egyptian prisons demanded a strike for their morale. From this was born the attempted assassination of Interior Minister Hassan al-Alfi in August 1993. The Egyptian security officials were monitoring the plot and rolled up 17 conspirators, but failed to apprehend the actual assassins. During the investigation they found some practical applications of the Soviet-Afghan War experience such as tunneling under houses to store weapons, hostages and hide. During the plot to kill Minister al-Alfi, separate plans were underway for the assassination of an internal security investigator Adel Abul-Azm and reconnaissance to kill Egyptian Foreign Minister Boutros Ghali. The terrorist operators were veterans of the Soviet-Afghan War, who kept up their training in Zawahiri camps (Badr, Qadisiyah, and Muraqasha) in Yemen. Another breakthrough in Zawahiri operational technique was seen in the attempt on Interior Minister al-Alfi, which was the utilization of suicide bombers. The al-Alfi assassination involved a suicide bomber on a motorcycle and failed, killing the assassin and a little girl Shayma. The death of the little girl so outraged Egyptians, that Zawahiri provided a partial

explanation in his 2001 manifesto *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. By 1995 Tanzeem was facing many problems:

- Lack of money due to the impact terrorism had on the overall Egyptian economy. The attack on tourists in the Khan el-Khalili Bazaar with a vehicle borne explosive device.
- Round-up of over 800 operatives, conspirators, co-conspirators and support to Zawahiris' group.
- The assassination attempt on the Interior Minister, multiplied efforts against Tanzeem.

Investigations and trials found that Tanzeem consisted of a core of seasoned jihadists with combat experience not only in the Soviet-Afghan War, but also:

- during the post-Soviet Afghan War period of the tribal wars between the Afghan warlords;
- the Sudanese civil war in the Christian south;
- the Balkan wars; and
- the Yemen internal insurgency war against the Marxist Yemen.

The 1998 series of trials dealt with Egyptian militants who returned from war in the Balkans, these were known as the Returnees from Albania and court records reveal that nine who evaded capture turned up in such operations as the U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Some of those who evaded capture and trial among the Returnees from Albania would meet their demise during U.S. airstrikes in the 2001 Operation Enduring Freedom.

### **Organization of Zawahiri's Tanzeem al-Jihad**

Zawahiri had organized Tanzeem al-Jihad into *Leejan al-Jihad* (Committees of Jihad), under him were eight committees and the book highlights their functions as well as the persons charged with running each function. It included:

- Internal Affairs: Served as a recruitment office, intelligence gathering and terror reconnaissance arm within Egypt. Led by Tharwat Shihata, a lawyer who managed the pipeline of released jihadists from Egypt to Pakistan.

- External Affairs: Manages relations outside of Egypt to include recruitment, intelligence gathering, and safehouses. Led by Ahmed Salama Mabrook, who was extradited from Azerbaijan to Egypt and imprisoned in 1998. He supposedly has experience in organizing jihad in Chechnya.
- Special Operations: This is the military arm of the organization, it combines planning and execution of suicide operations. The group combines training, rehearsal and execution of terrorist operations. It was led by Tariq Anwar Ahmed, until his death in November 2001 during Operation Enduring Freedom.
- Documents Office: Specializes in false papers, organizing funds for travel, arranging travel from airfare to contacts that will arrange your transfer through the mountains of Afghanistan. It was run by Shawqi Mustafa who was extradited and tried in the 1998 Returnees from Albania.
- Shariah (Islamic Law) Office: Led at one point by Muhammad Sharaf and is charged with the research and issuance of fatwas (legal opinions). Of note, Sharaf son who was 15, was murdered by Zawahiri in a homosexual setup by Egyptian Intelligence in 1996.
- Security Apparatus: Supports the special operations unit with logistically and planning insertion and exfiltration.
- Information Office: Produces and distributes videos, leaflets, runs websites, publishes books and is based out of London. It was led by Abdel-Mejid al-Bari who was detained in Kenya and is now led by Adel Abdel-Qadoos.
- Family Support Office: Is also led by Adel Abdel-Qadoos and is London-based, designed to provide financial support to the family of operatives with a focus on those martyred.

All these offices are subject to the Shura Council (Consultative Committee) a quasi-board that oversees operations and approved the expenditure of large sums. Of note, the book highlights the impact counter-terrorism efforts have had in the Shura Council, such as:

- Zaki Hassanein, killed in Operation Enduring Freedom.
- Tariq Ahmed, killed in Operation Enduring Freedom
- Abu Ubaydah al-Panshiri, killed in a ferry accident in Lake Victoria.
- Abdul-Aziz al-Jamal, extradited to Egypt from Azerbaijan in 1998.
- Essam Abdul-Tawab, extradited to Egypt from Azerbaijan in 1998.

## **Tanzeem al-Jihad Stations Worldwide: Did It Sustain Itself Financially?**

Another aspect of Zawahiri's Tanzeem al-Jihad are what is known as Tanzeem Stations located in Sudan, Yemen, Austria, Sweden, Germany, England, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Pakistan, Albania and the Caucuses. According to the book, and the author's examination of Egyptian court records, these stations provide logistical support to Tanzeem members in country and act as facilitators for operatives and the organization. Among the services these stations provide, is sustaining members, obtaining supplies, recruitment, forged documents, and fundraising.

Zawahiri's organization however by the end of the Soviet-Afghan War lacked the funds to sustain itself and Zawahiri looked to Usama Bin Ladin and the Arab-Afghans to energize his movement. He surrounded Bin Ladin with Tanzeem operatives and gradually took over his security. For Bin Ladin, Zawahiri's group was just another pet project to fund, one that would provide him with options he would exercise when exiled from Saudi Arabia to Sudan in 1991. What is important to take from the nuance, is that Zawahiri wanted to control Bin Ladin, his finances and his connections and he would achieve this through influence. In 1989, Zawahiri would be implicated in the murder of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, the spiritual founder of al-Qaida, which is based on his vision of establishing al-Qaida al-Sulba (a firm foundation) that would support Muslims oppressed worldwide with a range of services from money and technical experts to actual fighters. In November 1989, Azzam was killed in a massive vehicle borne explosion in Peshawar while on his way to Friday prayers. The rumors surrounding his death necessitated a statement from Bin Ladin in 1998. Upon Bin Ladin's 1991 arrival in Sudan, he gathered members of Tanzeem around him and the book claims established a total of 23 camps in Sudan. In 1995, Bin Ladin suggested he would be leader of a global Islamist movement in the Conference of Islamic Communities held in Khartoum. The conference included Hamas, Hizballah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Tanzeem al-Jihad and Gamaa al-Islamiyah (the Islamic Group). Bin Ladin who had cultivated a hatred for the United States, was encouraged to transform his hatred from boycotts to plans for direct action. The book insinuates that it is after this conference that Bin Ladin converted his speeches and boycott against America to terrorist action, starting with the November 1995 attack on the Saudi National Guard Complex in Riyadh, and energizing the Somali militant movement with trainers and fighters.

The author also fits a pattern in his assessment of Zawahiri's 2001 manifesto "Knights Under the Prophets Banner," and concludes the knights refer to five knights Zawahiri is most inspired by, who are: Salah Sirriyah, Essam al-Qamari, Yahya Hashem, Sayyid Qutb, and Omar Abdel-Rahman. If this hypothesis can be backed with further information, then one could question Zawahiri's character as he betrayed both al-Qamari and Abdel-Rahman. There are some who believe knights refer to the overall jihadist movement from Egypt to Afghanistan and back. Another disagreement I have with the book is the insistence that the term al-Qaida was

derived from the string of five Afghan bases (Farouk, Badr, Jalalabad, al-Siddiq and Jihad), it is most likely the name was derived from Azzam's many speeches and writings calling for the establishment of al-Qaida al-Sulba (firm foundation). The language of Islamist militants is important, as base and foundation are two different entities, with a foundation connoting flexibility that ranges from base to a transnational world of global logistical support.

### **Zawahiri's Ideological Vulnerabilities**

Zawahiri is vulnerable to Islamic argument, and responds to cogent and rational attacks to his ideology. The al-Qaida deputy views the work done by jihadist revisionists a direct threat, most recently the attack by his long-time friend and mentor Imam al-Sherief (Dr. Fadl), who has known Zawahiri since 1968 and led the organization until 1991. The work of Egyptian authorities in the long-term rehabilitation of violent militants has netted five Arabic books that counter jihadist logic, they include such titles as "Excess in Religion is Forbidden," "Excommunication of Muslims," and the "Discourse on Stopping Violence." The position of this group of counter-jihadists in the Citadel, Tura and Liman Prisons are:

- Public and frequent disavowal of their association with the Global Front Against the Crusaders and Jews, Zawahiri's creation with Bin Laden in 1998. Of note, Rifai Tahaa, a representative of Gamaa al-Islamiyah in Afghanistan initially entered the alliance and was pressured by the wider membership in Egypt to withdraw the organization.
- A joint Tanzeem al-Jihad (Egypt) and Gamaa al-Islamiyah communiqué condemning the May 2003 bombings in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and an appeal to Zawahiri and al-Qaida to issue an apology to the Muhayah neighborhood in general and the 18 killed specifically among the dead were 5 children.
- Essam Darballah published a specific counter al-Qaida strategy entitled "Wrongs upon Wrongs, and Mistakes upon Mistakes," its central theme of the erosion of popular support for Islamist politics due to events like the Riyadh and Casablanca bombings.
- Najih Ibrahim along with journalist Makram Muhammad worked to get a general condemnation from Islamist groups in prison of the attack on 9-11. The statement concluded the attack was not in the interest of Islam and Muslims. This also included the issuance of a condemnation from the Shura Council (Governing Body) of Gamaa al-Islamiyah.

Another vulnerability of Zawahiri is his attacks and abject hatred of the Muslim Brotherhood, that found its ultimate expression in a 1994 book "Bitter Harvest." Zawahiri attacks the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hizballah for working with the government and participating in

electoral politics. This only serves to further isolate al-Qaida and Zawahiri from the wider Islamist movement. As recently as late 2007, Zawahiri included criticism of Imam al-Sherief (Dr. Fadl) and the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia for their ideological attacks on al-Qaida using Islamic argument. Victory must be viewed as small short-term gains that cause a reaction from Zawahiri, instead of reacting to his videos, and an obsession on body counts. The long-term program of discrediting Zawahiri and al-Qaida must begin if we are to compete for minds.

## **Conclusion**

It is vital to America's national security that we study, discuss and debate Arabic works that discuss terrorism. Frequently terrorist leaders publish memoirs, manifestos and strategies primarily on-line, however Arab thinkers who research Arabic sources such as the court transcripts of Zawahiri and his cohorts offers a fresh perspective that not only provide insight into al-Qaida, but the vulnerabilities of the group. Gamal Abdal-Rahim highlights the inability of Zawahiri to compromise, a weakness that has isolated him from the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Gamaa al-Islamiyah and Hizballah. He is considered a fringe and delusional aspect within the spectrum of Islamist militant groups. This in turn offers an opportunity to further isolate him from Islamist radical political movements and characterize al-Qaida as a fringe group whose methodology and ideology will never solve the region's problems or usher in just governance. Other lessons include the way we name organizations such as calling Zawahiri's group Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) instead of how Arab intellectuals refer to it as Tanzeem al-Jihad (Afghanistan), Zawahiri's group, versus Tanzeem al-Jihad (Egypt), causes us to mentally miss the nuances of disagreements within the organization Zawahiri attempted to reconstitute. These divisions offer opportunities to undermine al-Qaida and its affiliates and add further friction to their ability to operate. On a tactical level this book does highlight the number of Zawahiri's associates killed or captured, that includes much of the Shura Council and operational leadership. Aside from adding friction, we must be wary as to how a kill or capture changes the dynamic of the organization. Currently, the Egyptian influence in al-Qaida is shifting to more North African leaders advising Bin Ladin. This is due in part to the killing of many of the pre-9/11 Egyptian operational leaders. Arabic books on terrorism represent the cutting edge for America's military war colleges; the challenge is wading through much propaganda to find truly insightful works that enable a different understanding of Islamist insurgency operations.

**Editor's Note: LCDR Aboul-Enein currently serves as a Middle East Counter-Terrorism Analyst. He lectures on Islamist Militant Theory within the Defense Department and is a prolific writer of reviews and essays on the subject. From 2002 to 2006, Aboul-Enein served as Middle East Country Director at the Office of the Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. He wishes to thank LT Andrew Bertrand, MSC, USN for his insightful edits and comments that enhanced this expose of Abdal-Rahim's work.**