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Title: Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi

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Synopsis

A letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri, written in Afghanistan, to Abu Musam al-Zarqawi, head of al-Qai'da in Iraq, in which the author presents his strategy of winning the jihad in Iraq. Zawahiri emphasizes that achieving al-Qai'da's main goal in Iraq, establishing a caliphate and extending the jihad to the greater Middle East, is as much a political as a military struggle in which all actions, military or otherwise, have political significance. Therefore, more attention should be given to the political efforts of building unity with the Muslim people (umma), the Muslim scholars (ulema) and the mujahidin. Further, any actions, which cause disarray among these groups, should be avoided.

Key Themes

The letter addresses the political situation in Iraq and advocates measures, which will foster unity among al-Qa'ida's supporters or attract new followers. Zawahiri presents his argument by first listing al-Qai'da's 4-point goal in Iraq:

1. Expel the Americans from Iraq.
2. Establish an Islamic authority and develop it into a caliphate, extending influence over as much Iraqi territory as possible.
3. Extend the jihad to Iraq's secular neighbors.
4. Extend the jihad to Israel.

He explains that the long-term goals (points 3 and 4) are impossible to attain without first achieving the short-term goals (points 1 and 2). Zawahiri then explains his conviction that in order to achieve the long-term goals al-Qai'da must immediately begin to address the political side of the conflict so as not to lose the short-term goals. Only by using their most powerful weapon, namely, the popular support of the umma in Iraq and neighboring countries will al-Qa'ida be ready for the inevitable withdrawal of American forces.

According to Zawahiri, the only way to garner popular support is to make every effort to avoid actions, which the umma does not understand or approve. In order to avoid such actions Zawahiri offers five main strategies:

1. Consult as many factions as possible in governance and decision making.
2. Create unity among the mujahidin.
3. Strive for unity with the ulema.
4. Do not attack the Shi'a.
5. Minimize excessive violence.

Strategy 1

Zawahiri advises Zarqawi to strive for unity with the people of Iraq because he believes the American forces may leave Iraq sooner than anticipated. In order not to be marginalized by other political elements Zarqawi is advised to begin laying the groundwork so that he may be ready. In order to accomplish this goal Zawahiri suggests including tribal and political leaders in al-Qa'ida decision making as much as possible. The letter invokes the example of the Taliban regime in

Afghanistan as a negative example in order to illustrate this point by noting restrictions to participation in the government to students and the people of Kandahar. In the end, according to Zawahiri, when the Americans invaded, the Afghan people did not have a strong affiliation to the Taliban and did not defend the regime. Therefore, if they are to enjoy a broad base of support in Iraq al-Qa'ida must strive to include as many political groups as possible in a coalition.

Strategy 2

Zarqawi is instructed to foster unity among the mujahidin. Zawahiri argues that any division among the mujahidin will lead to divisions among the umma. Therefore, every effort should be made avoid conflict.

Strategy 3

The umma's perception of Al-Qa'ida's relationship to the ulema is also important. Zawahiri calls Zarqawi to avoid highlighting doctrinal differences or making disparaging remarks about specific scholars, which the general public does not understand. As the ulema are a symbol of Islam, people may come to believe that religion and its adherents are unimportant if public denunciations and doctrinal differences are highlighted. In Zawahiri's opinion, the loss of faith is a greater detriment to al-Qa'ida's cause than any benefit gained from criticizing a particular theologian.

The example of Mullah Muhammad Omar, Taliban leader in Afghanistan, is invoked to illustrate his point. He notes that Omar himself is a Hanafi adherent of the Matrudi doctrine. Yet he did not draw attention to theological distinctions in the time of jihad. Zawahiri also argues that differences between religious doctrines will require generations to correct once the caliphate has been established. Therefore, the mujahidin should not concern themselves with solving these differences but concentrate on accomplishing the fundamental goals for Iraq.

Strategy 4

Al-Qa'ida's treatment of the Shi'a is another key element in fostering unity among the umma. According to the letter, Zarqawi is justified in attacking the Shi'a given the inevitability of a Sunni-Shi'a clash, the Shi'a's cooperation with America during the invasion of Afghanistan and the error of Shi'a beliefs. However, Zawahiri notes that the majority of Muslims do not understand these differences. Thus, the unity with the umma will be preserved by not attacking the Shi'a or highlighting doctrinal differences. Additionally, Zawahiri thinks that the threat of Iranian intervention on behalf of Iraqi Shi'a is a compelling reason to exercise restraint.

Strategy 5

Avoidance of unnecessary bloodshed is important for encouraging unity. Zarqawi is reminded that he is engaged in a struggle, which is being displayed in the news media and that the umma often does not comprehend the reasons for excessive violence seen in the media, though the actions are justified. Therefore, Zarqawi must refrain from excessive violence.