

## Using the Qur'an to Justify Terrorist Violence: Analysing Selective Application of the Qur'an in English-Language Militant Islamist Discourse

by Donald Holbrook

### *Abstract*

*Selective Qur'anic referencing comprises a core element of radical Islamist discourse endorsing militancy. These are often embedded in wider religious deliberations which also cite numerous Hadith and other religious sources to support a given argument. This article seeks to analyse and document the way in which specific verses of the Qur'an are used to legitimise justifications put forward for violence and targeting in a selected corpus of English-language extremist Islamist material. The article concludes that application of the teachings of the Qur'an is altered and tailored in major militant Islamist treatises to match their political narrative, thus violating strict Salafistic demands for literal application of the Qur'an's message.*

### **Introduction**

Modern militant Islamism, sometimes termed 'jihadi-Salafism' [1] departs from large swathes of non-activist and non-political Salafism in that it seeks to confront a self-proclaimed political 'reality'. Nonetheless, militant Islamists retain the emphasis on broadly defined Salafist positions, at least rhetorically. This includes the pivotal importance of the fundamentals of Islam, as contained in the Qur'an and Hadith - the collection of sayings attributed to the Prophet - and the literal implementation, as well as interpretation, of the religious tenets. As self-appointed vanguards of the religion, militant Islamists demand that Muslims live by their interpretation of these tenets and - in the words of Ayman al-Zawahiri - 'renounce popular sovereignty and every other sovereignty besides that of the Qur'an and Sunnah'. [2]

This basic, puritanical doctrine has been embraced and utilised by the religio-political agendas of radical fringe movements operating chiefly in the Middle East. Reuven Paz identifies three major strands of influence in this regard:

- (1) the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (most famously through Sayyid Qutb's ideas of *jahiliyyah*—pre-Islamic ignorance, and *hakimiyyah*—sovereignty of God),
- (2) Neo-Wahabis of the Arabian Peninsula, and
- (3) the works of prominent Palestinian-Jordanian Islamist activists (primarily Abdullah Azzam, Abu Qatada and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi). [3]

Although these militant elements have, as Paz notes, 'lost all connection with the original reformist Salafism of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth

---

century as well as the current purist Salafism' [4], at least in terms of vision and methodology, they still rely on legitimisations based on religious purity to justify their strategy and actions. As a result, isolated quotes from the Qur'an remain central to the narrative of militant Islamism. It has been embraced and extensively utilised by the Al-Qaeda leadership as well.

Thus militant Islamist ideologues and propagandists seek to supplement their message with references to the Holy Book of Islam, framing the narrative in a religious setting and adding perceived religious purpose and legitimacy to the prescribed campaign of jihadist militancy.

In the following, I shall analyse this core of the jihadi-Salafist narrative through an empirical, evidence-based approach, focusing on a sample of prominent extremist articles popular among English-speaking sympathisers of the militant cause. In doing so, I shall not seek to review all Qur'anic referencing in the texts under investigation. Indeed, the Qur'an remains central to many of the arguments put forward by the proponents of militant Islamism (albeit frequently in a truncated and de-contextualised manner). Ayman Al-Zawahiri, for instance, regularly relies in his messages and interviews on the verse *Al-Mā'idah* (5): 51:

O believers, do not hold Jews and Christians as your allies. They are allies of one another; and anyone who makes them his friends is surely one of them. [5]

For Al-Zawahiri, this is the foundational principle all Muslims should adhere to, in order to respect the division of *Al-Wala wa-l-Bara* (loyalty and disavowal – the concept of exclusion of enemies and cohesion of the righteous *Ummah*).

In this article, I will also not seek to analyze those verses specifically used to celebrate martyrdom, such as *Al-Imrān* (3): 3:

Never think that those who are killed in the way of God are dead. They are alive, getting succour from their Lord. [6].

This restriction is partly in order to make the dataset smaller and thus more manageable. Yet it is also due to the fact that radical preachers and other figures do not always use the verses related to martyrdom in the context of fighting (even though dying in battle is regarded as the surest way of entering *Jannah* (paradise)).[7]

Here I shall focus only on Qur'anic verses explicitly endorsing violence or fighting, which militant Islamists have sought to use in their messaging to encourage consumers of this material to support violent jihad. This excludes the relatively common usage of Qur'anic verses to generally encourage resolve from the *Ummah* and maintain strength whilst facing temptations, challenges and adversaries. It should also be noted, moreover, that this review is not intended as a dissection of the Qur'an itself, but rather the way in which individual and isolated verses are

---

used by jihadist propagandists to glorify and encourage acts of violence. As will be demonstrated below, their application does not always do justice to the Qur'anic verses themselves and the context in which they were made.[8]

Thus, here I pursue two main goals:

- to identify the nature of Qur'anic referencing justifying violence and especially the verses most commonly used in this regard in English-language Islamist material;
- to identify elements of selective and de-contextualised referencing which might be used to exploit weaknesses in the militant Islamist narrative.

The analysis is based on thirty texts which were either authored in English or translated by militant Islamist sympathisers and figures in the hope to win support for the jihadist cause and justify acts of violence against identified enemies and targeted societies.

Emphasis in this analysis has been placed on prominent UK-based publishers and distributors, especially Maktabah al-Ansaar and Babar Ahmad's online distributing network Azzam Publications. Additionally, the study focused on individuals prominent within the British militant Islamist scene, such as Abdullah Faisal and Abu Hamza Al-Masri, as well as Al-Qaeda material translated by militant Islamist sympathisers and jihadist 'media outlets' for English-speaking audiences. Understanding the militant Islamist 'product' intended for the English-speaking sympathisers is important, given the fact that many lack the language skills and education to check and challenge the religious justifications put forward for terrorist violence.

### *Methodology*

The review selected items that have been highlighted and distributed by major Islamist extremist outlets seeking to ensure that the core texts of the militant narrative are accessible to English-speaking sympathisers. The contextual period covered in these articles includes modern adaptations of medieval works from scholars and jurists such as Ibn Nuhaas and Ibn Tamiyyah, through to the introduction of contemporary interpretations of jihad and the professed individual obligation to fight in the writings of Abdullah Azzam and Mohammad Salam Faraj, the Balkan and Caucasus insurgencies and up to the post-9/11 era and the establishment of As-Sahab, Al-Qaeda's 'media' production network.

My focus was on versions and editions of texts and audio/visual files as presented by *ad hoc* distributing networks in order to analyse the narrative as presented to consumers of such material in the UK, US and other English-speaking communities which rarely access the texts in question in their original language. Any additions, interpretations and other ways through which the translated versions departed from the original work were thus part of the analysis. The

---

translations studied, therefore, were by the militant supporters themselves, not Western-based journalistic or academic organisations and think tanks. All the titles analyzed are listed in Appendix 1.

Prior to identifying the titles to be analysed, a coding protocol was established, designed to assess each item systematically in order to allow for direct comparison between all the files in the dataset. As well as the specific details of each item (title, publisher, author, year of publication and distribution, source) the coding sheet was designed to capture variables that related to the referencing of religious texts with the specific aim of endorsing violence, legitimising militant strategies and encouraging or demanding support for such methods.

Although various *Hadith* quotes are frequently used to legitimise violence, particularly specifics in terms of targeting and tactics that cannot be easily justified by applying the Qur'an (for instance targeting of children, women and the elderly), their application is less structured and systematic than the usage of Qur'anic verses, even though the combination of both Qur'anic and *Hadith* accounts is fundamental. When seeking to compare different items of militant Islamist material and assessing commonalities between them, therefore, the quoting of Qur'anic verses provides a far clearer and more manageable dataset. For this reason, the current study focused on usage of the Qur'an exclusively, in addition to paying attention to the narrative context in which the referral was applied.

While not all texts reviewed here included Qur'anic verses used to legitimise violence, many texts relied heavily on quotations from the Qur'an to justify the nature and level of violence prescribed in the text or in audio-visual messages, as will be elaborated further below.

### *Applying the Qur'an*

Parts of the Qur'an were revealed during a period of intense inter-tribal conflict in the Arabian Peninsula and during an increasingly determined campaign lead by the Prophet Mohammad, especially after the migration (*hijra*) to Medina, where he established the religion of Islam. [9] Specific *surah* (chapters) of the Qur'an, therefore, allude to aspects of warfare and fighting. These have subsequently formed the backbone of, and been exploited by, the rhetoric of contemporary militant Islamist activists.[10]

Fragmented elements endorsing violence are not unique to the Qur'an of course. Sections of the Bible and the Old Testament in particular, for example, contain vivid descriptions of bloodshed celebrated for its divine purpose. For instance, the Old Testament displays scant tolerance for 'idolaters', e.g. in sections of Deuteronomy where believers are commanded to: 'pull down their altars, break their sacred pillars, hack down their sacred poles and destroy their idols by fire' (7:5-6). Similar condemnation of idolatry in the Qur'an forms the foundation of one of the

---

---

more popular verses used to justify violence: *At-Taubah* (9): 5 ('the verse of the sword', see below). Numerous other commands and accounts of the Old Testament similarly glorify and legitimise violence.[11] 'Islamic activism is not', as Quintan Wiktorowicz reminds us, '*sui generis*.'[12]

The late Abdullah Azzam, a guiding figure of contemporary jihadists and inspiration to Osama bin Laden, sought to capture the chronological development of the concept of jihad and fighting in the Qur'an in his book *Defence of Muslim Lands*. Here he identified the major stages through which 'the order to fight was revealed.' First, was the demand of staying true to the faith and moving away from polytheism (explained in *Al-Hijr* (15): 94). Second, was the need to invite nonbelievers to Islam (*An-Nahl* (16): 125). If this was refused they could be fought, according to Azzam's interpretation of *Al-Hajj* (22): 39. Fighting defensive war was legitimised according to *Al-Baqarah* (2): 191, aggressively after the sacred month had passed, according to *At-Taubah* (9): 5 and, finally, the right 'to fight all out in general' was encouraged, according to Azzam, in to *Al-Baqarah* (2): 190: 'And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly Allah likes not the transgressors.'[13]

Azzam's overview includes some of the most popular 'fighting verses' identified in the discourse analysed. These 'verses of the sword' are framed and used so as to maximise the emphasis on violence in the Qur'an in order to reinforce the argument that Muslims are obliged to support the militant cause. In this way, the selective Qur'anic referencing frequently gives a skewed and false representation of the Holy Book.

Appendix 2 lists all the verses of the Qur'an that were instrumentalized in more than three of the articles under review to justify or encourage support for (terrorist) violence, as well as the full English translation for each verse (*ayah*) (according to Ahmed Ali's 1993 translation of the Qur'an).

In the analysis of thirty texts, one set of verses, *An-Nisā*: 74-75, was quoted more frequently than all the other *ayat* applied, featuring in nine texts analysed. The verses emphasise grievance-based violent responses, which correspond to the fundamental focus on grievances throughout the militant Islamist narrative. Overall, *Surah* 4 on 'The Women' (*An-Nisā*) (verse 84, in addition to 74-76), *At-Taubah* (9) (chiefly verses 5, 13-15, 38-39 and 111) and *Al-Baqarah* (2) (mainly *ayat* 190-191 and 216) were utilised most prominently to carry forward and frame the pro-violent message. In this regard, the study did not detect substantial differences in terms of year or period of publication. *An-Nisā*: 74-75, for instance featured in medieval texts, Soviet invasion-era books by Abdullah Azzam, as well as newer As-Sahab output of the articles under review.

Interestingly, the review only identified in two of the texts coded the verse *Al-Anfāl*: 60:

---

---

Prepare against them whatever arms and cavalry you can muster, that you may strike terror in (the hearts of) the enemies of God and your own, and others besides them not known to you, but known to God. Whatever you spend in the way of God will be paid back to you in full, and no wrong will be done to you. [14]

This *ayah* is one of the more prominent verses of the ‘Spoils of War’ used to justify violent jihad, and forms, according to Gilles Kepel, the core of the pro-militant narrative in the works of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Abu Mus’ab al-Suri and others. For Suri, the verse denoted the distinction of ‘praiseworthy terrorism’, as the act of violence committed in the service of God, since it commanded believers to ‘strike terror’ against enemies of Islam. *Al-Anfāl*: 60, therefore, formed the cornerstone of his definition of *irhab mahmud*, ‘terrorism by the righteous who have been unjustly treated.’ [15]

Although Suri did not approve of the 11 September attacks since the price was the loss of the safe haven in Afghanistan [16], Osama bin Laden has used similar terminology and argumentation to justify Al-Qaeda’s terrorist strategy and the 9/11 attacks. His audio message on 13 December 2001, for instance, explained how ‘our terrorism against America is praiseworthy terrorism in order to repel the injustice of the oppressor.’ [17]

Similar categorisation was applied in the *Supporters of Shariah* newsletter, coded for this article, which was published shortly after Al-Qaeda’s bombings of two US embassies in East Africa in August 1998. The newsletter, edited by Abu Hamza al-Masri’s group at Finsbury Park Mosque in North London, defined the act as ‘Islamic (obligatory) terrorism’, and therefore something that should be encouraged. In support of their argument, the authors quoted *Al-Anfāl*: 60. [18]

Some items reviewed did not rely on the Qur’an to encourage fighting and violence, utilizing instead either *Hadith* or anecdotal accounts glorifying the acts of ‘martyrs’ and highlighting grievances illustrating the urgent need for the *Ummah* to join and support the campaign in the name of Islam. Unsurprisingly, this related mostly to audio-visual material, with written texts based on more rigorous quoting of the Qur’an. In this regard, works by Abdullah Azzam, Ibn Tamiyyah and Ibn Nuhaas (through Anwar Awlaqi’s translation and interpretation) were particularly prominent in seeking to base the pro-jihadist argument on the Qur’an.

Moreover, Moulana Mohammed Masood Azhar, the leader of *Jaish-e-Mohammed* in Pakistan, based much of his book - *The Virtues of Jihad* - on the importance of fighting as set forth in the Qur’an. ‘There is consensus of opinion’, Azhar argued, ‘amongst researchers of the Quran, that no other particular action has been stated in such great detail as Jihad.’ [19] According to his analysis, the term *jihad-fi-sabilillah* (‘Jihad in the path of Allah’) was referred to in the Qur’an 26 times, and *qital* (fighting) 79 times.

In light of this apparent importance of Qur'anic foundations for prescribing violent jihad, as well as the centrality of doctrinal purity for the Salafi-jihadist, the current study identified several cases of inaccurate referrals and misrepresentations of the Qur'an in the samples analysed.

*De-contextualised and Truncated Use of Quotes from the Qur'an to Justify Violence*

The declaration from the 'World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders', issued in February 1998, announced the ambition of the group that later became known as Al-Qaeda to 'kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military.' The declaration, which is now seen as one of the more important public messages from the Al-Qaeda leadership, began by quoting *Sura At-Taubah* (9): 5, urging Muslims to recognise their duty to 'slay the idolaters' wherever they were found.[20] However, the verse, as it was written by bin Laden and his co-signatories, quoted only half the *ayah*, commanding Muslims to besiege idolaters wherever they could be found as soon as the months wherein fighting was prohibited had passed. Left out was the second part of the *ayah*—'but if they repent and fulfil their devotional obligations and pay the *zakat*, then let them go their way, for God is forgiving and kind.'[21]

Bin Laden, as Bruce Lawrence noted, applied the same verse in a similarly truncated manner in his earlier Declaration of War in October 1996. [22] The section bin Laden omitted followed, according to Rosalind Gwynne's analysis, a 'permitted' pause.[23] However, the context and implied message has been altered from that conveyed through the full *ayah*, or the verses immediately preceding and following 9:5. [24]. This is demonstrative of, what Lawrence identifies as, bin Laden's selective application of the Qur'an to fit his specific ambitions:

First, he selects only those Qur'anic verses that fit his message, and then cites them exclusively for his own purposes. He ignores both their original context and also the variety of historical differences among committed Muslims about how to apply their dicta. Second, he collapses the broad spectrum of Qur'anic teaching into a double requirement: first to believe and then to fight. [25]

The Qur'an in this case has been applied to match the specific topic and agenda of the group responsible, identifying 'idolaters' (worshippers of false gods) as legitimate targets. Ayman al-Zawahiri, founding member of the 'World Islamic Front', had argued in an earlier statement on behalf of *Al-Jihad* how the command to target idolaters was particularly relevant with respect to Western liberal democracies:

Democracy is a new religion. In Islam, legislation comes from God; in a democracy, this capacity is given to the people. Therefore, this is a new religion, based on making the people into gods and giving them God's rights and attributes. This is tantamount to associating idols with God and falling into unbelief.[26]

Other statements from Zawahiri also illustrate how Al-Qaeda attached the label ‘idolater’ (worshiper of false gods) to Christians, thus legitimising their targeting in light of its interpretation of the Qur’an. In 2006, for instance, he claimed: ‘Christianity cannot be accepted by a sound mind because it includes superstitions like the trinity, the crucifixion, redemption, the original sin, the infallibility of the pope, and the church's forgiveness of sins.’ [27] Numerous Al-Qaeda communiqués, moreover, have sought to bring Arab political leaders under this category of ‘idol kings’, whose targeting is therefore sanctioned by the Qur’an. [28]

Thus, Al-Qaeda seeks to structure both the core of its own narrative, as well as the Qur’anic verses themselves to match the group’s strategic ambitions and ideology, and base these arguments on perceived religious legitimisation.

A truncated version of *At-Taubah* (9): 5 also features in Abdullah Azzam’s review of the development of the concept of jihad in the name of the Lord in his seminal work *Defence of the Muslim Lands*, already mentioned above. Quoting Ibn Abidin (d. 1842), a *Hanafi* jurist and scholar, Azzam explained how the order to fight was revealed to Muslims in stages, arguing more aggressive war against *Mushrikun* - Jews, Christians and pagans (in his interpretation) - would be permitted after the sacred months had passed:

Then, they were ordered to fight with conditions, when the sacred months had passed: "Then when the sacred months (the 1st, 7th, 11th, and 12th months of the Islamic calendar) have past, then kill the *Mushrikun* wherever you find them..." [29]

The limitations on fighting as stipulated in *Sura* 9:5 were presumably deliberately excluded as was the different context in the Qur’an. The same goes for the book *Mashari al-Ashwaq ila Masari al-Ushaaq* by Ibn Nuhaas (Ahmad Ibrahim Muhammad al Dimashqi) [30], a mediaeval scholar (d.1411). The verse *At-Taubah* (9): 5 is used to introduce the first (‘On The Command of Jihad Against the Non-Believers and its Mandate, and the Stern Warning Against Those who Do Not Practice Jihad’) and fourth (‘The Virtues of *Ribaat* and the Virtues of the One who Dies in *Ribaat*’) chapters of the Ibn Nuhaas’ book, but is quoted without the second paragraph of the *ayat*, or those giving context, limiting the level of violence condoned in the first paragraph. Although the whole verse features unedited in Dhiren Barot’s book *The Army of Madinah in Kashmir* (written under the pseudonym ‘Esa al-Hindi’), the author erroneously relates it to *Al-Anfāl* (Surah 8) rather than *At-Taubah*. [31]

Barot, convicted of conspiracy to murder in London in 2006, also relied on the *Al-Anfāl*: 60 verse to encourage acts of terrorism, because: ‘terror works and that is why the believers are commanded to enforce it’, according to his interpretation of the *ayat* in question (since it referred to ‘terrorising’ the enemy). The author ignored, however, the subsequent verse which qualified and limited the nature and level of violence authorised in 8:60: ‘But if they are inclined to peace, make peace with them, and have trust in God, for He hears all and knows every thing.’ [32]

*Al-Anfāl*: 60 was also quoted in isolation in a particularly belligerent edition of the *Supporters of Shariah* newsletter (September/October 1998) which was coded as part of this study. The same applies to Suri's detailed dissection of the verse when arguing for his conceptualization of 'praiseworthy terrorism', as described above. [33]

## Conclusions

From our brief analysis of thirty texts it emerges clearly that the Qur'an is taken as guidance very selectively to suit the jihadists' particular strategic and political agenda and to strengthen the accompanying narrative set forth by proponents of militant Islamism. Numerous verses and sections of the Qur'an that call for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect, counter-balancing many of the verses used to justify (terrorist) violence, are ignored and excluded from their one-sided narrative. This is typical of the tailored, politically motivated foundation upon which much of the militant jihadist discourse rests. Quoting from the Holy Book of Islam is shamelessly selective in order to serve their propaganda objectives.

The English-language output from militant Islamist figures relies heavily on the repeated use of a limited number of Qur'anic verses to justify political violence. Their arguments appear to rely on truncated rather than complete passages from the Qur'an and are designed to fit their strategic narrative rather than being in conformity with the nuances of meanings of the Qur'an. The same 'doctored' use can be found in some of the abridged translations of medieval texts and more recent seminal works edited by jihadist publishing and distributing networks, which are also meant to serve contemporary jihadist propaganda.

When juxtaposed to the requirements set forth by Salafism for doctrinal purity and literal interpretation of the Qur'an (which includes the originally intended meaning) - values frequently invoked by the militant Islamists themselves - their peculiar selective utilization of the Qur'an appears paradoxical. Rather than being guided by the teachings of the Qur'an through the unadulterated application of its message, the narratives put forward by militant Islamists rely on a Qur'an *a la carte*, based on cherry-picked passages from specific verses to fit their pre-determined religio-political ideology and inform their messages to advance their group-specific ambitions.

Several authors in a previous issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* [34] exploring the concept of counter-narratives and the potential for counter-terrorism efforts, have advocated measures to challenge extremist narratives given their role in recruitment and radicalisation. Such efforts rely, in part, on identifying irregularities and flaws in the extremist argument. Our investigation illustrates how the narrative of militant Islamism seeks to frame its legitimisation for violence through tapping into the authority of the Qur'an. This scrutiny of a sample of major English-

---

language jihadist texts also indicates that propagandists of jihad violate the Salafists' own demands for doctrinal purity in terms of adherence to the Qu'ran. In other words - they tend to be dishonest and hypocritical.

**About the Author:** *Donald Holbrook is a Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, University of St. Andrews. He holds postgraduate degrees from Cambridge University and St. Andrews University. His current research focuses primarily on the language of extremism and, in particular, Al-Qaeda leadership communiqués.*

## Notes

- [1] This paper uses the terms 'jihadist', 'jihadi-salafist' and militant Islamist interchangeably. Legitimate concerns regarding the applicability and accuracy of such terminology, particularly the jihad-related terms, are outside the scope of this paper.
- [2] Zawahiri, Ayman Al- (2007). 'Annapolis - The Betrayal'. As-Sahab Media Foundation (14 December). See translation in: in *IntelCenter: Words of Ayman al-Zawahiri Vol. 1* (2008), Tempest Publishing, Alexandria VA. – Sunnah is the body of traditional customs and practices based on the Prophet's words or acts. Together with the Qu'ran it is accepted as authoritative by [Sunni] Muslims.
- [3] Meijer, Roel (2009): 25, Reuven Paz (2009), 'Debates within the Family: Jihadi-Salafi Debates on Strategy, *Takfir*, Extremism, Suicide Bombings, and the sense of the Apocalypse', in Meijer (2009) (Ed.) *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Hurst & Company, London: pp. 269-270.
- [4] Paz, Reuven (2009): p. 270.
- [5] Ali, Ahmed (1993): *Al-Qur'ān*, Princeton University Press, Princeton – New Jersey (1993). Other verses used within the same context include *Al-Baqarah* (2): 120 and *Al-Imrān* (3): p. 118.
- [6] Transl: Ali (1993). Other verses include *Al-Imrān* (3): 157 and 169-170.; *Muhammad* (47): 4-6 and *Al-Baqarah* (2): 154.
- [7] Feiz Mohammed, for instance, in his audio lecture titled 'The Grave' emphasised how dying in battle facing the enemy and standing guard for the Lord secured for believers life after death. Although 'martyrdom' in the battle was the most important form of death, according to Feiz, dying because of an abdominal disease, after reciting *surat al-Mulk* (67) or dying on a Friday, would also ensure an afterlife in heaven.
- [8] For a review of 'Verses from the Quran that explicitly endorse armed fight', see National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (December 2009). *Ideology and Strategy of Jihadism*: Appendix 1 (pp. 76-83).
- [9] Ibid: pp. 23-25.
- [10] Although the matter is complicated by ongoing debates over whether certain verses abrogate those thought to have been revealed earlier. Rosalind Gwynne's study (2001), however, found that bin Laden, for instance, did not hold this view: 'Al-Qa'ida and al-Qur'an: The "Tafsir" of Usamah bin Laden', <[http://web.utk.edu/~warda/bin\\_Laden\\_and\\_quran.htm](http://web.utk.edu/~warda/bin_Laden_and_quran.htm)>
- [11] The Book of Joshua, for instance, describes how, acting on the commands of Moses whose orders in turn were passed down from God, Joshua's conquest took prisoner the kings of the enemies and 'struck them down and put them to death' (20:18) since 'they should be annihilated without mercy and utterly destroyed, as the LORD had commanded Moses' (20:20). Consider also the ruthlessness of war as explained in God's laws delivered by Moses (in Deuteronomy), e.g.: When you advance on a city to attack it, make an offer of peace. If the city accepts the offer and opens its gates to you then all the people in it shall be put to forced labour and shall serve you. If it does not make peace with you but offers battle, you shall besiege it, and the LORD your God will deliver it into your hands. You shall put all its males to the sword, but you may take the women, the dependants, and the cattle for yourselves, and plunder everything else in the city' (20:10-14) and 'In the cities of these nations whose land the LORD your God is giving you as a patrimony, you shall not leave any creature alive' (20:20:16) (*The New English Bible: The Old Testament* Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press. 1970).
- [12] Wiktorowicz, Quintan (2004), in Q. Wiktorowicz (Ed.) *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*. Indiana University Press: p. 3.
- [13] Azzam, Abdullah : *Defence of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after Iman*. Maktabah al-Ansaar Publications.
- [14] Translation by Ali (1993).
- [15] Kepel, Gilles (2008). *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom: The Future of the Middle East*. Belknap Press-Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA; see Suri's *Global Islamic Resistance Call*, Chapter 8 in: Lia, Brynjar (2007). *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri*. London: Hurst, pp. 383-386.
- [16] See e.g. Kepel (2008) *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom*: p. 114
- [17] Bin Laden, Usama (2001) 'The Facts of the Conflict between us and America'; video message distributed by Al-Jazeera (12 December).
- [18] Sarmid, Nadeem, Mikail and Abu Hamza al-Masri (1998). *Supporters of Shari'ah* (September/October 1998 - 1419H. Issue 5.
- [19] Azhar, Moulana Masoud (1996). *The Virtues of Jihad*. Ahle Sunnah Wal Jama'at Publications, Islamabad: p. 10.
- [20] The declaration appeared in *Al-Quds al-'Arabi* (23 Feb. 1998). See translation in *FBIS Report: Compilation of Usama bin Laden Statements 1994-January 2004*. FBIS 2004. Note the broader intended meaning of 'idolaters' from the original translation, to include non-Muslims (including Christians and Jews who, according to Al-Qaeda, had deviated from the true meaning of their scriptures).
- [21] Translation by Ali (1993).
- [22] Lawrence, Bruce (2006) *The Qur'an: A Biography*. London: Atlantic Books.
- [23] Gwynne, Rosalind (2001) 'Al-Qa'ida and al-Qur'an: The "Tafsir" of Usamah bin Laden' (18 September). See <[http://web.utk.edu/~warda/bin\\_Laden\\_and\\_quran.htm](http://web.utk.edu/~warda/bin_Laden_and_quran.htm)> ; accessed 30 June, 2010.

[24] See also: Lawrence, Bruce (2006)

[25] Ibid, pp. 179-180.

[26] Zawahiri, Ayman Al- (1993). ‘Advice to the Community to Reject the Fatwa of Sheikh Bin Baz Authorizing Parliamentary Representation: Published Under the Supervision of Ayman al-Zawahiri.’ Translated in: Kepel, Gilles and Jean-Pierre Milelli (2000). *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA. Zawahiri based this point partly on *Sura Yūsuf* (12):40: ‘(What) you worship besides Him are nothing but names that you and your fathers have assigned, for which no sanction has been sent down by God. Authority belongs to God alone. He commands that you worship none but Him. This is the right way; but most men are ignorant.’ (Translation: Ali, 1993).

[27] Zawahiri, Ayman al- (2006). ‘Bush, the Vatican’s Pope, Darfur and the Crusaders’; video statement issued 29 September. See translation: *IntelCenter: Words of Ayman al-Zawahiri Vol. 1* (2008). Alexandria VA.: Tempest Publishing.

[28] See, for instance: Zawahiri (2006) ‘Four Years Since the Battle of Tora Bora - From Tora Bora to Iraq’ (statement issued 12 April); see *IntelCenter: Words of Ayman al-Zawahiri*, Vol. 1 (2008); Zawahiri (2006) ‘Realities of the Conflict Between Islam and Unbelief’ (statement issued 22 December); see *IntelCenter: Words of Ayman al-Zawahiri*, Vol. 1 (2008); Zawahiri (2006), ‘Congratulations on the Eid to the Ummah of Tawhid’ (statement issued 30 December); see *IntelCenter: Words of Ayman al-Zawahiri*, Vol. 1 (2008); bin Laden (2009) ‘Practical steps to Liberate Palestine’ (issued 14 March), As-Sahab; bin Laden (2009) ‘Fight on, O’ Champions of Somalia’ (issued 19 March), As-Sahab.

[29] Azzam, Abdullah (exact year unknown). *Defence of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after Iman*. Transl. and publ.: Maktabah Al-Ansaar, Birmingham.

[30] The item reviewed for the current study was the translation by Anwar Al-Awlaqi (distributed by Maktabah Al-Ansaar), whose audio lecture on the book reveals important insights into Awlaqi’s support for suicide bombings and civilian targeting [distributed by Dar Ibn al-Mubarak (Beirut) (2003)]. The specifics regarding *At-Taubah* (9): 5, however, also feature in Noor Yamani’s translation of the book.

[31] Hindi, Esa al- (1999). *The Army of Madinah in Kashmir*. Maktabah Al-Ansaar. Birmingham, p. 117.

[32] *Al-Anfal*: 61 (transl. by Ali, 1993).

[33] Lia, Brynjar (2007). *Architect of Global Jihad*.

[34] Volume III, issue 2, August 2009.

<b>APPENDIX 1: List of texts reviewed</b>		
<b>AUTHOR(S)</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PUBLISHER/TRANSLATOR (of copy examined)</b>
Omar Abdur-Rahman	‘Confronting the Ruler’	Azzam Publications
Anwar Al-Awlaqi (and his interpretation of the book by Ibn Nuhaas)	‘The Story of Ibn Al-Akwa / Mashari Al-Ashwaq’	Dar Ibn al-Mubarak (Beirut) (2003)
Moulana Mohammed Masood Azhar	<i>The Virtues of Jihad</i>	Ahle Sunnah Wal Jama’at Publications (1996)
Abdullah Azzam	<i>The Signs of Allah the Most Merciful Ar-Rahmaan in the Jihad of Afghanistan</i>	Maktabah Al-Ansaar
Abdullah Azzam	<i>The Lofty Mountain</i> (1st Edition)	Azzam Publications (2003)
Abdullah Azzam	<i>Join The Caravan</i> (2nd Edition)	Azzam Publications (2001)
Abdullah Azzam	<i>Defence of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after Iman</i>	Maktabah Al-Ansaar (N/A)
Abdullah Azzam	<i>Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations</i>	Unknown publisher
Azzam Recordings/ Publications, London	‘In the Hearts of Green Birds: The Martyrs of Bosnia’	Azzam Publications (1996)
Azzam Recordings/ Publications, London	‘Under the Shades of Swords’	Azzam Publications (1997)
Abdullah Faisal	‘Cancers in the Body of the Ummah’	Unknown publisher
Abdullah Faisal	‘Rejecting the Taghoot’	Various
Abdullah Faisal	‘Shirk in Perspective’	Various
Abdullah Faisal	‘Let the Scholars Beware’	Various
Abdullah Faisal	‘Peak of the Matter’	Various
Abdullah Faisal	‘Treachery from Within’	Various

Muhammad 'Abdus Salam Faraj	<i>Jihad - The Absent Obligation: And Expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula</i>	Maktabah Al-Ansaar (2000)
Esa al-Hindi (Dhiren Barot)	<i>The Army of Medinah in Kashmir</i>	Maktabah Al-Ansaar (1999)
Hizb ut-Tahrir	<i>Khilafah Magazine</i> (November 2000)	H u-T 2000/Khilafah
Usama bin Laden, Abdulaziz Alomari, Ahmed al-Haznawi, Adam Gadahn and others	'The Wills of the Martyrs of the New York and Washington Battles' a.k.a. 19 Martyrs (Parts 1 & 2)	As-Sahab (2002)
Usama bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Tah, Mir Hamzah, Fazlul Rahman	'World Islamic Front against Jews and Crusaders – Fatwa'	World Islamic Front's Statement Urging Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders. Through Al-Quds Al-Arabi. 23 February 1998.
Usama bin Laden	'Letter to the American People'	Islamist websites. 26 October 2002
Abu Hamza al-Masri, edited by Ibn Umar	<i>The Khawaarij and Jihad</i>	Maktabah Al-Ansaar (2000)
The Media Centre of the Voice of the Caucasus	'Russian Hell' parts 1, 2 and 3	qoqaz.com. Also mucadele.com and others
Sarmid, Nadeem, Mikail and Abu Hamza al-Masri	<i>Supporters of Shariah Magazine</i> : September/October 1998 - 1419H. Issue 5	Supporters of Shariah
Ahmad Ibn Tamiyyah	'The Religious and Moral Doctrine of Jihad' (from the book <i>Governance According to Allah's Law in Reforming the Ruler and his Flock</i> )	Maktabah Al-Ansaar (2001)
'Waislamah News Network'	'Contemporary Heroes of Islam Series 1: Khattab'; a.k.a. Biography of Khattab	Waislamah.net (2004) and distributed by Maktabah Al-Ansaar
Ayman al-Zawahiri	'The True Facts of Jihad and the Lies of Hypocrisy'	As-Sahab's sixth interview with Ayman Al-Zawahiri. Translated by Global Islamic Media Front. 4 August 2009.
Ayman Al-Zawahiri	'Gaza Massacre and the Traitors Siege in the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful'	As-Sahab. Translated by 'Jihad Media Battalion.' 15 January 2009.
Ayman al-Zawahiri	"The Sacrifices of Gaza... and Conspiracies"	As-Sahab. Translated by Global Islamic Media Front. 13 February 2009

<p><b>APPENDIX 2: Qur’anic verses most frequently used to justify and encourage acts of violence</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used in <u>nine</u> of the texts under review:</li> </ul>
<p><b>An-Nisā (4): 74-76</b> <i>Those who barter the life of this world for the next should fight in the way of God. And we shall bestow on him who fights in the way of God, whether he is killed or is victorious, a glorious reward. What has come upon you that you fight not in the cause of God and for the oppressed, men, women and children, who pray: “Get us out of this city, O Lord, whose people are oppressors; so send us a friend by Your will, and send us a helper.” Those who believe fight in the way of God; and those who do not, only fight for the powers of evil; so you should fight the allies of Satan. Surely the stratagem of Satan is ineffective.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used in <u>six</u> of the articles under review:</li> </ul>
<p><b>An-Nisā (4): 84</b> <i>So fight on in the way of God (irrespective of others). You cannot compel any one except your own self; but urge the believers to fight. It may well be that God will keep back the might of the infidels, for God’s might is greater, and severe His punishment.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used in <u>five</u> of the articles under review:</li> </ul>
<p><b>At-Taubah (9): 5</b> <i>But when these months, prohibited (for fighting), are over, slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, and take them captive or besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every likely place. But if they repent and fulfil their devotional obligations and pay the zakat, then let them go their way, for God is forgiving and kind.</i></p> <p><b>At-Taubah (9): 38-39</b> <i>What happened to you, O believers, that when you are asked to set out in the cause of God your feet begin to drag? Do you find the life of the world so pleasing that you forget the life to come? Yet the profit of the life of this world is but meagre as compared to the life to come. Unless you go out (to strive), God will inflict grievous punishment on you, and bring other people in your place, and you will not be able to harm Him in the least, for God has the power over all things.</i></p>
<p><b>At-Taubah (9): 111</b> <i>God has verily bought the souls and possessions of the faithful in exchange for a promise of Paradise. They fight in the cause of God, and kill and are killed. This is a promise incumbent on Him, as in the Torah, so the Gospel and the Qur’an. And who is more true to his promise than God? So rejoice at the bargain you have made with Him; for this will be triumph supreme.</i></p>
<p><b>At-Taubah (9): 13-15</b> <i>Will you not fight those who broke the pledge and plotted to banish the Apostle, and who were the first to attack you? Are you afraid of them? If you are believers you should fear God more. Fight them so that God may punish them at your hands, and put them to shame, and help you against them, and heal the wounds of the hearts of believers, And remove the anger from their breast; for God turns to whosoever desires.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used in <u>four</u> of the articles under review:</li> </ul>
<p><b>Al-Baqarah (2): 190-191</b> <i>Fight those in the way of God who fight you, but do not be aggressive: God does not like aggressors. And fight those (who fight you) wheresoever you find them, and expel them from the place they had turned you out from. Oppression is worse than killing. Do not fight them by the Holy Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do, then slay them: Such is the requital for unbelievers.</i></p> <p><b>Al-Baqarah (2): 216</b> <i>Enjoined on you is fighting, and this you abhor. You may dislike a thing yet it may be good for you; or a thing may haply please you but may be bad for you. Only God has knowledge, and you do not know.</i></p>

**Al-Hajj (22): 39-40** *Permission is granted those (to take up arms) who fight because they were oppressed. God is certainly able to give help to those who were driven away from their homes for no other reason than they said: "Our Lord is God." And if God had not restrained some men through some others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, where the name of God is honoured most, would have been razed. God will surely help those who help Him, - Verily God is all-powerful and all-mighty.*

- Used in three of the articles under review:

**Al-Anfāl (8): 39** *So, fight them till all opposition ends, and obedience is wholly God's. If they desist then verily God sees all they do.*

**Qur'anic translations by Ahmed Ali [Al-Qur'ān, Princeton: University Press (1993)]**