By Brian Fishman

Al-Qa'ida's Spymaster Analyzes the U.S. Intelligence Community

On August 6, 2006 Al Jazeera broadcast a video in which Ayman al-Zawahiri claimed that al-Gamaa al-Islamiya (Egyptian Islamic Group—Gamaa Islamiya)) had joined Al-Qa'ida. The video also included Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah—a player in Egyptian Islamist movements since 1979—swearing allegiance to Al-Qa'ida on behalf of the Egyptian group. Despite al-Zawahiri's star power, al-Hakaymah's claims were subsequently disputed by members of al-Gamaa al-Islamiya, which had formally renounced violence in 1997. Al-Hakaymah's bayat to Al-Qa'ida corresponded with the publication of his book, The Myth of Delusion, *a detailed dissertation designed to demystify the U.S. intelligence community. Arab observers, in and outside of Egypt, have since speculated that Al-Hakaymah will play an increasingly significant role in Al-Qa'ida because of his expertise on the United States security community and disillusionment with Gamaa Islamiya's non-violent approach. Since releasing* Myth, *al-Hakaymah has circulated a brief exhortation to individual jihad entitled* Toward a New Strategy *and a tactical handbook entitled* Fighting Alone.

Introduction

Muhammad Khalil Al-Hakaymah's treatise *The Myth of Delusion* is an exhaustively researched dissertation on the structure, practices, and weaknesses of the U.S. intelligence community. It highlights the community's historical mistakes and contemporary weaknesses in order to demonstrate that Al-Qa'ida can successfully operate against the U.S. *Myth,* however, is not a doctrinaire call to action, but a notably non-ideological effort to understand U.S. intelligence capabilities and intentions. It is a prime example of jihadi open source intelligence gathering.

Al-Hakaymah's study reflects Al-Qa'ida's increasingly refined understanding of the U.S. social and political structure. Although al-Hakaymah makes numerous factual mistakes, his report indicates that Al Qa'ida has evolved from studying U.S. security tactics and electoral politics to more sophisticated analyses of U.S. bureaucratic structure and weaknesses. Whereas security

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planners have tended to think of bureaucratic limitations as internal problems that may limit our ability to detect, prevent, or respond to an attack, we must now consider that Al Qa'ida will actively attempt to exploit these weaknesses.

Despite this scholarly approach, al-Hakaymah often misstates facts and his subsequent analysis is frequently faulty. He seems unable to distinguish between credible and bogus sources. Al-Hakaymah's reliance on unreliable sources is not always beneficial, as some websites that provide inaccurate information are also highly derogatory towards Muslims generally.

As Americans debate intelligence reform, it is important to remember that Al-Qa'ida uses open source documents for intelligence on U.S. weaknesses. We should be cognizant of Al-Qa'ida's work, but must not allow the group to hamper efforts to understand and address our strengths and weaknesses by limiting public discussion of reform. All sides in this debate must behave responsibly, but ultimately we have more to gain from public debate than Al Qa'ida has to learn.

Describing the Community

Al-Hakaymah's survey of the Intelligence Community is relatively accurate. He mentions fifteen U.S. intelligence agencies (there are 16) but focuses on three in particular: the National Security Agency (NSA), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). For example, he writes:

> *"The FBI has sixty branch offices in the United States and Puerto Rico, in addition to fifteen branch offices in other countries. More than twenty-two thousand men and women work for the FBI, including 9,400 Special Agents. The FBI's annual budget is about one and a half billion dollars."*

That al-Hakaymah's numbers are not precise (the actual number of Special Agents is closer to 12,000) is not important. His numbers are in the ballpark and he understands the basic role of each organization. He notes the NSA's SIGINT priorities and describes the CIA's mission as, "infiltrating other countries' intelligence services, receiving foreign intelligence agents, and exchanging intelligence information with friendly countries."

Al-Hakaymah understands—better than many Americans—the historical firewall between foreign intelligence gathering and domestic crime-fighting, which makes him suspicious of the FBI's increased presence overseas:

> *"The question to be asked is: If the United States has a CIA office in its Embassy in Cairo for espionage operations and information gathering and recruiting of agents, then what is the need to have an FBI office in the same Embassy and in the same country? What is the FBI office in Egypt doing, since it is a similar service to the Egyptian State Security Intelligence Service?"*

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Intelligence, Policymaking, and a 9/11 Conspiracy

Al-Hakaymah believes that U.S. intelligence agencies are the most critical threats to Al-Qa'ida. He also believes that the intelligence community, in concert with neo-conservatives, uses the intelligence bureaucracy to manipulate U.S. policymakers to achieve its political objectives. Al-Hakaymah's peculiar 9/11 conspiracy theory supports this thesis and demonstrates al-Hakaymah's weaknesses as an analyst of the United States.

Myth includes an impressive amount of research on the history of the neo-conservative movement, although most of the data is culled from secondary sources. Al-Hakaymah describes the formation of the Heritage Foundation, the famous "Team B" analysis of Soviet nuclear stockpiles, and the high-profile role of neo-conservatives appointees within the Bush Administration.

Despite this research, al-Hakaymah's conclusions are generally rehashed conspiracy theories that reflect a deep misunderstanding of the U.S. government. He is likely using Middle Eastern intelligence agencies—which often serve as operational arms of domestic political factions— as a model for understanding the U.S. community. Just as U.S. analysts often fail to understand Al-Qa'ida, al-Hakaymah's analysis of the United States is also flawed.

The disjointed, irrational 9/11 conspiracy theory al-Hakaymah describes is a prime example of his poor understanding of the United States. Al-Hakaymah sees the 9/11 attacks as the culmination of a decade of secret warfare between Al-Qa'ida and the U.S. intelligence community. He happily recounts the assertion by Michael Scheuer, former head of the CIA's Bin Laden unit, that Al Qa'ida sources inside Pakistan's intelligence services alerted Bin Laden to the 1998 cruise missile attack on his training camps in Afghanistan. This illustrates the central political purpose of *Myth*: to demonstrate that U.S. power is limited and can be defeated.

Myth's oddest passages describe 9/11 itself. Although the facts informing al-Hakaymah's analysis are taken directly from the 9/11 Commission Report, his scenario describes U.S. intelligence officials helping organize the 9/11 attacks in order to seize control of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Al-Hakaymah interprets President Bush's movement in Air Force One on 9/11 as an effort to prevent this mutiny by personally taking control in key locations.

It is not clear what purpose, if any, this story has for Al-Qa'ida, except to inflate the importance of the intelligence community within the U.S. government. Al-Hakaymah does not seem to have invented this theory—he mentions numerous information sources—which further demonstrates his inability to distinguish credible information sources.

Intelligence Failures

Despite asserting the intelligence community's power to control U.S. politics, al-Hakaymah always returns to his central message, which is that U.S. intelligence

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agencies are vulnerable. The CIA's penetration by foreign intelligence agencies is one of his favorite topics. Perhaps most interestingly, he is quite honest about Israeli Mossad's penetration of U.S. intelligence. Despite the standard jihadist assertions that the U.S. and Israel work in concert, al-Hakaymah explains that the U.S. is just as concerned about Israeli spies as those from other countries. He also points to the Aldrich Ames incident and the FBI's inability to find the perpetrator of the 2001 Anthrax attacks as evidence that U.S. intelligence can be defeated.

Al-Hakaymah also analyzes the faulty U.S. intelligence regarding Iraq's WMD program and relationship with Al Qa'ida. He describes the Department of Defense's decision to stand-up the Office of Special Plans as a new analytical intelligence unit before the invasion of Iraq and asserts that it relied too heavily on Iraqi exiles such as Ahmed Chalabi. Al-Hakaymah describes the tension this office created with existing intelligence agencies.

Post 9/11 Strategy
Al-Hakaymah strives to understand how 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq will change the U.S. intelligence community. He explains the oft-heard criticism that the intelligence community depends on technical collection capabilities rather than HUMINT and implies that the U.S. will refocus on HUMINT in the post-9/11 period. He has clearly read the memoirs of retired CIA officers and describes in detail U.S. tradecraft for recruiting and operating spies.

Al-Hakaymah is quite proud that 9/11 forced the U.S. to reorient its intelligence community and smugly recounts the FBI's attempts to bolster its personnel levels. He describes an exodus of disillusioned, older intelligence professionals being chased out by younger, more ideologically charged officers.

Al-Hakaymah is particularly interested in the intelligence community's lack of Arabic translators and explains that translators must be Americans citizens in good financial status, and able to pass a lie detector test. Al-Hakaymah is unnervingly interested in lie detectors; he describes their limitations and how they work. Although he never makes such a claim, al-Hakaymah may be considering how an Al Qa'ida supporter would infiltrate the intelligence community.

Al-Hakaymah understands the move to create smaller, more maneuverable military units and the doctrine of preemption. His clearest political prediction is that the U.S. will invade Iran, and he describes purported CIA contacts with Iranian dissident groups, including the Mujahidin e-Khalq and Kurdish groups.

Al-Hakaymah is aware that many in the West believe that moderate Muslims are the only antidote for his violent vision of Islam. This is the only section of *Myth* where al-Hakaymah abandons his detached analytical prose, choosing instead to viciously condemn Arab regimes for supporting U.S. policy to capture "hearts and minds." Al-Hakaymah predicts that the U.S. will recruit

Islamic groups that reject violence, including the Muslim Brotherhood.[1] He also accuses the U.S. of using humanitarian aid to curry favor in the Arab world.

Al-Hakaymah's analysis of U.S. efforts to bolster social bulwarks against Al Qa'ida in Arab states is insightful. He understands that the U.S. might promote religiously extreme—yet less militant—groups as a buffer to groups like Al-Qa'ida.   American planners should be aware that Al-Qa'ida understands this strategy and will likely take steps to mitigate its effectiveness, perhaps by infiltrating sleeper agents into such organizations themselves. This analysis may also explain al-Hakaymah's bitter departure from Gamaa Islamiya—he believes that their pledge of non-violence makes them a potential tool of U.S. intelligence.

Intelligence Gathering

Most of the *Myth of Delusion* focuses on organizational and strategic issues, but al-Hakaymah also provides his readers with a detailed analysis of U.S. surveillance techniques. Besides detailing numerous electronic surveillance tools, he explains three methods the U.S. to identify voice communications between terrorists.

The first method al-Hakaymah describes is to troll a vast database of voice calls to identify key words, including: *Koran, jihad, Hassan al-Banna, the doctor, etc*. The second method is to match known voice prints to individuals in non-Arab countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Chechnya. The third method is to monitor all Arabic phone calls in a non-Arabic speaking country.

Al-Hakaymah warns readers to be extremely careful of using cell phones. He argues that although U.S. intelligence cannot track all electronic communications, using such tools is not worth the risk. Al-Hakaymah attributes Somali warlord Mohammed Aidid's success resisting U.S. military pressure in the early 1990s to his reliance on human communication networks.

Conclusions

Al-Qa'ida has generated numerous visionary ideologues dedicated to strategic planning. These thinkers have long surveyed Western texts for insight on the United States and the West generally. Al-Hakaymah does not aspire to be a preeminent ideologue, rather Al-Qa'ida's premier spymaster. In late September, al-Hakaymah posted a document online urging Al-Qa'ida to develop a more formal intelligence structure for the long war ahead.

The *Myth of Delusion* is akin to Al-Qa'ida's National Intelligence Estimate of the U.S. intelligence community. It is a tool for Al-Qa'ida's senior leadership, and judging by Ayman al-Zawahiri's show of support for al-Hakaymah, it is likely being read at the highest levels of the Al-Qa'ida organization.

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[1] It is not entirely clear where al-Hakaymah is getting his information, but it appears to be from the article *Hearts, Minds, and Dollars* by David Kaplan. The article is available here:
http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=pmt&requesttimeout=500&folder=2027&paper=2283

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Appendix:

Brief biography of Abu Jihad Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah

Name: Abu Jihad Muhammad Khalil al-Hakaymah
Age: 45-50 y/o
Place of birth: Aswan, Egypt
Family: Married, at least three children (one man, two women). His
                       son may be in an Iranian prison.
Education: Holds a Masters degree in Social Services

Al-Hakaymah joined al-Gamaa al-Islamiya in 1979 near Aswan. Like many other Islamists in Egypt, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, he was arrested in 1981 following the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. After being released from prison, he resumed violent activities and was arrested numerous times, reportedly once alongside Dr. Omar Abdul Rahman (the blind Sheikh) who is imprisoned in the U.S. for his role in the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center.

Al-Hakaymah traveled to Saudi Arabia and then Pakistan in the late 1980s to fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. He may have spent time in Britain in the late 1990s, some sources report he was even jailed there. After 9/11, al-Hakaymah fled Britain and is likely somewhere along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border. Reportedly, he is no longer welcome in Egypt.[2]

There is an ongoing debate about how senior Al-Hakaymah was within al-Gamaa al-Islamiya. At the very least, he was a leader in the Aswan region. Based on the strong condemnation of his announcement with Ayman al-Zawahiri, it seems likely that he has overstated his importance to the overall movement.

Al-Hakaymah ran the Promise Keepers website at www.althabeton.co.nr, until it was taken down recently.

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[2] Sources: http://www.almaqreze.com/bayanat/artcl032.html

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