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# THE SHARED TRAJECTORIES OF AL QAEDA AND THE KU KLUX KLAN

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Thomas J. Ward

Dean, International College  
University of Bridgeport  
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604  
U.S.A.

Thomas J. Ward serves as the Dean of the International College at the University of Bridgeport. He edited *Development, Social Justice, and Civil Society: An Introduction to the Political Economy of NGOs* and has written numerous articles on comparative models of socioeconomic development and the history of political thought. In 2009 he was appointed to the Policy Advisory Council on International Education for the State of Connecticut.

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This article compares the numerous philosophical, organizational and operational parallels between Al Qaeda, a religious supremacist organization, and the Ku Klux Klan, a racial supremacist organization. Unlike Germany and Japan after WWII, where pockets of resistance were quelled quickly, the U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan has met continued resistance. This prolonged resistance is compared to the Klan in the U.S. South. The Klan fought inclusive democracy and pluralism for more than a century. In the South, White Christians ultimately opposed the Klan to the point where several states that had been KKK strongholds voted for President Barack Obama in 2008. The emergence of the Awakening Movement in Iraq, a Sunni Muslim-based resistance to Al Qaeda intimates that Al Qaeda may also eventually find itself uprooted by the power of rule of law and an enlightened populace that no longer subscribes to the maxim that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Islam, like Christianity and Hinduism, has had its advocates of peace and its advocates of violence. Mohandas Gandhi and his Muslim counterpart Abdul Ghaffar Khan believed that their strategy of nonviolent, proactive resistance or *satyagraha*<sup>1</sup> was the most effective vehicle for ending Britain’s military, political, and economic occupation of South Asia and for realizing the Asian subcontinent’s independence. Along with fellow Khudai Khidmatgars,<sup>2</sup> a nonviolent army composed of devout Pashtun Muslims, Khan endured imprisonment and torture<sup>3</sup> under the British and later the Pakistani governments. Yet Khan remained committed throughout his life to loving his oppressors and to responding to them through Gandhian-like principles that stressed inner peace and patience as key dispositions when facing the oppressor. When challenged as to whether his

belief system and activism were consistent with the teachings of Islam, Khan responded that his convictions and practices had their roots in the prophet Muhammad's practice of *sabr*<sup>4</sup> in Islam's formative years in Mecca.<sup>5</sup> With his death in 1989 at the age of ninety-seven, Islamic pacifism lost one of its most renowned advocates.

As Mujahadeen resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan grew, the Pashtun peoples that had once populated Khan's Khudai Khidmatgars once again became the region's fiercest warriors. By the end of the war against the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden, a Saudi by birth, had poured millions of his own funds into the Afghan Mujahadeen. He and his fellow militants had also received very

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substantial military support from a U.S. presidency committed to ending the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. The United States failed, in its calculus of bin Laden, to decipher the depths of his animosity towards all Western secularism. Through the conflict, bin Laden emerged as one of the most important leaders of the Islamist resistance in Afghanistan. By the late 1990s he began

to issue *fatwas* against the United States. He had emerged as a key leader in the Islamists' Jihad against the United States and its allies.

With the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011, the question of his and Al Qaeda's place in history naturally surfaced. The defenses that some on the Left have made for Osama bin Laden show a coincidence in parts of their agenda and bin Laden's. Both harbored a critical attitude toward the political and economic influence that the United States has exerted in the world. This animosity is conveyed in Noam Chomsky's May 2011 article condemning the killing of bin Laden. A longstanding critic of US foreign policy, Chomsky questioned the extent to which the labeling of Osama Bin Laden as a war criminal had been warranted. Chomsky is far more convinced of the guilt of former US President George W. Bush than of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda:

Uncontroversially, his [Bush's] crimes vastly exceed bin Laden's, and he is not a "suspect" but uncontroversially the "decider" who gave the orders to commit the "supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole" (quoting the Nuremberg Tribunal) for which Nazi criminals were hanged: the hundreds of thousands of deaths, millions of refugees, destruction of much of the country, the bitter sectarian conflict that has now spread to the rest of the region.<sup>6</sup>

Chomsky's position on this should not be interpreted as the norm for everyone on the Left. Chomsky was criticized, for example, by Christopher Hitchens for his sympathizing with Islam and Muslim terrorists.<sup>7</sup>

Osama bin Laden's success on the Left is reminiscent of Hitler winning the support of German communists for his 1933 election bid that led to him being named as Germany's Chancellor by German President Paul von Hindenburg. Hitler and bin Laden won the support of more than fringe groups. Both figures pointed to injustice in the treatment of the people whom they claimed to represent. For Hitler, it was the Versailles Treaty that had devastated the national fortune and stature of the German people. For bin Laden, it was European and American heavy-handedness in the post-World War II drawing of borders in the Middle East; in facilitating nationhood status to Israel and in helping to establish co-opted Arab monarchies throughout much of the Levant. While Hitler especially appealed to resentments, to national pride, to racial stereotypes and to Germany's desire for national vindication, Osama bin Laden garnered support through use of the Qu'ran, the Hadith, and assurances of vindication over the imperialist West.

Amongst militant Islamists and some on the Left, bin Laden surely garnered respect for having inflicted unprecedented damage on the American political and economic empire. In 2001, after all, when the American economy showed the promise of dynamic growth and vitality, bin Laden's comrades obliterated the Twin Towers and put the US stock market into an immediate tailspin. He abruptly ended the dream of reducing the national debt and curtailing deficit spending. President George Bush, who had viewed the strengthening of relations with Latin America as a top foreign policy priority, felt obliged to shift his strategic foci to champion "the War

on Terror,” a military enterprise that would add five trillion dollars to the U.S. national debt during his presidency.

As a consequence of its War on Terror, the Bush Administration abandoned its plan to strengthen ties with Latin America. It came to support the planned construction of a wall along the US-Mexican border<sup>8</sup> as a security measure. The proposed barrier proved to be more than a physical divide: it fostered hostility. Anti-American governments in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Bolivia soon became the new face of Latin America, neighbors who, a decade earlier, had hailed democracy and free markets from Chile to Mexico.

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When one explores the ideological underpinnings and the organizational philosophy of Al Qaeda, it becomes evident that bin Laden’s political agenda and his religious conservatism are in stark contrast with the materialism and agnosticism of those on the Left who sympathize with his cause. Unlike his admirers on the Left, bin Laden’s militarism had its roots in a narrow, fundamentalist

interpretation of Islam. Bin Laden did not envision a revolutionary future for Arabia but instead a tightly controlled political and religious structure through the resurgence of the Caliphate.

## **SYNERGIES BETWEEN AL QAEDA AND THE KU KLUX KLAN?**

Al Qaeda is an Islamist supremacist organization that supports and propagates reactionary political views. Numerous parallels exist between it and the Ku Klux Klan, another supremacist and reactionary organization. Indeed, Al Qaeda’s religious exceptionalism leads it to have more synergy with the Klan than it has with Marxian radicals or with revolutionary religious organizations such as the militant Popular Church in Latin America or Pan-Arabist socialism, as forged by figures such as Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser

and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. A comparative study of extant parallels between Al Qaeda and the Klan may assist in building a comprehensive, long-term strategic response to Al Qaeda.

## RELIGION AS AN APOLOGETIC FOR VIOLENCE IN THE MODERN WORLD

Camillo Torres was a well-known Roman Catholic intellectual and prelate who opposed the ruling government of Columbia in the 1960s. He scorned the gradualist social reform that had been championed by French theologian Jacques Maritain who had had a great influence on the Latin American church until the late 1960s. During his studies for the priesthood at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, Torres began to distance himself from the ruling elites of his country. He grew sympathetic to Marxism and to the Marxist insurgency in Colombia, seeing the communists as the best option for improving social conditions in Latin America. Torres was killed in a firefight with the Colombian Army in 1966. Shortly prior to that, he had issued a “Fatwa” calling upon Catholics to join him in a struggle to overthrow Colombia’s ruling government:

I took off my cassock to be more truly a priest,  
 The duty of every Catholic is to be a revolutionary,  
 The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution,  
 The Catholic who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin.<sup>9</sup>

Osama bin Laden and his associates issued a “fatwa” of their own on February 28, 1998 calling for “Jihad against Jews and Crusaders.”<sup>10</sup> In his declaration, bin Laden provided the following guidelines:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies —civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque<sup>11</sup> and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, “and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,” and “fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah.”<sup>12, 13</sup>

Elsewhere Al Qaeda, like Torres, contends that acceptance of imperialist oppression, in this case an American military presence in Muslim lands, constitutes sin: "Until the US troops are removed from all lands of the Muslims, no Muslim is absolved of sin except the Mujahadin."<sup>14</sup>

### SITUATING AL QAEDA ON THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Unlike Camillo Torres, Osama bin Laden never focused his outreach on the poor and marginalized. Al Qaeda had no "option for the poor" in its teachings as one finds in liberation theology or in the popular Church, a militant extension of liberation theology. In contrast, in his *Green Book*, Colonel Moammar Qaddafi did share many political views with Left-leaning movements, even while emphasizing the role of religion in governance:

Religion contains tradition, and tradition is an expression of the natural life of the people. Therefore, religion is an affirmation of natural laws, which are discerned therein. Laws which are not premised on religion and tradition are merely an invention by man to be used against his fellow man. Consequently, such laws are invalid because they do not emanate from the natural source of tradition and religion.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike bin Laden, Qaddafi adopted a Marxian lexicon and called for the empowerment and the arming of the masses: "The political and economic problems of minorities can only be solved within a society controlled by the masses in whose hands power, wealth and arms should be placed."<sup>16</sup> Qaddafi's most fundamental political unit was his version of "the soviet."<sup>17</sup> For Qaddafi, like Lenin, the decision-making process proceeds in theory from the local "Basic Popular Conferences" to "People's Committees" to a "General People's Congress," the national congress "where Secretariats of the Popular Conferences and the People's Committees convene."<sup>18</sup> Like the Soviet Union, the decisions on the higher levels in Qaddafi's structure always managed to reflect the views of his ruling "politburo."

Al Qaeda is not an ideological cousin of the Popular Church in Latin America nor is it ideologically related to the Islamic left of Moammar Qaddafi. It is also in stark contrast with the more secular Pan-Arabist views of the late Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser. Al Qaeda's political faith does not lie with the masses. It lies with the Al Qaeda leadership and their alleged privileged relationship with things divine.

Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda inner core were clearly religious supremacists. In *Moral Man & Immoral Society* Reinhold Niebuhr argued that dominant groups often claim “moral superiority” over competing centers of influence. This was certainly the case for Osama bin Laden. As Niebuhr describes it, those claiming moral superiority “justify their advantages by the claim of moral rather than intellectual superiority.”<sup>19</sup> Osama bin Laden effused after 9/11, noting that the collapse of the Trade Center Towers (rather than just the top floors that were directly hit by the aircraft) had even surprised him.<sup>20</sup> His supporters, as might be expected, saw the attack and the unanticipated collapse of the towers as a confirmation of divine approval of the attack.<sup>21</sup>

### KKK AND AL QAEDA—COMMON GENESES

Al Qaeda and the Ku Klux Klan appeared under similar circumstances. They each appeared during an occupation by unwelcome, outside forces. The Ku Klux Klan was created in 1865 shortly after the surrender of the Government of the Confederacy to Ulysses S. Grant’s Federal forces. This was succeeded by occupation of the Southern States by Federal Forces beginning in 1865.

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Al Qaeda likewise appeared in response to a military occupation, in this case, the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. The occupying force was identified as “the enemy” in both the case of the Ku Klux Klan and Al Qaeda. Resistance to the enemy served as the rallying point in both cases. In the case of Al Qaeda, the US-led occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the resistance that rose up against it served as a rallying point. This allowed Al Qaeda to assume a leading role against the US-led occupation of Iraq in 2003.

### A RELIGIOUS APOLOGETIC FOR VIOLENCE

Even today the remnants of the Ku Klux Klan connect their racist belief system to Christianity:

We, the Ku Klux Klan, reverently acknowledge the majesty and supremacy of Jesus Christ, and recognize his goodness and divine providence. Furthermore, we recognize our relationship to him as his [*sic*] sons and daughters of the living God. We recognize America as the re-gathering place of his people and before him we humbly bow and give thanks. We stand upright, and lift our faces to God our father, recognizing that this nation was founded as a White nation upon his purpose recorded in Holy Writ, and to these principles we submit ourselves.<sup>22</sup>

The Klan intimates a willingness to take all necessary measures, even violent ones, to preserve America's identity as a white nation:

Therefore, the great calling of our movement is to secure the preservation, protection and advancement of the White Race and to enrich our people spiritually, morally and materially. We must begin to restore order in the places where we live and work. The Ku Klux Klan is preparing for the coming disorder that will test the very survival of the White Race and White Christian ideals.<sup>23</sup>

In its February 28, 1998 Statement of "Jihad against Jews and Crusaders" Al Qaeda also proffered a religiously based apologetic to encourage terrorist acts against the United States:

Peace be upon our Prophet, Muhammad Bin-'Abdallah, who said, I have been sent with thee between my hands to ensure that no one but Allah is worshipped, Allah who put my livelihood under shadow of my spear and scorn on those who disobey my orders. The Arabian Peninsula has never—since Allah made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas—been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in it like locusts, eating its riches and wiping out its plantations. All this is happening at a time in which nations are attacking Muslims like people fighting over a plate of food. In the light of the grave situation and the lack of support, we and you are obliged to discuss current events, and we should all agree on how to settle the matter.

This statement attributed to key Al Qaeda leaders including Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, portrays the United States presence in Saudi Arabia as an effort to undermine Islam: "for over seven years the United



States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples.”<sup>24</sup>

## A SHARED OPPOSITION TO PLURALISM

For both Al Qaeda and the Ku Klux Klan, modern democracy constitutes an obstacle to their set social and political agendas. In his text *On Liberty* (1859) John Stuart Mill emphasized the need for democracy to protect minority views and to allow such views to be freely propagated. Such democratic largesse is neither welcomed by the Klan nor by Al Qaeda. The Ku Klux Klan rejects democratic pluralism because of its racial inclusiveness; Al Qaeda rejects pluralism because of its flat-lining of all belief systems and its dismissing of claims that a higher or superior faith can exist. In 1915 as it experienced resurgence, the Klan’s leadership issued a statement of Principles outlining its commitment to racial supremacy and its opposition to integration:

America was built upon people who share a common bond of blood, mind, heart, and ancestry. In these latter days, America has been cleverly deceived by the lies of race-mixers and mongrelizers into believing an insane notion—that two peoples can occupy the same place at the same time in harmony.<sup>25</sup>

Osama bin Laden opposed the existence of a Jewish state in the Middle East. He also despised the military presence of the United States in Arab lands, viewing it as a “declaration of war on Allah.”<sup>26</sup> Bin Laden called for the killing of Americans by all able Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque<sup>27</sup> and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, “and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,” and “fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah.”<sup>28</sup>

## AL QAEDA AND THE KU KLUX KLAN— SIMILAR METHODS

The Ku Klux Klan, we have already noted, emerged in response to the federal occupation of the South and the undoing of the Confederacy that resulted from this. The Klan was indignant due to the mandated inclusion of Americans of African descent in the South's political process. When the Klan experienced a revival at the beginning of the twentieth century, its leadership expanded its concerns from African-Americans and also warned against the growing influence of Catholics and Jews in the United States. It opposed immigration policies that contributed to the growth of these minorities. The highly publicized 1913 Klan lynching of Leo Frank, a young Jewish entrepreneur, in Georgia was a powerful statement of growing Klan animosity toward Jews.

Al Qaeda opposes the immigration of Jews to the Levant and calls for the destruction of Israel. It also opposes the presence of U.S. troops, especially "crusader armies"<sup>29</sup> on Saudi territory. Al Qaeda has manifested patent intolerance towards those who harbor secular, non-religious views. It even holds that kindred Abrahamic faiths, particularly Christianity and Judaism, have been compromised by secularism and moral laxity. Al Qaeda also shows contempt for the Shi'a branch of Islam. Indeed, Al Qaeda's opposition to Shiites and their Ayatollah leadership is reminiscent of the Klan's intolerance toward Roman Catholicism, which relied on papal authority. Ironically, both the Ku Klux Klan and Al Qaeda have their own religious authority figures, known as emirs and sheiks in the case of Al Qaeda and as imperial wizards and grand dragons in the case of the Klan.

Like the Klan, Al Qaeda has shown a willingness to retaliate against its nemeses, claiming that their actions represent the judgment of Allah. Al Qaeda's modes of chastisement parallel those of the Klan: bombings, kidnappings, torture, and intimidation. The Klan has favored lynching as its method of execution. Beheadings became Al Qaeda's trademark mode of execution in Iraq under Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, who oversaw Al Qaeda operations in Iraq from 2004 to 2006 when he was targeted and killed in a United States air and missile attack.

In attacks on enemies, Al Qaeda has killed many thousands through its bombings, including the two attacks on the World Trade Center, the attack

on the U.S.S. Cole and an attack on the Madrid commuter train system in 2004. Al Qaeda has also claimed credit for the bombings of the the Shi'ite Al-Askari Mosque in 2006 and in 2007. When the members of the Shi'a Haseinen al Mushtaba mosque and those of the Sunni Al Marat Mosque (both located near Abu Graib in Iraq) began a process of reconciliation, Al Qaeda reacted by bombing both mosques in June, 2007 and killing scores of people. Al Qaeda also claimed credit for the bombing of the Alexandria (Egypt) Church of Two Saints in January 1, 2011 that claimed the lives of twenty-one people.

### PROFILING AND REPRISALS

In the South, when the alleged perpetrator of a crime was identified as an African-American and when any civil rights initiative moved forward, the Klan often responded by kidnapping and lynching a random African-American to exact revenge. Al Qaeda has also become known for randomly kidnapping individuals because they matched a targeted national, racial, or religious profile. On June 22, 2004, for example, Kim Sun-II, a translator and a Christian missionary, was beheaded because of South Korean plans to send an additional 3,000 military troops to Iraq. Prior to this, he had been brought before cameras on a number of occasions and was forced to read Al Qaeda-generated statements before they took his life.

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### THE FUTURE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF AL QAEDA AND THE KLAN

In 1915 the Klan's Imperial Wizard William Simmons opted to decentralize the Klan and he reshaped its public persona into a patriotic, Protestant fraternal society. One of the most successful chapters of the Ku Klux Klan was headed by Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson of Indiana. By the early 1920s one of every three white males in Indiana had joined the Klan. Even the Governor of Indiana needed D.C. Stephenson's support to be elected and Stephenson boasted, "I am the law in Indiana."<sup>30</sup> The Ku Klux Klan was content with a civilian government, so long as the government

recognized its ultimate accountability to the Imperial Wizard and the Klan. Under Simmons' leadership, the Klan expanded its national membership to some two million.<sup>31</sup>

Al Qaeda sought to build a similar relationship with governments and constituencies, where it had significant leverage. The Klan spoke of its "Invisible Empire" and Al Qaeda had a "ruling emirate" in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Those seeking to benefit from Al Qaeda support from behind the scenes would eventually find themselves beholden to Al Qaeda's sheik or its local emir (bin Laden internationally and Zarqawhi in the case of Iraq). The Klan envisioned the return to a state of affairs in which its views on race would play a central role. Al Qaeda sought a return to the rule of the caliphate where Islamist views would play the central role in governance. In the case of the Klan, government was to be in the hands of those White Protestants (not Roman Catholics or Jews) who supported the need for a permanent racial divide, an end to federal interference, and its pluralist agenda. For Al Qaeda, the Arab world had endured occupation through Western colonization and the subdivision of Arab territory that had been imposed by the West at the end of the colonial period. Al Qaeda aspired to end the Western subdivisions of Arabia and replace these with a unified, Al Qaeda-linked caliphate, where there will be no place for tolerance and pluralism.

## RECOGNIZING THE DIFFERENCES

Al Qaeda distinguishes itself from the Ku Klux Klan in its romanticizing of the *mujahadeen* and *jihad*. Al Qaeda resembles the observations of Venezuelan writer Carlos Rangel that appear in his iconoclastic work *Du Bon Sauvage au Bon Revolutionnaire* (From Noble Savage to Noble Revolutionary). In this 1976 text Rangel argued that the roots of the deification of and lavish praise for communist rebels in Latin America stemmed from the myth of the "noble savage" that had been immortalized by the French social thinker Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Rangel reminds us that the myth of the noble savage preceded Rousseau by several hundred years and had its modern genesis in the Spanish conquest of the Americas. As the first explorers returned to Europe from the New World, they described the indigenous peoples as having circumvented

the corruption of the soul that had been part and parcel of the civilizing process. The indigenous tribes of the America were not inclined to greed or to violence according to early accounts. Their innocence was trumpeted and especially evoked by the French writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Rangel argues that the myth of the noble savage has remained part of Latin American folklore and, as he explains, through national liberation movements, a cathartic opportunity had presented itself for Latin Americans. Participation in the modern Latin American revolutionary movement, Rangel contends, opened the way to social redemption. It served as a vehicle to return once more to the purified state of the noble savage.<sup>32</sup>

In a similar way, membership in Al Qaeda and participation in terrorist acts have been seen as redemptive and provide a way to salvation. We witnessed the occasional interviews where a soft-spoken and almost mystical Osama bin Laden calmly outlined his religious views and their political implications. At the same time, behind the scenes, bin Laden's inner circle was reporting to him about planned acts of terror that would extinguish the lives of innocents who, at an inopportune time, found themselves in the wrong market, hotel, church, mosque, train, or airliner.

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In his book *The Rebel* Albert Camus opined with foresight that we had entered "the era of premeditation and the perfect crime"<sup>33</sup> where philosophy could be used as "a perfect alibi...even for transforming murderers into judges."<sup>34</sup> Bin Laden and his operatives indeed were trained terrorists and assassins who had transformed themselves into judges, "holy" judges because of their reliance on religious authority. Bin Laden's demeanor in his interviews and in his declarations suggest that, in spite of the innocent blood that he had shed, he remained convinced that his moral integrity was intact and that he and his militants remained holy.<sup>35</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan does not share this trait with Al Qaeda. Although the Klan lent frequent "lip service" to the Christian faith, the real motivation lay in preserving racial purity and privilege. The Klan's major aspiration was never to reach Paradise but, instead, to return to the glory days of the Old

South and to minimize the impact of Reconstruction. The Klan has frequently played an oppressive role, suppressing and eliminating proponents of integration and supporters of the rights of African-American citizens, including the right to vote. In contrast to Al Qaeda, the Klan has shown no affection for suicide and no Klan figure has the authority to grant plenary indulgences or to promise paradisiacal bliss to its militants. While the six initial founders of the Klan may all have been officers in the Confederate Army<sup>36</sup> and while the Klan's first Imperial Wizard<sup>37</sup> Lt. General Nathan Bedford Forrest had held one of the highest positions in the Army of the Confederacy, the Klan itself never engaged in the type of protracted military conflict that Al Qaeda has embraced. The Klan also never had subsidized a full-time military arm of operations.

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However, like Al Qaeda, the Klan did not hesitate to eliminate those who stood as obstacles to its supremacist agenda. It terrorized blacks, lynching some 20,000 in a three-year span between 1868 and 1871.<sup>38</sup> The Klan also marginalized, intimidated and lynched federal agents, carpetbaggers, and civil rights activists

who attempted to depose Jim Crow laws, including numerous civil rights leaders.

Differences between Al Qaeda and the Ku Klux Klan are also evident in their divergent belief systems (as well as conflicting interpretations of historical development based on those belief systems). Understandably, Al Qaeda denounces the European colonization of the Middle East, Africa, and much of Asia. It also feeds on the resentment that Arabs and most Muslims harbor toward the process through which Israel emerged as a sovereign state in the Middle East. Al Qaeda denounces the special support still provided to Israel by Western Europe and especially by the United States.

The contrasts between Al Qaeda and the Ku Klux Klan are substantial, however, their similarities may outnumber their differences. It is worthwhile to consider, because of their similarities, whether the measures that led to the Klan's decline might apply to Al Qaeda. If so, this might inform efforts to reduce Al Qaeda's influence in the Arab and in the broader Muslim world.

## ADDRESSING THE FUTURE OF AL QAEDA—LESSONS FROM THE KLAN?

In July 2011 Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated that the United States was “within reach of strategically defeating al Qaeda.”<sup>39</sup> For Panetta, it was still necessary to capture or kill ten to twenty remaining top Al Qaeda leaders located in “Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and AQIM (al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) in North Africa.”<sup>40</sup> While eliminating these leaders will cause Al Qaeda’s military efficiency to deteriorate, other dimensions of Al Qaeda’s operations also need to be addressed.

When the United States became involved in deposing Saddam Hussein in 2003, critics of the initiative soon diagnosed the initiative as a failure by contrasting the little time that it took to quell resistance in Post-World War II Japan and Germany versus the time that it has taken to end Al Qaeda-backed resistance in Iraq.<sup>41</sup> Granted, pockets of resistance quickly dissipated in Japan and Germany. However, that was not the case for the Confederacy where the Klan, like Al Qaeda in Iraq, emerged as a resisting force. The Klan remained a powerful political and paramilitary force in the South even one hundred years after the end of the Civil War.

Klan influence only waned in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Because of implementation of the rule of law in the South, as well as the integration of schools, lunch counters, law enforcement, and local governments, a climate for racial understanding and dialogue resulted.

Moderate White Christian ministers drafted a letter to Dr. Martin Luther King in 1963 while he was imprisoned in Birmingham. The pastors cautioned Dr. King to accept a gradualist approach to integration. They described his call for demonstrations as “unwise and untimely.”<sup>42</sup> King did not accept their counsel and defended his decision to take action, saying,

For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This “Wait” has almost always meant “Never.” We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.”<sup>43</sup>

As the civil rights movement grew and succeeded in its securing of voter rights and integration of schools, neighborhoods, and the workplace, white Christians in the South became increasingly committed and

outspoken in their support of Dr. King's efforts. They advocated in favor of strict enforcement of the law against Klan vigilantes. Even the outspoken militant segregationist George Wallace came to recognize the error of his ways. Wallace was elected Governor of Alabama for a fourth term in 1983 after having sought forgiveness from the African-Americans whom he had attempted to shut out of the political process. The Klan, which had won the attention of George Wallace in the 1950s and 1960s because of his political ambitions,<sup>44</sup> found itself increasingly isolated and disregarded by the close of the twentieth century.

In Iraq, the anti-Al Qaeda "Awakening Movement" gained prominence among Sunni leaders beginning in 2006 and 2007. At its center were Sunni clerics who had concluded that Al Qaeda posed a greater threat to Iraq's future than the US-led Coalition force of occupation. Awakening Movement clerics decided to form Citizens Groups and collaborate with Coalition forces in exposing and opposing Al Qaeda in Iraq. Even though the Awakening movement has suffered some setbacks in the past two years,<sup>45</sup> it is important to reflect on why Sunni clerics abandoned Al Qaeda and entered into constructive engagement with the United States military and with Shiite leadership in Iraq. This pattern may be reminiscent of Whites in the American South distancing themselves from the Klan as integration efforts succeeded.

Sunni leaders initially welcomed Al Qaeda just as the South welcomed the Klan after the Civil War. Al Qaeda trumpeted its opposition to the occupation of Iraq. However, as Al Qaeda continued under the leadership of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, it shifted from being a support to the Iraqi resistance and attempted to usurp the leadership role. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's "rule" as the "Emir of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia" from 2004 until his death in 2006 exceeded the brutality of any Imperial Wizard of Mississippi. Zarqawi made intimidation, kidnappings, beheadings, and bombings routine procedures. He shifted the main target of Al Qaeda away from the U.S. military to the Iraqis themselves and he especially targeted

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Shiites and their Sunni “enablers.”

Like a Grand Wizard, Osama bin Laden heralded Zarqawi’s achievements<sup>46</sup> in Iraq. He declared his support for Zarqawi’s declaration of war on Shiite Muslims in Iraq,<sup>48</sup> something for which bin Laden’s second-in-command, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, had gently rebuffed Zarqawi in his letter of July 9, 2005.<sup>48</sup> By the end of Zarqawi’s “rule,” Sunni leadership distanced itself from Al Qaeda’s lawlessness and volatility in the same way that White southerners chose to distance themselves from the Klan. White southerners had opted for rule of law rather than Klan vigilantism and Iraqis appeared to want the same.

Admittedly, there are ups and downs in Iraq, as there were in relations between White southerners and the Klan. For decades, the Ku Klux Klan’s reign of terror was covertly supported by local citizens, by law enforcement agencies, by state governments, and by the state court system in the South. Numerous perpetrators of Klan terror only finally faced sentencing and imprisonment for their crimes in the 1990s and later. The January 10, 1966 murder of Mississippi civil rights leader Vernon Dalmer was finally brought to justice in 1998 when a court in the State of Mississippi convicted Klan leader Sam Bowers of Dalmer’s murder and sentenced him to life in prison. The September 15, 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama claimed the lives of four young African-American girls: Addie Mae Collins (14), Carole Robertson (14), Cynthia Wesley (14), and Denise McNair (11). Bobby Franks Cherry, one of the four Klan co-conspirators, was finally convicted of murder and sent to prison in 2002. Another of the most horrific acts of Klan terror was the 1964 abduction, torture, and execution of civil rights activists James Chaney (21), Andrew Goodman (20), and Michael Schwerner (24) at the behest of Mississippi Klan leader Ray Killen. This brutal act of intimidation and murder was the subject of the 1988 film *Mississippi Burning*. After endless diversions, Mississippi Klan leader Edgar Ray Killen was convicted of manslaughter in June 2005. The protracted period needed to bring each of these figures to justice confirms the extent to which the Klan had embedded its presence not only in Southern society but in the mindset of the ruling elite.

In the cases of Iraq and Pakistan, factions of the military are assumed to have supported Al Qaeda acts or terrorism. Bin Laden himself managed to remain concealed in Pakistan for a decade. We have seen that Al Qaeda lost

influence in Iraq because, although Sunni leadership was understandably not inclined to support the American occupation of Iraq, some protections of the new American-induced model of governance made it more appealing than the coercion and demagoguery that were part and parcel of Zarqawi's Al Qaeda Emirate of Mesopotamia.

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Al Qaeda suffered a devastating setback with the death of Osama bin Laden. The frontline in ending Al Qaeda, like ending the Ku Klux Klan, can be expected to include ongoing military activity as Secretary Panetta has stated. However, the lessons of the demise of the Klan show that the need exists as well for the strengthening of internal security, human rights education, genuine implementation of rule of law, the furtherance of constructive dialogue among disputing parties, and an ongoing effort to gain the trust and confidence of moderate leaders. Keeping in mind the history of the Klan and the South, we need patience and a long-term approach.

In the mid-nineteenth century William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglas dared to criticize those who favored a gradualist approach to the abolition of slavery. Garrison expressed disappointment because of the failure of the Churches to condemn slavery. White Christian leaders' reticence towards the abolitionist movement resembles that of today's Muslim "moderates" who are constantly criticized for their failure to denounce Al Qaeda-type acts of terror.

One reason why White ministers hesitated to support Dr. King must have been fear of reprisals from congregants who remained sympathetic to segregation or even to the Klan. Some four decades after Dr. King's passing, fear of reprisal from the Klan has largely dissipated. In 2008 four States which had been Klan strongholds (Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida) witnessed their popular vote support Barack Obama's bid for the presidency.<sup>49</sup>

This stunning transformation of the American South took place over six decades. It gives one hope that, with the passing of time, with the continued implementation and enforcement of the rule of law, and through the furtherance of constructive dialogue especially between Shiites and Sunnis, Iraqis can identify and reach consensus on a shared national ethos that leads to a civil and prosperous Iraq.

## SUMMARY CHART OF PARALLELS BETWEEN THE KU KLUX KLAN AND AL QAEDA

The Chart that follows points to some of the parallels that exist between the Ku Klux Klan and Al Qaeda:

	The Ku Klux Klan	Al Qaeda
1.	Racial supremacist organization.	Religious supremacist organization.
2.	Hostile towards Judaism, Catholicism and other religions.	Hostile towards Judaism, Christianity, Shiite Islam, and Hinduism.
3.	Views religious and racial pluralism as a threat.	Views secularism and religious pluralism as a threat.
4.	Claims to have a religious rationale for its acts of repression and cruelty.	Claims to have a religious rationale for its acts of repression and cruelty.
5.	Unofficial government within the state referred to as "The Invisible Empire."	Unofficial government within the state referred to as "The Islamic Emirate."
6.	Organization decentralization since the 1920s.	Organization decentralization since 2001.
7.	Turns to intimidation and terror when its views are not accommodated. This includes bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, and lynching.	Turns to intimidation and terror when its views are not accommodated. This includes bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, and beheading.
8.	It does not appeal to intellectuals.	It has some appeal to intellectuals.
9.	Outspokenly Anti-Communist.	Outspokenly Anti-Communist.
10.	Its point of reference is the past (The Confederacy and prior to that).	Its point of reference is the past (The Caliphate).
11.	Resonated with sectors of the White southern establishment who supported segregation.	Resonates with sectors of more fundamentalist Sunni Muslim leadership who support a strict implementation of Sharia law in certain countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Yemen.
12.	Received clandestine support from certain sectors of the Southern society including pockets of the State militia and law enforcement and remained a powerful underlying force for over a century.	Receives clandestine support from certain sectors of society including pockets of the military and law enforcement and remains a powerful underlying force, notably in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Iraq.

## Notes

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1. *Satyagraha* was a term coined by Gandhi and his supporters for the form of nonviolent resistance to Britain's continued occupation and control of India. The term literally means "insistence on the truth."
2. *Khudai Khidmatgars* literally meant "Servants of God" in Pashtun.
3. Many of Abdul Ghaffar Khan's nonviolent followers were actually shot and killed by British troops.
4. In his text *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*, Eknath Easwaran, describes "*sabr*" as the Islamic equivalent of *satyagraha* or a nonviolent insistence on the truth (Easwaran p. 243).
5. Easwaran, Eknath, *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*, (Tomales, California: Nilgiri Press), 1999, p. 243.
6. *Guernica—A Magazine of Art and Politics*, "My Reaction to Osama Bin Laden's Death," by Noam Chomsky, May 6, 2011, [http://www.guernicamag.com/blog/2652/noam\\_chomsky\\_my\\_reaction\\_to\\_os/](http://www.guernicamag.com/blog/2652/noam_chomsky_my_reaction_to_os/).
7. *Democratiya 15*, Winter 2008, "Christopher Hitchens and his Critics: Terror, Iraq, and the Left," pp. 86-97, [www.dissentmagazine.org/democratiya/article.php?article=286](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/democratiya/article.php?article=286), accessed on September 3, 2011.
8. *Washington Post*, "How Big Man in McAllen Bundles Big for Clinton" by Matthew Mosk, November 25, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/24/AR2007112401359.html>, accessed on September 6, 2011.
9. Torres, Camillo, *Revolutionary Priest: Complete Writings and Messages of Camillo Torres*, (New York: Random House), 1973, pp. 460.
10. "Jihad against Jews and Crusaders—World Islamic Front Statement;" August 23, 1998, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>, accessed on September 6, 2011.
11. Located in Jerusalem, the al Aqsa Mosque is considered the third most important religious site for Sunni Muslims.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Rightfully one can draw a parallel between the Fatwa of Osama bin Laden and Pope Urban II's call for a Crusade to liberate the Holy Lands. However, one stark difference is that both the Ku Klux Klan (whose calls for violence are examined later in the paper) and Al Qaeda issued their calls for violence without the overt

support of the state while the Crusade was initiated with the support of both the Vatican and the European monarchy.

14. Gunuratna, Rohan, *Inside Al Qaeda, Global Network of Terror*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 2002, p. 88.

15. Qaddafi, Muammar, *Green Book*, p. 10; accessed online at [911-truth.net/other-books/Muammar-Qaddafi-Green-Book-Eng.pdf](http://911-truth.net/other-books/Muammar-Qaddafi-Green-Book-Eng.pdf) on July 28, 2011.

16. *Ibid.*, p.29.

17. A communal level of organization that facilitated an exchange of views and feedback within the Soviet Marxist-Leninist model of governance. It was meant to be the vehicle through which Soviet citizens could provide input into governance. Local opinions and recommendations were meant to flow to larger bodies of Communist Party organization culminating with the Supreme Soviet and the Politburo.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Niebuhr, Reinhold, *Moral Man and Immoral Society—A Study in Ethics and Politics*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 2001, pp. 123.

20. NPR, “Pentagon Releases Bin Laden Videotape: U.S. Officials say Tape Links Him to Sept. 11 Attacks,” December 13, 2001, <http://www.npr.org/news/specials/response/investigation/011213.binladen.tape.html>, accessed on September 1, 2011.

21. NPR, “Transcript of bin Laden Video Tape, December 13, 2001, December 13, 2001, <http://www.npr.org/news/specials/response/investigation/011213.binladen.transcript.html>, accessed on September 1, 2011.

22. Texas American Knights *Statement of Principles*; [www.texasamerican-knights.org](http://www.texasamerican-knights.org) accessed on April 2, 2011.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Jihad against Jews and Crusaders*, World Islamic Front Statement; February 28, 1998; <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>; accessed on March 1, 2011.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. The principal mosque in Jerusalem, marking the spot where Mohammed ascended into Heaven.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Jihad against Jews and Crusaders*, World Islamic Front Statement; February 28, 1998; <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>; accessed on March 1, 2011.

30. *Ibid.*

31. PBS *Jim Crow Stories*; [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories\\_org\\_kkk.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_org_kkk.html), downloaded on March 18, 2011.

32. Rangel, Carlos, *Du Bon Sauvage au Bon Revolutionnaire*, (Paris: Robert Laffont), 1976, pp. 29-39.

33. Camus, Albert, *The Rebel*, (New York: Vintage Books), 1956, p. 3.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Exclusive Osama bin Laden US Threats, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1F-GUQr4u8Q> assessed on September 4, 2011.

36. *Anti-Defamation League—Extremism in America*, “Ku Klux Klan History,” [http://www.adl.org/learn/ext\\_us/klk/history.asp?LEARN\\_Cat=Extremism&LEARN\\_SubCat=Extremism\\_in\\_America&xpicked=4&item=klk](http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/klk/history.asp?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_America&xpicked=4&item=klk), accessed on September 4, 2011.

37. General Robert E. Lee was supposedly offered the Grand Wizard position before General Forrest was approached. Lee had no interest.

38. Statistics of War, Oppressions and Atrocities of the Nineteenth Century; <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/wars19c.htm>.

39. *Reuters*, “Leon Panetta says Al Qaeda’s Defeat within Reach,” by Phil Stewart, July 9, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/09/us-afghanistan-usa-panetta-idUSTRE76818V20110709>, accessed on September 5, 2011.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *The Daily Beast*, “The Dish,” by Andrew Sullivan, January 10, 2007, [http://andrewsullivan.thedailybeast.com/2007/01/postwar\\_iraq\\_an.html](http://andrewsullivan.thedailybeast.com/2007/01/postwar_iraq_an.html), accessed on September 1, 2011.

42. African Studies Center-University of Pennsylvania, King, jr., Martin, Luther, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” by Martin Luther King, jr., April 16, 1963, [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html), accessed on August 29, 2011.

43. *Ibid.*

44. In his first bid for Governor, George Wallace was defeated by an opponent who had the support of the Ku Klux Klan. Wallace was supported by the NAACP in that election and was seen as a moderate but his position changed dramatically in 1962 and would change again in the late 1970s.

45. *New York Times*, "Awakening Movement in Iraq," October 19, 2010, [http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iraq/awakening\\_movement/index.html?offset=0&s=newest](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iraq/awakening_movement/index.html?offset=0&s=newest), accessed on September 5, 2011.

46. CNN World "Tape: Bin Laden tells Sunnis to fight Shiites in Iraq" by Octavia Nasr, June 1, 2006, [http://articles.cnn.com/2006-07-01/world/bin-laden.message\\_1\\_bin-laden-message-abu-ayyub-qaeda?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2006-07-01/world/bin-laden.message_1_bin-laden-message-abu-ayyub-qaeda?_s=PM:WORLD), accessed on September 5, 2011.

47. *Washington Post*, "Zarqawi Hijacked Insurgency," by Bradley Graham, September 28, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/27/AR2005092701601.html>, accessed on September 5, 2011.

48. *Council on Foreign Relations Essential Documents*, "Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi," July 9, 2005, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/letter-ayman-al-zawahiri-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/p9862>, accessed on September 5, 2011.

49. President Obama also won 47 percent of the popular vote in Georgia and 45% of the popular vote in South Carolina. He received more than 40% of the popular vote in every Southern State with the exception of Alabama where he received 38.8% of the popular vote <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/map.html>, September 5, 2011.

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