

Intelligence Capabilities of Al-Qaeda and Taliban Fighters

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Abstract

In recent years, information gathered and released from intelligence agencies and press alike have shown an increase in the amount of intelligence that Al-Qaeda and Taliban members have deployed post 9/11. With the countless documents and intelligence found by U.S. and other foreign agencies, a small fraction has been declassified and published on open-source links such as the media and Internet. A few great examples include documents captured by counterterrorist groups worldwide, in particular, the *Manchester Document*, a descriptive training manual captured in England from an active Al Qaeda cell. Alongside the *Manchester Document*, International Security and Assistance Forces in Afghanistan conducted a raid in the Sangin Valley on 15 July 2009 thus seizing a manual titled *Taliban 2009 Rules and Regulations Booklet Seized by CF on 15 July 2009*. With all of these increasingly complex documents and manuals found throughout the hands of the Jihadist, it can only be determined that the level of sophistication in regards to intelligence gathering and overall capabilities has grown substantially post 9/11 (Taliban Field Manual, 2009; The Manchester Document, 2009; Warrick, 2011).

Introduction

In many ways, intelligence and intelligence gathering can be a very intimidating topic, a subject that for many is unapproachable and incomprehensible; this belief however cannot be further from the truth. Intelligence is a very simple definition: the ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations (Merriam-Webster). Take this idea one step further and you get counter intelligence, tradecraft, spies and espionage, all the tricks and trades of the clandestine services who make intelligence their life. Over the many years, the world has changed; enemies have come and gone and the methods and spy craft have changed, some would say for the better while others would argue. Since the birth, rebellion, and legitimacy of our nation, the United States has had many enemies who have threatened our democracy and have done everything in their power to de-legitimize our freedom and everyday way of life (McCullough, 2005).

Intelligence Capabilities of Al-Qaeda and Taliban Fighters

Intelligence has played a role in all of these conflicts, whether it is with Paul Revere at Lexington and Concord or Wild Bill Donovan's Office of Strategic Services, the precursor for America's Central Intelligence Agency, it would be hard to imagine victory without it (Troy, 1996).

Technology has also given birth to a whole new generation of intelligence and intelligence gathering methods. With the delivery of aviation over a hundred years ago and the creation of space flight, man has embarked on a whole new era, an era of spy satellites and unmanned aerial drones that keep human collectors out of harm's way (Crouch, 2003). This being said, it would be extremely naive to say America and her allies are the only ones with these capabilities, or the only ones who are great at what they do. Quite the contrary actually, research states the overall simplicity it is for our enemies, both abroad and domestically, to gain intelligence and even generate their own in an effort to achieve victory over the west while reestablishing Sharia law throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Al-Qaeda and the Taliban

Almost twelve years ago, America witnessed some of the most horrendous attacks ever conceived by man. Airliners filled with innocent Americans slammed into the Twin Towers, changing America and her politics for the foreseeable future. Much has happened since that tragic day, the fall of the Taliban at Tora Bora, the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003 and Operation Neptune Spear, the raid that killed Usama bin Laden at his home in Abbottabad; twelve years and there seems to be no end in sight (Owen, 2012). There are no longer yellow ribbons tied to trees and 'support our troops' stickers spackled onto the back of car bumpers, but that does not mean the fight is over and our enemy has given up. Quite the opposite actually; our enemy is more determined now than ever and over the past decade they have made it their livelihood to defeat us, a profession that has proved challenging for counter-terrorism experts and operators alike. How is this possible? The answer to this question is a two-part response; the first part pertains to a combination of the history and the region and people as a whole while the second relies on arrogance and total lack of respect for those we believe to be inferior to us. The worst possible outcome for over more than a decade of fighting and insecurity does not come from politics or inexperienced generals, but rather from underestimating our foe. Misjudging our enemy is more from our inflated image of ourselves which is not so much our fault as it is our birthright as Americans; plus who is to say men from countries who do not even possess an Air Force can stand up to the most powerful nation on earth? Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters have learned how to adapt and overcome challenges ever since the days of Alexander when troops rode in on horseback up until the first American B-52 strike in late 2001 (Tanner, 2009). That being said, we have given Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other terrorist organizations throughout Afghanistan and even the rest of the world no other choice but to adapt. How is our enemy adapting and better yet, how do they continue to operate so successfully without all the "cool gizmos and gadgets" our great nation possess? It is a very simple answer, intelligence and the ability to gain it.

Open-Source Intelligence

Since the creation of the first army manual by Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben during the winter of 1778 and 1779, titled the *Revolutionary War Drill Manual*, the United States has kept and published impeccable records on military doctrine and tactics (American Revolution). U.S. manuals include everything from equipment maintenance to counterinsurgency and even how to avoid an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). A very useful tool, especially considering soldiers need to train and have references and guidelines to resort to when confusion arises. Nevertheless, there is one major problem: we are not the only ones reading them.

With the birth of the Internet and websites who cater to shopping, anyone with computer access can do wonders in open-source intelligence gathering and espionage. A prime example of the ease of Internet intelligence gathering would be the fortune 500 company, Amazon, a business who has gained a great reputation using the convenience of having almost anything with the ability to ship it within days. With only an internet source and five minutes of spare time, one can order the United States Army Field Manual *FM 3-21.8* or in non-military terms, *The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad March 2007*, for less than twenty three dollars (Amazon). *FM 3-21.8* includes everything a young Platoon leader needs to know about tactics and warfare when dealing with today's operational strategies on the battlefield (Headquarters Department of the Army, 2007). Some of the topics include maneuvers, battle drills, and what to do if the enemy is encountered unexpectedly such as an ambush. *FM 3-21.8* is not the only manual one can find on Amazon with the simple click of a button. Other great open-source intelligence found on Amazon includes: *Ranger Handbook*, a must have for combat soldiers on the battlefield, the *U.S. Army Leadership Field Manual*, and even *The U.S. Marines Corps/Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual* co-authored by General Petraeus who served as both commanders of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and the United States Central Command overseeing operations in Iraq (Amazon; All in, 2012).

With that mentioned, there arises a certain problem with anyone and everyone maintaining the ability to purchase published U.S. doctrine co-authored by none other than the ex-Iraq and Afghanistan senior military commander (All In, 2012). Having the ability to retrieve these manuals gives Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters first hand glimpses into the tips and tricks used by U.S. soldiers on the ground. These are just some of the obvious downfalls with our open-source material that could possibly be traced to enemy victories overseas. Another major downfall with the accessibility of our doctrine deals with the enemy's ability to mimic and duplicate our material for potential gains. Over the past few years, counterterrorist and law enforcement personnel have captured both Al Qaeda and Taliban field manuals stating how to conduct operations against the west and other non-Muslims who are considered enemies to the Jihad.

Captured Taliban Field Manual

On July 15, 2009, Coalition Forces seized a booklet containing the rules and regulations Taliban fighters and commanders are supposed to adhere to while operating in Afghanistan (public intelligence). Although this was not an exact duplicate of any U.S. manual or handbook, it was however a manual that was written after extensive

intelligence and Coalition Forces encounters had been analyzed and documented. The manual seized in the area around the Sangin Valley along with additional intelligence found on the raid gave senior commanders of the International Security and Assistance Forces or ISAF, as well as leaders and policymakers back home, a look into the mindset of our enemy and how they operate (Taliban Field Manual, 2009).

The recovered Taliban manual proved to be a treasure trove of information on Taliban Standard Operating Procedures as well as a glimpse at the un-orthodox means by which they govern themselves. Some prime examples are listed in section two of the manual, with regards to the treatment and overall outcome of enemy prisoners of war. Other examples published included the handling of captured American and other Coalition equipment and how to spot civilian contractors who are working for Coalition Forces in regards to construction and logistics (Taliban Field Manual, 2009). Last but not least the manual stated the hierarchy involved within the Taliban leadership while also stating that under no circumstances were fighters allowed to make critical decisions without the approval of key Taliban commanders. While previously stated, this manual is no exact duplicate of U.S. and or any other International Security Assistance Forces doctrine; it does suggest the overall growing complexity of insurgent forces (Taliban Field Manual, 2009).

The Manchester Document

Another great example and significant manual captured in the “war on terror,” who some have labeled the Holy Grail of intelligence, contains twenty eight pages of data and espionage techniques used by Al Qaeda members in their quest for victory. This document became very special in the fight against terrorism, not because it contained detailed plans on an impending attack or a complete list of cell members and contact information throughout the globe, but rather due to the location in which it was found. The manual was found, not in the mountains of Afghanistan or even a safe house in Baghdad, but rather a small suburban neighborhood located in the bustling city of Manchester, England (The Investigative Project on Terrorism). Once translated, the “Manchester document” gave counterterrorism experts throughout the west clear insight on just how Al Qaeda cells operate in our own back yard. In conjunction with descriptions on the day to day operations cell members are suppose to adhere to, the Manchester Document gives spectacular elaborations on who is a vital player for the cause or more specifically, who can bring something to the table. Some examples include statements in the manual that members with certain skill sets or trade craft along side those who posses certain objects and material were not only able to assist in the fight against the infidel, but were necessities to the Jihad cause (The Manchester Document, 2009).

Contained further along in the document is a paragraph that could very well be considered by many as the “Commanders Intent.” One bullet point in particular published by Al Qaeda stated “Gathering information about the enemy, the land, the installations, and the neighbors” is a key mission focal point and focusing on this task will lead to the eventual success of Al Qaeda and the ultimate demise of the west. This statement is a perfect example on how the enemy uses intelligence on us in everyday

situations in order to gain the upper edge and maintain their strategy of endurance and perseverance (Manchester Document, 2009).

Midway through the document, the author mentions both successful and failed attempts at espionage and intelligence gathering techniques, examples which provide a clear understanding of just what is to be expected in collectors. All of these models have been declassified and most are fictional; however, it gives perfect examples one could use to succeed and stay veiled leading to greater success rates. One distinct example in particular about a Nazi spy named Julius Seelber operating in England during World War II may not coincide with today's particular scenarios, but gives the perspective of possible double agents working right under the noses of governments who could hold some of its states' most valuable secrets (The Manchester Document, 2009).

An additional example, although unreal, acknowledged the importance of deception and patience while conducting covert operations against the west or any other government with western ties. In the example subtitled "Caution and Prudence," the author provided the case of a Roman general who sent soldiers disguised as slaves to spy on General Tomedia and gather intelligence on his ability to fight. During the operation, the Roman spies were made, however they were able to use deception and trickery to quickly counter the situation while gaining the upper hand and accomplishing their mission, thus providing their leaders with valuable enemy intelligence. The above-mentioned are great examples in the past about the successfulness of espionage and clandestine operations in history but do not parallel current scenarios, rather they merely serve as philosophy tools (The Manchester Document, 2009).

Mossad, the name given to the Israeli Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations "has been appointed by the state of Israel to collect information, analyze intelligence, and perform special covert operations beyond its borders." Since its inception in 1949, Mossad has become expert at the trade of intelligence gathering and covert operations, specializing in "preventing terrorist acts against Israeli targets abroad," while "planning and carrying out special operations beyond Israeli's borders" (Mossad). In the Manchester Document, a prime example of the Mossad, titled the "Ability to Observe and Analyze" is given for cell members to read and analyze. This example mentions the failed attempt of an assassination against Prime Minister Golda Meir, the fourth Prime Minister of Israel, while she was on board an El Al airplane. The document specifically illustrates a group of Palestinians who planned to attack the Prime Minister's plane while grounded by utilizing a clever ruse, which would enable them to blend in to their surrounds, consequently going unnoticed. The Palestinian agents were able to kidnap a potato merchant and manipulate his cart, converting it to a deadly weapon with the help of two Russian made rockets. The ploy would have worked if it was not for the observant nature of an Israeli officer who noticed the cart before it was too late (The Manchester Document).

From the narratives published in the Manchester Document, it is plain to see the seizure and translation of this document provided a gold mine of information regarding our enemy's ability to adapt and overcome while understanding the nature of intelligence and surveillance. It is also abundantly clear that underestimating our enemy, even though they do not possess nearly the technology and training capabilities, is a mistake; a mistake that could cause detrimental harm for our continuous fight for the protection of our nation and the free world (The Manchester Document, 2009).

Mali Background

Although the capture of the Manchester Document by England's Metropolitan Police served as a strategic victory in the on going "War on Terror," it has in no way served as an "end game" for the struggle against extremists. In the ongoing fight, Muslim radicals have shifted their efforts in the Middle East from the predominately historical battlefield of Iraq and Afghanistan to the war torn continent of Africa. In an effort to capture the entirety of Mali, a country which has been torn apart by war for years, Muslim fanatics have made it their ultimate goal to push further South from their Northern strong points in an effort to establish Sharia law throughout the country's entirety (Mali: A time line of northern conflict). Since their attack, beginning in April of 2012, rebel groups holding close ties to Al-Qaeda have proven to be a thorn in the back for Malian Government troops and the free world alike. Although the United States has joined the fight to eradicate the rebels with the help of intelligence and drone flights, it has been the French who have embedded themselves on the ground and continued the ground war North to free the country (Mali: A time line of northern conflict).

Mali Tip-Sheet

Operations conducted by the French military have been ongoing since late January of 2013 and has yielded enormous success, but with the end near, rebel forces are putting up stronger and stronger resistance each day (Mali: A time line of northern conflict). With their ever increasing push north through the country, French ground troops stumbled on a rare find, located inside an ex-militant safe house around the city of Timbuktu. Inside the house contained a manila envelope with a document containing some twenty-two tips and tricks on how to avoid lethal American and French unmanned aerial vehicles lurking above Mali (Al Qaeda tip sheet on how to avoid drones found in Mali). Drones such as the Predator and Reaper have been extremely deadly in the "War on Terror" and have even helped facilitate the successful raid on Usama bin Laden at his Pakistani home outside Abbottabad (Owen, 2012). Left behind by fleeing insurgents, the document, which was first published over two years ago by Abdallah bin Muhammad in Yemen has been in circulation ever since the conflict in Mali arose and is being used by members of Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (Al Qaeda tip sheet on how to avoid drones found in Mali).

The tip-sheet used by the Insurgents discloses excellent intelligence on countering U.S. drone operations, which has been gathered for years and distributed among its members worldwide. Although some of the tips like number ten, which inform members of Al-Qaeda to hide under trees, are fairly unsophisticated, others, like tip number eighteen, teach its members to deceive drone pilots by placing fake dolls and statues outside of ditches. High temperature signatures are also indicative of a presence on the ground, both by human heat signatures and the warmth left by car engines. Al Qaeda members have picked up on this trick and have advised members avoiding big brother to cover heat signatures with easy to find materials such as rugs or desert grass mats. With the unavailing of more modern drones such as the MQ-9 Reaper, capabilities have become much more advanced in the fields of thermal imagery and other advanced

infrared sensors, allowing drone pilots to see even the smallest of details on the ground (MQ-9 Reaper Hunter/Killer UAV).

The tip-sheet, which was by no means sophisticated according to American Military standards, did reflect Al Qaeda's capacity to coordinate between its different chapters while also maintaining the ability to distribute intelligence to its members worldwide. Along with the above mentioned, the Mali tip-sheet also proves that our enemy is working together in response to the ever-increasing drone strikes, doing what they can to melt into their surroundings whether it be the mountains of Afghanistan or the deserts of Mali and surviving to fight another day. With the escalating and ever-present intelligence capabilities on going by Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters, recent events have shown a more direct approach in the way of espionage and double agents. This very theory was proven in late December of 2009 with Al Qaeda leadership claiming responsibility for one of the most deceptive and deadly attacks the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has seen in over twenty-five years (Intelligence in Public Literature).

Humam al-Balawi Background

By the winter of 2009, the United States and her multiple intelligence agencies were getting nowhere in the hunt for Al Qaeda's top leaders including Bin Laden and his deputy, Aymam al-Zawahiri. With a new administration in the White House and the ever-increasing unpopularity in Afghanistan, American citizens were becoming weary and wanting results. These potential breaks came in the form of a Jordanian named Humam Khalil al Balawi, a 39-year-old physician who was in all hopes going to be the CIA's golden ticket due to his tantalizing knowledge of Al Qaeda whereabouts and his willingness to cooperate (Warrick, 2011).

Born into a wealthy family, al Balawi is not considered an average terrorist. In high school, records proved al Balawi to be a very motivated and enthusiastic individual who annually made straight A's and never had to be disciplined. After high school, al Balawi's parents considered him a sure thing for the University of Jordan's biosciences program, a school local to al Balawi with close family ties. Instead, al-Balawi was accepted to the University of Istanbul where he gained both his bachelor's degree and doctorate in six years time. With his new education and new wife, al Balawi decided to return to his home country of Jordan where he took up residence with his parents and family. Soon after his return, al Balawi began receiving exceptional job offers from local first-rate hospitals and private practices, jobs, which would ensure his wealth and prestige in the community. Turning these offers down, al Balawi instead decided to procure a life of simplicity and modesty obtaining a position in the Palestinian refugee camp known as Marka (Warrick, 2011).

Marka, one of six refugee camps in Jordan, was home to over 15,000 Palestinian refugees displaced as a result of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. Working with women and children, camp members soon took a liking to their new doctor, describing him as shy and serious with soft-eyes. With everything al Balawi was doing for his community, sacrificing time, money, and luxurious career paths, it would seem that sainthood and humanitarian prestige was in store for this young physician, but all of that was soon to change (Warrick, 2011).

Hard Knock

On January 19 2009, members from Jordan's elite Intelligence Agency, the "Mukhabarat" and Jordanian police officers assembled around the crowded streets just outside the house of Khalil al-Balawi, Humam's father. Leading the raid was a ten-year veteran of the Jordanians secret Intelligence Agency and cousin of King Abdullah II, Jordan's current King who took the throne from his father in 1999 (Warrick, 2011). Considered by many as a brilliant agent and outstanding team leader, Ali bin Zeid working with U.S. Intelligence Agencies had collected a plethora of information linking the young Jordanian doctor to Al Qaeda sympathizers while also playing a strategic role in recruitment and propaganda operations. Khalil al-Balawi was shocked as they dragged his son away blindfolded and bound, "Whatever you're looking for---it doesn't exist!" he shouted to the young captain, but it wasn't drugs or weapons that they wanted, it was his son's computers they were after (Warrick, 2011).

Terrorist Threat?

Two years before the raid in 2009, shocking images and quotes began to appear on a website sympathetic to Al Qaeda entitled, "al-Hesbah." Videos of American tanks struck by IED's in Iraq coincided with anti-western propaganda insinuating the destruction of America and her allies lit up across the web (Alhesbah). Inside the National Security Agencies's headquarters and home to a secret super computer, code-named Turbulence, analyst were soon drawn to statements like "*Your handcuffs will be as silver bracelets. The Hangman's noose will be a medal of honor.*" Statements like these and many others were written by a man named Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, an alias created by Balawi in an effort to maintain discretion and hide his real identity (Warrick, 2011).

Breaking Point

For three days the infamous Mukhabarat interrogated Balawi; sleep deprivation, torture and humiliation came in waves as he hallucinated constantly losing track of all time and reality. Balawi did not last very long in comparison to some of the more dedicated and coldblooded Jihadist, in fact he broke within the first day, giving up names and info on other members who frequently published for the "al-Hesbah." For reasons unbeknownst, Balawi stood out in the eyes of the Jordanian Intelligence group, especially with bin Zeid and a mission of turning Balawi was soon in effect (Warrick, 2011).

Asset

Balawi did not spend much time in Jordan after his release from the Mukhabarat and what little time spent out of his apartment was spent in quiet seclusion. As the days and weeks passed by, Balawi's family had become increasingly worried about his well being and his overall appearance and attitude; it was after all a complete shock when he sold his meager Ford and resigned his position at the Palestinian clinic. In March of

2009, Balawi arrived in the northwestern municipality of Peshawar, one of Pakistan's many bustling cities. Balawi's ultimate destination came as a shock to his brother after they parted ways at Amman's Queen Ali International Airport, especially after telling his family that he had decided to go to Turkey in order to complete preliminary exams with the intention of practicing medicine in the United States. Shortly after Balawi's arrival in Pakistan, miles away, a determined Zeid was reporting to his office, cheerful and ready to conduct the day's business (Warrick, 2011). Upon checking his email, Zeid noticed a message on a special account used only by informants. Inside the email contained a coded message that simply read "It's Balawi. I'm here."

Unlike Balawi's father and family, this message came as no surprise for Zeid; in fact Zeid had been expecting it. Zeid began turning Balawi from the moment interrogations commenced and even though it was considered a huge gamble, hopes were high for Balawi; after all he had the perfect skill set not to mention connections. In the days that followed, Zeid continued to receive coded messages about Balawi's overall condition and status. Living in the Waziristan market town of Wana, Balawi reported to his superior that he was getting along quite well as a spy and was confident in his cover story as that of a devout physician looking to perform jihad by treating sick and wounded Taliban fighters. By now, hopes were high for this up and coming double agent and the CIA tasked a fellow intelligence officer and friend, Darren LaBonte to assist Zeid in collecting information and developing their new asset (Warrick, 2011).

It had been over a month and still no contact with Balawi. It had almost seemed like he had vanished from the earth. Both the Jordanian and American intelligence agencies presumed he was dead, or even worse turned by the Taliban and their Al Qaeda counterparts (Warrick, 2011). It was not until late August, that Zeid receive an e-mail containing a video file taken by a low-quality handheld camera giving him exactly what he wanted. Balawi had given Zeid and his American counterparts vital information and video footage of Atiyah Adb al-Rahman, one of Usama bin Laden's closet associates (Warrick, 2011). In eight years, this was proven to be the closest anyone had ever gotten to an Al Qaeda top commander and it had intelligence officials puzzled but intrigued. Within the weeks to come, Balawi e-mailed pages of other information, information such as the structure of the local militant groups, their morale and even battle damage assessments on targets hit by Predator and Reaper drones. While Balawi's intelligence continued to arrive in droves, it was not until November of 2009 that Balawi ultimately passed down a name that stopped intelligence agents dead in their tracks (Warrick, 2011).

Aymam al-Zawahiri

Ayman al-Zawahiri, number two in the Al Qaeda hierarchy, second to only bin Laden and recently bin Laden's replacer, was considered by counterterrorist agencies worldwide as one of the most important high value targets on the planet. Wanted not only for his Al Qaeda allegiances and leadership roles, Zawahiri was also thought to be the master mind behind the attacks on the United States Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya in 1998 and the attacks on September 11, 2001 (www.cnn.com). If Balawi's information proved to be accurate, he would see Zawahiri

on a regular basis serving as his trusted physician while gaining valuable intelligence, intelligence that had not been collected since 2002 (Warrick, 2011).

The CIA's new "Golden Boy" was becoming more and more electrifying by the day; they had to meet him! Not at all as easy as it seems however, if this new double agent who was collecting some of the best intelligence since September 11, they had to tread lightly. Pakistan was obviously out of the question; the ISI, or Inter Service Intelligence Agency, was known to have too many leaks internally. It would have to be Afghanistan, more specifically Khost, a city in eastern Afghanistan and in close proximity to the Pakistani border (Warrick, 2011).

The Meeting

Khost, a city on the border of Pakistan, housed an airfield set up by the Russians in the 1980s. Named in honor of the first casualty in the "War on Terror," Camp Chapman was home to some of America's most elite members, men and women whose sole occupation was the hunt for America's high value terrorist. Khost was seen as a tactical location due to its strategic geographical position and previously erected airfield with defensible positions. After much deliberation, this medieval base was to become the meeting place between Balawi and CIA personnel. Agents on the ground were thrilled at this possible meeting and relished at the idea of further molding this asset for future source collection and who knows, maybe even the possibility of having an asset for possible assassination operations further down the road (Warrick, 2011).

Tragic Christmas

As the end of December arrived, hopes were not high for Balawi's impending arrival; he was in fact already two days late. After hours of waiting and mixed emotions dwindling between the American case agents, Balawi finally did show and in the company of a driver who was under the CIA's payroll. As Balawi's car approached the south gate, he made a phone call to agents on the ground stating his overall demands, the most important being that under no circumstances was he or his car to be searched before entering the front gate. This situation was not common practice among security personnel on the ground and raised dozens of eyebrows including Darren LaBonte and bin Zeid who were Balawi's primary case officers. Once security stood down, Balawi's car drove through the gate unimpeded and stopped just feet from CIA and Blackwater security personnel. What happened next was to be an embarrassing and detrimental attack, which took the lives of seven Americans including bin Zeid and also caused humiliation through the many intelligence ranks up to the President. It's not entirely clear what exactly went through Balawi's mind throughout his entire stay in Pakistan or who turned him into a triple agent? What was clear after the dust and smoke dissipated was the death and destruction left behind after his suicide vest detonated sending ball bearings and kids jacks hurling through the air cutting through metal like a hot knife through butter (Warrick, 2011). It had been done; a simple Jordanian doctor had penetrated deeply into the intelligence ranks and struck a killing blow, using his body like a human cruise missile.

Human Intelligence

What can make a logical man, not to mention someone with such a promising career and family, end it all in a single instance with the push of a button? The only logical reasoning, like all other suicide bombers could only be brainwashing. Balawi could not have entered Pakistan in early 2009 with the mindset of becoming a martyr. Like many suicide bombers, his Al Qaeda host guilted Balawi into strapping on a vest after they realized his insignificance towards other operations. Balawi tried many times to train in small unit operations but showed no skill towards simple tactical abilities and struggled in small arms, failing to master the ever common AK-47, even on single fire (Warrick, 2011). Balawi was played like a pawn and only after all other options towards his skill set were exhausted, did his leaders then decide the only option would be martyrdom. There were many videos made prior to the attack on 30 December, most of which showed a frail and drained Balawi preaching his cause however, the video fails to show any sort of passion and motivation in Balawi's demeanor (Warrick, 2011).

A Shot in the Dark

Balawi entered the compound on December 30th but with some skepticism. The only thing pushing him forward was that of shame, false bravado and the prospects of dishonor towards his family. What happened that fateful day turned out to be a strategic kill shot for Al Qaeda and her allies around the world, but after months of planning, the overall success of the mission was insurmountable to what they could have ever imagined. Al Qaeda leadership could have never known the number of VIPs located in Khost, not to mention the lack of security on the ground. In many instances, coordinated attacks like the one in Khost are followed by subsequent actions, whether it is by multiple fighters or an indirect mortar or rocket strike. Never the less, Al Qaeda scored a direct hit in the "War on Terror" and consequently added seven more stars on the wall at Langley and forever changed the way spies and intelligence agents do business (Warrick, 2011).

Policy Recommendations

Unfortunately terrorism is not simply black and white, but rather gray. The key to counterterrorism or combating terrorism globally lies with a simple tactic, limiting the number of open-source intelligence that is on the open market. Unfortunately leaks will forever plague intelligence officials and agencies worldwide; however, mitigating these risk could and would greatly affect our success rates. There also needs to be stricter regulations for the publication of manuals and guidelines that are being used to combat certain terrorist organizations and cells worldwide. In the case of the suicide attack in Khost, mistakes were made, however, not much could have been done to prevent such tragic events. What it all boiled down to that tragic day were the decisions on the ground made by handlers and security personnel who made the calls and adhered to them. There was a lack of security and a search was not completed, however this was done under the right circumstances and under good intentions.

Summary

With the many different opinions established throughout the intelligence and intellectual community alike, one thing is undeniably clear: Al Qaeda and Taliban members are proving every day their increasing use of superiority towards intelligence and spy craft. The evidence is insurmountable and it has become increasingly clear that the level of sophistication continues to improve leading to further frustration for counter terrorism experts and soldiers in the field. Al Qaeda and their Taliban counterparts can no longer be considered a rag-tag band of mountain fighters with aging equipment and fighters, but rather a force to be reckoned with. Sometimes on the offensive but always on the defensive; Al Qaeda and her allies around the world will continue to adapt to technology and tactics used against her and with a constant stream of new recruits, protecting our lively hood will continue to be a challenge in the years to come.

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