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Osama bin Laden: A Developmental Perspective

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Abstract ~ The attacks of September 11, 2001 have produced a new urgency to understand terrorism and its leaders in complex terms. This paper characterizes the evolution in cognitive complexity of Osama bin Laden across different life domains using the developmental paradigms of Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) and Michael Commons (Commons & Richards, 2002). We understand bin Laden as simultaneously simple and complex, both constructing and operating within a world that is absolute (reflecting simple, either/or thinking) in some domains and relative (reflecting more complex thinking) in others. He adheres ideologically to one absolute reality, rooted in his interpretation of Islam, although concurrently demonstrates a complex leadership style that encourages members to contribute uniquely to and take ownership of the process. This latter ability reflects greater complexity for both integrating and synthesizing multiple, com-

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peting perspectives and systematic thinking. Both internal and external factors facilitated this evolution, fueling movement from embeddedness to executive perspective.

Key Words: Osama bin Laden, Development, Terrorism, Self-Evolution, Differentiation and Reintegration.

Osama bin Laden: A Developmental Perspective

Arguably one of the most inciting figures of recent times, Osama bin Laden and his terror[1] organization al-Qaeda have thrust terrorism into the world arena as a force with which to be reckoned. We now have a new need to understand the motivation for terrorism that moves beyond psychopathology and/or the simple, dichotomous characterization of good versus evil (Hoffman, 2002). Many would argue that this endeavor necessitates a certain amount of intellectual risk-taking, as there is no one theoretical paradigm with which to frame the psychology of the terrorist, or the subsequent effects that terrorism has on the general public (Beck, 2002; McCauley, 2002a). Further, because terrorists represent a group not easily sampled, psychological analysis is more difficult and presents unique challenges.

Scheuer (2004) recently argued in his book, Imperial Hubris, that many in the academic and government communities have continued to describe bin Laden in oversimplified terms. In his estimation, many have characterized bin Laden as a depraved lunatic who despises our freedoms and targets us because of our liberty. This, in his estimation, is wrong and only perpetuates our misunderstanding of bin Laden; it also does not take into consideration how our own policies and perspectives fuel this insur-

[1] Jessica Stern's (2003) definition of terrorism is used here: "First, terrorism is aimed at non-combatants… Second, terrorists use violence for dramatic purposes: instilling fear in the target audience is often more important than the physical result. This deliberate creation of dread is what distinguishes terrorism from simple murder or assault."

gency. Scheuer argues that bin Laden is rather a flexible, complex, and innovative leader who poses a significant threat to the United States. Hoffman (2002) asserts a similar portrait, casting bin Laden as a very capable CEO operating in a complex environment, a stark contrast to the simple characterization of a mindless fanatic. Only when this complexity is acknowledged and understood will we be armed to prepare an adequate response.

To better understand the motivation behind terrorism and its leaders, many have sought out social scientists for answers. However, with this new trend has evolved a unique challenge for psychologists to provide opinions without compromising the ethical principles mandated by organizations such as the American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association (Post, 2002). This dilemma specifically relates to the problem of providing expert clinical opinions in the absence of examining the individual. These dilemmas become poignant when structured interviews and/or examinations of the terrorist are extremely difficult, and psychological analysis is instead based on past interviews and behavioral patterns.

This dilemma was recently discussed by Jerrold Post (2002), who detailed his experiences in developing a psychological profile of Saddam Hussein during the Persian Gulf War I of the early 1990s. In resolving this dilemma, Post (2002, p. 646) believed that these sorts of psychological profiles should be allowed so long as they "be based on research consistent with psychiatric principles and knowledge; be conveyed in a responsible manner that is mindful of the responsibility to society; and treats the subject with respect." Robert Wettstein (2002) echoed this point by saying that social scientists are ethically permitted to provide professional opinions about an individual without direct examination, although they must disclose the resulting limitations of the conclusions. Most importantly for purposes of this paper is the position of the American Psychological Association, as stated

in the APA Ethics Code (2002) section 9.01 (b), which states:

> Except, as noted in 9.01c, psychologists provide opinions of the psychological characteristics of individuals only after they have conducted an examination of the individuals adequate to support their statements or conclusions. When, despite reasonable efforts, such an examination is not practical, psychologists document the efforts they made and the results of those efforts, clarify the probable impact of their limited information on the reliability and validity of their opinions, and appropriately limit the nature and extent of their conclusions or recommendations (p. 13).

The purpose of this paper is to characterize the evolution, meaning-making, and cognitive complexity of Osama bin Laden using the developmental framework of Kegan (1982, 1994). In doing so, we hope to contribute to the ongoing search for understanding by elucidating how limitations in perspective-taking that occur within some domains (i.e., his religious ideology) coupled with complexity in other domains (i.e., administration) presents a unique set of challenges and threat to western society. As pointed out by Beck (2002), the threat facing the United States necessitates such an analysis, in spite of the acknowledged limitations. If we are to address the current problems facing us with respect to terrorism and all of its various manifestations, we must first understand them. Simply categorizing terrorists as "crazy", "deranged", or "evil" is not enough, and is most probably inaccurate (Beck, 2002; McCauley, 2002b; Scheuer, 2004). These sorts of characterizations also preclude a deeper understanding of the threat posed to western society.

Robert Kegan's Theory of Self-Evolution

According to Kegan (1982), meaning-making is a primary and basic human activity. People develop according to how meaning

is derived and constructed, a process of evolving how we relate our selves to the world. For Kegan, this process involves an invariable sequence of differentiating self from one's conception of the world, and then reintegrating this new way of knowing and constructing meaning into a qualitatively different conception of being. What begins as subject (or the embeddedness of self within a particular context or perspective) becomes object, and is something that can subsequently be reflected upon and reintegrated into a larger system of meaning. This latter process of reintegration is what distinctively alters the lens through which the world is constructed. According to Nakkula and Ravitch (1998), this experiential amalgam affects our entry into new experience, only to be integrated back into the amalgam to create a newer and more complex meaning matrix. The framework in which meaning is constructed is limited in a very unique way, constrained, impacted, and potentiated by experience in the world. As development unfolds, this experience both guides and is guided by one's larger meaning matrix, evolving new and reintegrated notions of self in relation to the world.

Similar to the work of Piaget and Kohlberg, Kegan uses a stage model to frame this process (Kegan, 1982, 1994) beginning at infancy with stage zero. Since little is known about bin Laden's early life, however, we begin our summary of the theory with the Imperial Stage (stage 2). At this stage, the child begins taking control (object) of those impulses and perceptions that were once integral (subject) to what constituted self. Kegan (1982) explains that for the first time, a self-concept emerges, where "with the capacity to take command of one's impulses (to have them rather than be them) can come a new sense of freedom, power, independence…" (p. 89). With this new perspective, however, emerges new embeddedness in those needs and wishes that are the new subject of being. There is no ability to integrate these needs and wishes with other people's needs and wishes, thus illustrating the limits of Imperial (stage 2) consciousness. In the

transition from stage 2 to stage 3 (2/3), the individual understands other people's needs and wishes but not social norms. In this stage 2/3 transition, understanding is still influenced by self-interest.

In negotiating movement to the next, Interpersonal Stage (stage 3), most begin to construct notions of self that are rooted within the social contexts to which they belong, and which involve integration of need systems among people. Identity is conceptualized in relationship to these collective entities, where self is both defined by and derived from this larger interpersonal whole. Kegan (1982) argues that this new self is not separate from the interpersonal context, but is rather defined within it. To describe this orientation, he uses the term fusion, where the context is required to bring self into being. Identity is located within the group structure, and is the point from which meaning is constructed - an order of consciousness, where self is given from within the interpersonal entities to which it belongs. Perspective is again limited, however, as the adolescent is often unable to conceive of these interpersonal groups as object, precluding an understanding of self as being separate from them.

In the transition from stage 3 to stage 4 (3/4), the individual realizes that they continue to be regulated by the interpersonal context, and that they are caught within it, but aren't yet able to move towards self-determination. As development unfolds, however, people begin the process of constructing a self that evolves into a position of administration through regulating and managing these interpersonal contexts, indicative of the Institutional Stage (stage 4).

According to Kegan (1982), achieving equilibrium at the Institutional Stage brings about a new construction of self that is no longer owned by and defined within these interpersonal contexts. A new independence emerges, where self is able to con-

ceive of the group as the primary object of administration and begins to regulate this space, rather than being regulated by it (indicative of the former, Interpersonal Stage). However, just as there is an embeddedness of perspective in other stages, the limitations here are rooted in the need to have these institutions to regulate in order to define self. Kegan says of this stage, "The 'self' is identified with the organization it is trying to run smoothly; it is the organization" (p. 101). Only when the self begins negotiating the Interindividual balance at stage 5 is it able to reflect upon and take as object these various institutions which, in the past, were required to give form to self. Rather than being embedded within the institutions that are the subject of one's psychic administration, the self at the Interindividual stage is able to reflect upon a self in relation to multiple institutions, characteristic of dialectical thinking. The Interindividual self is no longer bound by institutional limits, and is able to conceive of identity that is co-constructed in relationship to an endless number of institutions, a process that continues to evolve throughout life.

It is important to note here that these transitions are very powerful life forces, and that the transforming individual often experiences anxiety and discomfort during transitions. Indeed, where the environment is only partially supportive of the new structure, the transition is even more difficult to negotiate. One reaction to transition is to embed self deeper in the familiar and comfortable, an avoidance of movement altogether. In doing so, the self is able to stave off immediate pain. As will be discussed later, this tendency to cling to the familiar is one characteristic of extremists, unable to entertain perspectives outside the realm of their own ideology.

Limitations in Assessing Bin Laden

We acknowledge here that there are distinct limitations in applying Robert Kegan's theory of self-evolution (1982, 1994) to study

the development of Osama bin Laden, and the process through which he transformed into the leader of al-Qaeda. Psychological interviews and assessments were not obtained, and data are limited to journalistic research and past interviews conducted by various news agencies. Additionally, there are limitations to Kegan's theory specifically that prevent an accurate characterization of bin Laden's development, including the assumption that domain-specific functioning is indicative of functioning across life domains. That is, it is implied that if someone is generally operating at a particular stage of development in one area of life (such as at work), it stands to reason that they would be operating at this stage in all areas of life (such as family, school, etc.).

With respect to bin Laden, the central hypothesis is that he varies in terms of how he is functioning developmentally across life domains, thus violating this primary assumption. For purposes of this analysis, therefore, while Kegan's theory is still used as the primary framework for characterizing bin Laden's development, (although it is applied to various life domains as independent areas of functioning), we augment it with Commons' theory (Commons & Richards, 2002), which accounts for functioning at different stages and transitions between stages in various life domains.

Culture and Development

It is also important to acknowledge the issue of culture and questions about the universality of western psychological theory. Many psychologists are actively engaged in re-evaluating psychological theory cross-culturally, including theories of human development, and are trying to determine to what degree, if at all, they accurately describe development in cultures outside the culture of the theorist. Cultural psychologists and anthropologists such as Robert LeVine (1989) and Shweder et al., (1998) have been engaged in ongoing evaluation of theories such as Kegan's for some time. In contrast to Kegan (1982), Shweder et al. (1998)

describe the evolution of self as being contingent upon the cultural context to provide the framework for defining self. According to LeVine (1989), these contexts mold the self in ways that are not always consistent with western psychological theory. For example, Dasen (1977) demonstrated that Piaget's model of cognitive development was unable to be replicated among some from non-western cultures.

Kegan (1982) addressed this issue of culture by saying, "Our differences do not radically separate us, because there is a single context we all share and from which both sides of the tension spring - namely, meaning-constructive evolutionary activity, the motion of life itself" (p.209). According to Kegan, although culture and context do play a critical role in how meaning is derived, that meaning-making even occurs is universal. In other words, culture is the steering wheel directing the process of meaning-making in a myriad of ways, but it is not the engine driving the process. Likewise, others (Piaget, 1976; Commons et al., 1998) have argued that there is only one pathway along which development occurs irrespective of culture (that culture provides the content, but not the pathway), and that the pathway is able to be measured in terms of increasing complexity.

While we recognize the potential complexities and limitations of using Kegan's theory - or for that matter any western theory - to describe the development of a middle eastern Muslim who does not find western life acceptable, we do believe that the movement of human development is universal. It might be better, in the long run, to use Arab or Muslim contexts and theories to understand bin Laden better. However, for purposes of western societies trying to understand bin Laden, and bringing a radically different and utterly puzzling set of actions and perspectives into a framework we can understand, we believe in the value of this endeavor at the present time.

The Evolution of Osama bin Laden

Most of what others have written about Osama bin Laden has been domain-specific, focusing on the development of his ideology and the process through which he came to detest and eventually target the United States and other western societies. This began with his involvement in the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan through the 1980's, and lead into his subsequent formation of al Qaeda for purposes of establishing a strict Islamic order across the Middle East (Kepel, 2002). As a result, it is difficult to characterize bin Laden's development outside of his campaign against western society, as little is know. It is also somewhat difficult to understand the ways in which he negotiated early developmental stages (e.g. the Incorporative, Impulsive, and Imperial stages) in terms of Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory.

Despite these challenges, we argue that there is evidence of bin Laden functioning at different developmental stages varying by life domain. We understand bin Laden as simultaneously simple and complex, both constructing and operating within a world that is, in his perspective, absolute in some domains and relative in others. Ideologically, he adheres to one simple, absolute reality rooted in his interpretation of fundamentalist Islam, reflecting a lack of perspective-taking ability and systematic thinking. The purpose of institutions such as al Qaeda is to uphold this ideology in the face of other competing ideologies, with little attention paid to the cost of doing so (e.g., those who sacrifice their lives for this cause). This was illustrated well on a videotape released after 9/11, where bin Laden was seen laughing at the prospect that some of the 9/11 hijackers were ignorant as to their fate. Ideologically, bin Laden is unable to integrate and synthesize realities outside the realm of his own (rooted in his interpretation of Islam), and thus is generally functioning at imperial (stage 2) in his orientation to the world.

What makes bin Laden exceedingly dangerous and particularly interesting from a developmental perspective is the fact that this low-stage ideological orientation is complemented by an extremely complex leadership style and administrative disposition that encourages members to contribute uniquely to, and take ownership of the process. As a leader, and for purposes of furthering the goals of the institution, bin Laden's ability to organize both his experience and that of others is indicative of a higher-order understanding. Scheuer (2004) has characterized bin Laden in his ability to lead as a "first-rate innovator" and a "hugely successful" and "out-of-the-box-thinking CEO" in this regard (p. 117). Bin Laden's understanding of how al Qaeda (as a meta-system comprised of a myriad of terrorist sub-organizations) has the potential to impact another system (e.g. the United States, itself comprised of many sub-systems, such as economic and social domains) is evidence of a more complex, systematic ability to think.

This ability is reflected in how bin Laden and his organization go about picking targets, and the extent to which they commit themselves to the task - to the point where operatives train for years, in their enemies' own homeland, to learn how to fly airplanes, for example. Not only does this reflect an ability to both integrate and synthesize multiple competing perspectives, it also evidences a propensity towards systematic and dialectic understanding. Systems are conceptualized in terms of how they are able to impact other systems, for purposes of establishing a global meta-system rooted in Islam. Scheuer (2004) argues that in leading al Qaeda, bin Laden operates as a businessman and ideologue, soliciting creative ideas from those around him for purposes of furthering the larger institution.

Although we find little evidence that bin Laden has negotiated developmental movement ideologically, we will argue below that there is evidence of bin Laden having negotiated movement from

an Interpersonal (stage 3) to an Institutional (stage 4) orientation in administrating and executing jihad against western society. A confluence of factors facilitated this shift, both internal and external, profoundly impacting his developmental trajectory and affecting the propensity for his becoming the leader of al Qaeda. These include his early experiences with Islam and those who affected his views on religion, his wealth and opportunity for education, the invasion by and eventual defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan by the mujahideen, or "holy warriors", and the involvement of the United States military in combating the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq.

Concurrent Development: Ideological vs. Administrative Evolution

Most indicative of bin Laden's Interpersonal orientation within this particular domain was the extent to which he defined himself within various Islamic contexts, both early in life and over the course of his rise to becoming a leader. Early on, his father Mohammed was the most influential in this respect, and was responsible for first introducing bin Laden to Islam. According to Bergen (2001), Osama credited his father as being the inspiration for his participation in jihad against those who were perceived as threatening Islam. Although jihad has manifested in many ways throughout history, the most current strand was born in the late 1970's when Islamic militants began revolting against various governments (most notably the overthrow of the Shah of Iran) in hopes of establishing an Islamic caliphate that would adhere literally to the Koran (Kepel, 2002). Bergen (2001) discusses how, when bin Laden was young, his propensity to engage in Islam and jihad was rooted in his deference to his father. This might readily be interpreted to indicate that bin Laden's earliest associations with Islam occurred while his construction of meaning was reflective of stage 2-3 reasoning. Moving towards a stage 3 mutuality, there appears to be a quality of embeddedness within the needs and wishes of the family and culture with respect to jihad,

evidenced by bin Laden admitting he is acting according to the wishes of his father.

Developmentally, Osama bin Laden evolved adhering to an Islamic reality that was constructed by his father and fostered within his family; it had not yet become fully self-owned. Kegan (1982) says of the Interpersonal stage 3 negotiation that there is no independent self separate from the context of the other. As a young man developing within an Islamic society to a family who were devout Muslims, jihad became a source of profound meaning as it provided a point of connection to this larger familial and societal whole. Over the course of his development, this shared space expanded to include new contexts (e.g., his association with the mujahideen fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan). However, each context shared the same construction of reality, which revolved around jihad as a means of fighting for and maintaining a strict Islamic society. On the one hand, bin Laden was mired within a domain where the underlying ideology was absolute (characteristic of stage 2-3). To have entertained alternative possibilities would have been heresy in both his eyes, and those of his family and culture. However, bin Laden's ability to function differently and eventually change the administrative dynamic of those organizations conducting jihad is indicative of movement towards a higher-order complexity.

Kegan (1982) characterizes self at stage 3 (Interpersonal Stage), where an attack upon the collective body is experienced as an attack upon self. During bin Laden's collegiate years at King-Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, jihad came to represent the collective response to a perceived attack on self, itself located within the collective body. Bin Laden's own conception of Jihad involved him operating within two different fields of complexity, the first of which involved the simple reaction to any perceived threat to Islam, driven by the extreme ideology that was the structure of bin Laden's reality. There were

no other possible realities or perspectives to integrate, so negotiating them was impossible. The second field was much more complex, however, and involved how he set about executing jihad. He was not bound by ideological limits in engineering the process, and was able to regulate al Qaeda and jihad at a much higher level, understanding how one system had the potential to impact another system. This latter process eventually necessitated a systematic understanding of the world (Commons et al., 1998).

Subsequent to his father's death, bin Laden sought out new Interpersonal contexts with similar orientations to jihad, and with similar leaders providing a structured ideology and sense of purpose. An early example of this was while he was enrolled in King Abdul-Aziz University during the late 1970's, a period of great Islamic insurgency throughout the Middle East (Dennis, 2002). The Shah of Iran was overthrown by Ayatollah Khomeini, and many were calling for a return to society rooted in orthodox Islam (Bergen, 2001). After associating with an Islamic group known for such radical ideology (the Muslim Brotherhood), bin Laden became acquainted with a professor of religious studies, Abdullah Azzam. According to Corbin (2002), "Azzam offered his listeners an intoxicating blend of violent rhetoric and zealotry. His version of Islamic history was aggressive and militant" (p.9). Building on early experiences with his father, this shared ideology radically shaped Osama bin Laden's construction of reality, and fueled the creation of al-Qaeda.

From a developmental perspective, jihad evolved into the primary source of meaning for bin Laden, although his orientation to it was distinct in quality. Jihad provided an operational outlet for the shared ideology that was fostered by people such as Azzam, and fueled by the collective, militant Islamic contexts of which bin Laden was a part. To the extent that the desired ends were the same and the purpose shared by the group (the destruc-

tion of western society and establishment of a pan-Islamic state), bin Laden was constructing a self in relation to these contexts at an Interpersonal (stage 3) level (Kegan, 1982). Jihad was not simply a cause bin Laden participated in; it had become his cause, his reason for being, the context through which he located and defined self. Kegan (1982) says of this orientation, "There is no self to share with another; instead the other is required to bring the self into being… They cannot know themselves separate from the interpersonal context" (p. 97). The interpersonal context was critical in defining bin Laden's identity, as there was a fundamental inability to conceive of a self outside of this shared space, as it did not exist. This shared space was necessary in giving form to self.

Byman (1998) discussed the impact that interpersonal contexts have on the extremists' sense of self, saying that those from various ethnic groups strive for a communal identity, which is formed through engaging in terrorist activities. Beginning with the influence of his father and family, and continuing into his collegiate years, there was no evidence of bin Laden having constructed a self that was independent from these shared contexts. In contrast, the way in which he defined sense of self was intertwined with the shared reality of the group engaged in the establishment of a strict Islamic society. The ideology and sense of purpose was born from and fostered by the group, and provided the framework in which to operate.

Reeve (1999) asserted that the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 provided Osama bin Laden and the groups to which he belonged new operational purpose, in turn affecting the ways in which meaning was constructed. In retaliation for the Soviet Union invading Afghanistan, Reeve described the response by many Muslims as experiencing a religious duty to devote themselves to the war. This is indicative of an Interpersonal (Stage 3) orientation. Along with many other

Muslims, bin Laden fled from Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan, and for the next ten years he actively participated in waging jihad against the Russians. Although bin Laden remained intransigent in terms of his underlying belief system and ideology, the ways in which he came to operate and execute jihad evolved markedly over time, indicating movement towards higher-order operational thinking. Specific factors during this developmental period suggest movement from an Interpersonal (stage 3) to an Institutional (stage 4) way of constructing self.

The Complex Process of Developmental Transition: bin Laden's Administrative Self

Although this evolution in constructing self was indicative of internal transformation, various external factors contributed to it. Given his wealth and connections to high-profile business and government officials throughout the Middle East, much of bin Laden's contribution to the jihad against the Soviet Union involved traveling throughout the Middle East for purposes of raising money to fund the mujahideen. Additionally, because of his family background in construction, he was able to import heavy equipment in order to build roads, hospitals, and storage facilities in Afghanistan. Reeve (1999) discussed how this ability to affect the war provided bin Laden a sense of achievement and purpose. Ideologically he was static, functioning at an Imperial (stage 2) order of consciousness. Administratively, however, these factors helped bin Laden expand the platform (indicative of stage 3-4) from which he was able to come forth and affect the jihad against the enemy.

The resources that bin Laden had at his disposal were critical in facilitating developmental transition, as it allowed bin Laden to shift from being one of the many followers embedded within a shared Interpersonal reality to a point where he could more actively regulate and manage this reality. This is illustrative of Institutional (stage 4) consciousness (Kegan, 1994). Because bin

Laden was able to contribute with a distinct array of materials and capabilities that no one else was able to offer, the subsequent shift towards institutional administration was more natural than it might have otherwise been. Without these resources, the evolution may have taken longer or happened differently. However, to the extent that the institutional purpose was central to his identity, bin Laden began to shift from being embedded within a particular context towards managing it.

This evolution in consciousness was also evidenced by bin Laden shifting from actively fighting as one of the mujahideen towards directing them in the jihad against the Soviets. That a multi-millionaire would relegate himself to these sorts of duties was inspiring to those fighting with him. As a result, many began to look to bin Laden as a leader, another external factor fueling his transformation. According to Corbin (2002), one particular battle took place towards the end of the war in which bin Laden and roughly 35 other Afghan fighters held their position for several weeks causing the Soviets to eventually retreat; bin Laden became an instant legend. In acquiring this status, he began to engineer what would evolve into al-Qaeda, for purposes of expanding the jihad against the larger western society, once the Soviets were defeated. Evolving with this new status came new perspective on self as being the leader of the group, rather than being governed by it. This evidences bin Laden disembedding self from the Interpersonal context to which he belonged and reintegrating it into a new orientation where self is the administrator of this context.

In February of 1989, once the last of the Soviet army left Afghanistan after suffering a disgraceful defeat, Corbin (2002) reports that bin Laden and the mujahideen realized that religion could defeat the super powers of the world. Corbin explains that bin Laden also began to realize that the true potential for Islamic power was rooted in forming a pan-Islamic organization, rather

than one that was pan-Arab[2]. That is to say, he realized the power of uniting Muslims from around the world, rather than just those from Arab countries. This is significant on many levels and evidences his continuing evolution towards conceiving a self as administrator. This is typical of stage 4 (Institutional Stage).

Immediately after bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia after defeating the Soviet Union, Iraq invaded Kuwait, significantly destabilizing the Middle East. This invasion was also critical in that it set into motion a series of events that significantly impacted the development of bin Laden, fueling his rise to becoming a leader. According to Bergen (2001), when Kuwait was invaded by Iraq, bin Laden immediately offered the services of his mujahideen. After having just defeated one of the world's two super powers, Iraq was perceived as an insignificant obstacle for the mujahideen, and for bin laden who by that point was an authority. However, the Saudi royal family declined bin Laden's offer, instead enlisting the support of the United States of America. This infuriated bin Laden, and set into motion the new jihad against the west (Bergen, 2001).

The Saudi government turning their backs on the mujahideen was significant for several reasons in terms of the effects it had on bin Laden's evolution. First, even though the bin Laden and Saudi royal families had been close for a long time, this outright rejection implied the Saudis thought the mujahideen were impotent, despite recently having been funded by the Saudis to defeat the Soviet Union. Bin Laden also interpreted the move as a threat to the strict version of Islam to which he adhered, as infidels (US forces) would be operating on holy soil (Mecca and Medina). Developmentally, bin Laden's ideological embeddedness prevented him from appreciating the true complexity of the situation, and there was no attempt at moving beyond the Saudi insult to understand the larger picture. The insult to the institution was also an insult to self, and represented bin Laden's administrative

limits in understanding the circumstances, as his conception of self was located within and constrained by the very institution that had been insulted by the Saudis. In ideological, interpersonal, and administrative domains, the Saudi decision was insulting and stretched the bounds of bin Laden's ability to deal with the crisis.

Similarly, according to bin Laden's radical interpretation of Islam, the presence of the infidels (i.e., Americans) on holy soil was a desecration of their land, and bin Laden was already disgusted by what he saw as the western cultural degradation of his homeland (Corbin, 2002). As bin Laden's administrative self was rooted within the same Islamic institutions (al Qaeda and jihad) perceived as being assaulted by both the Saudis in their disdain for the mujahideen and the Americans who were polluting their holy land, there were distinct limits in how he was able to conceive the circumstances. He was unable to conceptualize his self in relation to these multiple systems. Were a fifth order of consciousness achieved (Kegan, 1994), or an Interindividual (stage 5) self constructed (Kegan, 1982), the presence of American troops may have been understood as simultaneously unfortunate and necessary (a juxtaposition only fully appreciated at a dialectical level of thinking) in protecting the Islamic holy land from inevitable invasion by the Iraqi military. As a consequence of these limitations and the inability to understand the larger dialectic, bin Laden instead focused on combating each perceived challenge to the Institution. This involved targeting both Saudi and United States interests. In this approach, bin Laden is demonstrating a stage 3-4 perspective where everyone has to be faithful to the regulations of Islam (Commons, personal communication, December 16, 2003).

As a result of bin Laden loudly opposing the Saudi government by funding Saudi opposition groups in London and running his jihadi group in Yemen, the Saudis decided bin Laden must be

exiled from the country. Thus, bin Laden and his mujahideen fled to Sudan, and were welcomed by Hassan Al Turabi, head of the National Islamic Front (NIF) organization, another major influence affecting bin Laden's administrative evolution from an Interpersonal to Institutional orientation in constructing self. Similar in quality to Azzam, Al Turabi adhered to a radical version of Islam that called for the creation of a pure Islamic state void of western influence. In exchange for the Sudanese government allowing his al Qaeda organization to operate within its borders, bin Laden began to simultaneously invest in the Sudanese economy and develop his jihad Institution. According to Bergen (2001), he led the double life of businessman and leader of a terrorist organization. The goal, as bin Laden and Al Turabi would have it, was to establish a pan-Islamic state (Corbin, 2002). For the second time in a decade, ideology was met with material means to actualize the goals of the greater Institution, although this time bin Laden was evolving as a leader, an administrator of the Institution.

Jane Corbin (2002) describes how bin Laden functioned as a leader realizing his own limitations, which is indicative of Institutional (stage 4) administration:

> From the start Osama bin Laden was conscious of his own credibility gap, despite his exploits in Afghanistan. He was not a respected Islamic scholar, and needed religious authority to give cover to his developing philosophy of terror. Jamal al-Fadl recounted how, during 1992 and 1993, al-Qaeda developed a hierarchy under bin Laden in which members with more religious training formed the 'fatwa and religious committee' to codify, and justify, with fatwas or religious rulings, the jihad against America and more secular Muslim governments… Once bin Laden and the hierarchy of al-Qaeda had concocted a self-serving fatwa to give cover to their violent aims, they began establishing

> military training camps on the Afghan model in the Sudan (p.37)

Perceiving his own vulnerabilities, bin Laden was able to regulate the institution by recruiting others to issue religious edicts for the greater purpose of the institution. By virtue of having been able to assess and evaluate self outside of the interpersonal context he was able to recognize his weaknesses, and the implications they had on the larger organization. Had bin Laden been operating in the interpersonal stage, he would have been unable to know himself outside of the interpersonal context (Kegan, 1982). Weakness and vulnerability would rather have been conceived as that of the collective interpersonal body. Kegan (1982) said of the Institutional balance, "Its self-naming and self-nourishing converts the world within its reach to operatives on behalf of its personal enterprise" (p. 223). The religious scholars who accelerated through the ranks of Al Qaeda became "operatives" on behalf of bin Laden to further the "enterprise" of radical Islamic fundamentalism, the very same institution bin Laden sought to regulate.

Bergen (2001) discussed this aspect of bin Laden, detailing a time during the Persian Gulf crisis of the early 1990s when he convened about forty Afghan Islamic clergy members (ulema) to address the presence of United States troops in the holy land. He says, "Although he may be well read in the Koran, even his stoutest defenders would have to acknowledge that bin Laden is not a religious scholar and does not have the authority to deliver a fatwa on his own" (Bergen, 2001, p.102). As a result of having manipulated these religious meetings, however, violent jihad was declared against America and bin Laden finally had the support of the most respected clerics to wage war. This ability to manipulate people around him is illustrative of bin Laden affecting others for purposes of benefiting his institution (Kegan, 1982), the same entity that gives him form and sense of self.

As the world community began to put great pressure on Sudan for harboring bin Laden and al Qaeda, the latter were eventually expelled from the country and Sheik al-Turabi was placed under house arrest in Khartoum for several years. As a result, bin Laden fled back to Afghanistan, whose government (the Taliban) shared similar visions of a strict Islamic society. Once established, bin Laden quickly began reviving the institution by setting up terror training camps for the mujahideen, and began associating with Ayman al-Zawahiri, another major ideological force in his life. According to Bergen (2001), on February 22, 1998, bin Laden and al-Zawahiri merged their terror organizations (i.e., Al Qaeda and Islamic Jihad, respectively) for purposes of conducting jihad under one unified Islamic Institution. In adhering to the same radical ideology, the overarching goal was to establish one coalesced Muslim state to rise up against the west. Corbin (2002) described this merger as a highly significant, saying, "Al Zawahiri is the brains and bin Laden the body" (p.20).

Functioning at an Institutional (stage 4) level as the leader of the Islamic organization, bin Laden surrounded himself with people who fulfilled critical roles within this Institution. Al- Zawahiri not only served as one of bin Laden's closest spiritual and political advisors, but he became the ideological backbone of the institution, filling this void for bin Laden. According to Bergen (2001), "The profound impact of al-Zawahiri on bin Laden's thinking has become increasingly clear, and some have suggested that this little known physician is more important to al-Qaeda than bin Laden himself" (p.206). It was this ability, however, to regulate others that allowed him to effectively serve his Institution. In doing so, he was able to disembed self from the Interpersonal context to which he belonged, and restructure a self that was an active administrator of this context.

In contrast to his relationships with Azzam and al-Turabi, however, bin Laden appears to have maintained total control over the

institution and its larger mission while acquainted with al-Zawahiri, indicating that the evolution from an Interpersonal to Institutional orientation was nearing completion. That is, this process of differentiation appears to have occurred in micro-stages, and is illustrated by how he constructed self differently in relationships over time. His association with Azzam in Afghanistan was characterized by complete embeddedness of self within the larger interpersonal context, where Azzam served as the leader of the Institution by providing it with its purpose and ideology. Bin Laden was a member of this larger Interpersonal body, and needed people such as Azzam in order to locate self. While associating with al-Turabi in Sudan, however, bin Laden had begun evolving the ways in which he constructed self, and this is evident in terms of his orientation to al-Turabi. Whereas Azzam brought the institution into being, al-Turabi was seen as a tool to facilitate an already thriving enterprise regulated by bin Laden. By the time bin Laden forged his alliance with al-Zawahiri, his evolution from the Interpersonal to Institutional stage was nearly complete. He had evolved from being a follower into an active administrator, consequently affecting how others were conceived in terms of their potential contributions to the Institution. This is not to say that all leaders function at an Institutional (stage 4) level, as they do not. It might, however, better explain why bin Laden has been as successful as he has in regulating al Qaeda.

One interesting question that remains, however, is the extent to which bin Laden has evolved through the Institutional (stage 4) and into an Interindividual (stage 5) orientation to the world. In an audio taped recently released to the public in November 2002, bin Laden cites as reasons for jihad the killing of innocent Iraqi and Palestinian civilians by the infidels. Throughout the transcript, there are references to Muslim communities that extend beyond the Arab world, which have nothing to do with al-Qaeda or the jihad it has been waging. On one level, there is an exten-

sion of self to communities beyond that particular organization. However, those communities that are the foci of bin Laden's rhetoric are all components of the same underlying institution, a pan-Islamic community adhering strictly to the word of the Koran. Towards these ends, bin Laden continually shows evidence of being rooted within the Institutional stage, where the institution is required to bring self into being.

When asked about his family or other personal aspects of his life, bin Laden repeatedly refuses to answer (Bergen, 2001). From this, one is able to draw one of three conclusions: (a) anything not directly related to the Institution plays little or no role in his sense of identity, or in how he constructs self; (b) it does play a role, but he doesn't want the focus of the interview to be redirected outside of the Institution; or (c) he is adamant about both serving the institution and keeping his family safe. The latter seems most consistent with his decision to leave his family in Saudi Arabia, and explains to some extent why a millionaire would leave such wealth to live in caves and be continuously hunted. His construction of self had evolved into the administrator of the Institution, and to abandon it would mean to abandon his sense of identity, in turn eliminating his primary source of meaning. It is because of the Institution that bin Laden has been able to give up a life of luxury, as it has led to a sense of greater purpose, and a richer meaning matrix in which to function. Additionally, the powerful sense of purpose derived at stage 4 is probably one primary factor inhibiting movement to an administrative Interindividual (stage 5) order of consciousness, as abandoning it is conceived as terrifying. As a result, even more effort is put into maintaining a stage 4 orientation to the world, and avoiding movement to stage 5.

There is little evidence to date suggesting bin Laden has moved beyond the Institutional stage, or that he is able to conceive of himself outside the organization he manages. However, one

example supporting this tendency towards an Interindividual (stage 5) understanding of self has been bin Laden's ability to conceive of how al Qaeda (as a meta-system comprised of multiple terrorist sub-organizations) has the potential to impact another system (e.g. the United States, itself comprised of many sub-systems, such as economic and social domains). This necessitates a more complex, systematic ability to think, where multiple systems are able to be seen in relationship to one another. This is reflected in how bin Laden and his organization go about picking targets (e.g. economic, symbolic), and the extent to which they commit themselves to the task - to the point where operatives train for years, in their enemies' own homeland, to learn how to fly airplanes. Not only does this reflect a propensity to integrate and synthesize multiple competing perspectives, it also evidences a tendency towards systematic and dialectic understanding. Systems are understood in terms of how they are able to impact other systems, for purposes of establishing the one correct, global meta-system rooted in Islam (reflecting the powerful presence of ideology). However, although there may be hints of Stage 4-5 movement, this remains an area for further study, as there is yet to be evidence of a self penetrating multiple systems.

bin Laden's Construction of the World as Evidence for Institutional Consciousness

Since 1996, when bin Laden declared war on the west, one consistent factor indicative of his ideological and administrative embeddedness within Imperial (stage 2) and Institutional (stage 4) orientations, respectively, has been bin Laden's tendency to characterize the world dichotomously, to categorize people into good versus evil, or the righteous versus the infidel. In doing so, he organizes people according to their relative position towards his ideology and Institution, and is able to more effectively identify potential threats to self. Characterizing the struggle as a holy war, bin Laden splits people into two groups: (a) those who are

Jewish or Christian, and who either are, or support the "Crusaders" (a term he uses to refer to the USA), and (b) the Muslim faithful who are resisting the aggressions of the former. Because the ideologies between these two groups are so polarized, the meaning derived from jihad becomes more lucid for the Muslim faithful, further differentiating the institution. This is critical in terms of bin Laden's development, because according to Kegan (1982), "the self is identified with the organization it is trying to run smoothly; it is the organization" (p. 101). By differentiating the institution in this way, his ideology and sense of self are emboldened.

bin Laden's construction of self is firmly rooted within being the administrator of jihad and radical Islamic fundamentalism, whose "truths" (or ideologies) are products of the ongoing institution, established well before bin Laden was its leader. It is the same ideology instilled during the war against the Soviet Union by other leaders such as Azzam, and which continue today in the new jihad against the west. For bin Laden, the primary difference was that he had become the "professor" of these ideologies, rather than one of the masses professed to, reflecting the evolution from an Interpersonal to Institutional way of knowing. In juxtaposing the ideology of the institution against that of the enemy, he has been able to further differentiate the purpose of the Institution, and consequently the self who is running it.

Examples of this are found in an October, 2001 interview, where bin Laden bemoaned that jihad was a duty for all Muslims. As published by CNN, bin Laden accentuated a sense of us versus them in an October 2001 interview saying, "America is against the establishment of any Islamic government. The prophet said, 'They will be targeted because of their religion'" (p.2). The implicit meaning is that those who consider themselves faithful Muslims must rise up against the "other", the embodiment of evil, or "Satan" as bin Laden characterized it. Similarly, in a May 1998

interview with bin Laden published by PBS, John Miller of ABC news asked the former for his thoughts regarding having been singled out as a terrorist. Bin Laden responded, "They rip us of our wealth and of our resources and our oil. Our religion is under attack. They kill and murder our brothers. They compromise our honor and our dignity and dare we utter a single word of protest against the injustice, we are called terrorists" (1998, p. 2).

The conflict is depicted as a unilateral attack on Islam by the United States and Israel, affecting all aspects of life for those assaulted. This extreme characterization exemplifies how bin Laden juxtaposes his own ideology (and that of the institution) against that of the perceived attackers. In construing the struggle as a duty for all Muslims, while at the same time depicting the United States as the antithesis of Islam, a clear ideological polarization occurs. Kegan (1982) discussed the Institutional orientation as being inherently ideological, where self clings to a set of "truths" that are perceived as absolute. Others adhering to a different set of truths are perceived as heretics, thus providing justification for jihad. From a recruitment standpoint, this polarization also increases the propensity for others to join the Institution, as the sides become much clearer.

Had bin Laden achieved full equilibrium at the Interindividual stage (stage 5) in all life domains, the overall performance of the Institution in retaliating against other attacking Institutions would no longer be conceived as the end itself (Kegan, 1982). Rather, self would be able to conceive of different realities, which would include "hearing negative reports about itself" (Kegan, 1982, p. 105), and in doing so would be capable of synthesizing and integrating multiple perspectives in arriving at a solution. There would be no dichotomous organization of the issues, as self would be actively relating to other institutions for purposes of co-constructing solutions that are greater than the sum of its parts. The rigid and unyielding quality of his Institutional rhetoric may

also be illustrative of early Interindividual (stage 5) negotiation, where bin Laden is beginning to react to the pain inherent within transition. Rather than face it, he instead burrows himself in what has become comfortable and familiar - stage 4, administrative consciousness rooted in stage 2 ideology. The same is true of extremists in general, where the closer they come to transition the more adamantly they cling to what they know, reinforcing the underlying orientation.

Beck (2002), recently discussed this tendency of terrorists to construct the world into a collective extreme of "us" versus "them". He says that because terrorists usually regard "themselves as the victims and the enemy as the victimizers" (p. 210), a radical, overarching ideology begins to manifest. "As this image of the enemy takes form, the terrorists own collective self-image is enhanced - holy, righteous, and courageous. Moral and religious symbols permeate their apocalyptic images: the forces of Evil vs. the forces of Good; Satan vs. Allah" (Beck, 2002, p. 210). Jihad is understood to be the just and righteous reaction to this image of evil, the infidel. To the extent that this image of "other" is constructed as the antithesis of the institution, new form, purpose, and meaning are given to the self managing it. The world is understood through a lens of collective extremes, where self is embedded within one institution diametrically opposed with others, giving each distinct identity.

Kegan (1982) states that the Institutional self comes to know self and derive meaning through the institution it is regulating. To the extent that bin Laden over-generalizes and characterizes the issues dichotomously, he differentiates these truths and sources of meaning further for the institution and self. In doing so, he is able to clearly distinguish self and the greater interpersonal context in which he functions. Violent methods are so successful in achieving these ends because, as Byman (1998) points out, the violence makes this contrast of us versus them sharper. The ter-

rorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were powerful in terms thrusting bin Laden's agenda into mainstream society, because by attacking one Institution (America) was he able to distinguish his own (al Qaeda and jihad). It also served to reinforce the loyal stage 4 commitment bin Laden had to jihad, as this orientation is very hard to leave.

Conclusion

The terrorist acts of September 11, 2001 fundamentally changed the United States of America. This new threat is evidenced by the Department of Homeland Security having raised its color-coded threat system seven times to "Orange" by the time of this manuscript. In developing strategies to combat terrorism, one of the first steps must be to understand the psychology of terrorist that moves beyond the simple characterization of them being crazy or psychotic. As many have pointed out (Beck, 2002; McCauley, 2002a; Scheuer, 2004), this is most likely false[2]. With the re-emergence of Osama bin Laden since 9/11/2001 on both audio and videotape, it is also important to understand how his leadership affects members of his organization in such a way as to compel them to fly airplanes into buildings, killing thousands of innocent people. This is critical because, as McCauley (2002a) points out, many of the 9/11 hijackers would not have met the criteria for DSM-IV diagnoses, including Anti-Social Personality Disorder, Depression, and suicidal tendency. Rather, he says that they were most probably normal by any psychiatric standard. In light of these realizations, more in-depth analysis is necessary in understanding why terrorism is meaningful to some.

Because extreme ideology plays such a critical role in the development of the terrorist, one such method of analysis is to study

[2] One of the compelling arguments against that is that terrorists acting in groups depend on one another and would weed out those who were mentally ill.

the process of meaning-making and the evolution of self embedded within radical Islamic Institutions such as al-Qaeda. In using Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) framework, there is evidence of bin Laden functioning at different developmental stages varying by life domain. Bin Laden is understood to be simultaneously simple and complex, both constructing and operating within a world that is absolute and relative. Ideologically, he adheres to one simple, absolute reality rooted in Islam, reflecting a lack of perspective-taking ability and systematic thinking, and an inability to integrate and synthesize realities outside the realm of his own, and thus is imperial (stage 2) in his orientation to the world. This low-level ideological orientation is complemented by an extremely complex leadership style and administrative disposition that encourages members to contribute uniquely to, and take ownership of the process. As a leader, and for purposes of furthering the goals of the institution, bin Laden's ability to organize both his experience and that of others is indicative of a higher-order understanding. Bin Laden's understanding of how al Qaeda (as a meta-system comprised of a myriad of terrorist sub-organizations) has the potential to impact another system (e.g. the United States, itself comprised of many sub-systems, such as economic and social domains) is evidence of a more complex, systematic ability to think. The larger movement, however, has continued to be integral in how he defines self, reflecting his embeddedness within this orientation. The institution has been necessary to give shape and form to bin Laden's administrative sense of self, indicative of an Institutional (stage 4) order of consciousness (Kegan, 1994).

Commons and Richards (2002) argue that there are interpersonal and personal benefits to increasing complexity. Relationships are conceptualized in more equal terms, and "The struggle for independence and dependence is integrated into a more functional interdependence in which contribution to the needs and preferences of others is part of non-strategic interaction. Unresolved

conflicts are dealt within a larger framework of co-constructing workable dialogues" (Commons et al., 2002, p. 210). When people are able to think in more complex ways, the potential for synthesizing multiple perspectives (both individual, systemic, and paradigmatic) becomes greater. As a consequence, mutually-constructed resolutions are more likely to result.

On one level, the degree to which bin Laden locates himself as the administrator of an institution bound by an inherent ideology seems a fundamental characteristic of the extremist. This embeddedness of self perpetuates a particular forestructure of understanding, as the self remains fused with the very ideology and institution promoting these doctrines. They are not exclusive of one another until the individual differentiates self from them, and subsequently gains new perspective. In doing so, bin Laden would gain the ability to conceive self in relation to many Institutions, including those who are perceived as the enemy, without being rooted in one exclusively - a dialectical (stage 5) level of thinking (Kegan, 1982) across life domains. It is possible that in gaining new perspective, the propensity for empathy and understanding of self might result, as Commons et al. (2002) suggest. As long as the self is defined by the organization will it be enslaved to those ideologies inherent within it - characteristic of the terrorist and extremist.

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