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The Global Energy Market:  
Comprehensive Strategies to Meet  
Geopolitical and Financial Risks



Oil and Terrorism

David Cook



THE JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY  
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THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKET:  
COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES TO MEET GEOPOLITICAL  
AND FINANCIAL RISKS

*THE G8, ENERGY SECURITY, AND GLOBAL CLIMATE ISSUES*

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*The Global Energy Market: Comprehensive Strategies to Meet Geopolitical and Financial Risks—The G8, Energy Security, and Global Climate Issues* examines a variety of scenarios for the future of global energy markets. Some of these scenarios evaluate factors that could trigger a regional or worldwide energy crisis. The study assesses the geopolitical risks currently facing international energy markets and the global financial system. It also investigates the consequences that such risks could pose to energy security, pricing, and supply, as well as to the transparent and smooth operation of the global market for oil and natural gas trade and investment. By analyzing these threats in depth, the study identifies a series of policy frameworks that can be used to fortify the current market system and ensure that it can respond flexibly to the array of threats that might be encountered in the coming years. The study also looks at the impact of emerging climate policy on the future of world energy markets.

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# OIL AND TERRORISM

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## ABSTRACT

Oil and terrorism: as oil is one of the major resources if not the major resource of some of the dominant Muslim countries, it is critical for radical Islamic groups to both deny their own governments (against whom they are rebelling) the revenues derived from oil, as well as create a sense of crisis in the world oil market that terrorist attacks can generate. Targets can be oil production facilities, oil pipelines, large tankers or even the offices of oil companies located in oil-producing countries. Although radical Islamic groups have carried out a number of paradigmatic attacks, they have yet to create the full-scale chaos that they need; nor, more critically for their goals, to turn the populations of target countries into sympathetic audiences for their struggle. This paper will examine the trajectory of attacks on oil targets by radical Islamic groups as well as the religious legal literature that backs these attacks up, and note what trends are likely for the future.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

1. Al-Qa`ida's focus upon attacking the oil industry has grown immensely since approximately 2004, representing a clear change in policy for the organization. Virtually all of its attacks are associated with the Arabian Peninsula.

2. Abu Musa`b al-Suri's strategic outlook of autonomous cells carrying out terrorist operations against the oil industry appears to have been adopted both by al-Qa`ida and a number of ideological affiliates.

3. The oil industry in non-Arab Muslim countries (Central Asia, Indonesia), Russia, Africa and South America has either been attacked or threatened by radical Muslim organizations that have the capacity to strike. Although these organizations to date have been either unable or unwilling to carry out deadly strikes, the fact of these initial probes gives the researcher reason to believe that they will be attempted again.

4. There exists no significant correlation between statements issued by al-Qa`ida and its affiliates and attacks upon the oil industry (after 2002).

5. Attacks upon the oil industry are usually carried out by organizations that have substantially failed in their other political and military goals, and for this reason have turned to attacking the oil industry out of desperation. In general, the most successful attacks have been suicide attacks.

### I. THE CENTRALITY OF OIL FOR RADICAL MUSLIM GROUPS

Being one of the major resources, if not *the* major resource of some Muslim countries, it is not surprising that oil and natural gas production have attracted the attention of radical Muslim groups. Radical Muslims comprise a wide variety of organizations, fronts and even tendencies within the much larger religion of Islam. These groups, however, share some common characteristics: overwhelmingly they call for full implementation of the *shari`a* within Muslim countries,<sup>1</sup> have a radical critique of the power structure within these countries (usually focusing upon the tyranny of the leader and the subservience of the *ulama* to him),<sup>2</sup> and often view themselves as the defenders of Islam against Western and most especially non-Muslim political, economic and cultural encroachment upon the Muslim world.

This paper will focus not upon the broad field of radical Islam, which can include both resistance groups of a religious-nationalist variety as well as non-violent pious societies of Muslims seeking to create mini-*shari`a* states (often called *jama`as*), but upon those radical groups that have as their primary focus the violent overthrow of their government, and the transformation of the state through coercive means into an Islamic state (according to their definition) or those globalist jihadist groups whose targets are non-Muslim countries. These latter groups can include both those who fight merely to defend Muslims they perceive as oppressed and to eventually win them liberation and an Islamic state<sup>3</sup>, or those groups—such as al-Qa`ida—whose goals are much broader and include a radical transformation of both the Islamic world and the subjugation of the non-

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<sup>1</sup> Shari`a is defined here as the divine law of Islam.

<sup>2</sup> Ulama is defined here as the religious leadership.

<sup>3</sup> Examples would include radical Islamic groups fighting in Bosnia—Herzegovina, Kashmir and Chechnya.

Islamic world. However, one should note that some of the Muslim countries with the most developed and violent radical Muslim groups (e.g., Egypt, Pakistan) have no oil resources, and therefore are effectively outside the discussion, except insofar as their members occasionally target oil-rich countries or participate in other groups.

For Muslim radical groups with such broad goals, the economic and political reasons to focus upon oil resources are fairly self-evident. Because of the paucity of natural resources in the Middle East (other than oil) and the exclusive dependence upon the revenues stemming from oil and gas, those Muslim oil-rich countries can be destabilized through attacks upon the oil infrastructure. Depending, as they do, upon these revenues to support an otherwise weak or in some cases non-existent economy, an attack on oil is a choke-hold that can be applied at any time. Additionally, for radical Muslims, the fact that such a high percentage of the revenues derived from oil go to non-Muslim multi-national corporations is enraging, and the additional fact that many of the oil workers and their dependents are non-Muslim and constitute a dilution of the Muslim character of their societies is doubly grating. To lose the money (as they see it) and be subjected to cultural invasion at the same time constitutes a strong enough provocation to attack.

Oil is also vulnerable. The oil infrastructure is usually concentrated in a few places within a given country, and while this fact makes protecting it theoretically easier, it also ensures that if an attack is successful, the destruction can have wide-ranging consequences. Additionally, the volatility of the oil market makes it particularly vulnerable to any threats—real or imagined. Therefore, even a failed hit or one on a subsidiary part of the oil industry (e.g., an oil tanker on the high seas) can have

ramifications far beyond the actual importance of the event by raising oil prices or causing the market to fluctuate. All of these subsidiary elements within the oil industry—oil tankers, refineries, storage areas, headquarters of companies, quarters for oil workers, etc.—cannot be protected on a permanent basis.

An additional difficulty stems from the ideological insidiousness of radical Islam. Indeed, it is by no means clear who precisely is a radical Muslim. Because the nature of this ideology is to gain converts (primarily among Muslims, but also by converting non-Muslims who increasingly form an important part of radical Islam), it is theoretically possible that trusted members of security forces or management could be suborned into betraying the facilities they are supposed to protect. This possibility exists in addition to the standard methods of gaining access through force, blackmail or bribery, which are all too common in and of themselves. For all of these reasons, discussion of the radical Muslim threat to the oil infrastructure in the Muslim world is important.

### **II. AL-QA`IDA AND SAUDI ARABIA**

Saudi Arabia is the major example of an oil producing country that is a primary target for radical Muslims. Not only is a heavy percentage of al-Qa`ida's membership drawn from Saudi Arabia, but the close Western involvement in the kingdom is a symbol for what is considered to be the exploitation of Muslim resources, the political and cultural dependency upon the United States and Europe, and the defilement of the Muslim holy places of Mecca and Medina (along with the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula). Since 1996, Osama Bin Laden has focused upon the U.S. "occupation" of Saudi Arabia, with his repetition of the traditional message, "Expel the Jews and the

Christians from the Arabian Peninsula,”<sup>4</sup> in order to bring down the political, economic and religious bases for the monarchy at once. Effective use of this statement and the sentiments that logically flow from it (expulsion of foreigners, cutting economic ties with the Western world, etc.) have in fact caused great harm to the Saudi Arabian regime, although it appears to have weathered this initial storm.

Beginning with his earliest statements in the summer of 1996, Bin Laden has often focused on the oil industry. In 1996 and later, he characterized the industry as a gigantic theft of the resources of the Muslims.<sup>5</sup> After the fall of the Taliban in December 2001, Bin Laden’s speeches have increasingly centered on targeting the oil industry with destruction. Initially, these addresses merely focused on the economic disparities between what the oil was worth and what the Muslim world—mainly Saudi Arabia—was actually getting paid for it. His “Message to the Americans” of October 6, 2002 gives the general tone of these pronouncements:

You steal our wealth and oil at paltry prices because of your international influence and military threats. This theft is indeed the biggest theft ever witnessed by mankind in the history of the world.<sup>6</sup>

However, one should also note that this point is number (d), in other words number four, on a long list of reasons why the United States should be attacked. In general, it is significant to note that few of Bin Laden’s pronouncements prior to September 11, 2001 mention the oil issue except in passing. While Saudi Arabia has always been important to

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., Bruce Lawrence (ed), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (trans. James Howarth, London: Verso, 2005), pp. 24 (August 23, 1996), 263-4 (December 16, 2004); *Sawt al-jihad* 10 (1424/2003), “Interview with Abu Jandal al-Azdi,” p. 25. The tradition can be found in al-Bukhari, *Sahih* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), iv, p. 39 (no. 3053); Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), vi, p. 275 and other collections.

<sup>5</sup> *Declaration of War* (Khurasan Publications, n.d.), e.g., p. 14; Lawrence, p. 163 (October 6, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence, *Messages*, p. 163.

Bin Laden, it seems that the key grievance was always the presence of United States and foreign troops on the soil of the kingdom.

Stealing oil is also mentioned in his following statements, and is given as the reason for the U.S. attack upon Iraq.<sup>7</sup> Oil's importance grows within these statements to the point where finally he characterizes it as "black gold."<sup>8</sup> But Bin Laden's most detailed statements concerning oil and the destruction thereof occurred in his long anti-Saudi speech calling for the overthrow of the monarchy on December 16, 2004. In it, he stated:

*Mujahidin*, be patient and think of the hereafter, for this path in life requires sacrifices, maybe with your life...be sure to know that there is a rare and golden opportunity today to make America bleed in Iraq,<sup>9</sup> in economic, human and psychological terms...Remember, too, that the biggest reason for our enemies' control over our lands is to steal our oil, so give everything you can to stop the greatest theft of oil in history from the current and future generations in collusion with the agents and the foreigners...oil, which is the basis of all industry, has gone down in price many times. After it was going for \$40 a barrel two decades ago, in the last decade it went for as little as \$9, while its price today should be \$100 at the very least. So, keep on struggling, do not make it easy for them, and focus your operations on it, especially in Iraq and the Gulf, for that will be the death of them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 240 (October 29, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 243.

<sup>9</sup> One should note that in *Sawt al-jihad* 9 (1424), pp. 22f. the Saudi Arabian al-Qa`ida argues against this very point, saying that jihad fighters should stay in the kingdom, and not go to Iraq, since they were needed for the uprising against the Saudi regime.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence, *Messages*, p. 272.

There is a great deal here that lends itself to interpretation, quite aside from his eerie prediction of oil at \$100 a barrel. First of all, by prefacing his comments with a call to self-sacrifice, Bin Laden is laying out the tactics that would come to be emblematic of the Saudi al-Qa`ida attacks against the oil facilities and infrastructure: they would overwhelmingly be martyrdom operations or *fida`i* operations.<sup>11</sup> Bin Laden very clearly is pointing to the actual destruction of the oil industry on the grounds that the resources were being extracted hastily, without regard for future generations of Muslims who might very well have to live off of these resources, and being undersold.

One might wonder whether Bin Laden in his analysis here is essentially expressing the realization that the al-Qa`ida uprising in Saudi Arabia was doomed to failure (as might have been apparent to an outsider by the end of 2004), and that as these Muslim resources were not going to be used for the benefit of Islam, it would be better to simply wreck them. Hitherto he had focused on economic disparities rather than actual long-term loss of the resource itself, and seems to be rather conscious of the transient nature of the oil reserves themselves. These interpretations can be backed up by several important analyses of Bin Laden's statements with regard to oil that have been published by radical Muslims. The first is a long analysis of the thought of Bin Laden by Abu Ayman al-Hilali in 2002,<sup>12</sup> and the second is terser and deals specifically with the oil issue from late 2007 in the wake of the attack on the oil refineries at Abqaiq, analyzing the overall trends of attacks on oil production (covered below).<sup>13</sup> Al-Hilali, in the earlier

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<sup>11</sup> Martyrdom operations are suicide attacks, *fida`i* operations are ones in which the attackers would fight until killed.

<sup>12</sup> Abu Ayman al-Hilali, *Ida`at hawla al-fikr al-siyasi li-l-Imam Bin Ladin min khilal khitabihi al-akhir* (aloswa.org, May 9, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Adib al-Bassam, *Ibn Ladin wa-l-naft*, appearing in *Sawt al-jihad* 30 (1428/2007), at anonymouse.org (tawhed.ws).

analysis, dealt in general terms with the methods by which Western economic weaknesses should be exploited, by focusing mainly on terror in order to create a jittery market, thereby increasing the price of oil.

Bin Laden's frequent calls for the overthrow of the Saudi royal family bore fruit in the uprising of the Saudi Arabian branch of al-Qa`ida that began in May 2003 (with suicide attacks in Riyadh directed against foreigners).<sup>14</sup> It is possible, then, to test the effects of his pronouncements. This uprising, however, did not initially focus upon the oil industry. Thanks to the jihadi journal *Sawt al-jihad*,<sup>15</sup> which served as an outlet for al-Qa`ida's propaganda in the kingdom during this period, it is possible to trace the interest in attacks against the oil industry. Most of the articles in the journal were presumably written by Yusuf al-`Ayyiri, who was the leader of the Saudi Arabian branch of al-Qa`ida until he was killed in June 2003, and then by `Abd al-`Aziz Muqrin, who followed him and penned the major textbook on guerrilla warfare in the kingdom before being killed himself in June 2004.<sup>16</sup>

*Sawt al-jihad* has frequently included articles discussing attacks in Saudi Arabia. It is interesting to note, however, that the earliest article on tactics and strategy of the *mujahidin* (from the autumn of 2003) does not even list oil production as a possible target, indicating the ambiguous status of such attacks.<sup>17</sup> But by 2004, with the May 1 attack upon the petrochemical plant in Yanbu` and the May 29 attack on two oil industry installations and a foreign workers' housing complex in al-Khobar, which killed 22

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<sup>14</sup> The uprising followed directly Bin Laden's call to "liberate" Saudi Arabia on February 11, 2003 (Lawrence, p. 183).

<sup>15</sup> Issues of which appeared between the summer of 2003 and spring of 2005, with a stray issue appearing in 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Available at [http://www.e-prism.org/images/battarbook\\_tanfeedh.pdf](http://www.e-prism.org/images/battarbook_tanfeedh.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> *Sawt al-jihad* 2, pp. 24-7.

foreigners, the focus on the oil industry had become much clearer.<sup>18</sup> It was evident that the Saudi Arabian security forces were not prepared to deal with such assaults, and more or less allowed the al-Qa`ida attackers to rampage freely for hours. In all of these initial operations, al-Qa`ida was able to portray the government as ineffective, and although it lost fighters, it gained a good deal of prestige at the time.

Al-Qa`ida materials about the oil industry have not always been consistent. There is a marked difference between the rhetoric of Bin Laden, for example, and the other Saudis associated with him, and that of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, his Egyptian second-in-command. Al-Zawahiri throughout his published works very rarely mentions oil or attacks upon oil facilities. In his “Letter to the Americans: Why do we fight and resist you?” of January 10, 2006, al-Zawahiri lists under point 5:d, “You steal our wealth and oil at paltry prices...this theft is indeed the biggest theft ever witnessed by mankind in the history of the world.”<sup>19</sup> This statement was immediately followed by attacks against the oil industry in Yemen (below); however, nowhere in his numerous statements does al-Zawahiri actually call for direct attacks against the oil industry.

Other formal discussions of attacks against the oil industry can be found in the pages of *Sawt al-jihad*. For example, in the wake of the Yanbu` and al-Khobar operations, the journal was asked whether such operations should be carried out, because if they increase, the United States might respond by deploying rapid response troops and simply occupy the oil production centers—taking charge of security itself.<sup>20</sup> This question strikes at the heart of the difference between Bin Laden of 2002 and Bin Laden

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<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370100>; and further materials in *Sawt al-jihad* 18, pp. 12f. and 19, pp. 26f.

<sup>19</sup> Translation from Laura Mansfield, *His Own Words* (TLG, 2006), p. 291; additional translations from <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP108206>.

<sup>20</sup> *Sawt al-jihad* 19, pp. 37-8.

of 2004 discussed above, and raises the question of to whom *precisely* the oil reserves actually belong? Are they for the benefit of the Saudis of today (to be preserved for the future Islamic state) or are they destroying the Muslim world by supplying its worst enemies (to be destroyed by any means necessary)? The answer is that there is no difference between infidel foreigner and the infidel Saudi; and therefore the attacks against the oil production are completely legitimate, and should not only generate market terror (temporarily) but actually destroy the system.

It is easy to see why this would then lead to the most ambitious attack ever carried out by al-Qa`ida in Saudi Arabia, which was the attack upon the central oil processing plant at Abqaiq on February 24, 2006. It goes without saying that this was a suicide attack, in which four attackers in two cars tried to enter the facility and cause havoc (it is not certain precisely how much damage such a small group could have caused). Several of the terrorists were shot dead and the rest captured.<sup>21</sup> The most interesting thing about the Abqaiq attackers was the relative prominence of the families from which they came. There was an al-Tuwajiri, who was related to one of the most famous scholars in Saudi Arabia, Hamud Bin `Abdallah al-Tuwayjiri, and an al-Ghayth, also closely related to a prominent religious family (head of the religious police).<sup>22</sup>

The attack at Abqaiq spawned a series of articles on the legitimacy of such attacks. As previously noted, Bin Laden's stance on the attack was detailed by Bassam al-Adib for *Sawt al-jihad*, in which it was portrayed as a success.<sup>23</sup> The point of the attack was to disrupt oil production, but also to make the market jittery, and although the first goal failed, the second one was a success. Additionally, the "Laws of Targeting

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/02/27/world/main1349135.shtml>.

<sup>22</sup> "Abiqayq suicide bombers hail from leading Saudi families" at SIA news (February 26, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> <http://anonymouse.org/cgi-bin/anon-www.cgi/http:tawhed.ws/r?i=4364>.

Petroleum-related interests and a Review of the Laws pertaining to the Economic Jihad,” by `Abdallah Bin Nasir al-Rashid (a very senior and important al-Qa`ida figure in Saudi Arabia) was published in the wake of the Abqaiq attack.<sup>24</sup> This document describes the oil reserves as “Muslim property” taken by the infidels, and that:

[...] the demolition of infidel property as part of a war is legitimate as long as the benefits outweigh the costs...it is permitted to destroy Muslim property if infidels have seized control of it, or if there are fears that something like this may happen, as long as the potential damage of the infidels making use of this property is greater than the potential benefit that can be obtained when this property is returned to Muslim hands.<sup>25</sup>

Al-Rashid gives a long list of the facilities it is permitted to attack that do not differ substantially from those previously discussed. In short, al-Qa`ida in Saudi Arabia, as a result of its failure to mobilize a popular uprising against the al-Saud family during the period 2003-05 has gradually turned to more and more extreme tactics, and is finally willing to simply destroy the economic basis of the country rather than allow anyone collaborating with the United States to benefit from it.

### **III. OTHER ARAB OIL-PRODUCING COUNTRIES**

There are a number of radical Muslim groups throughout the Arab world that exist in ideological sympathy with al-Qa`ida and sometimes in tactical alliance with it. It is not always possible to identify the connections between these groups. Probably the most important of these is Abu Mus`ab al-Suri (Mustafa Setmariam Nasar), who while never formally part of al-Qa`ida has served as a prominent ideologue and strategist for

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<sup>24</sup> Evan Kohlmann, “Laws of Targeting Petroleum-related interests and a Review of the Laws pertaining to the Economic Jihad,” at [globalterroralert.com](http://globalterroralert.com) (March 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

global radical Islam. As a Syrian, al-Suri is far from fixated on the oil industry. For many years he was involved in the radical Muslim uprising in Algeria, and then later served the Taliban in Afghanistan, liaising with radical groups in Central Asia especially. This extensive background within the world of radical Islam gave al-Suri a global perspective and allowed him to rather coolly assess the strengths and weaknesses of the movement in various regions. Al-Suri in his delineation of targets lists oil production as a major issue:

[...] These two goals must be a target for the Resistance and legitimate terrorism (*al-irhab al-mashru`*). We must hinder them from taking the resources. And we must prevent them from selling products. Not only through the jihad of the weak and crippled protagonists of peaceful boycott...but through military resistance, an Individual Terrorism Jihad and operational activity of small Resistance cells.<sup>26</sup>

Because al-Suri had come to the conclusion that formal fighting in a classic top-down hierarchical format (characteristic of al-Qa`ida prior to September 11, 2001) is pointless and no longer feasible, he calls for the establishment of autonomous cells in each region that would not be controlled operationally by any one leader. Instead, these cells would receive tactical instruction through the Internet, and an overall strategic sense of possible targets from the leadership, who would not be in direct communication with the cells (for fear of security compromise). These autonomous cells would then have the responsibility to train, prepare and target promising targets. Eventually, over a long period of time, attacks by these cells would have the effect of both destabilizing the enemy and of

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<sup>26</sup> This statement may be read under “plundering resources” and “selling products,” in Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 399 (translated from al-Suri, *Da`wat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya al-`alamiyya*, available at [http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/harmony\\_index.asp](http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/harmony_index.asp)).

creating a wave of conversion to the cause of radical Islam. There is no doubt about the primary target, however, in al-Suri's mind. He states:

So, the most important enemy targets in detail: First, the oil and sources of energy from the source until the drain: These are among the most important targets of the Resistance: 'Oil fields—oil pipelines—export harbors—sea navigation routes and oil tankers—important harbors in their countries—storage depositories in their countries...'<sup>27</sup>

Al-Suri comes to the conclusion that, "in short, it is the life-artery of our enemies, it originates from our countries and we have to cut it off..."<sup>28</sup> He further notes the total dependence upon oil revenues that is characteristic of the "apostate governments" radical Muslims are fighting.

It is interesting to compare al-Suri's vision with the reality. Al-Suri focused on the three regions of North Africa, Yemen and Central Asia as being the most promising for the creation of these types of cells (although he also worked extensively with European radical Muslims). All three of these regions have significant oil resources—although those of Yemen are minor compared to the other two—and suffer from weak or oppressive governments with many possibilities for radical Muslims to organize and carry out attacks, as will be seen.

Interestingly, al-Suri does not concentrate on Iraq. In Iraq, following the U.S.-led invasion of 2003, there has been a systematic progression of sabotage of oil resources on almost all levels—to the point where Iraqi oil production during the period of 2003-08

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 400.

has been only a fraction of what it was prior to that period.<sup>29</sup> However, this sabotage has been the result of the insurgency, and while significant in terms of denying the U.S. tangible benefits to its invasion, has rarely garnered much attention or press coverage.

More significantly for al-Suri's model of individual cell attacks have been the experiences in Kuwait and Yemen. In January 2005, a cell of six was discovered preparing attacks against Kuwait's oil production, and was killed.<sup>30</sup> Although there had been other attacks in Kuwait, notably in 2002, this cell-oriented attack—especially when taken together with the on-going attacks in Saudi Arabia at the same time—was particularly ominous. However, to date no other attacks have been registered.

Yemen, however, is a different case. Constituting as it does a lawless country with vast potential for recruitment into radical Muslim causes, Yemen must be considered a major field for attacks on the oil industry. It is ironic, then, that comparatively speaking, Yemen's oil production is not very substantial (approximately 330,000 barrels a day). However, because the Red Sea straits that border upon Yemen are a passageway for oil tankers, it was possible first in 2002 to target the French tanker *Limburg* by a suicide boat (similar to the one that attacked the U.S.S. *Cole* in 2001), and then to attack oil production plants in 2006 and 2007. Although ultimately the two last efforts were failures because the suicide attackers in both cases were killed by guards (who were described as “trigger-happy”), it is clear that Yemen will be on the forefront of radical Muslim operations against oil production in the Arabian Peninsula.

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<sup>29</sup> There are numerous reports of sabotage of Iraqi facilities; one of them carried out by al-Zarqawi against the port of Basra and the oil docks there is featured in *Sawt al-jihad* 16, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> See [http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?issue\\_id=3324](http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?issue_id=3324), and [http://www.upi.com/Security\\_Terrorism/Analysis/2005/12/28/kuwait\\_sentences\\_terrorists\\_to\\_death/7778/](http://www.upi.com/Security_Terrorism/Analysis/2005/12/28/kuwait_sentences_terrorists_to_death/7778/).

Further afield, al-Suri has been intimately involved in the civil war in Algeria (1991 - present day) as the primary spokesman for the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA) from approximately 1993-97.<sup>31</sup> Oil resources in Algeria are not easily accessible to the radical Muslim opposition, whose strength is largely among the villages, towns and suburbs of the northern Mediterranean section of the country, while virtually all the oil is located in the deep south (protected by the desert and distance). The GIA's successor group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), has specifically targeted oil production on occasion, but has been unsuccessful in causing any serious output fluctuations. However, it is interesting to note that since 2001, the GSPC and its successor organization, al-Qa`ida in the Maghrib, have established cadres located in the deserts of Mauretania, Mali, Niger and Chad, and periodically have carried out violent operations or kidnappings of Westerners (and others) in this region. While, for the most part, these cadres have been hunted down, if al-Qa`ida in the Maghrib were to plan to attack the Algerian oil industry, most probably the desert cadres would be the ones to carry such an operation out. To date, the Islamic radicals have frequently succeeded in blending their militancy with the popular frustrations of the desert nomads (especially the Tuareg) and thus carried out attacks.

In Libya, the major radical Muslim opposition group, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), has mounted opposition attacks, including several attempted assassinations against the regime of Mu`ammar Qaddafi since the early 1990s (usually through the aid of the radical regime in Sudan).<sup>32</sup> However, thus far, the LIFG—while

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<sup>31</sup> The GIA largely disbanded during that year as a result of doctrinal differences, reforming into the Salafist Group for Fighting and Preaching (GSPC) that in 2007 was reformed into al-Qa`ida in the Maghrib, aligning itself completely with al-Qa`ida.

<sup>32</sup> See <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefalifg1007.pdf>.

successful in integrating its structure with al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan—has been unable to carry out very many successful attacks during the recent past. In summary, these groups outside of Saudi Arabia—other than the ones in Iraq and Yemen—do not seem to have focused on the issue of attacking oil production. There are numerous possibilities, but thus far, they are unrealized.

#### **IV. CENTRAL ASIAN MUSLIM COUNTRIES, RUSSIA, INDONESIA AND NON-MUSLIM OPEC MEMBERS**

There are abundant possibilities for attacks within major oil producing countries, either in Central Asia, Russia or other regions of the world. Among this selection of possible targets, the ones in Russia and in the Central Asian republics stand out. Russia, because of its brutal suppression of the Chechen insurgency (1999-2001) and its large Muslim minority population (in addition to an unknown number of illegal Muslim migrants from the Central Asian republics), is highly vulnerable to attacks on its oil industry. Moreover, most of the Russian oil production is in its southern region, close to the Muslim-majority sections of Chechnya (itself possessed of significant oil production) and Dagestan.

While the Chechen rebels fought a bitter war against the Russians—especially after the actual conquest of Chechnya in 2001—by mounting a series of revenge suicide attacks through 2004, it is difficult to pinpoint any serious threat to Russian oil production. In November 2006, several Russian oil wells were blown up in Chechnya,<sup>33</sup> however, this sabotage hardly stands out within the context of almost daily attacks. It does not seem that the oil industry has been singled out in any way, and none of the significant terrorist operations led by either Chechens or their radical Muslim supporters

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,20783386-5005961,00.html>.

were *specifically* directed against it. It is, of course, possible that with the upsurge of attacks upon the oil industry in other regions of the Muslim world that Russian oil could become a target, and past Chechen abilities to penetrate Russian security does not bode well for Russian oil if they do. However, to date, there is not much evidence of any serious attempts.

Three of the five Central Asian republics have substantial oil or gas production, namely Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Of these countries, Uzbekistan is the only one that has a radical Islamic violent opposition, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Kazakhstan is relatively inhospitable, thus far, to radical Islam because of the comparatively syncretistic nature of the popular form of Islam, and Turkmenistan hitherto has simply been closed off to radical Islam. (This might conceivably change following the death of the “Turkmenbashi,” Turkmen President Sapurmurat Niyazov, on December 21, 2006, but the best evidence suggests that it will continue to be an inhospitable location for radical Islam.) However, in Uzbekistan—which is the Central Asian country with the deepest Islamic roots and where popular opposition is quite entrenched against the regime of Uzbek President Islam Karimov—one would expect to find evidence of attacks upon the oil industry. The IMU is primarily located in the eastern region of the Ferghana Valley, while Uzbekistan’s oil and natural gas resources are located in the western desert region. Consequently, despite the radicalism of the IMU, it has never been able to attack the country’s oil infrastructure. Most probably the reasons are the comparatively difficult locations of the oil and gas reserves in Uzbekistan, situated at a considerable distance from the population centers

and therefore easily defended, as well as the relative weakness of the IMU since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.<sup>34</sup>

Other important oil countries could be more vulnerable—a principal one being Nigeria.<sup>35</sup> Nigeria's population is almost evenly split between Muslims and Christians, and there is considerable radical Islamic activity in the Muslim north. Although Nigeria's oil reserves are located in the southern, Christian-dominated section of the country, there has been substantial penetration by Muslims into the region both through immigration and conversion. And interestingly enough, one of the major and most violent leaders of sabotage of oil facilities in southern Nigeria has been a convert to Islam, Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, who frames his struggle in terms of jihad.<sup>36</sup> Dokubo-Asari founded his Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force in 1998, and with it has carried out dozens of violent attacks, including kidnappings, attacks on oil facilities and workers, and murders. While other non-Muslims (most famously Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed in 1995) have also participated in such activities in the name of economic justice, it is possible that this region might attract additional Muslim radicals in the future.

Other African states that have significant oil production and could be targets for radical Muslim activity include Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Sudan.<sup>37</sup> All of these countries are either majority Muslim (such as Chad and Sudan) or have substantial Muslim populations, and Sudan has been ruled by a radical Muslim regime since 1989.

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<sup>34</sup> See Martha Olcott, *Central Asia's Second Chance* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for World Peace, 2007), p. 268, general discussion pp. 58-60, 101-4; also Pavel Baev, "Reevaluating the Risks of Terrorist Attacks against the Energy Infrastructure in Eurasia," *Chinese and Eastasia Forum Quarterly* 4 (2006), pp. 33-38 at [http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May\\_2006/Baev.pdf](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May_2006/Baev.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Bin Laden called for its "liberation" in his message of February 11, 2003 (see Lawrence, *Messages*, p. 183).

<sup>36</sup> See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3713664.stm> (Dokubo-Asari was imprisoned in 2006).

<sup>37</sup> There has been Ugandan radical Islamic activity against oil production, although it seems to have dissipated: <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373869>.

While for the moment, there are no visible radical groups targeting the oil industry in any of these countries, the gross economic disparities in Chad make such attacks a distinct possibility.<sup>38</sup> In 2011, according to the peace treaty of 2005, the southern Sudanese will vote whether to stay in Sudan or secede and form their own country. According to the interviews this author conducted there in January-February 2005, there is strong sentiment for secession because of the oppression leveled against the southern Sudanese by the northerners. If this were indeed to happen, then Sudan would have to divide its oil resources, which mostly sit right on the boundary between northern and southern Sudan, and even now are a significant source of tension between the two sides. If there is secession, and the southern Sudanese take all or most of the oil reserves, then it is very possible that the radical Islamic government in the north could react by initiating a jihad as it did during the civil war of 1989-2005.

In South America and the Caribbean, radical Islam has a small toehold that could possibly pose a threat to the oil producing country of Venezuela. Venezuela is adjacent to Trinidad and Tobago, which in 1990 was the scene of a coup attempt by the Jamaat al-Muslimeen. This group is quite marginal even in Trinidad, and does not enjoy significant support from the islands' Muslim population. However, in the recent past there have been plots by Lebanese radical Muslims on the Venezuelan island of Margarita (June 2007), albeit against the United States rather than Venezuela itself.<sup>39</sup> Such networks, while insignificant at the present time, could pose a threat in the future.

Of all the non-Arab Muslim oil producing countries, only two—Uzbekistan and Indonesia—have noticeable radical Muslim insurgencies; of these two, Indonesia's

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<sup>38</sup> John Ghazvinian, "When ExxonMobil came to Chad," at <http://www.slate.com/id/2163389/> (April 5, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N06409342.htm>.

radicals are much more nuanced, capable, and numerous, and range from groups that are essentially opposed to Western cultural intrusion (especially the Front Pembela Islam) to those jihad outfits that fight Christians in regions of the country that could become separatist, and to those groups like Jama`a Islamiyya (JI) that fight for the establishment of a transnational Islamic state throughout Southeast Asia. During the period 2002-06, JI and its ideological allies from the Philippines and Malaysia were able to mount a number of successful operations, usually of a suicide attack variety, that significantly diminished Indonesia's tourist industry—especially in Bali, which was hit twice.

During the initial planning for the first Bali attack of October 12, 2002, the JI operations leader Hambali (who was also the only non-Arab on the al-Qa`ida *shura* council, and the only serious link between al-Qa`ida and JI) discussed a number of possible targets that could be hit, including oil repositories in the Philippines and American oil companies in Indonesia.<sup>40</sup> Hambali was also known to have considered other targets such as oil tankers that use the Straits of Malacca or dock at Singapore.<sup>41</sup> However, in the end, JI refrained from all of these targets, perhaps because of the general strategy of radical Muslims prior to 2004-05 to avoid actual attacks on Muslim economic resources. Today, JI has been weakened by the arrest of Hambali and many of its leadership, with only Nooruddin Top and a few others still on the run. It is significant, however, that these few have been willing to amalgamate themselves entirely with al-Qa`ida (now calling themselves al-Qa`ida in Southeast Asia), and could be more fully in line with its overall goals as detailed above. Currently, however, the organization is very shadowy and has not carried out serious operations since 2005, so it is difficult to tell

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.iags.org/n0111041.htm>.

<sup>41</sup> Yun Yeo Teo, "Target Malacca Straits: Maritime Terrorism in Southeast Asia," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30 (2007), pp. 541-61.

whether its strategy has dramatically changed. Other countries in the region are not as rich in oil production as is Indonesia, with the exception of Brunei. It is difficult to know whether there is significant radical activity in Brunei.<sup>42</sup> The country would be highly vulnerable to attack, lacking the manpower for an army (it is protected by British Gurkhas mainly), and located very close to the last known bases of JI.

In general, Russia, the Central Asian republics, and African and South American oil producing countries have not faced serious disruptive attacks from radical Muslims. Although for the most part radical Islam has faded as a serious political and military opponent compared to the late 1990s and early 2000s in these countries, certainly in Russia, Uzbekistan and Indonesia it maintains the ability to carry out terrorist attacks. In other countries, radical Islam exists mainly as a focus for malcontents whose affiliation with al-Qa`ida and others is purely nominal.

## **V. CORRELATION BETWEEN INTENT AND ATTACKS**

One of the most interesting questions raised by research into the relationship between oil and terror attacks by radical Muslims is the question of whether there is a close correlation between calls for attacks (usually by the al-Qa`ida leadership) and either attempted or successful attacks. We can isolate a number of different prominent attacks on oil facilities or transportation:

- a.** the suicide attack on the French supertanker *Limburg* near Yemen on October 6, 2002;<sup>43</sup>
- b.** attacks by Saudi radicals in Yanbu` (May 1, 2004) and al-Khobar (May 29, 2004);
- c.** destruction of the Kuwaiti cell (January 30, 2005);
- d.** the attempted suicide attacks against the Abqaiq refinery facility in Saudi Arabia on February 24, 2006;

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<sup>42</sup> Interviewing in Brunei in December 2005 this author heard persistent rumors of a JI cell, but was never able to confirm its existence.

<sup>43</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2303363.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2303363.stm).

- e. suicide attacks on oil refineries and storage facilities in Yemen on September 15, 2006;<sup>44</sup>
- f. attacks on oil refineries in Yemen on November 8, 2007.<sup>45</sup>

These prominent attacks are all Saudi Arabian-based, and thus serve as useful test cases for judging whether al-Qa`ida's leadership actually has operational control over these significant activities.

The first case, the attack upon the French supertanker, was part of a series of strikes that happened during October 2002, including the attack upon the Marines at Failaka (in Kuwait) and the Bali bombings mentioned above. Osama Bin Laden did deliver a message on October 6, 2002, the same day as the attack on the supertanker.<sup>46</sup> But it strains credulity to believe that this series of complicated operations had not been prepared for some months previously. Apparently, the October 6<sup>th</sup> message was designed to say to the United States especially that al-Qa`ida was still powerful enough to carry out such operations.

There do not seem to have been any messages heralding the Saudi or Kuwaiti attacks, however, and indeed until 2004, Bin Laden had not focused inordinately upon oil-related targets for some years. The attack of September 15, 2006 in Yemen has been widely heralded as having been caused by al-Zawahiri's "Letter to the Americans: Why do we fight and resist you?" of January 10, 2006, described above. However, once again, it seems that there is no significant correlation between what al-Zawahiri actually said and the attack. Al-Zawahiri's words spoke of the theft of oil resources, a fairly worn accusation, and did not mandate any attacks at all. Bin Laden had made statements in

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<sup>44</sup> [http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8K554H00&show\\_article=1](http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8K554H00&show_article=1) and see <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370143>.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/africa/11/08/yemen.attack.ap/index.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence, *Messages*, pp. 160-72.

May of 2006, but surprisingly none on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 11 attacks, just days before the Yemen strikes.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, examination of prominent operations and their relationship to al-Qa`ida's published statements do not reveal any significant correlation after 2002. It seems clear that the model of operations that has been adopted has been that of al-Suri, with each small cell more or less on its own.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND PROGNOSIS**

The oil industry constitutes a high-profile target for radical Muslims, including al-Qa`ida and its ideological affiliates. Fixation upon the oil industry is highly varied among radicals, with the strongest and most dangerous elements localized among Saudi Arabian al-Qa`ida, and the weakest among radicals in the non-Arabic speaking Muslim world (e.g., Indonesia). This conclusion is not surprising, given the fact that most of the other governments opposed by radical Muslims have other pressure points far more vulnerable to attack, such as tourism, and high-profile economic or cultural targets to take the place of the oil industry.

Saudi Arabia remains by far the most prominent focus of radical Islamic attacks upon the oil industry (other than the outright war zone in Iraq). It is only in Saudi Arabia that one finds an organized al-Qa`ida network that commands—while not support of the broader population—certainly support of the local radicals, and can field significant operations. During the past four years, the Saudi Arabian government has broken up a large number of radical Islamic cells, but as the attacks on Abqaiq proved, their

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<sup>47</sup> But note the recent attempt on another Yemeni tanker at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/22/world/asia/22tanker.html?ref=world>, shortly after a series of pronouncements by al-Zawahiri.

intelligence-gathering capabilities have not been sufficient to thwart a determined cell.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, because of the wide availability of radical Islamic materials throughout the kingdom, and most especially on the Internet, it is very possible that even those people who are in positions of trust could conceivably be converted to the ideology of radical Islam.

Other countries described above could very well face sabotage of their oil resources, as many of them are highly vulnerable and have not prepared themselves for attacks. Indeed, it is difficult to know how one would prepare such a diffuse industry as oil production for a sustained attack from an ideological foe. If there is any consolation, it is that even in regions where radical Muslims have some operational strength and support from the local population, they have not succeeded in carrying out sustained attacks over a period of time that would actually damage the industry (as opposed to causing sporadic terror or market fluctuations).

Radical Muslims—either within al-Qa`ida or its ideological affiliates—clearly have the goal of destroying or significantly disrupting the oil industry, and have laid both the religious-ideological groundwork as well as the practical military rationale for carrying out attacks. Although it is clear that radical Islam in general is at a low point in terms of its political and military aspirations, this fact should not mean that the oil industry should not expect attacks. Indeed, from the examples cited above, it is clear that radical Muslims have tended to focus upon soft targets like the oil industry when their larger goals have failed.

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<sup>48</sup> Although they did manage to foil one in December 2007 (again directed against Abqaiq), although there is no way of knowing whether the plot was realistic or not:  
<http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=104877&d=22&m=12&y=2007>.

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