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December, 2011



FOR THE LOVE OF GOD: AL QAEDA'S USE OF IMAGERY AS PROPAGANDA  
IN INSPIRE MAGAZINE

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

Of Communications

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This study is a content analysis that examines Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) use of imagery propaganda as in the first six issues of *Inspire* magazine. The central questions of this study are 1). What was the predominant theme of the magazine; 2). Were English speaking countries the primary target; 3). Was the intention of the magazine to gain new recruits or further radicalize individuals already taking part in jihad. The study used four coders that identified the visible motifs contained in images in *Inspire* magazine, which were based on the motifs identified in the *Islamic Imagery Project* (IIP). The images, once coded, were subjected to an analysis that also applied information provided in the IIP handbook in order to determine what common Islamic imagery theme was represented by the motifs. The most common theme identified was a Call to Arms. The United States was referenced most frequently as a target and the magazine as a whole was geared towards new recruits. Based on the analysis, future Islamic Imagery studies should include motifs and/or other imagery that focus on the Love of Islam theme and the theme of Power. Both of these themes were a primary component of *Inspire* and central to the propaganda used by AQAP.

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# **For the Love of God:**

## **Al Qaeda's use of Imagery as Propaganda in *Inspire* Magazine**

### **Purpose**

This study analyzes images created by Al Qaeda that are released within *Inspire* magazine, which is an official publication released by Sada Al Malahim, the media arm of Al Qaeda's Yemen branch known as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The magazine is an online English language "how to" guide for terrorism. To date, seven issues of *Inspire* magazine have been released since 2010; however, the seventh issue was released after the conclusion of this study and was not included in the analysis. Each issue contains images that target Al Qaeda's audience possibly by influencing their thoughts and actions in order to meet the goal of the organization. Imagery used as propaganda is central to the dissemination of Al Qaeda's message and media campaign. *Inspire* contains articles that provide bomb manufacturing instructions, and other strategies and information pertaining to terroristic acts, as well as being comprised with images that serve as propaganda and aid the organization in spreading its messages.

The goal of this study is to explore and identify what themes are contained within the messages inferred by the images in the magazine, identify the target audiences, and describe how the imagery is designed to potentially influence the target audience to support the Al Qaeda mission. Many of the images released by various branches of Al Qaeda have contained messages that can aid in the radicalization process of individuals,



recruitment of Muslims in the Western world and mobilization of jihadists to take up arms. They contain messages demonizing the “Western infidels,” and use images that create a sense of Muslim victimization that will lead the target audience down the path to radicalization. This study looked at what themes are visible in *Inspire*, how they are being used and toward whom the messages are being directed.

Al Qaeda once focused primarily on violent attacks that framed its ideological beliefs; however, Al Qaeda’s scope has changed and the group has become an umbrella organization that supports various Islamic jihadist groups around the world and enhances these groups’ ability to wage war against the “Western infidels.” Al Qaeda’s core leadership, known as Al Qaeda Central, commands a network of allied groups around the globe. The media strategies employed by this organization effectively communicate its messages to all of its affiliate groups and to mainstream Muslims around the globe. The messages disseminated by Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups create an image for the organization that may be used to strengthen its cause and assist in its recruiting efforts. The image of an organization is essential to its success and the repeated release and circulation of the messages created by Al Qaeda continually strengthen the organization in the eyes of the target audience.

There are large Muslim communities throughout Europe and the United States. If official publications such as *Inspire* magazine and their messages were better understood, counterterrorism officials might be able to counter these messages and provide the target audiences with information that contradicts Al Qaeda’s messages and decreases the organization’s ability to recruit and grow its ranks. This type of information is essential to decreasing terrorism around the world.

# **Background: Al Qaeda Yesterday and Today**

## **Al Qaeda Central**

Al Qaeda is a religious terrorist organization that supports a multitude of Islamic groups, and their terrorist activities, around the world. In 1979, two events precipitated the formation of Al Qaeda. The Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan “marked the rise of a new wave of Islamic movements which toppled the Shah of Iran and eventually drove the Soviet Union from Afghanistan” (Gunaratna, 2002). Al Qaeda, meaning The Base, was founded entirely to create a society that adhered to the strictest Islamic principles.

Abdullah Azzam conceptualized Al Qaeda. He is thought to be the ideological father of the organization and was the mentor of Osama Bin Laden. Azzam was born in 1941 and studied Shari'ah Law at Damascus University. He was part of the resistance to the Israeli occupation in Jordan in 1967 and taught at the University of Cairo until he was expelled in 1979 for Islamic activism. After his expulsion, he left for Afghanistan (Gunaratna, 2002).

Together, Azzam and Bin Laden ran a group called Maktub al Khidmat lil Mujahidin al-Arab (MAK) out of Peshawar, Pakistan, in 1984 (Gunaratna, 2002). The group trained anti-Soviet Afghans and ran an ultimately successful campaign against the Soviets, who withdrew their forces in 1989. Azzam moved forward with laying the guidelines for Al Qaeda's training, which became Al Qaeda's founding document (Gunaratna, 2002). In 1989, Azzam was targeted and killed by a bomb containing 20 kilos of TNT, which also took the lives of his two sons. After Azzam's death, Bin Laden

began directing the organization as he saw fit (Gunaratna, 2002). It was not until Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri merged their organizations in the 1990s that he “was transformed from a guerrilla into a terrorist”(2002).

After the Soviets withdrew, Afghans joined political opposition parties and other groups to campaign against dictatorial Muslim rulers. Non-violent parties became violent and violent parties became even more combative. This set up the country for social instability and political unrest, which is the ideal environment for terrorist groups to grow. The success of the Al Qaeda was largely based on its creation of ideological, political, financial, and military committees that had influence over several Islamic terrorist organizations. Al Qaeda was able to recruit their fighters in Sudan, Yemen, Chechnya, Tajikistan, Somali and the Philippines; however, its main training ground was Afghanistan (Gunaratna, 2002).

Al Qaeda created a worldwide framework for an Islamist military and political organization. Beginning in the early 1990s, the group reached out to representatives of various Islamic terrorist groups and political movements and asked them to join with Al Qaeda’s council. Roughly 30 organizations established a relationship with Al Qaeda and were assisted in planning and executing attacks at home and abroad, “ as Al Qaeda’s policy was not to claim these operations as their own. Since these attacks occurred mostly in Asia and the Middle East, scant attention was paid to them in the international media” (Gunaratna, 2002).

This changed on September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Center crumbled to the ground and thousands of people were killed after Al Qaeda suicide bombers flew hijacked planes into the two buildings, changing the world’s view of terrorism forever.

Before the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, Al Qaeda was either directly or indirectly involved in many attacks in the 1990s, including the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 and the bombing of the USS Cole on October 12, 2000. A small suicide boat filled with explosives rammed the USS Cole and caused a 32 by 36 foot hole in the hull. The blast killed seventeen American military personnel (Global Security, 2006).

Al Qaeda is known to infiltrate Islamic communities around the world. Imams are recruited and the group attempts to gain control over Islamic NGOs, which are non-government charities. Rohan Gunaratna (2002), author of the book *Inside Al Qaeda's Global Network of Terror*, stated that the CIA reports that one fifth of all Islamic NGOs have been infiltrated by Al Qaeda, which has sought to mobilize and radicalize the Islamic diaspora through the use of these charities. Islamic propaganda disseminated by various Islamic associations and societies "exploited the political impotence felt by some Muslim migrants and left them vulnerable to Al Qaeda" (Gunaratna, 2002).

Since the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, Al Qaeda has lost its base for planning and training for terrorist attacks. The group now has to rely on its wider network to plan and execute operations. Al Qaeda is structured so it can function without a centralized command and work through the group's various cells and associations (Gunaratna, 2002). Al Qaeda's ideology is "puritanical," but its members are modern in the sense that they utilize up-to-date technology, such as satellite phones, laptops, encrypted communication, and the Internet (Gunaratna, 2002).

Al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden are a new breed of terrorists. They come from well-off families and are educated. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri are followers of the Salafi Strand

of Islam. It is associated with Wahhabism and Salifis are known as “ the pious pioneers of Islam, and the Salifi Dawah (Call of the Salafis) is Islam in its totality, addressing all humanity irrespective of culture, race, or colour.” The goal of the Salifi Strand is to return the nation to the Koran and the Prophet’s authentic Sunnah. It aims to revive Islamic thought and the establishment of a true Islamic society that is free of outside influence (Gunaratna, 2002). In 2011, Bin Laden was killed in a US military operation that left al-Zawahiri in control of Al Qaeda Central.

## **Al Qaeda and the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**

Al Qaeda has offshoot groups that stem from the central organization and are located throughout the Middle East. In 2009, two of the branches, one located in Yemen and the other in Saudi Arabia, merged to form Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The merger of the two groups has been considered a “jihadist revival in the Arabian Peninsula” (Yemen Times, 2011).

AQAP has pledged its allegiance to Al Qaeda central and is based in Yemen, where Bin Laden’s father was born and raised. The Leader of AQAP is Nasser al-Wahayshi, who was once a very close associate of Bin Laden. Al-Zawahiri endorsed the leadership of Nasser and considers him the Amir Al-Mujahedeen, or the commander of the Mujahedeen (Yemen Times, 2011). An article entitled *The Long War Journal: Arabian Peninsula al Qaeda groups merge*, published in January 2009, by Jane Novak, stated that Nasser was once a personal secretary to Bin Laden and Nasser was extradited in 2003 to Yemen from Iraq. The second in command of AQAP is Said Ali al Shirhri, who was previously released from Guantanamo and went to Saudi Arabia in 2007. Shirhri had

been accused of providing logistical support to Al Qaeda operatives in Iran and participating in the US Embassy bombing in 2008. Novak also states that AQAP constructed a training camp in Yemen that trains any fighters who want to take part in jihad. Additionally, the Imam University in Yemen serves as a recruiting and training center for Al Qaeda operatives (Novak, 2009).

According to the article *Yemen and U.S. security*, published by Germain Difo and the American Security Project (2010), the AQAP historically focused on local and regional issues. The organization shared Al Qaeda Central's goals of "ending foreign occupation of all Muslim lands worldwide, supporting Palestinians and 'liberating' Jerusalem, and overthrowing corrupt 'apostate' governments in the Arab world"(2010); however, AQAP began expressing its desire to attack Western interests outside of the Arabian Peninsula in 2009, which means their goals were becoming less regional and more universal. AQAP has primarily sought support throughout Yemeni society by building a reputation as a "champion of local causes (Difo, 2010). AQAP has targeted the tribal groups and has attempted to sway them into believing that the government is trying to destroy the tribal system and restrict the tribes' autonomy in Yemen (Difo, 2010).

A prison break in 2006 played a critical role in the formation of AQAP. On February 3, 2006, 23 men escaped from Political Security Central Prison in Sana'a. The escape route was a 45-meter tunnel that took roughly 55 days to dig (Yemen Times, 2011). The suspected Al Qaeda members that escaped from the prison included Jamal al-Badawi, the mastermind behind the USS Cole bombing; Nasser al-Wahayshi, the current leader of AQAP; and Qasim al-Rayami, Wahayshi's deputy. Once the 2009 merger of the Yemen and Saudi branches of Al Qaeda was complete, the attacks conducted by the

group become more daring. The article *Yemen and U.S. Security (2010)* listed multiple attacks that were conducted by AQAP operatives after the merger. Approximately two months after the groups united, they executed a suicide attack against South Korean tourists in Hadramout; a second suicide operative carried out a follow up attack once officials reached the previous attack site. In August of 2009, the group attempted a suicide bombing against the Saudi Chief of Counterterrorism and the Deputy Interior Minister. The operative had hidden the explosives in his rectum. In October 2009, a bomb plot was thwarted at a Saudi-Yemen checkpoint when two male operatives disguised as women attempted to cross. The article also listed the 2005 Christmas Day underwear bomber, as well as the April 2010 attack on the British Ambassador's convoy in Sanaa. The latter failed to kill the British Ambassador, but demonstrates that AQAP is capable of conducting attacks within Yemen and under the government's nose (Difo, 2010).

Since the merger, AQAP has intensified its use of anti-American rhetoric and propaganda. The operational focus of the group has expanded to include attacks against the United States, which was made clear by the claim of responsibility after the 2005 Christmas Day bombing (Difo, 2010). The group now publicly calls for attacks against the U.S. and other Western transportation systems and transportation networks; furthermore, the group has called for attacks against Western military forces. The means by which the group is achieving these goals are through its use of the media and manipulation of the people in the area in which the group operates. The group uses the media to maintain its support and increase its scope of target audiences. AQAP use the media to radicalize Muslims in the Western world (Difo, 2010).

## **AQAP and the Media**

AQAP devotes a considerable amount of attention to the media and the publicity revolving around the group. In 2008, Al-Malahim, the media arm of AQAP, was created. Al-Malahim, which is also called Epics or the Foundation, has released seven promotional films for the group; furthermore, Al-Malahim releases a bi-monthly magazine and also releases publications on Islamic legal studies. Al-Malahim is also responsible for the release of *Inspire* Magazine. Al-Malahim regularly broadcasts statements that are released by the organization, which are covered locally in Yemen (Yemen Times, 2011).

Security Management, a publication of ASIS International, released an article by Matthew Harwood in March 2011 stating that AQAP is the greatest terror threat to the United States. AQAP has most recently been linked to the Fort Hood rampage that killed 13 people, as well as the 2009 Christmas bomb plot and the 2010 printer bomb plot, both of which targeted the aviation sector (Harwood, 2011).

## **Fort Hood Massacre**

On November 5, 2009, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a U.S. Army psychiatrist facing deployment, opened fire at the Fort Hood Army post in central Texas, killing 13 people and injuring 30 others. Nearly all of those killed were military personnel. A *New York Times* article titled *Army Doctor Held in Ft. Hood Rampage*, by Robert D. McFaddon, reported, “it was one of the worst mass shootings ever at a military base in the United States” (2009).



After the attack, intelligence agencies found that Hasan had been in contact with Anwar al-Awlaki, a US born radical Muslim cleric that is associated with the AQAP. Al-Awlaki was once the spiritual leader at the mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, which Hasan attended (Critical Threats, 2010). Communications between the two were identified by authorities, but not found to be directly related to the attack. There were no previous indicators that led authorities to believe Hasan was planning an attack; however, al-Awlaki praised Hasan's actions over the internet, calling him a "hero" and guiding other individuals to follow in Hasan's footsteps (Johnston & Shane, 2009).

## **2009 Christmas Bomb**

On Christmas day, 2009, a 23-year-old Nigerian named Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to ignite an explosive device hidden in his underwear while on board Northwest Airlines Flight 253 that was headed toward Detroit. None of the 278 passengers onboard were injured. The device failed to fully ignite and lead to a series of firework-like pops. If the device had exploded, the results would have been devastating. According to officials, Abdulmutallab had planned on taking down the plane. Abdulmutallab stated that he had been directed by Al Qaeda to carry out the attacks (O'Conner & Schmitt, 2009).

Intelligence officials were able to link Abdulmutallab to AQAP and al-Awlaki. It was determined that al-Awlaki served as the inspiration for the bombing attempt. According to an Article released on NPR, by Dina Temple-Raston on *All Things Considered*, Awlaki may have directed Abdulmutallab to Yemen for training. Al-Awlaki serves as AQAP's propagandist and is in charge of training and mentoring English-

speaking recruits for the organization. In her article, Temple- Raston stated that Abdulmutallab attended the Finsbury Park Mosque in East London, also called Londonistan, which Awlaki has attended and where he possibly met Abdulmutallab prior to the attempted bombing (2010).

## **2010 printer bomb**

AQAP claimed responsibility for an attempted October 29, 2010 plot to send explosive devices on cargo planes that were bound for the United States. The packages were addressed to synagogues in Chicago, Illinois, and were sent from Yemen. The devices were loaded with PETN, which is a powerful explosive that was packed in computer printer toner cartridges. The explosives were designed so that cell phones could detonate them. A statement released by AQAP stated that they considered the attack to be a success. The attack demonstrated the weakness of the aviation system and would spread the word so that others would attempt this type of attack (CNN, 2010).

Anwar al-Awlaki plays a significant role as a recruiter and propagandist for AQAP. He has been connected not only to the plots and attacks listed above, but also to many more identified throughout his career, including the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

## **Anwar al-Awlaki and AQAP**

Anwar al-Awlaki was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico in 1971. After his father finished his degree, the Awlaki family moved back to Yemen, where Anwar al-Awlaki

received his primary and secondary education. In 1991, Awlaki returned to the US, and attended Colorado State University and earned a bachelors degree in Civil Engineering. In 1996, Awlaki moved to San Diego, California, where he began his Masters work in Education Leadership at San Diego State University. While in San Diego, Awlaki was an Imam at the Rabat Mosque and it is believed that this is where his initial contact with terrorists began. According to the article, *Militant Islam's Global Preacher: The Radicalizing Effect of Sheik Anwar al-Awlaki*, published by Critical Threats (2010), tax records revealed that Awlaki was the Vice President of the Charitable Society for Social Welfare, which was a Yemen-based organization known to funnel funds to Al Qaeda (2010).

In 2000, two of the 9/11 hijackers, Nawaf al Hazmi and Khalid al Mihdar, began attending the Rabat Mosque. After Awlaki moved to Falls Church, Virginia, to pursue a doctorate at George Washington University, he became the University's Muslim chaplain and served as an Imam at the Dar al Hijrah mosque in Falls Church. Once again, the two 9/11 hijackers visited the mosque where Awlaki served. It is believed that Awlaki was their spiritual leader and developed a close relationship with the bombers; however, the full extent of his involvement with the 9/11 plot is unknown and there was not sufficient evidence to prosecute him (Critical Threats, 2010).

Awlaki spent roughly two years in London and returned to Yemen in 2004, where he remained. He was arrested by Yemen authorities in 2006, but released after eighteen months (Critical Threats, 2010).

Awlaki was an advocate of radical Islamic thought and believed "that jihad against the West is an obligation borne by all Muslims"(Critical Threats, 2010). Even though

Awlaki lacked any formal Islamic education, English-speaking Muslims around the world respect him as an Islamic scholar and follow his teachings. He was capable of translating Al Qaeda's messages and excels at summarizing and disseminating its philosophy to a broader audience than was achieved by al Qaeda Central. Awlaki was able to spread his messages through multiple venues, using sermons at mosques, video publications, online forums, personal websites and written treatises that spread like wildfire across the Internet. Awlaki spoke directly to western audiences, targeting English speakers by creating an open dialogue and answering their questions directly (Critical Threats, 2010). Awlaki gained recognition from English speaking audiences "because he interprets the writings and theories of Al Qaeda masterminds in straight-forward English" (Nefa Foundation, 2009) and distributed it through venues easily accessible by English speaking individuals; for example, the internet-based *Inspire* magazine is a venue that can readily be found and downloaded by anyone with an internet connection.

Awlaki has been connected, through his work and teachings, to multiple Islamists that have either planned or executed attacks on Western targets, including the Christmas Bomber and the Fort Hood shooting referenced earlier. Other violent attacks that have been linked to Awlaki include the 7/7 bombings that targeted London's transportation system and killed 52 people and left 700 others wounded. A bookshop, where the bombers held their meetings, carried copies of lectures by Awlaki and the bombers were found to be in possession of his work (Critical Threats, 2010). Awlaki was also connected to the Toronto 18, which was a group of 18 men arrested in 2006 that had planned an attack on downtown Toronto, Canada, that involved U-Haul Trucks packed with

explosive material. After the arrests, Awlaki's lectures were found on one of the laptops belonging to the attackers. Additionally, Awlaki was linked to the Fort Dix plot in 2007 after five immigrants from Jordan, Turkey and Albania trained in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains for an attack on the Fort Dix military base in New Jersey. One of them was recorded on surveillance talking about Awlaki and stating that his message and interpretation of the duties belonging to all Muslims was the truth (Critical Threats, 2010). The Virginia Jihad Network, dubbed so by the attorney who prosecuted the men, was a group of eleven men who were arrested for conspiring to train for, and participate in, violent jihad overseas. The men had bought weapons and trained with the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan. The leader of the Virginia Jihad group was an Islamic scholar named Ali al Timimi, who was Awlaki's connection to the group. Awlaki met with Timimi specifically to speak with him about recruiting young Muslims for jihad (Critical Threats, 2010). Prior to the Christmas Day bomber's failed attempt at blowing up a plane over U.S. soil, Awlaki's involvement was limited to providing the inspiration for committing attacks and legitimizing the attacks based on Shari'ah Law. After this attack, it became clear that Awlaki was no longer merely the propagandist for the group, but had become an operational advisor to Western recruits for the AQAP (Critical Threat, 2010). Awlaki's ability to be an inspirational recruiter as well as an operational leader has been a great benefit to AQAP and Al Qaeda Central; however, it is a dangerous combination for the targets of any future attacks, especially if the attackers are individuals whom Awlaki assisted in the radicalization process who wish to attack innocent people on international soil.

## **AQAP, Anwar al-Awlaki and the Media**

The success reaped by AQAP through the use of the Internet to inspire and call jihadist to arms cannot be denied. The group's strategic approach to online media has provided the organization's followers with a new world of experiences that virtually connect each individual to the group. AQAP is able to provide online supporters with knowledge, skills and a community that was previously unavailable. Now, supporters have online role models like Anwar al-Awlaki and "Thanks to its clever use of English-language media, AQAP has been able to put those American supporters on a noble quest to vanquish injustice and save the world from invading evil"(Brachman, 2011).

Jarret Brachman, managing Director of Cronus Global and an internationally recognized counterterrorism specialist, wrote an article titled *Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland: AQAP*, in which he stated that Awlaki was a senior member of AQAP and was able to become the most "likeable terrorist among Western Al Qaeda supporters" (2011). Awlaki has desensitized his audiences through the use of online media and openly calls for violence against the United States. Awlaki was able to relate to Western audiences, something few Al Qaeda personalities have been able to do. Brachman goes further and refers to Awlaki as AQAP's "gateway drug so to speak"(2011). Awlaki has focused on the Internet to reach audiences in far reaching geographical locations, inspiring them to replicate attacks on their own. Awlaki and the AQAP is doing more than providing Westerners with knowledge: they are providing Westerners who are leaning towards radicalization with the inspiration to carry out violent attacks on United States soil.

Matthew Harwood states in his article that "what makes AQAP more dangerous

than core al Qaeda leadership...is its ability to market its message to alienated Muslims in the West using social media and web publishing” (2011). The article also states that Awlaki has created an idea of al Qaeda that is intended to inspire young Muslims in the West and to direct them to take arms and carry out terror attacks in their own countries. The message being released by AQAP is that western jihadists should stay home and carry out attacks. They do not need to travel to Yemen to learn how to fight (Harwood, 2011). Now, there are magazines being published by AQAP that can provide potential recruits with all the information needed to conduct their very own attack in the areas in which they live.

In 2007, AQAP began publishing *Sada al-Malahim* (The Echo of the Battle), a magazine published twice a month that articulates the group’s views on political and theological issues that are being faced by Muslims globally. The magazine includes news commentary that reflects the mission of the group and interviews with terrorist leaders and their biographies. The magazine also includes tips on how to be a better Al Qaeda fighter and letters that show approval for the group that were sent in by the public (Difo, 2010).

*Yemen: On the Brink*, a paper published by Alistair Harris and the Carnegie paper series, included information regarding the analysis of AQAP media output and suggested that Al Qaeda is trying to radicalize the Muslim population into collective action. In the article, Harris states that *Sada al-Malahim* is “designed to have a broad appeal and is likely to resonate successfully in Yemen”(2010). The magazine has become increasingly successful in aligning itself with the social diagnosis of Yemeni grievances. *Sada al-Malahim* is limited by being published online in the Arabic language. The target audience

is the Global Islamic community, which is reflected by its use of Arabic language; however, there is now an English language magazine published by the group called *Inspire* magazine.

Seven issues of *Inspire* magazine have been released since its inception in 2010. *Inspire* was created to target aspiring jihadists in English speaking areas and provides them instruction and guidance on the commission of violent acts (Black, 2010). Al-Awlaki is believed to be the mastermind behind *Inspire*. Brachman stated in his article, *Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland: AQAP*, that AQAP has pioneered “creative ways for empowering and motivating their online supporters”(2011). *Inspire* Magazine is filled with extremist propaganda, smooth graphics, compelling headlines and articles that provide instructions needed to make-bombs, disassemble an AK-47, and much more. According to Brachman, *Inspire* is not just another piece of propaganda released by a terrorist organization, rather it is a significant achievement that is closing the gap between basic online supporters and the online supporters who are now knowledgeable on what it takes to be an operative for the group. The imagery in the magazine draws the readers in and fills the reader with the feeling that they are part of Al Qaeda. The magazine creates an online community of recruits that can now log off the computer and know how to make a bomb and know the most deadly places to put them. Now, these individuals are real world jihadists that have a real identity, rather than just an online name. Al-Awlaki has created a step-by-step approach to joining Al Qaeda and *Inspire* is that stepping stone needed in the radicalization process. *Inspire* has helped make Al Qaeda a global movement (Brachmann, 2011).



# Literature Review

To fully understand the messages contained in the images within *Inspire Magazine*, both visual imagery and propaganda must be considered. The majority of the research that pertains to both topics were separate because there is not much research available that combines the two fields. The imagery studies that contributed to this review are associated with rhetoric, speech communication and other fields of communication; however, the only information used in this study regarding propaganda and visual imagery came from the *Islamic Imagery Project* (IIP) described below.

The goal of propaganda, according to Dr. Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, in their book *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2006), is the “deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.” This definition describes the desired outcome of AQAP and Al Qaeda and the AQAP’s manipulation of the content in *Inspire Magazine*. The goal of AQAP is to encourage Muslims worldwide to take arms and wage war against the enemies of Islam. The magazine is intended to influence readers’ thinking and ultimately direct their actions. The images in the magazine serve to create a connection to the readers and ultimately change their perceptions of jihad and create positive cognitions toward the use of violence. The images released by AQAP and Al Qaeda Central serve as the center piece in Al Qaeda’s propaganda warfare.

For the purpose of this study, research was conducted on imagery studies that pertained to the analysis of specific images and magazines. The methodologies used in these studies are applicable to the methodology described in the next chapter and assisted in connecting visual imagery to studies in propaganda.

# Visual Imagery Studies

In the book, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Methodologies* (2007), Gillian Rose describes the study of visual imagery as being central to social life and culture. Images are said to interpret the world: “Images are never innocent.” Images always have meaning that relates to the way that they are viewed.

In her book, Rose provides a historical account of the growth of visual imagery studies. A main concern regarding these types of studies has not been how the images look, but rather how they are looked at by the audiences who view them. The effect of the image has, in the past, been central to many of these types of studies. The study conducted for this paper examines what is inside the picture and what the message is behind it. Images make sense in relation to what they are surrounded by, such as the images in *Inspire* magazine. Rose states that in order to take a critical approach to interpreting images, one must first take an image seriously. Rose argues that you must look at everything within an image and that images are not always reducible to their contexts. Next, the social and cultural influence affects the meaning of the image and this must be taken into account when analyzing images. Lastly, Rose states that you must consider how you look at an image. These three practices are an essential part of analyzing every image and enhance the meaning behind them (Rose, 2007). Rose states in her book that there has been continual, but separate, volumes of work that use images to answer research questions. These works do not necessarily examine the images, but often make images. Imagery studies have often been used in anthropology and human geography and the use of images has been established in these fields of research.

Furthermore, visual sociology has more recently begun studies in imagery and often uses images to study visuality, which is the way that vision is constructed, such as how a person views things or is able to view something, in order to prove the extent of analytical value that visual material can provide to a research project. Another area of visual studies that was mentioned in Rose's book is the studies that examine the effect of image, such as art history or cultural studies. The wide range of studies conducted using visual methodologies makes it difficult to identify a generalized description of visual imagery studies. Rose makes five points in her book that, according to recent research, have a valuable effect on the social impact of images. The first point Rose makes is that there should be concern for the way that an image is visualized based on culture. Social situations can change the meaning of an image and that must be taken into account when analyzing an image. The next point is also concerned with visual culture - that it is essential to understanding how an image is looked at and the relationship of the image to ourselves and our surroundings. The third point focuses on how images are embedded in the "wider culture"(2007). Fourth, Rose points out that each audience member brings his or her own interpretations to alter the possible meaning of an image. Finally, Rose states that images have "their own agency" and they often work in combination with many other forms of representations, such as text. Rose makes an important point and states that " So although virtually all visual images are multimodal in this way - they always make sense in relation to other things, including written texts and very often other images - they are not reducible to the meanings carried by those other things" (Rose, 2007).

Lawrence J. Mullen and Julie D. Fisher conducted the initial study analyzed for this study's literature review in their article *Visual Analysis of Prescription Drug Advertising*

*Imagery: Elaborating Foss's Rhetorical Techniques*. This study used two methods of rhetorical visual analysis, developed by Sonja Foss in the late 1980s to early 90s, that were used to examine a prescription drug advertisement in 2004 (Mullen & Fisher, 2004).

The study meshes Foss's two methods together and then elaborates on the combined techniques to enhance visual study analysis. Elaboration is stated to be a term taken from theory development literature, which states that elaboration may be conducted when two theories and/or methods share similar concepts or analyze the similar types of data. The two theories are simply put together and used as one to analyze a specific target.

The authors of the study used Foss's "message formulation from images" and "evaluation of images" and combined them both to test the analysis capabilities of a combined approach. The first technique is a reading component of visual analysis that involves three steps: 1. Identifying presented elements, 2. Processing the presented elements, 3. Formulating the message (Mullen & Fisher, 2004).

Identification of elements consists of pulling out parts of the image, such as lighting, camera angles, lines, colors and any other identifiable concepts in the image. Processing elements within an image requires that the elements be identified and then organized. This occurs when an image has a meaning attached to it, such as religious, social or symbolic meanings that the viewer understands. The third step occurs when the viewer formulates a message based on the image. The interpretation is subject to the viewer's previous encounter with that image or a similar image, personal background, knowledge, and personal characteristics that help individuals understand the world in which they live (2004).

The “evaluation of images” method is the second part of the elaboration method proposed by Mullen and Fisher. The evaluation is composed of three parts, the first being the identification of the function of the image. The second part is the assessment of the identified function and the third is the analysis of the features of the image and the function of the image itself. The function is determined based on the contents of the image, such as the subject matter, colors, forms, visual components and any data used in the image. The authors state, “ The function provides the ability to make judgments of image quality. The function should be differentiated from the creator’s purpose” (Mullen & Fisher, 2004). The important part of the image is not just the function the creator of the images intended, but the action that the image translates to the receiver. How the image is interpreted is dependent upon the receiver and their previous experience and knowledge. There is no correct interpretation of an image’s function. This model asks the receiver to determine how well the function of the image is communicated, which leads to the final evaluation and critique of the connection between the function and the image elements that are intended to support the function in the image (Mullen & Fisher, 2004).

The elaboration of two of Foss’s methods made the analysis of an image a simpler process. Both methods are based on the visual elements of an image, but the key is how the critic breaks down the elements. The authors stated that, for their study, the aesthetic concept of line and color were the most useful and the production elements, such as camera angle and lighting, were also considered. In sum, the elaboration method defined the basic visual elements of the image based on aesthetic, production and nonverbal communication elements, which are examined based on their presentation and influence on one another in the image. The final step of the elaborated method is the assessment of

value of the image based on the function of the elements of which it is composed of which it is composed.

Mullen and Fisher used the elaboration method to examine a Zyrtec ad found in Time Magazine. The advertisement was an image of a woman in a flowery dress who was displayed in an outdoor setting. The authors examined the aesthetic elements and found that the woman was the focal point of the image and represented mother earth. Mullen and Fisher stated that the concept of mother earth is powerful and crosses cultures. The advertisement was directed towards a broad audience and the concepts in the images were powerful enough to affect multiple cultures. The production elements of the image were comprised of text and other graphic elements. It was determined that the print was not the most important feature of the image, but it took up a large amount of space on the page. The text was the base on which the image sat on the page. The color of the text was blue and matched the blue sky in the background of the image. In order to understand the implications of the text and visual elements, the authors explain that the “Words help to perceptually categorize the meaning of the image”(Mullen & Fisher, 2004). The assessment of the function, as stated by Mullen and Fisher, is conducted by determining if the elements of the image contribute to the function. The image was found to be effective in that the elements did contribute to the function of the image and the mother earth element was found to be persuasive across the multitude of cultures; furthermore, the advertisement was found to be valuable from a marketing standpoint based on the reach of the image to a large audience and its function. Lastly, Mullen and Fisher stated that the elaboration method will continue to facilitate the analysis of future visual studies and increases the explanatory power of Foss’s Methods.

The research conducted in the Zyrtec study is directly relevant to the study of *Inspire* magazine. The images found in *Inspire* magazine will be analyzed based on the basic visual elements within the picture, such as the use of color, symbols and focal points such as people and religious places, to determine the underlying meaning in the message and its function or theme, as it is called in this study. Mullen and Fisher made a very important point in their paper: the viewer of the image formulates the message based on his or her own meanings attached to the symbols within the image and its surroundings. The meaning of the symbols is what will determine what AQAP's images are saying to the audience and what action the images are calling for. Furthermore, Mullen and Fisher reiterate the importance of understanding an image's function and/or theme and the message derived by the audience, which is the basis of the study on the AQAP's magazine. The methodology used in the Zyrtec study assists in explaining the purpose of examining images; however, the Zyrtec study examines rhetoric rather than propaganda, which is the focus for the study on *Inspire*. The elaboration method is more applicable to the *Inspire* study than Foss's two methods individually, which is why this section focused on Mullen and Fisher's method versus the original methods by Foss.

Another study examined was conducted by Yongjun Sung and Heidi J. Hennick-Kamiski and reported in the article *The Master Settlement Agreement and Visual Imagery of Cigarette Advertising in Two Popular Youth Magazines* (2008).

The Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) was completed in 1998. Tobacco companies were restricted in their marketing practices of tobacco products. The MSA addressed some practices in youth marketing; however, it did not provide specific guidelines for magazine advertisements. The study conducted by Sung and Kamiski

examined pre and post MSA magazine advertisements in *Rolling Stone Magazine* and *Sports Illustrated*, both of which have high youth readership. According to the authors, visual imagery plays a significant role in cigarette advertising. The theoretical basis for this study comes from Social Learning theory, which is explained by the authors: “ Social Learning theory explains behavior change in terms of rewards associated with observed behavior that, in turn, become motivators. It posits that opportunities for learning can occur through observations of live models through exposure to symbolic models in the media, including advertising (Sung and Kamiski, 2008).

Sung and Kamiski chose to address magazines in their study because magazines were not addressed specifically in the MSA. Magazines are a powerful advertising tool that can have images and text that are excellent production quality. High quality images and articles are able to communicate longer messages within the magazine by keeping the reader’s attention focused on design and context. A magazine is also able to target specific segments of an audience based on behavior, demographics and psychological characteristics targeted in each group of people. In the 1970s, magazines replaced TV cigarette advertising due to the broadcast ban, which may be a key contributor to initiation of smoking by youth (Sung and Kamiski, 2008). This study identified the significant role magazines play in a society of specific religious groups or cultures and the potential impact that they may have on the audience.

The study found that after the MSA, tobacco companies continued to promote their brands in magazines with a large teen readership base. Sung and Kamiski examined the visually oriented characteristics of cigarette ads, the use of human models and the overall theme/appeal. The most “ contentious” aspect of the visual imagery was determined to be



the theme, and that pictures were more important to consumers than the words displayed. The sample used an existing database created by the Department of Justice that contains ads prepared by the major tobacco companies. The ads were coded into categories and a content analysis was conducted. Coders were used to analyze the content of the ads, which had a high percentage of agreement on the variables included in the study. It was found, based on the analysis, that the three most popular brands known for being youth-oriented (Marlboro, Camel, and Newport) maintained a very strong presence in both magazines that were analyzed. It was found that the advertisements post MSA relied heavily on visual imagery and less on verbal messages. It was also discovered that more human models were used and more artwork depicting anime or youth-oriented avatar type images were used in response to banning cartoon characters like Joe Camel (Sung and Kamiski, 2008). Lastly, it appeared to the authors that little had changed after the MSA. There were limitations to this study, such as the fact that only two magazines were used and they were not compared to other magazines without high youth readership, but the overall determination was that cigarette advertising was still highly evident in the magazines analyzed.

The visual imagery used by tobacco companies in magazines can create and reinforce positive cognitions regarding smoking and what a cigarette can potentially do for you. The images create a positive social experience for the reader and encourage and reinforce the smoking behavior. This type of imagery can be duplicated in other forms, such as the use of religious extremism or terrorism. Imagery used in jihadist in propaganda can create feelings of connectedness and positivity towards the images seen in a magazine such as *Inspire*, and reinforce the notion that it is okay to build a bomb in

your kitchen or attack innocent people based on what is stated and reinforced in the imagery of a magazine.

In essence, both studies use visual imagery analysis to study an image that can be directly related to propaganda. In the first study, which looked at the Zyrtec advertisement, the image was intended to create a positive feeling in the audience toward the drug and to using the drug. In the second article, the smoking advertisements were targeting youth and the intention of the images was to create positive feelings toward smoking and to entice readers (youth) into smoking cigarettes. Action is a specific goal for the images analyzed in both studies and changing action is central to the definition of propaganda.

## **Propaganda Studies**

Propaganda is the dissemination of information with the intention of shaping thoughts and directing behaviors and actions that are sought by the propagandist. Information used in a propaganda campaign can come in many forms, such as speeches, posters, music, or anything that can be used to influence an audience. In this study, the information is released through *Inspire* magazine. *Inspire* uses various forms of propaganda. The purpose of *Inspire* magazine is to provide potential terrorists with the information they need and influence them to commit acts of violence. This type of propaganda is referred to as agitative, in that it “attempts to rouse an audience to certain ends and usually resulting in significant change”(Jowett and O'Donnell, 2006). Furthermore, the propaganda in *Inspire* can be described as black propaganda. There are three forms of propaganda described by Jowett and O'Donnell (2006), white, grey and


black. White propaganda is considered to be relatively true. The source is clearly defined and the information is considered accurate. Grey propaganda lies somewhere in between white and black. The source of grey propaganda may be correctly identified, or it may not and the accuracy of the information released is unclear. Black propaganda generally comes from a hidden source and the information released is generally made up of lies (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). In the case of *Inspire*, the source is very clear, but the messages being spread are the ideologies of the group, rather than proven fact. The type of propaganda used by the AQAP can be considered a form of black or grey propaganda, depending on how the messages are analyzed. *Inspire* will be further analyzed in the next chapter.

The book *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion New and Classic Essays* (2006), compiled by Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, contains a chapter on *The Characteristics of Propaganda*, by Jacques Ellul. The chapter begins by providing an explanation of propaganda as a technique that is based on the scientific analysis of sociology and psychology-“the propagandist builds his techniques on the basis of knowledge of man, his tendencies, his desires, his needs, his psychic mechanisms, his conditioning.... he shapes his procedures on the basis of our knowledge of groups and their laws of formation and dissolution, of mass influences, and of environmental limitations”(Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). In his chapter, Ellul explains the characteristics of propaganda, the first being the individual and the masses, meaning that modern propaganda does not focus on the individuals, but the individuals within the masses. The participants of the masses are not treated as individuals, rather they are looked at for what they have in common with the others. It is assumed that the individuals in the group are


guided by the same motives and will react with the same impulses. According to Ellul, direct propaganda is aimed at changing opinions and attitudes. Propaganda can also be covert or overt. Covert propaganda hides its goals and the source and is often called black propaganda; however, overt propaganda is used to reassure the propagandist's own forces and push the group in a specific direction (2006). Each type of propaganda can be used separately or combined and each type can be considered white or black propaganda, depending on different factors, opinions on the use, and aims and actions of the propagandist. According to Ellul, "The aim of modern propaganda is no longer to modify ideas, but to provoke action"(2006), which is precisely the purpose of *Inspire* magazine. Ellul also separates propaganda as propaganda of agitation and propaganda of integration. Propaganda of agitation is the most visible and attracts the most attention. It is composed of opposition and is often led by a party with the plans to demolish a government or the established rule. This type of propaganda includes revolutionary movements and was related to the Crusades of 1973. Propaganda of integration, however, is used to stabilize a nation or to unify and reinforce a society. This is the propaganda used in developed nations and is called propaganda of "conformity"(Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). Different groups or governments, depending on their goals and techniques, can apply various characteristics of propaganda in their campaigns. Furthermore, there does not have to be a specific set of techniques used by a propagandist; methods are constantly subject to change. AQAP uses a form of agitation propaganda to speak to its audience. AQAP wants to guide individuals to action, but the group does not hide who the source is, which is customary in black propaganda. Ellul associated black propaganda with covert propaganda; however, AQAP can be said to use black propaganda, but use more overt

techniques. The group states its goals, but does not use fact to change the thoughts of a group; the group uses lies to provoke the audience and create a widespread anger against the designated enemy. These techniques are commonly used in black propaganda.

Further research on propaganda related to terrorist organizations did not reveal any available imagery studies; however, there were many studies that examined symbols used as propaganda and propaganda in relation to terrorism, which were covered in this literature review.

Brian J. Altenhofen (2010) a PhD student in the Telecommunication and Media Studies at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, conducted research and published an article titled *Solace in Symbols: Discovering Cultural Meanings in Symbolic Propaganda* that examined the  logo as a propaganda tool. A graphic designer named Milton Glaser created the NY logo in 1977. Glaser was assigned the task of creating a logo to correspond with a campaign to boost tourism in New York City, New York. At the time, the City had faced major blackouts and was terrorized by the serial killer called Son of Sam. The logo was part of a campaign to boost the image of the City. In the article, Altenhofen broke down the logo to explain its meaning. The letters alone carry significant meaning. According to Altenhofen, the typeface used was Slab Serif, which later became known as New York Times in Microsoft Word because of its relationship to the City. In a philosophical sense, the author states that the “I” in the logo plays off of the ethos of each person’s “inalienable rights underpinning the very foundation of America”(2010), and each person’s right to express themselves. The red heart represents love and passion. Love has a meaning even without the presence of words. Altenhofen states that the red heart is the focal point of the logo and symbolizes

the emotional and spiritual part of a human being and ties the positive feelings to New York.

Altenhofen compares the  logo to the Nazi party's use of art as propaganda and propaganda created by the Soviet Union in an attempt to prove that propaganda is an integral part of communications. Altenhofen uses a definition of propaganda as stated by Ellul, which was originally offered by psychologist Daniel Learner " Propaganda is the expression of opinions or actions carried out deliberately by individuals or groups with a view to influencing the opinions or actions of other individuals or groups for pre-determining ends and through psychological manipulations (Altenhofen, 2010). The initial goal of the New York logo was to change the public opinion of New York. Altenhofen states that the hyperbole technique, which is "an extravagant exaggeration"(Miriam Webster Online, 2011), is used to change the public's opinion of New York by using the word love as a way of showing a strong and positive emotion towards the City and activates an emotional response in the public. Altenhofen stated that the hyperbole never reveals the entire truth and that it is a general claim to love something or someone (2010).

When comparing the logo to Nazi art propaganda, Altenhofen related the party's use of emotions such as love to create support for the party. The image used for comparison is that of a young girl smiling with a cup in her hand that has the swastika imprinted on it. The cup is used by the girl to collect donations. Altenhofen stated that the image provides a sense of optimism and happiness, which the girl's face expressed. The picture created a positive view and instills feelings of hope in the viewer. The image makes the viewer believe that the party is committed to peace and progress, which was

far from reality. The image was stated to contain only “half-truths” and “ideals” (2010). The New York logo attempts to create the same type of positive image, regardless of the poverty and crime that is currently part of the City itself. Altenhofen relates the bandwagon technique, which is described later on in the chapter, to the New York logo as well. The icon became inseparable from the City and other cities around the world, such as London and Paris, have adopted the same type of logo as well (2010).

Altenhofen next compared the NY logo to the Communist government of the Soviet Union and its attempt to create a unifying symbol that would generate a desire for people to live equally and communally. Vladimir Tatlin, a Constructivist and artist, attempted to design everything he could, from clothes to whole cities, to “create an aesthetic which would change the behavioral habits of the Soviet population” (2010). Altenhofen states that it is not hard to compare Tatlin’s attempt to that of the mass production of the NY logo. Lastly, Altenhofen states that the logo does in fact attempt to change the public’s attitude toward the City and draw people to the City by conveying positive emotions that change the previously held negative perceptions of the City.

This NY logo article connects symbols to propaganda and examines their use. Symbols are powerful tools that can be used by propagandists to draw the public in and create emotions that the propagandist is able to influence and ultimately direct the public’s behavior. This is the goal of *Inspire* magazine. The AQAP wants to drive people to act, and change their perceptions of violence. The NY logo attempted to change the public’s perceptions of New York, and it worked. *Inspire* magazine has the ability to reach English speaking audiences and attempts to change their perceptions of violence.

A study conducted by Paul Baines, Nicholas J. O’Shaughnessy, Kevin Moloney,

Barry Richards, Sara Butler and Mark Gill, titled *Muslim Voices: The British Muslim Response To Islamic Video Polemic- An Exploratory Study*, examined the British-Muslim response to militant Islamic propaganda (2006). The central idea behind the study was that jihadist communications attempted to focus on a “meta-narrative of Muslims as a unitary grouping self defined as victims of Western aggression”(2006). The authors stated that there were early signs that some forms of propaganda would have been more potent, such as cartoons, when introducing jihadists’ ideas to some groups. The study found that, for the most part, Muslim respondents were unsympathetic to the messages in the jihadist video clips. The authors stated that the senders of these messages were primarily concerned with Western involvement in the Middle East, and that the messages were designed to manipulate symbols and tailor them to social and cultural environments of the receivers. Therefore, per the authors, the meta-narrative is that of Muslims being victims of the West. The goal of the study was to examine the perceptions of specific Muslim groups. The methodology used in the study involved the use of jihadist video clips obtained from the Internet and four discussion groups created to determine the views and content of the videos. The authors initially conducted a content analysis of multiple propaganda video clips to determine what messages the senders may be trying to transmit to receivers. The videos were taken from two entities: Iran and Al Qaeda. Both groups attempted to glorify terrorism, but there were identifiable ethical differences. The authors noted the modernity found in the videos and reported that it seemed like the videos were an attempt to parody the western culture. A key feature to both groups was the view that there was a “global conspiracy against Islam”(2006).

Each of the four groups watched the videos provided for the study and then



discussed the videos within a group setting. One of the limitations of the study was the surroundings in which the videos were viewed. The group settings were different from how the videos would naturally be seen (i.e. home setting or with a group of close friends or family), which could have impacted the outcome of the viewing. Furthermore, the groups were not representative and there was not a large selection of videos. The authors found that the viewers overall were unimpressed with the Iranian videos; however, the authors feel that the social marketing techniques used should be of concern. The videos acted as symbols that could be shared through a private language. Without the Muslim culture, a viewer may not fully understand what they are watching. One of the groups, which was comprised of four men from London, revealed no support after watching the video in their groups; another group of all women who were mothers found that the cartoon video of young Muslim children dying was justified and could urge individuals into action. A group of young women felt this video was geared to influence young men and worried about the impact these clips may have on children of their own. The last group, a group of young men, watched the videos and sympathized with the plight of the Muslims and the oppression they were forced to endure. This group seemed to be more susceptible to the messages in the video (2006).

Martyrdom was a major theme identified in the videos, especially the cartoon video, which appeared to be the video to which the audience was able to connect. Lastly, the authors provided propositions for any research conducted in the future. The authors stated that respondents with confused identities were more susceptible, that there were intergenerational differences in susceptibility and those who felt contempt for the West and its culture were also more susceptible (Baines, Butler, Gill, Moloney,

O'Shaughnessy, Richards, 2006). Victimization and martyrdom were predominant themes in the videos used in the study. These themes were ones that the respondents understood and may have identified with. These propagandistic themes are also used by AQAP in *Inspire* magazine. The impact of these videos is comparable to the impact the magazine may have and the propositions of susceptibility are applicable to future research in the field of terrorism and propaganda. The type of study conducted is not the same type of study being conducted for this research paper; however, the themes are relevant and the symbolism related to the themes can be identified in Al Qaeda propaganda outside of video recordings. The possible impact of Al Qaeda's propaganda lends itself to the outcome of this study and any future studies that are conducted on the possible impact of magazines, images and videos released by Al Qaeda.

A study conducted by Zahen Harb titled *Aiming at Liberation: Al-Manar Media Campaigns against the Israeli Occupation of Southern Lebanon (1998-2000)* examined Hezbollah's media campaign that helped achieve liberation from Israeli forces in Southern Lebanon. The article also examined Al-Manar TV, which is affiliated with Hezbollah and the role it played in the media campaign. The central questions asked in the article were whether or not Hezbollah's campaign should be labeled as a propaganda campaign and, if not, what other alternative exists. Initially, the article provided the background of the campaign, which the author states was organized since the early 90s. The media policies of the group transitioned after 1996 to adopting new audiences and supporters. Foreign reporters were brought in to interview the group and English and French speaking personnel were used to explain the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Audiences began extending outside of Lebanon and supporters went beyond the Muslim Shiite

community. Hassan Eiz-Addine was the head of Hezbollah's media relations from 2001-2004. He believed that the most important years of the televised conflict were between 1997 and 2000, when the world was able to watch the liberation take place and saw Israeli troops withdraw from Lebanon. During this time, Hezbollah had a group of political propaganda and psychological warfare experts that came together to create a new media plan. The planners took past campaigns, propaganda techniques, and policies into consideration when creating the new strategy, which became a "structured system that was used by Hezbollah's media group." Core policies of this strategy were revealing the truth and gaining credibility, which was stated in the article as two criteria for propaganda. Hezbollah viewed the Israeli reporting of events as being distorted and felt it had to deliver their side of the story, which was of course the truth. Hezbollah's media messages countered what Israeli media was saying and the authors referred to this strategy as defensive and integrative propaganda. Credibility was primarily articulated through the media and Hezbollah was able to keep its credibility high. A central feature of this study was the group's use of credibility and truthfulness in propaganda. The article examined various operations and the media coverage they received three years prior to liberation, and specifically the liberation days of May 24th and 25th, 2000. Each operation detailed various techniques the author related to propaganda. Findings of these techniques included media credibility and undermining the credibility of Israeli forces. The findings also discuss the use of "plain folks device," which is intended to show that the leader of an organization is just like his people. This technique was identified after the son of Hezbollah's Secretary General was killed on June 25, 1998. Harb stated that, because the Secretary General allowed his son to fight with the people and by not moving

his son's body before the others, he was made out to be a credible leader, who was "plain folk" and became a symbol of heroic sacrifice, which in turn created wide spread patriotism. The bandwagon technique was identified in media coverage of an operation, known as the Beit Yahoun Operation on May 15, 1999, which was reviewed by Harb. During this struggle, "resistance fighters" attacked occupying forces at Beit Yahoun and after the win, a parade was organized in Beirut to celebrate this monumental event that was called "the Conquest." Footage of the operation was revealed the day of the conflict, which was unusual for the group. Under normal circumstances, the group took time to edit the videos before releasing them. In this instance, Harb stated that Hezbollah felt it was more important to get the information out quickly and the coverage created the feeling that the resistance was something "anyone could do" (2009). The coverage created a "follow the crowd" impact, which is the bandwagon technique.

There were seven techniques of propaganda, including bandwagon, originally identified by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in 1939. Randal Marlin, in his book *Propaganda & the ethics of persuasion*, provided detailed examples, along with the original definition of each of the seven techniques. The first technique identified in the book is name calling, which Marlin states is a force that influences opinions and can be easily recalled and remembered. An example provided was that of "traitor" or "pro-choice." Each of the terms has a negative connotation attached to it and name calling has the ability of attaching a name to a person, regardless of truth or fallacy. The second technique is called the glittering generality, which is a term of "virtue" that is used to influence the public and make them approve of a specific thing without any fact. The next technique is transfer, which occurs when the authority of one person or thing is used

to create a positive image of another person or thing based on association. Marlin's example is when a new politician has pictures taken of him or herself with an older well-established politician to "share in the latter's prestige"(2002). Next, Marlin describes the testimonial, which is when someone who is well respected testifies that something or someone else is great. The plain folks technique, which was described earlier, was described in Marlin's example as when a politician makes himself appear to the public as one of them by doing everyday things that all people do. Card stacking is the use of facts and falsehoods of various kinds to create the best or worst image of a specific person, place, thing, or idea. Marlin referred to this as the use of fact or fiction in such a way that it creates a positive opinion, regardless of the facts that are left out (2002).

The coverage of the two days surrounding the liberation was the most critical. Harb stated that the campaign succeeded in changing enemy action and policy. Al-Manar released media clips that showed massive crowds marching towards villages and people were rejoicing in the streets, waving flags and kissing. In the author's reflections, he stated the Al-Manar manufactured a significant campaign that accomplished what it set out to do by disseminating political, social, and patriotic messages to the audiences and created national support for the cause. Furthermore, Al-Manar succeeded in creating national unity and drew up support for the resistance groups, which Harb stated, summarized the core aspects of propaganda (2009).

AQAP may not be using truthfulness as a technique; however, it is using source credibility. Harb's article summarizes the importance of this technique in a campaign and shows the power that this feature of propaganda plays in a campaign. Furthermore, the author points out multiple other techniques of propaganda and imagery, such as a person

becoming a national symbol and the impact of the image of the marching crown during the days of liberation, which can have a significant impact on a movement. These types of images are in *Inspire* magazine - men holding guns and martyrs' profiles being released and praised. Terrorists are glorified in the magazine, which is the same type of glorification that Hezbollah used in its media campaign and it succeeded.

Al Qaeda's use of propaganda is dissected in Kenneth Payne's article *Winning the Battle of Ideas: Propaganda, Ideology and Terror* (2009). Payne's article stated that "Propaganda is at the heart of the struggle between Al Qaeda's strain of militant Islamism and the government of the United States and the United Kingdom" (2009). Payne's article looked at specific elements of what he called the Al Qaeda Propaganda Narrative and how the group's media messages are released to audiences. These themes are central to any study that examines the messages being disseminated by Al Qaeda. Furthermore, Payne briefly described the U.S. and the U.K. governments' counter propaganda (2009). For the purpose of this study, only the sections on the Al Qaeda Propaganda Narrative will be reviewed.

Al Qaeda is engaged in an ideological struggle that, according to Payne, relies on propaganda. The propagandist must persuade the audience to be a part of his or her ideology and reinforce the beliefs of the current followers. The Al Qaeda Narrative revolves around specific themes that make up the ideology of the group and the brand of terror they represent. The narrative should be created in a specific way to change or alter opinions. Creating a pure Islamic state that enforces the idea of "us" versus "them" divides the world and turns "them" into the enemy of the true Islam and the "us" into the true believers. An Islamist Utopia is another central feature of the Al Qaeda Narrative.

The group aims to bring all Muslims together and, according to Payne, awaken the Muslim Ummah, which is the worldwide community of Muslim believers, whose togetherness is based completely on their faith. Muslim victimization is another element of the narrative. Specifically, Al Qaeda created messages that show that Westerners and other allies were blocking the creation of an Islamic state and that the Islamic world is under attack. Victimhood was a predominant theme in Al Qaeda's messages and the "atrocities" faced by Muslims are highlighted in communications disseminated by the group (Payne, 2009). In the realm of propaganda, this can be a significant tool to sway an audience, which could, depending on the exact usage, be used as agitative propaganda.

The call to arms is another element used in the Al Qaeda Propaganda Narrative. Communications from the group are continually calling for or threatening attacks, including articles and images within *Inspire* Magazine. Payne states that action is critical to any group and Al Qaeda makes the "call to jihad the manifestation of will"(2009). Once there has been a call to arms, Al Qaeda next legitimizes terror and glorifies martyrdom. An eye for an eye is a key theme brought to light by Payne, which is how Al Qaeda justified killing; it is vengeance and justice for the acts of an entire nation. Terrorism itself is said by Payne to be a powerful form of propaganda because it creates credibility and increases the reach that a group has for audiences. The glorification of martyrs is the last element included in the Al Qaeda narrative. A martyr is seen as someone who answered the call and died for his or her faith. These individuals are seen as true heroes who may have a significant impact on an audience's beliefs and attitudes toward Al Qaeda. If people are voluntarily dying for the cause, then it must be a great cause (2009).

The themes identified in the Narrative are central to this study. These themes may be identified in the research conducted for the analysis of *Inspire* magazine. Payne's analysis contributed to defining and coding themes of propaganda that are included in the study. Islamic purity, victimhood, call to arms, vengeance and glory of martyrdom are important to analyze in order to understand Al Qaeda's use of propaganda. These elements, when used by propagandists, can be powerful tools and their identification in the magazine and the extent of their use can provide insight into the meaning behind the message and whom these ideas may be reaching.

Imagery studies, the methods used to study images, and propaganda have not been extensively studied together. Individually, each field has developed varying definitions and methodologies to study how something functions and the affect it has on an audience. Together, these two fields can provide insight into AQAP's *Inspire* Magazine, and any other propaganda used by the group in other forms of media. AQAP uses television, Internet, social media, magazines, movies and any other form of communication that is accessible to the group. The methodology used in this study, as described in the next chapter, could be used to enhance future studies that may examine terrorist groups and propaganda. Imagery studies and propaganda are two fields of research that should be further reviewed and applied together. The two fields go hand in hand and the methodologies of each field compliment one another. Public perceptions are based on what the public is able to hear and see. Everything can be influential. An athlete that sponsors a brand of toothpaste on the morning news can have an impact on the teenager who sees the commercial and then realizes that he or she needs the athlete's brand of toothpaste. Together, propaganda and imagery studies are a potent combination in the



field of research.

## Methodology

Jihad that is fueled by propaganda directed at the Western world is not a recent phenomenon. In 1914, a fatwa was issued against the Ottoman Empire by the highest religious authority, Shaykh al-Islam, and the State of Mufti. The fatwa stated that war was legal under the circumstances at hand and jihad had become the obligation of all individuals. The fatwa was unique, as it was a call to arms not only to the subjects of the Ottoman Empire, but to all Muslims around the world, including Muslims living in India, Central Asia, North Africa and the Balkans. The fatwa was translated into Arabic, Turkic, Urdu and Persian in order for the intentions of the Fatwa to be known by a larger audience. The Fatwa stated, “they [Muslims] were obligated to come to the rescue of the Ottoman Empire and attack their non-Muslim rulers” (Peters, 2005).

Today, Al Qaeda has mastered the art of a global call to arms through propaganda that exhorts Muslims worldwide to take up arms against the enemies of Islam, wherever they may be. Al Qaeda has found influence in writings by Sayyid Qutb, a fundamentalist Islamic writer that influenced Bin Laden and many other religious extremists. Qutb called for Islam to recreate itself and reject western values to create a pure Islam, one that is reflected in the desires of Al Qaeda and has been the goal of a struggle surrounded by acts of terrorism against all those deemed to be the enemy of Islam. Qutb was hanged in 1966 and he was seen as a martyr (Wright, 2007). His message remains a focal point of the Al Qaeda propaganda machine.

Al Qaeda’s, as well as that of their various branch organizations such as AQAP, use

of far-reaching propaganda is central to its fight. This study examines the propaganda themes used by AQAP in *Inspire* Magazine and attempts to determine the intended audience of the magazine and areas that the magazine is used to reach.

### **Research Questions:**

*Q1. What are the predominant themes contained in the images created by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Inspire Magazine?*

*Q2. Is the magazine geared towards the English Speaking countries as a whole, or are there specific groups/locations that are targeted in the messages contained within the images?*

*Q3. Are the majority of the images aimed at recruiting new members or are they mainly geared to encourage people who are already radicalized to carry out a terroristic act?*

## ***Inspire* Magazine, Images and the Islamic Imagery Project**

*Inspire* is AQAP's propaganda machine. It is an online English language magazine that is an attempt to "inspire Western youth to take violent action against fellow Westerners in defense of Islam"(Betts, 2011). In other words, the magazine attempts to change a reader's way of thinking by providing them with information that will radicalize their beliefs.

*Inspire* uses both text and visual images to influence its readers and creates in the reader a sense that violence against the enemies of Islam is not radical, but rather is a

responsibility of all Muslims. *Inspire* seeks to have the reader feel that violence is not only a legitimate means of achieving a goal but that it is even desirable (Social Psychology Eye, 2011). The magazine even celebrates the deaths of non-Muslim service men and women. *Inspire* is valuable to readers because it provides technical information that is otherwise hard to obtain (Betts, 2011). It is a “how to guide” for bomb making and gun use, specifically the AK 47. Brachman states in his article that AQAP and its use of *Inspire* is pioneering ways to motivate online supporters who were once only in the background, but have now been given the power to act. *Inspire* gives life to the people of Al Qaeda. The goals and ideologies of the group are now more accessible to a global audience and have enabled supporters to become operational. Brachman attributes the success of the magazine to Anwar al-Awlaki, because of what Brachman calls the “Awlaki Effect,” which is his ability to speak persuasively to an audience and become one of the most liked terrorists and speakers for Al Qaeda. Al-Awlaki has shifted AQAP’s focus from more traditional means of communication to the Internet and has basically “repackaged” Al Qaeda’s message, making it much more potent. Awlaki understands the radicalization process, and *Inspire* plays off of his understanding by decreasing dissonance between “virtual mobilization” and “physical mobilization” by providing the influence individuals need to become fully radicalized and commit violent acts of terrorism, which is the goal of *Inspire* (Brachman, 2011).

As of the beginning of September 2011, AQAP had released a total of six issues of *Inspire* magazine since its inception in 2010. Each issue covers different topics and contains different images and articles that focus on timely world events that are sometimes used to make fun of the West and enhance AQAP’s own use of propaganda by

incriminating others and justifying jihad. The sixth edition, for example, highlights Bin Laden's death. The cover page of the issue is Bin Laden shrouded in white, which is meant to symbolize his purity and religious authority. Bin Laden is referred to as a martyr and the magazine reflects the sadness felt within the jihadi community. The issue goes further and highlights other martyrs who lost their lives to the cause. The "how to" section included instructions for training with an AK 47 and how to make Acetone Peroxide, which is said in the magazine to be a popular explosive that is easy to construct. The explosive is highlighted as being used often by martyrs and this statement is further emphasized by an image of a martyr wrapped in a green flag. The image of the martyr is used as an example in the later part of this chapter.

During the initial review of the magazine, the author of this study established specific criteria to determine which images would be analyzed. Each issue contained a large number of images. Some of the images consisted primarily of text and were considered to be explanatory or descriptive. These types of images were used by Al Qaeda to show the reader a trade, such as how to use a weapon or how to build a bomb, rather than serve as tools for propaganda. The images created entirely for propagandistic purposes were made up of dramatic pictures of attacks, death or heavenly subjects that seemed to be an attempt to change thought unlike the images that provided factual information like building a bomb. Furthermore, some of the images in the magazine were very small, or contained only an image of a person or leader of the organization. The images that were important to this study were those that were created by Al Qaeda and AQAP with the intent of manipulating thoughts or actions of the reader. The author's initial review of each issue determined the minimum criteria for the images to be used in

the study. The amount of text in the images was the first criterion established. Each issue of the magazine contained colorful articles or statements made up of text, making it clear that the text was the focal point of the image in question. Such primarily textual images were not included in the study because they did not contain imagery that was applicable to the research conducted for the study and the motive of the image was made clear by the text; furthermore, any form of coding or analysis would not be needed for these types of images.

The size of the image was the second criterion for selection. The minimum size for an image selected was one-fourth of the page. After reviewing the magazines, it was determined whether or not the images that met size requirements also contained identifiable imagery suitable for further analysis. The last criterion established was that identifiable motifs, which will be described in further detail in a later section, must be readily apparent. The images with no motifs present were not included in the study.

Based on the criteria, the author isolated a total of forty-eight images from the magazine to be used in the study. A total of eight images were taken from each of the six issues in order to obtain a representative sample. Each of the images matched the criteria listed above. The images were provided to coders separate from the magazine and displayed on a white background on a separate piece of paper. This separation ensured that the text or articles within magazines would not influence their findings.

Once the images were selected, the *Islamic Imagery Project (IIP)*, which is an analysis of symbols in images often used in jihadist propaganda that was conducted by the Combating Terrorism Center at the Military Academy in West Point, New York, was

used by the coders to determine what motifs were present in each of the images. A motif is a usually recurring salient thematic element (Miriam Webster Online, 2011). The IIP is a project devoted to understanding Islamic imagery through education and scholarly research and analysis. It identified motifs commonly used in jihadi propaganda and created a handbook that provided the definitions of the motifs so that they could be used in future research. “ Visual propaganda is considered by counterterrorism scholars to be more than just a host for textual messages; rather is it treated as an expressive medium unto itself” (2006). The IIP regards jihadi imagery as the “primary tool” used by Islamic extremists and terrorist groups; therefore, the IIP is designed to analyze and understand the meaning behind images released by Islamic Extremist groups and is central to the analysis of the images in *Inspire* magazine.

The IIP organizes the motifs into the following categories:

- I. Nature
- II. Geography, Political Symbols, and States
- III. People
- IV. Weapons, Warfare & the Afterlife
- V. Other

Each of the categories contains motifs that can be applied to the images taken from *Inspire* and each was used by the coders to decide what, if any, motifs were present. Once the coders identified the motifs they observed in each image, an analysis was conducted based on the coders’ findings and information reported in the IIP to determine what theme applied to the image. A theme, as defined for this study, is an underlying recurrent message that is related to the ideological goal of a group or organization.

Coders used the visual motifs identified by the IIP to identify the elements of each image. Each of the 48 images was analyzed in its entirety and then broken down by symbols and meanings. The IIP handbook, which identified 100 motifs commonly used in Islamic Imagery, assisted coders in determining what motifs were present based on information and examples provided in the IIP handbook. Coders were given the IIP handbook that listed the possible motifs, as well as the general meaning of the motif itself. For example, one of the IIP handbook pages showed a picture of the Battle Flag referred to as al-*raya*, which is a symbol of revolt and battle; the page noted that it is used in the contemporary Islamic movement to symbolize the desire to re-establish the Islamic caliphate and the offensive movement of jihad. The section on al-*raya*, as well as all other sections for the various motifs, provided example images that used the motif and defined its use historically and currently. These examples were to assist coders in determining what motifs were present in each image and what the motif meant historically and presently.

Definitions, which are relevant to the study, were also provided to the coders and are listed in the appendix, were provided to the coders, as well as the IIP handbook that describes the possible motifs. Listed below are the primary themes used in the analysis of the magazine. The author adopted the themes, which were based on Payne's research and reported in the literature review. The author further clarified and defined the themes after further research. The themes and the clarifications were not provided to the coders in order to reduce any influence they could have had on the coders. The themes are as follows:

**Victimhood:** An attempt to make Muslims and/or Islam appear to be a victim of an

enemy designated by the group.

**Call to Arms:** A call for an audience or group member to take action for the group and commit an act of terrorism or other form of contribution to the group; It is a call for recruitment and inspiration to act.

**Vengeance and Justice:** An attempt to justify violence and terrorism based on the need for vengeance or in the name of justice for Muslims.

**Glorification of Martyrs:** An attempt to create positive feelings towards martyrs of the group who were killed or committed suicide (suicide attack) in the name of the group or Islam.

**Purification of Islam:** The desire to create a pure Islamic State or reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate.

**Other:** Any other theme present that is not referenced above

The unit of analysis was “the images” in their entirety. The images were deconstructed by the motifs identified by the coders from the *IIP*, and used for later analysis in order to determine what themes were present.

The author selected four coders, who were chosen based on educational history, background and age. A variety of age groups was included, i.e., mid-twenties, forties, fifties and sixties age ranges. The educational requirement was a bachelor’s degree. The coders held degrees in different fields, including from economics, history, political science, and criminal justice. The religious affiliation of the coders included two that were Christian, one of which was Catholic and one that was Buddhist. Background



criteria included employment and study experience; Coders' backgrounds included government employment and/or military history backgrounds. An additional requirement was that the coders were relatively up to date on current events in world news. On average, the coders viewed televised news programs and/or Internet news publications on a daily basis and had a general knowledge of terrorism and al Qaeda. None of the coders had a Muslim background. Lastly, all four of the coders were Westerners and resided in the United States with easy access to the Internet.

Prior to beginning the study, the coders underwent training conducted by the author that focused on how to use the IIP. Example images were discussed in the training session in order to eliminate any confusion. An electronic copy of the images was available for any clarification needed due to color or darkness changes in printing. The electronic images were also on a white background separate from the rest of the magazine. The study took approximately two hours for each coder to complete and the training took approximately 30 minutes or less. Two of the coders asked for extensive explanation on the directions and two of the coders did not. There was no discernible difference in the results based on the length of time required for explanation by each coder.

### ***Coder Results:***

Three of the four coders had seventy-five percent or higher agreement on motif identification that led to the identification of themes that dominate the 48 images. Although not all of the motifs identified by the coders were the identical in this instance, the *themes* identified were the same. In fifty-six percent of the images, coders agreed on the themes contained in the images based on the motifs that they identified. Coders

identified many, if not most, of the same motifs, but each coder was subject to this/her own perceptions and therefore may have focused on different aspects of the image, resulting in the identification of more or fewer motifs by individual coders. Perceptions of the coders apparently altered the overall coding of various images. The fact that there were variations in the interpretations of the coders suggests that there will be variations in the interpretations of readers who view the images on the Internet. However, the online audience would have also had the text of the magazine to direct their interpretations. There was no single image in which coders did not find at least one common motif. There were, however, six instances in which two of the coders' results identified one theme and the other two coders' results identified an additional theme; which resulted in two different themes being applicable to one image. An example of this type of split between coders and the motifs different identified in a specific image is provided below.

### **Example**

#### **Image Number 33:**



*This image was taken from Inspire magazine Summer 2011 issue.*

Image 33 is relatively simple; yet, it displays the subjectivity of the coders and their focus on one specific aspect of an image, rather than another. For example, the Black Flag was identified in the image by only two of the four coders, which may have been due to the fact that coders may or may not have thought the Flag in the image was the same exact flag listed in the IIP. The motifs identified by coders for the image are listed below.

**Coder 1:** Landscape-Sandy Desert; Weapons Combination

**Coder 2:** Landscape- Sandy Desert; Weapons Modern

**Coder 3:** Weapons Modern; Black Flag; Landscape –Sandy Desert

**Coder 4:** Black Flag; Weapons Modern; Jihadi Operational Leaders; Landscape-Sandy Desert

There was also subjectivity in the analysis of coder motifs selection. The author used a majority rule method of theme selection. During the analysis, all of the motifs identified were researched in the IIP and the motifs that resulted in the majority meaning identified for the image were applied to a theme.

Using image number 33 as an example, the above listed coder results for motifs had specific meanings listed in the IIP. The section below titled analysis and application to a theme, reported in the next set of examples, is an example of how the image analysis was conducted. The motifs and their meanings in the IIP were used to determine which of the

IIP motifs were present. Using the definitions listed on page 49 for the themes, the application to a theme was included in the example for each coder. Coders 1 and 2 results identified the “other” theme because there were no identifiable features of motifs that related the image to one of the specific themes. Coders 3 and 4 results were applied to the Purification of Islam theme. Examples and further explanation of analysis and theme identification are as follows:

**Coder 1:**

**Motifs:** Landscape-Sandy Desert- Symbolized the Landscape of Islamic Culture and evokes the Arab identity, success and faith.

Weapons Combination- The combination of Pre and modern weapon evokes the successes in Islamic history and modern jihadi campaigns.

**Analysis and Application to a theme:** There were no motifs listed that indicated that there was an identifiable theme. The weapons were used simply to highlight that the group has in fact had historic and modern successes in the jihad campaign. The desert is a symbol of the Islamic culture. Since none of the themes, such as Call to Arms or Purification of Islam could be applied, the image would be labeled with the “Other” theme.

**Coder 2:**

**Motif:** Landscape- Sandy Desert – See above

Weapons Modern: “Illustrates the violent nature of jihadi warfare and exaggerates the power of the jihadists’ military technology... evoke

jihadi victories... [and] embody the inherent capacity of the jihadi movement to overcome and defeat the West... used by jihadi soldiers and martyrs to associate themselves with violent jihadi activism... (IIP, 2006).

**Analysis and Application to a theme:** Coder two identified the same motifs as coder one, which also put the theme into the “Other” category.

**Coder 3:**

**Motifs:** Weapons Modern –See Above

Black Flag- Symbol of religious revolt and battle and symbolizes the offensive jihad and reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate.

Landscape –Sandy Desert- See Above

**Analysis and Application to a theme:** The weapons and desert were also identified by coders 1 and 2; however, the black flag adds an additional significant component to the meaning of the image, which is the reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate. This meaning signified the theme Purification of Islam.

**Coder 4:**

**Motifs:** Black Flag- See above

Weapons Modern- See above

Jihadi Operational Leaders- Serve as examples of individuals who are pious and militarily successful. These individuals are also used to draw attention to the movement, to events or successes and also to attract

recruits.

Landscape- Sandy Desert- See above

**Analysis and Application to a theme:** The sandy desert and weapons were both listed by coders 1 and 2; coder 3 also listed the Black Flag. The Jihadi Operational Leaders motif can direct a theme to a Call to Arms when used in conjunction with a motif that evokes violence, such as the color red, but in this image, there is only a connection between the leaders and the Black Flag, which directs the theme to the reestablishment of the caliphate. Since the leaders call attention to the movement, it is assumed that the magazine is directing attention to the recreation of the Islamic Caliphate and attaches this image to the theme of Purification of Islam.

To further explain the analysis, the author used the motifs with the predominant meaning or whose meaning occurred most frequently, based on their definition in the IIP, to determine what theme was present. An example of the predominant motifs and themes identified is included with the response to the research questions.

## ***Research Question Findings***

***Question 1. What are the predominant themes contained in the images created by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Inspire Magazine?***

The predominant themes identified in *Inspire* magazine are a Call to Arms, Glorification of Martyrdom, and Vengeance and Justice. The paragraphs below discuss each of the identified themes; however, only the three most common themes are discussed in detail.

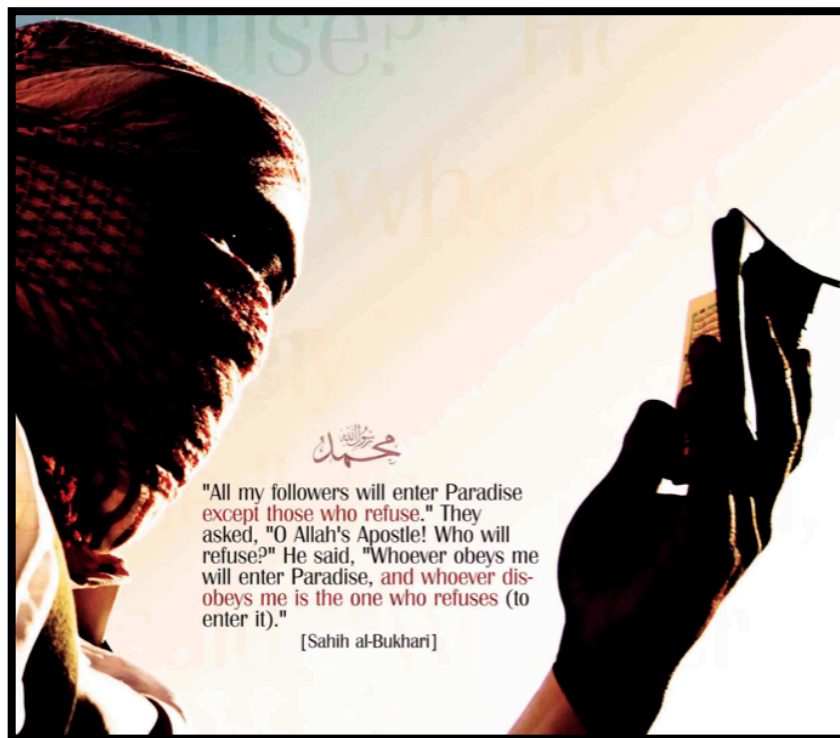
### ***Theme One: Call to Arms***

The dominant theme expressed in the images was A Call to Arms, which is a call to action for the group, recruitment and inspiration to take up arms, join the group and fight the enemy. There were twenty-seven images out of the forty-eight used in the study, including four with identifiable alternative themes, which were applicable to the Call to Arms theme.

An example of one of the images that resulted in this theme based on the coders' findings was image number 20.

#### **Example**

#### **Image Number 20:**



*The image was taken from Inspire Magazine Summer 2011 Issue.*

### **Analysis and Application to Call to Arms Theme:**

Some of the motifs identified by coders in the image above are the of Path of the Koran; colors Red and Black, and Jihadi Operational Leaders. These motifs, especially the colors and the Operational Leaders, were commonly used in multiple images. Each of the motifs symbolized a certain aspect of the image: the Path of the Koran is a reminder for jihadists to uphold their religious duties; the color Red symbolizes the evocation of violence; Black represents the importance of Jihad and the reestablishment of the caliphate and religious adherence; and the Jihadi Operational Leaders is aimed at recruitment of new supporters and advertisement of the movement. The call for violence is the central theme of the magazine. Images that advocate a call to violence are an attempt by the organization to conjure up the desire for readers to carry out attacks for the jihadist cause. These types of images flood the magazine in an attempt to influence the readers. Not only are the graphics in the magazine sophisticated, but so is the propaganda behind their message. By making the reader feel that they need to uphold their religious duties, the creators of the magazine are using overt propaganda in order to push the readers in a specific direction, which is to attack the enemy. A Call to Arms theme was identified in fifty-six percent of the images, which means over half of the images used in the study called for aggressive action against a specific target and attempted to recruit new members who would be willing to conduct attacks once they log off their computers. The Call to Arms theme was present in all six issues of the magazine and was the most frequently identified theme in four of the six issues. In only one issue, Summer 2010, was this theme identified in fewer than three of the eight images taken from the magazine.



## ***Theme Two: Glorification of Martyrdom***

There were ten images, including only one image with an alternative identifiable theme, which were related to the theme Glorification of Martyrdom. This was the second most frequently occurring theme in *Inspire* images and constituted approximately twenty percent of the sample images. The magazine issue released in the fall of 2010 was predominantly identified as using the Martyrdom theme. Overall, five of the six issues contained images that were determined to be utilizing the theme in at least one image. The Glorification of Martyrdom theme is an attempt to create positive feelings towards martyrs who were killed or committed suicide (suicide attacks) in the name of the group or Islam. It is also an attempt to suggest that future martyrs will also be glorified. The Glorification of Martyrdom can be seen as an advertisement for death for jihad and is used to entice the reader and make the reader believe that his or her own death might be highlighted as an act of martyrdom in a future issue. The martyrs portrayed in the magazine are highlighted and their biographies are placed on display in order to glorify the events that precipitated their death. This type of imagery is used to influence the audience and create positive thoughts toward taking their own lives during jihad. An example of the Glorification of Martyrdom theme is shown below in Image number 18.

## Example

### Image Number 18:



*Taken from Inspire magazine Summer 2011 issue.*

#### **Analysis and Application to theme:**

In this image, a martyr is shrouded in green. The coders all identified this individual as a martyr, and identified the color motifs Green, White, and Blue during the course of the study. What stands out in this image is the martyr, who is meant to portray a bold statement declaring that there is no greater sacrifice than dying as martyr and there is no greater reward once the martyr enters Heaven. The colors stand for Islam (green), purity (white) and heavenly paradise (blue). Note that all of these meanings for the motifs were listed in the IIP and used to analyze the images (IIP, 2006). This image is a form of overt and agitative propaganda. The creator of the image is attempting to instill the idea that dying for the jihadist cause and dying while attacking the enemy is the valiant and noble way to die. The rewards promised in “heavenly paradise” can be seen as a glittering generality used as imagery. The image is simply glorifying death in the face of the

enemy.

Being the second most common theme identified, it demonstrates the aim of the magazine by emphasizing the positive connotations that the AQAP and Al Qaeda are attempting to instill in the reader and what their rewards will be for their “good work” in the name of Islam. The fact that the two most common motifs command violence and death for the cause is a daunting thought when the widespread scope of the audience is considered. Anyone with an Internet connection has access to *Inspire* magazine and there is no stopping a person from seeing these images. The magazines are readily available online and are all in English. The magazine also goes so far as to explain how to commit attacks in the reader’s own backyard, making “lone wolf” attacks all the more possible.

### ***Theme Three: Vengeance and Justice***

There were seven Images identified that related to the theme Vengeance and Justice, with only one image having a possible alternate theme. This theme was present in fourteen percent of the magazine’s imagery. The issue released in Summer 2010 was primarily identified as using the Vengeance and Justice theme; however, three of the six issues contained an image determined to have the Vengeance theme. Image Number 39 is identified as an example of the Vengeance and Justice theme.

## Example

### Image Number 39:



*Taken from Inspire magazine Fall 2011 issue.*

### Analysis and Application to theme:

The focal point of the image is Osama Bin Laden, who symbolizes resistance to the unjust authority and dedication to jihad. In jihadi imagery, Bin Laden serves as the inspiration for the movement and the continued fight. Even in death, Bin Laden's image is still used. It is possible that his image will be used more often since Bin Laden is now considered a martyr. Another significant aspect of the image is the use of the 9/11 imagery, which is related to the motif Important Victories. This motif is used to promote faith in the cause and inspire others to join in the successes of the movement. The most potent facet of this image is Bin Laden and the symbolism that surrounds him that calls for the defeat of the unjust authority, which in this image is the twin towers on 9/11. This image is also a call for recruitment, but the poignant aspect of the image is the symbolism of resistance against the United States, which is referenced by the 9/11 imagery.

In addition to the three predominant themes, which have been discussed in the

examples above, additional themes were identified that occurred less frequently in the 48 images. Seven (fourteen percent) of the images did not contain motifs that related to one of the five specific themes. These images were labeled with the sixth theme, which was defined as the “Other” theme. Two of the images that were categorized as “Other” also contained motifs related to an alternative theme. Three images were labeled as the Purification of Islam theme; however, two of three images were deemed applicable to an alternate theme. It is interesting that not one of the 48 images used in the images used in the study contained motifs that coders related to the Victimhood theme, which was the first theme defined for this study. Victimhood was a major theme identified by Payne and has frequently been seen as a theme for jihadi imagery; however, *Inspire* magazine focused on violence and recruitment versus the justification for the violence and the Victimhood theme was not present. Defeating a designated enemy is the only obvious justification for jihad that is identifiable in the images.

***Question 2.*** *Is the magazine geared towards the English Speaking countries as a whole, or are there specific groups/locations that are targeted in the messages contained within the images?*

The magazine is an English language online magazine that, as a whole, is aimed at an English speaking audience; however, the **United States** was the only English speaking country directly identified. Other locations were identified in the magazine, but not all the areas mentioned were targets.

After the author examined all of the images used in the study, there were eleven

instances where the **United States** was directly targeted in the images. For example, some images contained U.S. Officials, or the U.S. Flag. There were three images that referenced the recent postage bomb plot on 9/3/2010, which was an attempt AQAP to send explosives by way of UPS planes. The plot was stopped; however, AQAP claimed responsibility for the thwarted attack (Roggio, 2010). There were two images that pinpointed the Twin Towers in reference to the 9/11 attack funded by Bin Laden and Al Qaeda Central. There was one reference to the Fort Hood massacre and the Christmas Day bomber. Bin Laden appeared in many of the images that referenced previous attacks presumably because he is attracting attention to the fight against the unjust and lending his image, similar to that of the propaganda technique of transfer to enhance the image. The United States was the main target of the magazine based on the number of times it was referenced and the manner in which it was used in the images. When a target was mentioned, it was most frequently the United States; however, not every location mentioned was a target.

**Palestine**, which is said to be the “mother of all Islamic causes,” is used to create sentiments of Islamic nationalism (IIP, 2006). There were two images from the magazine that reference Palestine. Both of these images included pictures of children that, according to the IIP, are meant to evoke notions of pride, honor and injustice. An image of living children, which was used in one of the images, represents the future of the fight and the next generation of fighters (Image 14, November 2010). Images of dead children are used to create feelings of injustice, anger and the desire to retaliate against the determined enemy, which was used in the second image identified. The second image contained a live child with hands out stretched over a dead child’s body (Image 6,

January 2011).

The outline of **Saudi Arabia** appeared in two of the images. Saudi Arabia is one of the enemies closer in proximity to the group and is said to be the birthplace of Islam and home to two of Islam's holiest sites. It is often used in propaganda to signify the enemy; however, in this magazine, Saudi Arabia does not appear to be the direct target of the majority of the magazine (IIP, 2006).

**Pakistan** appeared in one image with a positive connection to Bin Laden. The image was of Bin Laden with a thank you message for avenging his death (Image 4, Summer 2011).

The **Egyptian** revolution was mentioned in one image, which appeared to say that the Egyptian revolution was not aggressive enough. The image stated, "If this Egyptian Revolution has taught us anything, it has taught us that sitting and waiting for tyrants to fall is not practical; mobilization of the people is necessary for the tyrants to fall"(Image 37, March 2011).

There were two references to **Yemen** that were identified. The first was of a jihadi fighter with a gun that had one line written in green at the bottom of the image that stated "in search of martyrdom." The second image was that of President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his "failed state"(Image 45, November 2010).

**Question 3.** *Are the majority of the images aimed at recruiting new members or are they mainly geared to encourage people who are already radicalized to carry out a terroristic act?*

*Inspire* magazine is an attempt to recruit new members for the organization and to

further the radicalization process of those individuals who already have the desire to conduct jihad.

The Call to Arms theme can be viewed as a direct attempt to recruit new members. This theme appeals to the potential members' desire for power and action.

It is clear that the magazine is intended to call for fighters to carry out attacks. The magazine offers a "how to" section for those who have no training. Potential jihadist fighters do not have to travel to the Middle East in order to receive certain types of arms training because the magazine offers examples of bomb construction and the proper use of weapons. The magazine is meant to inspire and influence the reader to conduct attacks within their personal regions. If the primary identified target is the United States, and the magazine is geared toward English speaking individuals, than it is possible the magazine is calling for violent attacks within the United States that will be carried out by these new recruits. As discussed in previous sections, AQAP has been able to influence recruits to conduct attacks, such as the Christmas Day Bomber and the Fort Hood shooter. Anwar al Awlaki, who was killed on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011, after a drone strike targeted him and Samir Khan, was one of the primary members of Al Qaeda that was able to influence Western recruits. The latter was an American citizen born in Pakistan and, per the *New York Times*, was the editor of *Inspire* (New York Times, 2011). Both Awlaki and Khan were critical to the success of *Inspire* as both were born in the United States and understood the Western mind and culture. One can infer that if the two people running the magazine were Americans that the magazine was intent on targeting new recruits in the United States. It is difficult to determine what will happen with the magazine and who would be capable of filling their shoes and maintaining the magazine's broad appeal to



the Western world. Without someone like Awlaki, there may be a lapse in the magazine's ability to influence potential Western recruits. Awlaki's death, however, may have a more significant impact in that it may spark the desire for revenge and may influence both former supporters and new recruits to retaliate against the United States Government.

*Inspire* magazine also attempts to drive current recruits further into the radicalization process. The theme Glorification of Martyrdom can be viewed as an attempt at furthering the radicalization process of individuals who have already been indoctrinated. Glorifying martyrdom is an appeal to a person's faith and their soul. This theme appeals to those with ideals and who long to give themselves to the movement. Once a person is fully indoctrinated and believes in nothing more than in the fight for Islam and waging jihad, martyrdom is the ultimate sacrifice that they can give. Rewards are offered in paradise and the images in the magazine include the white lights and gates of Heaven. Martyrdom is shown to be the ultimate sacrifice and *Inspire* suggests that those who take part in this unselfish act will be praised by Allah and be rewarded for all time. The motifs used in the images that are central to martyrdom may not appeal to young, new recruits, who are excited about the prospect of fighting for a cause and heroism, as much as they would appeal to an older supporter who already believed in the cause and values the glorification of Allah more than the acts of violence themselves. The images in *Inspire* will appeal to both of these individuals, but the frequency of the Call to Arms theme suggests to the author that the magazine is geared more towards new recruits.

## Conclusion and Discussion:

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011, after the conclusion of this study, *Inspire* magazine released its seventh issue, which celebrated the tenth anniversary of 9/11. The issue is filled with images of the devastation and destruction that was inflicted on America. A final image in the issue is a picture of Grand Central Station in New York. The People in the image are rushing by in a blur. At the bottom of the page are the words “Targeting the populations of countries that are at war with the Muslims”- Coming Soon Anwar al Awlaki. Three days after the release of the seventh issue, Awlaki and Samir Khan were killed. The articles that were said to be forthcoming from Awlaki may or may not be in the next and eighth issue, but we can assume that AQAP will use his name and his image. The death of Awlaki is not a death sentence for AQAP; however, it is unclear what the immediate consequences are for *Inspire* magazine. The seventh issue was not due to be released until November or December 2011, but with the tenth anniversary of 9/11, a special edition was released. However, if there is another issue released, it is possible there will be a posthumous message from Anwar al-Awlaki (Miller, 2011).

*Inspire* magazine is a propaganda tool used to call lone wolf jihadists into action and to recruit new members within the Western world. The *Islamic Imagery Project* (IIP), as the primary basis for the analysis of images in the magazine, is invaluable as a means for codifying and analyzing themes used by AQAP. During the coding, coders identified new imagery that they would have liked to include as motifs. *Inspire* is a display of power and any future studies regarding *Inspire* magazine or Islamic imagery should include additional motifs that are used to signify the Love of Islam and power, which were determined to be significant themes within the magazine and possibly Islamic

imagery as a whole. Jihadi warriors were used countless times throughout the magazine, but there was no meaning applied to these individuals by the IIP. These fighters were not operational or religious leaders; which were the only motifs available for people involved in the movement. They were ground level troops that could have a significant impact on the audience depending on how their images were used in the magazine. Potential new recruits can identify with these fighters and may long to be like them. The author believes it would be useful to include ground level fighters in the IIP motifs so that they can be studied in future research. In addition, the images frequently contained clouds. Coders questioned whether these might portray heavenly paradise or if they were used as a backdrop for airplanes used in attacks and in references to martyrs. If clouds and fighters had been included as motifs, the analysis of several images may have changed.

This study was not without limitations; subjectivity of the coders and analysis was an issue, as was the relatively small numbers of the coders. A larger study with individuals from different religious backgrounds and education levels may change the motifs identified in the images; however, it is unlikely that the identification of the ultimate message behind the magazine would change. AQAP wants new fighters and they want to attack the enemy; this was made very apparent throughout the images.

Studies of both propaganda and visual imagery produce valuable insight into mass movements and other forms of extremism. Studied together, they are a potent combination and yield a deeper understanding of organizational attempts to create or alter the beliefs of their target population. This study has viewed propaganda and visual imagery in tandem, demonstrating the potential for expanded studies.

The use of propaganda in Islamic jihad imagery will continue to evolve whether or

not *Inspire* magazine continues. Awlaki was not the leader of AQAP, but he was a significant player in the game. The organization will shift and try to fill the void left by Awlaki's death, whether or not this void is ever filled remains to be seen. We can be sure that AQAP will continue to master the use of electronic media to deliver its message in a powerful and global manner.

# Appendix

## Definitions:

**Terrorism:** Deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change (Hoffman, 2006)

**Image:** A visual representation of something (Miriam Webster Online, 2011).

**Propaganda:** The deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2006).

**Motif:** A usually recurring salient thematic element (Miriam Webster Online, 2011).

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