



TRC TWW Report

Terror Web Watch Report



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- Item 1: TWW Analysis of Ayman al-Zawahiri Video Released on January 6.
- Item 2: Hezbollah and the Iraqi Insurgency: Same Media Tactics, Evolving Medium
- Item 3: Kuwaiti Mujahideen in Iraq Announce Plan to Take the Battle Back to Kuwait (Country Profile)
- Item 4: Video Available: English Reading of al-Zawahiri Speech, Possibly by "Azzam the American."



Graphic: *Al-Jazeera's* Arabic subtitles obscure al-Qaeda's English ones as Ayman al-Zawahiri attempts to communicate with both Muslim and western audiences in early January.



Orientation/Introduction:

Please review the introduction to the Terror Web Watch at [Intel Report](#).

Item 1: TWW Analysis of Ayman al-Zawahiri Video Released on January 6.

It has been over a year since the world last heard from al-Qaeda ([Group Profile](#)) leader Osama bin Laden. His deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has proven more prolific, appearing without bin Laden eight times in the last year. He most recently emerged in a recording with English subtitles played on *al-Jazeera* on January 6. In the speech, al-Qaeda's Number Two focuses on four points. He calls on Muslims to come to Pakistan ([Country Profile](#)) to help earthquake victims. He celebrates President Bush's announcement that the United States ([Country Profile](#)) will bring some troops back from Iraq ([Country Profile](#)) as an admission of defeat. He denounces the Egyptian elections and US efforts at democracy promotion in the Middle East as vehicles for US domination. And lastly, he calls upon the Mujahideen fighting around the world to unite against a US-led attempt to control the Muslim world.

Revolutionary in a turban

Like other more recent speeches by Zawahiri, this speech is far less religious in nature than it is political. His speeches since late 2004, with one exception, have been more anti-imperialist in their rhetoric than strictly Islamist. Zawahiri has departed from the most common formula of Islamist writing whereby each point made is backed up by multiple excerpts from the Koran and the *ahadith* (sayings and traditions of the Prophet), instead attempting to appeal to common sense and nationalist pride.

The change was demonstrated most obviously in his November 29, 2004 speech. In that appearance, he forewent relying on verses of the Koran and other religious sources and based his point around the quote of a famous Egyptian playwright best known for romantic plays that should be hated by Salafi Islamists. The spiritual father of the al-Qaeda movement should be expected to heap anathema on such a person, rather than quote him in an international appearance. However, the playwright, Ahmad Shawki, is the kind of symbol of Egyptian culture that a champion of an anti-imperialist movement would utilize and, thus, an appropriate symbol for Zawahiri's new image as an instigator of revolution ([WAR Report](#)).

Though Zawahiri is an eye surgeon, his grandfather held Egypt's ([Country Profile](#)) highest religious position, Sheikh of al-Azhar, and Zawahiri himself has been an active Islamist since age 15. In his only really religious appearance recently, in late January 2005, Zawahiri returned to his Islamic scholar roots in a speech entitled "Liberating Mankind Under the Banner of the Koran." "Liberating Mankind" laid out a formula for reform in the Muslim world that would beget a virtuous Muslim caliphate. "Liberating Mankind" for Zawahiri was in some ways an abbreviated equivalent to the Communist Manifesto or Mao's "little red book." Revolutionary leaders throughout time have understood that it is not enough simply to denounce the encroachment of a competing ideology or an occupation by a foreign people or subset of society. An alternative must be presented: a blueprint, a reason to fight, a light at the end of the tunnel to justify the violent revolt. In post-September 11 appearances, this is Zawahiri's first stab at such a thing. Thus, though it is religiously based, "Liberating Mankind" was still very much revolutionary in spirit.

Since "Liberating Mankind," Zawahiri has still peppered appearances with Koranic verse but to a lesser extent than may be expected by someone who was originally positioned to provide the spiritual balance and religious dignity to Bin Laden's warrior-revolutionary image. Speculation may be made that Zawahiri is attempting to ascend the political throne of al-Qaeda in Bin Laden's apparent absence. The shift may be a sign that Osama Bin Laden is, for all intensive purposes, out of the picture.

Elections causing al-Qaeda leader obvious anxiety

The unifying themes of all of Zawahiri's messages in the past two years have supported the al-Qaeda strategy of igniting an international insurgency of Muslims. This global "intifada" would fight to overthrow secular, western-



allied, "puppet" governments and kick out all western interests from Muslim lands. This would be accomplished by attacking western citizens and Muslim government entities that have agreements of mutual support.

It is even better to attack westerners "in the heart of their hearths" as it is said in Arabic, meaning in western homelands. The idea behind this is that western civilian populations would put pressure on governments to accede to terrorists' demands to withdrawal from Muslim countries or face further attack. This worked beautifully in Spain ([Country Profile](#)) in 2004, but it has not proven to work as well in the United States nor, as of yet, in the United Kingdom ([Country Profile](#)).

Most recently, Zawahiri's speeches have demonstrated a tangent that is clearly distracting him. Zawahiri's most recent appearances show clear concern over elections and democratic reforms that are taking place in the Middle East and Central Asia. He first focused on the topic in his June 11, 2004 appearance, and his last two appearances have demonstrated that he sees such developments as worrisome. This most recent video focused on the recent elections in Zawahiri's native Egypt, and indicated that he had followed the news of the elections closely. He also mentioned the municipal election that took place in Saudi Arabia ([Country Profile](#)) last year. He likely sees the al-Qaeda vision for the region as competing in an existential battle with the alternative vision of Middle East democratic reformers and the United States. Voter turnout rates in recent elections in Iraq, Afghanistan ([Country Profile](#)), and Egypt could represent to him the tally of people who are rejecting the al-Qaeda vision. He is clearly threatened by these developments, and he has spent much of his last two speeches attempting to denounce them.

Democracy, al-Qaeda-style

Traditionally, al-Qaeda has viewed elections and democracy as manmade systems invented by the West that are not legitimate elements of a true Islamic political system. Oddly, in his most recent speech, Zawahiri seems to acknowledge the popularity of democratic ideals by referring to them as something that may be compatible with al-Qaeda's vision for the Islamic world. Instead of denouncing democracy as a concept, he has denounced the most recent elections as rigged or fraudulent, saying that "free elections" may be obtained if al-Qaeda's plan for resistance is followed:

"My Muslim Umma, you will not enjoy free elections, protected sacred places, governments that are held accountable to their populations, and a respected and feared judiciary unless you are liberated from the Zionist Crusader occupation and the corrupted and corruptor governments" (BBC translation of al-Jazeera footage).

Zawahiri also comments on Algeria's ([Country Profile](#)) 1992 elections, whose results were overturned because Islamists were winning. He said that the Islamists should have been brought "to their honored place in Parliament." This kind of talk is highly abnormal, as "free elections," especially, were not a part of the vision for the Islamic caliphate as proffered by al-Qaeda in the past, nor were "honored" positions in Parliaments.

Al-Qaeda's ideology and tactics have exhibited a clear the-means-justify-the-ends mentality (the expression is also common in Arabic). Adopting traditionally western concepts as part of the vision for self-determination they are trying to propagate may be a tactic to appeal to a larger audience, especially in light of the apparent popularity of such concepts in Muslim countries.

Interestingly, Zawahiri views democracy in the western world very differently. He uses the presence of democratic political systems and the rule of law in western countries conveniently to justify targeting western civilian populations for the actions of their governments. He explained this in his comments on the London tunnel attacks ([Terrorist Incident](#)) in a video aired on *al-Jazeera* on September 1, 2005.

"[Non-violent British Muslim leaders] say that the response to the crimes committed by Bush and Blair is not to strike civilians. We tell them that treatment in kind is just. We also tell them that these civilians are the ones who pay taxes to Bush and Blair to equip their armies and assist Israel. They are also the ones who serve in their forces and security agencies, and they are the ones who elected them. Even those who did not vote for them consider them to be legitimate rulers who have the right to order them and [think that] they should obey them, and [think that] they have the right to order strikes on us and the killing of our sons and daughters, to launch



war in their name, and to kill Muslims on their behalf. They even consider the disobedience of their orders a crime punishable by law."

Earthquakes and Islamists

This is the second time Zawahiri has appealed to Muslims to help Pakistani earthquake victims. This time, he has asked followers to come to Pakistan to supervise the distribution of aid, claiming that Musharraf's government has been stealing resources intended for victims. First of all, if Zawahiri is attempting to set himself up as a possible leader of the pan-Islamic nation, he has to show compassion when such a tragedy besets Muslims. Also, Zawahiri would not miss a chance to insult Musharraf or point out his corruption. However, there may also be political calculations to the plea.

He may also be drawing on lessons learned from the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood ([Group Profile](#)) in Egypt. The Brotherhood made a huge impact and significant strides in gaining popularity among the mainstream population in Cairo during a devastating earthquake that struck Egypt in 1992. Though not as deadly as the one that recently hit Pakistan, more than 550 people were killed in Cairo, almost 10,000 were injured, and thousands were displaced when 8,300+ buildings were destroyed ([source](#)). While Egypt's corrupt and self-serving government sat on its hands, Muslim "brothers" took to the streets with food, water, basic goods, and medical services. This created an enduring impression on the people of Cairo that has contributed to the Brotherhood's popular success. Zawahiri may be hoping that Salafi Islamists might exploit the tragedy in Pakistan in the same way: to gain more adherents to their side in Pakistan.

Foreshadower of Destruction

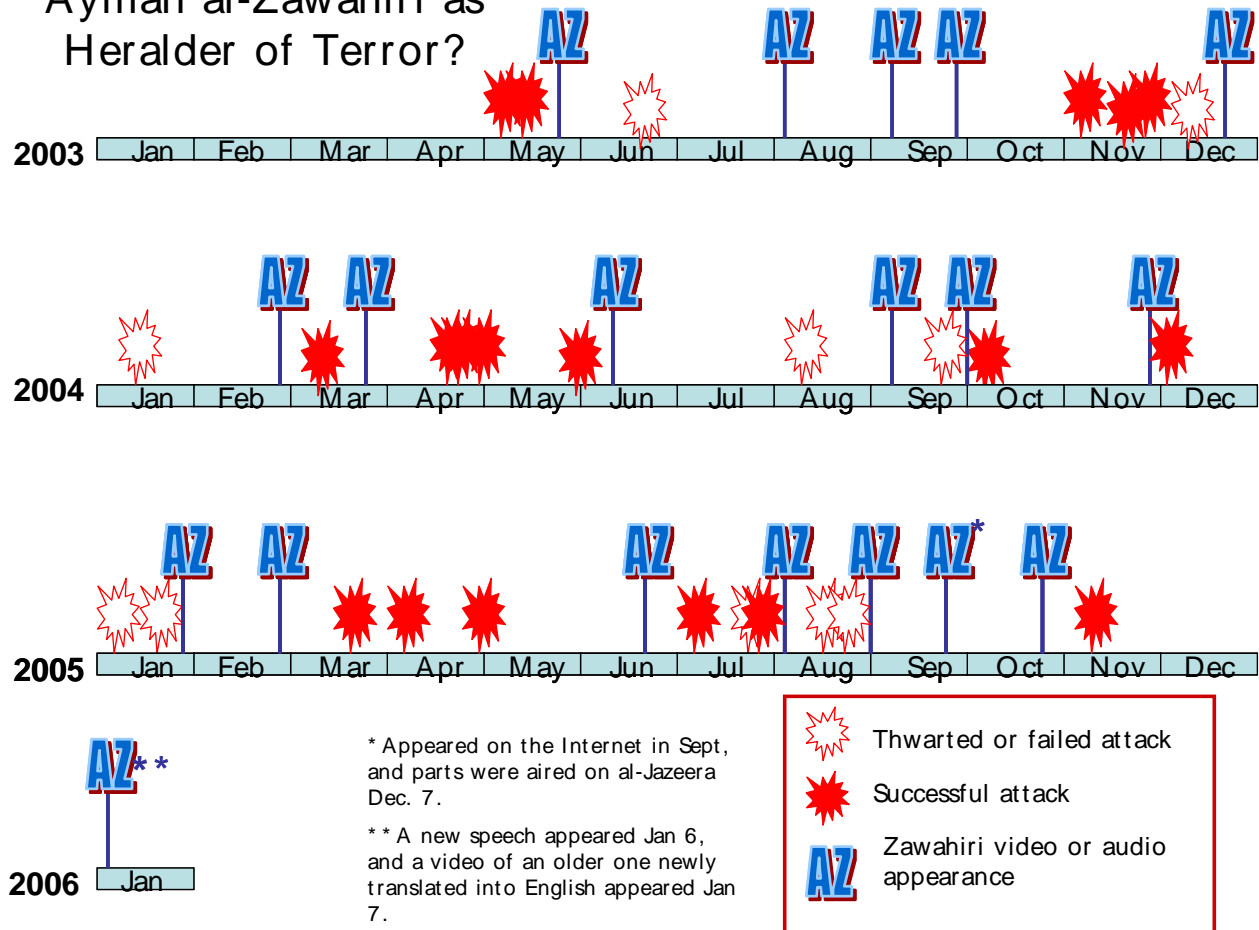
There has been much analysis done on the theory that Zawahiri's appearances may be timed to foreshadow, trigger, or signal terrorist attacks. In several cases, terrorist attacks followed appearances by the leader by a number of weeks or less. The strongest piece of evidence for such a theory came in October 2004. Zawahiri appeared in a video on October 4, urging Muslims to "liberate Palestine," and days later Israeli tourists were attacked in the Sinai Peninsula ([Terrorist Incident](#)). This newest video has prompted speculation that it could be an augury of the next attack.

However, looking at the big picture of all recent Zawahiri appearances and attacks, this theory does not pan out. Zawahiri has made a number of speeches over the last two and half years, and there have been a number of terrorist attacks. Chances are that there are going to be times when these events happen within a few weeks of one another. In a number of cases, they have not. This alleged pattern seems to be a symptom of the natural human desire to make sense of random violence and to look for patterns that may help predict the next terrorist attack. (In an attempt to amend the theory, a new twist has even been put on it that says that every *two* appearances foreshadow the next attack (see [al-Qaeda video is 'green light' for attack, analyst warns](#)))

The chart below shows a timeline of Zawahiri appearances since 2003 and al-Qaeda attacks and thwarted attacks. There does not appear to be any discernible pattern.



Ayman al-Zawahiri as Heralder of Terror?



Note: Attacks were selected based on a compelling link of the attackers to al-Qaeda. Attacks that were strictly part of separatist or nationalist struggles, such as those by Chechen or Filipino separatists or Iraqi or Afghan insurgents, were disregarded. Thwarted attacks were only included if they had progressed past initial planning stages. Assassinations of individuals were not included. Tracking of attacks and speeches begins in May 2003, when Zawahiri began making regular appearances. List may not be conclusive.

Attacks:

- May 12, 2003: Bombings of foreign compounds in Riyadh.
- May 16, 2003: Jewish and western targets bombed in Casablanca.
- June, 2003: Thwarted attempt against US embassy in Nairobi.
- November 8, 2003: Bombing of foreign compounds in Saudi Arabia.
- November 15 & 20, 2003: Attacks against synagogues and British targets in Istanbul.
- December 12, 2003: Plot to bomb UK embassy in Sana'a thwarted.
- January 2004: Ricin plots in the UK and France thwarted.
- March 11, 2004: Madrid train attacks.
- April 17 & 21, 2004: Car bombs and suicide bomb against security/police in Saudi Arabia.
- May 1, 2004: Attack on westerners in petrochemical building in Saudi Arabia.
- May 30, 2004: Siege of western compound in Khobar, Saudi Arabia.
- August 13, 2004: Attacks in Pakistan against Musharraf and the US embassy thwarted.
- September, 2004: Attack thwarted against US embassy in Lebanon.
- October 7, 2004: Sinai Peninsula bombings against Israeli tourists and others.
- December 6, 2004: Attack on US consulate in Jeddah.
- March 19, 2005: Bombing of theater in Doha, Qatar.
- April 2005: Three small attacks against foreigners in Cairo on the 7th and 30th.
- July 7, 2005: London subway bombings.



July 21, 2005: Failed copycat London subway attacks.
July 23, 2005: Bombings at Sharm al-Sheikh in the Sinai Peninsula.
August 19, 2005: Failed attack against US ships in the port of Aqaba, the port of Eilat.
August 2005: Thwarted attempt to attack Israeli cruise ships in Turkey.
November 9, 2005: Amman hotel attacks.

NOTE: all of these attacks can be found in the TRC Terrorist Attack Database.

The timing of Zawahiri's appearances seems to coincide not with attacks, but with political developments he desires to comment upon, and also with Muslim holiday months of Ramadan and Dhu al-Hijja. Ayman al-Zawahiri's plan seems to be not to herald or signal attacks with his appearances, but to inspire new attacks and to continue to clarify, perpetuate, and shape the political vision of the international Salafi Jihad.

In spite of the obvious worry caused to Zawahiri by elections in some countries, he may be succeeding. After *al-Jazeera* aired portions of the most recent video and published an Arabic transcript on its website, it held a poll to gauge the reaction of readers and viewers to the al-Qaeda leader's words. The poll asked simply, "Do you agree with what Zawahiri said in his last speech?"

The respondents to the poll probably mostly come from a select segment of Arab society. They are people who are interested in the world enough to keep up on the news, and they are also people who are well-off enough to own computers or access them in Internet cafes. Conventional wisdom holds that this wealthier segment of Arab society should be more or less the most pro-western strata.

If so, the poll indicates a worrisome trend. Nearly 60 percent of the approximately 30,000 respondents said that they agreed with Zawahiri. An additional 16.3 percent said that they agreed with some of what the al-Qaeda leader had to say. Only 25.7 percent said they did not agree ([poll](#)).

While some western interests are worried that al-Zawahiri's speech may herald an attack in the next 30 or so days or that there may be a hidden signal buried within his words for a sleeper cell, the actual significance of the speech may be more horrible than that and may be as simple as the words themselves. He may not be signaling a cell to attack, but instead influencing thousands or possibly millions. He is setting himself up as the articulator of all complaints Muslim, a spokesman uninhibited, as mainstream Muslim leaders are perceived to be, by messy diplomatic relations and patronage systems with western countries.

The idea brings to mind a statement Zawahiri made on the second anniversary of the September 11 attacks ([Terrorist Incident](#)), taunting his western audience with their lack of understanding of the nature of al-Qaeda. "Do you know what Al-Qaeda is?" he asked, "It is the product of a Muslim world community that has decided to fight you to the death, refusing to surrender to your crimes and excesses. Can you crush the whole Muslim world community?" Zawahiri, even then, understood that his role was occasionally to blow on the fire that had already started and that others would fuel it for him. An attack from the al-Qaeda core is still possible, but the neophytes are likely to take over the bulk of fighting from now on.

Item 2: Hezbollah and the Iraqi Insurgency: Same Media Tactics, Evolving Medium

"The aim is not to execute an operation, which is followed by complete silence, but telling the reason why it was executed." – *Thurwat al-Sinam*, online magazine of Al Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers ([Group Profile](#))

Filming a terrorist attack and airing it through the media can have a significant impact in an insurgency in three ways: it establishes the credibility of the perpetrator; serves as a recruitment tool, and demoralizes the enemy. This model was employed effectively by Hezbollah ([Group Profile](#)) in its campaign against Israel in the 1990s, mostly via its own television station—*Al-Manar* ("The Beacon")—to reach Lebanese, Israeli, and foreign audiences. In a twist that accounts for modern technology, Iraqi insurgent groups are now primarily utilizing websites to broadcast attacks. The Internet has been transformed into the latest forum of information warfare.



When Israel ([Country Profile](#)) invaded Lebanon ([Country Profile](#)) in 1982, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) had a reputation of invincibility in the Middle East based on their previous successful campaigns. One manner of countering this perception and establishing Hezbollah as an effective force against the Israeli occupation was to film attacks (ambushes, assassinations, suicide bombs, roadside bombs) with pre-positioned cameramen and to broadcast the tapes through *Al-Manar*. The documented, visual successes against Israeli troops gave confidence to the Lebanese people and demonstrated the vulnerability of Israeli troops. Hezbollah was soon recognized within the Arab world as an organization that could lead the resistance, and their funding and recruitment increased dramatically.

Similarly, the Iraqi insurgency is opposing a daunting opponent in a US-led stabilization force. By filming brutal attacks—including suicide bombs, IED roadside bombs, beheadings—and airing them daily via the Internet, insurgent groups are providing visual documentation of effectiveness against the occupying forces to an Iraqi and Arab audience. By far, Al Qaeda in Iraq has been the most successful in utilizing this new medium. By airing attacks, most notably the beheading of Nicholas Berg ([Terrorist Incident](#)), and posting multiple, daily statements through the web, Zarqawi's organization has transformed itself into an established leader of the Iraq insurgency.

In Lebanon, *Al-Manar* complemented the attack videos by airing the names and pictures of suicide bomb martyrs. Underneath the image, Koranic verses were displayed that justified the attacks and promised rewards in the afterlife. These videos challenge prospective martyrs and entice their participation: here is a fellow Muslim who has given the ultimate sacrifice, justified and celebrated by the Koran. Al Qaeda in Iraq has likewise followed this model. In addition to airing attack footage and scenes of destruction caused by Coalition forces, the group similarly highlights the sacrifice of fighters killed in the insurgency. Web biographies of martyrs and video clips detailing their suicide attack are made available on a regular and updated basis.

Hezbollah recognized that the IDF could not sustain an occupation of Lebanon without the support of the Israeli population. Though the Israeli government controlled much of the Israeli news coverage, Israeli citizens were able to view the footage of attacks from western news sources and increasingly from *Al-Manar* via satellite. As noted by Hezbollah commander Sheik Qaouk, "By the use of these films, we were able to control from a long distance the morale of a lot of Israelis." In sum, the repeated airings of successful attacks against Israeli soldiers helped convince the Israeli public that the situation in Lebanon was increasingly untenable and not worth the loss of life, contributing to the government's decision to withdraw in 2000.

Iraqi insurgency communiqués likewise reveal their recognition that the sustainability of the US occupation in Iraq ([Country Profile](#)) rests on the support of the US public. When western news agencies refused to air the footage of Daniel Pearl's beheading in 2002 ([Terrorist Incident](#)), Zarqawi and his group turned toward the Internet as a venue to reach a western audience. Moreover, the footage of Nicholas Berg's beheading was viewed widely in the US via the Internet. The barbarity of this attack and others contrasted sharply with the cleaner war presented in the western media. The cumulative effect has been to undermine the contentions of control and progress put forth by the US and Iraqi governments.

Item 3: Kuwaiti Mujahideen in Iraq Announce Plan to Take the Battle Back to Kuwait ([Country Profile](#))

Fear of terrorists returning from the insurgency in Iraq ([Country Profile](#)) concerns nearly all Arab countries. Saudi Arabian Interior Minister Prince Nayyef has worried aloud that veterans returning from Iraq will be even more well-trained and deadly than those that dispersed after the Afghan Jihad. A message circulated on Jihadist web groups may support those fears. Signed by "Abu Mahajen al-Kuwaiti" and dated December 27 (though it was circulated more recently), the message announces that Kuwaitis fighting in Iraq are upset by developments in their home country and may divert their attention from the Iraqi theater to attack Kuwait or Kuwaiti interests.

[begin translation]

In the Name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate

[Koranic verse and introductory lines of blessing for God and the Prophet]



The brother Mujahideen in Kuwait heard [news] from their correspondents in Kuwait and heard of the announcement of war against the freedom and honor of the united believers in Kuwait issued in order to please America.

Therefore, the fighting Mujahideen brothers from the State of Kuwait in Iraq met with their brothers the Arab Mujahideen and the military leadership [in Iraq] in order to find a way to respond to the decries, which have been issued in Kuwait. The response will be a militant and powerful one, inflicted upon the Kuwaiti regime, either in Kuwait or against Kuwaiti interests in Iraq. We say to the Kuwaiti regime that they will pay the price for their betrayal of the Islamic Umma and the Mujahideen of Kuwait and that we will avenge our brothers who have been imprisoned in the prisons of the Kuwaiti regime.

Abu Mahajen al-Kuwaiti

2005 12 27 [sic]

[end translation]

Item 4: Video Available: English Reading of al-Zawahiri Speech, Possibly by "Azzam the American."

Released on January 7, this video, entitled "Letter to America," includes an English language reading of a speech said to have been written by Ayman al-Zawahiri. This video was released nearly simultaneously with the new al-Zawahiri video discussed in Item 1.

While some have confused the tape as a (second) new al-Zawahiri speech, it actually is a reading of an essay posted on Islamist websites in 2002. On November 24, 2002, it was translated and printed in its entirety by the British paper *The Observer*, though attributed to Osama bin Laden rather than Ayman al-Zawahiri. The video comes with a slightly distorted, but unaccented, English language reading of the "Letter," along with English subtitles. The voice is that of a native (American) English speaker and sounds similar to that of Azzam the American, who made headlines with an English language, highly-threatening al-Qaeda speech issued in October 2004. There is no attribution or evidence, however, that the speaker is, indeed, Azzam.

The "Letter" poses and answers the questions: "why do we fight you?," and "what is it we are calling you to, and what is it we want from you?" The past year has seen al-Qaeda publish videos either in English or with English subtitles, apparently in an attempt to help their messages reach the largest community of Americans or westerners possible. The video is available from TRC upon request. The transcript from the original translation in *The Observer* is available [here](#).

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