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GLOBAL JIHAD IN NUMBERS. DID AL QAEDA FULL FIELD ITS POSTULATES?

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Al Qaeda is a one of the most prominent and recognizable terrorist organization in the world history which due to the attacks on New York and Washington took its chance to spread worldwide the ideology of Global Salafi Jihad (GSJ) becoming also an ideological avatar of the “global extremist movement” (Olsen 2011, 1-3). The decade after the attacks on WTC and Pentagon brings certain outcomes regarding al Qaeda’s expanded ideology of GSJ¹ and the key to examine the resonance of Global Jihad is to look at the ideology via political ends set by al Qaeda.² This study exposes the limitation of GSJ, which in truth jeopardizes their own brothers and the efforts taken by Osama bin Laden and Ajman al Zawahiri to set the Muslims against the West.

The inception of ideology of Global Jihad

The genealogy of GSJ delineated by the al Qaeda can be connected with two events in Arabs world. “America’s presence in Arabia during the Gulf War—a desecration of Muslim Holy Land—and America’s use of Saudi Arabia as a base for an attack on Iraq”³ influenced al Qaeda’s decision to shift from “near enemy” to “far enemy” strategy (Lewis 2004, 134). Furthermore, the general failure of jihadists militants in Egypt (Al Jihad and Gama’a al Islamiyya), Algeria (e.g. GIA) and Bosnia and Herzegovina to convince poor masses of people to stand against tyranny also played significant role (Kepel 2006, 78, 89). It showed that the struggle with “close enemy” completed with the mischance. Consequently due to linkage of two fictions of radical fundamentalism (Saudi and Egyptian) as well as internationalist target, Bin Laden and Al Zawahiri shifted the logic on the track of the immediate and vicious strife against the “far enemy” (Kepel 2006, 78). The exceptional example of shifted political ends are the issued fatwas: first one from 1996 being against United States⁴; second one from 1998 appealing to kill Jews and Crusaders being all over the place.⁵

Al Qaeda leaders but mainly Ajman al Zawahiri finally came to conclusion that the new strategy had to be based on the international war and

media resonance. Therefore, the only spectacular attacks on Americans and Jewish (or generally western) targets may bring anticipated effect of gained followers. However, the efforts taken by al Qaeda (and other Islamist groups) in 90s such as attacks on US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998 did not drum up needed support of Muslim society, it rather brought up the atrocity of ruthless fundamentalists for whom life does not have any value (Kepel 2006, 78).⁶ Thus, for Al Zawahiri the only solution was to transfer the struggle to the territory of the enemy „to burn the hands planting the fire” in Muslim countries (Al Zawahiri 2001). The breakthrough for al Qaeda was the changed organizational structure (e.g. less linked, independent networks) and successful attack on the WTC and Pentagon which entrenched the Global Jihad as global strife and established al Qaeda as a chief of that movement (Taarnaby 2007, 171).

¹ The Global Salafi Jihad (GSJ) or Global Jihad is defined here as a transnational movement of like-minded militants where al Qaeda plays a leading role. It includes affiliated and associated individuals, networks and groups, which more or less are affected by al Qaeda’s guiding ideology. However affiliated groups, networks prescribe the name of al Qaeda for themselves e.g. al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The term “Global Salafi Jihad” was launched by M. Sageman in his *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, describing as “a worldwide religious revivalist movement”. Nevertheless, “Salafist jihadism” was coined by scholar Gilles Kepel, this term refers to a jihadist movement or ideology among Salafi Muslims, this term is used interchangeably with “Radical Islamist movement”.

² For the purpose of this study, “political ends” embody successful attacks in the name of Global Jihad. This study do not explore the popularity of GSJ, because it is hard to measure it. Even if the GSJ would gained vast popularity, the key in Global Jihad is to conduct the attacks. Thus, this study determined terrorist incidents as a standard of the followed Jihad.

³ Nevertheless, the group remained focused on the near enemy until the second half of 90s.

⁴ The title of fatwa: “Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places”

⁵ The title of fatwa: “World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders”. According to M. Sageman, this declaration consolidated Global Salafi Jihad. And the term ‘crusader’ refers to the Christians such as Europeans and Americas.

⁶ Moreover B. Tibi in his book from 1997 quotes that in Algeria Islamic Salvation Front murdered 20.000 people (today the number reach more than 100.000), in Turkey 37 writers were burned, in Pakistan in 1995 several hundred praying people were murdered in mosque. Nowadays those acts are a daily routine in certain Muslim countries (Tibi 2004)

Concerns regarding the success of Global Jihad

At present it is not an open secret that during last decade al Qaeda has been suffering endogenous and exogenous limitations, consequently its position as a prime terrorist organisation declined. The globally multi-layered security measures (i.e. subverted communication, finance, recruitment or monitored financial and internet traffic) taken by western countries have debilitated al Qaeda’s (as well its affiliates) capabilities to conduct attacks outside the Middle East. Indeed, al Qaeda has strived internal cleavages because they were not able to find conjoint definition with its affiliates regarding common target, enemy or even ideology. It may be seen as advantage, because those divisions compose “operational resilience”, nevertheless, it also restrains the groups abilities to design or launch a consistent strategy to attain principal aims (Moghadam, Fishman 2010, 2, 6-17; Olsen 2011, 1-3; Jenkins 2012, 4). The invasion to Iraq had a significant impact on jihadists internal debate, exposing substantial fragmentation, where the Iraqi community after clashes with foreign troops concentrated (mainly Sunni) on the “near enemy” as a priority for jihadists actions (Brooke 2010, 45). Due to this unwanted shift, al Qaeda again had to rearrange its approach of Global Jihad moving towards “hybridized strategy”⁷ because its foregoing tactics had accomplished weakened support (Brooke 2010, 45-46). This can be assumed as a failure of its previous long-ranged global plans.

The confirmation of this, is the undermentioned exploration of the activity of Muslim extremists presented in the terrorist incidents. Presented outcomes are adverse for al Qaeda members and also for those who believed and followed the GSJ. Al Qaeda being in the front

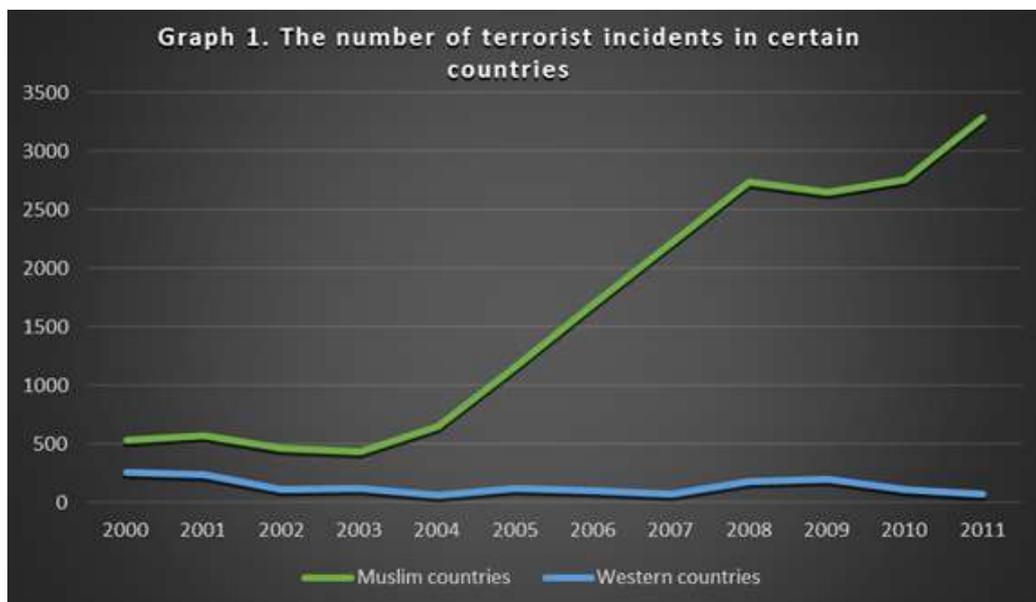
⁷ “Hybridized strategy” combine the warfare with far and near enemy. Al Qaeda attempted to convince Muslims that challenge with near enemy is actually part of a broader fight. More about “hybridized strategy” (Brooke 2010).

of Global Jihad ideology confined it in its own core killing mainly Muslims. In spite of the efforts to represent and fight for a broad “Islamic cause”, al Qaeda apparently failed to enlist majority support (Azzam 2006). Even other successes after 9/11—i.e. attacks in Madrid and London—had not enabled Global Jihad (and al Qaeda) to achieve its political ends. The capabilities to attack US diminished. Statistics data obtained from RDWTI (Rand Database World Terrorism Incidents) and GTD (Global Terrorism Database, University of Maryland) portray how on the turn of the decade after 9/11 the growth of fundamentalist’s theories and terrorist’s organizations had directed the numbers the occurrence of the terrorist’s incidents, including suicide attacks. Results clearly present if the Global Jihad was followed in a desirable direction or if caused unexpected decay. Study of data and graphs is authorial. Utilization of two sources led to avoid miscalculation and enabled to achieve reliable scores, moreover graphs include only successful attacks. Author based the analysis also on the outcomes of Pew

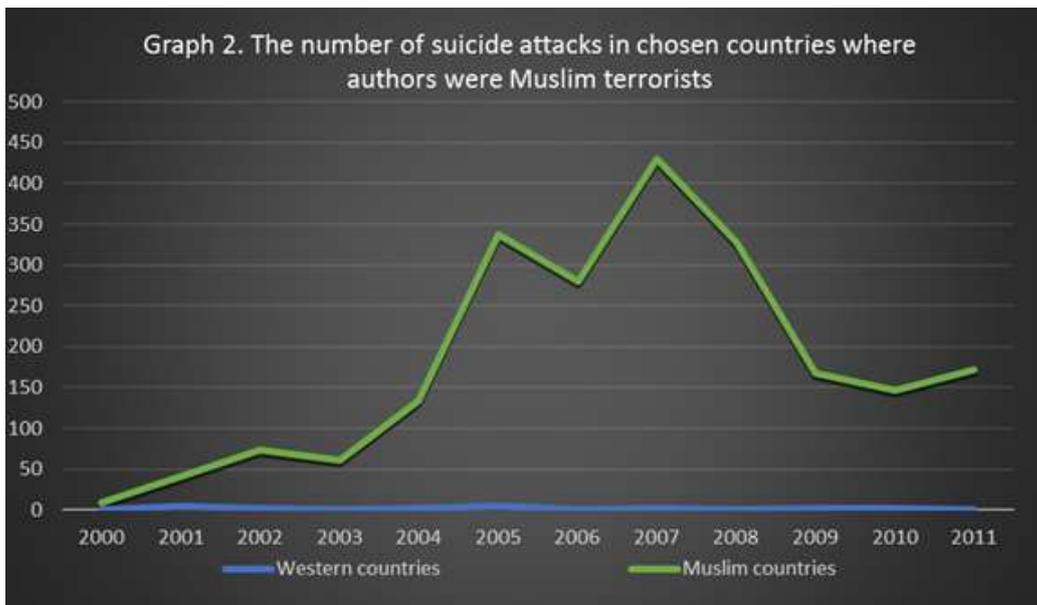
Research to abstract the atmosphere within Muslim society.

Real activity of Muslim terrorists

Data from the 1st and 2nd graph portray that not western but Muslim countries has mainly suffered terrorist incidents. Results for Muslim countries show dramatic increase of incidents and suicide attacks after invasion to Iraq in 2003, whereas scores jotted for western countries in both graphs show plateau at low values. The number of all incidents in Muslim countries rose sharply till 2008, noticing more stable growth after that time which consequently reached peak roughly of 3300 incidents in 2011. Suicide attacks in Muslim countries fluctuated (in ten years period), culminating the biggest activation up to 2007 reaching peak of 450 suicide attacks in this year. After that time, the suicide attacks significantly fell to level of 150 attacks, nevertheless, from 2011 is seen another increase of this type of attacks.



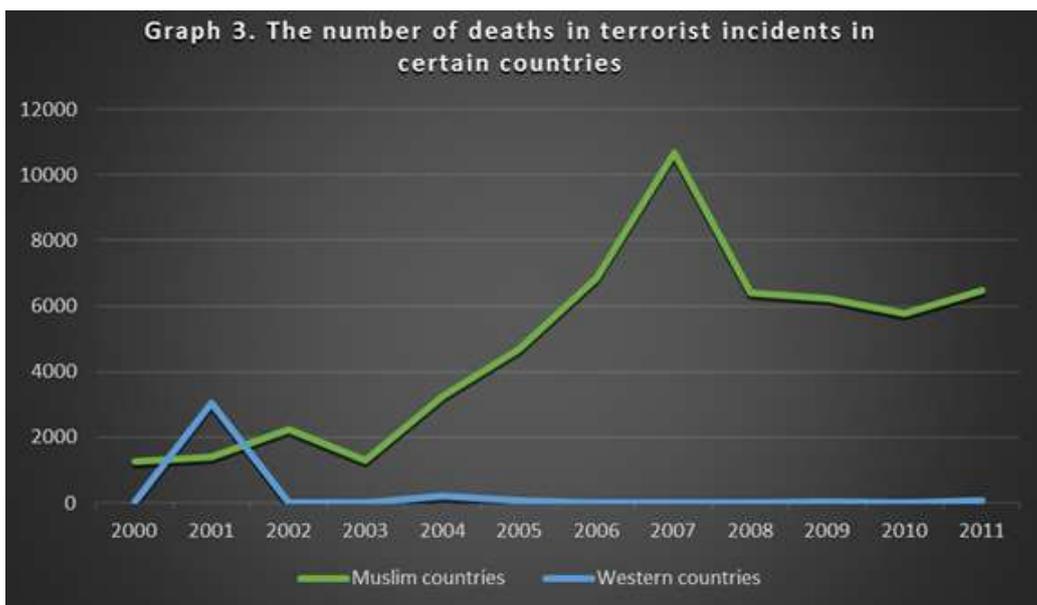
Source: authorial based on GTD.



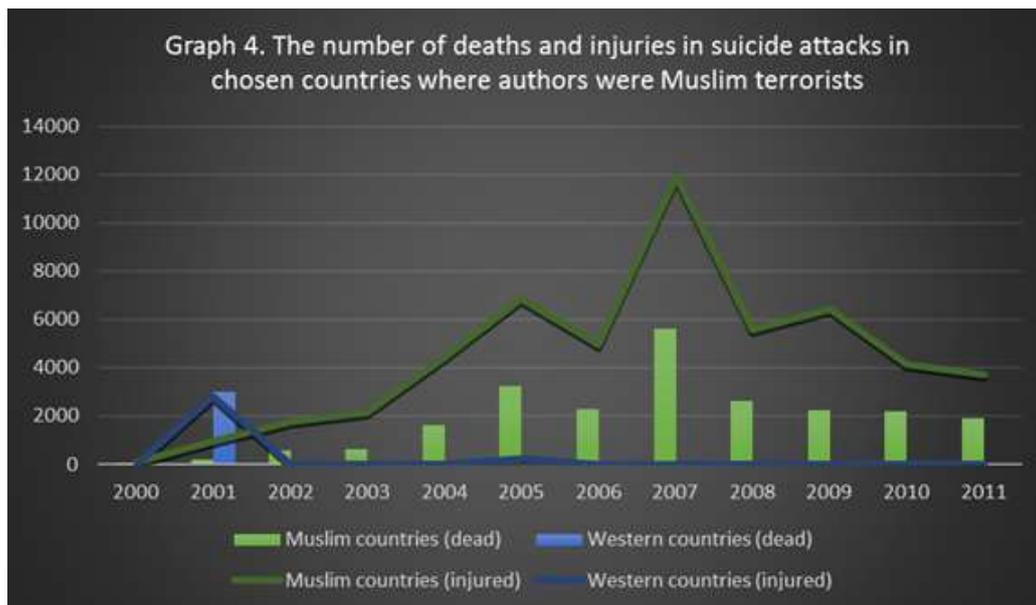
Source: authorial based on GTD.

Large number of victims (3rd graph) in Muslim countries is also overwhelming with regard to the deaths toll in terrorist incidents. There is enunciated rapid tendency in Muslim countries, which in 2007 crossed the line of 10.000 victims, after that time decrease up to 6.000 of casualties is observed. Western countries may be said to be safer, despite the attacks on WTC, Pentagon, Madrid and London. Regarding the suicide attacks

(4th graph), it is tangible that regardless the attacks on WTC and Pentagon, western countries have not suffered as much as the Muslim countries. This clearly shows the pitfalls to transfer the suicide attacks to the ground of Crusaders as is it was ordered in Global Jihad strategy what may indicate diminished support in Europe (Helfstein, Abdullah, 2009).



Source: authorial based on GTD and RDWTI.

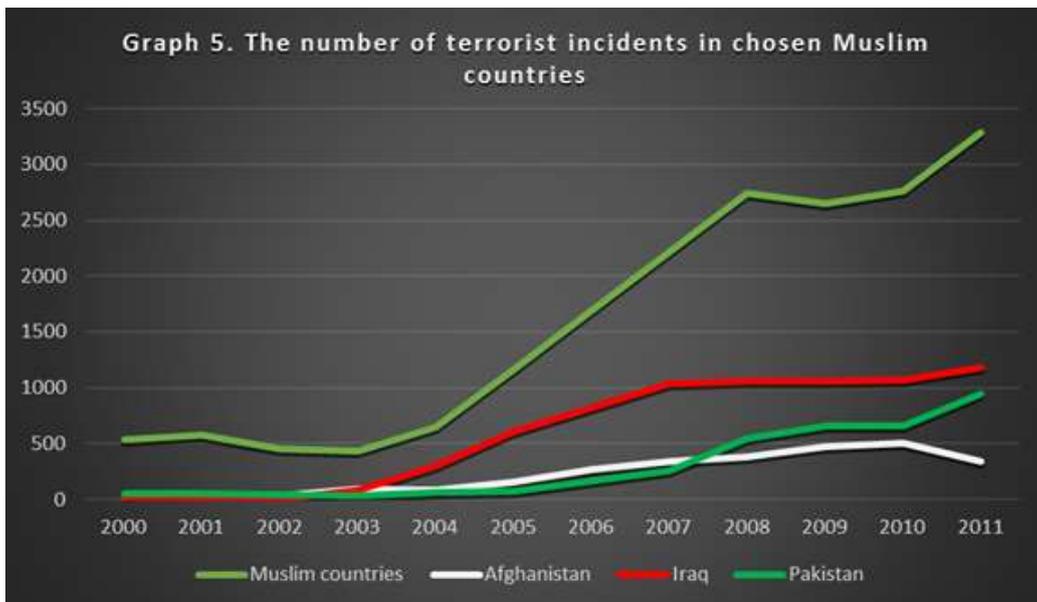


Source: authorial based on GTD and RDWTI.

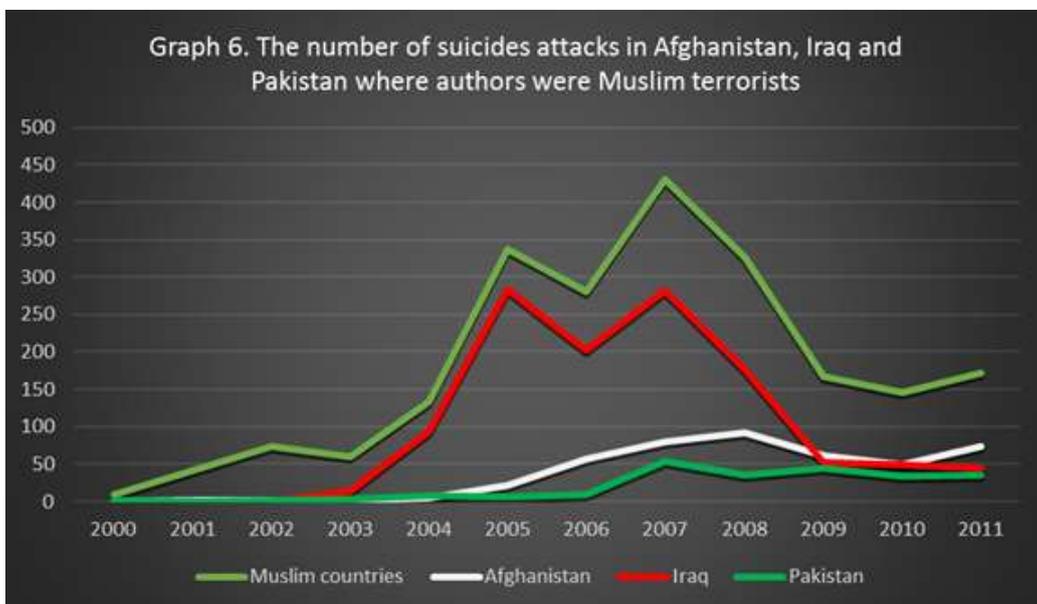
Two invasions after 9/11 to Afghanistan and Iraq, but especially that one from 2003 to Iraq caused the outburst of the terrorist incidents. Consequently Iraq became the main area of fundamentalist struggle, furthermore, ousted Sunni government on the behalf of the new-born Shia ruling administration contributed the sectarian violence among Iraqis. According to obtained data (5th graph), in three studied countries have seen constant increase of terrorist incidents from 2003/2004, however, the numbers related to Iraq are exceeding significantly thereupon the incidents in this country pose one third of total attacks in Muslim countries. The average number of terrorist's incidents in Iraq from 2008 has not go under threshold of 1000 incidents. In the relevant statement M. Nasr claims that al Qaeda in perception of the majority of Muslims is responsible of giving momentum to sectarian violence in Iraq that is a warning sign for its followers (Nasr 2006, 58-75). However more

worrying in case of Iraq are suicide attacks (6th graph) which almost coincide with the total of reported suicide incidents in Muslim countries. For Afghanistan and Pakistan gradual rise of suicide attacks is noted till 2008, after that time it reaches plateau. Data of Iraq behave rather unstable reaching peak in 2006 and 2008, after that time fell to the level of the other two countries.

Nevertheless, again from 2011 in those three countries an increase of terrorist incidents is seen as well as suicide attacks. What we know contemporarily is fact that those attacks are even higher and such activities are described as a sectarian struggle which main aim is to oust other Muslim factions (Sunni vs. Shite). Here it is relevant to mention a M. Nasr statement which claims that al Qaeda in perception of the majority of Muslims is responsible of giving momentum in sectarian violence in Iraq what is a warning sign for its followers.



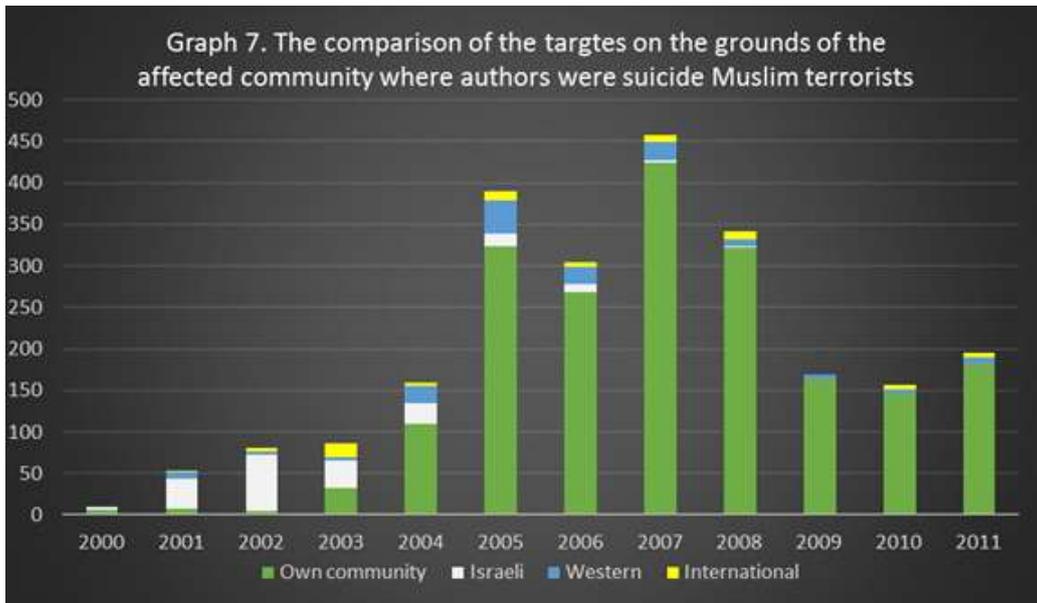
Source: authorial based on GTD and RDWTI.



Source: authorial based on GTD and RDWTI.

The 7th graph shows that Muslims are the leading target in suicide attacks. It proves that in the first decade after 9/11, westerners (even e.g. American soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq) have not been hit as badly as Muslims. Moreover, interestingly Israelis were aimed at most in the first three years after 9/11 what was quite promising for al Qaeda leaders and consensual with its ideology of Global Jihad. Nevertheless,

the results of suicide attacks show precisely that Muslims have been the premier target of those incidents. Al Qaeda's subsequent poor capability to undertake action against Israel and western countries posed significant strategic limitations showing that GSJ is weak in its design and al Qaeda members offered just lip service and slogans (Brooke 2010, 60, 66).



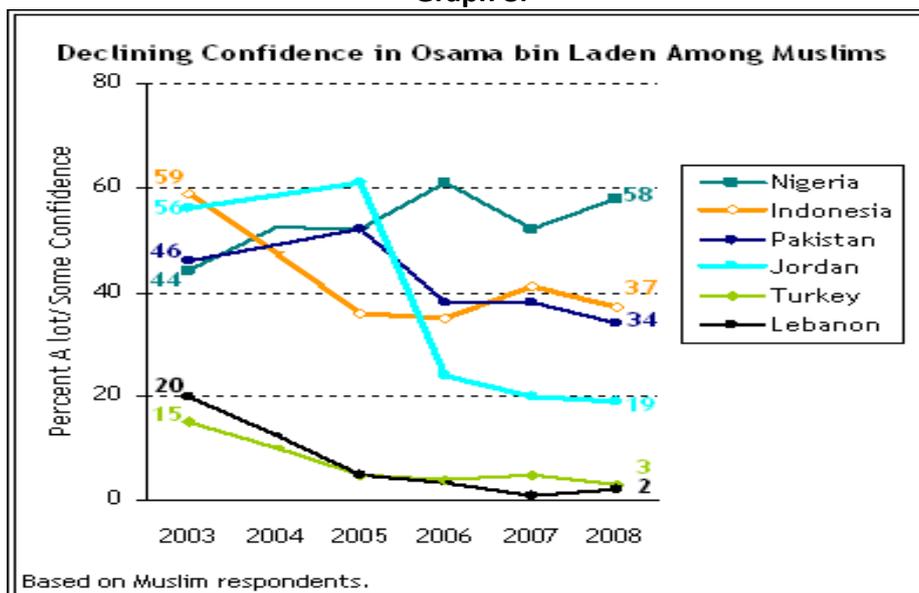
Source: authorial based on GTD and RDWTI.

Due to those above mentioned actions, there are positive trends (8th graph) in certain Muslim countries which “have shown decreasing support for violent extremism” ravishing internal harmony (Etling 2014). Consequently Bin Laden’s popularity has plummeted in recent years in analysed countries (except Nigeria), the most significant decrease was noticed in Jordan, where confidence of al Qaeda leader dropped from 56% in 2003 to 19% in 2008. Whereas 3% of Muslims in Turkey and 2% in Lebanon confirmed in 2008

that Bin Laden was taking right actions in world affairs.

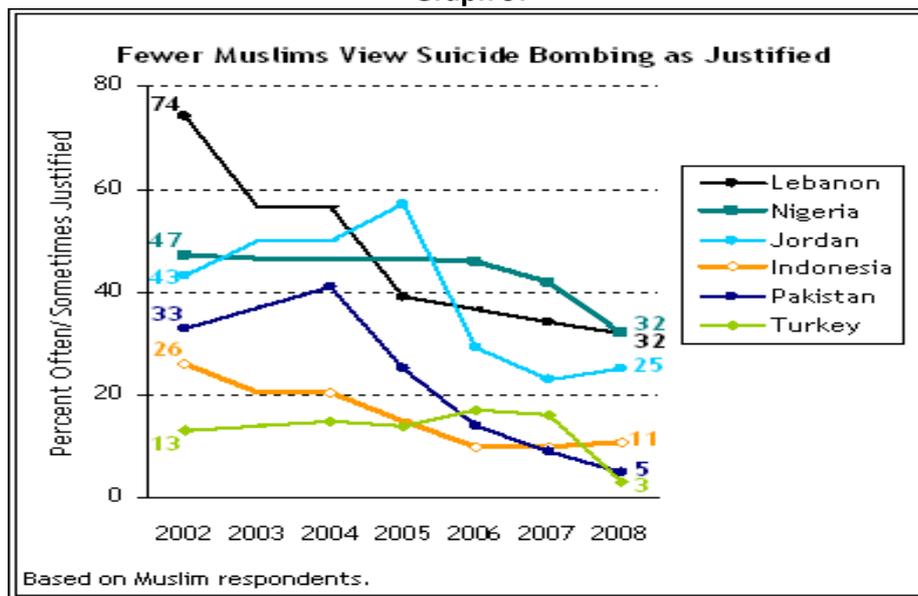
Moreover support for suicide attacks (9th graph) sharply declined throughout the period from 2002 to 2008. The most significant decrease was observed in Lebanon where 74% of respondents justified suicide attacks in 2002, but in 2008 that percentage tumbled to 32%. Pakistani support for suicide bombing also plunged from 33% to 5% (Global Public Opinion 2014).

Graph 8.



Source: Pew Research.

Graph 9.



Source: Pew Research.

Conclusion

Presented data corroborate that al Qaeda and its followers of the ideology of Global Jihad declined and failed to attract Muslims achieving needed approval against western countries (Moghadam, Fishman 2010, 1-2). Al Qaeda's ambitions and legitimacy of GSJ weakened due to fierce bloodshed within own community causing in turn more vociferous opposition in Muslim countries. Graphs neatly present that terrorist attacks confined itself in a Muslim world prompting utmost bloodshed and increased sectarian tensions between Muslim factions. The ideology of Global Jihad undermining western world is an unfulfilled dream of al Qaeda members as other Muslim fanatics. However it still pose a threat and cannot be neglected, because they need just one successful attack to overthrow the confidence in Europe or America. As one of the first suicide bombers Anwar Aziz

once mentioned "battle for the cause of Islam are won not by guns, but planting a fear in the heart of the enemy" (Margalita 2003). Nevertheless as we know western countries overcame with this threat whereas Muslim countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan or even Syria plunged into the fear and decay.

The author is a graduate in Political Science and National Security. His interests are bound with the phenomena of suicide terrorism and Global Jihad, as well as the role of religion in propelling the political violence and terrorism. He analyses the impact of al-Qaeda and other Salafi groups on the security within Muslim and Western countries. He is a fellow member of Analytical Centre of Globalization and Regional Cooperation based in Yerevan and has also participated in several conferences and forums related to security in Middle East and Caucasus.

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