

The Western Media's Misreading of al-Qaeda's Latest Videotape



By [Michael Scheuer](#)

Al-Qaeda's 48-minute, September 2 video featured a short introduction by the group's deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and a lengthy presentation by Azzam al-Amriki (Azzam the American), who apparently is U.S. citizen Adam Gadahn. The video comes just before the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attack, and it is the only known al-Qaeda video that is exclusively devoted to an offer from the group to Americans to convert to Islam. So far, Western media analysis has focused on four themes, all of which seem to assign the video to the dust bin of irrelevancy.

The primary theme of Western media analysis has been that the al-Zawahiri-Azzam tape is an effort—some term it a "PR campaign"—to soften al-Qaeda's image, to focus more on proselytizing than on violence. Another theme is a sense of relief that the journalists and media experts have not been able to find a blatant "threat" in the video, a theme that has been reinforced by an argument offered by unnamed U.S. officials who point out that Azzam al-Amriki is not a senior al-Qaeda leader and so his words are not as important as those of Osama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. Another theme that seems to accompany most new al-Qaeda videos has been again expressed about this one, namely, that the film is an effort by al-Qaeda leaders to keep the group "relevant." Finally, the fourth theme is a more or less "invisible theme" that entails the Western media's traditional ignoring of the fact that al-Qaeda's audience is as much Muslim as American.

After reviewing this media coverage, there are three reasons to be concerned. First, it appears that the media has skimmed over the tape's opening passage when they claimed that there was no "threat" in the September 2 message. "And as our brother Azaam the American talks to you," al-Zawahiri explained, "he talks to you as one who feels pity for the fate which awaits his people, and as a perceptive person who wants to lead his people out of the darkness into the light." What Azzam has to say, al-Zawahiri claims, "is grave and serious...I beseech God . to open your hearts to benefiting from his words and experience" {1}

The threat in al-Zawahiri's words is starkly apparent; he says there is a dark, pitiable fate awaiting Americans because of their policies and actions toward Muslims. Azzam is even more direct, asserting "Time is running out [to decide to convert], so make the right choice before it is too late and you meet the death [that was] the most dismal fate of thousands before you." He adds that "death is

something every soul must taste and that it may be closer than you and I think."
:He adds

To what can we attribute the obvious ignorance of Western peoples in general " toward the religion of the Muslims and its teachings? This ignorance, which causes the people of the West to rapturously applaud when Israel perpetrates wholesale slaughter of Muslims in Lebanon and Palestine, and leads them to give their assent to the atrocities their governments commit in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the Muslim world, and makes them voice their approval when their armies desecrate copies of the Quran in Guantanamo and televangelists insult our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon Him. These events, coupled with these reactions, showcase a seething animosity and definite ignorance of the religion of Islam and the nature of its followers...Today, the televangelists, false prophets, and charlatans prey on the gullible, and the illiterate are glorying in Israel's blood . "lust and excessive appetite for destruction in Lebanon and Palestine

A second concern lies in the analysis of the video as a simple public relations event that is unrelated to other al-Qaeda activities. Nothing could be further from being accurate. The September 2 video is in no way an isolated occurrence, but rather part of an al-Qaeda effort that began early in 2002 in which bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have more than adequately fulfilled the Prophet Muhammad's requirements for actions that must be taken vis-à-vis an enemy before attacking him militarily. There are three such actions: multiple, clear warnings of an intention to attack; offers of a truce; and public calls on the foe to convert to .Islam

For more than four years, bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have publicly conducted this campaign and fulfilled these requirements several times over. Indeed, al-Qaeda has gone what it views as the extra mile in trying to make sure that Americans recognize the seriousness of the threat they face. Specifically, in late October 2004 bin Laden made a speech warning Americans that they could elect whomever they pleased but if U.S. foreign policy did not change, they would be attacked more fiercely than on 9/11. In this speech, bin Laden spoke in language shorn of Quranic reference and Islamic poetry, almost as if he wanted to ensure that the translation from Arabic to English would be unambiguous. The September 2 al-Zawahiri-Azzam video takes this tack toward clarity one step further by using an American convert to Islam who speaks English and can employ idiomatic phrases. Azzam talks directly to his fellow citizens and offers what seems to be something of a final warning before al-Qaeda again attacks inside the United States. It is clear beyond doubt that al-Qaeda wants no one in the West to be able to claim that Americans were not fully warned in the aftermath of the next attack .in the United States

The most troubling concern derived from Western media analysis is one that is often missing in such efforts, which is the reality that al-Qaeda, in its statements and videos, is speaking as much to Muslims as to Westerners. In the September 2 video, for example, Azzam appears to be completing a process prescribed by the Prophet Muhammad by taking special care to address Muslims at the end of his talk to preempt claims from them that it is unacceptable for the mujahideen to have said they "want to slit the throats of the infidels and now say that they want :to invite them to Islam." To this point, Azzam says

Our reply is that our message has not changed and that the mujahideen have " always been the first to call to Islam. And that even though the defense of Islam and Muslims from the merciless, relentless Crusader onslaught is their first priority, anyone who pays any attention to [the] messages of the leaders of the jihad like Sheikh Osama bin Laden and Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, may God protect them, will know that they have been constant in inviting the Americans and other unbelievers to Islam, and in pressing upon them that they want the best

for them, and making it clear to all that we have no choice but to fight those who fight us, and that were matters in our hands, we would prefer that all Americans . "and other unbelievers end their aggression, abandon unbelief and accept truth

Azzam wraps up his talk, and, it appears, al-Qaeda's effort to execute the Prophet's pre-war requirements, by telling Muslims—and implicitly Americans—that the mujahideen cannot wait long for a positive U.S. decision to convert to Islam. "Islam encourages us to invite even the most abstinent enemies and give the chance to repent," Azzam admits, but "what is really surprising is that some [Muslims] among us want to suffice with [the] invitation alone without resorting to . "self-defense when the enemy insists upon aggression and wanton destruction

Notes

.1. "Invitation to Islam," al-Sahab Productions, September 2, 2006"

ترجمة مختصرة

يقول شوير : أخطأ الاعلام الغربي في فهمه لرسالة الظواهري وعزام في أربعة أخطاء جعلت هذه الرسالة وكأنها لا قيمة لها ولا تستحق الالتفات اليها

الخطأ الأول هو القول بأن الرسالة جاءت لتحسين صورة القاعدة والقول بأنهم يستخدمون اسلوب الدعوة والحوار وليس العنف فقط بل وصل الأمر ببعض المحللين بأن وصفها بأنها مقدمة لتحول مسار القاعدة نحو ترك العنف !!

الخطأ الثاني: وهو ذلك الاحساس بالارتياح لدى الصحفيين وخبراء الاعلام الذين لم يكونوا قادرين على اكتشاف رسالة تهديد واضحة في الشريط حتى أن مسئولا أمريكيا رفض الكشف عن اسمه علق بالقول إن عزام الأمريكي ليس قياديا في القاعدة وأن كلماته لا وزن لها مقابل كلمات القادة كبن لادن والظواهري

أما الخطأ الثالث: فهو القول بأن الشريط كان مجرد محاولة من قادة القاعدة لابقائها في صورة الأحداث

وأخيراً الخطأ الرابع : فهو عدم الاهتمام الدائم من الاعلام الغربي بأن رسائل القاعدة موجهة أيضا للمسلمين وليس للأمريكان وحدهم

أولا يبدو أن وسائل الاعلام قد تجاهلت مقدمة الشريط التي جاءت على لسان الطواهري حين قال " ان الأخ عزام سيتكلم اليكم بدافع شعوره بالشفقة لمصير شعبه وكشخص يريد اخراج أهله من الظلمات إلى النور أسأل الله أن يشرح صدوركم لفهم كلماته والاستفادة من خبرته"

التهديد في كلمات الطواهري واضح كالشمس إذ أنه يقول أن هناك مصيرا أسود ينتظر الأمريكيين بسبب سياساتهم تجاه المسلمين

عزام كان مباشرا أكثر "إن الوقت ينفذ ويجب أن تختاروا .. قبل أن تموتوا على الكفر والضلال كما مات الآلاف منكم من قبل فكل نفس ذائقة الموت وهو أقرب إلينا مما نتوقع"

ثم أتبع ذلك بكلام مطول عن مجازر الغرب بحق المسلمين في العراق وأفغانستان ودعمهم لاسرائيل في مجازرها بحق المسلمين في فلسطين ولبنان اضافة لحوادث الاساءة للقرآن في جواتانامو والاساءة للرسول محمد

المسألة الثانية حول اعتبار الشريط مجرد حملة علاقات عامة للقاعدة فلا يوجد مايشير إلى ذلك... فالشريط لم يكن ردا على واقعة بعينها بل هو موضوع مستقل بذاته بدء به قادة القاعدة مبكرا منذ عام 2002 حينما قرر بن لادن والظواهري اتباع طريقة النبي محمد بدقة في التعامل مع الأعداء فبدأوا يحققون خطوة بخطوة كل المتطلبات التي يلزم اتمامها قبل مهاجمة العدو عسكريا في خطوات واضحة تمثلت في "تحذيرات واضحة متكررة ... أعقبتها دعوة لتغيير السياسات المعادية .. ثم دعوة الشعب للتحول إلى الاسلام "

منذ عدة سنوات .. بن لادن والظواهري يقومون بحملة ظهور إعلامي مكثف لاستكمال هذه الشروط وتكرارها والتأكيد عليها عدة مرات واليوم ... القاعدة ترى أنها قد بلغت المرحلة الأخيرة من تحقيق تلك الشروط ففي أكتوبر 2004 قال بن لادن للشعب الأمريكي انه ليس المهم من سيختارون في الانتخابات ولكن اذا لم تتغير سياسات أمريكا الخارجية فانهم سيلاقون هجوما أكبر من 11 سبتمبر ... في ذلك الشريط تحدث بن لادن بعبارات تخلو من النصوص القرآنية والشعر الاسلامي حتى تكون رسالة واضحة يسهل فهمها حين تترجم للانجليزية

واليوم عزام والظواهري يقومون بخطوة أخرى عبر دعوة الأمريكيين للتحول للاسلام بواسطة شخص يتكلم الانجليزية مستخدما نفس عباراتهم

عزام تكلم مباشرة إلى شعبه ..وقدم لهم مايمكن
اعتباره التحذير الأخير قبل أن تهاجم القاعدة مرة
أخرى داخل الولايات المتحدة

مشكلة أخرى في الاعلام الأمريكي وهو تجاهله أن
جهود القاعدة الاعلامية موجهة أيضا إلى المسلمين
... فعزام قد ظهر في صورة الرجل الذي يتبع
المنهج الذي حدده النبي محمد عبر تنبيه المسلمين
في أمريكا ...مؤكدًا على " أن الدعوة للإسلام
كانت ولا تزال أول أولويات المجاهدين ..تماما
كأولوية الدفاع عن المسلمين ..وهو أمر واضح في
رسائل قادة الجهاد كالشيخ أسامة بن لادن والدكتور
الظواهري حفظهم الله ... وأنه لايجوز للمسلمين
في أمريكا أن يعملوا فقط في الدعوة بينما يتركون
الدفاع عن النفس مع ما يرونه من اصرار العدو على
العدوانية والتدمير "