

By **Scott Stewart**

On July 11, 2010, al-Malahim Media, the media arm of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), published the first edition of its new English-language online magazine "Inspire." The group had tried to release the magazine in late June, but for some reason — whether a technical glitch, virus (as rumored on some of the jihadist message boards) or cyberattack — most of the initial file released was unreadable.

The magazine was produced by someone who has a moderate amount of technological savvy, who speaks English well and who uses a lot of American idioms and phraseology. We did not note any hint of British or South Asian influence in the writing. A government source has suggested to us (and we have seen the claim repeated in the media) that Inspire was produced by a U.S citizen who was born in Saudi Arabia named Samir Khan. Khan is a well-known cyber-jihadist — indeed, The New York Times did an excellent story on Khan in October 2007. Given Khan's background, history of publishing English-language jihadist material and the fact that he reportedly left the United States for Yemen in 2009 and has not returned, it does seem plausible that he is the driving force behind Inspire.

The magazine contains previously published material from Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Musab al-Suri and Anwar al-Awlaki. While it also contains new material, this material, especially from al-Awlaki and AQAP leader Nasir al-Wahayshi (aka Abu Bashir), is consistent with their previously published statements. One of the messages by al-Awlaki featured in Inspire, "A Message to the American People," was previously released to CNN and reissued by al-Malahim on the Internet July 19, almost as if to validate Inspire. Even though the way in which some of the material in Inspire is presented is quite elementary, and could lead some to believe the magazine might be a spoof, we have found no analytical reason to doubt its authenticity.

Presentation aside, the material is quite consistent with what we have seen released by al-Malahim media in its Arabic-language materials over many months. When closely examined, the inaugural issue of Inspire provides a good gauge of AQAP's thought and suggests the general direction of the broader jihadist movement.

Inspiration

In a letter from the editor appearing at the beginning of the magazine, the purpose of Inspire is clearly laid out: "This magazine is geared towards making the Muslim a mujahid." The editor also clearly states that Inspire is an effort by al-Malahim Media to reach out to, radicalize and train the millions of English-speaking Muslims in the West, Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Inspire does not represent any sort of major breakthrough in jihadist communication.

English-language jihadist material has been available on the Internet since the early 1990s on sites such as Azzam.com, and jihadists have released other magazines directly targeting English-speaking audiences. What is remarkable about Inspire is that it was released by al-Malahim and AQAP. Within the jihadist movement, AQAP has assumed the vanguard position on the physical battlefield over the past year with links to several attacks or attempted attacks in the West. AQAP has also been frequently mentioned in Western media over the past several months, and it appears that al-Malahim is trying to exploit that notoriety in order to get the attention of English-speaking Muslims.

Regarding AQAP's links to recent attacks, Inspire follows the trend of AQAP publications and leaders in recent months in praising Fort Hood shooter Maj. Nidal Hasan and failed Christmas Day bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab and lifting them up as examples for all jihadists to follow. "We call on every Muslim who feels any jealousy for their religious beliefs to expel the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula, by killing all of the crusaders working in embassies or otherwise, and to declare war against the crusaders in the land of the Prophet Muhammad — peace be upon him — on the ground, sea and air. And we call on every soldier working in the crusader armies and puppet governments to repent to Allah and follow the example of the heroic mujahid brother Nidal Hassan [sic]; to stand up and kill all the crusaders by all means available to him...."

In the article discussing Abdulmutallab, the author again brags about the manufacturing of the improvised explosive device used in the Christmas Day attack even though that device, like the one used in the assassination attempt against Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, failed to achieve the objective. "The mujahidin brothers in the manufacturing department managed with the grace of Allah to make an advanced bomb. The bomb had been tested and proven effective as it has passed through the detector ports. The martyrdom bomber managed with the grace of Allah to reach his target, but due to a technical glitch, the bomb did not explode completely; and we will continue on our path until we get what we want...." This statement would seem to indicate that if AQAP is able to recruit a willing suicide bomber who is able to travel to the West, they will again attempt to attack an airliner using a similar device.

Airliners remain vulnerable to such attacks. STRATFOR has previously noted when discussing AQAP and its innovative IED designs, there are many ways to smuggle IED components on board an aircraft if a person has a little imagination and access to explosives. As we wrote in September 2009, three months before the Christmas Day bomber's attempted attack, efforts to improve technical methods to locate IED components must not be abandoned, but the existing vulnerabilities in airport screening systems demonstrate that an emphasis needs to be placed not only on finding the bomb but also on finding the bomber.

Throughout the magazine, articles criticize the U.S. operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen; Saudi operations against jihadists; the burqa ban in Europe and even global warming — Inspire carried a reproduction of a statement purportedly authored by Osama bin Laden earlier this year titled "The Way to Save the Earth" that criticizes U.S. policy regarding climate change and calls for economic jihad against the United States.

The magazine also contained a portion of a previously-released message titled "From Kabul to

Mogadishu" by al Qaeda second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri that encouraged the people of Yemen to join al Qaeda in its global struggle. It only quoted a part of the original message that pertained to Yemen and omitted portions that pertained to other locations.

AQAP Revealed

In addition to the recycled content from al Qaeda's core leadership, Inspire also contains quite a bit of new and interesting content from AQAP's military and theological leaders. An interview with AQAP leader Nasir al-Wahayshi provided al-Wahayshi the opportunity to reinforce several points he has been making for months now regarding his call for jihadists to conduct simple attacks using readily available weapons. "My advice to my Muslim brothers in the West is to acquire weapons and learn methods of war. They are living in a place where they can cause great harm to the enemy and where they can support the Messenger of Allah."

Al-Wahayshi continued "...a man with his knife, a man with his gun, a man with his rifle, a man with his bomb, by learning how to design explosive devices, by burning down forests and buildings, or by running over them with your cars and trucks. The means of harming them are many so seek assistance from Allah and do not be weak and you will find a way."

This call was echoed by Adam Gadahn in March 2010 when the American-born spokesman for al Qaeda prime advised jihadists to strike targets that were close to them with simple assaults and urged his audience to not "wait for tomorrow to do what can be done today, and don't wait for others to do what you can do yourself."

These calls are part of a move toward a leaderless resistance model of jihadism that has accompanied the devolution of the jihadist threat from one based on al Qaeda the group to a broader threat based primarily on al Qaeda franchises and the wider jihadist movement. (STRATFOR is currently putting the finishing touches on a book that details our coverage of this devolutionary process since 2004.) With this shift, more attacks such as the Times Square bombing attempt, the Fort Hood shooting and the June 1, 2009, Little Rock shootings can be anticipated.

In an effort to provide training in terrorist tradecraft to such grassroots and lone-wolf jihadists, Inspire contains a section called "Open Source Jihad," which is the term that AQAP uses to refer to leaderless resistance. This section is intended to serve as "a resource manual for those who loathe tyrants." The material is intended to allow "Muslims to train at home instead of risking a dangerous travel abroad," and one part exclaims, "Look no further, the open source jihad is now at hand's reach." The section also contains a lengthy step-by-step guide to constructing simple pipe bombs with electronic timers, bearing the rhymed title "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom." The images of New York City contained in this section serve as a reminder of the importance New York holds in jihadist thought as a target. Such rudimentary improvised explosive devices are unlikely to cause mass casualties, but like the pipe bombs employed by Eric Rudolph, they could prove deadly on a small scale if they are employed effectively.

When considering this concept of leaderless resistance and of using publications like Inspire to

train aspiring jihadists, it is important to remember that this type of instruction has only a limited effectiveness and that there are many elements of terrorist tradecraft that cannot be learned by merely reading about them. In other words, while the jihadist threat may be broadening in one way, it is also becoming less severe, because it is increasingly emanating from actors who do not possess the skill of professional terrorist operatives and who lack the ability to conduct complex and spectacular attacks.

Cartoon Controversy

One of the other features in Inspire is an article by Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born Yemeni cleric who has been linked to Nidal Hasan, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, Faisal Shahzad and two of the 9/11 hijackers. In his article, titled "May Our Souls be Sacrificed for You," al-Awlaki focuses on the controversy that arose over the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed that first appeared in 2005. Although the cartoons were published nearly five years ago, the jihadists have not allowed the issue to die down. To date, the jihadist response to the cartoons has resulted in riots, arsons, deaths, the 2008 bombing of the Danish Embassy in Islamabad and an attack in January 2010 in which a man armed with an axe and knife broke into the home of Jyllands-Posten newspaper cartoonist Kurt Westergaard in Denmark and allegedly tried to kill him. The Kashmiri militant group Harkat-ul-Jihad e-Islami (HUJI) also dispatched American operative David Headley to Denmark on two occasions to plan attacks against Jyllands-Posten and Westergaard in what HUJI called "Operation Mickey Mouse."

In his Inspire article, al-Awlaki states, "If you have the right to slander the Messenger of Allah, we have the right to defend him. If it is part of your freedom of speech to defame Muhammad it is part of our religion to fight you." Al-Awlaki continues: "This effort, the effort of defending the Messenger of Allah, should not be limited to a particular group of Muslims such as the mujahidin but should be the effort of the ummah, the entire ummah." He also referred to a 2008 lecture he gave regarding the cartoon issue titled "The Dust Will Never Settle Down" and notes that, "Today, two years later, the dust still hasn't settled down. In fact the dust cloud is only getting bigger." He adds that "Assassinations, bombings, and acts of arson are all legitimate forms of revenge against a system that relishes the sacrilege of Islam in the name of freedom."

Inspire also features a "hit list" that includes the names of people like Westergaard who were involved in the cartoon controversy as well as other targets such as Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who produced the controversial film *Fitna* in 2008; Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who wrote the screenplay for the movie *Submission* (filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, the director of *Submission*, was murdered by a jihadist in November 2004); and Salman Rushdie, author of the book *The Satanic Verses*. Most of these individuals have appeared on previous jihadist hit lists. A new notable addition was American cartoonist Molly Norris, who was added due to her idea to have a day where "everybody draws Mohammed." Norris made her suggestion in response to threats against the irreverent animated television program *South Park* by Muslims over a brief scene in an episode that lampooned the Prophet. Comedy Central censored the *South Park* episode featuring Mohammed because of the threats, provoking Norris's suggestion.

Al-Awlaki and AQAP appear to believe they can use the anger over the Mohammed cartoons to help them inspire Muslims to conduct attacks. In this edition of Inspire, they are clearly attempting to fan the flames to ensure that the dust will not settle down. They are also seeking

to train these radicalized individuals to kill people, although, as we note above, that is a difficult task to do remotely over the Internet.

One other thing the magazine seeks to accomplish is to help make the jihadist training experience better for English speakers who seek to travel to jihadist training camps abroad. There have been anecdotal reports of Westerners who have traveled to get training and who have not had positive experiences during the process — and of at least one Somali-American who was executed after expressing his desire to leave an al Shabaab training camp and return home. In light of this problem, AQAP includes an article in Inspire titled "What to Expect in Jihad" and designed to reduce the "confusion, shock and depression" that can be experienced by trainees at such camps. The article also provides a list of things to bring to the training camp, including a friend to help ease the loneliness, and recommends that aspiring jihadists learn the local language.

The time and effort that AQAP put into this first issue of Inspire, and the support the magazine apparently receives from important AQAP figures such as al-Wahayshi and al-Awlaki, are strong indicators of the group's intent to support leaderless resistance as a way to attack the West, something AQAP has had some difficulty doing itself.