



**DSSI**

**DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEMS, inc.**

*METATEMPO: SURVIVING GLOBALIZATION*

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# GASOLINE ON THE FIRE

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A STRATEGIC SCENARIO ANALYSIS

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## 'AL-QAIDA'S ENDGAME?' FOLLOW UP

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In November of 2001, Decision Support Systems, Inc. (DSSi) made publicly available a strategic scenario analysis entitled '**Al-Qaida's Endgame?**' This analysis was a summary of our extensive work after 11September2001 to make sense out of the terrorist actions, and be 'forward looking' to prepare for what might come next. DSSi believes that it remains critical for analytical and predictive purposes to understand the stakes that al-Qaida is playing for.

The **Endgame** briefly dealt with the possibility that al-Qaida would acquire a nuclear weapon of some sort, perhaps more than one. It has subsequently been made public, in the 4March2002 edition of *Time Magazine*, that the U.S. was quite concerned at the time that al-Qaida may have acquired a nuclear weapon (either a 'suitcase nuc' from the Soviet Special Operations arsenal, a demolition charge, or a tactical warhead) and planned to use it in the U.S., inside New York City to be precise. DSSi principals, because of our understanding of al-Qaida and its leadership, are much less U.S.-centric in approach. Thus our concerns were for the most effective use of such a device, which we believe to be outside the U.S.

In many ways, the U.S. is incidental to what motivates al-Qaida, dramatic and lethal terrorist acts against U.S. targets notwithstanding. **Gasoline on the Fire** is a follow-up brief, based on another round of scenario analysis, being made publicly available by DSSi. Again, we see a significant 'nexus' immediately on the horizon, with potential for operations by al-Qaida that could have enormous consequences.

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## UNDERSTANDING AL-QAIDA

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DSSi principals have been tracking al-Qaida since the late 1980s, and we feel that we have a relevant level of insight into the leadership, organization, and operations. An interested reader is welcome to visit <http://www.metatempo.com/publications.html> for the wealth of material we make freely available.

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## A REMINDER ABOUT SCENARIOS

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**Gasoline on the Fire** is a brief resulting from a strategic scenario analysis process. For those not familiar with the scenario analysis process, it is important to stress that the process is not predictive. Forecasting, the process of assigning probabilities to potential events and outcomes, is a different function. Scenarios can lead to forecasts, but that isn't their main purpose. In many ways, good scenario planning translates into a low 'accuracy' rate for negative consequences—the process allows for action in advance that may prevent or minimize the probability such outcomes.

It is also important to point out that this is distinctly **not** alarmist, and not intended as a 'scare scenario.' DSSi is making this brief publicly available with the intention of improving the level of discourse and planning being undertaken by concerned parties. As such, this is about informing, educating, and alerting others to the possibilities that we see as professionals, with the fervent desire that what we outline is nothing more than entertaining reading, rather than prophetic.

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## ASSUMPTIONS

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Inaccurate assumptions can lead to inaccurate scenarios, so it is worth reiterating DSSi's assumptions regarding al-Qaida. As an organization, al-Qaida can be described as:

- Well motivated
- Sophisticated, intelligent
- Having a purposeful structure—it's a designed organization
- Undertaking targeted missions for psycho-social effect
- Being what they need to be to accomplish their goals: "By any means necessary"
- Operating with a larger goal in mind, a 'grand design'
- Having few known limitations in operational scope and capabilities—al-Qaida excels in the approach of 'improvise, adapt, overcome'
- Not as isolated as it appears, al-Qaida will increase its support base in scale and scope unless destroyed, in its entirety, simultaneously
- In control of the engagement, setting the rules. These rules of engagement are intended to be a double-bind for the U.S.—lose-lose, when viewed on the correct timescale

Al-Qaida is playing for significant stakes:

- Promote the pan-Islamic struggle, restoring Islamic 'purity' (as al-Qaida interprets Islam)
- Overthrow 'corrupt' regimes of Islam, replacing them with strict Shari'ah
- Induce the U.S. to leave the region, particularly Saudi Arabia
- Reduce U.S. power in absolute and relative terms

There is nothing preventing al-Qaida from conducting operations in line with their main objective. In addition, al-Qaida will attack the U.S. to maintain engagement and to escalate the conflict for their own purposes. The U.S. government understands at least that much, which is why it has activated and continues to maintain the 'shadow government' for the purposes of continuity in the event of a successful catastrophic attack.

These assumptions are derived from reference of the statements made by al-Qaida leadership against their actions. Those not familiar with the culture and spiritual beliefs of these individuals may find it unusual that their own words could be a reliable guide, but al-Qaida's leadership has actually been fairly forthcoming and direct about their intentions. For example, the 'mission statement' released in February 1998 by the 'World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders' is explicit. The basis for the conflict, uniting bin Laden's organization with a number of other militant Islamic groups, is three-fold:

First, for over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples.

If some people have in the past argued about the fact of the occupation, all the people of the Peninsula have now acknowledged it. The best proof of this is the Americans' continuing aggression against the Iraqi people using the Peninsula as a staging post, even though all its rulers are against their territories being used to that end, but they are helpless.

Second, despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader-Zionist alliance, and despite the huge number of those killed, which has exceeded 1 million... despite all this, the Americans are

once against trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war or the fragmentation and devastation.

So here they come to annihilate what is left of this people and to humiliate their Muslim neighbors.

Third, if the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jews' petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there. The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal crusade occupation of the Peninsula.

[Translation courtesy of <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>]

Summarizing:

- 1) U.S. troops are stationed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, home of Islam's two most holy cities, Mecca and Medina, to protect the Kingdom against potential Iraqi aggression and to enforce the United Nations (U.S.-driven) sanctions against Iraq
- 2) See point one, only more so
- 3) U.S. actions in the Middle East support the occupation of Palestine, and enforce weakened or 'puppet' regimes in the region

It's worth noting that Osama bin Laden, in statements made after 11 September 2001, has reiterated these points. In a moment of comic relief for counter-terrorism professionals, the 'talking head' instant-experts on terrorism and commentators in the news media were surprised to hear the Palestinian and Iraqi causes as an issue for al-Qaida, many of whom thought this was a radical new direction, and trying to 'co-opt' the causes and media attention on the plight of the Palestinian and Iraqi people. Our opinion is that the press release from 1998 is clear enough, and suitably in advance of such statements, as to indicate the depth of knowledge (or lack thereof) of the 'experts.'

The World Islamic Front then issued their fatwa, a legal judgment, stating:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah."

This is in addition to the words of Almighty Allah: "And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? – women and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will help!'"

We – with Allah's help – call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.

[Translation courtesy of <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>]

To summarize again:

- Regain control of Jerusalem, the location of the al-Aqsa Mosque
- Remove U.S. influence and troops from Saudi Arabia, home to Mecca and Medina
- Defeat the U.S. in the Middle East, and reduce its ability to project force into the Middle East. Remove or destroy U.S. assets and allies in the region, leaving Islamic regimes

- Liberate Moslems throughout the region
- There are no boundaries, there are no rules

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#### DATA POINTS—INDICATORS

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A number of relevant data points were considered as indicators in preparation for this strategic scenario analysis:

- Al-Qaida leadership remains ‘at large’ and operationally viable. The ‘sequels’ to 11September2001 were planned out and prepared for prior to the events of that day, and are probably little changed due to subsequent U.S. actions. Members of al-Qaida’s leadership may be restricted in their freedom of movement or communication, but the freedom they do have is more than adequate for management of the organization, contrary to the U.S. position on the matter
- Al-Qaida-trained personnel are widely distributed and available. No ‘last stand’ of al-Qaida has taken place in Afghanistan, leaving over 10,000 trained personnel still alive and possibly active. In all probability, al-Qaida is relying on 200-300 core cadre, full-time committed members, with 2,000-3,000 reliable ‘assets’ capable of military, guerrilla, and terrorist operations. The remaining ‘affiliates’ of al-Qaida comprise a potential threat that cannot be well-assessed. Affiliates provide at least a distributed support network and may provide intelligence support as well. Sleeper agents, covert operators living among their potential targets, have been sporadically identified from Singapore to Rome. These human ‘precision munitions’ are ready and waiting, for exactly what remains unknown. Potential Western targets are thoroughly penetrated, with various intelligence and law enforcement agencies clearly incapable of complete identification of the sleepers. Abu Qutadah, a cleric in the U.K. connected to al-Qaida, disappeared in mid-December despite heavy surveillance. If he remains in the U.K., the local network is so well hidden that no trace has been picked up in the intervening time period between then and the writing of this brief. If he escaped from the U.K., reminiscent of the evacuation of al-Qaida personnel prior to the 11September2001 action, then this is another example of how porous the borders of Nation-States are, and how little control they really have. Viable and effective support networks remain in place
- Capabilities of al-Qaida appear not to have been tapped into. This is curious—if the available capabilities weren’t used against forces in Afghanistan, just what are they being saved for? There are indications that al-Qaida made significant weapons purchases from a variety of arms merchants, but this considerable base of weapons doesn’t match the caches located and destroyed in Afghanistan by U.S. troops. Given the number of Stinger missiles in-theater from the Afghan war against the Soviets, and the number purchased by al-Qaida, why have none of those weapons systems seen use? Al-Qaida was pursuing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), but the success or failure of this effort remains unclear. Regarding nuclear weapons, Pakistani nuclear scientist Sultan Mahmood met with Osama bin Laden, and has failed numerous polygraphs about his innocent interaction (failure of a polygraph is not an indication of presumptive guilt, but should only be considered among the rest of these indicators). Chemical and biological weapons are also unresolved. The U.S. did suffer a contained anthrax attack, which may or may not be al-Qaida connected, but which demonstrates that the capability does not require a significant base to acquire. Tests of al-Qaida facilities in Afghanistan are reported to have returned negative results for exposure to chemical and biological weapons, but that begs the question of why manufacture there for targets elsewhere, requiring hazardous and risky transportation? Negative tests in Afghanistan may only indicate an unwillingness to

use them in that theater of operations. Al-Qaida has untapped resources that are not being discussed in public materials. For example, al-Qaida has a relationship with the 'black network' of the old Bank of Credit & Commerce (BCCI)—the failed Islamic bank that engaged in money laundering, international espionage, and terrorism. BCCI's connections with Pakistani intelligence, as well as al-Qaida, go back long before bin Laden was in the awareness of Western intelligence agencies. Access to the 'black network' would provide al-Qaida with services, intelligence, and even support—money laundering networks, technical details on fuel-air explosives, billions of missing petrodollars, armaments skimmed from the logistics trail through Pakistan during the Afghan war, etc.

- The U.S. is dispersed and spread thin. Military forces are dealing with both homeland security and forward force projection. Afghanistan is a political economic basketcase. Warlords are increasing the general level of instability with in-fighting, territoriality, and jockeying for position and power. The interim government is lacking in resources, and itself at great risk, as indicated by the 14February slaying of a Minister at the Kabul airport. Taliban and al-Qaida fighters are regrouping, with commanders like Haqqani and others reassembling dangerous fighting forces, while other pockets of fighters were never really impacted at all and are waiting for their opportunity. The historical pattern in Afghanistan is to dodge the initial assault, size up the enemy, make probes on facilities to get tactical intelligence, plan assaults, and then engage. The Soviet invasion made significant headway initially, including control of the urban areas, which proved to ultimately be meaningless. With the U.S. starting to see casualties and encounter stiff resistance, the historical pattern may well be repeating. A complicating factor is the depletion of precision munitions in the Western arsenal. The U.K. depleted its resources almost immediately into the conflict. The U.S. has expended a large part of its arsenal of such weapons. Was the military campaign largely a distraction in a barren place that has also served to reduce the force projection capabilities of U.S. military? Special operations personnel are being deployed out to locations such as Yemen, Georgia, and the Philippines, dispersing the most effective human weapons the U.S. possesses
- Contrary to U.S. desires and perceptions, the region is not stabilized. The Gallup Organization poll results released (courtesy of USA Today, and available at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/attack/2002/02/27/usat-pollresults.htm>) at the end of February 2002 are indicative, with such highlights as:
  - The favorability rating of the U.S. is 16% in Saudi Arabia, a key element of this dispute in this conflict, and only 9% in Pakistan, at the front line
  - The moral justifiability of the U.S. military action in Afghanistan is supported by only 4% in Pakistan, and only 2% in Indonesia, the most populous Moslem country in the world
  - Belief that the 11September2001 attacks were carried out by Arabs is only 4% in Pakistan, and only 11% in Kuwait, the reversal of the invasion of which was the purpose of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and one of the reasons for U.S. troops being present in Saudi Arabia
  - In the context of these numbers, Pakistan's Musharraf 'severing' the links between Pakistan's intelligence agency and Islamic radicals (including al-Qaida) is beyond belief. Pakistan's intelligence agency is more fundamental to the government than Musharraf, and has outlasted numerous regimes

These data points provide indicators that al-Qaida is still viable, able to conduct world-wide operations, in possession of unknown capabilities, and enjoying a potential support base that the U.S. has

managed to alienate. The U.S., meanwhile, is not enjoying the attention or commitment to the 'war on terror' as it did within the first weeks after the 11September2001 attacks, and is weaker in an absolute sense from its pre-reprisal state. Whether al-Qaida has suffered a greater negative impact relative to the U.S. remains to be seen.

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## THE UPCOMING NEXUS

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In the course of conducting continual scenario analyses post-11September2001, certain periods of time have represented greater potential for al-Qaida operations than other—e.g., the start of hostilities in Afghanistan, the Moslem Hajj to Mecca. The next critical approaching nexus is the Arab League Summit taking place in Beirut, Lebanon at the end of March 2002. The Summit itself is not the critical event (unlike the hajj, which posed a significant threat of thousands of al-Qaida infiltrating into Saudi Arabia), but a window in time that opens an opportunity. Attending the Summit will be the major leaders of the Islamic world, from Qathafi of Libya to Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. It is highly probable that during the course of the Summit, Crown Prince Abdullah will formally announce his 'peace plan' for settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This plan would entail formal recognition of Israel and normalization of relations between Israel and the States of the Islamic world, in exchange for Israel returning to the pre-1967 borders and ending the occupation of Palestinian territory.

Any such plan is directly contrary to fundamental principles for al-Qaida, and is in fact a 'sell out.' Without discussing the viability of such a plan, regarding which DSSi principals have their doubts, the consummation of such an agreement would be viewed as such:

- Jerusalem, site of the al-Aqsa Mosque, is unlikely to be released by the Israelis. The site of the Mosque has Millennial and Messianic significance for Judaism and Christianity, making the location the most dangerous flashpoint for conflict of any physical place in the world. The Dome of the Rock is an Islamic holy site, which along with the al-Aqsa Mosque occupy the location that the so-called 'Third Temple' needs to be built on as one of the preconditions for a great deal of prophecy to occur. That these prophecies involve the coming of a prophet or the return of Jesus Christ and the 'end of days,' while Islam recognizes Mohammed as the final Prophet is just one of the overwhelming differences in this matter
- Recognition of Israel and concessions by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia is a nearly unthinkable action and humiliation for Islam. Such an action only reinforces perception that the Saudi royal family are tools or puppets of the U.S.
- Settlement of the 'Palestinian question' would dramatically reduce hostilities in the region, at the perceived cost of expanded U.S. and Israeli influence in region.
- The probability of ending sanctions against Iraq become less likely, since Iraq would then likely be seen as the next probable point of destabilization and conflict in the region

Note that these points directly relate, in a negative fashion, to the objectives outlined by the World Islamic Front charter—increasing the probability that this issue is under close scrutiny by al-Qaida's leadership. To further increase instability in the region, there is the internal Indian conflict between Hindus and Moslems, and the India-Pakistan tensions over Kashmir. Hindus tore down a significant mosque in 1992 in Ayodhya, in the Indian State of Gujarat. On this site, Hindus plan to rebuild the temple to Ram, starting in mid-March 2002. This has initiated a great deal of bloodshed, and may well spill over the border with Pakistan. While it is fairly clear that al-Qaida is involved in the Kashmir escalation in order to destabilize the region, as of this writing there is no indication of 'agents provocateur' at Ayodhya, although it wouldn't come as a surprise.

The Palestinian-Israeli tensions are also at a de facto state of war, but with a number of recent, questionable events:

- Osama bin Laden's post-11September2001 comments in support of the Palestinian cause and the suffering of the Iraqi people. After the hijackings and use of civilian airliners as guided missiles, the issue of a sovereign Palestinian State has essentially been moot. Any such State would require freedom of transport, including an airport, with flight times to any target in Israel measuring inside the scramble times for a fighter intercept. This risk may well have been the last nail in the coffin for independent Statehood for the Palestinian people—increasing the tension in the region further
- Increased suicide bombings, including the introduction of female bombers. The necessary expansion of security procedures to account for the potential of women bombers—many of which will violate cultural and Islamic restrictions—will further aggravate the hostilities
- Reaction by Ariel Sharon in predictable, arrogant, and stupid ways, perpetuating escalation in the conflict
- The 'Karine A' weapons shipment, with unknown intended recipients. The Israelis cast the ship as making a delivery to the Palestinian Authority to suit their own agenda, but there are a number of irregularities regarding the ship. Among the possibilities are that the ship was an Israeli ploy to provide the necessary 'sparkle' for expansion of counter-Palestinian operations; that the weapons were intended for Hezbollah; or that the weapons may well have been intended for al-Qaida operating in the area
- The sniper attack of 2March2002 was stunning in its audacity and effectiveness. A sniper killed seven soldiers and three civilians at an Israeli checkpoint north of Ramallah. In a span of time between 30 and 60 minutes, with an old carbine rifle held together with nails, the sniper performed at the top of possible performances. The rifle was clearly a 'throw-away,' intended for the operation, but disposed of by the sniper to cleanly get away. What is striking about this attack is that Palestinians aren't trained to that level of skill. This is not a criticism of the Palestinian cause, but a simple fact—their operators are only trained to the bare minimum level necessary to do a job. Snipers in the past have generally hit a limited number of targets in a brief period of time and retreated, or been suicidal. Such professionalism either indicates a dramatic change in Palestinian training, or introduction of outside operators, perhaps al-Qaida. It is interesting that credit for the more recent effective attacks has been claimed by the al-Aqsa Brigades

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#### SCENARIO SINGULARITY, AN ANALYTICAL HAYWIRE

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The scenario that may unfold during the nexus at the end of March 2002 is simply expressed: initiation of military hostilities in Occupied Palestine against the Israelis. What rapidly occurs at that point is best expressed as an old joke: "What if we had a war, and everyone came?"

As this brief has outlined, the initiation of hostilities against the Israelis by al-Qaida is not outside the mandate they have taken upon themselves. Only a few thousand trained fighters, well-equipped, could get the war started. Winning the war is another matter, but very quickly things become such a mess that it's almost a non-issue:

- Sharon and the Israeli military would react immediately, and would likely use the initiation of the hostilities to expand the war to achieve their own objectives—to the

detriment of the Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan

- Where does that leave the Islamic world? Once the war starts, a line is drawn, and the Islamic world has little choice but to choose sides
- The leadership of the Arab League nations, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their ‘peace proposal,’ would be embarrassed or discredited. While the leaders talk about peace, al-Qaida provides the war
- By default, leadership in the war would come from al-Qaida. The re-emergence of al-Zawahiri, possibly in Egypt, and Abu Zabaydah, either in Occupied Territory or Jordan, could quickly turn the conflict into a multi-front war. The very fact of al-Qaida’s involvement would immediately draw in the U.S., which wouldn’t even have the hint of an option to side with the Islamic States—such a move by al-Qaida negates the options the U.S. might normally enjoy
- U.S. engagement would vindicate al-Qaida’s assertions vis-à-vis the relationship between Israel and the U.S., the general belief in the Middle East being that Israel ‘calls the shots’ for U.S. foreign policy in the region
- The U.S. would be forced to engage with limited available resources in the region
- Attacks inside the U.S. at this point would be devastating—attacking political command authority, economic targets, command & control, logistics support at ports and military bases, and possibly mass-attrition attacks on U.S. civilian populations. In military terms, the U.S. involvement in force projection to the Middle East is on exterior lines—long supply chains that depend on domestic resources and production to sustain. The U.S. wins wars based on industrial and technical might—deprive such sustainment, and the U.S. is disadvantaged in fighting the war

At this point in the scenario process, DSSi encounters something comparatively rare, a catastrophe of options, too many factors interacting so that no sense can be made of what might emerge next. In this sort of situation, it rapidly becomes impossible to look forward—the decision points, possible courses of action, sequels and branches—everything becomes fuzzy, indistinct. Such a singularity, a point beyond which extrapolations or possibilities become impossible to resolve in advance, is frightening in implication, and the existence of it is why DSSi principals are gravely concerned.

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## CONCLUSIONS

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Proper conclusions for this sort of strategic scenario analysis are the actions that can be taken to mitigate the potential negative outcomes observed during the process. In this case, all the potential actions are large-scale, difficult to accomplish in the limited time remaining:

- Resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in a fair and balanced manner
- Defuse the tensions in the region, including those between India and Pakistan
- Vitalize the economies of the region, where grinding poverty and refugee camps feed militant Islam and hatred of the West

There are more questions that arise out of the muddle that rapidly emerges out of the scenario that should also be considered:

- How far is Israel willing to go in its war with their Islamic neighbors?
- Where would Hezbollah and Iran side? There is no love lost between Hezbollah and Iran, and the members of al-Qaida and Wahabi Sunni Islam. However, as long as there is no Middle East peace agreement, Israel's influence on the U.S. will block U.S. rapprochement with Iran and Hezbollah, both of which could be strong forces for anti-terrorism in the region
- How rapidly would Pakistan collapse? Would the next regime go nuclear with India?
- Would the U.S. be able to weather the next successive waves of attacks from sleepers? With the likely consequences of significant attacks, will the U.S. be able to achieve victory, and if so, at what price?
- Would China use the hostilities as an excuse to go on a pogrom against its own dissidents and Islamic population?
- Similar to how the Allies and Soviets 'divided' Europe after World War II, would Russia look at support of a U.S.-Israeli conflict with Islam as an opportunity to divide the Middle East?

The situation exists such that al-Qaida need only add fuel to the existing burning issues for them to rapidly explode out of control. An overriding result of this analysis is the absolute necessity for greater action and investment in the Middle East, to settle hostilities and make this possible future less likely to occur.