

Al-Qaeda: Followers

Al-Qaeda followers often differ from the Al-Qaeda leadership. Professor Hoffman said that there's no single profile for terrorists, and this is especially true for Al-Qaeda. This is an organization that has a presence or associated movements in dozens of countries. And we see some of them being poor, some being rich, some well-educated, some uneducated.

So in Europe we see many individuals linked to Al-Qaeda attacks who have master's degrees. But we also see some who have been radicalized in prison.

In the Muslim world we have a lot of individuals join associated movements who are poor, who are illiterate. But also again many people who are quite sophisticated and well-educated, especially by the standards of a relatively poor country.

The motivations of the Al-Qaeda followers are often quite different than the leadership. The 1998 declaration I read where we talk about U.S. policies in the Middle East, these too often enrage Al-Qaeda followers. But at times their motivations are more about things like sectarianism. They are more angry at Shia than they are at the United States. And they are more about the struggle within Islam.

Many of them are also quite concerned about social issues. So the cartoons in a Danish newspaper that mock the prophet Muhammad. The French government's decision to prohibit Muslim women from wearing a veil in France. These are things that enrage and energize many of the followers of these movements but are not particularly important to the leadership.

Now what Al-Qaeda leaders are very good at is attracting people because of the social grievances, because of the sectarianism and bringing them to training camps, bringing them to war zones. And there proselytizing them and giving them a different sense of identity.

Bringing them in and saying we know you're concerned about this social issue. We know you're concerned about this particular conflict. But it's part of a bigger picture. And they've had some success in changing the orientation of some of the fighters who have come across their path.