

## **A HISTORY OF ARAB TERRORISM**

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It was in the latter third of the twentieth century that "terrorist" became strongly associated with "Arab" in the West. The words were welded in the 1972 Olympic Games at Munich. Images broadcast worldwide of armed, hooded Palestinian terrorists peering from the balcony of Israeli athletes' apartments were powerfully fearful. The terrorists, members of the Black September faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization, took eleven Israelis hostage and brokered a deal with German authorities to be flown by helicopter to a NATO air base. There, an airliner was to fly them all to Cairo.

The German police thought there were five terrorists. Five snipers were assigned to kill the terrorists before they boarded the helicopters. But there were eight terrorists. Nonetheless, the police attempted to carry out their plan. A brief firefight ensued that ended badly. All the Israelis died, along with five terrorists and one German policeman.

For many years afterward, the images and narrative from the Munich games defined Arab terrorism in much of the West.

### *Three stages of Arab terrorism*

Terrorism has been used by peoples and nationalities around the world throughout history, but the terrorism carried out by Muslims has for several decades has either been done by Arab Muslims (i.e., all nineteen hijackers of Sept. 11, 2001) or has been inspired by Arab sponsors or teachers (Abu Sayyef terrorists in the Philippines). Hence, the problem of Muslim terrorism is almost exclusively a problem of Arab terrorism.

Modern Arab terrorism has gone through three stages. The first was a revival of strict Islamic devotion. Islamism, as the movement came to be called, was originally a reform

movement calling secularized Arab governments and societies to return to the basics of pure Islam as the reformers defined it. Islamism began in Egypt in the early 1920s. It was and still is fundamentally religious in nature. It was not originally violent but became violent fairly soon; Islamists believed that they were obligated to strike those who defied Islam as Islamists perceived it. For many decades afterward, and still significantly today, the targets of Islamist terrorists were Arab governments. Islamism's goal was the institution of strict Islamic law, *sharia*, in Muslim countries and the rooting out of all non-Muslim influences in the ordering of societies.

The second stage of Arab terrorism was born by the displacement of Palestinian Arabs from their homes by the United Nations' establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. When it became obvious that Israel would not be defeated in conventional battle, as the wars of 1948 and 1956 proved, armed Palestinian groups arose to fight the Israelis.

These groups were essentially secular-political in outlook rather than Islamic; nationalism was a strong ideal in the Middle East at the time.<sup>1</sup> For example, the famed Palestine Liberation Organization, PLO, was founded in 1964 as an umbrella Palestinian nationalist organization, not a religious one, to coordinate the tactics and strategy of several existing violent and political groups. While the PLO used terrorism to fight Israel, it did not overlay Islamism atop its agenda. Palestinian-based terrorism, ultimately supported by Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and many other Arab governments, has always been the most active Arab terrorism, even after Osama bin Laden

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<sup>1</sup> There was anti-Jewish violence in Palestine dating all the way back to the 1920s, but the organization of essentially terroristic, anti-Israel factions among the Palestinians really dates from the establishment of Israel as a political entity. In 1952, for example, "there were about 3,000 incidents of cross-border violence" and from 1951-1955 almost 1,000 Israelis died in such attacks, according to the Israeli government.

founded al Qaeda, whose attacks, while more lethal and sensational, have not been nearly as numerous as those of Palestinian-based groups.<sup>2</sup>

Black September's attack in Munich was a variant of anti-Israel violence, not an attack upon the West generally nor even Germany specifically. The attack's basic goal was to force Western governments to pay attention to Palestinian grievances.

By the end Soviet war in Afghanistan many thousands of Arab men had embraced Islamism and jihadism. Arab terrorism reached its third stage in the early 1990s. Henceforth, Islamist terrorism would be directed not only at insufficiently Islamic governments or Israel, but also directly at the West, especially the United States.

*Why did they attack us?*

In the aftermath of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, many Americans, shocked that they would be so suddenly and brutally attacked, asked, "Why do they hate us?" It seemed that the question was asked mostly by a sector of Americans who already had some answers readily at hand, namely, that we were attacked because America was a cultural and economic imperialist power that was at best resented by the Third World and more commonly hated. The barely-unspoken presumption was that we got what was rightfully coming to us.

Anatol Lieven wrote in the London Review of Books that America is "a menace to itself and to mankind." MIT's Professor Noam Chomsky repeatedly characterized the United States as the world's major terrorist state. At the other end of the ideological spectrum was the Rev. Jerry

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<sup>2</sup> Islamist terrorist groups operate there now whose direct patrons are Syria and Islamic Iran. There are excellent reasons to believe that Islamist terrorist groups became dominant before 2000; their influence and proven murderousness may have been a key reason Yasir Arafat turned down breathtaking concessions offered by Israel during the Wye River negotiations sponsored by the Clinton administration. By 2004 Arafat's own officers openly acknowledged the Islamist groups' power. In 2002 an officer of Fatah, founded by Arafat in the 1950s, openly told the Jerusalem Post, "We can't ignore the role of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the resistance against Israel. On the

Falwell, a nationally-known, politically active, Baptist pastor in Lynchburg, Virginia. Falwell claimed on a broadcast of The 700 Club only two days after the 9/11 that the attacks were God's judgment on America for abortion, feminism, homosexuality and liberal organizations such as the ACLU. (He retracted on CNN on September 14.) Such statements from the far Left and far Right are representative of the verbal vitriol that American and western European figures have hurled at America to “explain” the attacks.<sup>3</sup>

It took months for non-superficial explanations to appear in the mainstream media. Why so long? At an address at Hillsdale College, journalist Brit Hume said in April 2003 that “the idea that those who attacked America were themselves illegitimate – indeed, even evil – is not the kind of thing that springs to the minds of the people responsible for Newsweek cover stories. What springs to their minds is that we’ve done something wrong.” With our own citizens and other Westerners saying such things, and finding an amplifier in the media, it became easy to believe that non-Westerners of the world must really despise us.

With less intensity, the explanation of Arab terrorism as springing from poverty and hopelessness found support on both sides of America’s political aisle. “We fight against poverty,” President George W. Bush said in a speech in Monterrey, Mexico, “because hope is an answer to terror. ... We will challenge the poverty and hopelessness and lack of education and failed governments that too often allow conditions that terrorists can seize.”

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other hand, we can't turn a blind eye to the broad popular support that they enjoy among the Palestinians" (Apr. 19, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The difference between the Right and Left is that the Right said the attacks were divine judgment against America because of individual Americans' increasingly immoral character, while the Left said the attacks were the justified and inevitable response by the oppressed to America's imperialistic economic and foreign policies.

Former Vice President Al Gore argued that the anger underlying terrorism in the Islamic world stemmed from “the continued failure to thrive, as rates of economic growth stagnate, while the cohort of unemployed young men under twenty continues to increase.”<sup>4</sup>

The problem with this explanation is that it does not explain. Its root is the immiserization thesis of Marxism, as redefined in the 1950s by Paul Baran, a Polish-born American economist and a Marxist. Baran took Marx’s idea that capitalism immiserates workers and applied it to the worldwide economy. America, a capitalist nation, automatically makes the rest of the world poorer and more miserable. About twenty years later, Immanuel Wallerstein wrote an elaborate intellectual reinforcement of Baran’s thesis, and their revisions of Marxist theory really define Marxism today.<sup>5</sup>

However, disciplined research rebuts the idea that poverty, in itself, breeds terrorism. Many commentators have noted that the nineteen hijackers of 9/11 hailed from the privileged classes of Egypt and Saudi Arabia; ringleader Mohammed Atta held advanced university degrees, for example.

Professor Alberto Abadie of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government completed extensive research on the relationship between poverty and terrorism, published in November 2004. He told the university's newspaper, "In the past, we heard people refer to the strong link between terrorism and poverty, but when you look at the data, it's not there. This is true not only for events of international terrorism but also for the overall level of terrorism, both of domestic and of foreign origin."<sup>6</sup> He summarized his conclusions in his paper succinctly,

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<sup>4</sup> Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Mlecková, “Seeking the Roots of Terrorism,” <http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39b01001.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Lee Harris, “The Intellectual Origins Of America-Bashing,” Policy Review, Dec. 2002.

<sup>6</sup> "Harvard Gazette," Nov. 4, 2004.

I fail to find a significant association between terrorism and economic variables such as income once the effect of other country characteristics is taken into account. ... The estimates suggest, however, that political freedom has a non-monotonic effect on terrorism. This result is consistent with the observed increase in terrorism for countries in transition from authoritarian regimes to democracies. In addition, the results show that certain geographic characteristics may favor the presence of terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

Another study rebutting a linkage between poverty and terrorism was done by Alan B. Krueger, professor of economics and public policy at Princeton University, and Jitka Malecková, professor of Middle Eastern studies at Charles University in Prague. In June 2003, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published their paper, "Seeking the Roots of Terrorism." Krueger and Malecková concluded,

Instead of viewing terrorism as a response . . . to poverty or ignorance, we suggest that it is more accurately viewed as a response to [the terrorists' own] political conditions and longstanding feelings of indignity and frustration that have little to do with economic circumstances. We suspect that is why international terrorist acts are more likely to be committed by people who grew up under repressive political regimes.<sup>8</sup>

Asking, "Why do they hate us?" really misses the point. It is more fruitful to ask why the political repression of the Arab people by Arab governments leads their more privileged members to attack us.

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<sup>7</sup> Alberto Abadie, "Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism," October 2004.

<sup>8</sup> <http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39b01001.htm>

Even before the United States launched offensive operations against Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, President Bush was taking pains to point out that America was not making war against Islam itself, but against those who wage war against us or support the terrorists.

Arabs account for only about twenty percent of Muslims worldwide. There are tens of millions more Muslims in Indonesia than in all the Arab lands combined. There are enormous numbers of non-Arab Muslims who are not unified in rage against America. Islam today is much greater than Arab Islam.

However, it is impossible to speak meaningfully about Islam without being immersed in Arab history. Since the conquest by Arabian armies of northern Africa, the eastern Mediterranean coast and lands to the east and north, the rise and fall of Arab culture has been almost identical with the rise and fall of Islam itself. Islam did not wipe clean everything Arabic that came before it, but it did alter or subsume everything. It was among the Arabs that radicalized Islamic revivalist movements began, and it was from them that it has spread to other Muslim areas.

#### *Muslim expansionism and Western response*

Within a mere eighty-one years after the death of Mohammed, Islam came to dominate land masses from the Arabian Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean. Muslim armies stormed into Europe from the east and the southwest. Spain fell under Arab domination in 713 and was not fully freed until 1492. In 732, an Arab army under Abd er Rahman marched toward Paris; it was defeated near Tours by Charles Martel.

By the tenth century, the best army and navy in Europe were Muslim, under the command of Abd ar-Rahman III of Spain. "The cultural achievements of his caliphate . . . [were] unmatched

by any Christian or Muslim state. The period of his reign (and really until 1031) marks the Golden Age of both Arab and Jewish culture in Spain.”<sup>9</sup>

The Muslim Ottoman Turks penetrated into eastern Europe as far north as Poland, and into Russia all the way to St. Petersburg, where there is still today a large, active mosque.

Arab naval raiders reached England, the western coast of Europe and even Iceland. For hundreds of years Islamic civilization was the historical pinnacle of world history in almost every category and was far more religiously tolerant than Christendom, especially for Jews and sectarian Christians. The West was almost constantly on the defensive; the cultural and religious survival of Europe was, as Wellington would later describe Waterloo, a close-run thing.

It was fashionable for awhile after Sept. 11's infamy to blame the East's hatred of the West on the Crusades. The Crusades were a series of eight major invasions by European armies of near-Eastern lands that occurred intermittently from 1095-1291. Their main focus was wresting Jerusalem from Muslim control, in which they were successful for awhile. The Crusaders established kingdoms in Syria and Palestine, but these were small and penetrated no more than about fifty miles into Arab lands.

At their end, as Princeton University's Professor Bernard Lewis has pointed out, the Crusades ended in the defeat of the Crusaders; they were a Muslim victory. By 1300, Muslim armies were so decisively victorious that European armies did not return for five hundred years, when they were much more successful due to technological advantage and modern home-state economies.

The present-day effects of the Crusades are debated among historians. Karen Armstrong made a strong case in *Holy War: the Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World* that Europeans after the Crusades saw Islam as "the irreconcilable enemy of Western civilization"

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/santiago/text.html>

and that the "hatred and suspicion" of the Christian West by Muslims engendered by the Crusades "still reverberates," including specifically in the 9/11 attacks.

Osama bin Laden has repeatedly referred to Western powers, especially the United States, as "Crusaders." He has called the American military response to Islamist terrorism a new Crusade against Islam. Yet he has not said that his campaign of terror is intended to avenge the Crusades. His objective is to inculcate Islamism in Muslim countries today, not seek revenge for a series of battles beginning almost a millennia ago.

Professor Thomas Madden wrote in "Crisis" in April 2002 that although scholars are still working out the truth about the Crusades, "much can already be said with certainty":

For starters, the Crusades to the East were in every way defensive wars. They were a direct response to Muslim aggression – an attempt to turn back or defend against Muslim conquests of Christian lands. ...

With enormous energy, the warriors of Islam struck out against the Christians shortly after Mohammed's death. They were extremely successful. ... The old Roman Empire, known to modern historians as the Byzantine Empire, was reduced to little more than Greece. In desperation, the emperor in Constantinople sent word to the Christians of western Europe asking them to aid their brothers and sisters in the East.

That is what gave birth to the Crusades. They were not the brainchild of an ambitious pope or rapacious knights but a response to more than four centuries of conquests in which Muslims had already captured two-thirds of the old Christian world. At some point, Christianity as a faith and a culture had to defend itself or be subsumed by Islam. The Crusades were that defense.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Madden, "The Real History of the Crusades." *Crisis*, April 1, 2002.

After the last Crusade was vanquished, the Islamic caliphate counter-attacked. In 1480, Sultan Mehmed II captured Italy's easternmost town, Otranto, and razed it. He intended to use it as a port for the conquest of Italy itself. The danger was so great that Rome was evacuated, but Mehmed died and nothing came of his plans. The overland route into Europe, through the Balkans, was repeatedly invaded by Muslim armies; one under Suleiman the Magnificent was defeated at Vienna not by European arms but by a rainstorm that negated his use of artillery.

Yet by the end of the seventeenth century, the tide had turned. After the Ottoman army was decisively defeated at Vienna in 1683, Islam began a retreat that many say has not yet ended, a retreat encompassing not only the military realm, but the commercial, economic, political, scientific and social.

### *The Muslim eclipse and the Muslim response*

The Muslim world began to be eclipsed by the West well before its final siege of Vienna and has lived in the West's shadow ever since. It is historically ironic that the Islamic spearhead against the West for hundreds of years was the Ottoman regime, headed not by Arabs but by Muslim Turks. Yet today the Turks are formally allied with Europe and the United States in NATO and Turkey is the best example of democracy to be found among Islamic nations.

Beginning about three hundred twenty years ago, wrote Bernard Lewis,

Muslims began to feel threatened by the rise and expansion of the great Christian empires of Eastern and Western Europe. The old easy-going tolerance, resting on an assumption not only of superior religion but also of superior power, was becoming difficult to maintain. The threat that Christendom now seemed to be

offering to Islam was not longer merely political and military; it was beginning to shake the very structure of Muslim society.<sup>11</sup>

With varying degrees of enthusiasm, the Muslims' ruling and intellectual classes across the near-Eastern lands began to understand that no longer could they merely observe what was happening in Europe, they had to imitate Europe in order to have any chance of competing with it. The list of things the Turks and later the Arabs adopted from Europe is long, but two of them bear particular weight today. The first is the triplet concept of nationhood, citizenship and patriotism, which were never native to the near-eastern Muslims. Even today they have not sunk in very far. The Arab culture is generally oriented around the tribe and the clan, loyalty to which still defines the second level of how most Arab societies are organized today. (The first level is Islam.)

The attempt to adopt these triplet concepts finally resulted in pan-Arabism, a movement for the unification of the Arab peoples at a political level. Closely related to Arab nationalism - the ideology that all Arabs are one people, united by language, culture and history - pan-Arabism was first pressed about a century ago. It found renewed vigor in the 1950s as a means to defeat Israel on the one hand and on the other to strengthen Arab culture and identity against the West. Its primary spokesmen in those days were Syrian and Egyptian, both countries being ruled by secular parties. Egyptian President Abdul Gamel Nasser (1918-1970) was a tireless worker for pan-Arabism. In fact, he led Syria and Egypt to merge into a single state in 1958 called the United Arab Republic. But the UAR dissolved only three years later after a coup in Syria.

The inability of pan-Arabist-inclined governments to generate economic growth, coupled with the stunning defeat of both Egypt and Syria by Israel in 1967's Six Day War, led to pan-

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<sup>11</sup> Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong*. Perennial Press, 2002

Arabism's decline as an ideal. The highly westernized and charismatic Nasser could not succeed in making pan-Arabic nationalism work, and the concept pretty much died along with him.<sup>12</sup>

The second European concept adopted with varying strength across Arab lands was political also. The Arabs generally began to reclaim political autonomy only in the early 1900s. Having been dominated by European countries, they adopted variants of European economic models. But they did so at exactly the wrong time: when European socialism was first burgeoning but before its inherent weaknesses became evident. Canadian journalist David Warren grew up in Pakistan, an Islamic state. He wrote that Arab leaders most often,

... became socialists of one kind or another, for in the world of only a few decades ago, that very Western ideology of 'socialism' could still be presented as the coming thing, as a 'scientific' thing, the cutting edge of progress. Most came to believe that the best way to modernize their societies was through central planning, and that their own class was in effect the socialist vanguard.<sup>13</sup>

But political-economic socialism requires a coherent national order. The post-colonial Arab leaders attempted to make Western-style nations of peoples whose historical social structure was ancient nomadic Bedouinism. Their socialist and nationalist plans, wrote Warren, became "a catastrophe. ... None of [their] five-year plans ever worked. And the only thing that did work was the elites clinging to power, trying to Westernize or modernize their societies with increasing frustration."

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<sup>12</sup> During 1991's Gulf War, I was a career Army officer, assigned to the US Army's main operations center below the Pentagon. There I read a State Department message summarizing what a very senior Egyptian government official had said to an American diplomat. One thing stuck in my mind. "Egypt is the only true Arab nation state," said the official. "The rest are all tribes with flags." This particular official insisted that American ideas about Arab unity were nonsense.

<sup>13</sup> "Wrestling With Islam," <http://www.davidwarrenonline.com/Miscell/index02.shtml>

The economic stagnation of Arab countries was coupled with increasing Westernization of Arab elites. According to Warren, in recent decades the leadership of the Arab countries was “quite well acquainted with the broad cosmopolitan world of modernity,”<sup>14</sup> and had been educated in European universities. “And while they remained Muslim, at least nominally, they were also secularized [and] tended, unconsciously or even consciously, to look upon their own religious inheritance as backward, inferior, incapable of competing.”

### *The self-immiserization of the Arabs*

It was not the West that immiserated the people of the Arab lands; it has been their own governments, usually meaning dictators, attempting to imitate the West. They failed because the patina of westernization they adopted was unsuitable for their native culture and was incomplete in any event: the Arabs never adopted a capitalist system, but attempted to make European-style socialism work anyway. But even in Europe, socialism is capitalist at heart.<sup>15</sup>

In America, power follows money. One makes a lot of money and then uses the money to gain power. In the Near East, money follows power. One uses or gains power in order to garner

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<sup>14</sup> “When Pakistan was created, its founder, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, famously declared, ‘You are free, free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state.’” (Zahir Janmohamed, Washington Post, June 25, 2003; Page A23)

<sup>15</sup> However, the modern West treated Middle Eastern lands as backward places to be conquered or enlightened (The French and British from 1798-1948) and/or as holding resources to be gained through commercial exploitation (America, Britain and France from the 1930s until now). In fact, Arab “countries” are mostly a Western imposition, except for Egypt, and much of the troubles there arose from the fact that the national boundaries of Arab countries were drawn by European rulers.

For much of the Cold War America used Arab nations, along with Turkey and Iran, as a bulwark against potential Soviet expansionism toward the oil fields of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It was not an unreasonable fear, but it skewed our relationship with the region in utilitarian ways, which many Arabs saw as another form of colonialism.

Today, however, the great majority of Iranians today are too young to remember pre-Islamism days and are rejecting the harsh, oppressive rule of the ayatollahs. The ayatollahs have not made the people’s life better than under the shah; in many ways it is worse, especially in the regulation of personal minutiae. Of the Iranians, “the majority want a sweeping transformation. They do not want to be told what to think, what to wear, what to read, what to watch and how to behave, and they are frustrated at the glacial pace of change.” (New York Times, June 16, 2003). In many ways, this statement defines the frustration felt by masses of Arabs with their own governments.

wealth. This is exactly the model Saddam Hussein followed, for example, although much more brutally than most Arabs had done before, and it has been what the House of Saud has done since Franklin Roosevelt's concordance with it in World War II imbued it with international legitimacy.

The enormous infusion of dollars into oil-producing Arab states followed the Arab oil embargo after the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Without raising production, the Arab states tripled their oil revenues,<sup>16</sup> especially Saudi Arabia, whose money is the irrigation stream of Arab terrorism today.

Petrodollars have not resulted in as much improvement of the lives of ordinary Arabs as might be expected, given the enormous revenues oil has garnered. The vast majority of oil dollars have stuck to the fingers of the ruling classes. Oil's effect has been to depress severely every other economic activity in the Arab lands. For that reason, some Arab writers have called the oil economies, "golden manacles." The net export of non-petroleum products out of all the Arabs countries combined is less than that of Finland. The non-oil component of the combined gross domestic products of the Arab oil states is less than that of Israel.

Westernization has, however, resulted in some improvements in the material life of the Arab peoples. The Western idea of a comprehensive education system has taken root in almost every Arab country, although women are still generally very limited in what they may study. Over the decades, Arab cities began to show clear Western influences, especially in improvements in infrastructure and sanitation. Western architecture is prominent, if not actually dominant, in some new Arab cities, especially in the oil states.

Even so, Arab leaders could not use Western means to achieve Western-like successes without giving real power to the people. This they did not want to do. Arab culture is very

strongly patriarchal. There is no tradition of gender, social or economic egalitarianism, though women's rights wax and wane across different Arab lands. This is critical, because in the Arab lands today, the concentration of wealth and the concentration of political power are in the same hands, unlike the West from late medieval times on, where commerce led wealth to be concentrated in the hands of those who had no inherited political position. But in the Arab countries, there are no economic centers to challenge the ruling despots because the despots are the economic centers.

Many Arab scholars know these things, of course. In 2005 the Arab Human Development Report was issued under United Nations' auspices by a group of Arab social scientists. Thomas Friedman summarized it thus:<sup>17</sup>

The report notes that most Arab states today resemble "a 'black hole,' which converts its surrounding social environment into a setting in which nothing moves and from which nothing escapes." All political parties, institutions, courts, intelligence services, police and media are centralized in the hands of the Arab leader - that's why the "modern-day Arab state is frequently dubbed 'the intelligence state.'" What all these states have in common, the report says, "is that power is concentrated at the tip of the executive pyramid and that the margin of freedom permitted (which can be swiftly reduced) has no effect on the state's firm and absolute grip on power." But without a majority of people behind them, all of these Arab regimes lack legitimacy. ...

The chain constricting freedom, the report notes, "completes its circle in the political realm, squeezing Arab public life into a small and constricted space. ... This

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<sup>16</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*. Hatherleigh Press, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, "Arabs Lift Their Voices." *New York Times*, April 7, 2005

complicated process has led Arab citizens, including some among the intelligentsia, to a state of submission fed by fear and marked by denial of their subjugation."

All these things, developing over time, were fertile ground for a religious reactionary movement among the masses.

### *The religious reaction*

Beginning in the 1970s, large movements of young Arabs occurred from the rural areas to the cities because of a population explosion after World War II. (Middle Eastern countries have a very young population, which is one reason Iran today is a socio-political and religious powder keg.) Gilles Kepel, head of the post-graduate program on the Arab and Muslim worlds at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* in Paris, explains<sup>18</sup> that this generation was the first mostly literate one as well. Because they could read and decipher religious texts Islamist propaganda was soon directed their way. Says Kepel,

Yet the younger generation, in facing the challenges that confronted them in this strange environment, could hardly draw on their newly acquired written culture.

Because they had acquired this cultural capital, they had 'great expectations' – which were not met – and this led to social deprivation on quite a new scale.

Such experiences were all the more bitter in the 1970s, as this was also the first generation to reach adulthood without any living memory of the colonial era. As a result, they tended to take the political elite in power at its word. The latter, young people believed, was accountable for what it had delivered (or, in most cases, not delivered). This created a huge feeling of disarray, of relative deprivation, of social

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<sup>18</sup> Gilles Kepel, "The Trail of Political Islam." <http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-5-57-421.jsp>

frustration – and, in consequence, a desire to find a language which would be able to decipher the evils of society, and to bring about an alternative.

Because Arab oil wealth enriched some Arab states and not others, a great economic divide came to be opened for the first time among the Arab masses. The overall effect of Westernization has been, as Kepel noted, to leave many Arabs in a state of *relative deprivation*. They are overall better off than they were, say, before World War II, but relative to their political masters, the West and even from one Arab nation to another, they see themselves as getting the short end of the stick.

"Relative deprivation" is a term of art among religious historians. Among very religious communities, whether Islamic, Jewish or Christian, relative deprivation often leads to eschatological fervor. Eschatology is a religious hope for an ideal, religiously pure time. And this soil was also fertile for the work of Islamic revivalists who had begun about 80 years ago to challenge Westernization on religious grounds. They increasingly succeeded because they had the intellectual-religious tools necessary for the task.

Their eschatology was that the Westernization of their Arab cultures had corrupted the Arab cultures and was apostate to Islam. By rejecting Westernism and practicing strict Islam, their societies would recover their authenticity and pure Islam would be recovered, yielding ideal societies. As Ian Buruma wrote in "The New York Times Magazine" (Nov. 5, 2004), "The religious revolution that now stalks the Muslim world has come as a reaction, in part, to the failure of modern secular politics."

There were other crucial contributing factors. Khaled Abou El Fadl, professor of Islamic law at UCLA's School of Law, wrote that the classical period of Islamic civilization was marked by a high degree of discourse, a tolerance for disputation and a firm grounding in moral philosophy

and principled thinking. Terrorism in classical Islamic jurisprudence was unconditionally condemned: "Regardless of the desired goals or ideological justifications, the terrorizing of the defenseless was recognized as a moral wrong and an offense against society and God." But classical Islam has disappeared. Continues Prof. El Fadl,

Much has changed in the modern age. Islamic civilization has crumbled, and the traditional institutions that once sustained the juristic discourse have all but vanished. The moral foundations that once mapped out Islamic law and theology have disintegrated, leaving an unsettling vacuum. More to the point, the juristic discourses on tolerance towards rebellion and hostility to the use of terror are no longer part of the normative categories of contemporary Muslims. Contemporary Muslim discourses either give lip service to the classical doctrines without a sense of commitment or ignore and neglect them all together.

There are many factors that contributed to this modern reality. Among the pertinent factors is the undeniably traumatic experience of colonialism, which dismantled the traditional institutions of civil society. The emergence of highly centralized, despotic and often corrupt governments, and the nationalization of the institutions of religious learning undermined the mediating role of jurists in Muslim societies. Nearly all charitable religious endowments became state-controlled entities, and Muslim jurists in most Muslim nations became salaried state employees, effectively transforming them into what may be called "court priests." The establishment of the state of Israel, the expulsion of the Palestinians and the persistent military conflicts in which Arab states suffered heavy losses all contributed to a widespread siege mentality and a highly polarized and belligerent

political discourse. Perhaps most importantly, Western cultural symbols, modes of production and social values aggressively penetrated the Muslim world, seriously challenging inherited values and practices, and adding to a profound sense of alienation.<sup>19</sup>

At first, Islamists' enemies were other Arabs – the political classes who had tried to institute Westernization in the first place. The first significant group of Islamists was the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, a 22-year-old elementary school teacher, as an Islamic revivalist movement. Al-Banna emphasized that Islam was a comprehensive way of life. Over the next twenty years the Brotherhood's ideology came to encompass religion, education and politics. It became terrorist inside Egypt not long after its founding and was outlawed. A Muslim Brother assassinated Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi in December 1948. Al-Banna himself was killed by government agents in Cairo in February, 1949.

The Egyptian government legalized the Brotherhood again in 1948, but only as a religious organization; it was banned again in 1954 because it insisted that Egypt be governed under sharia, or Islamic law. The brotherhood attempted to assassinate Nasser four times and four of its members assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981.

The Brotherhood's slogan is, "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Quran is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope." The Brotherhood served as a model for subsequent revivalist movements and is theologically aligned with Saudi Wahhabism. The Palestinian terrorist group Hamas is an outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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<sup>19</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Islam and the Theology of Power." Islam for Today, <http://www.islamfortoday.com/elfadl01.htm>

The Islamist movement and its terrorist wings need to be distinguished from secular Arab movements. One way to do so is by looking at their respective targets. Until the rise of al Qaeda, Islamist terrorism was directed mostly inward, toward secular-leaning Arab governments. In contrast, terrorism directed against Israel was done primarily by Arab secular-nationalist groups such as the Palestine Liberation Organization. From its beginning, the PLO was oriented toward the reclamation of land and homes lost to Arabs by the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. An example of secular-based terrorist group operating against Israel is the al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades, a homegrown group behind the rash of suicide bombings against Israelis in the second Intifada of 2002-2004. The Brigades are affiliated with the al-Fatah faction of the PLO. However, as Iran's Islamic revolution solidified its grip, its mullahs began sponsoring Islamist terrorist groups against Israel, Hezbollah being a principle example.

Today anti-Western terrorism is the near-exclusive province of al Qaeda, founded by Osama bin Laden and headed by him.<sup>20</sup> By the time of al Qaeda's advent, Islamism "defined Islam as the exact antithesis of the West, under the guise of reclaiming the true and real Islam. Whatever the West was perceived to be, Islam was understood to be the exact opposite."<sup>21</sup> Bin Laden broke new ground in two ways: first in the boldness and scope of his attacks and second in that he was uninterested in traditional internal Muslim bickering. Any Muslim was welcome who wished to fight America, the West, or the apostate rulers of Muslim countries.

### *Osama bin Laden's strategic objectives*

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<sup>20</sup> Al Qaeda, however, is not a unitary organization with a rigid, vertically-organized chain of command. It is a conglomerate of sometimes disparate groups with like aims, willing to use like means, enjoying the fruits of bin Laden's core staff's work, and oriented on common enemies, mainly Saudi Arabia's ruling royals and America.

<sup>21</sup> El Fadl, op. cit.

Converted to Islamism by fighting in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden became the most die-hard *jihadi* of all. Unfortunately, he had hundreds of millions of dollars of family wealth to back him up. Bin Laden used a great deal of it before his access to it was cut off.

The new mission in life that bin Laden adopted can be stated simply: pure Islamic rule and life for Islamic lands, followed by re-establishing a unified, Muslim caliphate reflecting the old Muslim empire at its peak. After that, the rest of the world is to be converted to Islam by peaceful means if possible, by war if necessary.

*The first imperative: eject America.* Bin Laden, being a Saudi, turned attention first to his home country even though he no longer lived in it. No matter where pure Islamism might be established, Islamism as a renewal movement would fail if never established in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was the native land of Mohammed; bin Laden frequently referred to it as "the land of the Two Holy Mosques" (one being Mecca itself, the holiest site in all Islam, the other being in Medina).

The Soviets had hardly withdrawn in defeat from Afghanistan than there was an enormous influx of American and other Western military forces into Saudi Arabia after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. After the Gulf War, a substantial American military presence remained in Saudi Arabia. Their presence was objectionable to bin Laden for two reasons. First, the Westerners defiled the holy land of Mohammed because they were non-Muslim infidels. Second, their presence proved the impotence, and hence the religious apostasy, of the ruling House of Saud. A pure Islamic nation would have no need of infidel troops to defend itself. As far as he was concerned, the Americans were invaders of Saudi Arabia; he told *The Independent* of Britain in 1996 that "our country has become an American colony." Bin Laden became convinced that America was in conspiracy with "Zionists" to destroy Islam.

Bin Laden was also convinced that Mohammed's native land must be trod only by Muslims, never by non-Muslims. True Islam in Saudi Arabia could not be achieved with the *kufir* (unbeliever) army stationed there; hence the American presence must be expelled and not just America's military presence. All non-Muslim Americans must leave.

Bin Laden's first grievance, though, was against the ruling House of Saud, whom bin Laden (and many clerics in Saudi Arabia, for that matter) considered apostate to Islam. Not only had it invited the American army into the kingdom - the most serious charge Osama held against the royals - bin Laden has been emphatic that the Saudi regime is corrupt and oppressive of the Saudi people, although, of course, he blamed the United States for all this. In his 1996 fatwa (religious judgment), "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," bin Laden said of the House of Saud:

The latest and the greatest of these aggressions, incurred by the Muslims since the death of the Prophet (Allah's blessing and salutations on him) is the occupation of the land of the two Holy Places - the foundation of the house of Islam, the place of the revelation, the source of the message and the place of the noble Ka'ba, the Qiblah of all Muslims - by the armies of the American Crusaders and their allies. . . .

[T]he competition between influential [Saudi] princes for personal gains and interest had destroyed the country. Through its course of actions the regime has torn off its legitimacy:

(1) Suspension of the Islamic *Shari'ah* law and exchanging it with man made civil law. . . .

(2) The inability of the regime to protect the country, and allowing the enemy of the *Ummah* [Muslim people] - the American crusader forces- to occupy the land for the longest of years.

There followed a long list of grievances against the Saudi regime, particularly emphasizing its un-Islamic rule, the wealth-corruption of its princes and accusations of being a puppet of the USA.

Yet Osama seems indifferent whether the Saudi royals convert to pure Islam, as bin Laden defines it, or are destroyed. In a November 1996 interview with "Nida'ul Islam," bin Laden said, regarding Saudi Arabia,

There are several choices for the regime [of which] the most important of these is to bring back Islamic law, and to practice real Shura [consultative government].

The regime may resort to this choice after finding itself in the position of a morsel of food for the Americans to take, after the enmity has been stirred with their people. These people today feel that the Americans have exceeded their limits both politically and economically, the regime now knows that the public are aware that their sovereignty is shared. This was particularly evident in the recent period through the American press statements which give justification to the American occupation which only exists to rob the wealth of the people to the benefit of the Americans. This option is dependent on the agreement of the people who hold the solution and have the ability to effect change, at the forefront of these would be the honest scholars.

As for the other option, this is a very difficult and dangerous one for the regime, and this involves an escalation in the confrontation between the Muslim people and

the American occupiers and to confront the economic hemorrhage. Its most important goal would be to change the current regime, with the permission of Allah.

Abd-al-Bari 'Atwan, editor in chief of the London-based Al-Quds al-'Arabi newspaper, said after another interview with bin Ladin, conducted by Jamal Isma'il in Afghanistan and broadcast on Middle East television,

I felt that the man had his own vision and special strategy. This strategy is based on his concept of the region. The first point in this strategy is that the US Administration or the US forces, which he considers occupation forces in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, are a prelude to a comprehensive Israeli-Jewish hegemony over the region with the aim of looting its wealth and humiliating its Muslim people. One senses this as the essence of his creed and strategy.

Therefore, he believes that expelling these US forces from the Arab world is a top priority. He believes that the regimes should be reformed or, more correctly, changed. The regimes immune to reform should be changed, the *sharia* should be applied properly, and a just Islamic system should be set up in the Islamic and Arab states, particularly the Gulf states. This is a summary of his strategy. Currently, he does not want to fight the regimes. That is what he told me. He wants to fight the Americans, who are protecting these regimes.

So while bin Laden does not specifically seek to destroy the House of Saud, he thinks it will be necessary if the House does not reform. If the royals are brought down violently, bin Laden thinks it will be by popular uprising, a revolution resulting from the long-suffering Saudi people deciding to suffer no more. His 1996 fatwa makes clear that he expects this general uprising to do two things in sequence: expel the Americans from Saudi Arabia, then force reform of the

Saudi regime or its replacement. The result will be the institution of a true Islamic society - as bin Laden understands such a society to be.

Because bin Laden thinks that US forces entered Saudi Arabia not as allies but as conquerors, he is convinced that America will not vacate Saudi Arabia on its own. It must be expelled violently. This task, he says in the *fatwa*, is the primary duty of every true Muslim.<sup>22</sup>

### *The greatest threat to Islamism*

Yussuf al-Ayyeri, one of Osama bin Laden's closest associates since the early 1990s, was killed by Saudi security forces in Riyadh in June 2003. He wrote a book published by al Qaeda entitled, *The Future of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula*, after the Fall of Baghdad. In it al-Ayyeri explained succinctly America's greatest threat to Islamism: "It is not the American war machine that should be of the utmost concern to Muslims. What threatens the future of Islam, in fact its very survival, is democracy."

Iran-born author Amir Taheri summarized the book thus for the New York Post:

Al-Ayyeri then shows how various forms of unbelief attacked the world of Islam in the past century or so, to be defeated in one way or another.

The first form of unbelief to attack was "modernism" (*hidatha*), which led to the caliphate's destruction and the emergence in the lands of Islam of states based on ethnic identities and territorial dimensions rather than religious faith.

What Al-Ayyeri sees now is a "clean battlefield" in which Islam faces a new form of unbelief. This, he labels "secularist democracy." This threat is "far more

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<sup>22</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** The United States removed most of its armed forces from Saudi Arabia after 2003's invasion of Iraq. But some American military remain there, as well as

dangerous to Islam" than all its predecessors combined. The reasons, he explains in a whole chapter, must be sought in democracy's "seductive capacities."

This form of "unbelief" persuades the people that they are in charge of their destiny and that, using their collective reasoning, they can shape policies and pass laws as they see fit.<sup>23</sup>

Modernity is precisely what bin Laden and his allies are fighting against, for modernity carries within it the idea that human societies should be able to shape their culture as they please. But such is anathema to radical Islamism, which wants to make strict *sharia*, Islamic law, the sole rule of society.

### *The problem of science*

Equally threatening to Islamism as the Western democratic tradition is the Western idea that truth about the very nature of reality and humankind's place in the cosmos can come from human investigation – science – rather than divine revelation. Experimental science is a European invention, although the Muslims came close to inventing it near the end of their golden age. In fact, the Turks built a great observatory near Istanbul in 1577 that was the equal of any in Europe. But the sultan ordered it razed to the ground on the insistence of the Chief Mufti. That event ended decisively near-Eastern Muslim science down to the present day. Science education in Arab lands today is limited in scope and is more engineering than research science.

Modern science has had a much more difficult time being accepted in Muslim lands than elsewhere in the world. In an article, "The Religion of Modern Science: Roots of modern God-free thinking," published in the western-based *Islamic Journal*, Muslim author Harun Yahya

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thousands of American civilians who live there. So American infidels still corrupt the soil of the

wrote of Western scientific absolutists who “regard modern science as absolute and true religion, and want to impose this view to all humankind. . . . However, the question is not that whether Islam is in line with science or not, but whether science is in line with Islam. What needs to be approved is science, not Islam.”<sup>24</sup>

There are many points of contention and conflict between Arab Islam and the West, but the chief religious contention between Islamists and the West is not really between Islam and Christianity but between Islam and Western scientific-materialism.

Because of the supremacy of the sciences in western thought, Western culture has become caught in a cycle of ever-increasing changes. Western societies contend with an exponentially increasing pace of cultural changes. The pace and kinds of changes that we adapt to (with greater or lesser difficulty, to be sure) are exactly the changes that Islamists correctly believe would destroy basic structures of their society which they believe are the divinely-commanded.

In their view, certain social structures (such as the status and role of women) are absolutely essential, required by Allah's command as revealed in the Quran. Without those structures, a society is wholly corrupted. We see them as hopeless religious fanatics; they see us as godless and degenerate.

The tension between Islam's historic traditions and modern pressures of scientific modernity is found throughout the Muslim world. Many Arab intellectuals know that their countries have fallen behind most of the rest of the world. They want to gain the benefits of technological society, but without the cultural baggage that comes with it. They want to modernize their societies but not Westernize them. Their vision of modernization is mostly technological, such as communications, medical science, education, transportation, and consumer goods.

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Land of the Two Holy Mosques.

<sup>23</sup> Amir Teheri, “Al Qaeda’s Agenda for Iraq.” New York Post, Sept. 4, 2003

These twin desires – keep the West out but bring modernity in – are in perpetual tension. Not even the strictest mullahs are willing to give up their cell phones and hearing aids in their dream of a throwback Muslim society. As for the so-called Arab street, enormous numbers of them want to live in the West, and many millions of them have emigrated from Arab lands to do so. Before America invaded Iraq, seventy-five percent of the world’s refugees were from Muslim countries.

But the Arabs’ state their revulsion for the West more strongly than they really mean. So, wrote Victor Davis Hanson,<sup>25</sup>

The best way to get America and the West out of millions of Islamic lives is not to burn effigies of George Bush in the Arab Street, but would be for Arab governments to prohibit immigration to the West, to stop importing Western material goods, and to bar decadent Westerners from entering Arab countries.

Any takers? The bitter truth is that the Middle East wants the West far more than the West the Middle East.

Whether political or religious fervor primarily motivate anti-Western terrorism is unclear, and in any event does not matter. The bifurcation of politics and religion is a Western notion, not a Muslim one. In any event, their aim is to cleanse the Arab lands of Westernism and institute their own version of pure Islamic society. The paradigms of success are Iran and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan; even the very conservative Saudis are too Western for them.

*The Old is New Again*

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.ifew.com/insight/14038rch/haruny.htm>

<sup>25</sup> V. D. Hanson, “Winning After All.” National Review, June 2003, <http://www.nationalreview.com/hanson/hanson062003.asp>

The war that radical, violent Islamists are waging against the West springs from the fact that Islamism and Westernism are fundamentally incompatible. But both are too deeply embedded in both sides' culture, social systems, politics and religion to be very easily altered. Compared to this centuries-old struggle, the Cold War was a brief respite. Rather than the new millennium inaugurating a golden age of human progress and well-being, what was old is new again. History has returned. For Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the three great religions of this conflict, history began about 3,600 years ago.