

II. Fire in the Garden: The Religion of bin Ladin

This paper is the third in my “Religion of bin Ladin” series, a work in progress: The first was “Terror As the Hand of God,” the second was “Jihadism,” and I have named the third paper after an apocalyptic image in Salafi mythology, “Fire in the Garden.”

According to an eschatological myth, one of the major signs before the Day of Judgment is the emergence of the *Dajjal*. His name comes from *dajl*, which means ‘lying’, and it refers to an imposter who will claim lordship during the final tribulation:

He will bring about great trials, some of which are that he will command the heavens and it will rain and he will command the earth and it will produce vegetation. He will have with him a Garden and a Fire. However, his garden will be a fire, and his fire will be a garden.¹

This is the figure whom scholar of Islamic apocalyptic, David Cook, identifies as a “tempter” or “Antichrist, the one who leads the world astray until Jesus descends from the heavens and kills him.”² The image of his garden and his fire is symbolic of his “doublespeak.” It also signifies the paradox of reversal that is about to come on the Day of Judgment when God will set things right again. Apocalyptic motifs express the extremes of cosmic and ethical dualism at the end of the status quo world. Cosmic dualism is the division of universe into two armed camps, one representing light and one representing darkness. Ethical dualism is the separation of all deeds into evil and good actions.

It is commonplace now to speak of the “world before” and the “world after” the attack by nineteen members of Usamah bin Ladin’s al-Qaida network on the military,

¹ “Major Signs Before the Day of Judgement,” Imaam Muhammad Ibn Saalih Al-‘Uthaimeen, His explanation of the book *Lumu’at-ul-‘Itiqaad* of Imaam Ibn Qudaamah [pg. 105-110] <<http://www.al-manhaj.com/Page1.cfm?SectID=23>> (accessed 2002).

² “Sound Familiar? Understanding Islamic End-Times beliefs,” Rod Dreher interviews David Cook in the *National Review*, (accessed February 28, 2003, 9:00a.m.).

political, and financial centers of the United States. It is said that since three airplanes they commandeered and propelled as bombs into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, incinerated the former and badly damaged the latter, the “world has changed.” We have changed our foreign policy, legal procedures, and alignments with other nations. People are stunned and confused by rapid change and seek the reasons for it. A former CIA director has spread the idea that we have entered into “World War IV.”³ Sales of a popular series of Christian apocalyptic *Left Behind* novels have soared to over 30 million copies. Counter-terrorism experts say the attacks that killed almost 3,000 non-combatants are unprecedented in their scale and impact in the history of terror.⁴ According to the Western, Gregorian calendar we are beginning a new millennium, but the end of the age according to the Muslim calendar occurred with the Iranian Revolution and the historic signing of the Camp David accords by Yitzhak Shamir of Israel and Anwar Sadat of Egypt in 1979. Both of these events prompted an intensification of expectations of a change in the status quo world for some Muslim groups. It can reasonably be argued that millions of Christians, Muslims, and Jews are reading signs of apocalypse and millennial rule in current events.⁵

The attack on the WTC Twin Towers in New York, the tallest building in Manhattan, was led by an architect from Egypt, Muhammad Atta. In both the bible and the Qur’an, towers are a symbol of prideful distance from God. The Twin Towers were designed by Minoru Yamasaki, a favorite architect of Usamah bin Ladin’s designated enemies, the Saudi royal family, who merged secular and Islamic influences in their constructions. Yamasaki incorporated motifs of Islamic architecture into his buildings. He conceived of the World Trade Center “a mecca, a relief from the narrow streets...of the surrounding Wall Street area.”

Yamaski replicated the plan of Mecca’s courtyard by creating a vast delineated square...capped by two enormous ,perfectly square towers

³ The designation originated with neoconservative scholar Elliott Cohen of George Washington University. *LA Times*, April 16, 2003.

⁴ Bruce Hoffman, David C. Rapoport (insert sources later).

⁵ While a discussion of Jewish messianism is beyond the scope of this paper, the topic is well documented in *End of Days* by Gershom Gorenberg and an overlooked article by Ithamar Gruenwald, “Apocalypticism, Mysticism, Messianism and Political Assassination,” in *Criterion* (journal published by the Divinity School at the University of Chicago), Vol 35, No. 1(Winter 1996)pp. 11-17.

--minarets, really. Yamasaki's courtyard mimicked Mecca's assemblage of holy sites—the Qaa'ba (a cube) containing the sacred stone...and the holy spring—by including several sculptural features, including a fountain, and he anchored the composition in a radial circular pattern, similar to Mecca's....To Bin Ladin, the World Trade Center was probably not only an international landmark, but also a false idol.⁶

It is not unlikely that it was the al-Qaida “martyr,” Mohammad Atta, who was keenly aware of his target's symbolic significance. Given the unique architecture of the Twin Towers, the eradication of the WTC might have been consciously planned as a strike against the cosmic camp of disbelief that ruled the holy land of the two mosques, Saudi Arabia. This was the second attack by al-Qaida on the Trade Center; it survived a bombing in 1993 by a sleeper cell of Egyptian terrorists with ties to bin Ladin. Atta completed the job.

David C. Rapoport called September 11, 2000, “the most destructive day in the long, bloody history of terrorism.”⁷ That history in modern times is characterized by four successive waves of terror beginning with Russian anarchists in the 1880s who committed political assassinations. The second wave consisted of anti-colonial movements, whose success was followed by the rise of a third wave of political terrorism that initiated airplane hijacking. Rapoport assigns bin Ladin's al-Qaida network to an emergent “fourth wave”⁸ of religious terrorism and says that “Islam is at the heart of the wave.”⁹

Some date the advent of religious terror with the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon by Hizb'ullah, a Shiite organization. It was in 1983 that bin Ladin offered to fund a training camp for assassins in the Egyptian desert. In 1987 bin Ladin and his mentor, Abdullah Azzam, gathered Arab recruits together in their first training camp in Afghanistan. It was the nucleus of a transnational underground network of religious terrorists dedicated to armed struggle against the infidel powers, the

⁶ “The Mosque to Commerce, Bin Laden's special complaint with the World Trade Center,” by Laurie Kerr,(accessed: Friday, December 28, 2001, 8:58 a.m. PT) personal email from Patsy Rahn.

⁷ “Modern Terror: The Four Waves,” p. 1.

⁸ The four sequential waves are: the Russian anarchist wave, the anti-colonialist wave, the New Left wave, and finally the religious wave. Each wave lasts about a generation.

⁹ Ibid.

Soviet Union, the United States, Western Europe, Israel, and their client Muslim regimes in the Arab region. The camp was named after the first generation of Muhammad's supporters in Madinah, "Al-Ansar." Two years later, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, a victory bin Ladin attributed to God.

Believing that all of Islam was under cultural, moral, religious, and military threat from the United States and its allies, bin Ladin and Azzam had set up recruitment offices throughout the world to summon young Muslim men to learn techniques of terrorism. In the early 1990s, Afghan factions fought for control of the government and Azzam was killed in a car bombing. Many of the foreign fighters dispersed to fight in Bosnia, Chechnya, and to seed so-called "sleeper cells" in Europe and America. Others returned to their home countries to organize bombings and assassinations of officials, intellectuals, and tourists. Their purpose was to call Muslims back to the religion of Muhammad's followers, the "pious predecessors," and the pristine law of Shari'a as they interpreted it. In Algeria, civil war broke out. In Egypt assassinations of infidels and apostates increased, undermining Egypt's overburdened economy. In Riyadh and Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, members of al-Qaida attacked American military installations in 1994 and 1996, the first attacks by al-Qaida against Americans in the Middle East. But they were preceded by the first "spectacular" strike waged by al-Qaida in America, a massive car bombing that intended to bring down the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. It was planned and executed by a group of Arabs whose spiritual leader, Sheikh 'Umar 'Abd as-Rahman, the head of the Egyptian Islamic Group, migrated to New Jersey in 1990 just as the Egyptian government began a harsh crackdown on terrorists in Egypt. The first World Trade Center bombing, as it became known as after September 11, 2001, killed six civilians, injured around one thousand, and caused a net loss of one billion dollars. Three years earlier, investigators had arrested a follower of Rahman's after he killed the head of the violent Jewish Defense League in New York City. They carried off a trove of papers from his apartment, but did not read them until after the WTC bombing. Among them were references to a "nascent jihad army" and attacks on the "enemies of Islam" by "destroying...their high world buildings." (footnote: "Prosecuting the New York Sheikh," by Andrew McCarthy, *Middle East Quarterly*, March, 1997).

In 1997 the prosecutor of Sheikh Rahman blamed the WTC bombing and three other planned, but intercepted, attacks on New York City targets in 1993 on fundamentalist Islam. He referred to the religious concept of *jihad* as a “bedrock tenet of Islamic doctrine” that is responsible for “Islam’s universalistic demand of political hegemony,” which means that “all the world must adopt the Muslim religion or submit to the authority of Muslim rule.” (Ibid) His view was echoed by certain scholars who discounted any interpretation of *jihad* as a spiritual or moral struggle. (Ibid, quote from Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East*, p. 233) In their view Islamic fundamentalism and violent, armed struggle against the United States are one and the same. They make no distinction among fundamentalist schools of thought or between violent and non-violent fundamentalist groups.

If religious terrorism is the hallmark of a fourth wave of terror beginning in the latter twentieth century, then some believe that “Islam is at the heart of that wave.” (Rapoport)

While it is true that some of the most “spectacular” acts of terror in the past twenty years have been carried out by Islamic groups, “holy terror” is not exclusive to Islam.¹⁰ A prominent counter-example is the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1994, by two disaffected white supremacists, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. The bombing was initially attributed to “Muslim terrorists” by a journalist who has made his career on uncovering Islamic terrorist cells in the United States.

One must not be careless in ascribing religious terror to Islam. The name of the religion comes from the Arabic word for ‘peace’, or ‘submission’ to Allah (SAW). Violent theologies sometimes mutate from non-violent parent religions that justify the status quo. The violent new religion that sets itself in opposition to the status quo also sets itself in opposition to the parent religion that justifies the status quo. Thus, an organization of religious terrorists, such as al-Qaida, seeks to change the religion from which it springs. It usually begins that process by declaring its parent religion to be corrupted by false doctrines and that it is necessary to restore the parent religion to its original state. The upstart religion, or heresy, usually focuses on one or two doctrines that

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it interprets as a mandate from God to commit violence in order to attain a religious goal. The religious goal is usually the collective salvation of the faithful, and heretical group may consider its use of terror as means of achieving the collective salvation of all who respond to their message or call to faith.

But how can a religion of peace, such as Islam or Christianity, become identified with a wave of terror?

Specific historical cases of religion and violence demonstrate that any religion may spin off violent heresies that have been typed as “revolutionary millennial movements” by Catherine Wessinger.¹¹ A revolutionary millennial movement is one where members believe that violence “is the means to become liberated from their persecutors and to set up the righteous government and society.”¹² But Rapoport notes that her definition does not distinguish political from religious revolutionary movements.¹³ The difference, I believe, between political and religious terror is that the religious terrorist group believes it is acting as the hand of a God who wields a sword. Frequently, the group will identify its mission and means in exactly these words. If a terrorist movement believes that God has ordained righteous government and society that can be achieved by wielding a sword against God’s enemies, then it is acting as the hand of God to bring about a millennial kingdom. A millennial kingdom is a community of saints, the saved, or the spiritually elite that is governed by divine laws. Religious terrorist believe that whatever divinity rules the universe has chosen them to cleanse a corrupt society with a divinely-sanctioned violence.

But in what sense can a Muslim movement like al-Qaida be considered millennial, since millennialism is usually associated with Christianity’s myth of the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth?¹⁴ Millennialism is the process by which people band together to seek their collective salvation by creating a new world, a new city, or a new “man” (*anthropos*). In creating the new world they act out a cosmic plan derived from the familiar mythology of their own religion. While the myth is known to all as a

¹¹ Wessinger, Catherine, (ed.); *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*. (Syracuse University Press). 2000.

¹² Ibid, p. 33.

¹³ Personal email, January, 2002.

¹⁴ “A Brief History of Millennialism and Suggestions for a New Paradigm for Use in Critical Incidents” by Jean E. Rosenfeld in Wessinger (ed.), pp. 347-351, op.cit.

symbolic story of hope and justice, only a few people will try to replace the status quo with the new world envisioned in the myth. Various millennial movements share a defining common goal: to replace the status quo world with a mythological reign of peace and justice.

Millennial movements that seek violently to overthrow the status quo are revolutionary. Millennial movements that employ other means are “progressive.” A progressive movement will become revolutionary when God tells it to use violent means to change the status quo world.¹⁵

Islam began as a progressive millennial movement in the year of the *hijra* to Yathrib, 622 (A.D.). There the prophet Muhammad established Madinah, which means “new city,” and governed it according to Allah’s revelations. The first community (*umma*) included Jews and Christians, and Mohammad, like Moses during the Exodus, became their judge. The authentic record of this millennial rule was handed down in the *Sunna*, which expands upon the Qur’an and provides Muslims with a “straight path” of faith and righteous behavior. Modern Islamic revitalization movements seek to cleanse the corrupt status quo by instituting Islamic law. They seek to emulate the pure religion of the millennial rule in Madinah. Most of these “Islamist” or “fundamentalist” movements are progressive. They cleanse their societies by educating youth in their schools of thought or trying to win elections. (Example: Turkey’s new government)

One of the most puritanical of these fundamentalist movements is Salafism. The Salafi seek to unify the Muslim *ummah* by calling people back to the “real Islam” of the *salaf as-saalih*—of Muhammad’s first generation supporters.¹⁶ The Salafi believe that if a Muslim ascribes himself to the pious predecessors, he ascribes himself to infallibility (*‘ismah*).¹⁷ They identify themselves as the one saved sect among the many sects in Islam and their interpretation of Qur’an and Sunna as the true interpretation.

¹⁵ A case in point is recorded by Kerry Noble, a leader in a peaceful group that turned to violence, in *Tabernacle of Hate* (Voyageur Publishing) 1998.

¹⁶ While some religious purifiers define the “pious predecessors” as the generations up to the murder of the fourth caliph, Ali, in 661 by the Kharijite heretics, the Salafi believe that each successive generation from the first, being farther from the Prophet and his practice, were less authentic Muslims.

¹⁷ “Questions on ‘Manhaj’ (Methodology)” from the “Fataawa of Shaykh Al-Albaanee,” <www.theclearpath.com/sunnah/fataawa_al_albaanee/06.php> (accessed 4/12/03), taken from *Al-Manhaj*, May 28, 2002, p. 6/12. Since Islam has no pope, it has no doctrine of infallibility attributed to a current leader. Infallibility rests in the sacred texts themselves and requires right interpretation to be correctly transmitted to the next generation of Muslims. This can present obvious problems.

The Salafi follow the conservative teaching of the Hanbali school and the interpretation of Ibn Taymiyyah and his pupil, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah. They reject the rationalist interpretation of other medieval commentators and the call to political action by modern commentators. Their core teaching is expressed in the Quranic verse,

“This day I have completed your Religion for you, and I have perfected My favor upon you, and I am pleased with Islaam as a Religion for you.” (Surat-ul-Maa’idah: 3)

Which according to their interpretation, means: “So whatever was not (part of) the Religion on that day, is not (part of) the Religion on this day. And the last part of this *Ummah* (nation) will not be rectified, except by that which rectified its first part.”¹⁸ If the religion of the first generation was “complete” and “perfected,” then any subsequent elaboration of theology only weakens the purity of the original faith, according to the Salafi.

The Salafi movement originated in Egypt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Out of Salafism developed both the politically-active Muslim Brotherhood and the violent Egyptian jihadist groups, and al-Qaida—all of which the Salafi regard as deviant sects. The Muslim Brotherhood began in 1928 after the fall of the Ottoman empire in 1924 and the partition of the Arab world by European powers. The Brotherhood began as a populist, anti-colonial movement that helped Gamal Abdul Nasser’s secular party take control of Egypt. Afterwards, Nasser imprisoned hundreds of the Brothers, some of whom formed a revolutionary underground after they were released by Anwar as-Sadat. One of the underground groups assassinated Sadat two years after he made peace with Israel in 1979. The resulting crackdown on the jihadists left them with no place to hide in the Valley of the Nile, and many of them fought in the Afghan war between 1979 and 1989. A jihadist leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri joined with Usamah bin Ladin after the death of Abdullah Azzam to form al-Qaida as a transnational jihadist movement. Thus, al-Qaida’s parent religion was the Salafi school of thought, with which it shares all of its theology, except for the revolutionary mandate to wage violent *jihad*

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 2/12.

now against its enemies.¹⁹ The Salafi believe that the time for revolutionary action has not yet arrived, and that the world can be changed by calling all Muslims to unity under the banner of the Salafist interpretation of the millennial kingdom.

The Salafi ask, “What are the **foundations** by which the Islamic world of today can be set anew?” One of their religious experts answers that “The principal foundation is returning back to Islam” because, Muslims have deviated from the way of the pious predecessors by instead following individual leaders. Al-Qaida means “the **foundation.**” It accepts the teachings of the Salafi, but regards all compatriots who reject the obligation of waging armed struggle against infidels and apostate Muslims as deviant sects. Each group is uncompromising in its conviction that all other Muslims are deviationists who weaken the religion and divide the *ummah*.

There are many reformist, fundamentalist, politically active, and sectarian movements in Islamic world, but the majority of them are not revolutionary millennial movements that exclusively advocate armed struggle to abolish the status quo and establish a mythical kingdom on earth.

Thus, “Islam” may be at the heart of the fourth wave of religious terror, but it is not the Islam of the status quo or even the Islam of the respected clerics, the *ulama*. It is a deviant, heretical movement that developed in Egypt and Afghanistan and has spread to all the inhabited regions of the world today. The network at its peak probably included from 10,000 to 30,000 warriors. It consists of various semi-independent cells that communicate with one another via modern technology and media, as well as human couriers. Operatives are supported by funds from bin Ladin’s personal holdings, as well as contributions from anonymous donors channeled through charitable organizations, mosques, and informal transmission networks. Cells may spend years preparing for terrorist strikes requiring only a few men willing to die as “martyrs” or witnesses to their divine struggle against superior powers. Their terrorism is inspired by religious goals, but it is organized more like the Communist international or the Red Brigades of the political third wave of terror than a religious institution.

¹⁹ Not all leaders of al-Qaida were deviant Salafists, and as the network expanded it drew in members of other purification movements that are similar but not the same, including the Taliban of Afghanistan and Wahhabis from the Arabian peninsula.

Al-Qaida adopted its preferred means of violence from the al-Fatah terrorists who hijacked airplanes and threatened to blow them up with hostages inside to attract the world's attention to the plight of the Palestinians. After the first Palestinian intifada, Hamas, another violent offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, introduced "suicide bombing" into the terrorist lexicon, claiming that while the Israelis had tanks, they had only a human means to deliver death to their enemies. Suicide is proscribed in status quo Islam. Hamas and Al-Qaida have introduced another innovation in their use of the suicide bomber, or *shahid*. One who destroys himself in order to destroy others is promised eternal bliss in heaven and the status of hero on earth. Adopting secular or proscribed modes of violence does not make al-Qaida less religious. Al-Qaida justifies suicide bombing by calling it the highest form of "witness" to the faith. Al Qaida claims that the untutored *shahid* demonstrates greater faith than the most esteemed scholars and that militant jihad is an obligation that abrogates all other religious obligations until the new order is established. As bin Ladin affirms with characteristic, understated humility:

"We only strive to do our duty without being religiously ashamed."²⁰

The idea that al-Qa'ida is empowered by ethics and theology may be repugnant to outsiders, but as David Koresh once said, "Theology is life and death." We ignore violent theologies at our peril.

Much attention has been paid to the definition and status of *jihad* as a religious duty in Islam since al-Qaida *mujahidin* committed suicide by terrorism on September 11, 2001.

Some scholars define *jihad* as 'effort' and distinguish among its various applications in the Qur'an and the Sunna. They point out that fighting in a just cause in defense against aggression is enjoined in the Qur'an, but that the rules set forth forbid killing non-combatants, attacking places of worship, destroying infrastructure, and

²⁰ Allouni, Tayseer and Usamah bin Ladin. "The Unreleased Interview: A Discussion on the New Crusader Wars," October 21, 2001. <<http://www.oureffort2001.com/RESEARCH/TALIBAN/Interview.htm>> Accessed 11/13/2002. On this suppressed videotape, bin Ladin gives an detailed explanation of the theology of his *jihad*, claiming that his enemies are immoral and that the *mujahidin* of his movement are motivated by ethical self-sacrifice.

granting refuge to the enemy who seeks it.²¹ Reuven Firestone explores the roots of *jihad* among Muhammad's supporters in Medina, and posits that their internal conflict over the importance of militant jihad is reflected in the suras from that period. In the modern era, the term has been appropriated both by those who regard it as an obligation to struggle against all temptations to stray from the straight path and those who advocate political violence and terrorism as a means of cleansing apostates who corrupt the religion and infidels who violate Islam's sacred space and spread their immorality to the Muslim world.

In the United States, jihad is routinely mistranslated as 'holy war'. There is a sloppy tendency to identify "holy war" with Islam. Scholar-activists associated with the Middle East Forum and the Project for the New American Century have privileged the view of Bernard Lewis that Islam is in decline and the thesis of Samuel Huntington that Islam and the West are headed for a "clash of civilizations." (Huntington confuses religion with complex cultural systems.) Their views of Islam as a bellicose religion are magnified in the context of a national policy that seeks to eradicate the al-Qaida network and to wage "preemptive war" against "rogue" states that are accused of facilitating terrorism. One RAND analyst, Laurent Murawiec recommended to a Pentagon advisory board that the United States overthrow the Saudi Arabian government because its Wahhabi religion was allegedly the religion of bin Ladin.

Wahhabism was an eighteenth-century reform movement that attached itself to the warriors of the House of Saud to wrest control of Mecca and Madinah and the Arabian peninsula from the Ottoman Turks. It is theologically similar to Salafism, but historically distinct. Some Saudi clerics criticize bin Ladin's theological justification for the killing of civilians, other Muslims, and for suicide operations, but they call for overthrowing the Saudi government because it has strayed from Wahhabi practice. Three Saudi clerics reported that they were imprisoned by the government for calling for "more adherence to Wahhabi teachings" after the first Gulf War. (footnote: It is the Saudi opposition, not the Saudi government, that praises militant *jihad* in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, and the Sudan.) Those like Murawiec who carelessly identify the

²¹ "Quran and Religious Violence," a paper delivered at the UCLA Center for the Study of Religion colloquium on Dec. 5, 2001.

Saudi government's religion with al-Qaida find themselves in unintended agreement with opposition clerics who advocate the overthrow of the Saudi regime.

The earliest statement of bin Ladin's religion is found in "The Neglected Duty," a pamphlet left behind at the site of Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981. The author argues that now is the time to take up the sword of militant *jihad* against the immorality and corruption of fellow Muslims, who have been weakened by Western influences. (This theory was first propounded by Sayyid Qutb, who was executed in 1966.) It wasn't until the Egyptian jihad movements were being successfully suppressed in 1996 and 1998, that al-Qaida released two documents calling for militant *jihad* now against the non-Muslim powers who were corrupting Islam in Muslim countries. (See al-Qaida's documents: "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places [Saudi Arabia]"; "The Islamic Front of Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders.")

All three documents assert the core doctrine that militant *jihad* is an individual obligation (*fard ayn*) for all true Muslims now, because Islam is under attack by infidel powers and the apostate rulers of Muslim states. Faraj and bin Ladin advocated "Jihad of the Sword" and "Jihad in the Path of Allah. Both Faraj and bin Ladin liken the fall of the Baghdad Caliphate to the Mongol invaders in 1258 to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and to the establishment of U.S. military bases on the Arabian peninsula. Their call (*da'wah*) to faith and the sword is inspired by the medieval writings of Ibn Taymiyyah, who developed his doctrine of defensive, militant *jihad* against Muslim apostates during the time of the Mongol invasion. Faraj and bin Ladin center their theology of "call and combat" on Sura 9 (*al-Tawbah* 'Repentance'), Ayah 5, the Verse of the Sword.

"Then when the sacred months²² have slipped away, slay the polytheists [or pagans] wherever ye find them, seize them, beset them, lie in ambush for them everywhere."²³

²² In the Islamic lunar calendar of twelve months, four are "sacred": Shawwal, Dhul-Qu'adah, Dhul-Hajjah, and Muharram. These months do not correspond to months in our solar calendar, but "migrate" across them each solar year.

²³Faraj in Jansen, op.cit., p. 195.

According to Egyptian jihadists, the “polytheists” were the foreign tourists, secular intellectuals, and Western powers, whose influence on Egypt threatened the purity of the religion of their Islamic forebears, who were the only true Muslims. Both the Faraj tractate and the al-Qaida documents use accepted rules of textual exegesis to prove their case to a sophisticated Muslim audience. The five authors²⁴ of the 1998 al-Qa’ida Fatwa are conversant with traditional methods of commentary. Their methodology (*manhaj*) gives their message persuasive power and aids in the recruitment of middle class, educated young Muslim men who would ordinarily form the backbone of a vibrant, conventional status quo society.

Scholars of Islam praise these documents for their “coherence” and their force of logic.²⁵ Bernard Lewis calls al-Qaida’s 1998 Declaration of War “a magnificent piece of eloquent, at times even poetic Arabic prose.”²⁶ Bin Ladin (or al-Zawahiri) communicates to his Muslim audience through rhetoric, poetry, allusions, and parables that they understand. Bin Ladin compares his jihad against the Soviet Union and the United States with historic battles of Islamic heroes against the “Romans” and the “Persians.”²⁷ His letters, interviews, and tapes are culturally literate works intended for a Muslim audience of potential recruits. Clothed in conventional methodology and story, the jihadist argument, whether it is expounded by Faraj, Abdullah Azzam or bin Ladin, appears more compelling and less deviant than it actually is. Bin Ladin asserts a higher claim to authority than that of the scholars because the warrior’s knowledge is imparted by the “light of faith.”²⁸

²⁴ Usamah bin Ladin of al-Qa’ida, Ayman al-Zawahiri of Gamaa’ah al-Islamiyyah (Egypt) and al-Qa’ida, Abu-Yasir Rifa’i Ahmad Taha of Gamaa’ah al-Islamiyyah (Egypt), Shaykh Mir Hamzah of Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan, and Fazlul Rahman of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh.

²⁵ *The Necessary Duty: The Creed of Sadat’s Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East*. 1986. (New York: Macmillan Company), p. xvii.

²⁶ *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1998), forwarded to me by John R. Hall.

²⁷ Isma’il, Jamal and Usamah bin Ladin, “Interview with Usamah Bin-Ladin,” (aired June 10, 1999). <www.terrorism.com/terrorism/binladintranscript.html> p. 3/12.

²⁸ See the parable of the boy, the magician, and the monk in bin Ladin’s statement of Dec. 27, 2001, carried on on Al-Jazirah satellite channel TV’s “First War of the Century” program (n.d.). See website of International Association of Counterterrorism and Security Professionals and link to FBIS documents.

“In the prophet’s tradition, a boy with little knowledge used to shuttle between a magician and a monk. When an animal once blocked a road to people, the boy said he would now know who was better, the monk or the magician. Given his little knowledge, the boy was unable to decide who was better, which would have given him peace of mind. He asked God to show him who was better. If the monk was dearer

My intention is not to praise terrorist propaganda, but to point out that bin Ladin's religion has a rare power to attract the most promising members of a young generation away from more progressive ways of changing the status quo.²⁹ Bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri are themselves sons of prominent families in their respective Arab societies, who might have become conventional leaders under different circumstances.

In a paper presented last year I identified bin Ladin as a *type* of messiah.³⁰ A cross-cultural definition of a messiah is one who bears a message of salvation and liberation to a community that has despaired of both. He inaugurates a new era of justice, redress of grievances, peace, and prosperity. He can be priest, warrior, prophet, child, or sage, but he symbolizes the coming of a new world. A messiah claims his message is truth and it is received as God's word by his followers. It is in this *generic* sense that I classify bin Ladin as a messiah. I don't believe if bin Ladin were killed, his followers would anticipate his resurrection or concoct a new myth that he was sequestered, not dead. Nor would I identify him with the Sunni or Shi'ite savior figures--Jesus, *al-Mahdi*, or a hidden *Imam*. In Jihadism there may be *many* messianic leaders. The theory of leadership expounded by Faraj in "The Necessary Duty" makes it clear that jihadists believe that when a commander, or amir, is lost, then another amir will naturally arise from the ranks of the members.³¹ Thus, if bin Ladin disappears, another amir will emerge and fill his shoes. One cannot cut off the head, so to speak, and decapitate the organization. Leadership is fluid.

A related feature of al-Qa'ida is the fluidity of the transnational network itself. Clark L. Staten speaks of the "devolution" of terrorist groups and Bruce Hoffman calls al-Qa'ida "particularly dangerous...because it is a remarkably adaptive and nimble

to God, then he would kill this animal. The boy then took a stone and killed the animal with it. The monk came to the boy and told him: My son, you are today better than me. Despite the monk's knowledge and the boy's ignorance, God filled the heart of this boy with the light of faith. The boy then started to sacrifice for the sake of God. The youth of Islam expect their scholars to say such words. They expect them to tell those who carried their heads on their shoulders for the sake of God the words that the scholar told that boy. They expect them to say: You are now better than us. This is the truth. In the tradition of the prophet, may God's peace be upon him, people differ from one another based on the extent of their faith in God. It is not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the use of it."

²⁹ Rosenfeld, Jean E., "Violence," Encyclopedia of Religion and American Cultures (New York: Macmillan Company) 2003 (forthcoming).

³⁰ "The Religion of bin Ladin: Terror As the Hand of God." A paper presented at the forum of the UCLA Center for the Study of Religion, November, 2001.

³¹ Faraj in Janson, Op. cit., p. 24. "...there will always be a leader available since in a given group one of its members is always the best one..."

organization” with no “set modus operandi nor any single identifiable footprint.”³² However, the organization favored by al-Qa’ida conforms to a known myth selected and elaborated by Salafi fundamentalists. The Jihadist interpretation of the myth is given in a small commentary found on an jihadi website.³³ It is based on a saying of Muhammad:

“Indeed before you, from the people of the book, they were divided into 72 sects, and ... this Ummah will divide into 73 sects. 72 in the Hellfire and one in the Paradise, and that is al-Jamaa’ah (the Group)”³⁴

The commentary describes this sect as a “small group of pious people in a large group of evil people.”³⁵ It is not from any particular branch of Islam, Sunni, Sufi, Shiite, or from any particular country or region. Like al-Qa’ida it is both trans-sectarian and transnational. How then can this sect, called “the saved sect,” “the victorious sect,” “the Group” (*al-Jamaa’ah*) and “the Strangers,” know itself to be the only one among seventy three that will attain Paradise? Two clues are given:

The text says that “the saved and victorious sect” should follow the way of the Prophet and his Companions, the “first generation” of Muslims, “in belief and action, in morals and in manners, outwardly and inwardly.” Their exemplary faith and deeds constitute the first criterion.

The second criterion is that “the ‘Jamaa’ah’ is ‘what is in accordance with the truth, even if you were to be alone!’” More who hear their message may disobey than obey them.³⁶ Thus, the exemplary ones may encounter massive resistance. Like al-Qa’ida they are relatively few, intransigently certain they alone follow the true path, and may be intensely reviled and persecuted.

The purpose of the saved sect is to “establish the order of Allah.”³⁷ In another narration of the Prophet, the saved sect--like the Jihadists--is called the “Mujaahidin” (“those who fight for the truth”)

³² Hoffman, op. cit. p. 7.

³³ “Who are the Ghurabaa’—The Strangers?” <www.azzam.com>

³⁴ “Who are the Ghurabaa—The Strangers?” <azzam.com>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

The saved sect will not cease to exist or be able to be harmed by those who forsake them until the end of the world. According to the Prophet, they will never cease fighting “upon the truth, over-powering” until “the resurrection,” or, alternatively, “the hour is established.”³⁸ They have a critical role to play when religion is threatened.

The story of the saved sect teaches that although the Group is condemned by the majority it will continue “establishing the order of Allah and making jiidah in His path regardless of what people say.”³⁹ When the Group disappears, the unity (*tawhid*) of Allah will disappear from the earth and “that is the moment when every soul will be brought to its account. In other words, the duty of the saved and victorious sect is to prevail with words and the sword in defense of the truth in establishing a new order of Allah. Its disappearance from earth coincides with the hour of judgment and its admission to Paradise. According to this myth, Jihadism can never be defeated. It will prevail on earth if it defeats evildoers and if evildoers succeed in eradicating it, Allah will punish the adversaries and reward the faithful at the hour of its eradication. (One can only hope that al-Qa’ida does not plan some act that will hasten the end of the world, if it appears that it is failing to achieve Allah’s purpose, because its mission has apocalyptic overtones.)⁴⁰

The myth of the saved sect is both millennial and apocalyptic. It accounts for the way in which al-Qa’ida is diffusely structured and conceives of its origin, religious superiority, call to arms, and ultimate goal of transformation of the social world. It is a hidden elite of deed among the world of Islam. The myth accounts for any opposition, persecution, or stigmatization Jihadism may encounter in the performance of its necessary duty. It explains why Jihadists wish to rid the *ummah* of foreign pollutions. And it contains a millennial paradox unseen in other religions: the mujahidin will wage jiidah in the Path of Allah to unite all Muslims under the banner of the ideal Caliphate, but there is no anticipated reign of peace and justice. When fighting ends, so will time and history. Until then, the perpetual goals are recruitment and war.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 2.

³⁹ Ibid, p .3.

⁴⁰ See Catherine Wessinger’s category of “fragile millennial groups” in *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence, Historical Cases*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press) 2000, pp. 3-39.

Most important, the myth provides a morally justifiable role for the killer as the agent of salvation and for a campaign of terror and destruction as the highest duty of the faithful. What concerns it is no less than what concerns God. All else is secondary. Ibn Taymiyyah, Faraj and bin Ladin argue that Jihad in the Path of Allah is the most important “pillar” of Islam and takes precedence over the other five obligatory religious duties of every Muslim, *when special conditions obtain and religion is in a state of crisis*.

In comparative terms, the myth of the saved sect is analogous to the myth of the Phineas priests in violent Jewish and Christian sects. It is a clandestine continuation of the mission of the most revered ancestors, the *salafi*, who were a “first generation” of Companions of the Prophet and his “rightly-guided” successors.⁴¹ Like the myth of the hidden Imam in Shi’a Islam, the belief in a ruler or *a messianic elite* that holds to the truth throughout ages of unbelief and corruption, transmits hope to those who are troubled by theodicy. In a time of decline, oppression, or injustice, such messianic myths make sense of what Mircea Eliade called the “terror of history.” Likewise, the violent Christian Identity movement sees itself as warriors against the cardinal sin of race-mixing, or the violent anti-abortionist justifies his mandate to kill because he is a soldier in the “Army of God.” In all cases, the religious warrior believes he is striking out *defensively* against a greater outrage than the one he perpetrates. This is not logical, but it is highly compelling to those who resonate with its *mytho-logic*.

* * *

The ultimate concern of a religious congregation is that which orients it to the reality beyond the visible world. Members profess to live by and even to die for their ultimate concern. The ultimate concern of the *mujahidin*, is in bin Ladin's words, "that this nation ... unites... under the Words of the Book of Allah ...or his Prophet... and ... the establishment of the righteous *Khilafah* [the Caliphate] of the nation...[which] has been prophesied by our Prophet... that the righteous *Khilafah* will return with the permission of Allah...and the nation is asked to unite itself [against] this⁴² Crusader’s

⁴¹ Actually, the Salaf (ancestors) include both the Emigrants (*al-muhadijun*) from Mecca and the Supporters (*al-Ansar*) from Medinah who comprised the Companions of Muhammad and the first four “Rightly-Guided” Caliphs up to the assassination of Ali in 661AD.

⁴² The meaning here would favor the use of the words, “against the Crusader’s campaign.

campaign, the strongest, most powerful, and most ferocious....Crusaders' campaign to fall on the Islamic nation... since the dawn of Islamic history. There has ... never been a campaign like this one before. So...the world today is split in two parts."⁴³

Al-Qa'ida's *mujahidin* assume the role of the righteous ancestors, (*salafiyyun*) until the Caliphate returns. Until then the world is split into good and evil parts. By inflating the strength and ferociousness of the "Crusader" adversary, bin Ladin elevates the "campaign" against the West to the level of a cosmic war.⁴⁴

The spectacular level of violence achieved in the 9/11 attacks reflects the apocalyptic grandiosity of al-Qa'ida's ultimate concern. When bin Ladin was asked to give his analysis of the 9/11 attacks, he said, "The immense materialistic towers were destroyed..."⁴⁵ Towers can be symbols of unbelief and infidelity to the one God. It is the duty of the *mujahidin* to defend the religion against unbelief. Attacking the towers is an announcement to all Muslims that a righteous few are taking up the sword as the hand of Allah to defeat unbelief.

* * *

Bin Ladin's religion is a type of Salafi fundamentalism, similar to, but not the same as the puritanical Wahhabi sect of his home country, Saudi Arabia. Salafis consider themselves to be the saved sect. But not all Salafis are Jihadists. Quentin Wiktorowicz distinguishes between "reformist Salafis" who call the *ummah* to return to the purity of the first generation and Jihadist Salafis who call the *ummah* to arms. He cautions that our strategies to counter Jihadi terrorism could radicalize the reformist Salafi community and persuade their youth to answer the Jihadist call.

"If the U.S. is to avoid radicalizing the Salafis and creating a legion of new supporters for Bin Ladin, it must **understand** the ideology and dynamics of the movement and how Salafis might respond to any U.S. action....Security policies should therefore evaluate the

⁴³ "Interview," op.cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 5/15.

impact of policies on the balance between violent and non-violent elements within the Salafi community to avoid a ‘jihadization’ of the movement” (bold typeface added).⁴⁶

Wiktorowicz’s nuanced distinction between terrorists and puritans within the Salafi fundamentalist movement is evidence-based. In 1992, after the Algerian government refused to allow an elected fundamentalist party to assume power, the violent Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a collection of Salafi groups, massacred Muslim civilians, claiming that anyone who “tacitly” supported the government was conducting an “offensive” against Islam.⁴⁷ As has happened among far right groups preaching violence in the United States, the GIA’s extreme stance led to internal disagreement, splintering, and its eventual demise. Even bin Ladin distanced himself from the GIA. Some GIA soldiers put down their arms after listening to their revered clerics denounce the GIA on the radio. Thus, the murderous campaign of GIA terrorists was defeated from within by reformist fundamentalists.⁴⁸

The lesson is that the violent jihad promulgated by al-Qa’ida is susceptible to opposition within Islam, *even when that opposition is vociferously hostile to Western influence and policies*. We do not have to change the “hearts and minds” of Islamic fundamentalists to defeat terrorism; the ultimate defeat of Jihadism may result from the esoteric critique over the use of violence in defense of Islam and when and where it is permissible. This discourse is ongoing.

Although reformist and “extremist” Salafis may share a mission to purify religion, they differ on the means and timing. Faraj criticized the reformists for meeting the Jihadist call to arms with the argument that more time for preparation was needed to return the people to religion. The reformists criticize the Jihadists inciting mischief and mayhem (*fitnah*) in a bid for power.

Ideally, the internal critique of extremism within Salafi ranks will discourage young men from joining the jihad against the West and the Jews. Hopefully, al-Qa’ida

⁴⁶ Wiktorowicz, Quentin. “The New Global Threat.” (see Charles Cameron email with URL and journal cite), December, 2001, p. 2/15.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 8/15.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.12/15.

will be branded by reformists as a deviant sect like the seventh-century Kharijites by their reformist brethren.

Analogically, the Salafi movement is to Islam as Christian Identity is to American Protestantism. What sets Jihadist Salafis apart from Identity activists is al-Qa'ida's global scale of violence and its outsized impact.⁴⁹

Religious terrorism is a phenomenon today in all three religions of the Book.⁵⁰ Typically, religious terrorists select one benign doctrine from their parent religion and reinterpret it to legitimate terrorism. Because their program is extreme relative to their entire religious tradition, such groups often have trouble generating enough new recruits. Therefore, exploitation of the media to spread the message is critical to achieving their goals. Use of abnormal violence to harass the enemy serves the dual purpose of polarizing moderates in the target population and creating the cosmic dualism the terrorist asserts as a cause for holy war and of provoking a militant response that "proves" the need to retaliate in reciprocal fashion.

Terrorism is employed to divide the world into good and evil camps, gain sympathy for the defenders of the good, and attract recruits for the jihad against the evildoers.

The survival of the organization and the continuation of the mission depend on perpetuating this balance of terror.⁵¹ The most effective counter-terrorism strategy would devise various ways and means of interdicting it. Bruce Hoffman of RAND favors a multi-axial counter-terrorism strategy, "designed,

⁴⁹ See David C. Rapoport, op.cit.; Kerry Noble, *Tabernacle of Hate*, Jean E. Rosenfeld, op.cit.

⁵⁰ The assassination of Anwar Sadat was mirrored by the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the hands of a zealous Jewish messianist, Yigal Amir on Nov. 4, 1999.⁵⁰ When asked if he acted alone, Amir replied, "It was God." (CNN World News Online, Nov. 7, 1999, "Rabin's alleged killer appears in court.") As Armstrong pointed out fundamentalism is a rapidly growing religious phenomenon in Christianity and Judaism, as well as Islam. Like other non-hierarchical millennial movements, fundamentalism spins off radical edge groups that justify violence as God's mandate.

⁵¹ Bin Ladin uses the phrase "balance of terror" in his unpublished interview with Allouni (see above). He also expresses an implicit notion of reciprocal violence that one can discern in several of his communications. I believe this "reciprocity" is rooted in the culture of the Ancient Near East, which gave us the Code of Hammurabi and the *lex talionis* ('eye for an eye' concept of justice and redress of grievances).

"...to utilize the full range of measures...psychological as well as physical, diplomatic as well as military, economic as well as moral....For us to succeed against terrorism, our efforts must be as tireless, **innovative**, and dynamic as our opponents."⁵²

An innovative counter-terrorism policy would identify and exploit the movement's internal constraints. Rapoport has observed that groups that wage "holy terror" must observe divine rules that may lead them to act in; "manifestly self-destructive ways."⁵³

Nearly all religious terrorists are "deontological"; they perform their deeds for God and in accordance with their conception of God's law. Whatever ensues is God's will. Even if they are defeated, persecuted, sacrifice themselves, are captured, interrogated, tried, imprisoned, or executed, they *must* continue their jihad of word and sword. In contrast, ordinary armies operate according to the principle of "consequentialism"; decisions are taken after a cost/benefit analysis is performed. Consequentialism is a self-preserving, rational modus operandi, while deontology leads to self-exploitation. So it is that the battle between Jihadists and nation-states is particularly asymmetrical in the unique sense that each side makes decisions according to very different rules. If Jihadism follows the historical pattern of deontological, violent, millennial movements, given time and persistent opposition, it may self-destruct.⁵⁴

* * *

Time and historical example actually favor the West in this asymmetrical struggle. Over time most sanguinary religions self-destruct or become routinized. When time is too short and the stakes are too high, however, interventions other than military campaigns are possible. When revolutionary religious movements armed with convincing proofs of their righteousness are brutally suppressed, they tend to replicate

⁵² Op. cit.

⁵³ Rapoport, David C. "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *The American Political Science Review*, 1984, p. 94.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of deontology and consequentialism, see Garrett O'Boyle, "Theories of Justification and Political Violence: Examples from Four Groups." *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 2002, pp. 23-46. This type of asymmetry between opponents may also contribute to a recalcitrant "cycle of violence" that resists rational negotiation techniques and conflict resolution. Consider the current Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

and change to accommodate to intense persecution. Even if all the potential amirs and members of Jihadism were captured or killed, their message would remain to cultivate future Jihadists. Only when their grievances are addressed in a manner that eradicates the “soil” in which terrorism grows, will the threat truly disappear.

Ideas cannot be killed by tanks. They sprout up from the blood of the self-designated martyrs, as the dragon’s teeth of the darkness decried in the Qur’an and by reformist Muslims. The greater the political success of reformist fundamentalists in their respective countries, the greater the likelihood that they will repudiate terrorism and those who justify it as a religious obligation. The political repression of reformist movements in Egypt and Algeria may have led to the expatriation of jihad to Israel, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, and the United States, to name only the most significant cases.

The victory of a fundamentalist party in Turkey may instruct us about democratization, Islamic-style. Ideas must ultimately be fought with ideas. Allowing open discourse to flourish in Iran, Egypt, Sudan, and in other nations is a precondition for eliminating the terrorist edge of the massive fundamentalist tide of revitalization among *dar al-Din*, the world of Islam.

(7137 words)

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