

The Soil of Arab Terrorism

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Foreword

This paper presents an overview of the historical, social, religious and economic factors of anti-Western terrorism by Arab Muslims. The terrorism committed against Israel by groups such as Hamas and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade is thus excluded from this purview. While their religious extremism is of practically one cloth as that of al Qaeda (especially Hamas), they do not attack targets outside Israel.

Israel is, of course, a Western nation, but its history vis-a-vis the Arabs is unique and very short. The violence committed outside the Middle East against American or other Western nations is not directly related to the conflict with Israel. Osama bin Laden did not champion the Palestinians, for example, until after Sept. 11, 2001, and then only tepidly. His brief, verbal support of the Palestinians was immediately renounced by Yasir Arafat.

By “Western” I mean Europe and what many political scientists call the Anglosphere:¹ nations that trace their legal and cultural history back to England. The Anglosphere’s major states are the United States, the United Kingdom (of course), Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There are other nations that are seeing a rise of Islamic terrorism, such as India, the Philippines and Indonesia, but at the root of the groups committing those acts lies Arab-Muslim inspiration, training and funding.

My thesis is that contemporary anti-Western terrorism, shaped almost entirely by Arab Muslims even if not being committed exclusively by them, has grown from soil hundreds of years in the tilling, but is specifically nourished by certain factors that developed only in the last fifty years or so.

Why do they attack us?

In the aftermath of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, a number of Americans, shocked that we would be so suddenly and brutally attacked, asked, “Why do they hate us?” It seemed to me 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 is a cultural and economic imperialist power that was at best

¹James C. Bennett, “An Anglosphere Primer.” One of the key points in the still-developing theory of the Anglosphere is that its nations “have not only formed a distinct branch of Western civilization . . . they are now becoming a distinct civilization in their own right [that is] Western in origin but no longer entirely Western in composition and nature.” http://www.travelbrochuregraphics.com/extra/anglosphere_primer.htm

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 has repeatedly characterized the United States as the world’s major terrorist state. Those statements are representative of the verbal vitriol that American and western European figures have hurled at America to “explain” the attacks.

It took a long time, months at least, for non-superficial explanations to appear in the mainstream media. Why so long? Britt 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.”²

With our own citizens and other Westerners saying such things, and finding an amplifier in the media, then 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,” 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.” . . . Al Gore argued that the anger that underlies terrorism in the Islamic world stems from “the continued failure to thrive, as rates of economic growth stagnate, while the cohort of unemployed young men under 20 continues to increase.”³

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 the workers and applied it to the worldwide economy. America, a capitalist nation, automatically makes the rest of the world poorer and more miserable. About 20 years later, Immanuel Wallerstein wrote an elaborate intellectual

²Address at Hillsdale College, April 28, 2003. <http://www.hillsdale.edu/newimprimis/default.htm>

³Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Mlecková, “Seeking the Roots of Terrorism,” <http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39b01001.htm>

reinforcement of Baran's thesis, and their revisions of Marxist theory really define Marxism today.⁴

That is a topic for another day, though. Even dyed-in-the-wool capitalists have to admit that the massacre of more than 3,000 people in one violent morning certainly indicates anger at us at best, and hatred of America is not too strong a description of what drove nineteen Arab terrorists to their deeds.

In June 2003, 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, published an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* called, "Seeking the Roots of Terrorism." They 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."⁵

So the real question is why does their own political repression lead them to attack us?

By "them" I mean specifically the Arab Muslims who committed anti-American terrorism of Sept. 11, 2001, and other dates before and since. More generally, I mean the millions of Arabs who harbor strong feelings of resentment or anger at the West generally and the United States specifically.

The president has said from the beginning that our war is not against Islam itself, but against those who wage war against us or support them. Americans tend to have a very incomplete view of Islam, practically equating it with the Arab lands.

But Arab Islam is a clear numerical minority in the world. There are tens of millions more Muslims in Indonesia than in all the Arab lands combined. The hundreds of millions of non-Arab Muslims 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 the lands east and north of there, 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. And it was among the Arabs that radicalized Islamic revivalist movement

⁴Lee Harris, "The Intellectual Origins Of America-Bashing." <http://www.policyreview.org/dec02/harris.html>

⁵<http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39b01001.htm>

began, and it was from them that it has spread to other Muslim areas.

A time line of East-West conflict

The roots of today's conflict predate America. It was fashionable for awhile after Sept. 11's infamy to blame the East's hatred of the West on the Crusades, the last of which occurred almost 750 years ago. But this is really a silly notion.⁶ For one, the Crusades ended in the defeat of the Crusaders; they were an Arab victory.⁷ Also, the Crusades were almost the only offensive action Europe was able to mount against the East until relatively recent times and they penetrated only a short distance into Arab lands.

In contrast, the Muslim Arab armies had stormed into Europe from the east and the southwest. Spain fell under Arab domination in 713 and was not fully freed until 1492. Within only 81 years after the death of Mohammed, Islam came to dominate land masses from the Arabian Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean. A few years later an Arab army under Abd er Rahman marched toward Paris; it was defeated near Tours by Charles Martel in 732.

By the 10th 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."⁸

Islam under the aegis of the 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. The Crusades had no significant effect on the mainstream of conflicts between East and West. For hundreds of years, including the entire time of the Crusades, Islamic civilization was the historical pinnacle of world history in almost every category and was far more religiously tolerant than Christendom, especially for

⁶I would add that the idea of the Crusades causing today's Arab anger at the West is very new even among the Arabs who claim it. It is an excuse, not a cause, and it is now used by Arabs mainly to cement their own feelings of victimization, and also because so many in the West are willing to believe it.

⁷But not only an Arab victory, as substantial numbers of Muslims opposing the Crusaders were from non-Arab, Muslim lands to the east. Saladin, the famous enemy of Richard the Lionheart, was from present-day Kurdish lands.

⁸<http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/santiago/text.html>

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.

Yet by the end of the 17th century, the worm had turned. After the Ottomans' defeat at Vienna in 1683, Islam began a retreat that has not yet ended, a retreat encompassing not only the military realm, but the commercial, political and social. These retreats comprise the soil from which has grown contemporary Arab anti-West emotions and terrorism. Most importantly, the retreat has been religious as well, and this is the seed that grows in the soil.

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 320 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."⁹

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 concepts of nationhood, citizenship and patriotism, which were never native to the near-eastern Muslims. Even today they have never sunk in very far. The Arab culture is oriented around the tribe and the clan, loyalty to which still defines the second level of how Arab societies are organized today. (The first level is Islam.) Even so highly westernized an Arab leader as Egypt's

⁹Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong*. Perennial press, 2002

Abdul Gamel Nasser could not succeed in making pan-Arabic nationalism work, and the concept died almost along with him. During the Gulf War I read a State Department message summarizing what a very senior Egyptian government official had said to the American ambassador. 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.

Second 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 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.”¹⁰

There are many points of contention and conflict between Arab Islam and the West, but the chief religious contention is not really between Islamic Arabs and Christian or Jewish Westerners, but between Islamic Arabs and *scientific-materialist* Westerners.

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. However, the pace and kinds of changes that we adapt to (with greater or lesser difficulty, to be sure) are exactly the changes that fundamentalist Arab Muslims correctly believe would destroy basic structures of their society which they believe are the divinely-commanded.

¹⁰<http://www.ifew.com/insight/14038rch/haruny.htm>

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

The threat from the West

The political and social westernization of Arab lands, coupled with the heresy of scientific truth, are the water and fertilizer of modern Arab terrorism. What we call Islamic fundamentalism – an inapt term, but we’ll make it do – is a defensive reaction to those influences, and al Qaeda’s terrorism is the extreme demonstration thereof. For by

historical standards, the Arab elites have become very westernized, indeed, mainly along British and French models, who had conquered Arab lands beginning in the late 1700s.

Canadian writer David Warren grew up in Pakistan, not an Arab state but an Islamic one. He wrote¹¹ that in recent decades the leadership of Pakistan and the Arab countries were “quite well acquainted with the broad cosmopolitan world of modernity,”¹² and had been educated in European universities. “And while they remained Muslim, at least nominally, they were also secularized [and]

Related to the scientific materialism of Western society is its secularism, the rejection of religion in the affairs of law and state policy.

As of this writing (June 2003) the American policy vis-a-vis religion in Iraq seems badly flawed because it emphasizes secularism over religion, says Professor Amitai Etzioni of The George Washington University. America is ignoring religion in its plans to transition Iraq into a civil society. But the 13 goals announced by the American administration there “all speak only to secular issues,” he says.

Whether deliberately or unwittingly, they reflect the concept of the “end of history” - that all ideologies are on their last legs as the world embraces the American version of democracy, human rights and the free market.

This idea, in turn, is an extension of the Enlightenment conceit that modernity is based on rational thinking. Irrational religion, then, belongs to history, and secularism - reason and science - will govern the future.

This apparent dismissal of religion as importantly formative in the life of a religious people may serve to demonstrate to the Iraqis that we dismiss their religion as not merely inconsequential to the shape of the country to come, but actually as a danger.

Amitai Etzioni, “Mosque and State Will Mix.”

http://www.omaha.com/index.php?u_np=0&u_pg=609&u_sid=774193

¹¹“Wrestling With Islam,” <http://www.davidwarrenonline.com/Miscell/index02.shtml>

¹²“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, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A28807-2003Jun24.html>)

tended, unconsciously or even consciously, to look upon their own religious inheritance as backward, inferior, incapable of competing.”

The Arabs generally began to reclaim autonomy only in the early 1900s. However, they began to adopt European political models at exactly the wrong time: when European socialism was first burgeoning but before its inherent weaknesses became evident. Hence, says Warren, the 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.”

But political-economic socialism requires a coherent national order. They attempted to make Western-style nations of peoples whose predominant social structure was ancient nomadic Bedouinism. Their socialist and nationalist plans 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.”

The self-immiserization of the Arabs

It is now evident that it was not the West that has 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.¹³

¹³However, the modern West treated Arab lands as backward places to be conquered (The French and British from 1798-1948) and/or as holding resources to be gained through commercial exploitation (America and France from the 1930s until now). In fact, Arab “countries” are 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 as a bulwark against potential Soviet expansionism toward the oil fields of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, a not unreasonable fear, but one that slewed our relationship with the region in utilitarian ways, which many Arabs saw as another form of colonialism. One of the reasons the Islamic Revolution in Iran (which is not Arabic) and all the anti-Americanism it entailed such had wide support of the people in 1979 was that Shah Pahlavi, whose secret police were hated bitterly, was seen by them as an American puppet, with justification.

Today, however, the great majority of Iranians today are too young to remember pre-Islamic days and it is the harsh, oppressive rule of the ayatollahs that is being rejected by the people. 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*

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 seizes or gains power in order to garner wealth. This is exactly the model Saddam Hussein followed, 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.

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,¹⁴ 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 we might expect, given the enormous revenues oil has garnered. There has been some trickle-down effect, but the vast majority of oil dollars have stuck to the fingers of the ruling classes. For that reason, some Arab writers have called their oil, "golden manacles." Oil's effect has been to depress severely every other economic activity in the Arab lands. 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 many 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.

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. 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 wealth was increasingly concentrated, mainly through commerce, in the hands of those who had no inherited political position. But in the Arab countries,

Times, June 16, 2003: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/16/international/middleeast/16IRAN.html?th>) In many ways, this statement defines the frustration felt by masses of Arabs with their own governments.

¹⁴Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*. Hatherleigh Press, 2002.

there are no economic centers to challenge the ruling despots because the despots *are* the economic centers.

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 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, explains¹⁵ that this generation was the first mostly literate one as well. They could read and decipher religious texts – and significantly, Islamist propaganda that 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 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 opened for the first time among the Arab masses. The *overall* effect of Westernization has been to leave the Arab peoples 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 to one another, they see themselves as getting the short end of the stick.¹⁶

¹⁵*The Trail of Political Islam*, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-5-57-421.jsp>

¹⁶Western capitalism and politics and human politico-religious freedom are all joined at the hip. This fact is, thank goodness, helping guide American policy in reconstructing Iraq. On June 20, 2003, the chief civilian administrator in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer, wrote in the Wall Street Journal, “Higher living standards – and political freedom – cannot emerge if economic freedom is denied. And so rebuilding the Iraqi economy based on free market principles is central to our efforts.” <http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=110003654>

The religious reaction

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 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 them and was apostate to Islam. By rejecting Westernism and practicing strict Islam, their societies would recover its authenticity and pure Islam would be recovered.

At first, their enemies were other Arabs – namely, the political classes who had tried to institute westernization in the first place. The first significant group of Islamists, as they have come to be called, 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 20 years the Brotherhood's ideology came to encompass religion, education and politics. It became terrorist inside Egypt not long after 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 (Islamic law). The brotherhood attempted to assassinate Nasser four times and four of its members assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981.

The Brotherhood's slogan is, "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."¹⁷ The Brotherhood served as a model for subsequent revivalist movements and is theologically aligned with Saudi Wahhbism. The terrorist group Hamas in Palestine is an outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood.

¹⁷<http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/mb.htm>

Three key events

Three events, beginning in 1979, energized Islamism and shape the form of anti-Western terrorism today.

The first: Iran underwent an Islamic revolution that succeeded in 1979 in exiling the shah and installing a religious government that claimed to be true Islam. In fact, the ayatollahs' government bears little resemblance to the much more tolerant caliphates of earlier centuries and the office of ayatollah was unknown until the 19th century, anyway. But today, these facts are beside the point. Ayatollah Khomeini specifically named the United States as the "Great Satan," and a great deal of contemporary anti-American fervor in the Middle East today is derived from his unrelenting, eloquent denunciations of the US. Iran's religious ruling class remains passionately anti-West, meaning mostly anti-American.

Even though the ayatollahs and Iranians were Shia Muslims, their success in driving out Shah Pahlavi – a thoroughly westernized monarch – inspired other Islamic revivalists. The ayatollahs proved that pure Islamism could be instituted nationally, even its first form was Shiite. The Iranian revolution served as an ideological beacon to radicalized Sunni Muslims, if not exactly a religious one.¹⁸

The second: The year after Khomeini seized power in Iran, the USSR invaded Afghanistan, a Muslim nation. With American approval, the Saudis poured money into the Afghan resistance and declared fighting the godless communist Soviets to be *jihad*.

Training camps set up by the Saudis and Pakistanis in Afghanistan and Pakistan totally indoctrinated young Muslim men in radical Islamism. The men there received only two kinds of training: religious indoctrination in a medieval-style Islam and military training for combat and martyrdom. It was from these camps, run by the Pakistan intelligence service, that al Qaeda and the Taliban were born.

After nine years of fruitless combat, the Soviets withdrew. Muslims hailed the Soviets' defeat as an Islamic victory, achieved because of the pure Islamic faith wielded in the cause.

Osama bin Laden served alongside the Afghan mujahedin. Despite the "great warrior" myth that bin Laden has inculcated over the last 10 years, he held mostly non-combat positions in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. He and other non-Afghan fighters were called "internationalists" by the

¹⁸Saudi Wahabbist clerics actually teach that Shia Islam is a Jewish invention and that Iran is not really Islamic at all.

mujahedin, who held them mostly in contempt, considering them mostly adventurists (with much justification). Bin Laden, having been professionally trained as a civil engineer, helped the mujahedin in the construction of roads and fortifications. From all accounts, he did a competent job, but at the end of the Soviet war the mujahedin ejected him from the country. The Taliban invited him back when they seized power in 1996.

Bin Laden has said that the Soviets' defeat was a landmark in his own ideology. For the first time since the 17th century, Islam had defeated a Western power decisively. Heretofore, bin Laden had been a rather indifferent Muslim, but the Afghan war converted him.

The third: In 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait, resulting in the long-term stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden has said that the permanent presence of infidel troops on the holy soil of Mohammed's homeland was intolerable.

These three events are by far the principal dominant events shaping anti-Western terrorism today. But more was required for the terrorist violence to reach the level of Sept. 11, 2001. There was a clear, consistent record for many years prior to that date of the West, especially America, barely responding to a rising level of violence against it.

Until September, 2001, the American and other Western governments treated terrorism as crimes, with law-enforcement and judicial procedures as the preferred remedy. Therefore, Western military action against al Qaeda was, until then, rare, and when it was done it was weak, erratic and ineffective.

From the beginning, the West's response to terror was legalistic. There was a long record of non-response to Islamic terrorist acts, not all committed by al Qaeda, that convinced al Qaeda that it would not pay a meaningful price for its acts, and that the West, especially America, would actually shrink from confronting al Qaeda.

1988: abduction of 16 western tourists in Yemen that resulted in four deaths. Response: none.

1992: Attempted attack on US troops in Yemen. Response: none

1993: Truck bombing of the World Trade Center that killed six people and injured scores more. Response: FBI investigation, indictments and some convictions. No action outside US borders.

1993: Training and material assistance to Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid, whose militia killed 18 US soldiers, wounded many more and destroyed two helicopters one fateful day in Mogadishu. Osama bin Laden claimed responsibility for this action in 1997 during an interview broadcast on CNN. Response: US withdrew its troops two weeks later

1996: Bombing of Khobar Towers, an American military barracks in Saudi Arabia, in which 19 American service members died. Response: US requested Saudi cooperation in an investigation. Saudi's refused. No action taken by US.

1998: Bombing of American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, killing more than 200 people, most of them Muslim Africans. Response: US launched about two dozen cruise missiles at Afghanistan and Sudan. Al Qaeda undamaged both places; civilians killed in Sudan. No other action taken.

2000: Suicide boat attack on *USS Cole* while docked in Yemen in 2000, killing 17 US sailors and injuring 39 others. Response: None. US terminated use of Yemeni port facilities

Thus emboldened, Osama bin Laden decided to attack America itself. Some sort of plan to do so was in the works before the attack on *USS Cole*; hijacker boss Mohammed Atta entered America with a tourist visa the first half of 2000, and petitioned for a student visa in June of that year. Yet the almost purely rhetorical response of the United States to repeated attacks certainly convinced bin Laden that the way was clear to a massive action within the United States itself.

Conclusion

Today anti-Western terrorism is the near-exclusive province of al Qaeda, headed by Osama bin Laden.¹⁹ Osama bin Laden broke new ground in two ways: first in the boldness and scope of his attacks and second in that he is uninterested in traditional internal Muslim bickering. Osama bin Laden broke new ground in two ways: first in the boldness and scope of his attacks and second in that he is uninterested in traditional internal Muslim bickering. Any Muslim is welcome who wishes to fight America, the West, or the apostate rulers of Muslim countries.

Whether political objectives 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.

Despite the successes of Islamism in Iran and Afghanistan, I think a good case can be made that

¹⁹Al 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 a common enemy, the West, mainly America.

the eclipse of the Muslim world continues. There is growing and recently violent unrest in Iran, and another revolution there to overthrow the ayatollahs is not out of the question. Afghanistan has been liberated from Taliban rule. The recent terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia have led prominent voices there to call for liberalization and cracking down on terrorist groups that have been allowed to flourish there.

Many Arab intellectuals who decry Westernization admit that their countries must modernize. They see modernization as mostly technological, such as communications, medical science, education, transportation, and consumer goods. They want to modernize but not Westernize, which would incur actual culture changes such as the status and role of women, representative democracy, true freedom of religion or a free press.

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 the Iraq campaign, 75 percent of the world’s refugees were from Muslim countries.

The Arabs’ state their revulsion for the West more strongly than they really mean (verbal exaggeration being a cultural trait of Arabs, as Patai exhaustively documents). So, says Professor Victor Davis Hanson,²⁰

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.

That being said, the real struggle for Islam’s soul is not in the Arab lands, anyway. It is on the periphery of Islam’s reach – in Asia, the Pacific rim and sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, Islam’s population “center of gravity” is geographically located east of Afghanistan.²¹

²⁰<http://www.nationalreview.com/hanson/hanson062003.asp>

²¹Ralph Peters, “Rolling Back Radical Islam.”
<http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/02autumn/peters.htm>

We find violence there by Muslims – and against them – but not violence related principally to al Qaeda or its cause. In those areas Christian missionary activities are increasing, but the new Christian missionaries are not from America and certainly not from Europe. They are being sent by the churches of Africa and Asia. For just as the reactionary Islamists of the Arab world feel their day is arriving, the fact is that demographically, worldwide Islam is not gaining significant numbers of new converts. In contrast, Christianity is spreading rapidly in the Third World, both by birth-rate and by conversion. Islamism does not find root there, except where Arab Islamists have directly worked to export it.

Postscript: Is al Qaeda on the ropes?

Some commentators are wondering whether al Qaeda isn't pretty much kaput already. See, for example, a Christian Science Monitor opinion piece that says al Qaeda's size and capabilities have been overrated all along, while a BBC piece is less confident.

The 9-11 attacks showed a impressive technical capability. Since then, various figures in the US government, including the executive and Congressional leaders, have warned us that more attacks are on the way, and that they may be as terrible as 9-11, or perhaps worse, what with plans for dirty bombs found in al Qaeda's possession. More than one news commentator has pointed out that bin Laden's organization plans its major attacks up to two years in advance, less time than has elapsed since 9-11-01. So they say that the next attack's operatives may already be in America, waiting for their pre-determined strike date to come up.

I demur. I think al Qaeda really is on the ropes. Osama bin Laden and the rest of al Qaeda did not expect and were not prepared for America to go to war after Sept. 11.

That bin Laden expected some aerial strikes against Afghanistan after 9-11 is indicated by al Qaeda's abandonment of older camps and facilities just before that date. But I do not think he expected the US to do anything much more severe than launch some cruise missiles and conduct maybe a day or two of bombing by fighter-bombers. He was unprepared for a campaign of the intensity and duration that began the first Sunday in October 2001.

There is no doubt that al Qaeda was entirely unprepared for America to send ground combat troops to Afghanistan. American special operations forces (SOF) especially surprised them. The speed and agility of SOF in linking up with the Northern Alliance and SOF's deadly coordination of air power, especially heavy bombers, was something for which al Qaeda gives no evidence of ever having

foreseen.

The one time they tried to stand and fight, during Operation Anaconda in the Spring of 2002, they suffered severely. According to statements of U.S. Army officers, al Qaeda fighters were competent to operate their weapons in a reasonably skilled manner and defend static positions. But when confronted by considerably more skilled American soldiers, who know how to do a lot of things, they got killed “by the bucketloads,” as one American officer put it.

Think about it – remember those recruiting video segments that CNN and other news networks played in the weeks following 9/11? Mostly, they showed guys dressed in black running an obstacle course or shooting up a cinderblock room, neither of which are terribly complex tasks. US troops saw little that showed al Qaeda actually knew how to conduct integrated-arms operations or successfully conduct mobile operations.

They also had little idea of the sophistication and capabilities of American technology and weapons, or of the enormous destructiveness of our weapons. They adapted poorly, at best, to the pervasiveness and effectiveness of American sensors and target acquisition systems. They never got time to rest, recuperate or refit because they were neither equipped nor organized to do so. The record shows that after only a few days of active resistance, all they could do was hunker down, try to hide, and take our pounding.

In short, they were entirely unprepared for the level and intensity of the attacks America’s armed forces made against them.

That does not mean that al Qaeda is entirely helpless. But its primary base of training and support, Afghanistan, has been removed from their use. I do not think they thought this would happen. Since 9-11, no other deadly acts have been carried out against the United States, although there have been several bombings elsewhere that likely have links to al Qaeda, in Bali, Pakistan, Tunisia, Morocco and significantly, Saudi Arabia.

The attacks on 9-11 were terrible, but they were also the worst that al Qaeda was capable of doing. If they could have done worse then, they would have. If they could detonate a nuclear warhead in Washington, they would. If they could explode a “dirty bomb” or unleash biological or chemical attacks, they would. I don’t think they can. I think they shot their best shot on 9-11, and had no follow-on attacks planned because years of experience had shown them that they did not need to hurry.

I do not predict that al Qaeda will neither attempt nor succeed in deadly attacks inside the US

again. I do predict that they will not be able to mount an attack approaching the magnitude of Sept. 11's. They have been hurt too much in personnel losses and interruption of their command and control. Al Qaeda was much more fragile than we thought. It has been hurt hard.