

CIVILIZATION'S FIGHT

Before and After
September 11, 2001

By David Aikman

"This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom."

—President George W. Bush, September 20, 2001

Speaking to a joint session of the U.S. Congress in an address broadcast all over the world, President George W. Bush on September 20, 2001, defined his own response to the terrorist atrocities inflicted upon New York and Washington just nine days earlier. Many Americans considered it one of the greatest presidential addresses in many decades. It was thoughtful, careful, resolute and rousing, warning Americans that the struggle against their global terrorist adversaries would be lengthy, that there would be "new and sudden challenges," and that "great harm" had indeed been done to the nation. But, the president insisted, "In our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom—the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time—now depends on us."

Bush's words resonated everywhere. One of the most striking consequences of the September 11 attacks was the spontaneous surge of patriotic sentiment across the U.S. In many parts of the country, it became impossible after a few days to buy a U.S. flag of any description. From radio antenna of sedans and poles rising from pickup trucks, the stars and stripes flapped in the wind along freeways across the country. Millions of dollars were offered spontaneously to the families of the estimated 5,000 victims of the September 11 terrorism by thousands of individuals and communities.

There were other, unanticipated effects also. In a *Time* Magazine article September 24, 2001, essayist Roger Rosenblatt thought that one unexpected benefit of the tragedy was that the "age of irony" had come to an end. "For some 30 years—roughly as long as the Twin Towers were upright—" Rosenblatt wrote, "the good folks in charge of America's intellectual life have insisted that nothing was to be believed in or taken seriously. Nothing was real." His comment: "Are you looking for something to take seriously? Begin with evil." Several commentators reflected on the tragedy as demonstrating the folly of post-modernist relativism. In *U.S. News and World*

Report, writer John Leo excoriated both multiculturalism and “the therapeutic culture,” which he characterized this way: “There is no evil, no right and wrong, only misunderstandings that can fade if we withhold judgment and reach out emotionally to others. Everything can be mediated and talked out. . . .” These assaults upon postmodernism and multiculturalism prompted one academic name long associated with both streams of thought, Professor Stanley Fish, currently dean of the college of liberal arts and sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago, to respond in a *New York Times* opinion piece. Relativism, he asserted, was indeed alive and well, “if by relativism,” he said, “one means the practice of putting yourself in your adversary’s shoes.” Anyway, he asserted, relativism was just “another name for serious thought.”

Well, there has certainly been a lot of serious thought in both the U.S. and the world as a whole since September 11, 2001. One question that many Americans have asked themselves is how to account for the passionate anti-American venom demonstrated both by the meticulously well-organized hijackers and the mobs that have filled streets in many parts of the world since then, cheering on the perpetrators of the September atrocities. President Bush in his September 20 address put it this way: “Americans are asking, why do they hate us?” Then he answered his own question this way: “They hate what they see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”

All of this was true, but it was far from a full explanation of why 19 Arabs, nearly all of them of Saudi Arabian nationality, plotted and planned for years to take over U.S. civilian airliners and deliberately crash them into New York’s World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, killing themselves and as many people as possible. Who was Osama bin Laden, and what was his organization, al Qaeda?

How could there be prospective terrorists based in as many as 60 countries, including the U.S. (Where the FBI estimated there might still be as many as 1,000 “sleepers” waiting to be mobilized for some future outrage) willing to try something similar at the first opportunity, as U.S. government officials said was the case? Were the teachings of Islam “good and peaceful,” as President Bush said they were in his speech to the U.S. Congress, and had the terrorists simply been out to “hijack Islam itself,” as he told Americans?

Politicized, ideologically dictatorial Islam should best be termed “Islamism,” a word that accurately suggests the transformation of a religious worldview into a totalitarian ideology.

In the U.S., the debate over the origins of the ideology behind suicide hijackings caused some observers to blame religion, any religion, in general. In *The New Republic*, Andrew Sullivan, a self-proclaimed Roman Catholic and an ardent supporter of gay rights, made the case that any set of firm, monotheistic religious beliefs, including those of his own Roman Catholic tradition, needed to be carefully corralled by secular state power to prevent its inflicting harm upon the human race. After the prominent Baptist leader Rev. Jerry Falwell declared on TV that the World Trade Center attacks were God’s judgment upon the U.S. because of gay rights activism, ACLU efforts to restrict public religious expression in the U.S., and other acts of wickedness, some commentators declared that this merely proved that any set of clearly defined, ardently held beliefs, including Christian ones, constituted generic “fundamentalism.” There was no difference in principle, some felt, between Rev. Jerry Falwell and Osama bin Laden. (The fact that Falwell subsequently apologized for his public intemperance and has never been known to advocate mass murder upon civilians was not commented upon by those who had made this case).

Among students, scholars, and practitioners of Islam, however, the debate on the origins of Osama bin Laden’s ideology became more focused. Some scholars argued that there was a spirit of militance and intolerance at the very heart of Islam itself, expressed in the sacred words of the Koran, Islam’s holy

scripture. Others claimed that bin Laden had essentially “hijacked” Islam, trying to assert as mainstream a tradition that had always held only a minority place in the historical development of the religion. A third interpretation was that bin Laden’s ideology was essentially the heir to the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, notably Communism, Nazism and Fascism, and was a savage political thought system best described as “Islamofascism,” a theocratic, triumphalist coda bent upon global theocratic domination. What almost all scholars agreed was that politicized, ideologically dictatorial Islam should best be termed “Islamism,” a word that accurately suggests the transformation of a religious worldview into a totalitarian ideology.

In this briefing, we will try to put the ideology of al Qaeda (literally “the base”), the loose-knit but tightly disciplined international network of pro-bin Laden Islamist terrorist groups into the context of Islam as a whole. Of course, how the U.S. responds to the attack in its efforts to track down and destroy al Qaeda is likely to take months, perhaps years to be unveiled. The atrocity and tragedy of September 11 is a challenge both to the U.S. and to the whole of the civilized world. As with all crises, however, it could turn into one of the great national and diplomatic opportunities for the U.S. as this nation seeks to lead the world against one of the most savage outbursts of barbarism in decades.

The setting of historical Islam

The core facts about the history of Islam are simple. It was founded by Mohammed, an Arabian born to a distinguished family in Mecca around 570 A.D., but orphaned in his early years and brought up subsequently by first his grandfather, and then an uncle. Engaging in the caravan trade as a trader, Mohammed around 595 married a wealthy widow, Khadija, to whom alone he remained married until her death. Subsequently, he was to have nine other wives.

In the year 610 A.D., during a personal retreat to a cave not far from Mecca, Mohammed began to receive the first of what Muslims believe were divine revelations, mediated to him in person by the Angel Gabriel. Early on, the revelations were accompanied by sweating, rolling on the ground, and groaning,

causing Mohammed to be deeply worried about the source of the revelations. His wife, Khadija, reassured him that what he was hearing came from God. Muslims believe that the first instructions to Mohammed, through Gabriel, were “Recite!” Gradually, the visits of the Angel Gabriel led to a whole series of revelations, which together constitute the Koran. Some of them were received while Mohammed was in Mecca, where he experienced great opposition. Others were received after he moved to Medina in 622 (the date of the *hijrah*, or beginning of the Islamic formal calendar).

Muslims believe that the Koran is a holy book entirely dictated by God. They are thus deeply hostile to any kind of textual analysis or criticism analogous to what various critics and skeptics of the Bible for some 250 years have leveled at the sacred book of Christians and Jews. They also believe that Mohammed could not read or write, and thus could not have derived the Koran from knowledge of any other book. But what they do not deny is that the emergence of the Koran as the revelation of God came about in a setting in which Mohammed heard about the beliefs of Jews and Christians who lived in Arabia in his own day, argued with them, actually fought with the Jews, and finally rejected both communities.

Muslims believe that some of the Jewish Biblical figures—for example, Abraham, Moses, King David—were prophets, and that Jesus was a prophet of his own era, but that neither Christians nor Jews really understood what God was revealing to them. Mohammed, Muslims believe, is the “seal of the prophets,” the last human being to whom God—Allah—has revealed his message for the human race. Islam means “submission” (i.e. to God’s will as expressed in the Koran); a Muslim is someone who has submitted to God’s will. In the Islamic cosmology, Abraham himself was actually a Muslim, since Islam was not only God’s original message, but the only one.

The rejection by the Jews of Mohammed’s message while Mohammed was still based in Medina led to his changing the direction of prayer, the *qibla*, from Jerusalem, the original direction, to Mecca. The Jewish sabbath day of rest was also changed into the Muslim Friday. Mohammed’s struggle with the Jews was also not merely a theological one. Because they

resisted both his temporal and spiritual authority in Medina and later Mecca, he eventually expelled all of them from Mecca, massacring hundreds of Jewish men in a final struggle with them.

According to Islam, Jews and Christians are “people of the book,” spiritually a step up from rank polytheism, which was the dominant religion of the Arab world until Mohammed imposed Islam upon all the Arabian tribes of the Peninsula, but clearly of inferior status to Muslims. In the Koran, there are verses where Muslims are asked to be gentle with Christians and Jews (“Bear patiently with what they [the unbelievers] say and leave their company without recrimination” (Sura 73:10) or “Be courteous when you argue with people of the book, except with those among them that do evil. Say: ‘We believe in that which has been revealed to us and which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one. To Him we submit’” (Sura 29:46).)

But there are other verses that are entirely different. The reason for the change is that after Mohammed’s triumphal entry into Mecca in 630 he no longer needed to placate either Christians or Jews for political reasons. In Sura 2:193 we read “Fight against them until idolatry is no more and God’s religion reigns supreme,” and in 9:29 “Fight against such of those to whom the Scriptures were given as believe in neither God nor the last day, who do not forbid what God and His apostle have forbidden, and do not embrace the true faith, until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued.” The Koran goes on: “The Jews say Ezra is the son of God, while the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. Such are their assertions, by which they imitated the infidels of old. God confound them! How perverse they are!” (Sura 9:130).

It is impossible to read the Koran without concluding that Mohammed himself had a deep and abiding dislike for Jews, and contempt for Christians, who Muslims believe have actually mistranslated or misinterpreted the original message of the Gospels.

In fact, Sura 5:58 admonishes Muslims: “Believers, do not seek the friendship of the infidels and those who were given the book [the Bible] before you, who have made of your religion a jest and a diversion.” Two verses later, the Koran says that Allah has transformed these unbelievers (i.e., Jews and Christians) “into apes and swine, and those who serve the devil.”

Mohammed died in 632, but his successors led Arab armies to victories over the Byzantines and other

foes in Syria, Egypt and Iraq and created within less than a decade of Mohammed’s death a vast new Arab empire. As leaders of the *umma*, a concept unique to Islam of a community that is *both* spiritual and temporal, they were called “caliphs,” from the Arabic word *khalifa*, who considered themselves “servants” of the prophet. The Shi’ite strand of Islam, comprising about 15 percent of all the world’s estimated 1.2 billion Muslims (there are an estimated 1.9 billion Christians), grew out of a dispute over the legitimacy of Ali, the fourth caliph and Mohammed’s son-in-law. Not

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surprisingly for a religion that expanded in part through military conquest, three of the four caliphs were themselves assassinated, and the caliphate quickly became a hereditary post taken over by whatever dynasty or ruling ethnic group dominated the Muslim world. The last caliph, a Turk, was deposed in 1924 when the newly secularized republic of Turkey, no longer the Ottoman Empire, abolished the position entirely. What is striking about the ideology of al Qaeda and associated Islamist groups is that many of them wish to re-establish the caliphate on a global scale, in effect imposing Muslim world government upon the entire human race.

The vast Arab empire that grew out of the early Islamic conquests quickly spread in the seventh century A.D. across North Africa, into Central Asia, to the borders of China, and into northern India within decades of Mohammed’s death. Muslim armies had overrun Spain by the first few decades of the eighth century, and would have brought Islam right into

the heart of Western Europe had they not been stopped by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in 732.

The pattern of Muslim conquest had by then become plain. The victorious Arab armies forced pagans and various polytheists to convert to Islam, but they permitted the Christian communities they conquered to continue in their more ancient faith as long as they paid a poll tax to the Muslim rulers and abided by certain strict regulations. The status of conquered Jews and Christians was specifically designated as *dhimma*, inferior to Muslims. *Dhimmi*s in much of the Arab world in medieval times were forbidden to ride horses, bear arms, build new houses of worship or repair old ones. They were required to wear special clothes, a practice that the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan tried in the year 2001 to re-impose on Hindus living in Afghanistan until international outrage prevented them from carrying this out.

Apologists for Islam, whether from within or outside the faith, have often pointed out, correctly, that Jews at certain stages of Arab Muslim history were treated much better under Islam than they were in the Christian world of their day. The greatest figure of medieval Judaism, Maimonides (1135-1204) was court physician to Salah ed-Din, (Saladdin), the Kurdish warrior who led Arab armies to victory over the Crusaders in 1187. Jews after their expulsion from Spain in 1492 took refuge in the Muslim Ottoman Empire and its newly conquered capital Istanbul. Still, even Maimonides, at the height of his own attainment in the court of Saladdin, lamented over the situation of the Jews in general caught in the *dhimmi* status. "God has cast us into the midst of this people, the nation of Ishmael, who persecute us severely, and who devise ways to harm and humiliate us," he complained.

It is significant also that one of the most admired intellectuals in all of Arab literature, the historian ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was unequivocal in the destiny he thought was deserved by Jews and Christians. "It is for them to choose between conversion

to Islam, payment of poll tax, or death," he wrote in his classic philosophy of history, *The Muqaddimah*. Ibn Khaldun was also unequivocal in his estimate of the value of *jihad*, or war as a religious duty. He wrote: "In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and the obligation to convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or force."

Interpretations of *jihad*

The word *jihad* literally means "struggle," and it can include the "struggle" against sin as well as the concept of struggle on behalf of Islam, including means not limited to warfare. Mohammed himself spoke of the "greater jihad" (meaning struggle against personal sin) and the "lesser jihad," meaning warfare against foes of Islam. But it is simply erroneous to suggest that *jihad* means merely "a struggle to improve the quality of life in society, struggle in the battlefield for self-defense," as argued by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, an American Islamic group strongly antagonistic to any criticism of Islam or Islamic practices around the world. The most

prominent Western scholar of Islam, Bernard Lewis, has asserted that "the overwhelming majority of classical theologians, jurists and traditionalists. . . understood the obligation of *jihad* in a military sense."

In fact, Islamic jurists early on in Muslim history developed the concept of the world as divided into Muslim and non-Muslim zones. The Muslim zone, *Dar al-Islam*, (abode of Islam) was implied to be in perpetual war with the non-Muslim world, *Dar al-Harb*

(abode of war). This did not mean that Muslims should force non-Muslims to convert at the point of a sword, but simply that they should obtain political primacy through conquest and then create conditions in which Muslim rulers could enforce through *sharia*, or Islamic law, the ethical and social principles of the Muslim *umma*. In fact, it is true that *Sura 2:256* declares: "There shall be no compulsion in religion,"

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—ibn Khaldun (1332-1406)

a Koranic injunction frequently cited to demonstrate Islam's alleged pacific nature. Obviously, though, if you are a non-Muslim living in a Muslim-ruled state there is no freedom of religious practice in any way comparable to what exists in all Western nations and in much of the rest of the world today.

Throughout most of Islamic history, *jihad* meant armed resistance by Muslims when the Muslim *umma* came under attack. But at different times some groups within Islam have elevated *jihad* in its meaning of wars of conquest to impose Islam upon adversaries to be central to Islamic thought. This was the case of Kharijites in the seventh century, the Assassins in the eleventh century, and in the writings of the legal philosopher ibn Taymiya (1268-1328). All Muslims believe in the "Five Pillars of Faith" of Islam: the profession of faith ("There is no God but God and Mohammed is his prophet"), prayer five times a day, charitable giving, fasting during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. But the Kharijites made *jihad* the sixth "pillar of Islam."

It is significant that presently one of the most notorious of the London-based Islamic militants, Sheikh Omar bin Bakri Muhammad, who has raised money for the Palestinian terrorist organizations Hamas and Islamic Jihad, shares this view. "Jihad," he has written, is "one of the main Pillars of Islam after *Tawhid* (profession of monotheistic faith) and *Da'wa* (proselytizing). In fact Jihad is . . . *Da'wa* [proselytizing] by the Islamic state as its foreign policy." Sheikh Bakri presents himself as the spokesman for bin Laden's International Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Christians.

The concept of the Dar al-Islam (abode of Islam) is an even broader concept than the *umma*, denoting any part of the world which is actually under the governance of Muslims. The Dar al-Harb (abode of war) has always meant those other parts of the world not yet acquired by Islam through conquest or conversion, and thus potentially the locus of continuing struggle.

Over the centuries, particularly when Islamic communities have become softened by wealth, success, or compromise with surrounding cultures, many Islamic thinkers have sought to return Islam to a hypothetical golden age when the Muslim law, *sharia*, was rigorously implemented upon the *umma* and when every Muslim sought with all his energy to take the message of Islam to the farthest corners of the world. Invariably, Muslim scholars of this point of view have elevated *jihad* to a priority status in correct Islamic conduct. Ibn Taymiya sought to return Islam to what he considered its pristine state of purity at the time of Mohammed. A ruler who failed to implement the *sharia* rigorously, in ibn Taymiya's view, forfeited his right to rule. In fact, ibn Taymiya characterized any Muslim who failed to live up to his definition of the righteous Muslim as, de facto, an unbeliever. One of the worst categories of human beings, in ibn Taymiya's universe, was a Muslim who converted himself into the category of unbeliever

through his failures in Muslim conduct. In effect, bad Muslim behavior was tantamount to reverse conversion, in ibn Taymiya's formulation. In particular, he regarded *jihad*, meaning warfare to extend the Dar al-Islam, as central to the obligations of all Muslims, and especially of their rulers.

Ibn Taymiya's writings exerted a profound influence on another Islamic sectarian firebrand, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) whose sect of puritannical Islam, Wahhabism, rose to power in Saudi Arabia 200 years ago and has dominated it ever since.

Through huge financial support by Saudi Arabian government agencies and private individuals, Wahhabism has been nurtured in Muslim communities from Central Asia to North Africa, from Indonesia to the U.S.

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Wahhabists. In the first of his declarations of war against the U.S., the August 1996 document issued by Osama bin Laden after the bombings of U.S. embassies in East Africa, bin Laden himself quotes ibn Taymiya at great length. "To fight in defense of religion and belief," he cites ibn Taymiya, "is a collective duty; there is no other [greater] duty after believing than fighting the enemy who is corrupting the life and the religion. There are no preconditions for this duty and the enemy should be fought with the best of one's abilities." In effect, harking back to ibn Taymiya, bin Laden believes that Muslim rulers who fail to resist and fight against unbelievers have abandoned the right to be called Muslim (i.e., the current ruling family of Saudi Arabia). Bin Laden has targeted the U.S. at the outset because he believes it is propping up a corrupt, and indeed "infidel" Muslim regime in the Arabian peninsula. In fact this belief, that the U.S. has suppressed democratic movements in the Arab and Islamic world primarily for its own selfish motives of maintaining an uninterrupted supply of oil, is widely shared in the Arab world. Where bin Laden goes far beyond most Muslims, however, is in believing that the U.S., the West, and indeed the entire civilized world as we understand it (i.e., not subject to Islamic theocracy and rule by terror), must be overthrown.

The rise of Islamism

The Muslim Arabs captured Jerusalem in 638 A.D. from the Byzantines. But the Arab claim to the rulership of the Muslim *umma* was ended by the rise of the Ottoman Turks, who first conquered the Byzantine Empire in 1453 and then extended Turkish rule throughout the Arab world with their taking of Jerusalem in 1517 (the same year in which Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Schlosskirche in Wittenberg) and their move south into the Arabian peninsula. The Turks threatened the heart of Europe in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, only finally being pushed back

from the gates of Vienna in 1683. By then, though, the tide of global power and learning had swept back decisively in favor of the Christian West.

The Protestant Reformation, the rise of Western science, the exploratory, commercial and migratory thrust of European powers throughout the world, the revolution in social organization accomplished in Western societies rendered all competing civilizational groups, from the Islamic world to

Moghul India to Ching Dynasty China irrevocably vulnerable to the great Western advance. The French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution further accelerated these social and political changes. Even though Napoleon's defeat in 1815 led largely to a status quo diplomatic settlement in Europe called the Concert of Europe (1815-1854) that included the Ottoman Empire, this once formidable world power sank be-

neath the weight of its cumbersome institutions, its absence of the means of self-correction, and the yearnings of its subject populations for cultural and political self-expression. Throughout most of the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire was known as "the Sick Man of Europe."

The Sublime Porte, as the Ottoman regime was universally dubbed, did attempt reforms during this time, but the social and political core of the empire seemed to most observers to be the victim of a terminal illness. When the Ottoman Empire rashly joined Germany and the Central Powers in 1914, it provoked the Arab world over which it ruled into a revolt that changed forever the political geography of the Middle East. Arab leaders and intellectuals now came to terms with concepts like national independence, statehood, cultural modernity and international competition.

Of course, the implementation of those concepts was in most instances shaped by the rival ambitions of the Western powers after World War I broke out, a point alluded to specifically in the video released by Osama bin Laden October 7 just after President Bush's announcement of the U.S. military campaign against al Qaeda. Bin Laden complained about the

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“more than 80 years of humiliation and disgrace” suffered by the Arab world. He was obviously referring to the carving up of Muslim Arab states by the British and the French in the wake of the defeat of the Turks after World War I. That slicing up of the Dar al-Islam not only helped the Jewish state of Israel come into existence—a point of ongoing rage to devout Muslims in the Arab world—but it set in place the authoritarian Arab monarchies that either survive today (as in Saudi Arabia and Jordan) or metamorphosed into secular nationalist republics deeply antipathetic to revivalist Islam (Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and Bashar Assad’s Syria).

But it was in 1928 that an Egyptian school-teacher, Hassan al-Banna, was to found an Islamic revival organization that helped eventually set much of the Islamic world on fire and was the direct ancestor of all modern Islamism. The organization he founded, the Muslim Brotherhood, was intended to achieve the complete re-Islamization of the state and the purification of the Muslim faith. Seeing himself in the line of purifying reform exemplified by the Saudi sectarian ibn al-Wahhab, al-Banna sought to spread as broadly as possible “belief in the unity and perfection of the Muslim system, the identification of the state with religion, the execution of the Muslim law, the return to the Koran and the Hadith [sayings attributed to Mohammed] and to no other sources, to refrain from scholastic theology, the opposition to mystic innovations, and the imitation of the early righteous ancestors.” The Ikhwan, as the group became universally known, from the Arabic for “brothers,” spread throughout the Arab and then the Islamic world by means of underground cells. Often they resorted to terrorist acts against foreigners or prominent political figures. In 1954, they tried to assassinate Nasser himself, and six of the conspirators were hanged.

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Islamism during and after the Cold War

As long as the Soviet Union was locked in a Cold War struggle for global primacy with the U.S., and offered a secular alternative to Western democratic capitalism, secular pan-Arabism was attractive to many Arabs. But it was the catastrophic defeat of Syria, Egypt and Jordan by Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967 that disillusioned much of the Arab world

socialist secularism as a vehicle for achieving Arab national greatness. From the late 1960s onwards, Islamist thinking gained more and more followers among Arabs and then in the Shi’ite Muslim nation of Iran. Anger with both Western capitalist “imperialism” and Soviet-style atheistic socialism helped propel Iran dramatically out of the Western orbit when the Ayatollah Khomeini took power in 1979. Khomeini’s “Death to America” slogan and his humiliation of the U.S. by taking 50 American diplomats hostage for 444 days was a turning

point for many Arab Islamists. They now came to believe that they could, by similar tactics, re-Islamize their own societies.

The decisive moment for Osama bin Laden, of course, was not what happened in Iran, but events in Afghanistan. Born in 1957 to a prosperous Saudi business family, bin Laden, like many Saudi young men, had for a time enjoyed the fleshpots of Beirut as a playboy. But his own father re-discovered his own Islamic faith during a business project to re-construct the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and his newfound piety deeply affected the son. The younger bin Laden grew a beard, invariably the sign of Muslim piety, became much more deeply observant in the practice of his faith, and cast around for an Islamic cause into which to throw himself. He found it when the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan in December of 1979. Almost immediately, bin Laden set about organizing support for Afghan freedom fighters, and training and recruiting thousands of Arabs who wanted to participate in the new *jihad* against the Soviets. Bin Laden became the chief recruiter

for a virtual foreign legion of “Afghan” Arabs from countries as diverse as Egypt and Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Morocco who wanted to join the *jihād*. It helped him, of course, that the U.S. government itself was using first Saudi Arabia, and then Pakistan, as a conduit for finances and weaponry to build up the *mujahedeen* (“holy warriors”). At the time, most Americans saw the fight against the Soviets as a vital part of the Cold War. They applauded this novel effort to weaken Moscow by bleeding its armies to death in an unwinnable war in the mountains of Central Asia.

It was one of Afghanistan’s neighbors who first drew the attention of Washington to the dangers of this policy. “You are creating a new Frankenstein,” then Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is said to have told then U.S. President George Bush in the late 1980s. What she meant was that this new, international fraternity of combat-hardened Arabs and other Muslims, exultant at their successes against one superpower and deeply indoctrinated into Islamist *jihād*, would eventually turn against the superpower that had encouraged them into existence in the first place. The fact that the U.S. essentially abandoned Afghanistan once it had helped forced the Soviets to retreat is clearly a factor that embittered bin Laden and his fellow “Afghan” Arabs, by now numbering several thousand.

But what turned bin Laden savagely from his anti-Soviet posture to a raging anti-Americanism was the invitation extended by the Saudi government to U.S. troops to be based on Saudi soil during the build-up to the Gulf War in 1990. Even though the Americans were in his country to protect it against the entirely secular forces of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, bin Laden saw their presence not merely as another of the ongoing “infidel” slights to Islam, but proof that the U.S. would do everything possible to prop up the Saudi royal family. The Saud family banished bin Laden in 1991 and stripped him of his Saudi citizenship. He settled for a few years in Sudan. In

his eyes, meanwhile, the ruling dynasty of Saudi Arabia had already fulfilled ibn Taymiya’s definition of Muslim leaders who had become infidels by abandoning the principles of their faith.

But there is obviously far more to the passionate anti-American venom of bin Laden than theological resentment at the House of al-Saud. In many respects, bin Laden’s hatred of the West is a hatred of modernity, of the success and achievements of globalization that to a striking degree have bypassed the Arab world and much of the Islamic world as a whole. A columnist for the Egyptian magazine *Al-Ahram Al-Arabi* wrote gleefully after the terrorist destruction of the World Trade Center towers: “The world has discovered that the strength of the oppressed is great when the situation becomes unbearable. . . . The city of globalization, with its economic, political, and military symbols, has collapsed, and the theory of globalization will be buried with the establishment of the false coalition [of world powers allied against al Qaeda].” That hatred, of course, is also

partly based on envy, and indeed incomprehension, of a phenomenon—modern international capitalist culture—that obviously is the antithesis of the ethos of traditional Islam. Much of the Islamist hatred of the West derives from a sensibility deeply offended by Western vulgarity: pornography on the Internet, crass popular music, casual sexuality, the endless search for novelty and distraction by spoiled young people, in effect the mass popular culture of large cities not just in the Western world but in those countries of the world increas-

ingly integrated with globalization.

Then, of course, there is Israel. This non-Islamic presence, of Jews no less—those original critics and mockers of Mohammed—this outpost of Western thought and democracy in the heart of the Dar al-Islam, has been an offense to many Muslims, perhaps to most Arab Muslims since the day of its independence in 1948. Muslims almost universally believe that Israel could not have continued to sur-

Much of the Islamist hatred of the West derives from a sensibility deeply offended by Western vulgarity: pornography on the Internet, crass popular music, casual sexuality, the endless search for novelty and distraction by spoiled young people.

vive, much less defeat its adversaries, without American support and encouragement. For all Islamists, Israel's very existence, not to mention the absence of a Palestinian state, is a living repudiation of Islam's self-image as a religion perpetually moving forward and the Dar al-Islam as being a place where the despised *dhimmi*s can be kept in their place. As if a Jewish state in itself were not enough of an affront to Islamists, Israel's control of access to Islam's third holiest site, the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, is profoundly resented by most Arabs. For bin Laden, the Palestinian issue was not initially front and center; it was subordinate to his declaration of war upon America for having its troops in Saudi Arabia. But after September 11, when bin Laden realized that he needed a broader platform of support from Muslims than the hitherto rather narrowly focused objections to Americans on Saudi soil, Palestine emerged as prominent among his grievances. In the October 7 video, he said this: "As to America, I say to it and its people a few words: I swear to God that America will not live in peace before peace reigns in Palestine, and before all the army of infidels depart the land of Mohammad, peace be upon him." In effect, bin Laden now wants to use the Palestinian issue as his most prominent banner to rally Muslims all around the world to his cause. It will almost certainly be one of the greatest challenges to U.S. diplomacy during the war against al Qaeda to maintain its alliance with Israel and its absolute commitment to Israel's survival in the face of a probable growing chorus of voices demanding pressure upon Israel to concede a state to the Palestinians in short order.

America is certainly hated in much of the Arab world because of its support for Israel. But it is also hated simply because it is America. There is a diffusely felt resentment on the part of much of the world towards the world's only military superpower, the political and economic colossus that somehow always manages to ensure that international conflicts are resolved in ways helpful to American interests. Many in the world, and not just the Arab world, believe that Americans demonstrate a screechy and

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even hypocritical moralism, denouncing human rights abuses in other nations but not always owning up to their own social, political and economic shortcomings. It does not seem to matter to bin Laden and to millions of Muslims around the world that the U.S. military interventions in the Balkans, in 1995 and 1999, were initiated to rescue Muslim communities from ethnic cleansing by non-Muslims. Nor does it make a difference that the U.S. is one of the most consciously self-critical societies in the world, willing and at times even eager to listen to harsh attacks upon its character and its policies. Nor does it appear to matter that the U.S. has usually tried hard to bring its own NATO allies and the U.N. into the decision-making process of its foreign policy in recent years. Bin Laden and his cohorts are also

unimpressed by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's comment, while still ambassador to the U.N. during the first Clinton administration, that she favored an "assertive multilateralism." What they probably remembered her saying were words that she uttered as Secretary of State in February 1998 during one of the many U.S.-Iraqi crises of the past decade. Albright said: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future." Well, "indispensable" is arguable, but "vulnerable" is not. In the Egyptian opposition newspaper, *Al-Sha'ab*, less than two weeks after September 11, columnist Khaled Al-Sharif wrote: "Everyone was in a state of shock because of what happened, and all were surprised to see America, which controls the world, collapse, and the Satan that rules the world, burn. The patron of terrorism was burned by its own fire."

This, of course, is the hate-filled rhetoric of Islamism, the poisonous speech that in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of mosques throughout the Islamic world, is being used to rouse the world's Muslims into a war to the death with the U.S. From the point of view of the Islamists and their followers, it is a legitimate *jihad*, a struggle with the forces of unbelief that stand in the way of the advance of Islam.

But more clearly than anything, the call articulated by bin Laden is a fight to the death not just with the U.S. and Israel, but to any mode of commerce or discourse or creativity or social life that does not fit into the pinched, medieval mindset of a utopian campaigner for a universal, coercively imposed, brutally reactionary, theocratic dictatorship.

A golden opportunity for diplomacy

Two major perceptions of the events of September 11 seem to have crystallized all over the world. One is that if the U.S. can be terrorized and devastated by the newest network of international assassins, no nation on earth is safe. The second is an almost intuitive understanding that the U.S. is the only power on the planet with the resources, the credibility and the overall respect to lead a global assault on the deadly virus of terrorist fanaticism.

It is hard otherwise to explain the astonishing offers of intelligence collaboration, with no quid pro quo suggested, from powers normally as suspicious of American motives as Russia and China. The willingness of some of the “stans,” the formerly Soviet Central Asian states, to make their airfields available for U.S. tactical sorties into nearby Afghanistan is additional evidence of the global sea-change. So is Russian consent to this, and acquiescence to U.S. military overflights. As for the U.S.’s traditional close allies, the Germans have been overwhelmingly cooperative, and not since World War II has a British prime minister rallied so unhesitatingly to America’s side in time of trouble.

We should understand the point clearly: the very magnitude of the anti-American atrocities of September 11 has presented the U.S. with the greatest opportunity to lead and indeed reshape the global security system in its history.

First, the sense that world civilization itself, not just the U.S., came under attack September 11, along with the desperate carnage in Manhattan, has helped erase in many countries previously critical the image

of the U.S. as either pushy and arrogant on the one hand, or—contradictorily—selfish and aloof on the other. To a remarkable degree, the most important parts of the world seem to really want the U.S. to win this conflict.

Second, so broadly-based—at least for now—does the global popular sympathy seem to be in many countries that the U.S. would be downright negligent not to move in rapidly to develop that sympathy further. What the world is surely ripe for is a major re-ordering of security relationships that could provide a basis for stability among the major powers—the U.S., Russia, China, the European Union, and Japan in particular—possibly for the next few decades.

Should the major powers join in a grand security system—perhaps called the Global Concert—opposed to global anarchy, its existence might help stabilize some politically vulnerable Third World states, such as India and Pakistan. This global security system would make it clear that all the world’s major powers had undertaken mutually not to exploit domestic unrest anywhere in the world for their own national purposes.

The Middle East, of course, is likely to remain tense with or without the Global Concert, though the opportunities for Israel’s front-line Arab neighbors to exploit overall global tensions would be lessened. A new global security network might dissuade muscle-flexing powers like Iran or Iraq from pursuing their own regional and global agendas through the medium of Israeli-Palestinian tensions. It might also damp down any hopes among Palestinian radical Islamic elements that outside forces would eventually inter-

vene on their behalf in the conflict. If this turned out to be the case, the incentive for the Palestinian authorities to accept less than perfect peace terms with Israel, and thus actually bring an end to the conflict, would be very strong.

Yet one of the main challenges of the Global Concert in the short and medium-term will be infor-

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mational. Huge efforts—and on the U.S. side there is much catching up to do—must be made to refute Islamist contentions that the U.S.-led war against terrorism is a war against Islam. Wherever they can be found and assured of protection from reprisal (a pre-requisite even with the U.S.) prominent moderate Muslims must be brought forward and encouraged to explain, on-camera and in print, why every element of the bin Laden ideology is incompatible with core Islamic values of charity and peace. Relatives of Islamic victims of the New York bombings should be interviewed in a way that evokes powerful emotions of sympathy for bereaved families. U.S. government information services, meanwhile, must work overtime preparing documentaries that portray the freedom and sense of fulfillment of Muslims living in the U.S. For the U.S. to win globally the war against bin Laden and his fanatical followers, it must prevail in the global war of ideas. For the Global Concert to last beyond this war also, it must share in that struggle. It will become increasingly important in the years ahead, independently of the war on the bin Ladenites, to convince the world's poor that

no answer to their economic or cultural needs is ever going to be found in a religious conflict waged against the West.

V.S. Naipaul, named as Nobel laureate for literature barely a month after September 11 2001, and author of two books on Islamism (*Among the Believers* and *Beyond Belief*) soberly articulated just how huge the stakes are in America's—and the world's—struggle to undo the terrorist network of al Qaeda.

“We are within reach of great nihilistic forces that have undone civilization,” he said in a talk in Melbourne before the terrorist attacks in the U.S. “Religion has been turned by some into a kind of nihilism, where people wish to destroy themselves and destroy their past and their culture . . . to be pure. They are enraged about the world and they wish to pull it down.” The Taliban have offered their own small contribution to this assault on civilization

by reducing Afghan women to the status of indigent misery and by demolishing through artillery fire and dynamite two of the great artistic achievements of Asia, the Bamiyan statues of Buddha. But al Qaeda, hellbent on acquiring weapons of mass destruction such as systems of chemical and biological warfare, is intent on destroying more than merely the emblems of human culture. They would like to pull down, all over the world, civilization itself. “We tremble,” wrote Charles Krauthammer in *The Weekly Standard* in commenting on Naipaul, “because for the first time in history nihilism will soon be armed with the ultimate weapons of annihilation. For the first time in history, the nihilist will have the means to

match his ends. Which is why the war declared upon us on September 11 is the most urgent not only of our lives, but in the life of civilization itself.”

Krauthammer is right, and President Bush is right. This is civilization's fight. And we must win it. ÿ

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—Charles Krauthammer

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