

Somebody Else's Civil War

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.Call it a city on four legs heading for murder. ... New York is a woman holding, according to history, a rag called liberty with one hand and strangling the earth with the other.

-Adonis [Ali Ahmed Said],
"The Funeral of New York, "1971

IN THE WEEKS after the attacks of September 11, Americans repeatedly asked, "Why do they hate us?" To understand what happened, however, another question maybe even more pertinent: "Why do they want to provoke us ?"

David Fromkin suggested the answer in *Foreign Affairs* back in 1975. "Terrorism," he noted, "is violence used in order to create fear; but it is aimed at creating fear in order that the fear, in turn, will lead somebody else--not the terrorist--to embark on some quite different program of action that will accomplish whatever it is that the terrorist really desires." When a terrorist kills, the goal is not murder itself but

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something else--for example, a police crackdown that will create a rift between government and society. that the terrorist can then exploit for revolutionary purposes. Osama bin Laden sought--and has received international military crackdown, one he wants to exploit for his particular brand of revolution.

Bin Laden produced a piece of high political theater he hoped would reach the audience that concerned him the most: the *umma*, or universal Islamic community. The script was obvious: America, cast as the villain, was supposed to use its military might like a cartoon character trying to kill a fly with a shotgun. The media would see to it that any use

of force against the civilian population of Afghanistan was broadcast around the world, and the *umma* would find it shocking how Americans nonchalantly caused Muslims to suffer and die. The ensuing outrage would open a chasm between state and society in the Middle East, and the governments allied with the West-many of which are repressive, corrupt, and illegitimate-would find themselves adrift. It was to provoke such an outcome that bin Laden broadcast his statement following the start of the military campaign on October 7, in which he said, among other things, that the Americans and the British "have divided the entire world into two regions-one of faith, where there is no hypocrisy, and another of infidelity, from which we hope God will protect us."

Polarizing the Islamic world between the *umma* and the regimes allied with the United States would help achieve bin Laden's primary goal: furthering the cause of Islamic revolution within the Muslim world itself, in the Arab lands especially and in Saudi Arabia above all. He had no intention of defeating America. War with the United States was not a goal in and of itself but rather an instrument designed to help his brand of extremist Islam survive and flourish among the believers. Americans, in short, have been drawn into somebody else's civil war.

Washington had no choice but to take up the gauntlet, but it is not altogether clear that Americans understand fully this war's true dimensions. The response to bin Laden cannot be left to soldiers and police alone. He has embroiled the United States in an intra-Muslim ideological battle, a struggle for hearts and minds in which al Qaeda had already scored a number of victories-as the reluctance of America's Middle Eastern allies to offer public support for the campaign against it demonstrated. The first step toward weakening the hold of bin Laden's ideology, therefore, must be to comprehend the symbolic universe into which he has dragged us.

AMERICA, THE HUBAL OF THE AGE

BIN LADEN'S October 7 statement offers a crucial window onto his conceptual world and repays careful attention. In it he states, "Hypocrisy stood behind the leader of global idolatry, behind the Hubal of the age-namely, America and its supporters." Because the symbolism is obscure to most Americans, this sentence was widely mistranslated in the press, but bin Laden's Muslim audience understood it immediately.

In the early seventh century, when the Prophet Muhammad began to preach Islam to the pagan Arab tribes in Mecca, Hubal was a stone idol that stood in the Kaaba—a structure that Abraham, according to Islamic tradition, originally built on orders from God as a sanctuary of Islam. In the years between Abraham and Muhammad, the tradition runs, the Arabs fell away from true belief and began to worship idols, with Hubal the most powerful of many. When bin Laden calls America "the Hubal of the age," he suggests that it is the primary focus of idol worship and that it is polluting the Kaaba, a symbol of Islamic purity. His imagery has a double resonance: it portrays American culture as a font of idolatry while rejecting the American military presence on the Arabian peninsula (which is, by his definition, the holy land of Islam, a place barred to infidels). Muhammad's prophecy called the Arabs of Mecca back to their monotheistic birthright. The return to true belief, however, was not an easy one, because the reigning Meccan oligarchy persecuted the early Muslims. By calling for the destruction of Hubal, the Prophet's message threatened to undermine the special position that Mecca enjoyed in Arabia as a pagan shrine city. With much of their livelihood at stake, the oligarchs punished Muhammad's followers and conspired to kill him. The Muslims therefore fled from Mecca to Medina, where they established the *umma* as apolitical and religious community. They went on to fight and win a war against Mecca that ended with the destruction of Hubal and the spread of true Islam around the world.

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Before the Prophet could achieve this success, however, he encountered the *Munafiqun*, the Hypocrites of Medina. Muhammad's acceptance of leadership over the Medinese reduced the power of a number of local tribal leaders. These men outwardly accepted Islam in order to protect their worldly status, but in their hearts they bore malice toward both the Prophet and his message. Among other misdeeds, the treacherous *Munafiqun* abandoned Muhammad on the battlefield at a moment when he was already woefully outnumbered. The Hypocrites were apostates who accepted true belief but then rejected it, and as such they were regarded as worse than the infidels who had never embraced Islam to begin with. Islam can understand just how difficult it is for a pagan to leave behind all the beliefs and personal connections that he or she once held dear; it is less forgiving of those who accept the truth and then subvert it.

In bin Laden's imagery, the leaders of the Arab and Islamic worlds today are Hypocrites, idol worshippers cowering behind America, the

Hubal of the age. His sword jabs simultaneously at the United States and the governments allied with it. His attack was designed to force those governments to choose: You are either with the idol-worshipping enemies of God or you are with the true believers.

The al Qaeda organization grew out of an Islamic religious movement called the Salafiyya—a name derived from *al-Salaf al-Salih*, "the venerable forefathers," which refers to the generation of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Salafis regard the Islam that most Muslims practice today as polluted by idolatry; they seek to reform the religion by emulating the first generation of Muslims, whose pristine society they consider to have best reflected God's wishes for humans. The Salafiyya is not a unified movement, and it expresses itself in many forms, most of which do not approach the extremism of Osama bin Laden or the Taliban. The Wahhabi ideology of the Saudi state, for example, and the religious doctrines of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and a host of voluntary religious organizations around the Islamic world are all Salafi. These diverse movements share the belief that Muslims have deviated from God's plan and that matters can be returned to their proper state by emulating the Prophet.

Like any other major religious figure, Muhammad left behind a legacy that his followers have channeled in different directions. An

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extremist current in the Salafiyya places great emphasis on jihad, or holy war. Among other things, the Prophet Muhammad fought in mortal combat against idolatry, and some of his followers today choose to accord this aspect of his career primary importance. The devoted members of al Qaeda display an unsettling willingness to martyr themselves because they feel that, like the Prophet, they are locked in a life-or-death struggle with the forces of unbelief that threaten from all sides. They consider themselves an island of true believers surrounded by a sea of iniquity and think the future of religion itself, and therefore the world, depends on them and their battle against idol worship.

In almost every Sunni Muslim country the Salafiyya has spawned Islamist political movements working to compel the state to apply the *shari'a*—that is, Islamic law. Extremist Salafis believe that strict application of the *shari'a* is necessary to ensure that Muslims walk on the path of the Prophet. The more extremist the party, the more insistent and violent the

demand that the state must apply the *shari'a* exclusively. In the view of extremist Salafis, the *shari'a* is God's thunderous commandment to Muslims, and failure to adopt it constitutes idolatry. By removing God from the realm of law, a domain that he has clearly claimed for Himself alone, human legislation amounts to worshipping a pagan deity. Thus it was on the basis of failure to apply the *shari'a* that extremists branded Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat an apostate and then killed him. His assassins came from a group often known as Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the remnants of which have in recent years merged with al Qaeda. In fact, investigators believe that Egyptian Islamic Jihad's leaders, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Muhammad Atef (who was killed in the U.S. air campaign), masterminded the attacks of September 11. In his 1996 "Declaration of War against the Americans," bin Laden showed that he and his Egyptian associates are cut from the same cloth. Just as Zawahiri and Atef considered the current regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt to be a nest of apostates, so bin Laden considered the Saudi monarchy (its Wahhabi doctrines notwithstanding) to have renounced Islam.

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According to bin Laden, his king adopted "polytheism," which bin Laden defined as the acceptance of "laws fabricated by men. . .permitting that which God has forbidden." It is the height of human arrogance and irreligion to "share with God in His sole right of sovereignty and making the law.

Extremist Salafis, therefore, regard modern Western civilization, as a font of evil, spreading idolatry around the globe in the form of secularism. Since the United States is the strongest Western nation, the main purveyor of pop culture, and the power most involved in the political and economic affairs of the Islamic world, it receives particularly harsh criticism. Only the apostate Middle Eastern regimes themselves fall under harsher condemnation.

It is worth remembering, in this regard, that the rise of Islam represents a miraculous case of the triumph of human will. With little more than their beliefs to gird them, the Prophet Muhammad and a small number of devoted followers started a movement that brought the most powerful empires of their day crashing to the ground. On September 11, the attackers undoubtedly imagined themselves to be retracing the Prophet's steps. As they boarded the planes with the intention of

destroying the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, they recited battle prayers that contained the line "All of their equipment, and gates, and technology will not prevent [you from achieving your aim], nor harm [you] except by God's will." The hijackers' imaginations certainly needed nothing more than this sparse line to remind them that, as they attacked America, they rode right behind Muhammad, who in his day had unleashed forces that, shortly after his death, destroyed the Persian Empire and crippled Byzantium—the two superpowers of the age.

AMERICA, LAND OF THE CRUSADERS

When thinking about the world today and their place in it, the extremist Salafis do not reflect only on the story of the foundation of Islam. They also scour more than a millennium of Islamic history in search of parallels to the present predicament. In his "Declaration of War," for instance, bin Laden states that the stationing of American forces on the soil of the Arabian peninsula constitutes the greatest aggression committed against the Muslims since the death of the Prophet in AD 632.

To put this claim in perspective, it is worth remembering that in the last 1,300 years Muslims have suffered a number of significant defeats, including but not limited to the destruction of the Abbasid caliphate by the Mongols, an episode of which bin Laden is well aware. In 1258 the ruthless Mongol leader Hulegu sacked Baghdad, killed the caliph, and massacred hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, stacking their skulls, as legend has it, in a pyramid outside the city walls. Whatever one thinks about U.S. policy toward Iraq, few in America would argue that the use of Saudi bases to enforce the sanctions against Saddam Hussein's regime constitutes a world-historical event on a par with the Mongol invasion of the Middle East. Before September 11, one might have been tempted to pass off as nationalist hyperbole bin Laden's assumption that U.S. policy represents the pinnacle of human evil. Now we know he is deadly serious.

The magnitude of the attacks on New York and Washington make it clear that al Qaeda does indeed believe itself to be fighting a war to save the *umma* from Satan, represented by secular Western culture. Extreme though they may be, these views extend far beyond al Qaeda's immediate followers in Afghanistan. Even a quick glance at the Islamist press in Arabic demonstrates that many Muslims who do not belong to bin Laden's terrorist network consider the United States to be on a moral par with Genghis Khan. Take, for instance, Muhammad Abbas, an Egyptian

Islamist who wrote the following in the newspaper *Al Shaab* on September 21:

Look! There is the master of democracy whom they have so often sanctified but who causes criminal, barbaric, bloody oppression that abandons the moral standards of even the most savage empires in history. In my last column I listed for readers the five million killed (may God receive them as martyrs) because of the crimes committed by this American civilization that America leads. These five million were killed in the last few decades alone.

Similar feelings led another *Al Shaab* columnist that day, Khalid al-Sharif, to describe the shock and delight that he felt while watching the World Trade Center crumbling:

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Look at that! America, master of the world, is crashing down. Look at that! The Satan who rules the world, east and west, is burning. Look at that! The sponsor of terrorism is itself seared by its fire.

The fanatics of al Qaeda see the world in black and white and advance a particularly narrow view of Islam. This makes them a tiny minority among Muslims. But the basic categories of their thought flow directly from the mainstream of the Salafiyya, a perspective that has enjoyed a wide hearing over the last 5° years. Familiarity thus ensures bin Laden's ideas a sympathetic reception in many quarters.

In Salafi writings, the United States emerges as the senior member of a "Zionist-Crusader alliance" dedicated to subjugating Muslims, killing them, and, most important, destroying Islam. A careful reading reveals that this alliance represents more than just close relations between the United States and Israel today. The international cooperation between Washington and Jerusalem is but one nefarious manifestation of a greater evil of almost cosmic proportions. Thus in his "Declaration of War" bin Laden lists 10 or 12 world hot spots where Muslims have recently died (including Bosnia, Chechnya, and Lebanon) and attributes all of these deaths to a conspiracy led by the United States, even though Americans actually played no role in pulling the trigger. And thus, in another document, "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," bin Laden describes U.S. policies toward the Middle East as "a clear declaration of war on God, His messenger, and Muslims."

As strange as it may sound to an American audience, the idea that the United States has taken an oath of enmity toward God has deep roots in the Salafi tradition. It has been around for more than 50 years and has reached a wide public through the works of, among others, Sayyid Qutb, the most important Salafi thinker of the last half-century and a popular author in the Muslim world even today, nearly 40 years after his death. A sample passage taken from his writings in the early 1950s illustrates the point. Addressing the reasons why the Western powers had failed to support Muslims against their enemies in Pakistan, Palestine, and elsewhere, Qutb canvassed a number of common explanations such as Jewish financial influence and British imperial trickery but concluded,

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All of these opinions overlook one vital element in the question. ..the Crusader spirit that runs in the blood of all Occidentals. It is this that colors all their thinking, which is responsible for their imperialistic fear of the spirit of Islam and for their efforts to crush the strength of Islam. For the instincts and the interests of all Occidentals are bound up together in the crushing of that strength. This is the common factor that links together communist Russia and capitalist America. We do not forget the role of international Zionism in plotting against Islam and in pooling the forces of the Crusader imperialists and communist materialists alike. This is nothing other than a continuation of the role played by the Jews since the migration of the Prophet to Medina and the rise of the Islamic state.

Sayyid Qutb, Osama bin Laden, and the entire extremist Salafiyya see Western civilization, in all periods and in all guises, as innately hostile to Muslims and to Islam itself. The West and Islam are locked in a prolonged conflict. Islam will eventually triumph, of course, but only after enduring great hardship. Contemporary history, defined as it is by Western domination, constitutes the darkest era in the entire history of Islam.

AMERICA AND THE MONGOL THREAT

WHEN ATTEMPTING to come to grips with the nature of the threat the modern West poses, extremist Salafis fall back on the writings of Ibn Taymiyya for guidance. A towering figure in the history of Islamic thought, he was born in Damascus in the thirteenth century, when Syria stood under the threat of invasion from the Mongols. Modern radicals find

him attractive because he too faced the threat of a rival civilization. Ibn Taymiyya the firebrand exhorted his fellow Muslims to fight the Mongol foe, while Ibn Taymiyya the intellectual guided his community through the problems Muslims face when their social order falls under the shadow of non-Muslim power. It is only natural that bin Laden himself looks to such a master in order to legitimate his policies. Using Ibn Taymiyya to target America, however, marks an interesting turning point in the history of the radical Salafiyya.

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in Laden's "Declaration of War" uses the logic of Ibn Taymiyya to persuade others in the Salafiyya to abandon old tactics for new ones. The first reference to him arises in connection with a discussion of the "Zionist-Crusader alliance," which according to bin Laden has been jailing and killing radical preachers-men such as Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, in prison for plotting a series of bombings in New York City following the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. Bin Laden argues that the "iniquitous Crusader movement under the leadership of the U.S.A." fears these preachers because they will successfully rally the Islamic community against the West, just as Ibn Taymiyya did against the Mongols in his day. Having identified the United States as a threat to Islam equivalent to the Mongols, bin Laden then discusses what to do about it. Ibn Taymiyya provides the answer: "To fight in the defense of religion and belief is a collective duty; there is no other duty after belief than fighting the enemy who is corrupting the life and the religion." The next most important thing after accepting the word of God, in other words, is fighting for it.

By calling on the *umma* to fight the Americans as if they were the Mongols, bin Laden and his Egyptian lieutenants have taken the extremist Salafiyya down a radically new path. Militants have long identified the West as a pernicious evil on a par with the Mongols, but they have traditionally targeted the internal enemy, the Hypocrites and apostates, rather than Hubal itself. Aware that he is shifting the focus considerably, bin Laden quotes Ibn Taymiyya at length to establish the basic point that "people of Islam should join forces and support each other to get rid of the main infidel," even if that means that the true believers will be forced to fight alongside Muslims of dubious piety. In the grand scheme of things, he argues, God often uses the base motives of impious Muslims as a means of advancing the cause of religion. In effect, bin Laden calls upon his fellow Islamist radicals to postpone the Islamic revolution, to stop

fighting Hypocrites and apostates: "An internal war is a great mistake, no matter what reasons there are for it," because discord among Muslims will only serve the United States and its goal of destroying Islam.

The shift of focus from the domestic enemy to the foreign power is all the more striking given the merger of al Qaeda and Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The latter's decision to kill Sadat in 1981 arose directly

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from the principle that the cause of Islam would be served by targeting lax Muslim leaders rather than by fighting foreigners, and here, too, Ibn Taymiyya provided the key doctrine. In his day Muslims often found themselves living under Mongol rulers who had absorbed Islam in one form or another. Ibn Taymiyya argued that such rulers- who outwardly pretended to be Muslims but who secretly followed non-Islamic, Mongol practices-must be considered infidels. Moreover, he claimed, by having accepted Islam but having also failed to observe key precepts of the religion, they had in effect committed apostasy and thereby written their own death sentences. In general, Islam prohibits fighting fellow Muslims and strongly restricts the right to rebel against the ruler; Ibn Taymiyya's doctrines, therefore, were crucial in the development of Sunni Islamic revolutionary theory.

Egyptian Islamic Jihad views leaders such as Sadat as apostates. Although they may outwardly display signs of piety, they do not actually have Islam in their hearts, as their failure to enforce the *shari'a* proves. This non-Islamic behavior demonstrates that such leaders actually serve the secular West, precisely as an earlier generation of outwardly Muslim rulers had served the Mongols, and as the Hypocrites had served idolatry. Islamic Jihad explained itself back in the mid-1980s in a long, lucid statement titled "The Neglected Duty." Not a political manifesto like bin Laden's tracts, it is a sustained and learned argument that targets the serious believer rather than the angry, malleable crowd. Unlike bin Laden's holy war, moreover, Islamic Jihad's doctrine, though violent, fits clearly in the mainstream of Salafi consciousness, which historically has been concerned much more with the state of the Muslims themselves than with relations between Islam and the outside world. The decision to target America, therefore, raises the question of whether, during the 1990s, Egyptian Islamic Jihad changed its ideology entirely. Did its leaders decide that the foreign enemy was in fact the real enemy? Or was the 1993 bombing in New York tactical rather than strategic?

The answer would seem to be the latter. Bin Laden's "Declaration of War" itself testifies to the tactical nature of his campaign against

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America. Unlike "The Neglected Duty," which presents a focused argument, the "Declaration of War" meanders from topic to topic, contradicting itself along the way. On the one hand, it calls for unity in the face of external aggression and demands an end to internecine warfare; on the other, it calls in essence for revolution in Saudi Arabia. By presenting a litany of claims against the Saudi ruling family and by discussing the politics of Saudi Arabia at length and in minute detail, bin Laden protests too much: he reveals that he has not, in fact, set aside the internal war among the believers. Moreover, he also reveals that the ideological basis for that internal war has not changed. The members of the Saudi elite, like Sadat, have committed apostasy. Like the Hypocrites of Medina, they serve the forces of irreligion in order to harm the devotees of the Prophet and his message:

You know more than anybody else about the size, intention, and the danger of the presence of the U.S. military bases in the area. The [Saudi] regime betrayed the *umma* and joined the infidels, assisting them. ...against the Muslims. It is well known that this is one of the ten "voiders" of Islam, deeds of de-Islamization. By opening the Arabian Peninsula to the crusaders, the regime disobeyed and acted against what has been enjoined by the messenger of God.

Osama bin Laden undoubtedly believes that Americans are Crusader-Zionists, that they threaten his people even more than did the Mongols-in short, that they are the enemies of God Himself But he also sees them as obstacles to his plans for his native land. The "Declaration of War" provides yet more testimony to the old saw that ultimately all politics is local.

THE FAILURE OF POLITICAL ISLAM IF THE ATTACKS on the United States represented a change in radical Salafi tactics, then one must wonder what prompted bin Laden and Zawahiri to make that change. The answer is that the attacks were a response to the failure of extremist movements in the Muslim world in recent years, which have generally proved incapable of taking power (Sudan and Afghanistan being the major

exceptions). In the last two decades, several violent groups have challenged regimes such as those

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in Egypt, Syria, and Algeria, but in every case the government has managed to crush, co-opt, or marginalize the radicals. In the words of the "Declaration of War,"

the Zionist-Crusader alliance moves quickly to contain and abort any "corrective movement" appearing in Islamic countries. Different means and methods are used to achieve their target. Sometimes officials from the Ministry of the Interior, who are also graduates of the colleges of the *shari'a*, are [unleashed] to mislead and confuse the nation and the *umma* ... and to circulate false information about the movement, wasting the energy of the nation in discussing minor issues and ignoring the main one that is the unification of people under the divine law of Allah.

Given that in Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere regimes have resorted to extreme violence to protect themselves, it is striking that bin Laden emphasizes here not the brutality but rather the counterpropaganda designed to divide and rule. Consciously or not, he has put his finger on a serious problem for the extremist Salafis: the limitations of their political and economic theories.

Apart from insisting on the implementation of the *shari'a*, demanding social justice, and turning the *umma* into the only legitimate political community, radical Salafis have precious little to offer in response to the mundane problems that people and governments face in the modern world. Extremist Islam is profoundly effective in mounting a protest movement: it can produce a cadre of activists whose devotion to the cause knows no bounds, it can galvanize people to fight against oppression. But it has serious difficulties when it comes to producing institutions and programs that can command the attention of diverse groups in society over the long haul. Its success relies mainly on the support of true believers, but they tend to fragment in disputes over doctrine, leadership, and agenda.

The limitations of extremist Salafi political theory and its divisive tendencies come to light clearly if one compares the goals of al Qaeda with those of the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, whose suicide bombers have also been in the headlines recently. The ideology of Hamas

also evolved out of the Egyptian extremist Salafiyya milieu, and it shares with al Qaeda a paranoid view of the

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world: the umma and true Islam are threatened with extinction by the spread of Western secularism, the policies of the Crusading West, and oppression by the Zionists.. Both Hamas and al Qaeda believe that the faithful must obliterate Israel.. But looking more ""closely at Hamas and its agenda, one can see that it parts company with al Qaeda in many significant ways.. This is because Hamas operates in the midst of nationalistic Palestinians, a majority of whom fervently desire, among other things, an end to the Israeli , occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state in part of ,historic Palestine..

The nationalist outlook of Hamas' public presents the organization with a number of thorny problems.. Nationalism, according to the extremist Salafiyya, constitutes *shirk-that* is, polytheism or idolatry. If politics and religion are not distinct categories, as extremist Salafis argue, then political life must be centered around God and God's law.. Sovereignty belongs not to the nation but to God alone, and the only legitimate political community is the *umma*.. Pride in one's ethnic group is tolerable only so long as it does not divide the community of believers, who form an indivisible unit thanks to the sovereignty of the *shari'a*.. One day, extremist Salafis believe, political boundaries will be erased and all Muslims will live in one polity devoted to God's will.. At the moment, however, the priority is not to erase boundaries but to raise up the *shari'a* and abolish secular law. Nationalism is idolatry because it divides the *umma* and replaces the *shari'a-centered* consciousness with ethnic pride.

If Hamas were actually to denounce secular Palestinian nationalists as apostates, however, it would immediately consign itself to political irrelevance. To skirt this problem, the organization has developed an elaborate view of Islamic history that in effect elevates the Palestinian national struggle to a position of paramount importance for the *umma* as a whole. This allows Hamas activists to function in the day-to-day political world as fellow travelers with the nationalists. Thus one of the fascinating aspects of Palestinian extremist Salafiyya is a dog that hasn't barked: in contrast to its sibling movements in neighboring countries, Hamas has refrained from labeling the secular leaders in the Palestinian Authority as apostates. Even at the height of Yasir Arafat's crackdown against Hamas, the movement never openly branded him as an idolater.

Like al Qaeda, Hamas argues that a conspiracy between Zionism and the West has dedicated itself to destroying Islam, but for obvious reasons it magnifies the role of Zionism in the alliance. The Hamas Covenant, for example, sees Zionism as, among other things, a force determining many of the greatest historical developments of the modern period:

[Zionists] were behind the French Revolution, the communist revolution. ...They were behind World War I, when they were able to destroy the Islamic caliphate [i.e., the Ottoman Empire]. ... They obtained the Balfour Declaration [favoring establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine], [and] formed the League of Nations, through which they could rule the world. They were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains by trading in armaments, and paved the way for the establishment of their state. It was they who instigated the replacement of the League of Nations with the United Nations and the Security Council. ...There is no war going on anywhere, without [them] having their finger in it.

Do a number of intelligent and educated people actually believe this? Yes, because they must; their self-understanding hinges on it. Since their political struggle must be for the greater good of the *umma* and of Islam as a whole, their enemy must be much more than just one part of the Jewish people with designs on one sliver of Muslim territory. The enemy must be the embodiment of an evil that transcends time and place.

Although the sanctity of Jerusalem works in Hamas' favor, in Islam Jerusalem does not enjoy the status of Mecca and Medina and is only a city, not an entire country. To reconcile its political and religious concerns, therefore, Hamas must inflate the significance of Palestine in Islamic history: "The present Zionist onslaught," the covenant says, "has also been preceded by Crusading raids from the West and other Tatar [Mongol] raids from the East." The references here are to Saladin, the Muslim leader who defeated the Crusaders in Palestine at the battle of Hattin in 1187, and to the Muslim armies that defeated the Mongols at another Palestinian site called Ayn Jalut in 1260. On this basis Hamas argues that

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Palestine has always been the bulwark against the enemies of Islam;

the *umma*, therefore, must rally behind the Palestinians to destroy Israel, which represents the third massive onslaught against the true religion since the death of the Prophet.

Despite the similarities in their perspectives, therefore, al-Qaeda and Hamas have quite different agendas. Al-Qaeda justifies its political goals on the basis of the holiness of Mecca and Medina and on the claim that the presence of U.S. forces in Arabia constitutes the greatest aggression that the Muslims have ever endured. Hamas sees its own struggle against Israel as the first duty of the *umma*. The two organizations undoubtedly share enough in common to facilitate political cooperation on many issues, but at some point their agendas diverge radically, a divergence that stems from the different priorities inherent in their respective Saudi and Palestinian backgrounds.

The differences between al-Qaeda and Hamas demonstrate how local conditions can mold the universal components of Salafi consciousness into distinct world views. They display the creativity of radical Islamists in addressing a practical problem similar to that faced by communists in the early twentieth century: how to build a universal political movement that can nevertheless function effectively at the local level. This explains why, when one looks at the political map of the extremist Salafiyya, one finds a large number of organizations all of which insist that they stand for the same principles. They do, in fact, all insist on the implementation of the *shari'a*, but the specific social and political forces fueling that insistence differ greatly from place to place. They all march to the beat of God's drummer, but the marchers tend to wander off in different directions.

The new tactic of targeting America is designed to overcome precisely this weakness of political Islam. Bin Laden succeeded in attacking Hubal, the universal enemy: he identified the only target that all of the Salafiyya sub-movements around the world can claim equally as their own, thereby reflecting and reinforcing the collective belief that the *umma* actually is the political community. He and his colleagues adopted this strategy not from choice but from desperation, a desperation born of the fact that in recent years the extremist Salafis

had been defeated politically almost everywhere in the Arab and Muslim world. The new tactic, by tapping into the deepest emotions of the political community, smacks of brilliance, and-much to America's chagrin-will undoubtedly give political Islam a renewed burst of energy.

EXPLAINING THE ECHO

THE DECISION to target the United States allows al Qaeda to play the role of a radical "Salafi International." It resonates beyond the small community of committed extremists, however, reaching not just moderate Salafis but, in addition, a broad range of disaffected citizens experiencing poverty, oppression, and powerlessness across the Muslim world. This broader resonance of what appears to us as such a wild and hateful message is the dimension of the problem that Americans find most difficult to understand.

One reason for the welcoming echo is the extent to which Salafi political movements, while failing to capture state power, have nevertheless succeeded in capturing much cultural ground in Muslim countries. Many authoritarian regimes {such as Mubarak's Egypt) have cut a deal with the extremists: in return for an end to assassinations, the regime acquiesces in some of the demands regarding implementation of the *shari'a*. In addition, it permits the extremist groups to run networks of social welfare organizations that often deliver services more efficiently than does a state sector riddled with corruption and marred by decay. This powerful cultural presence of the Salafis across the Islamic world means not only that their direct ranks have grown but also that their symbolism is more familiar than ever among a wider public.

But the attack on America also resonates deeply among secular groups in many countries. The immediate response in the secular Arab press, for example, fell broadly into three categories. A minority denounced the attacks forcefully and unconditionally, another minority attributed them to the Israelis or to American extremists like Timothy Mc Veigh, and a significant majority responded with a version of "Yes, but"- yes, the terrorist attacks against you were wrong, but you must understand that your own policies in the Middle East have for years sown the seeds of this kind of violence.

This rationalization amounts to a political protest against the perceived role of the United States in the Middle East. Arab and Islamic commentators, and a number of prominent analysts of the Middle East in this country, point in particular to U.S. enforcement of the sanctions on Iraq and U.S. support for Israel in its struggle against Palestinian Nationalism. Both of these issues certainly cause outrage, and if the United States were to effect the removal of Israeli settlements from the West Bank and alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people, some of that outrage would certainly subside. But although a change in those policies would dampen some of bin Laden's appeal, it would not solve the problem of the broader anger and despair that he taps, because the sources of those feelings lie beyond the realm of day-to-day diplomacy.

Indeed, secular political discourse in the Islamic world in general and the Arab world in particular bears a striking resemblance to the Salafi interpretation of international affairs, especially insofar as both peak in terms of Western conspiracies. The secular press does not make reference to Crusaders and Mongols but rather to a string of "broken promises" dating back to World War I, when the European powers divided up the Ottoman Empire to suit their own interests. They planted Israel in the midst of the Middle East, so the analysis goes, in order to drive a wedge between Arab states, and the United States continues to support Israel for the same purpose. Bin Laden played to this sentiment in his October 7 statement when he said,

What the United States tastes today is a very small thing compared to what we have tasted for tens of years. Our nation has been tasting this humiliation and contempt for more than eighty years. Its sons are being killed, its blood is being shed, its holy places are being attacked, and it is not being ruled according to what God has decreed.

For 80 years—that is, since the destruction of the Ottoman Empire—the Arabs and the Muslims have been humiliated. Although they do not share bin Laden's millenarian agenda, when secular commentators point to Palestine and Iraq today they do not see just two difficult political problems; they see what they consider the true intentions of the West unmasked.

Arab commentators often explain, for instance, that Saddam Hussein and Washington are actually allies. They ridicule the notion that the United States tried to depose the dictator. After all, it is said, the first Bush administration had the forces in place to remove the Baath Party and had called on the Iraqi populace to rise up against the tyrant. When the people actually rose, however, the Americans watched from the sidelines as the regime brutally suppressed them. Clearly, therefore, what the United States really wanted was to divide and rule the Arabs in order to secure easy access to Persian Gulf oil—a task that also involves propping up corrupt monarchies in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Keeping Saddam on a leash was the easiest way to ensure that Iran could not block the project.

Needless to say, this world view is problematic. Since World War I, Arab societies have been deeply divided among themselves along ethnic, social, religious, and political lines. Regardless of what the dominant Arab discourse regarding broken promises has to say, most of these divisions were not created by the West. The European powers and the United States have sometimes worked to divide the Arabs, sometimes to unify them. Mostly they have pursued their own interests, as have all the other actors involved. Bin Laden is a participant in a profoundly serious civil war over Arab and Muslim identity in the modern world. The United States is also a participant in that war, because whether it realizes it or not, its policies affect the fortunes of the various belligerents. But Washington is not a primary actor, because it is an outsider in cultural affairs and has only a limited ability to define for believers the role of Islam in public life.

The war between extremist Salafis and the broader populations around them is only the tip of the iceberg. The fight over religion among Muslims is but one of a number of deep and enduring regional struggles that originally had nothing to do with the United States and even today involve it only indirectly. Nonetheless, U.S. policies can influence the balance of power among the protagonists in these struggles, sometimes to a considerable degree.

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Until the Arab and Muslim worlds create political orders that do not disenfranchise huge segments of their own populations, the civil war will continue and will continue to touch the United States. Washington can play an important role in fostering authentic and inclusive polities, but ultimately Arabs and Muslims more generally must learn to live in peace with one another so as to live comfortably with outsiders. Whether they will do so is anybody's guess.

It is a stark political fact that in the Arab and Muslim worlds today economic globalization and the international balance of power both come with an American face, and neither gives much reason for optimism. Osama bin Laden's rhetoric, dividing the world into two camps-the *umma* versus the United States and puppet regimes- has a deep resonance because on some levels it conforms, if not to reality, then at least to its appearances. This is why, for the first time in modern history, the extremist Salafis have managed to mobilize mass popular opinion.

This development is troubling, but the United States still has some cards to play. Its policies, for instance, on both West Bank settlements and Iraq, are sorely in need of review-but only after bin Laden has been vanquished. These policy changes might help, but the root problem lies deeper. Once al Qaeda has been annihilated without sparking anti-American revolutions in the Islamic world, the United States should adopt a set of policies that ensure that significant numbers of Muslims-not Muslim regimes but Muslims-identify their own interests with those of the United States, so that demagogues like bin Laden cannot aspire to speak in the name of the entire *umma*. In 1991, millions of Iraqis constituted just such a reservoir of potential supporters, yet America turned its back on them. Washington had its reasons, but they were not the kind that can be justified in terms of the American values that we trumpet to the world. Today we are paying a price for that hypocrisy. This is not to say that we caused or deserved the attacks of September 11 in any way. It is to say, however, that we are to some extent responsible for the fact that so few in the Arab and Muslim worlds express vocal and unequivocal support for our cause, even when that cause is often their cause as well.

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Since the events of September 11, innumerable articles have appeared in the press discussing America's loss of innocence. To foreigners, this view of America as naïve bumpkins, a band of Forrest Gumps who just arrived in town, is difficult to fathom. Whether the MTV generation knows it or not, the United States has been deeply involved in other peoples' civil wars for a long time. A generation ago, for example, we supposedly lost our innocence in Vietnam. Back then Adonis, the poet laureate of the Arab World, meditated on the ambivalence Arabs feel toward America. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, his poem seems prophetic:

New York, you will find in my land

...the stone of Mecca and the waters
of the Tigris. In spite of all this,
you pant in Palestine and Hanoi.
East and west you contend with people
whose only history is fire.

These tormented people knew us before we were virgins.

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