

ABSTRACT

TITLE OF THESIS: Usama Bin Laden and Weapons of Mass Destruction: What's Holding Him Back?

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The current operations and future plans of Usama bin Laden have been a top priority concern for U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies for some time. Noted as a premier terrorist leader and financier, U.S. authorities have accused bin Laden of ordering and supporting a host of violent acts. Bin Laden himself makes no secret of his terror campaign, although he shrouds it in an elaborate tapestry of religious and ideological propaganda. Central to this campaign is bin Laden's open declaration of war on the U.S. In the context of this war, where does bin Laden draw the line on the level of violence he is willing to use? Does he have a line?

Media and scholarly sources speculate that bin Laden already owns a weapon of mass destruction (WMD), but these conjectures have produced few substantive details. The author has also chosen to address this highly sensationalized topic, but from a unique perspective. If bin Laden does, in fact, own a weapon of mass destruction (WMD), then what is holding him back?

The available literature acknowledges bin Laden's access to and likely possession of WMD, but avoids consideration of the factors restraining his using them against U.S.

targets. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature, suggesting possible restraints and testing them against the evidence on bin Laden and his organization. The author has proposed the hypothesis that the following reasons are restraining bin Laden from using WMD: fear of public revulsion; fear of retaliation, the unpredictability of WMD in the delivery phase, and the dangers of handling, transporting, and delivering WMD.

The study used three available categories of evidence in order to assess the applicability of these restraints. Each category constitutes a chapter in the thesis. These are bin Laden's personal history and psyche, his public persona, and the group that follows him. The author concludes, on the basis of this evidence, that in the majority of instances the four restraints specified do not apply to bin Laden. Since the author considered the applicability of all four restraints at the end of each of the three evidentiary chapters, this effort produced 12 separate conclusions. The evidence was slightly ambiguous in only two cases. The other 10 conclusions revealed no evidence of known restraints on bin Laden. Reviewed as a whole, the 12 conclusions suggest that none of these restraints can be said to be a serious factor in bin Laden's decisions regarding WMD. Therefore, another *unknown* restraint appears to be restraining bin Laden. This restraint may be as ephemeral as a question of timing.

Ascertaining the likely restraints on bin Laden's or on anyone's decision to use WMD can feed vital data to law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and enhance their counterterror programs. If fear of public revulsion is keeping a terrorist group from escalating, one can easily infer public opinion is important to the group. This opinion can then be manipulated to harm the terrorists' cohesion and morale. If the sustained deployment of U.S. or allied forces in the area has been a major restraint, removal of

these troops could trigger a spike in violent attacks. Deploying more troops may lessen the severity and frequency of attacks.

Looking at restraints to action is just one way to attempt to understand terrorists' motivations. If the rapid technological advances and increased proliferation of WMD materials highlight anything, it is the need to understand why terrorists do what they do. In the end, knowledge of others' capabilities fails to explain anybody's actions. Plenty of WMD-capable actors do not use WMD, and may never have committed a terrorist act at all.

Therefore, knowing a group's "order of battle" may reveal aspects of a group's capabilities, but provides little in the way of anticipating a terrorist threat. Without an appreciation of motivations, responding to terrorism can often become just that—a response. The stakes in light of the global WMD terrorist threat are too high to permit a reliance on effective response without at least equal effort in the realm of prevention.

**USAMA BIN LADEN
AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION:
WHAT'S HOLDING HIM BACK?**

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author
And do not reflect the official policy or position of
The Joint Military Intelligence College or the U.S. Government

DEDICATION

This thesis is first dedicated to God, who sustained my family and me through the challenges of producing such a volume. I also dedicate these efforts to my abiding wife (b)(6) whose faith in me never wavered, and whose devotion to her husband and children knows no bounds. Not only did (b)(6) keep a vigilant watch on our home during my long hours in the computer lab, but she contributed heavily to the inspiration and quality (including hours of editing) of the final version of this thesis.

I also dedicate this work to JMIC professors (b)(3);10 USC 424 (b)(3);10 USC 424 for the top quality guidance they offered, their fascinating seminars that awakened the essence of this work in me, their encouraging reassurance, their dedication to scholarship and education, and especially their patience.

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USAMA BIN LADEN AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION: WHAT'S HOLDING HIM BACK?

CHAPTER ONE

A NEW WAY TO LOOK AT WMD TERRORISTS

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim...We—with God's help—call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans...

Usama bin Laden, in his February 1998
fatwa

Bin Laden has not only attacked US interests and threatened the USA and its citizens, he has raised the prospect of even more destructive future attacks with nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons of mass destruction...The available evidence... suggests that his organization may well have acquired a chemical weapon.

Stefan Leader, in "Usama bin Laden and the
Terrorist Search for WMD"

To seek to possess the weapons that could counter those of the infidels is a religious duty. If I have indeed acquired these weapons, then this is an obligation I carried out.

Usama bin Laden regarding weapons of
mass destruction, in a December 1998
interview with ABC News

The purpose of Chapter One is to present the topic of this study in a concise, but complete manner. Key facets of Chapter One are the author's research question and hypothesis. Also included in this chapter are a review of the relevant literature and a brief discussion of the author's methodology.

Two areas of importance to the author are noteworthy at the front of this chapter. First, this study reflects the author's concern over the threat of weapons of mass

destruction (WMD) terrorism, and his desire to promote a sound, dispassionate treatment of this threat. Second, the author wishes to encourage, and even accelerate, the current process several other scholars have undertaken, which is to continue to generate new paths of approach to the study of WMD terrorism.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF THIS STUDY?

The February 1998 *fatwa* Usama bin Laden issued together with four prominent Muslim leaders is not the first threat the infamous Saudi-born archterrorist has leveled at the U.S.—nor will it be the last. What distinguishes this *fatwa* and subsequent 1998-99 bin Laden statements is the explicit targeting of American civilians, a significant departure from his earlier public comments. It is noteworthy that attacks previous to February 1998 pointing to bin Laden's involvement such as the 1992 explosion in Aden, Yemen, the 1995 Riyadh bombing, and the Khobar Towers explosion in 1996 all appear to have targeted U.S. military personnel only. The bombs which rocked the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania—and cost several American civilian lives—exploded in August 1998, six months after *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, a London-based Arabic newspaper, published bin Laden's *fatwa*.

Nor do conventional explosives appear to be the only threat the U.S. faces from the global terrorist network bin Laden operates. Terrorism specialist Stefan Leader believes that bin Laden already has a chemical weapon (CW), and “may well be looking for a suitable opportunity to use such a weapon.”¹ The comments of a spectrum of U.S.

¹Stefan Leader, “Usama bin Laden and the Terrorist Search for WMD,” *Jane's Intelligence Review* 11, no. 6 (June 1999): 37.

private-sector and government authorities reflect a similar degree of suspicion that bin Laden possesses such an arsenal.² Now he has made it quite clear U.S. civilians are also “fair game” in his war on America. It is no wonder the future actions of this man are a top priority concern for U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

If bin Laden does, in fact, own a weapon of mass destruction, then what is holding him back? The available literature acknowledges bin Laden’s access to and likely possession of WMD, but avoids consideration of the factors restraining his using them against U.S. targets. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature, suggesting possible restraints and testing them against the evidence on bin Laden and his organization. With a full understanding of these restraints, the U.S. would be empowered to strengthen them, or at least to avoid removing them, and attempt to steer events in such a way as to continue to foreclose the WMD option for Usama bin Laden. The hope that this empowerment is achievable prompted and has guided this entire study. As such, this thesis constitutes the author’s definitive answer to only one question—why has Usama bin Laden refrained from using weapons of mass destruction against U.S. targets in the prosecution of his war on the “infidels”?

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT THE POINT

Bin Laden’s extensive, almost decade-long search for WMD is well established, which at least demonstrates he has the desire and the intent to acquire them.³ Given his

²Leader, 34-35.

³Leader, 34-35. See also Gavin Cameron, “Multi-track Microproliferation: Lessons from Aum Shinrikyo and Al Qaida,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 22 (1999): 287-291.

extensive links to Sudan, Iraq, and Iran, it is possible he could acquire such weapons or at least WMD-related technical assistance through these countries, if bin Laden does not yet already have WMD such as CW.⁴ National Intelligence Council chairman John Gannon intimates that bin Laden has already received such assistance from somewhere, charging that Al Qaeda has long been at work attempting to develop a CW arsenal.⁵ For bin Laden, then, access to WMD does not appear to be an obstacle to conducting an attack. An important remaining issue is one of motivations, and whether such motivations include the possibility of WMD use.

A range of experts and officials including Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet agree that bin Laden is planning further anti-U.S. attacks. U.S. intelligence agencies may have already foiled at least seven terrorist acts by bin Laden operatives in the span of just seven months (between August 1998 and March 1999), according to published documents. The motivation for his campaign against Americans is revealed in *fatwas* and other public statements, which emphasize two key overlapping demands: 1) the removal of the U.S. presence from Saudi Arabia and some quadrants of the Persian Gulf, and 2) the preservation and protection of Muslim holy sites from the "infidels."⁶

⁴Leader, 37. On bin Laden's links to these countries, also see the comments of a U.S. counterterrorist official and Congressional Researcher Kenneth Katzman in "Mixed Signals on Saudi Bombers," *Islamic Affairs Analyst* (November 1996): 13. For any of these three states, it is not impossible that the prospect of financial gain or the ensuing disruption of Western policies that would follow a WMD attack would at some point outweigh the perceived risks of a WMD-armed bin Laden. These risks include being caught providing bin Laden WMD assistance, and the possibility that bin Laden might use WMD against their own territories.

⁵Gannon also argues that Al Qaeda had already made plans to use CW against U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia. For Dr. Gannon's comments, see "CIA: Bin Laden Planned Chemical Attack on U.S. Troops in Gulf," 19 November 1998, *CNN*, URL: <<http://cnn.com/US/9811/19/bin.laden.02/index.html>>, accessed 23 May 2000.

⁶Leader, 34 and Magnus Ranstorp, "Interpreting the Broader Context and Meaning of Bin Laden's *Fatwa*," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 21 (1998): 321.

The mass extermination of U.S. forces and other civilians in the Gulf, and the creation of an overwhelming sense of fear in order to break U.S. political will, manipulate U.S. public opinion, or disrupt U.S.-Muslim/U.S.-allied relations both qualify as possible means for bin Laden to achieve his two objectives. WMD and the terror they create have the potential to cause both mass extermination and overwhelming fear, and with a rapidity users of conventional weapons may be hard pressed to match. The question for bin Laden and his organization to answer, then, appears to be whether the benefits of a successful WMD attack outweigh anticipated drawbacks.

Scope of the Study

The above reasoning explains why this thesis treats bin Laden and his organization, known as Al Qaeda, as a credible WMD threat. This work focuses on the group dynamics and uniquely tailored cost-benefit analysis that affect the decisions of one group. The purpose of this writing is to attempt to understand why an organization with a record of past violence, a strong motive, and a determined and powerful enemy would not resort to a class of weapons within its reach that can be more destructive, and arguably more terror-inspiring than conventional weapons.

The author has used the available literature to construct a WMD restraint model consisting of four restraints generally believed to prevent most violence-prone groups from using these weapons: fear of public revulsion; fear of retaliation; unpredictability of the weapon in the delivery phase; and dangers of transporting, maintaining, and delivering the weapon. The author used this model to evaluate the relevant evidence on bin Laden, testing the applicability of these four restraints to bin Laden and his group.

The chapter on synthesis assesses the efficacy of this model in bin Laden's case, and includes judgments on the model's utility and the relative usefulness of adding new restraints if required.

Assumptions the Study Makes

The principal assumption that undergirds this thesis is that bin Laden possesses, or can easily obtain or produce, chemical, biological, or radiological weapons. This assumption is based on four factors: intent to possess, necessary funds, necessary resources, and the ease of acquiring and producing such weapons. Bin Laden's interest in owning these weapons, as written above, is well documented, and there is good reason to believe he already has such an arsenal. U.S. intelligence sources reported in June 1999 that the available evidence indicates bin Laden has acquired ingredients used to produce chemical or biological weapons.⁷

As for funding, bin Laden's personal fortune, gained through inheritance and investment returns, is currently estimated to be between \$100-400 million. On the issue of necessary resources, expert Gavin Cameron identifies both bin Laden and the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo as being uniquely able to successfully pursue WMD acquisition through their use of a multi-track strategy. This strategy, in which a group with significant funding simultaneously seeks chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, is enhanced in bin Laden's case by Al Qaeda's diffuse nature (not geographically bound),

⁷Cameron, "Proliferation," 290.

autonomy of action (decentralized authority), and two-pronged search for both the finished products and an indigenous production capability.⁸

The relative ease with which chemical and biological weapons are produced or acquired is also found in much of the literature. James Campbell and Walter Laqueur are just two of the authors that agree on this point. Campbell argues that many of today's non-state groups have the necessary access to materials and technical requirements, the funding, and connections to individuals fluent in WMD technologies to develop their own arsenal.⁹ Laqueur writes that biological weapons are cheap and easy to produce, and notes that botulinum, for example, is "a thousand times more toxic than sarin...and little sophisticated knowledge is needed to manufacture it."¹⁰ Laqueur repeatedly emphasizes in his new book *The New Terrorism* the ease of acquisition for non-state groups, contending that advances in technology have made this access possible. He also presents the possibility that "rogue governments, which may themselves not use these weapons for fear of retaliation, can readily supply the raw materials or the finished product to terrorists either by political design or for commercial gain."¹¹

Important Definitions

James Foxell defines WMD terrorism as "mass-scale violence purposed to cause immense death tolls enacted through use of weapons capable of killing or sickening large

⁸Cameron, "Proliferation," 282-283, 285.

⁹James Campbell, *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism* (Seminole, FL: Interpact Press, 1997), 3.

¹⁰Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 63-65.

¹¹Laqueur, 5.

numbers en masse."¹² Foxell's parameters, though, are broad enough to encompass incidents such as the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings, and here the U.S. government agrees with him, including in its definition of WMD any conventional explosive in excess of four pounds. The more accepted view on WMD, and one that is more helpful to this thesis, incorporates nuclear, biological, chemical, and radiological weapons, and this paper will consider WMD terrorism only in the context of these four weapon types.

This thesis will focus primarily on three of these weapons types—chemical, biological, and the nuclear variant known as a radiological dispersal device (RDD). While there is evidence that bin Laden has been searching for a nuclear weapon,¹³ several obstacles make this the most challenging of the weapons to manage. Fissionable and fusionable nuclear weapons derive their extreme lethality from the nuclear yield they produce upon detonation. A traditional nuclear arsenal of fission or fusion weapons requires a significant quantity of weapons-grade fissile material (the most difficult technical barrier,¹⁴ now perhaps made easier by Russia's continued economic decline and porous borders), and a pre-made nuclear device or high-tech production infrastructure. Traditional delivery of the weapon as a deployable bomb (from land-based, sea-based, or aerial platforms) also requires command and control facilities and extensive delivery capabilities.

¹² Joseph Foxell, "The Debate on the Potential for Mass-Casualty Terrorism: The Challenge to US Security," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 98.

¹³ Leader, 35-36.

¹⁴ Richard Falkenrath, "Confronting Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Terrorism," *Survival* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 45.

A "suitcase" nuclear bomb or other type of improvised nuclear device is an option for bin Laden, as it is for any non-state actor able to acquire the weapon or obtain sufficient amounts highly enriched uranium (HEU) metal.¹⁵ Buying a suitcase bomb, though, would require bin Laden operatives to tailor it to the needs of a terrorist attack, and to employ or bypass its various arming and fail-safe systems, a task dependent on advanced scientific and technical knowledge. Once in possession of HEU metal, building one's own nuclear device requires an even wider array of technical expertise. Another cost of building such a bomb is that it would be necessarily crude compared to those assembled under government programs, and as such requires a much higher amount of fissile material to produce any nuclear yield.¹⁶ Any yield at all resulting from a homemade bomb would be much lower than that which the more efficient government-designed weapons can produce. This thesis will treat nuclear yield-producing devices in the context of the difficulties they impose on potential users.

An improvised device much easier to operationalize is a radiological weapon, or RDD. An RDD, which employs radioactive substances but, in the absence of a chain reaction, does not produce a nuclear yield, applies to both the exposure of radioactive fissile material to victims and the detonation of such material with conventional explosives. Both methods of delivery, while not nearly as destructive as a true nuclear weapon, can cause many cases of contamination or death by dispersing radioactive material, and yield a significant terror effect.¹⁷ This thesis emphasizes RDD because

¹⁵Falkenrath, 45.

¹⁶Leader, 35.

¹⁷Gavin Cameron, "The Likelihood of Nuclear Terrorism," *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 16. See also Falkenrath, 62.

although actors may be required to turn to states for the necessary nuclear material to build them (increasing their transparency to law enforcement and foreign intelligence collection in the acquisition phase), actors can transport and deliver RDD as easily as chemical and biological weapons (CBW).

Chemical refers to toxic substances—gaseous, liquid, or solid—whose chemical effects result in the incapacitation or death of exposed humans, animals, or plants. There are four general types of chemical weapons: blister (sulphur mustard, nitrogen mustard, and Lewisite), blood (hydrogen cyanide and cyanogen chloride), choking (chlorine and phosgene), and nerve agents.¹⁸ The Central Intelligence Agency divides nerve agents into two categories. G-series agents (tabun, sarin, and soman) cause paralysis of the respiratory muscles, and are quick to kill. V-series agents (VX, VE, VG, VM, and VS) are more toxic than G-series and capable of contaminating a piece of territory over the long-term.¹⁹

Biological addresses both pathogens and toxins. Pathogens are normally occurring, living organisms such as bacteria, viruses, or fungi that an actor can collect and develop into a weapon. These organisms are often self-replicating, passing from host to host according to the nature of its transmissibility, which can vastly increase the range of exposed targets over time. In contrast to biological pathogens, victims of chemical weapons must have direct contact with the weaponized material. Toxins are poisonous substances made by living systems, and which can also be artificially produced.

¹⁸Jessica Siern, *The Ultimate Terrorists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20-24. See also Barbara Starr, "Chemical and Biological Terrorism," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26, no. 7 (14 August 1996): 20.

¹⁹Starr, 20.

Biological weapons are generally recognized as being more toxic, but less controllable and slower-acting than CW.²⁰ Advances in genetic engineering have widened the prospects for weaponization of biological agents, allowing for the design of new agents, more resistant strains of existing agents, and biological weapons (BW) tailored to specific military uses.²¹

SUMMING UP THE POINT

The urgency of this threat from bin Laden and Al Qaeda is the product of three factors. First is the existence of rapid advances in technology, accompanied by the growing proliferation of WMD materials and of scientific knowledge of such materials. Second is bin Laden's increasingly threatening posture. This terrorist has expanded his anti-U.S. target list to include American civilians "in any country,"²² and is the likely author of the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Bin Laden is also alleged to be the mastermind of the aborted conspiracy to bomb U.S. cities during this New Year's millenium celebrations,²³ and has aggressively sought and may own WMD. Third is the difficulty of predicting a bin Laden attack with such weapons. Al Qaeda's diffuse cell structure, bin Laden's ties to other terrorists and Islamists (supporters of an

²⁰Stern, 20-21.

²¹Starr, 20.

²²Ranstorp, "Fatwa," 329.

²³David Vise and Steven Mufson, "More Are Arrested in Probe of Terrorism," *The Washington Post*, 31 December 1999, final ed., Sec. A1. Also see Brian Knowlton, "Arrest of Bin Laden-linked Suspects Led to US Terror Alert," *International Herald Tribune*, 15 December 1999, 1.

Islamic revival), and the availability of CBW through dual-use technologies are just a few of the aspects which make timely prediction more difficult.

This thesis addresses the bin Laden threat by suggesting a number of possible restraints which may hold him back from attacking with WMD, and analyzing the available data to discover whether the data support any of these restraints. This search for likely restraints is imperative, because knowing why bin Laden has not resorted to such an attack can provide the U.S. intelligence community with valuable insight on whether or when he will use WMD. The U.S. may be unaware of a restraint it has placed, and its removal could trigger an attack. Conversely, knowing which restraints work allows the U.S. the opportunity to strengthen them. The thesis, in effect, offers a revised method for evaluating the potential of other groups to use these horrifying weapons.

WHAT DO OTHERS SAY ABOUT THE POINT?

The important literature on the subject of terrorism is too vast to enumerate here. For the purposes of this proposal, the following review will focus on two narrower topics—WMD terrorism and bin Laden. Closing this section is a treatment of works that combine both subjects, followed by a brief explanation of how this thesis fits into the available literature.

WMD Terrorism

Most scholars identify the threat from WMD as rapidly rising, along with a growing number of potential users and an increase in motives for use. For example, Richard Betts, a Columbia University political science professor and Director of National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, argues in his work that the "new threat of mass destruction," CBW, cannot be effectively countered by traditional deterrence strategies. He sees the threat as imminent, requiring immediate steps toward a comprehensive U.S. civil defense program to reduce casualties from such an attack.²⁴ In spite of the identification of this threat, terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman wrote in 1997 that "there is an absence of serious, non-alarmist, and non-sensationalist [terrorism] studies considering the WMD dimension." Hoffman asserts the few that exist are "seriously dated," having been based on a now obsolete perception of the international environment.²⁵

Authors who have recently addressed WMD terrorism issues frequently cite the lack of U.S. preparedness for such an attack. Observers such as Ashton Carter, John Deutch, and Philip Zelikow, all former high-level government officials, contend the U.S. is totally unprepared for terrorist use of WMD. They recommend an overhaul of the U.S. strategic outlook, warning that with the increase in motives for use, the U.S. is more in danger of mass destruction than at any time since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.²⁶

²⁴Richard K. Betts, "The New Threat of Mass Destruction," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January-February 1998): 26.

²⁵Bruce Hoffman, "Terrorism and WMD: Some Preliminary Hypotheses," *The Nonproliferation Review* 4 (Spring-Summer 1997): 45.

²⁶Ashton Carter, John Deutch, and Philip Zelikow, "Catastrophic Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 6 (November-December 1998): 80-83.

There are several more in-depth works that attempt to analyze the nature and dynamics of WMD terrorism. The main points of two important books in this category have already been briefly addressed, both Lacquer's *The New Terrorism* and Campbell's *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism*. International relations professor Angus Muir calls the Campbell book a "pioneering work," due to its attempt to apply theoretical frameworks to WMD terrorism.²⁷ As a fundamental aspect of his theoretical study, Campbell identifies three group profiles of possible WMD users: the apocalyptic millennial, such as Aum; the religious redemptive, such as Al Qaeda; and the ethnic racist hate group, on the order of Aryan Nation.²⁸ He argues these three types of non-state groups tend to reject the current social order, and are the most capable of producing a brand of "post-modern terrorist" ripe for using or threatening to use WMD. By virtue of his more scientific approach, Campbell also includes a more developed view of restraints to WMD use than most authors. He argues that terrorists have traditionally avoided such weapons because of their technical complexities, the risk of popular and target government backlash, and the proven track record of conventional tactics.²⁹

Several journal articles also approach WMD terrorism from a scholarly perspective. *The Journal of Conflict Studies* published a piece by Gavin Cameron of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey called "The Likelihood of Nuclear Terrorism." Here Cameron strongly asserts the likelihood of a terrorist attack with a radiological weapon, pointing out its ease of acquisition and delivery, its still

²⁷ Angus Muir, "Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Case of Aum Shinrikyo," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 22 (1999): 86.

²⁸ Campbell, *Weapons*, i.

²⁹ Campbell, *Weapons*, 31-32.

considerable terror effect, and its guarantee of worldwide coverage.³⁰ In another section, he analyzes the use of CBW in terms of restraints and motivations. Cameron cautions that while fear of retaliation and public revulsion, risks and dangers of the weapons, and perceived counterproductivity restrain many potential users, there are still several factors to attract users. These include cost, lethality, ease of transport and delivery, and less lead-time (as opposed to nuclear weapons) in developing a CBW capability.³¹ Importantly for this thesis, Cameron at least touches on some likely restraints to CBW use. He mentions the possibility that terrorists could be deterred by the unpredictability of the weapons in the delivery phase, or by the dangers of manufacturing and handling the weapons.³²

Joseph Foxell highlights what he considers a major restraint to WMD use in an article which appeared in the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence* in the Spring 1999 issue. Here Foxell emphasizes the fear of public revulsion, and an accompanying loss of sympathy for the terrorists' cause as a primary deterrent to WMD use.³³ Regarding state sponsorship of WMD terrorism, Foxell entertains the possibility that corrupt governments would divert WMD materials for sale on the black market where "terrorist proxies" could buy them. He argues that such states in a position to use non-state terrorist groups have access to "a practically untraceable tool for covert proxy warfare."³⁴

³⁰Cameron, "Nuclear," 16-18.

³¹Cameron, "Nuclear," 21.

³²Cameron, "Nuclear," 22-23.

³³Foxell, 94.

³⁴Foxell, 99.

In "Terrorism and WMD: Some Preliminary Hypotheses," terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman argues that groups with a religious orientation are more likely than any other type to use WMD. At times Hoffman's article seems specifically intended to counter the now famous words of terrorism expert Brian Jenkins. Jenkins observed in 1975 that "terrorist want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening and not a lot of people dead."³⁵

It is arguable that groups now have more access than ever before to WMD materials, technology, and expertise. There also appears to be an increase in violence-espousing groups for whom "the world's judgment is unimportant."³⁶ Both factors suggest a WMD attack is more likely than Brian Jenkins believed in 1975 when he made his observation, or even in 1985 when he wrote that "it has not been the style of terrorists to kill hundreds or thousands."³⁷ However, a typology based exclusively on religion may obscure group goals.

For instance, as proof that Jenkins' observation is outdated, and that his identification of religion-oriented groups as most prone to mass violence is accurate, Hoffman presents three unrelated attacks: the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Aum's 1995 Tokyo subway attack, and the Oklahoma City bombing, which occurred only a month after the Tokyo incident.³⁸ Boiled down to its essence, religion implies nothing more than commitment to a set of beliefs with a supernatural focus. Millions of people

³⁵Brian Jenkins, *The Potential for Nuclear Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1977), 8.

³⁶Foxell, 97.

³⁷Brian Jenkins, "Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?" California Seminar on Arms Control and Foreign Policy, paper no. 64 (Los Angeles: Crescent Publications, 1985): 6-7.

³⁸Hoffman, 47.

are similarly committed without having ever contemplated the use of mass violence. Furthermore, it would be hard to come up with a more disparate collection of terrorists, whose only obvious link is a willingness to commit mass violence, not sincere adherence to a religious faith.

It seems, then, a fairly useless gesture to group these three examples under the rubric of religion, since one is no further ahead in understanding their motivations or objectives as a result, with the possible exception of Aum, because of its apocalyptic view. Even in Aum's case, the key role of its millennialism was to foment the arguably political objective of the overthrow of the government in Tokyo. Not until the political, organizational, and psychological dynamics of Aum are explored does one begin to arrive at some constructive conclusions about its use of WMD. In this light, religion is a chimera, distracting the observer from an informed understanding of group goals and motivations. It certainly seems pointless to attempt to understand Timothy McVeigh as a Christian. Clearly, McVeigh's relationship with and hateful attitudes toward the U.S. government are far more critical factors than a specious affiliation with a sect whose doctrinal message is one of love, forgiveness, and the repudiation of violence.

Daniel Gressang has derived a more useful approach to the phenomenon of WMD terrorism, concentrating on the dynamics of the relationship between terrorists and their intended audience. One of his principal matrices regarding WMD use identifies the most likely users as those whose relationship with society is inapposite (non-reciprocal), and whose audience is esoteric rather than temporal.³⁹ The author asserts such groups have

³⁹Daniel S. Gressang IV, "Audience and Message: Organizational Goals and Terrorist Use of WMD," paper presented at the 2000 International Studies Association conference, Los Angeles, California, March 2000, 19. Publication forthcoming.

little regard for society, may in fact welcome its destruction, and tend to discard social norms that might have prevented them from causing mass destruction. Aum, in Gressang's view, encapsulates these trends, and he includes some Islamic extremists and millennial cultists as also resembling this profile. The surrounding populace, then, for such a group, has no value and its utility is entirely dependent on its ability to provide new recruits.⁴⁰

Gressang also argues that the danger of an actual WMD attack lies in the lack of disincentives for a group with an esoteric audience.⁴¹ Counterterror techniques that may be useful against conventional terrorists, such as a "reintegration-punishment" strategy, are likely to have little effect because they assume a preoccupation with popular opinion and a desire to return to mainstream society. Gressang includes bin Laden and his network in his treatment of likely WMD users, explaining that like Aum and the U.S. militia movement, groups such as Al Qaeda also have few disincentives to dissuade them from an attack.

One important basis for the inapposite relationship with society these groups foster is a view of the surrounding social system as "irredeemably corrupt, contaminated, or evil."⁴² Does bin Laden share this view? The nature of this man's relationship with society, and with his targeted audience, must be explored in order to address this question.

⁴⁰Gressang, 18.

⁴¹Gressang, 33.

⁴²Gressang, 13.

This brief review of literature on WMD terrorism suggests the following conclusions: while the WMD threat is rapidly rising, the U.S. appears to be completely unprepared to counter it. Some authors have contributed to the typology of WMD users, in an attempt to bolster the response to WMD terrorism, and several well-reasoned profiles of the future WMD terrorist now exist. However, the utility of religion as a filter through which to understand and predict WMD use is debatable. The literature also repeatedly confirms chemical, biological, and radiological weapons as the most likely weapons of choice for WMD users. Finally, these writings support the choice of restraints to bin Laden's WMD use that comprise the hypothesis of this work.

Bin Laden, Group Dynamics, and the Charismatic Leader

There is only one extant biography of bin Laden, written by Yossef Bodansky in 1999—*Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*. A large volume of over 400 pages, the book follows bin Laden from his childhood up to recent developments regarding his status as an exile in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Most interesting and useful are sections examining both bin Laden's coming to manhood as a very impressionable, increasingly radicalized Muslim during an extremely turbulent period in Islam's recent history, and his formative years spent in support of the Afghan *jihād*, an experience which shaped much of his current militant attitude. Also noteworthy in the Bodansky book are treatments of bin Laden's strategic outlook, and of the opinions of other Muslims about him.

Other aspects of the work are less helpful. Bodansky makes a number of remarkable claims regarding bin Laden's WMD-related activities and the level of

cooperation and present condition of Muslim militancy.⁴³ Without the citing of any sources to support these claims (the book has no citations), Bodansky's statements about these critically important subjects unfortunately remain unsubstantiated allegations.

Other scholars have written important work on bin Laden in the form of single chapters of their books. Ahmed Rashid, in his book on the Taliban, includes a chapter called "Global Jihad: The Arab-Afghans and Osama Bin Laden." The most useful contribution of Rashid's is his illumination of the forces that gave birth to Al Qaeda and bin Laden's rise to a leadership role within it.⁴⁴ In Muslim author Mamoun Fandy's book, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, a chapter is devoted to bin Laden's role as a dissenting force in Saudi politics, in spite of his exile and revocation of citizenship. Like Rashid, Fandy chronicles some of the history behind Al Qaeda's and bin Laden's rise. Distinguishing features of this chapter include a portrayal of bin Laden as a man with a broken sense of self, elements of bin Laden's worldview, and a brief discussion of the bonds that tie his supporters to him.⁴⁵ These works reveal a man who has suffered from a succession of personal rejections—who is at once vulnerable, because in spite of the Taliban's protection he lacks the true support of any legitimate state or society, and dangerous, because this absence of legitimate ties removes traditional restraints on his behavior.

⁴³Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1999), 34, 40, 45-49, 325-331.

⁴⁴Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 130-133, 136.

⁴⁵Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 179-181, 183, 193.

A Joint Military Intelligence College thesis on bin Laden from last year provides an interesting look at the nature and functions of Al Qaeda, the unifying and guiding role of bin Laden's personality within the organizations under Al Qaeda, and specifically his links to the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group. The paper, "Usama bin Laden: His Links to the Egyptian Terrorist Groups," explores his early history and ideological philosophy. The author, David Bennett, identifies the man as a lingering, very real threat to the U.S., but avoids any assessment of the possibility of a bin Laden WMD attack.⁴⁶

Magnus Ranstorp, a colleague of Angus Muir's at St. Andrews University, argues in a well-written scholarly assessment of bin Laden's February 1998 *fatwa* that this document's power is not that it is revolutionary or shocking, but that it "encapsulates broad sentiments in the Muslim world."⁴⁷ This ability to effectively address broad Muslim concerns suggests bin Laden will remain a major security threat for the U.S., and is an enduring representation of some elements of the Islamic revivalist forces growing in the Middle East.

On the subject of group dynamics psychologist Jerrold Post has been a heavy contributor for years. A particular focus of his studies is the group dynamics of terrorist organizations. Irving Janis' *Victims of Groupthink*, and an earlier book, Wilfred Bion's *Experiences in Groups*, are the definitive works on the subject,⁴⁸ but Post has broken

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⁴⁶See [REDACTED] *Usama bin Laden: His Links to the Egyptian Terrorists*, MSSJ Thesis (Washington, DC: Joint Military Intelligence College, August 1999).

⁴⁷Ranstorp, "Fatwa," 326-327.

⁴⁸See Irving Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1972), and Wilfred Bion, *Experiences in Groups* (London, UK: Tavistock, 1961).

ground in his own right by substituting Janis' corporate setting for that of the violence-espousing terrorist group.

In *Groupthink* Janis discusses aspects of group dynamics that are easily identifiable in terrorist organizations, such as a deeply ingrained "us versus them" mentality, the overwhelming pressure to conform, and the tendency to take excessive risks. Post adds to this work his characterization of the terrorist group member's personality,⁴⁹ which is especially vulnerable to the need to belong to a group and to the pressures of group dynamics. For Post, the violence these groups commit becomes self-perpetuating, and ultimately more important than the group's professed cause. In his article "Terrorist Psycho-logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces,"⁵⁰ Post persuasively argues that individuals become terrorists not primarily to avenge a wrong, but so that they can join these groups and commit terroristic violence. Post also concludes that terrorist groups have a distinct need to commit violence, not as a contribution to its cause, but to justify its existence.

Terrorism expert Martha Crenshaw, noted for her application of organizational process theory to terrorist groups, reinforces several of Post's conclusions with her own analysis. Crenshaw, according to her essay "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches,"⁵¹ perceives terrorist behavior as the product of internal dynamics, rather than an attempt to secure externally-focused goals, and views the need

⁴⁹Post often describes the typical terrorist group member as having an incomplete psychosocial personality, which tends to compel the individual to seek a sense of completeness within the group.

⁵⁰See Jerrold Post, "Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces," in *Origins of Terrorism*, ed. Walter Reich (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵¹See Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches," in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, ed. David Rapoport (New York, NY: Columbia University, 1988).

to survive as the most pressing of these internal dynamics. In another of her articles, "How Terrorists Think: What Psychology Can Contribute to Understanding Terrorism," Crenshaw questions the high incidence of terrorist groups continuing their terror campaigns even though they have become counterproductive to their stated goals. Her explanation for this phenomenon is that terrorism appears to "serve the important social psychological function of maintaining the group."⁵² Hence, Post and Crenshaw both assert that generally there exists a major distinction between a group's stated goals and its real objectives.

Another author's brilliant contribution to group dynamics is Eric Hoffer, whose seminal work on the subject is *True Believer*. Hoffer's thesis is that followers of a mass movement become members not to advance their own self-interest, but to purge their psyches of an unwanted self. For these psychologically wounded followers, catharsis takes the form of a holy cause, which in their minds becomes so righteous that followers believe their total devotion to this cause absolves them of all their flaws.

Hoffer also clearly recognizes the significance of a leader who perceives these needs of his followers. Often the role in which these leaders excel is to articulate the holiness of his cause in such a way that followers become convinced the cause has the power to make them clean, to purify them. Leaders so positioned at the fore of a movement also generally recognize the additional cohesive effects of what Hoffer calls unifying agents, such as hate, action, and cohesion, which tend to further bind followers

⁵²Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorists Think: What Psychology Can Contribute to Understanding Terrorism," in *Terrorism: Roots, Impact, Responses*, ed. Lawrence Howard (New York, NY: Praeger, 1992), 75.

to himself as well as the cause.⁵³ Such leaders, often called charismatic if they succeed, become catalysts, sustaining the mass movement through the clever manipulation of reality and of followers' needs.

Martha Crenshaw's views also stress the significance of the leader. Crenshaw underscores the importance of the charismatic leader to a terrorist group in her essay on terrorism and organizational theory, emphasizing the need to thoroughly understand the dynamics that formed the leader's personality.⁵⁴ Another valuable aspect of Crenshaw's scholarship is the power she attributes to the leader in his ability to establish and implement incentives and disincentives for the purpose of controlling group members.

Bin Laden and WMD Terrorism

In spite of how much is known and suspected about the connection between bin Laden and WMD, the attention it has attracted seems more hype than scholarship. One is reminded of Bruce Hoffman's assessment of the literature on WMD terrorism. A few scholars have simply ignored the connection. Both James Campbell and Walter Laqueur, in their works on WMD terrorism, refer to bin Laden several times without ever hinting at his background in WMD-related activities, or the possibility that he would use WMD.

Terrorism expert Stefan Leader's *Jane's* article, "Usama Bin Laden and the Terrorist Search for WMD," small as it is, thus becomes an important essay into what is known about bin Laden's WMD background. Leader details many aspects of bin Laden's search, pinpointing his contacts with potential WMD suppliers, the use of his

⁵³For above references to Hoffer, see Eric Hoffer, *True Believer* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1951), 21-23, 103-110.

⁵⁴Crenshaw in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, 19.

operatives as WMD purchasing agents, and his increasingly radicalized, militant attitude. Leader's conclusion is that while there is little chance bin Laden has acquired or can build a nuclear weapon, the threat of him attacking with chemical, biological, or radiological weapons is real.⁵⁵ Leader indicates bin Laden appears to have the funding, resources, capabilities, motive, and intent to use WMD, with little to restrain him.

Complementing Leader's piece is a more scholarly article in the form of a comparative study, the second by Gavin Cameron. Titled "Multi-track Microproliferation: Lessons from Aum Shinrikyo and Al Qaeda," this work establishes intriguing WMD-related similarities between two groups widely disparate in organizational structure and motivations. Of particular interest regarding Al Qaeda are Cameron's assertions that bin Laden's group sees WMD acquisition as "critical to the successful outcome of [its] immediate goals," and that both groups "demonstrate the difficulties in countering the proliferation of nonconventional, especially chemical, weapons by substate groups."⁵⁶ This reasoning suggests on the first hand that it is shortsighted to assume bin Laden will stick to conventional weapons. Secondly, Cameron indicates the West would be hard-pressed to prevent bin Laden from acquiring WMD. Both authors agree that bin Laden wielding a nuclear device is farfetched, but neither article questions the circumstances that have so far prevented a bin Laden attack with other WMD variants.

Author Jessica Stern, in discussing political obstacles to WMD use, distinguishes between less likely users such as the Irish Republican Army, which has a clearly defined

⁵⁵Leader, 37.

⁵⁶Cameron, "Proliferation," 297.

constituency upon which it depends financially, and more likely groups which have "amorphous constituencies."⁵⁷ In her view bin Laden's group, with its *ad hoc* structure, revenge motives, and independent means falls in the latter category, and is well motivated to employ such an attack. Stern reinforces her assessment of bin Laden by arguing that Al Qaeda is particularly ripe for WMD use due to its apparent ability to overcome four types of major obstacles—technical, political, moral, and organizational.

The last two types require some elaboration. In her treatment of moral obstacles, Stern offers Albert Bandura's theory on "moral disengagement," which identifies the following four techniques of achieving this disengagement: moral justification, displacement of responsibility, minimizing or ignoring victims' suffering, and dehumanizing the victims.⁵⁸ Interestingly, bin Laden's rhetoric incorporates all four of these techniques, such as his frequent use of the dehumanizing term "infidel." Stern also argues that certain organizational factors may enhance a group's acceptance of risk. According to her, "terrorists might employ WMD...to maintain the integrity of the group or to meet their own psychological needs."⁵⁹ In explaining why these needs increase risk-acceptant behavior, Stern relates these group dynamics to prospect theory, which holds that people facing "grave losses" are more likely to embrace risk. Throughout bin Laden's public statements runs a worldview depicting the Muslims in imminent danger, for instance regarding the eradication of their holy sites and the loss of their religion and way of life.

⁵⁷Stern, 78.

⁵⁸Stern, 80-81.

⁵⁹Stern, 83.

The Implications of the Literature: Is There a Gap?

In light of all the evidence tying bin Laden to WMD, and of the ease of acquiring at a minimum CBW, one assessment is clear. Judging from his heretofore exclusive use of conventional weapons, it is apparent that there are factors restraining bin Laden from turning to WMD. Understanding the nature of these restraints is critical for the U.S. and its intelligence community.

Yet the literature repeatedly avoids consideration of these restraints, preferring to focus primarily on the likelihood of a bin Laden WMD attack. The words of the scholars and experts on this point seem repetitive at times, often hinging on such phrases regarding bin Laden as: "prepared to use any means, including WMD"⁶⁰ or "obliged to resort to...the use of WMD."⁶¹ This thesis finds its niche in the literature by accepting the scholars' belief that bin Laden is a likely candidate to use WMD, and then asking the logical follow-on question: "if we are confident he is likely to use them, why has he not used them yet?"

There is also potential for a broader application of the work contained in this thesis. The author suggests that because it is difficult to generalize about terrorist groups, one approach to a better understanding of any group that threatens to escalate or has escalated its attacks is to attempt to discover what restraints have been preventing this escalation. Understanding escalation as it applies to terrorism is important because, as James Foxell suggests, it appears to be an inherent feature of terrorism. Describing the

⁶⁰Leader, 34.

⁶¹Cameron, "Proliferation," 279.

process as "self-engorging," Foxell argues that this brand of violence dictates increasingly bold acts as a means of reaping the full measure of shock-value.⁶²

Treatment of restraints to escalation in a generalized framework is nothing new. The literature, however, most often discusses restraints in the nuclear context, declaring that technical details prevent most actors from successfully building or even operating a pre-made nuclear weapon.⁶³ Chemical, biological, or radiological terrorist attacks are almost always described as more feasible than nuclear, and a number of authors tend to devote more attention to the ease of acquiring a capability to use these three weapon types than to the difficulties they present.⁶⁴

Ascertaining the likely restraints on bin Laden or on anyone can feed vital data to law enforcement and intelligence agencies to enhance their counterterror programs. If fear of public revulsion is keeping a terrorist group from escalating, one can easily infer public opinion is important to the group. This opinion can then be manipulated to harm the terrorists' cohesion and morale. If the sustained deployment of U.S. or allied forces in the area has been a major restraint, removal of these troops could trigger a spike in violent attacks. Deploying more troops may lessen the severity and frequency of attacks.

Looking at restraints to action is just one way to attempt to understand terrorists' motivations. If the rapid technological advances and increased proliferation of WMD materials highlight anything, it is the need to understand why terrorists do what they do.

⁶²Foxell, 98.

⁶³Richard Betts, "The New Threat of Mass Destruction," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January-February 1998): 26.

⁶⁴Betts, 26-41. Also see Karl-Heinz Kamp, "Nuclear Terrorism Is Not the Core Problem," *Survival* 40, no. 4 (Winter 1998-1999): 168-171.

In the end, knowledge of others' capabilities fails to explain anybody's actions. Plenty of WMD-capable actors do not use WMD, and may never have committed a terrorist act at all.

Therefore, knowing a group's "order of battle" may indicate something about what a group could do, but provides little in the way of anticipating a terrorist threat. Without an appreciation of motivations, responding to terrorism can often become just that—a response. The stakes in light of the global WMD terrorist threat are too high to permit a reliance on effective response without at least equal effort in the realm of prevention.

THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND KEY QUESTIONS

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study is that Usama bin Laden has not attacked the U.S. with a weapon of mass destruction due to the following set of restraints: fear of public revulsion; fear of retaliation; unpredictability of the weapon in the delivery phase; and dangers of transporting, maintaining, and delivering the weapon. The author chose these generic restraints from the relevant literature, finding them to be among the most common the experts cite as strong inhibitory factors to WMD acquisition and/or use. The task of the study was to present a significant amount of the evidence on bin Laden relating to WMD, and then to apply the four restraints to this evidence, to determine the existence of any suggestive correlation between them.

Key Questions

A baseline question that undergirds this study is what are bin Laden's goals? The complexity of this question cannot be overstated. Several experts conclude that terrorists have multiple layers of motivations to commit violence.⁶⁵ Often a terrorist's professed goals represent an outer layer of motivations, which hide a closely guarded inner layer of reasons. Sometimes these professed goals bring a terrorist group together, but over time are replaced by internal needs such as survival. One of the most intriguing aspects of this concept of multiple layers is that the terrorist may be hiding his inner motivations from himself as well as from his fellow group members or his audience.

Also pertaining to this question of goals is the need for a thorough understanding of bin Laden's established and planned methods for achieving these objectives. Appreciating these methods can better illuminate the nature of these goals, and especially which of the goals are more important to him. Finally, would the likely results of a WMD attack actually run contrary to bin Laden's goals? If the aftermath of a WMD attack is likely to be counterproductive to bin Laden's professed goals, there is a strong possibility that he would be attempting to achieve a different, unannounced set of objectives through the acquisition or use of WMD.

Who is bin Laden's target audience—the Arab world, all Muslims, the West, the US, Allah, or some combination? Knowing his intended audience is a critical step in understanding the meaning of his message, and the extent of his intentions. For instance, one can argue that a terrorist group such as the Irish Republican Army, with a very defined audience both in Ireland and the U.S. to which it owes its funding and other types

⁶⁵See Campbell, *Weapons*, 23-27 for the views of Martha Crenshaw and Jerrold Post on these layers of motivations.

of support, has societal needs which help to restrain it from grossly excessive violence against that society. Another follow-on question regarding audience is what is the nature of his relationship with these audiences, and with society in general? Learning about bin Laden's, and any would-be WMD terrorist's, feelings toward society is an important step in determining a group's willingness to destroy that society. What is his and Al Qaeda's relationship to society and their intentions regarding WMD?

Lastly, what is known about bin Laden's psychological makeup? Traditionally terrorism literature has tended to only lightly treat psychological approaches. However, a number of scholars that figure importantly in this study insist that psyche has a tremendous impact on one's decision to become a terrorist and to commit violence. Are there any assessments that one can make regarding bin Laden which suggest a proclivity toward WMD acquisition and/or use? Also, how does bin Laden's psyche affect his relationship with Al Qaeda? As for Al Qaeda, why do its members follow bin Laden, and are there any factors in their psyches which relate to decisions regarding WMD?

THE PLAN OF ATTACK: HOW TO DISCUSS THE POINT

The first step of the author's methodology is an examination of the available evidence on three subjects relevant to the connection between WMD terrorism and Usama bin Laden: the man himself and his psyche; his public persona, stated message, and worldview; and finally the group that follows him. Each of the subjects comprises its own chapter in the study. The literature the author has included in these chapters consists not only of reports and opinions on bin Laden and his group, but the scholarly work of

many experts on general concepts with direct applications to these subjects. The combined use of these types of literature has heavily contributed to the author's ability to infer aspects of bin Laden's individual personality, his role in and relationship to his group, and the ties between bin Laden and the various audiences to which he appears to speak. Historians, terrorism analysts, various U.S. officials, religious authorities, area studies experts, and psychologists all have invaluable contributions to make to a study of this kind. The author has analyzed the expertise of all these professionals' fields for the sake of achieving a truly interdisciplinary approach.

Following the author's treatment of each of these three subjects is a review of the related evidence on the basis of the four restraints found in the hypothesis. The question the author answers in these concluding sections is whether any of this evidence suggests one or more of these restraints are, in fact, keeping bin Laden from using WMD. The author considers the results of the three concluding analytical sections of these chapters in a subsequent chapter on synthesis. In this chapter, for each restraint the author has asked whether the evidence from all three subjects of interest supports the application of that restraint to bin Laden's case. This chapter contains the author's final estimation of the hypothesis, and a decision on which of the four restraints has withstood the test of the evidence and shown itself a likely reason for bin Laden's avoidance of WMD use.

In order for the author to have demonstrated the validity of the entire hypothesis, the evidence from each of these three chapters would have to indicate the feasibility of applying all four restraints to bin Laden's hesitation to use WMD. An invalid hypothesis, however, does not cheapen the value of having addressed this hypothesis. The act of asking the research question regarding possible inhibitory restraints that guides this study,

and attempting to answer it by applying the generic restraints found in the literature is intended to generate an informed discourse on the true restraints holding back bin Laden. If the U.S., its Intelligence Community, and the West wish to prevent this kind of attack, then the value of knowing exactly which factors are restraining bin Laden cannot be overestimated.

A "hit-or-miss" approach is certainly not desirable—the stakes regarding WMD are too high. These raised stakes naturally should deter the use of trial-and-error approaches to the discouragement of WMD terrorism. However, when any government employs a policy toward a group prone to extreme violence without considering its ripeness to use WMD, without assessing its motivations and internal dynamics with their attendant connections to the use of violence, even the most well-intentioned policy could enhance the potential for a WMD attack. There is no reason, however, that any government should have to relegate itself to blind policy ripostes in the area of WMD counterterrorism.

Just as the U.S., its government, and even its media have made a conscious effort to avoid actions that promote terrorism,⁶⁶ this same effort is clearly applicable to the realm of WMD terrorism. That is why an informed view on the actual restraints preventing a group from using WMD can effectively guide policymaking. Governments can choose policies that strengthen applicable restraints, avoid measures that weaken them, and even consider adding new restraints on the basis of its officials' informed view of the group's motivations and internal dynamics. The role of an intelligence service,

⁶⁶For a detailed treatment of the U.S. media's conscious campaign to avoid the promotion of terrorist activity, see (b)(6) USAF, *Terrorism and the Media: Strange Bedfellows*, MSSSI Thesis (Washington, DC: Joint Military Intelligence College, September 2000).

then, is to collect and analyze all the available evidence on a target group, combine this analysis with an interdisciplinary approach to the expert opinions of scholars working in general fields related to the specifics of the target group, and finally to produce an assessment of the actual restraints on WMD use that apply to the target group. The methodology used in the following study represents a preliminary model of this process.

The author's primary tools in evaluating the evidence are archival searches to obtain the material, and descriptive analysis to disaggregate and re-assimilate the material into a cohesive form. Archival research for this thesis includes the extensive use of libraries, both to better understand WMD terrorism and to inform my perceptions of bin Laden and Al Qaeda. For a more detailed look at the man and the organization, the research also included a thorough search of media sources and the World Wide Web. This aspect of the research is intended to add to the balanced view of Al Qaeda's group dynamics, and of bin Laden's relationship with his network that the library research provides. The author also consulted various subject matter experts personally, both in the manner of general discussions and in a few cases, formal interviews.

Once these separate elements are considered in turn, the analytical process combines them in the form of descriptive analysis. The purpose here is to synthesize the learning process, to put together the pieces of data offered the author by bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and a range of experts who have contributed to this process on related topics both general and specific. Descriptive analysis plays a particularly important role in the chapter on synthesis.

Following the chapter on synthesis is a brief treatment of some aspects of WMD terrorism that relate to the WMD threat bin Laden poses. This treatment includes a

special focus on the threat of a WMD attack on the domestic U.S., and reviews the basis for recent allegations that the WMD threat has risen significantly in the past few decades. Since some of these experts see another WMD attack as inevitable in the near future, the author believes the brink of the 21st century is an excellent moment in which to argue for the improvement of the West's current approach to predicting and preventing WMD terrorism.

CHAPTER TWO

BIN LADEN: THE PROFILE

The American forces [in Saudi Arabia] should expect reactions to their actions from the Muslim world. Any thief or criminal or robber who enters the countries of others in order to steal should expect to be exposed to murder at any time.

Usama bin Laden in his December 1998 ABC interview with Rahimullah Yusufzai

Interviewer: What are your future plans?

Bin Laden: You'll see them and hear about them in the media, God willing.

March 1997 CNN interview with Peter Arnett

[Bin Laden] was not fully accepted in Saudi society despite his wealth. This marginalization sometimes explains the desire to rebel against the system.

Egyptian scholar S'ad al-Din Ibrahim

It is recorded that the prophet Mohammed on his deathbed declared, "Let there not be two religions in Arabia."⁶⁷ Bin Laden has operationalized the most extreme interpretation of this decree, using violence and threats of violence in an attempt to rid Saudi Arabia of all non-Muslims. Chapter Two's purpose is to explore the man behind this violent campaign, to discover the individual that lives somewhere inside the larger-than-life bin Laden phenomenon. The real Usama is consistently buried under the specifically tailored persona that bin Laden offers to the public, and the demonic, turbaned image that the media presents of him. Any analysis of bin Laden must exhibit an awareness of these false images, and of the motivations of the parties who are

⁶⁷Lewis, "License to Kill," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 6 (November-December 1998): 16.

manipulating the images for their own ends.

A study of these fake "bin Ladens" would still produce valuable insights into the myth that surrounds him, and would elucidate the motives that guide the construction of his persona. Chapter Three examines this persona in depth. The challenge in Chapter Two, however, is to ask hard questions about bin Laden's career in terrorism apart from the mythology and mystique. What occurred in his life to prompt a violent response? Why is bin Laden committed to a life of involvement in terrorist activity? Why did he form a terrorist group, and what purpose does it serve for him? What are the real reasons for his terrorist behavior, and specifically for his war on the U.S.?

PERSONAL HISTORY AND FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Bin Laden's Past: The Origins of a Terrorist

Bin Laden's present worldview is the result of almost 30 years of sharply defining experiences, several of them traumatic. Born into a rich Saudi family in 1957, his early Islamic beliefs coalesced under the guidance of his father Mohammed, a construction builder who, when Usama was young, was tasked with renovating the Mecca and Medina mosques. Bin Laden's father was deeply moved by this work, and his growing reverence for Islam filtered down to his son.⁶⁸

The rest of this decade played a critical role in bin Laden's transformation into the man he is today. A period that began with the Yom Kippur War, a *cause celebre* for Arab Muslims, and the wealth-producing oil boom of 1973-74, quickly dissipated into an

⁶⁸Bodansky, 3.

era of uncertainty and violence throughout the Arab world. The sudden onset of such affluence and an increasing exposure to decadent Western values triggered an acute identity crisis and a growth of radical opinions.⁶⁹ Generally speaking, times of uncertainty are likely to spur a return to the faith, particularly among those whose perception of self-worth is most closely tied to the religious identity in danger of dilution. Religion fulfills the human need for identity and self-worth for many people of many religions, because it can provide certainty, guidelines of behavior, and a perception of one's place in the universe.⁷⁰

The Muslim world in the 1970's was apparently no exception to this trend. The fundamentalist backlash of this era was an attempt to carve out a "more pure" Islam from the confusion of the day, to redraw the stark division between Muslim and infidel, and to mobilize Muslims to reject the poison of Western influence. One such ideologue, and author of the influential 1975 work *The Party of God in Struggle With the Party of Satan*, Wail Uthman, considered Western influence the bedrock of Islamic ills, and Islamic militancy the only cure.⁷¹

Two more events of the 1970's challenged Muslim thinking in distinctly different ways. In 1977 Egyptian President Sadat began the Egyptian-Israeli peace process with a visit to Jerusalem, which shocked and angered Muslims unprepared for peace overtures toward Israel, and encouraged many to consider fundamentalist responses to the crisis in Islam. Then two years later Ayatollah Khomeini established an Islamic state in Iran,

⁶⁹Bodansky, 3-4.

⁷⁰Dr. Mark Weisenbloom, "History, Culture, and Ideology," seminar presented at the Joint Military Intelligence College, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, DC, 29 Mar 2000.

⁷¹Bodansky, 5.

inviting Muslims to believe in militant solutions and in a bright future for Islamism. Such factors, when added to the impact of Sunni and Shi'ite revolutionary thinkers of the late 1970's whose writings emphasized confrontation and struggle, helped to breed events such as the militant takeover of Mecca's Grand Mosque by Saudi White Guardsman-turned-Islamist rebel Juhayman al-Utaibi in November 1979.⁷² It is the simple search for identity that is represented in this at times violent lurching of the Muslim world.

Saudi Arabia, with its conservative Muslim traditions and newly found wealth and influence, became a focal point for the Arab identity crisis. The prosperous city of Jedda, as the main Saudi Red Sea port and hub of Western influence, epitomized this role, and had the added importance in the mid-1970's of sheltering many Muslim intellectuals fleeing from persecution in other countries. Discontented Saudi youth, searching for a sense of belonging, were exposed to the opinions of these intellectuals, who argued for a return to strict Muslim ways and a complete break from exposure to the West.⁷³

Then in 1975 the mentally unstable Saudi Prince Faisal ibn Musaid assassinated his uncle Faisal, the king of Saudi Arabia. Knowledge of the prince's deep exposure to and acceptance of Western ideas delineated the dangers of the "infection" of the West, and pushed many Muslims, including bin Laden, into a more conservative, increasingly militant prosecution of their faith.⁷⁴ This was the climate at the time of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which shocked the Muslim community to its foundation and led to the creation of the "Afghan Arabs," a worldwide collection of militant Muslim

⁷²Bodansky, 6.

⁷³Bodansky, 4.

⁷⁴Bodansky, 5.

freedom-fighters bent on expelling the Soviets militarily. Bin Laden was an integral part of this effort, and the experience in Afghanistan changed his life in three significant ways.

Patterns of Violence

First, the Afghanistan conflict confirmed bin Laden's Muslim militancy.

Watching poorly equipped Muslims face the overwhelming destructive power of the Soviets taught him a need to fight hard for his religion, and almost assuredly linked in his mind the bearing of arms to the survival of Islam. Bin Laden also had the privilege of being surrounded by thousands of militant Muslims from across the globe, the notorious "mujahedeen" who eventually received U.S. help in fighting the Soviets. No doubt he was profoundly influenced by these men, and by the common cause they shared.

Second, the Afghan War instilled a strong "us versus them" mentality in bin Laden. He saw the invasion as the rapacious act of one of the superpowers to eradicate a Muslim group, and an act which hearkened back to the tragic medieval Muslim experience during the Crusades. The world was no longer a forum in which Muslims were struggling to express themselves and shape their identity—it was a war zone, and Muslims were under siege. Bin Laden's behavior and public statements from this period forward strongly reflect a "zero-sum" attitude, which typically allows little room for more peaceful oppositionist interactions such as limited or conditional cooperation, pushing for change through the political process, or civil disobedience.

Third, the Afghan conflict steeped bin Laden in the ways of violence. No longer was his experience shaped only by concern for the future of Islam; he now wore the

blood both of his mujahedeen comrades and that of the enemy, the non-Muslim invader. By 1989 the USSR had withdrawn in defeat. It is reasonable to judge that this experience introduced bin Laden to the consideration of violent prescriptions as a means of solving problems.

The Impact of the Gulf War

That these lessons from the Afghan War became part of bin Laden's thinking is borne out by his activity in the years that followed. An international development which became the single most important influence on this activity came to a head on 17 January 1991—the Gulf War. In the months prior to the U.S. action, and fresh from his well-received victories in Afghanistan, bin Laden in a special meeting with Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan had asked to play the lead role in the safeguarding of Saudi Arabia and liberation of Kuwait.⁷⁵ Not only did Riyadh soundly reject him, but the regime quickly turned to the U.S. instead, and over the objections of bin Laden and others invited a flood of thousands of armed "infidels" to defile holy ground with their presence.

With barely a time delay, and no doubt resentful of his marginalization in the new conflict, bin Laden substituted one superpower for another and turned his ire on the U.S., who now bore the mantle of "infidel invader" and would-be eradicator of Islam. In integral element of this substitution was a necessary shift in bin Laden's view of Iraq. In August 1990 he had argued for a role in the conflict as a loyal Saudi, a defender of the regime against Saddam. Now events pushed him to reconsider this attitude.

Bin Laden began to recast the Gulf War as an example of Western oppression,

⁷⁵Bodansky, 29-30 and Rashid, 133.

and his public statements shifted emphasis to the suffering of the Iraqi people, both during the War and later as a result of Operation DESERT FOX and the UN sanctions. In his February 1998 *fatwa*, and in other statements, bin Laden repeatedly characterizes the Gulf War as American aggression against Iraq. In this *fatwa* he references the "great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the Crusader-Zionist alliance." Scholar Bernard Lewis notes that this view is widely accepted in the Muslim world,⁷⁶ and bin Laden's use of it clearly represents his effort to manipulate Muslim opinion and reinforce his message that the U.S. is the direct and most contemptible enemy of Islam.

DISSECTING THE PSYCHE

The Reasons for His Self-hatred

This re-characterization of world events and demonization of the U.S. was a critical step in bin Laden's desperate search for a sense of self-worth, a search that would ultimately end with his ascension to leadership of a terrorist organization. Bereft of home and kin after his exile to Sudan, cut off from legitimate society even after his contribution and devotion to the Afghan *jihad*, and rejected as defender of the faith in favor of the infidel Americans in the Gulf War, bin Laden ran the risk of remaining a low-status, forgotten outcast despite his personal wealth. The act of binding together a group of adherents, certain of whom have sworn undying devotion to him,⁷⁷ probably restored to bin Laden the positive sense of self which may have eluded him since the Soviet

⁷⁶Lewis, "License," 15-16.

⁷⁷Fandy, 183.

withdrawal, and may never have been a part of his character until the Afghan War.

Dr. Marshall Heyman, an analyst who has been closely studying bin Laden, sees a pattern of rejection and likely neglect in his personal history. Noted as one of as many as 52 children of Muhammad bin Laden, Heyman describes Usama as "lost in a sea of children," an understandable prescription for fatherly neglect. While detailed narratives of bin Laden's early life are scanty, Heyman suggests another reason Usama more than any of his brothers was likely at the "other end of the continuum from the favored son." Bin Laden's mother (one of eight) was reputed to be the "least" among Muhammad's wives, particularly because Usama was the only child she produced. For this reason—the low status of his mother—it is reported that bin Laden was accorded the dishonor of eating last after all the rest of the family had dined.⁷⁸

One is reminded of the Old Testament history of 10 of the sons of Jacob, those who were not born of his beloved wife Rachel. Of Rachel's famous offspring, the Book of Genesis relates that "Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph best of all his sons," and that "when his brothers saw that their father loved him best of all his sons, they hated him," and later plotted his death.⁷⁹ Worse for Usama was the fact that among his siblings he was alone in his ignominy, rather than one of 10. These familial factors indicate both a strong probability of neglect, and perhaps more importantly a likely perception of worthlessness on the part of bin Laden, which of course are major potential contributors to low self-esteem.

⁷⁸Marshall Heyman, Director of Behavioral Assessment Systems Consultants, interview by author, 6 June 2000.

⁷⁹*New American Bible* (New York, NY: Catholic Book Publishing, 1970), 33-43.

The bin Laden family's Yemeni origins add further emphasis to a background typical of low self-esteem. Although Usama himself was born in Riyadh, the bin Ladens' original homeland is the Hadramout region of southern Yemen. The family fortune notwithstanding, according to the traditional Saudi view Usama has therefore never been a true countryman, which is grounds for even the poorest "genuine" Saudi to look down on him.⁸⁰ Egyptian professor S'ad al-Din Ibrahim depicts both Bin Laden and his family, despite their wealth, as marginal in terms of Saudi society due to their foreign blood.⁸¹

This is not too surprising, considering that Saudi Arabia has been described as a country obsessed with parentage. Worse yet for Usama, his mother was Syrian, which made him "almost a double outsider" according to one family friend. The same friend described Usama's childhood in the family as lonely, and attributed the difficulties of his early years to the shame his mother's alien background brought him.⁸²

Bin Laden's aggressive Islamic militancy may in part be a means for him to attempt to compensate for these deficiencies, an understandable but arguably unsatisfying psychological reaction. Stalin's ruthless persecution of the Georgian intelligentsia, as if to prove his lack of affection for and affiliation with his homeland, comes to mind as a prominent historical example of this reaction. Finally, even within his own "alien-born" family, Mamoun Fandy writes that the other bin Ladens moved to denounce and disown Usama as he increasingly lost favor with Riyadh, an indication that royal ties and

⁸⁰Fandy, 180.

⁸¹Isma'il interview with bin Laden. Ibrahim also sees bin Laden's criticism of the Saudi regime as a form of rebellion against the royal family's earlier attempts to marginalize him as a prince of low family descent.

⁸²Mary Anne Weaver, "The Real Bin Laden," *The New Yorker* 75, No. 43 (24 January 2000): 34.

business opportunities reigned over love for their errant brother.⁸³

It is possible bin Laden also suffers from codependency. One who is codependent suffers from low self-esteem, an inadequacy derived from the inability to control certain aspects of his life.⁸⁴ For bin Laden these aspects may be his father's affection or his low status in the family. The codependent person then seeks to compensate for this lack of control by controlling other people, often those in need of some "rescuing," and expects to be rewarded and loved for this misguided act of self-sacrifice. He also believes love has to be earned, not freely given, and is therefore very concerned with the image he presents to those he expects to love him, and must have their approval. Bin Laden could indeed have seen the Arab Afghans as men in need of salvation, and may have urgently sought to lead them in the belief he was satisfying their needs, while in fact his own need for psychological fulfillment drove him to the task.

Dr. Marshall Heyman completes this psychological perspective with his interpretation of bin Laden's image consciousness. According to Heyman, bin Laden's only perceived threat is not public disapproval, but anything that could displace him from his current role as a militant leader of Muslims.⁸⁵ So to those whose loyalty and approval he craves—in particular the core of militant Islamists—he must again and again prove his own faithfulness to the cause of Islamism. His devotion to this cause, in order to convince himself as well as his followers, must therefore indeed be "extravagant and

⁸³Fandy, 180.

⁸⁴David Moore, "Codependency," lecture presented on radio station WAVA FM 105.1, 13 June 2000.

⁸⁵Interview with Marshall Heyman.

uncompromising”⁸⁶—a requirement suggested by Hoffer and which manifests itself in violent acts of terrorism. Mamoun Fandy confirms bin Laden’s success in this endeavor, writing that “in both Afghanistan and Yemen, he acted on his ideological convictions and thus won the confidence of his followers.”⁸⁷ It was likely a crowning moment in his search for validation when, at the behest of Hassan al-Turabi and the Sudanese government, bin Laden presented himself to the delegates of the 1995 Islamic People’s Congress as a major Islamist leader.⁸⁸

The Issue of Psychic Wounds

The suggestion that hurtful aspects of bin Laden’s past explain his compelling need to obtain a sense of self-worth finds resonance in the literature on “psychic wounds.” This approach resembles the use of typologies and psychological profiles, which has been a fixture of terrorism analysis for some time. Of course, such typologies regarding terrorism can be just as dangerous as they are helpful. The threat that using typologies will degenerate into labeling, which can obscure the true underlying causes, motivations, and patterns of terrorist activity, is ever-present. However, there are at least a few breakthroughs in this arena which are particularly useful for an analysis of bin Laden, provided these factors are then added to a larger analytical framework, and are not expected to “stand alone.”

The concept of “psychic wounds” is one such breakthrough. It is not surprising

⁸⁶Hoffer, 24.

⁸⁷Fandy, 181.

⁸⁸Fandy, 185.

that scholars would assess terrorists to be suffering from certain psychological afflictions, although this in no way suggests that terrorists should be considered irrational. As psychiatrist and terrorism expert Jerrold Post explains in his discussion of psychic wounds, "There is, of course, no necessary relationship between emotional health and logic."⁸⁹ Post believes the root causes of terrorist behavior often reside in one's early past, attributable to negative childhood experiences. Post and other experts such as Drs. Don Silver and Charles Brenner argue that these experiences can harm the development of one's conscience and sense of morality.

A common thread in the writings of these men is that the perception of parental disapproval constitutes a major potential psychic wound, and one that strikes directly at one's sense of self-worth. This reasoning dovetails very well with a study of terrorist personalities conducted in West Germany. The study concluded that the subjects did, in fact, have psychic wounds which predisposed them, on the one hand, to seek a like-minded group, and on the other to redirect their self-loathing (a result of the wounds) outward, against society.⁹⁰

Thus the concept of psychic wounds, as developed upon in the German study, suggests psychology can explain both the group dynamics which bind terrorists to each other and to their violence, and the desire to inflict violence on others as a means of compensating for one's own perceived inadequacies. Hoffer resoundingly agrees with this suggestion when he writes, "Self-contempt produces in man 'the most unjust and criminal passions imaginable, for he conceives a mortal hatred against that truth which

⁸⁹Post, in *Origins of Terrorism*, 26.

⁹⁰Campbell, *Weapons*, 16-18.

blames him and convinces him of its faults.' ”⁹¹ Some of the literature also asserts that once committed to a group, individuals fitting the above profile will remain committed to the cause, inflicting violence and retaining group status. What is argued here is that these group members incur a sense of guilt with each terrorist act, requiring further acts of self-negating violence and continued adherence to the group to avoid facing the weak self.⁹² This reasoning is very similar to Hoffer’s notion that hate is an evocative rallying point for mass movements, and that the hate is required to be sustained in order to maintain group cohesion among self-negating individuals.⁹³

Bin Laden as Narcissistic, Charismatic Leader

The leadership aspect of group dynamics also figures prominently in the literature on the psychology of terrorism. On mass movements, Hoffer argues that once the conditions for group formation have developed, the arrival of a gifted leader to unite and breathe life into the movement is indispensable.⁹⁴ The terrorism literature usually discusses this dynamic in terms of charismatic leadership. There appears to be a blind acceptance which is symptomatic among the followers of such leaders, whether of mass movements or of terrorist groups. Such followers are generally compliant with the leader’s whims, and indeed, even see their leader in a superhuman light.⁹⁵

This extension of godhood may be necessary for two reasons. First, followers

⁹¹Hoffer, 89.

⁹²Campbell, *Weapons*, 17.

⁹³Hoffer, 85-89.

⁹⁴Hoffer, 104-105.

⁹⁵Campbell, *Weapons*, 18.

about to plunge into a hazardous undertaking seek some measure of overwhelming strength that will see them through, as can be found in an infallible leader.⁹⁶ Second, belief in a powerful, charismatic leader allows adherents to abrogate responsibility for their actions,⁹⁷ projecting the burden of morality onto their wise deity in a reinforcing act of self-negation.

Just as the terrorist leader fulfills the needs of his followers who wish to shed their unwanted selves, the followers can fill an aching void in the psychology of the leader. For the leader with a wounded psyche, the low self-esteem he carries with him from his childhood can only find restitution in the adulation of others, calling him to lead a group of unquestioning admirers who in turn find new life in his narcissistic, often strict, leadership style. Paranoia often accompanies this leader, according to the experts,⁹⁸ probably a naturally occurring outgrowth of the vital importance of the group to his sense of self-worth. Hence one can argue for a certain degree of symbiosis among narcissism, paranoia, and charismatic leadership.

In the context of a narcissistic and paranoid personality, bin Laden's quick descent from admired war-hero and Saudi royal confidant to family outcast and political undesirable within three years (1989-1992) was certain to provoke a desperate attempt to regain a position of strength and restore his self-esteem. That bin Laden experienced a very brief period as Riyadh's favorite son immediately after his return, including

⁹⁶Hoffer, 20.

⁹⁷Stern, 80.

⁹⁸Campbell, *Weapons*, 18.

celebrity status and many speaking engagements,⁹⁹ was certain to increase the pain of his loss of status.

Carrying this psychological context one step further, bin Laden's involvement in terroristic violence from 1992 to the present becomes much easier to understand in light of an additional factor that aggravated his plunge in credibility. Not only was bin Laden confronted by some of his harshest personal rejections in quick succession, but he also had to come to grips with the prospect of an extended American presence on the peninsula. The presence of U.S. forces on Saudi holy ground served as a constant reminder to bin Laden of his failure to attain the role he fervently desired at the time—holy savior of Muslims in the Gulf and protector of Islam's holiest sites.

Simply put, bin Laden wished to be regarded as something akin to the "Sword of Allah." It should be remembered that imagining himself as a mainstream public hero did not yet conflict with his worldview when he returned from Afghanistan. Although his outlook had already become increasingly militant as a result of the war,¹⁰⁰ in 1990 bin Laden still entertained a vision of himself as a respected Saudi citizen. Bin Laden's supplication of Riyadh to lead the fight against Saddam in the name of the kingdom, as well as Bodansky's assessment that bin Laden was a "fiercely loyal citizen"¹⁰¹ at the time, indicate a serious quest on his part for a legitimate role in society. It was only after his humiliating rejection in 1990 by Riyadh that there is any evidence of the disregard for public opinion that now characterizes bin Laden's statements and actions.

⁹⁹Bodansky, 28.

¹⁰⁰Bodansky, 28.

¹⁰¹Bodansky, 29.

Not only was bin Laden severely marginalized both politically and socially at the very time he sought this distinction, but he was forced to watch the infidels who had usurped this role from him defile his homeland and his religion's most hallowed ground. Drawing strength from the anti-U.S. and anti-secular sentiments in the Muslim world, bin Laden's war on the U.S. and its secular Muslim collaborators is a logical and understandable product of his need to overcome his lack of self-worth. Just as important to the evolution of his terror campaign, of course, was both his rage against Americans as those who stole a great opportunity to gain self-worth, and his feelings of betrayal and rejection by his home government. Bin Laden's motivation to build his network into an arm of terror constitutes a misguided attempt to achieve a position of strength, any strength—even as a violent terrorist leader—to recover from his feelings of inadequacy.

Hoffer's treatment of the charismatic leader should not be overlooked. Qualities he considers essential to such a leader, far from a strong intellect or talent for originality, include a sense of arrogance, charlatanism, and imitation.¹⁰² These traits, properly exploited, can all enhance the followers' perception of their leader's infallibility, by exaggerating the powers of and myths about the leader.

Bin Laden's overt arrogance is hard to miss, even after the most cursory review of his public statements. On the surface his attitude appears quite modest. Reports of his ascetic lifestyle and simple attire are well known, best illustrated perhaps in the recent story of his splitting a fried egg three ways during a meal at his cave dwellings in Afghanistan.¹⁰³ These caves are supposedly without running water and use only the most

¹⁰²Hoffer, 107-108.

¹⁰³Tony Karon, "Portraits of Osama bin Laden," *Time Daily*, URL: <<http://www.time.com/special/look/0,2633,20894-1,00.html>>, accessed 24 May 2000.

primitive heating system in the cold months.¹⁰⁴ He is also reported to have a quiet demeanor, suggestive of piety and a contemplative nature.¹⁰⁵ His statements and interviews abound with references to God's grace, power, and sublimity, reinforcing his message of professed modesty.

Yet these practices could easily, and probably do, represent a mask of self-sacrifice devised by an extreme narcissist attracted to the prestige of a living martyr. The previous chapter clearly demonstrated bin Laden's disregard for public opinion and his cry of defiance against legitimate society¹⁰⁶ as revealed in his worldview. One of the most revealing examples of bin Laden's arrogance is his belief that he and his followers caused the collapse of the Soviet Union, and based on this "victory" are capable of defeating the governments of the U.S. and the other capitalist countries.¹⁰⁷

Bin Laden's charlatanism is also easy to discover, particularly in his aggressive misrepresentation of history. Accordingly, the U.S. forces currently in Arabia are "Crusaders" and "locusts, crowding its soil, eating its fruits, and destroying its verdure." These forces, bin Laden writes, are bent on "plundering [Arabia's] riches, overwhelming its rulers, humiliating its people, threatening its neighbors, and using its bases...to fight against the neighboring Islamic peoples."¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere he claims that as a result of extended Western policies against Iraq beginning with the Gulf War, this concerted

¹⁰⁴Bodansky, 1.

¹⁰⁵Rashid, 132 and Karon, 3.

¹⁰⁶Hoffer emphasizes both of these rhetorical aspects of the charismatic leader as key examples of his arrogance on page 107 of *True Believer*.

¹⁰⁷Fandy, 179.

¹⁰⁸Lewis, "License," 14.

attempt to “destroy” the Iraqi people caused “an appalling number of dead, exceeding a million,” and that the Americans “are trying once more to repeat this dreadful slaughter.”¹⁰⁹ Neatly forgotten here, along with an accurate account of events, is bin Laden’s own historical background as an ardent enemy and denouncer of Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

These distortions play an important role in bin Laden’s campaign, exaggerating the grievances of the Muslim world for the benefit of his specific Muslim audience. Perhaps even more compelling, and equally as exploitative, is the sense in bin Laden’s reading of history of an imminent, inevitable confrontation with the West. As noted, this erroneous reading is intended to convey that the eradication of Islam is nigh, and the necessity of a decisive armed battle with the West and its allies requires the immediate and total sacrifice of every able-bodied Muslim.

Imitation is an obvious component of Bin Laden’s campaign. In fact, there is little individuality or originality in his rhetoric or worldview. His message is designed not to break new ground, but to exploit and draw strength from the founts of Islamism that pervade the entire history of the Muslim world from its inception. Thus, he crafts his words so that his conclusions and calls for *jihad* appear to flow from a logical interpretation of the Koran, of the teachings of great Muslims,¹¹⁰ and of both ancient and recent history, not from his own radicalized view or psychological needs. Magnus Ranstorp notes bin Laden’s repetitive use of Muslim history to define his agenda, and describes the February 1998 *fatwa*, in spite of its call for the killing of U.S. civilians as

¹⁰⁹Lewis, “License,” 15.

¹¹⁰Fandy, 191.

well as soldiers, as “neither revolutionary nor unique.”¹¹¹ Mamoun Fandy writes, “Bin Laden’s cosmology and worldview are shaped by Islamic narrative as handed down...throughout the ages.”¹¹²

LEADER AS IMITATOR: BIN LADEN DRAWS ON ISLAM’S PAST

Bin Laden and the Assassins

Interestingly, bin Laden’s approach to *jihad* is rather like that of the secretive Order of the Assassins (in Arabic, *Nizari*), a murderous offshoot of Islam’s Ismaili sect which terrorized Muslims labeled as “apostates” from the 11th to the 13th centuries. David Rapoport establishes that the Assassins, like bin Laden, perceived their terrorist behavior as a *jihad*. Reacting with violence to the uncertainty of an era of internal disarray, the Assassins acted to “purify” Islam. Similarly, bin Laden often characterizes today’s Islamist terrorism in the context of a sacred obligation to cleanse Islam of non-Muslim values.¹¹³

Bin Laden exhibits the same belief the Assassins held, that those who died for the *jihad* became martyrs, instant entrants into Paradise. Rapoport also indicates the Assassins separated themselves from Arabian society, living in isolated compounds reminiscent of bin Laden’s terrorist camps. For here, just as at Khost or any of bin Laden’s other training facilities, the medieval Assassins trained their recruits, taking

¹¹¹Ranstorp, “*Fatwa*,” 326.

¹¹²Fandy, 190.

¹¹³David Rapoport, “Sacred Terror,” in *Origins of Terrorism*, ed. Walter Reich (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 121-122.

advantage of the effects of this isolated living to enhance moral disengagement among their ranks.

In fact, in employing murder as part of a terror campaign, bin Laden is also drawing on the history of Islam in a general sense. According to Rapoport, "The proclivity for assassination...characterizes the early sacred terrorists in Islam," a point Bernard Lewis also emphasizes when he notes the pervasiveness of assassination in early Islam.¹¹⁴ That a high frequency of assassinations should be found in Islam's early history is no surprise. One can find the roots of this practice in the very founding of the religion itself—and in the actions of its founder.

Following in the Footsteps of the Prophet

Several scholars agree that Mohammed regularly used assassination to strengthen his position—eliminating opponents, rivals, or anyone he deemed a threat to his plans—during the *hijra*, that period of time from his departure out of Mecca in 622 until his return in 630.¹¹⁵ The victims of Mohammed were prominent Arabs, especially in Medina, both Muslim and non-Muslim—many were in fact Jews whose wide influence in this region of Arabia proved threatening to the early expansion of Islam.

Mohammed's policy of assassination appeared to have three objectives. First, it eliminated anyone with the potential to become an obstacle to the religion's consolidation and growth, including early Muslims who did not appear fully committed to Islam and

¹¹⁴Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 129.

¹¹⁵Many of these scholars' names are provided by Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 124-125. Representative of this list are Maxime Rodinson, M.G.S. Hodgson, Montgomery Watt, and Muslim writers Ibn Hisham and Ibn Ishaq.

those whose behavior simply provoked Mohammed. There is enough evidence to substantiate that Mohammed regarded anyone—both from within and outside the body of Muslims—as a potential target.¹¹⁶

Second, the murders were intended to induce non-Muslims, particularly Jews, to convert. Of course, instilling fear in the hearts of non-Muslims of the cost of rejecting Islam was a part of this objective. There is more to this aspect of the policy, however. A fundamental aspect of the assassinations was to recruit kinsmen of the intended victims as the murderers. Much of the literature on these assassinations records that the first such murder was the work of one Umayr ibn 'Adi, who killed his kinswoman, a poet who had ridiculed Mohammed, while she slept with her children.¹¹⁷

That the assassins, usually new converts to Islam, were capable of violating the most sacred personal bonds of family for the sake of their new faith was supposed to showcase the power of Islam. The comments of Maxime Rodinson, who analyzes the Umayr incident in his book *Mohammed*, suggest the policy of using family members of victims as their assassins represented an attempt to portray Islam as possessing an irresistible force, one that swept away all opposition.¹¹⁸ This characterization bears a striking resemblance to Hoffer's premise that group members must believe they have access to a source of irresistible power for a mass movement to be sustained.¹¹⁹ The possibility exists that the assassinations and their triumph over the sacredness of family

¹¹⁶Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 124.

¹¹⁷Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 125. Rapoport asserts that there is scholarly consensus on this historical point.

¹¹⁸Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammed* (London, UK: Penguin, 1971), 171.

¹¹⁹Hoffer, 20.

bonds served as a substitute for the supernatural miracles prophets are supposed to perform, and which Mohammed was unable to produce for the public view.¹²⁰ Thus, Islam appears to have established its claim to supernatural or divine—and therefore irresistible—power not only through the assertion that the angel Gabriel recited the Koran to Mohammed, but through an egregious form of murder.

Third, the murder of a relative was probably intended to bind the assassin more closely to Islam and to Mohammed.¹²¹ Since many of Mohammed's victims were targeted merely because they failed to demonstrate that they were fully committed to Islam, one's degree of ardor as a Muslim was, obviously, of utmost importance to one's survival. During Islam's founding period, killing a kinsman became a clear sign of one's total devotion to the religion, and according to Rapoport, earned the assassin both Mohammed's approval and the remission of all his sins in the eyes of Allah.¹²² Once the assassin killed, fervent devotion to Islam surely became more compelling because only through this religion and the approval of its founder could such a heinous act appear justified. In his article, "The Psychodynamics of Terrorism," Abraham Kaplan suggests that the nature of guilt can explain the devotion of a violent actor to the cause that

¹²⁰ [REDACTED] Defense Intelligence Agency analyst, interview by author, 27 June 2000.
(b)(3):10 USC 424

¹²¹ One can see a resemblance between some of the practices of Islam's founding period and the patterns of recruitment and indoctrination of cult members described by Louis West in his article "Cults, Liberty, and Mind Control," in *The Rationalization of Terrorism*, eds. David Rapoport and Yonah Alexander (Frederick, MD: Aletheia Books, 1982), 103. Especially of note regarding Islam and Mohammed are these authors' treatment of cultic techniques such as generating guilt, tying the recruit's survival to his loyalty to the group, imposing isolation on the recruit, and lowering the importance of the self. Another cultic trait of West's, which deserves to be fully cited, is the requirement of "acts of symbolic betrayal or renunciation of self, family, previously held values, or the past in general, designed to increase the psychological distance between the recruit and his or her previous way of life."

¹²² Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 124-125.

requires violence of him.¹²³

In Kaplan's view, guilt is a self-reinforcing mechanism that compels the new adherent to commit violence. The early Muslim assassin, already made to feel guilty or inadequate over his untested devotion, was recruited on condition that only the act of assassination would guarantee his acceptance—and thus his absolution. Yet the murder itself naturally imposed a feeling of guilt, which then was required to be absolved by the approval of Mohammed or perhaps a subsequent act of symbolic self-destruction.

Kaplan would expect this self-destructive act to take the form of more violence: for Hoffer, adherence to Islam itself constitutes a self-negating act which would effectively purge the assassin of his crime.¹²⁴ Although any mass movement carries within it the seeds of self-negation, according to one expert, the religion of Islam has *ab initio* tended to sublimate the individual in favor of the community, which would certainly enhance its self-negating effects.¹²⁵ These varieties of catharsis to cleanse one of individual misdeeds become particularly potent when a charismatic leader like Mohammed is available to shoulder the blame.¹²⁶

For Jerrold Post, terroristic violence is a powerful means of reinforcing an adherent's commitment to the group. Applying group dynamics to the use of terrorism, Post argues that a recruit who commits illegal or unsanctioned acts in the eyes of his larger society increases his dependency on the group that ordered him to act. Violent acts

¹²³Abraham Kaplan, "The Psychodynamics of Terrorism," *Terrorism* 1, no. 3-4 (1978): 251.

¹²⁴Kaplan, 251. See also Hoffer, 21.

¹²⁵Dr. Jonathan Owen, "Islam and the Economy," seminar presented at the Joint Military Intelligence College, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, DC, 23 March 2000.

¹²⁶See the author's previous section in this chapter, "Displacement of Responsibility," for more on this process.

tend to cut off the hopes of the recruit that his future could ever lie outside the group.

Post also indicates that charismatic leaders are particularly adept at inducing dependency states in their followers, especially those plagued by fear and doubt.¹²⁷ A brief glance at Mohammed's life as the founder of a major world religion, especially during the *hijra* and his two-year reign in Mecca, speaks loudly to his charismatic appeal. Even prior to his rise to theocratic power, aspects of Mohammed's early days suggest he may have suffered from what Jerrold Post calls the incomplete psychosocial identity, which the literature suggests is a precursor of the narcissistic, charismatic leader-type personality.¹²⁸ As for these chosen followers, it is extremely likely that fear and doubt were close companions of the early Muslim assassins, even more so directly following their first murder—it is untenable to suggest these men were all professional killers before their attraction to Islam.

The new assassins had sacrificed their allegiance to one society (that of their

¹²⁷Post, "Group Dynamics," 23-31.

¹²⁸Author Darlene May notes that Mohammed had lost both his parents by an early age, his father having died before he was born and his mother having died when he was only six. May also writes that in pre-Islamic Arabia while fathers sometimes buried their baby daughters, they often displayed an exaggerated preference for their sons (Darlene May, "Women In Islam: Yesterday and Today," in *Islam in the Contemporary World*, ed. Cyriac Pullapilly (South Bend, IN: CrossRoads Books, 1980), 378-379). Psychology literature firmly establishes the critical link between parental support and children's self-esteem. So Mohammed was not only deprived of the ability of his parents to help build his self-esteem and complete his identity, but he also had no father to fulfill his paternal societal role as Mohammed's promoter and sanctifier. Although the literature generally agrees that some of the Islamic commentary about the barbarity of pre-Islamic Arabia is overstated, it is hard to imagine that as a fatherless orphan Mohammed had an easy time adjusting to his society at age six. Also worthy of mention is the work of renowned child psychologist Erik Erikson, who determined that the stage of development (which he labeled *Industry vs. Inferiority*) in which children begin building critical aspects of their self worth starts at age six (Guy Lefrancois, *Of Children* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1986), 48). For an exposition of the narcissistic charismatic leader see pp. 17-19 and 23-24 in the Campbell book, and also Jerrold Post, "Narcissism and the Charismatic Leader-Follower Relationship," *Political Psychology* 7, no. 4 (1986): 678-679. Among the several traits of such leaders Campbell lists, several are suggestive of Mohammed, including a longing for status and power, a demand for recognition, readiness for aggression against outsiders, and the use of religious ideas to gain advantages or manipulate people. The leader reverts to these measures to compensate for the psychological afflictions that result from his incomplete psychosocial identity.

family and the old Arabia), but were not yet accepted by another (Islam), thus belonging to neither. It is illustrative to imagine them having just performed their heinous and inordinately demanding initiation rite, now without any meaningful social attachment on which they could depend. With the blood of their kinsmen still on their hands, these new assassins were tailor-made to become dependent on a leader such as Mohammed, who became a source of the reassurance and affirmation they desperately needed.

Recent psychological studies on charismatic religious cults strongly reinforce this assessment of the new assassins' susceptibility to the group dynamics operating under Mohammed's direction. Based on their field research, several experts agree that the more isolated and unaffiliated a new member is, the more likely he is to attach himself fervently and unquestioningly to the group. These psychologists found that among their test populations, only membership in the group provided these new recruits with the identity and support they needed. The relevant studies also investigated the relationship between group dynamics and socially aberrant behavior. The data revealed that the more relief the recruits showed on joining the group, the more likely they were to commit acts that violated the mores guiding their old affiliations.¹²⁹

According to Rapoport, Mohammed ceased the practice of assassination "when the community was ready to incorporate new territories and the army was given its first offensive role."¹³⁰ While this change in tactics did, in fact, occur at the end of Mohammed's life, it was a transition dictated by pragmatism, not remorse or incompatibility with religious tenets. The fact, therefore, that several of Islam's early

¹²⁹Studies conducted by psychologists M. Galanter, R. Rabkin, J. Rabkin, and A. Deutsch are cited by Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 34-35.

¹³⁰Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 124.

leaders were themselves assassinated is; in light of this history, no surprise since the very founder of the religion engaged in multiple assassinations to achieve his own objectives.¹³¹ Any arguments that this phenomenon of systematic assassination came from a source outside of Islam and Mohammed (such as pre-Islamic Arabia), and cannot be ascribed a central role in the religion's founding period, are weakened by Mohammed's willingness to embrace assassination despite Koranic precepts against the taking of life. Regardless of where the idea of assassination originated before Mohammed adopted it, its use was a signal to early adherents and non-Muslim observers that Islam incorporated rather than rejected the practice of murdering its enemies. Moreover,¹³¹ the type of murder ordained was not in the context of battle, but occurred while these enemies slept, or during a meal, or while they were surrounded by family—murder by stealth, and intended to terrorize. These early assassinations may in part explain the prevalence in Islam, throughout its history, of the terroristic murder both of traitorous "apostates," who posed a threat to Islam from within, and external enemies perceived to represent obstacles to Islam's future.

The Emotive Power of the Founding Period

David Rapoport admits that the literature often fails to address the link between Mohammed's actions and subsequent examples of Islamic terror, but this avoidance does not preclude its veracity. Indeed, Rapoport asserts there is evidence of such a connection, arguing that among religious cultures there is a definite relationship between terrorists

¹³¹Of particular note here are the assassinations of the third and fourth Caliphs (Uthman and Ali), murdered in 656 and 661 by Muslims. In both cases, certain groups of Muslims approved of the assassinations on the grounds that they were unfit rulers.

and the founding period of their religion, and further that there is no viable reason Islam would be an exception.¹³² Khachig Tololyan, in his article "Cultural Narrative and the Motivation of the Terrorist," added heavily to the establishment of this connection in 1987 when he broke new ground on the dynamics of Armenian culture and the nature of contemporary Armenian terrorism. Important contributions of Tololyan's include the concepts of "projective narrative" and "transcendent collective values,"¹³³ illustrative terms which relate the strength of the founding period's ability to set a tone for future activism.

Certainly, one such precedent that grew out of the Mohammedan period was the sense that there was an urgent need to "purify" Islam of unclean influences, and that this purification required drastic measures, including violence and even murder, although Mohammed likely couched the act of killing in euphemistic language befitting his new religion. The fact that Jews and other non-Muslims were victims as well, rather than only Muslims whose devotion was "questionable," expanded this precedent, so that "purification" also included the elimination of external threats to Islam. Thus, Mohammed appears to have sown the seeds of later Islamic terror against the unholy influence both of the internal "apostate" and the external infidel. The origins of the classical Islamic precept of world Islamization, the need to overcome all non-Muslim influences until all the earth resides in *dar al-Islam*, are a lot easier to recognize,

¹³²Rapoport's line of reasoning suggests that some other cause for this lack of scholarship on the connection between Mohammed's practice of assassination and Islamic terrorism exists. See Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 118-120.

¹³³Khachig Tololyan, "Cultural Narrative and the Motivation of the Terrorist," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (December 1987): 217-236. Also see Tololyan as cited by Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 118-119.

grounded as they are in Mohammed's "purification" campaign. What is also easier to understand in light of Islam's founding period is the prevalence of assassinations and "assassination cults" throughout Islamic history.

M.G.S. Hodgson, Bernard Lewis, and Rapoport are just three of the scholars who emphasize the significance of assassination in Islam. Rapoport in particular stresses that while assassination is common to other religions as well, it is within Islam that this practice became a matter of organizational policy for some sects. Using Judaism and Christianity as examples, Rapoport argues that within these other religions assassination was predominantly a matter of individual action, rather than a recurrent theme and persistent policy found within the group context.

Of the four Muslim assassination cults Rapoport mentions by name—*Nizari*, *Kharijite*, *Khunnag*, and *Kaysaniyya*—most interesting is his comment that the assassinations of the *Nizari* continued well after they had begun to prove counterproductive to their ostensible goals. This dynamic, in which terrorism becomes a self-sustaining process, is well-known in terrorism literature,¹³⁴ and indicates the centrality of violence in the Assassins' *raison d'etre*, and probably in their mode of survival as a group. The author suggests that the Assassins were still imbued with the belief they were assisting their religion, but because of the psychological need to continue killing,¹³⁵ were unable to end their assassinations at an appropriate time for fear of their

¹³⁴For the reference to terrorism as a self-sustaining process, see Crenshaw in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, 19. See also Campbell, *Weapons*, 21-28 for a brief review of some of the literature on terroristic violence becoming an end in itself, rather than simply a means.

¹³⁵James Campbell, Martha Crenshaw, and Jerrold Post all agree that violence is critical to the ability of a terrorist organization to maintain group cohesion. Campbell writes, "Both Crenshaw and Post indicate that a terrorist group must act even when the external situation indicates a high degree of risk, the alternative being an intra-group implosion of defections or splintering (Campbell, *Weapons*, 26). On the need to survive, Crenshaw reminds readers that "organizations are dedicated to survival. They do not

sect unraveling.

In contrast, Mohammed was able to transition from assassination to military force because the original assassins were only a part of the early Muslim community. Many others did not have to kill in order to gain acceptance in the religion. While the early assassins did, by the nature of their actions, bind themselves to Islam, theirs was a role that was merely a part of Mohammed's larger designs—the assassins' calling was to eliminate his foes, and thereby induce conversions through dread, terror, and mystique. Moreover, there is no evidence the original assassins were themselves a group, with its own internal dynamics. It is more consistent with the evidence to argue that these early killers were individually bound to Mohammed, and that the group dynamics they experienced, although enhanced by their unique source of guilt and need for self-negation, were those to which the entire Muslim community was subjected.

Yet the religion of Islam has still bred many iterations of assassination cults throughout the centuries. In fact, assassination is so common a theme in Islam that Rapoport spends a good deal of time in his piece "Sacred Terror" discussing the importance these cults placed on choosing a favorite lethal weapon for their activities, which in effect became their "signature." Rapoport also notes that it is one of these cults—the *Nizari*—that is responsible for giving birth to the actual term "assassin," due to their reputation for using hashish.¹³⁶ This prevalence, in reality, is not surprising. Rapoport, illuminating the dynamics of religious-based terrorism, writes that:

voluntarily go out of business. Right now, the immediate objective of many hard pressed terrorist groups is the same as the immediate objective of many of the world's hard pressed corporations...that is, to continue operations (Crenshaw in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, 22).

¹³⁶Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 122-123.

The sacred terrorists' eyes are on the past—on the particular precedents established in the religion's most holy era, the founding period when deity and community were on the most intimate terms and when the basic rules of the religion were established...Borrowing from terrorists in other religions is not evident; within a particular religious tradition, terrorist groups do resemble each other, more because they study the same sources than because they communicate with each other. This last point can be put in another form: ways of acting in the founding period became sanctified, and subsequent generations interpret and reinterpret those roles.¹³⁷

For Rapoport these dynamics are particularly appropriate in regard to Islam. The importance in Islam of its founding period is unmistakable, enshrined in the concept of the *Sunna* (i.e. the Way of the Prophet). For Muslims, the *Sunna*—a set of traditions based on the life and actions of Mohammed and his followers—is the definitive model for how they should live their lives. The Sunna, then, is a classic example of Tololyan's "projective narrative,"¹³⁸ in which the thoughts and actions of the founder are visited and revisited by subsequent generations.

Applying the Myth of the Founding Period to the Present

There is indeed reason to link Mohammed to later iterations of Islamic terror. It is known that ancient Muslim terrorists cited at least two Mohammedan precedents to justify their actions—the Koranic defense of eliminating unfit rulers,¹³⁹ and the tradition built on Mohammed's injunction to use direct action to set aright what is "reprehensible." In the contemporary world, militant Gholam-Reza Fada'i Araqi writes that the Koran authorizes the killing of all troublemakers, with a particular focus on "the ringleaders and some of their agents," an interpretation which bears an immediate resemblance to Mohammed's elimination of rivals and mockers. Analyst Amir Taheri agrees that "the

¹³⁷Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 118.

¹³⁸Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 119.

¹³⁹According to the Koran, a ruler's rejection of *shari'a* reduces him to infidel status.

tradition [of assassination] thus established [in the 7th century] was to continue throughout the history of Islam.¹⁴⁰ Lastly, Rapoport discusses Mohammed's use of assassination as having become an "archetype" for Islam, destined to influence the future, and made especially attractive by its offer to later Muslims of martyrdom and instant entry into Paradise. Rapoport notes a staggering statistic in support of this concept of assassination as an Islamic archetype—35 to 40 percent of the caliphs that reigned from Mohammed's death in 632 until the end of the Abbasid dynasty in the 13th century were assassinated. By contrast, during a similar period in Western Europe following the establishment of feudalism, no monarch was ever assassinated by a vassal.¹⁴¹

For Rapoport, investigating the roots of Muslim terror first found in the policy of assassination used by Mohammed, and later adopted by cults such as the *Nizari*, is crucial to understanding the motivations and philosophical underpinnings of Al-Jihad, the Egyptian terrorist group that assassinated President Sadat in 1981. The author agrees, and adds that these same roots of terror can help to explain other contemporary Muslim terrorists, including Usama bin Laden. The most important message communicated by Mohammed's assassination "archetype" is that the purification of Islam and safeguarding of its future was a task of the highest calling, and that horrific violence was an appropriate and justified means of achieving this purification.

Bin Laden's war on the U.S. with its impious and infectious culture, and his suspected connections to other violent incidents, such as a 1995 attempt on the life of

¹⁴⁰ Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1987), 246. For Araqi's letter, see Taheri, 246.

¹⁴¹ Rapoport in *Origins of Terrorism*, 119, 125.

secular Egyptian President Mubarak,¹⁴² can be considered the ugly stepchildren of this Mohammedan archetype. In prosecuting his form of terrorism, bin Laden is, in his own way, imitating and also drawing strength from the pattern of violence set down by the founder of his religion, and with the same purpose in mind—protecting Islam. Just as Serb President Slobodan Milosevic infuses his persona with the legend of the Serb hero Prince Lazar of the 14th century,¹⁴³ and Adolf Hitler tied his Nazi Party to the myth of an ancient Aryan race,¹⁴⁴ bin Laden clings to Mohammed and traditions of Muslim militancy to empower his own agenda.

It is important to note that bin Laden's use of Mohammed and of the religion of Islam to justify his terrorism should not compel anyone to conclude he is a religious terrorist *per se*. Despite bin Laden's professed devotion to Allah, thorough analysis requires one to search for a deeper cause, especially given the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who claim this same devotion and nevertheless lead peaceful lives. Similarly, an American white supremacist who claims devotion to Christianity requires further study if one is to understand his real motivations. In the opening pages of *True Believer*, Eric Hoffer warns readers to be conscious of "religiofication," the art of transforming practical needs into holy causes. It seems quite apparent, then, that while Islam is critical to bin Laden's worldview and the prosecution of his terror campaign, there is in fact a very practical need at the root of his immersion in "religiofied" violence.

¹⁴²Bodansky, 121-135.

¹⁴³Dusko Doder and Louise Branson, *Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 3-5.

¹⁴⁴Phyllis Cannon, prod., "Hitler and the Occult," *History's Mysteries*, narr. David Ackroyd, History Channel, 7 June 2000.

THE ROLE OF ISLAM: RELIGION AS SHROUD

How Bin Laden Uses Islam

Bin Laden's practical need is likely personal, even private at its source, suggesting the importance of understanding his inner psychology. That being said, appreciating the religious context in which he operates is also vitally important. That bin Laden's ultimate motivation for involvement in terrorism may spring from psychological afflictions does not weaken the power he is able to access by emulating Mohammed and past generations of Muslim terrorists.

Indeed, attaching himself to this legacy of religious-based violence may provide just the rationalization bin Laden needs to hide his personal, psychological motives from his audiences—and perhaps to hide them from himself as well. In this context, religion becomes a drape which one uses to cover a hurting inner self—another layer of the onion, and not its core. To discuss bin Laden's actual motivation in terms of such psychic wounds is consistent with the assessment of Usama's incomplete self-image. The relevance of imitation to this psychological flaw, as expressed above and seen in bin Laden's reliance on Islam and its militant incarnation, is best illustrated by Hoffer: "This excessive capacity for imitation indicates that the hero is without a fully developed and realized self."¹⁴⁵

In his book on the Taliban, Ahmed Rashid explores bin Laden's need to imitate from yet another angle, finding evidence for this need in his consistent search for

¹⁴⁵Hoffer, 108.

mentorship.¹⁴⁶ Rashid's account reveals that bin Laden not only looks to the ancient militants to acquire the strength and completeness he lacks, but relies heavily on contemporary militants as well, often after forming personal contacts with them. Authors credit fellow Muslims such as Azzam, Turabi, and Zawahiri as not only being men bin Laden admired, but also as thinkers who shaped and even determined his worldview.¹⁴⁷

The Incomplete Self

This pattern of imitative behaviors, seen as a whole, strongly reinforces the view that bin Laden suffers from an incomplete self-image and bruised sense of self-worth. It is therefore not quite appropriate to say that he is simply a militant Muslim fighter and leave it at that. The evidence and relevant studies of terrorism and psychology indicate that bin Laden's low self-esteem compels him to market himself—and indeed to perceive himself—as just such a fighter, in order to replace his unwanted self with the cathartic purity of a holy cause. It is only natural, in view of this affliction, that Usama would seek out respected giants of the Muslim world after which to model himself, believing on some level that he is incapable of commanding the support he craves on his own merit.

For the dynamics of successful leadership of a movement such as bin Laden's network really hinge on infallibility, an illusory status to which arrogance, charlatanism, and imitation can heavily contribute. Hoffer understands that the successful leader must be able to "kindle and fan an extravagant hope."¹⁴⁸ In that this hope is generally founded

¹⁴⁶Rashid, 136.

¹⁴⁷Bodansky, 53, 309 and Rashid 131.

¹⁴⁸Hoffer, 18.

on the vision of a bright, often utopian, and therefore unlikely future, the leader must convince his followers the movement possesses some sort of irresistible force that will guide them to this impossible destiny.¹⁴⁹ Whether this force is to derive from the leader himself, or from some talisman he holds, such as WMD (or both), the faith required of the followers calls for a leader perceived as infallible. Not only has bin Laden portrayed himself as such a leader, but there are also indications that there are those in his network who believe he is, in fact, infallible.

Bin Laden the *Infallible*

Muslim perceptions of bin Laden's infallibility continue to energize Islamist terrorism. His mere involvement in an operation mobilizes grassroots support for the plot, and bolsters the willingness of the conspirators to face retaliation. Bin Laden has come to symbolize the militant Muslim confrontation with the West, a role which some agree is of supreme importance to him. Bodansky calls this status "the realization of his aspirations," and warns that bin Laden "cannot and will not avoid a confrontation" out of fear of losing this exalted position.¹⁵⁰ Two conclusions from this treatment of infallibility are evident: 1) it is a pervasive Muslim belief in bin Laden's infallibility that has thrust him into the role of symbolic leader of the militant struggle; and 2) bin Laden's obsessive

¹⁴⁹See Loren Lomasky, "The Political Significance of Terrorism," in *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice*, eds. R.G. Frey and Christopher Morris (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 90-93. Lomasky argues that terrorism is primarily an expressive—not an outcome-oriented—activity. Accordingly, such activity does not need to be tied to a reachable goal. James Campbell, Martha Crenshaw, and Thomas Kissane see terrorists' achievement of their cause as a threat rather than a desirable end for the terrorists. These authors contend that group survival and solidarity, with their restorative psychological effects, are ultimately more important to terrorists than their professed cause. This dynamic appears to explain why terrorists' demands become tend to become increasingly unlikely to be achieved. As Campbell writes, "these demands must be kept beyond the ultimate target's ability to yield to them so that they cannot be met." See Campbell, *Weapons*, 23-26.

¹⁵⁰Bodansky, 337-338.

need for this status will drive him to continue supporting and conducting terrorist operations. He will not risk his symbolic office by allowing himself to be perceived as uncommitted or indolent.

The sensationalized attention bin Laden receives, especially from the U.S., which tends to demonize, and therefore mythologize, him rather than to report on his activities, enhances this aura of infallibility. As one editorial in a Pakistani newspaper pointed out, "When the U.S. expresses its hatred for Usama, feelings of love for him intensify in the Muslim world."¹⁵¹ Articles and news shows luxuriate over grandiose assumptions of his wealth, power, and elusiveness, often ignoring facts such as recent U.S. successes in thwarting several bin Laden terrorist operations in the aftermath of the 20 August 1998 American military strike on the Khost complex and Al Shifa plant. The result of this media circus is that bin Laden appears capable of anything, striking at will when the fancy takes him. There is no doubt bin Laden capitalizes on this legendary reputation to bolster his status as a militant leader.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON BIN LADEN THE MAN

The relevance of paranoia to a discussion of bin Laden's current state of mind is rooted not only in his personality, but also in real or suspected events unfolding around him. Fawaz Gerges, a professor of Middle Eastern Studies, contended in July 2000 that bin Laden's group was splintered and fractured.¹⁵² Actually, signs of this fragmentation

¹⁵¹Bodansky, 405.

¹⁵²Loeb, 2.

had already begun to reveal themselves after the onset of the year. A March 2000 *Washington Post* article reported that bin Laden's organization showed increasing signs of weakness. The authors attribute the decline to the wave of arrests of alleged bin Laden followers and terrorist associates prior to the millennial celebrations. According to the authors, those arrested include dozens of terrorists who had received training in Afghanistan and were linked to bin Laden. The article also suggested that bin Laden's infrastructure had started to crack as early as 1998, due to the arrests that followed the August U.S. embassy bombings in East Africa.¹⁵³

In addition to hints of fragmentation, there have been enough reports on bin Laden's failing health, including some from Pakistani officials, to at least suggest that there is reason for concern over his future. While associates of bin Laden continue to report his condition as healthy, other sources confided to the *London Sunday Times* in April 2000 that an Iraqi doctor allegedly had to be flown into Afghanistan to treat bin Laden.¹⁵⁴ The sources, claiming bin Laden remains ill and is also depressed, argue that his fear that the Taleban will eventually refuse to shelter him has aggravated both conditions.

One can rather easily make the case that bin Laden suffers from aggressive paranoia, aside from the constant threat of his expulsion by the Taliban, just on the basis of recent reporting. In May 2000 Reuters reported that bin Laden had replaced his entire contingent of Arab bodyguards with Pakistani and Bangladeshi replacements, apparently

¹⁵³David Vise and Lorraine Adams, "Bin Laden Weakened, Officials Say," *Washington Post*, 11 March 2000, final ed., Sec. A3.

¹⁵⁴Ismail Khan, "Bin Laden's Life Saved by Iraqi Doctor," *London Sunday Times*, 9 April 2000. Document ID EUP20000409000063, accessed on Intelink, 10 April 2000.

having lost confidence in the former group after reports circulated about two informants being among them.¹⁵⁵ Then there is the issue of his flight from one corner of Afghanistan to another. The *Washington Times* reported in July 2000 that bin Laden abruptly moved from his base in Kandahar, Afghanistan, to a remote site in the country's north-central region. Reportedly fearing a U.S. missile attack on his Kandahar complex, bin Laden left the base with 2,000 commandos who served as his bodyguards during the journey to his new home.

These details beg the question of why bin Laden thought armed bodyguards would be able to protect him from a missile attack. In truth, moving with such a large number of personnel could actually increase chances of a successful missile attack by providing a target easier to locate. Traveling in very small numbers and dispersing would typically provide much better protection from a stand-off attack with advanced weaponry. One could surmise that the ineffectual use of several thousand bodyguards to stave off a U.S. missile attack in reality represents a desperate measure by bin Laden to convince himself he is physically secure.

When regarding the paranoid personality in a leadership position, there is a logical disconnect in the assumption that the weakening or fragmentation of his group indicates growing impotence. Such a trend within a group with a violent history may actually increase the threat of violent behavior. The leader may perceive this behavior as the only recourse to prevent the group's disbanding. If any of the rumors about bin Laden's worsening health are accurate, the issue of physical and mental condition adds

¹⁵⁵Ismail Khan, "Worried Bin Laden Replaces Bodyguards," *Reuters*, 28 May 2000, *Yahoo News*, "World Headlines," URL: <http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20000528/wl/pakistan_binladen_1.html>, accessed 5 June 2000.

another layer of concern to his future decision-making. In his classic book on ailing rulers, *When Illness Strikes the Leader: The Dilemma of the Captive King*, Jerrold Post asserts that leaders become sick the results range anywhere from loss of a sense of purpose to disaster.¹⁵⁶ In light of Post's book, the combination of mental and physical sickness which some ascribe to bin Laden would clearly not lessen the likelihood that his decisions could prove dangerous.

Post's description of some likely effects of the ailing leader who suffers from narcissism and depression is particularly relevant to a study of bin Laden. Post writes of this leader that he is always subject to fits of depression and major setbacks, because the inner void that possesses him can never truly be filled. In this case, the only distraction that may serve to temporarily alleviate the pain of this harsh inner world is a preoccupying focus on external threats.

It is as if the narcissist either aggressively seeks, or, if he has to, deliberately creates this battle against an external foe to distract him from his inner wounds. This individual wants to strike out at those who originally caused him this pain, but often, as in the case when a parent is responsible, such a victory is out of reach. According to Post, the narcissist finds this surrogate battle against his surrogate foe "a great relief, a legitimization of the suppressed wish to lash out" at the original cause of his pain.¹⁵⁷ This view of the narcissist leader's overriding urge to do battle with an external enemy as a compensatory measure for his psychic wounds adds significant weight to the argument that bin Laden's war on the U.S. represents a similar attempt to hide from and

¹⁵⁶Jerrold Post, *When Illness Strikes the Leader: The Dilemma of the Captive King* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 30.

¹⁵⁷Post, *When Illness Strikes the Leader*, 30-38.

compensate for the pain of his own inner wounds.

During the Afghan War the Soviets obliged bin Laden's need for someone to hate and fight against by playing the role of the external enemy. After the *jihad* fell apart and the Soviet Union dissolved, bin Laden needed a new external foe to fill in for the USSR. Once bin Laden had decided on the U.S., it was necessary for him to paint a worldview conducive to America's demonization. Luckily for bin Laden, generations of prior Muslim revivalists had provided a significant body of ideologically sound anti-Western rhetoric. It was easy for bin Laden, already a Muslim militant, to adapt this rhetoric and to create a new war to assuage his personal psychological afflictions. In order to convince himself and his followers of the necessity to do battle with his chosen external foe, it was up to bin Laden to provide solid ideological grounds to justify this battle. Chapter Three closely examines bin Laden's elaborate justification, which he projects through his carefully constructed public persona.

REVIEW OF BIN LADEN THE MAN: HOW THE RESTRAINTS HOLD UP

1. Is fear of public revulsion restraining bin Laden?

On the basis of this study of bin Laden as individual, the evidence does not support the idea that this fear holds him back. The clandestinity that has played a large part in bin Laden's life, and especially in his terrorist career, combined with a series of personal disappointments, have engendered in him a rejection of society and a desire for its structural revision. As a result, there is no sign of an allegiance to society, or even to the Muslim world, hence the opinions of this public mean little to him. Replacing this

allegiance is his attachment to other militants, to his followers' admiration, and to the cause that purges him of his hated self.

The psychological afflictions that haunt bin Laden have obscured the sting of public revulsion. In his need to fight an external foe to temporarily relieve him of the pain of contemplating his inner wounds, all of society has become the hated enemy, because society has already rejected him. As long as the militant core of Islam continues to applaud his terroristic war, and as long as this war assuages bin Laden's longing for a complete self-image, the only emotion he will allow himself to reserve for society is hate.

2. Is fear of retaliation restraining bin Laden?

The evidence presents a mixed view of the presence of this fear in bin Laden. Chapter Two highlights among other personality traits a case of aggressive paranoia in bin Laden. One could interpret this paranoia in general as a contributor to a persecution complex, which would certainly convince the individual that retaliation is a likely scenario. Fear and insecurity appear to accompany such personalities. However, bin Laden's case could be that of competing emotions. On the one hand, bin Laden is constantly expecting an attack or an attempt to undermine his authority and status. At the same time, his psychic wounds drive him to commit violence in spite of the possibility that such acts could result in his capture or death. One finds consonance with this dualism in historical figures such as Hitler and Stalin, excessively paranoid, but driven by their personalities not to hide and shelter themselves, but to fight the world no matter what the cost.

3. *Is the unpredictability of WMD in the delivery phase restraining bin Laden?*

There is no evidence to suggest that this concern affects bin Laden in any way, other than his past record of avoidance of WMD use. Certainly bin Laden's search for WMD speaks to his willingness to consider a WMD attack regardless of unpredictability. The evidence suggests that the horror that accompanies WMD, and the sense of power these weapons impart to potential users outweigh for bin Laden pragmatic assessments of their relative utility as a weapon of precision. Similarly, one can apply this argument to any previous use of WMD, and ask if any among the users expected these weapons to achieve precise, tactical objectives, rather than secure strategic goals such as creating an overall sense of terror, panic, and demoralization.

4. *Is fear of the dangers of handling WMD restraining bin Laden?*

The evidence unambiguously points to a lack of concern over these dangers. As an individual with narcissistic, paranoid tendencies, bin Laden already lives in a world of constant threats. Yet he has built a life which encourages dangerous situations, and in some sense has likely already conquered his fear of danger as a result of his experiences in the Afghan War. The elaborate war bin Laden has built to provide internal psychological relief already places him in a battlefield setting—rather than moan about the dangers of weapons which may be available to him, he is more apt to consider any and all means to continue the fight. Moreover, since the survival of his group and its emulation for him and his cause is so critical to his self-worth, if WMD can serve to bind the group together more closely, these weapons become even more desirable. Therefore, according to the criteria outlined in Chapter One which are designed to suggest whether

one or more of four generic restraints are causal factors in group's decision to refrain from WMD use, none of these restraints applies as far as bin Laden and his individual psyche indicate.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BIN LADEN PERSONA: MESSAGE AND WORLDVIEW

This front has been established as the first step to pool together the energies and concentrate efforts against the infidels represented in the Jewish-Crusader alliance.

Usama bin Laden in a December 1998 interview with
ABC News

The ruling to kill the Americans...is in accordance with the words of almighty God, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God."

Usama bin Laden in his February 1998 *fatwa*

The purpose of Chapter Three is to continue the presentation of relevant evidence.

This time the focus of study is bin Laden's public persona. This persona has several components, the first of which is a set of bin Laden's written and spoken public statements. There are quite a few relevant documents that have served as Al Qaeda's communiqués, including several published interviews bin Laden has given, one *fatwa*, and one "Declaration of War." A second component is a collection of media reports and other eyewitness accounts of bin Laden and his movement, which journalists, interviewers, colleagues, and admirers have provided over the course of several stages of bin Laden's life. Among the bedrock elements of this component are sensationalized accounts of bin Laden's personal history, particularly during the Afghan War. A third layer of the persona is the myth of bin Laden, a carefully contrived, propagandized image which borrows from media coverage, the manipulation of Muslim sentiments, and the exploitation of fear to cover the real Usama with a larger-than-life veneer. Bin Laden is

simultaneously a hero to militant-minded Muslims and a bogeyman to the U.S. and its allies.

There is no doubt that the second component of the persona, particularly in the sense of Western official rhetoric and journalistic reporting, contributes heavily to the construction of this legendary image. Regarding the effect of the second component on the third, Mamoun Fandy accuses both Western governments and media organizations of significantly enhancing bin Laden's global importance in the act of demonizing him for their own purposes. There is another element of Fandy's criticism of the Western response: he argues that the West's aggressive demonization campaign has allowed bin Laden to point out the "anti-Muslim" nature of Western policies.¹⁵⁸ Thus, for the sake of his global image, bin Laden very capably exploits both the terrorist and counterterrorist rhetoric that his war on the U.S. generates.

Understanding the significance and purpose of bin Laden's mythical image is critical, since there are actually two types of audiences in a position to digest it—the external and the internal. The idea that terrorists speak to themselves as well as their external audience through their statements and myths is nothing new. Years ago authors such as Nathan Leites and Bonnie Cordes wrote about the importance of terrorist auto-propaganda, a term for a group's use of rhetoric to convince themselves of the appropriateness of their behavior. Hence there are two paths to insight on terrorist thinking which communiqués can reveal—a study of how terrorists want other to perceive them, and of how terrorists want to perceive themselves. Cordes argues that the

¹⁵⁸Fandy, 178-179.

way in which terrorists explain their actions to themselves provides a rich understanding of their mentality and motivations.¹⁵⁹

A fourth and, for the purposes of this study, final component of bin Laden's persona is the elaborate worldview to which he prescribes, a worldview reflected by the other three components. One can recognize a myriad of influences on the formation of bin Laden's worldview. The religion of Islam, of course, is a keystone of this worldview, but it is not the only principal source. Muslim historical experience, particularly the pattern of Muslim grievances both past and present, is a constant theme of bin Laden's public statements. The rhetoric found in these statements also reflects many of the views shared by previous militant thinkers, suggesting that bin Laden's view of the world is indelibly linked to a rich historical tapestry of militant Muslim thought, rather than representing a unique departure.

Bin Laden's personal history is yet another influence on this worldview, as well as quite possibly being the true source for much of the venom he reserves for the U.S. and its infidel friends. As he has suffered, so has the entire Muslim world, according to bin Laden, suffered at the hands of the infidels. Since both of these aggrieved parties require a redress of their grievances, what is the product of bin Laden's worldview?

The answer is bin Laden's message, a fifth component of his persona. His message, powerfully expressed in his communiqués, is an angry, uncompromising, and allegedly righteous call to kill the infidel for the sake of Islam's future. How bin Laden presents this call to commit violence, and how he justifies it, constitute the substance of

¹⁵⁹Bonnie Cordes, "When Terrorists Do the Talking: Reflections on Terrorist Literature," in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, ed. David Rapoport (New York, NY: Columbia University, 1988), 151. References to Nathan Leites' views are also included on page 151.

this chapter. Bonnie Cordes contends that, when properly analyzed, what terrorists openly express offers a vital window into who they really are.¹⁶⁰

EXAMINING THE MESSAGE

The Context of Bin Laden's Message

Any analysis of bin Laden's public persona should begin with an appreciation of the context in which he functions. It is easy to characterize his repeated calls for the murder of Western "infidels" as the ravings of an extremist, but in so doing one ignores the thoughtfully crafted rationale and potential appeal of his message. The fact is that the themes that comprise bin Laden's worldview do resonate among many Muslims.¹⁶¹ At the heart of this worldview burns a purist interpretation of Islam and a militant reading of Muslim historical experience, which bin Laden cools with oft-repeated public statements of humility and obeisance toward Allah. Bin Laden's show of respect for the Islamic God,¹⁶² as well as his fluid and extremely articulate discourse on Muslim grievances, explains this resonance to a large degree.

When bin Laden calls for the murder of Westerners, he is careful always to couch these commands in the colorful language of this worldview. A bedrock element of this

¹⁶⁰Cordes in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, 167.

¹⁶¹Ranstorp, "Fatwa," 324-326.

¹⁶²One finds a striking example of this show of respect for Allah intertwined in a suggestive call for militant rebellion in bin Laden's March 1997 interview with CNN's Peter Arnett: "We are confident, with the permission of God, Praise and Glory be to Him, that Muslims will be victorious in the Arabian peninsula and that God's religion, praise and glory be to him, will prevail in this peninsula." See Usama bin Laden, "Transcript of Usama Bin Laden Interview," interview by Peter Arnett, CNN Impact, 31 March 1997, URL: <<http://www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/im...5/09/feature/transcript.ladin.html>>, accessed 26 January 2000. Cited hereafter as Arnett interview with bin Laden.

vision is an aggressively manipulated version of recent history, guided by constant reference to the annals of Islam's past. For example, bin Laden characterizes the Gulf War purely as American aggression against Iraq, and the U.S. forces that fought in it as invaders and occupiers.¹⁶³ Not surprisingly, given this view of history, he is quick to brand U.S. troops as "Crusaders." His purpose here is to link the current U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia with the historical scars Muslims bear from their unique perceptions of Western aggression during the medieval Crusades. Similarly, the economic hardship which UN sanctions have placed on Iraq becomes yet another example of the continuation of the brutal Crusades.

A distinguishing feature of these historical allusions is a constant sense of persecution,¹⁶⁴ reinforced by a sharply defined "us vs. them" mentality. Thus, bin Laden asks the Muslim reader to connect not just with his Islamic heritage, but with a painful legacy of conflict with and exploitation by the hated West. Scholars Bernard Lewis and Magnus Ranstorp both agree bin Laden's message derives its potential appeal from the drawing of these historical parallels because many Muslims see the Gulf War, the U.S. presence in Arabia, and UN sanctions against Iraq as continuations of this legacy.¹⁶⁵

The key to the deliberate use of themes with broad Muslim appeal is their potential to mask or mollify what Bernard Lewis calls bin Laden's extreme interpretation of Islam.¹⁶⁶ The extremeness of the call to murder is buried in a richly woven pattern of pan-Muslim grievances. Thus, the enemy deserving of slaughter no longer seems the

¹⁶³Lewis, "License," 15, 19.

¹⁶⁴Ranstorp, "*Fatwa*," 325.

¹⁶⁵Lewis, "License," 15-19 and Ranstorp, "*Fatwa*," 326.

¹⁶⁶Lewis, "License," 19.

solitary U.S. soldier standing guard at Prince Sultan Airbase whom bin Laden finds personally insulting. The enemy becomes the infidel Crusader who has bedeviled Muslims throughout time.

It does not seem unusual that Western or Muslim scholars would paint bin Laden's worldview as extreme according to Muslim teachings. Lewis reminds his audience that "at no point do the basic texts of Islam enjoin terrorism and murder."¹⁶⁷ An important question to ask, however, is how many Muslims may actually be sympathetic to this worldview in the context of contemporary Muslim attitudes? Or, to put it another way, how extreme is this worldview in the marketplace of Muslim ideas? While Lewis explains that "the militant and violent interpretation is one among many,"¹⁶⁸ it is still a voice in the current resurgence of Islam, with Koranic verses to give it credence. British scholar David Kibble points out that it is possible to interpret the Koran in a way that justifies the use of violence and terrorism in the name of spreading Allah's rule.¹⁶⁹ Bin Laden has shrouded his call to violence in a complex layer of religion, ideology, and propaganda that invests him with power far beyond that of merely a wayward extremist. Thus his embrace of death and extreme forms of violence do not seriously detract from the weight of his public persona or appeal among many Muslims.

Referring to bin Laden's February 1998 call to kill U.S. troops and civilians, Lewis himself asserts that "some Muslims are ready to approve, and a few of them to

¹⁶⁷Lewis, "License," 19.

¹⁶⁸Lewis, "License," 19.

¹⁶⁹David Kibble, "The Threat of Islam: A Fundamental Reappraisal," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19, no. 4 (October-December 1996): 363.

apply, the declaration's extreme interpretation of their religion."¹⁷⁰ The *Economist*, reporting during the aftermath of the U.S. retaliatory strikes on Sudan's Al Shifa plant and bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan, noted that bin Laden's words now resonate among many ordinary Saudis. "Mr. bin Laden," the report continues, "commands an increasing fascination for ordinary Arabs," and is a man "whose survival enhances his stature."¹⁷¹ Noting his growing appeal as a Muslim cult figure and source of inspiration, Yossef Bodansky reports that one Pakistani official describes bin Laden as an "ultimate hero," with one manifestation of this status being the dramatic rise in the number of babies now being named "Usama."¹⁷²

One should remember that according to the classical Islamic doctrine of *jihad*, killing the infidel is not murder in a technical sense—it is legitimate killing in the context of a just war.¹⁷³ Any Muslims, then, who accept the classical application of *jihad* could use this reasoning to believe they have absolved themselves of murder under their interpretation of Islamic ethics. When bin Laden calls for armed *jihad* against the backdrop of the inviolability of Muslim "holy ground" in Saudi Arabia and the suffering of Iraqi children under Western-imposed sanctions, he provides a compelling justification for extremists to commit violence, as well as a persuasive portrayal of Western brutality for a portion of militant-minded Muslims. Typical of these calls is the following statement bin Laden made in a May 1998 interview regarding his *fatwa* issued three

¹⁷⁰Lewis, "License," 19.

¹⁷¹"Today's New Cult Hero," *Economist* 348, no. 8083 (29 August 1998): 44.

¹⁷²Bodansky, 405.

¹⁷³The Koran proscribes murder as a rule.

months earlier, that targets of the *fatwa* include "all that share or take part in killing of Muslims, assaulting holy places, or those who help the Jews occupy Muslim land."¹⁷⁴

The Message's Prime Directive

Bin Laden's prime directive, even though he couches it in historical allusions, is clear—kill the Americans because it is one's sacred duty as a Muslim.¹⁷⁵ Bin Laden's intention, as seen in his writings and interviews, is to convince the Muslim world this directive is an unavoidable religious imperative. Among bin Laden's most useful tools in crafting his directive are the teachings of the *ulema*—a brotherhood of mainly Sunni Muslim theologians which has guided the faithful for centuries. The *ulema*, as a branch of Islam's learned clergy, have no special association to bin Laden. Their importance to bin Laden lies in the ease with which he quotes these authorities, using their reputations to enhance the status of his message.

The *ulema* advise that religious duties fall into either of two categories, collective or individual. Offensive acts in the name of Allah are a collective responsibility, for the faithful to discharge as a group. Defense of Islam and its traditions, however, become the individual responsibility of every Muslim, which implies the burden of action is never to be placed on others.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, if bin Laden can demonstrate to a portion of Muslims the future of their religion is at stake, he need look no further for justification of his

¹⁷⁴Usama bin Laden, "Talkng with Terror's Banker," interview by John Miller, ABC, 28 May 1998, URL: <http://204.202.137.114/sections/world/dailynews/terror_980609.html>, accessed 26 January 2000. Cited hereafter as Miller interview with bin Laden.

¹⁷⁵The author is not suggesting bin Laden necessarily believes this killing is a sacred duty.

¹⁷⁶Lewis, "License," 15. Muslim religious authority Majid Khadduri writes that in the case of a sudden attack on the community, every believer—including women and children—is obligated to fight.

message than the teachings of the *ulema*. That is why his worldview incorporates both the need for Muslim self-defense and the warning of a fabricated U.S.-Israeli plan to “de-Islamize” and occupy the holy sites of Islam.¹⁷⁷

It is by no means critical that most of the 1.2 billion Muslims embrace bin Laden’s dire vision of Islam’s future. A small core of operatives and a slightly wider collection of sympathizers to provide resources and new recruits may be all he needs to achieve his goals, which in the near term he professes are to safeguard Islam’s holy places and rid Arabia of the infidel.¹⁷⁸ If, for instance, his known and documented search for WMD has borne fruit and he intends to use them, bin Laden could employ these weapons with the help of just a few followers, and with potentially devastating results.¹⁷⁹

In fact, the violence contained in all of bin Laden’s public statements suggests he is not concerned with a universal acceptance of his views. Instead, as Ranstorp indicates regarding his February 1998 *fatwa*, the two purposes of his statements appear to be to mobilize followers and to manipulate the enemy through fear.¹⁸⁰ Such an audience specificity, which marginalizes the role of the larger public, i.e. world opinion, implies

Other forms of armed *jihād* become a collective responsibility, according to Khadduri. See Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), 60.

¹⁷⁷Ranstorp, “*Fatwa*,” 325.

¹⁷⁸A third, longer-term goal of bin Laden’s which he addresses in several of his public statements is the universal adoption of rule by *shari’a* in the Muslim world. The author suspects bin Laden harbors yet another long-term goal shared by many followers of classical, or purist Islamic doctrine—namely Islamization of the entire world. This doctrine is replete with promises of Islam’s inevitable global victory over the infidel. The impossibility of this utopian victory, as in the case of other belief systems, has not stopped many adherents from acting to bring it to fruition.

¹⁷⁹The above discussion of professed, and even secretly harbored, goals does not exclude the possibility that all of these goals in fact serve to hide bin Laden and Al Qaeda’s real motivations to engage in terrorism. These terrorists may even be hiding these motivations from themselves. The author explores this theme in Chapters Three and Four.

¹⁸⁰Ranstorp, “*Fatwa*,” 326.

that bin Laden may be somewhat indifferent to general public revulsion and its effects. Among bin Laden's published views that suggest this lack of concern are his stamp of approval of the use of WMD to defend Islam, his disregard for innocent bystanders at the site of terrorist attacks, and his openly stated call for the killing of civilians.¹⁸¹

Characteristic of such calls for murder by terrorists is a concerted effort to paint all potential victims as guilty parties—in fact to make these targets appear so guilty that the act of their being killed is no longer murder at all, but is sanctified by the righteousness of the cause. Bonnie Cordes notes the "extraordinary lengths" to which terrorists go in order to convince their audience and themselves that they as terrorists and the group they champion are the victims and the target is the aggressor.¹⁸² Yet the only justification bin Laden gives to rationalize the killing of U.S. civilians is that they support and pay taxes to their government,¹⁸³ a weak offering unlikely to persuade almost any audience—except himself, his core group, and perhaps other militants—that these unarmed bystanders deserve death.

The Role of Violence in the Message

There has been a consistent pattern of violent language in bin Laden's public statements. In examining eight of his most substantive statements to date,¹⁸⁴ one notices

¹⁸¹Bodansky, 368-369.

¹⁸²Cordes in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, 150.

¹⁸³Bodansky, 369.

¹⁸⁴These statements are, beginning with the most recent, bin Laden's June 1999 interview on Qatari TV, a January 1999 interview with *Time* magazine, his December 1998 and May 1998 ABC interviews, his February 1998 *fatwa*, a March 1997 interview with CNN, an interview with a Pakistani newspaper in February 1997, and of course bin Laden's notorious October 1996 "Declaration of War."

not only that there is a steady level of violence throughout, but that there is not a great deal of discrepancy between the level of violence in his interviews as opposed to decrees.¹⁸⁵ This is surprising given that the stated purpose of both his October 1996 "Declaration of War" on the U.S. and his February 1998 *fatwa* urging *jihad* is to incite attacks, and that he appears to treat his interviews as opportunities to justify his actions and his worldview.

Bin Laden makes little attempt in any of his statements to hide his violent worldview and his starkly realized "us vs. them" mentality. Theoretically, he could gain an advantage in the forum of world opinion with his insistent focus on the plight of Muslim peoples around the world. His references to these sufferings, however, are always in the context of conflict and hate, and of a war in which Muslims must triumph. For instance, in his February 1997 interview with the Pakistani media he asserts that Muslims must "drive out the United States from the Arabian peninsula because this is the root of all problems," and later describes Americans as "little mice" who deserve beheading.¹⁸⁶ A poignant example of this union of Muslim sufferings and inciteful propaganda occurs shortly after the opening words of bin Laden's October 1996 decree:

It should not be hidden from you that the people of Islam had suffered from aggression, iniquity, and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist-Crusaders' Alliance and their collaborators; to the extent that the Muslims' blood became the cheapest and their wealth as loot in the hands of the enemies. Their blood was spilled in Palestine and Iraq. The horrifying pictures of the massacre of Qana, Lebanon are still fresh in our memory. Massacres in Tajikistan, Burma, Cashmere, Assam,

¹⁸⁵The author evaluated these statements not only through content analysis, but also by calculating the total number of words divided by the number of expressly violent words per document. Violent words constituted four categories: violent action verbs directed at the intended target, nouns describing a violent act against the intended target, violent action verbs attributed to the target to incite sympathizers, and nouns which dehumanized the intended target.

¹⁸⁶Usama bin Laden, "Pakistan Interviews Osama Bin Laden," BK1803163097 Islamabad Pakistan, 18 March 1997. Document ID FTS19970319001325, accessed on Intelink, 28 February 2000.

Philippines, Fatani, Ogadin, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya and Bosnia-Herzegovina took place, massacres that send shivers in the body and shake the conscience.¹⁸⁷

This use of war-like language is not uncommon. Richard Leeman argues that terrorists frequently use the mantle of "war" to justify violent behavior. Leeman writes, "labeling terrorism as 'war' means that it is [supposedly] a legitimate use of violence, that terrorists are not subject to ordinary criminal codes, and it renders legitimate previously illegitimate targets."¹⁸⁸ Interestingly, when bin Laden titled his October 1996 decree a "Declaration of War against the Americans," he used a tactic similar to the U.S.-based terrorist group Weather Underground, which called its first communiqué "A Declaration of a State of War."

Bin Laden's Five Audiences

In using the war-like speech described above, bin Laden sacrifices the general public sympathy that many non-Muslim cultures might have for any disenfranchised group, and may even alienate a significant portion of modern-day Muslims. Instead, his "aggrieved Muslim," violence-espousing worldview seems targeted at five specific audiences, which are summarized in Chart A.

¹⁸⁷Usama bin Laden, "Declaration of War," 12 October 1996, *MSANEWS*, URL: <<http://msanews.mynet.net/MSANEWS/199610/19961012.3.html>>, accessed 20 February 2000.

¹⁸⁸Richard Leeman, *The Rhetoric of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1991), 51.

Group 1	Hardcore of Muslim followers and radical terrorists
Group 2	Recruitable Muslim militants ready for violence
Group 3	Sympathetic Muslims tired of Western arrogance
Group 4	The secular leadership of Muslim countries
Group 5	The United States, its Western allies, and Israel

Chart A: Bin Laden's Five Audiences

Source: Author's own construction.

Interestingly, four of the audiences bin Laden explicitly addresses in his 1996 "Declaration of War" correspond very closely with the five groups shown above. He refers by name several times to his fighting "Muslim brothers" (Group 1), the faithful Muslim youth and other motivated Muslim men (Groups 2 and 3), secular Muslim regimes and especially Riyadh (Group 4), and U.S. government leaders (Group 5). The final audience bin Laden addresses is Allah himself, in the context of a closing prayer.¹⁸⁹

It is noteworthy that none of these groups constitute in any sense the "general public." Group 1 includes bin Laden's hardcore of loyal followers, but is not restricted to them. The author has added radical Muslim terrorists to Group 1 as well, because of their demonstrated commitment to terror, and the close working relationship several such groups have with bin Laden. Bin Laden's aim in influencing this first group, which is already convinced of his basic worldview, is merely to reinforce this worldview and confirm its message, to continually feed this group's anger and urge to commit violence.

¹⁸⁹Bin Laden, "War Declaration."

Group 2 consists of a pool of waiting and potential militant recruits ready to participate in bin Laden's operations. Young, frustrated, compelled by their psychological needs, and alienated from their own societies, these individuals may have already participated in violent or rebellious activity—perhaps of a random, rather than organized, nature—and are looking for a rewarding way to channel their anger. Many in this category are already receiving training in the Islamist schools or *madrasas* sometimes labeled “Jihad University” which militants are running in Pakistan. After this ideological conditioning, these students are well suited to join a militant or terrorist group.¹⁹⁰ Bin Laden's task regarding Group 2 is to, in a sense, “finish the training,” to offer his cause as a means for these young people to put their anger into practice. By supplying his cause with his idealized worldview and associated religious rhetoric, bin Laden works to convince this pool of recruits that they can indeed embrace violence, yet remain free from personal guilt and responsibility. To keep up the appearance of righteousness for this audience, bin Laden is always careful to apply the context of a sanctified, “holy” cause to his public statements. When members of this group accept this cause, they become open to the possibility they will join Group 1 and become members of the hardcore.

Group 3 represents Muslims who are on the borderline between disgruntled and militant. As Western culture aided by technology steps up its invasive march through the Muslim world, and as local living standards and economic opportunities appear to plunge even further compared to the industrialized world, there is reason to believe that some everyday Muslims are becoming more sympathetic to views such as those of bin

¹⁹⁰Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Education of a Holy Warrior,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 25 June 2000, Sec. 6.

Laden.¹⁹¹ There is potential for bin Laden to persuade members of this group to join Group 2, which would help to maintain a healthy supply of new recruits for operations. Even if these sympathetic types do not transition to full-scale militancy, their voice of support—and concomitant disdain for bin Laden's enemies—aid bin Laden's propaganda function and enlarge his mythical persona. Inherent in bin Laden's appeal to these three audiences is the expectation that as a result of his propaganda some of the members of these groups will become increasingly militant, and consequently make the transition to a higher numbered, and thus more loyal, group.

Groups 1, 2, and 3 are distinguished, then, by their susceptibility to bin Laden's articulate but violent message. With these first three audiences in mind, the continual reference to Muslim grievances becomes a means of solidifying the commitment of cadres, inciting Muslim militancy, and cultivating a pool of angry potential recruits.

Group 4 bin Laden casts as brothers turned betrayers, due especially to the provision of assistance to the West in the case of several of these regimes. Bin Laden often directs his invective at these "collaborators." In his December 1998 ABC interview bin Laden warns, "our hostility...is leveled against...the regimes which have turned themselves into tools for this occupation of the greatest House in the universe." Later in the interview he asserts that "these countries belong to Islam and not to those rulers. May God exact his revenge against all of them."¹⁹² Warnings to these governments to shun the West and Israel litter this interview and several of his other statements, and are both

¹⁹¹"Cult Hero," 44.

¹⁹²Usama bin Laden, "World's Most Wanted Terrorist," interview by Rahimullah Yusufzai, ABC, 28 December 1998. URL: <http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections...s/transcript_bin_laden1_981228.html>, accessed 3 January 1999. Cited hereafter as Yusufzai interview with bin Laden.

implicit and explicit. What remains implicit is the intent to attack or direct attacks against these governments. Even the implied threats can serve bin Laden's intent to inspire fear and dread among these leaders.

Bin Laden clearly articulates his message that these governments are guilty of the "gravest sin in Islam," and that by befriending the "infidel" they themselves become apostates, a category generally considered even worse than infidels. In the same interview he quotes the Koran as stating, "Ye who believe, take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors; they are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them for friendship is of them."¹⁹³ Guilty by association with the West, these leaders are not only betrayers of Islam, but are also dehumanized along with the U.S. and its allies, thus rendering "collaborator" governments as legitimate targets for bin Laden. His accusatory treatment of this audience indicates targeting these regimes may be a secondary objective of the *jihad*, as well as a component part of bin Laden's dream of "Islamizing" the Muslim world.

Bin Laden has made it very clear he would like to see "Taliban-like" regimes in all Muslim countries. In his December 1998 interview he calls Afghanistan under Taliban rule "the only state in this age which started to apply Islam, and all Muslims should support it. It is the state of scholars. [Afghanistan is] reminiscent of the state of Medina, where the followers of Islam embraced the Prophet of God."¹⁹⁴ Biographer Yossef Bodansky argues that the universal adoption of strict Islam among Arabs and

¹⁹³Yusufzai interview with bin Laden.

¹⁹⁴Yusufzai interview with bin Laden.

Muslims is really the ultimate goal of bin Laden's war.¹⁹⁵ Conversely, in his October 1996 decree most of bin Laden's accusations against the Saudi government stem from Riyadh's application of secular law instead of *shari'a*—strict Islamic law and teachings. In this document he warns that “it is not a secret that to use man-made law instead of the *shari'a*...is one of the ten ‘voiders’ that would strip a person from his Islamic status.”¹⁹⁶

Bodansky writes that “bin Laden is convinced that the U.S. presence in the Muslim world, particularly in his home country of Saudi Arabia, prevents the establishment of real Islamic governments and the realization of the Islamic revivalism to which he and other Islamists aspire.”¹⁹⁷ Hence bin Laden perceives the *jihad's* stated objective of driving out the U.S. as directly linked to a longer-term goal—the universal adoption of strict Islam in the Muslim world. The additional stated goal of protecting Muslim “holy sites” from defilement, then, is an important and necessary step in an intended re-creation of the Muslim world as an impenetrable fortress buttressed by *shari'a*. These intertwined objectives are outlined in Chart B:

Time Duration	Goal
Immediate focus	Removal of U.S. presence from the Arabian peninsula
Immediate focus	Cleansing and protection of Islam's holy places from the infidel
Long-term focus	Universal adoption of rule by <i>shari'a</i> in the Muslim world

Chart B: Bin Laden's Publicly Stated Goals

Source: Author's own construction.

¹⁹⁵Bodansky, x.

¹⁹⁶Bin Laden, “Declaration of War.”

¹⁹⁷Bodansky, x.

As for his repeated accusations of the secular Arab regimes, bin Laden may perceive this as a means not only of alienating these officials from devout Muslims, but of urging radicals to consider these governments as future targets. In both cases, bin Laden's demonization of the Saudi government and other Arab regimes could serve to weaken Arab ties to the West, and to threaten the internal stability of the "collaborators" either before or after a U.S. military withdrawal. In this context, the *jihad* would continue even after a U.S. pullback, switching most of its focus to the destabilization of the secular Arab regimes. Until this destabilization occurs, the accusations in bin Laden's statements can serve to inspire fear in the capitals of these regimes.

Many of bin Laden's statements indicate the special attention he reserves for Group 5—the U.S. and its Western allies. The likely objective in this case is to inspire dread in bin Laden's enemies, prompting an eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces. Bin Laden often uses his statements to emphasize the "costs" to Americans of the U.S. presence on the Arabian peninsula. In a May 1998 ABC interview John Miller asked bin Laden if he had a message for American citizens. Bin Laden responded that if the Americans as a people, and mothers of American soldiers in particular, value their lives and the lives of their children, they should find a government that will look after their own needs and not "the interest of the Jews." Bin Laden continued his threats by saying that the "continuation of the tyranny [U.S. "occupation" of Arabia] will bring the fight to America, like Ramzi Yousef [World Trade Center bomber] and others." Elsewhere in this interview bin Laden claims that "America will see many youths who will follow Ramzi Yousef."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸Miller interview with bin Laden.

Disregard for Public Opinion

It is evident bin Laden places little value on the sympathies of the U.S., the West, the secular Arab regimes and their supporters, and the general public. If Bernard Lewis' contention is accurate that many, or even most, Muslims find bin Laden's war a "grotesque travesty of the nature of Islam and even of its doctrine of *jihad*,"¹⁹⁹ then it is reasonable to conclude bin Laden is indeed unconcerned with the sympathies of many contemporary Muslims.²⁰⁰ The logic behind bin Laden's message points forcefully to the conclusion that the two purposes of bin Laden's statements appear to be to mobilize followers (Groups 1, 2, and 3 in Chart A), and to manipulate the enemy (Groups 4 and 5) through fear. The urge to mobilize followers may also include a plan to forge stronger ties among Muslim terrorist organizations. One author describes the purpose of bin Laden's *fatwas* in particular as an attempt to build a strategic consensus among separate but likeminded terrorist groups.²⁰¹

The need to court public opinion has been a centerpiece of the "classic terrorist's" plan for decades.²⁰² Bin Laden's disregard for this goal, as exhibited in his statements, brings to mind WMD terrorism authority James Campbell's description of the "post-modern terrorist," whose traits suggest a willing consideration of WMD use.²⁰³

Terrorism expert Daniel Gressang agrees that a communicative divide exists between

¹⁹⁹Lewis, "License," 19.

²⁰⁰See Chart A. This far more numerous class of contemporary Muslims, as a modern-oriented, peace-abiding group not easily influenced by bin Laden's militant rhetoric, is outside the scope of audiences this rhetoric targets, and therefore does not correspond to any of the groups listed.

²⁰¹Karon, 3.

²⁰²Campbell, *Weapons* , 4-5.

²⁰³Campbell, *Weapons* , 4-5.

newer, emergent terrorist groups and the general public. He argues that some of the more militant Islamic groups "have abandoned, or never initially accepted, society...as the legitimate audience for their message." Gressang touches on several traits applicable to bin Laden when he concludes that "groups which, by virtue of the identity of their audience, demonstrate such disdain and disregard for public approval and opinion, who seek to advance an ideal at the expense of all else, who seek the approval of a deity, who care little about alienating others, may be more prone to cross the line into mass application of WMD."²⁰⁴

EXPLORING THE WORLDVIEW UNDERNEATH THE RHETORIC

Bin Laden's Bipolar World

In light of the above argument that bin Laden's statements should be understood in terms of audience, it is logical to view this man's words foremost as a form of communication. On the subject of terrorism and communication, one of the leading works is Richard Leeman's *The Rhetoric of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. Central to Leeman's thesis is his conceptualization of terrorist rhetoric as bipolar, exhortative discourse.²⁰⁵ Rhetoric in this sense first divides the world into positive (i.e. Islamic militants and practitioners of *shari'a* like the Taliban) and negative components (i.e. decadent U.S., its non-Muslim and Muslim allies, all infidels), hence two "poles" of existence.

²⁰⁴Gressang, 17-18.

²⁰⁵Leeman, 46.

This is the core of bin Laden's worldview—the world as neatly divided into two camps, with no justifiable middle ground. His comments in a June 1999 interview help to unravel the nature of this worldview further: "Let us say that there are two parties to the conflict. The first party is *world* Christianity, which is allied with Zionist Jewry and led by the United States, Britain, and Israel, while the second party is the Muslim *world*."²⁰⁶ This bipolarity appears to exclude those who are neither Christian nor Jewish. However, as intimated in bin Laden's statements, the conflict against the "Crusader-Zionist Alliance" may be simply one phase of a wider-ranging plan. In the same interview he refers to "the forces of world infidelity" as the source of aggressions against the Muslim world. Arguably this is a much more encompassing term which is suggestive of all non-Muslims. In his December 1998 interview, bin Laden's response to the question of whether his *jihād* also targets pro-Western Arab regimes is very suggestive of such a layered plan: "The main effort, *at this phase*, must target the Jews and the Crusaders."²⁰⁷ This excerpt begs the question "What is the next phase?" Neither Arab "collaborators" nor other non-Muslim groups are excluded as future targets of *jihād* in his public statements.

Adda Bozeman and Lewis Ware's views on the role of conflict in cultures complements this interpretation of bin Laden's worldview. A key facet of Bozeman's studies is what she calls "the normative value of conflict" in the evolution of Islamic thought and teachings. In her view, "from Islamic law flows a dualistic view of the

²⁰⁶Usama bin Laden, "Usama bin Laden: The Destruction of the Base," interview by Jamal Isma'il, Qatar Al-Jazirah Television, 1805 GMT (10 June 1999). Document ID FTS19990611000017, accessed on Intelink, 28 February 2000. Italics added. Cited hereafter as Isma'il interview with bin Laden.

²⁰⁷Yusufzai interview with bin Laden. Italics added.

universe. The Muslims, who have submitted to the One God, and the *Kafirun*, those who have not accepted Islam, share the earth in a state of constant historical tension.”²⁰⁸ For Muslims, then, the notion of a “middle ground” is untenable.

Religion itself, as a general rule, supports this notion of a “zero-sum” world in two important ways. First, by marking its adherents with a special identification, religion establishes separateness,²⁰⁹ which draws a distinction between those who belong and those who do not. In describing how religious groups are likely to establish two separate camps, British scholar Angus Muir writes that “religious groups tend to have a Manichaeian outlook that divides the world into ‘them’ and ‘us.’”²¹⁰ Second, religion defines what is “good” and what is “evil.” Since ordinarily religions require one to align oneself with the “good” and expunge the “evil,” religion can be a powerful determinant of attitudes and behaviors.²¹¹ This working theory finds resonance in many faiths, of course. Among other factors, what does vary among belief systems is the specific prescription for facing—and in some cases destroying—the embodiment of evil. In attempting to better understand bin Laden, there is an important element in Islam which suggests the very deep entrenchment of a “zero-sum” attitude, and a concomitant intolerance of the “evil.”²¹²

²⁰⁸Adda Bozeman, in Stephen Blank and others, *Conflict, Culture, and History: Regional Dimensions*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1993), 59.

²⁰⁹Weisenbloom, seminar, 29 March 2000.

²¹⁰Angus Muir, “Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 22 (1999): 81.

²¹¹Weisenbloom, seminar, 29 March 2000.

²¹²Muslim authority Majid Khadduri reinforces the existence of this thread in Islam when he writes that, according to Muslim legal theory, “it is the duty of the imam as well as every believer not only to see that God’s word shall be supreme, but also that no infidel shall deny God or be ungrateful for His favors.” See Khadduri, 59.

This element is the inseparability of religion and life itself for many Muslims. The religious distinction between Muslim and infidel appears to bleed over into many other aspects of one's environment. In the realm of international law, Ware writes that Islam "posits a religious definition of statehood which excludes an equality of relationships between states of differing confessional persuasions."²¹³ One can raise the historical argument that several Muslim states have had beneficent relations with non-Muslim states and non-Muslim populations over time.²¹⁴ Ware, however, contends that Islamic teaching considered such relations more akin to armistices, thus by no means to be thought of as indefinite, and that they were appropriate when they served to protect the community of Muslims. Ware contrasts this geopolitical outlook with what he calls the "Europocentric theory and practice of a normative international political order."²¹⁵

The division between Muslim and infidel is not just a macropolitical concept; it operates on a deeply personal level as well. The Koran, empowered as the final and supreme word of Allah, imposes the burden of *jihad* on each and every Muslim. *Jihad* itself, according to Ware, derives its strength from a doctrinal acceptance of Islam's universality and inherent truth.²¹⁶ This belief has allowed influential Muslim thinkers

²¹³Lewis Ware, in Blank and others, 59.

²¹⁴Regarding Muslim state relations with non-Muslim peoples, early Muslim governments' much discussed relations with *dhimmis*, the collective name for Jews and Christians who also bear the Muslim title of "People of the Book," comes to mind. "People of the Book" is a name on which the literature often elaborates to show that Jews and Christians were granted a protected status because of their receipt of Allah's pre-Koranic revelations. In contrast to this benign perspective is the reality that Muslim rulers obliged *dhimmis* to pay a poll tax in order to avoid persecution, which reveals that a *dhimmi's* claim to individual rights lay in his ability to pay tribute, not in any exaltation of his status. Majid Khadduri asserts that according to Muslim legal theory, death by *jihad* was a possibility for *dhimmis* who refused to pay the tax. See Khadduri, 59.

²¹⁵Lewis Ware, in Blank and others, 58, 64, 66.

²¹⁶Lewis Ware, in Blank and others, 62.

like Sayyid Qutb to make the quite logical conclusion in the 1950's that "truth and falsehood cannot co-exist on earth....The liberating struggle of *Jihad* does not cease until all religion belongs to Allah."²¹⁷ Whether one's fulfillment of *jihad* is spiritual or armed, one's actions are always in opposition to the existence of unbelief which, while spiritually embodied in man's rebellious nature,²¹⁸ is physically embodied in the infidel and his ways.

Indicated here is the notion that the religiously-prescribed understanding of "zero-sum" conflict in the Muslim world is intended to resonate in the actions of states and individuals alike—within the entire *ummah*. A natural consequence of this notion is that Muslims who accept the "zero-sum," bipolar worldview of classical Islam would seek to act on this basis, each according to his understanding of the requirements and boundaries of *jihad*.

Defining and Exhorting Against the Enemy

After redefining the world as bipolar, militants like bin Laden intent on agitating for armed *jihad* must exhort followers to take action against the negative component,²¹⁹ seen as the corrupting West and its facilitators, the system. Action in this sense clearly refers to violence, which Leeman observes is in contravention of societal norms. Since terroristic violence rejects these norms, Leeman concludes that the use of "unsanctioned

²¹⁷Kibble, 358.

²¹⁸Lewis Ware, in Blank and others, 68.

²¹⁹Leeman, 46.

violence...invites the user to justify, or legitimate, that violence."²²⁰ Here bin Laden relies heavily on the tools of demonization and dehumanization.

To exhort the use of violence there must be a clear distinction between friend and foe, hence the bipolar construction similar to bin Laden's "us versus them" mentality. Once this firm line is drawn, the foe must be made deserving of extinction. The biological analogy of antibodies attacking a disease is appropriate for understanding bin Laden's view of non-Muslim and specifically Western influence as a contagion.

Creating two poles is a crucial precondition to demonizing the enemy regime and dehumanizing its citizens, because the nature of bipolarity is founded on a perceived illegitimacy and inhumanity of the system that supports the enemy. Bin Laden's colorful language reinforces this perception vividly when he likens the Western "occupation" of the Arabian peninsula to a swarm of locusts feeding from a plate. This image of gluttonous animals attempts to de-legitimize both the system that brought about the U.S. presence, and the individuals that comprise the system—the locusts.

What is critical in the transition from polarization to demonization and dehumanization is the extension of the term "inhumanity." If the system oppressing the Muslim world is inhumane, so are the people that live under, accept, and propagate the system. Leeman asserts that within terrorist rhetoric the opposing system "is clearly inhuman, manifesting itself as an order, a program, a machine, a *thing*."²²¹ For bin Laden the opposing system is the "Crusader-Zionist Alliance."²²² Those who operate within the

²²⁰Leeman, 46. Italics in the original.

²²¹Leeman, 49.

²²²Ranstorp, "Fatwa," 325.

system are not human, but types.²²³ Whether the vehicle for this dehumanization is the characterization of the enemy as animals, cogs, or inhumane marauders, bin Laden completes his terrorist rhetoric with an insistent use of dehumanizing terms against anyone obstructing the advent of his vision of Muslim destiny.

In the context of the classical Islamic conception of a bipolar world with no middle ground, another division has occurred, this time within the Muslim community—militant vice secularist. This split is significant, and very suggestive of the all or nothing attitude so prevalent in the former group. In the mind of militant Muslims such as bin Laden, the disdain for any neutrality or compromise often translates into hostility toward Muslims, devout or not, who reject *jihad* of the sword. Bin Laden has clearly articulated his view that any Muslims, whether private citizens or public officials, not actively participating in *jihad* against the U.S. are no longer members of the *ummah*—the community of faithful Muslims. In his December 1998 interview he intimates that any Muslim unwilling to take arms against the U.S. has committed “the gravest sin in Islam.”²²⁴ Two years earlier in his “Declaration of War,” bin Laden wrote that Muslim deeds which result in de-Islamization, such as Riyadh’s invitation to the U.S. to deploy its forces on the peninsula, strip one of the right to call himself Muslim.²²⁵

Thus, bin Laden’s violent language does not end merely with the advocacy of murder in a strictly controlled ideological context. The demonization of the U.S. and its Muslim and non-Muslim allies, and the dehumanization of their populations, are integral

²²³Leeman, 49. Italics in the original.

²²⁴Yusufzai interview with bin Laden.

²²⁵Bin Laden, “Declaration of War.”

to his message. These verbal techniques support the ideological context of his statements, and can contribute to a sense of “moral disengagement” among his followers from the consequences of their actions.

As an example of the effectiveness of such a dehumanization campaign, a left-wing German militant interviewed in 1981 said that “even today I do not feel any scruple concerning a murder, because I cannot see some creatures...as human beings.”²²⁶ This man’s conscionable acts of murder were directly linked to the dehumanization of the victim, a most useful vehicle for this disengagement. Jessica Stern contends that moral disengagement is critical to the ability of terrorist groups to use WMD.²²⁷

In the case of militant Islam, agitators are ably assisted in the facilitation of this moral disengagement in other Muslims by the emotive quality of *jihad* doctrine, which is the ideological mantle many Muslim extremists use to justify violent behavior. *Jihad* as a key Islamic concept, if it is understood in its historical and theological contexts, connects a Muslim at once to the whole history of Muslim struggles and to the deep matters of his own faith. *Jihad* is also at its core a distinctive concept—it separates Muslims from non-Muslims. An externally focused *jihad* is directed at the physical threat wielded by the infidel, while an inner *jihad* seeks to purge a Muslim of any infidel ways within his soul. Thus, even when *jihad* is a deeply personal, spiritual experience, it nevertheless contributes to the construction of a bipolar world.

Beyond its emotive significance in the Muslim world, *jihad* has historically borne a hallowed status, which can have the effect of purifying deeds done in its name.

²²⁶Stern, 82.

²²⁷Stern, 80.

Together, these qualities of *jihad* render an invaluable service to Muslim militants who seek to exhort the use of violence in its name. One reason militants are able to make use of *jihad* is the relative malleability of its doctrine, which is briefly elicited below.

***Jihad* in a Bipolar World**

A Muslim's understanding of the role of *jihad* in his life is, technically speaking, up to him.²²⁸ Islam does not accept the intervention of an intercessor between Allah and his followers, instead asserting that this relationship is direct and inviolable. The fact that *fatwas*, traditionally to be issued by Muslim clerics although anyone can declare one, are not legally binding on any Muslim reinforces this inviolability.²²⁹ Hence there are many interpretations of and responses to the notion of *jihad*, none subject to the authority of a single leader, nor of a ruling body. As Lippman says, "in orthodox Islam there are no central doctrinal authorities, no equivalent of bishops or the College of Cardinals, no pope, and no intermediary between man and God."²³⁰

²²⁸*Jihad* derives its meaning from the Arabic verb *jahada*, which means "exerted." According to scholar Majid Khadduri, *jihad's* juridical-theological definition is the application of one's power in the path of Allah. Khadduri, on the basis of Muslim legal theory, argues that this basic definition is inextricably linked to the requirement to spread belief in Allah and to make his word supreme over the entire world, whether by violence or persuasion. Hence *jihad* in a theological sense, not militant, mandates eventual global Islamization when understood in terms of its logical conclusion. See Khadduri, 55-56. Muslim jurists speak of four categories of *jihad*: that of the heart, tongue, hands, and sword. The first represents one's internal struggle against sin, the next two compel one to right what is wrong in society, and the last is a clear call to arms against enemies of the faith. The Koran's unequivocal call to armed *jihad* is found in its 61st *sura*, or chapter, and is justified as universally applicable to Muslims in general in the writings of the Muslim jurists Bukhari, Da'ud, and Darimi: "[The Koran says] O ye who believe!...Carry on warfare in the path of Allah with your possessions and your persons." See Khadduri, 55-57. Despite these jurists' definitive views, Muslims still vary widely in their response to *jihad*.

²²⁹Dr. Jonathan Owen, "Islam in the Contemporary World," seminar presented at the Joint Military Intelligence College, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, DC, 16 March 2000.

²³⁰Thomas Lippman, *Understanding Islam* (New York, NY: Meridian, 1995), 2.

Religious leaders in Islam generally rise due to their reputation for piety. Rather than issue binding decisions, these learned men instead offer such gifts to the *ummah* as a more enlightened understanding of the sacred texts, and may act as advisors to temporal authorities on issues involving religious law. Even the Islamic caliphate, an office which lasted for about 700 years after the death of Mohammed in 632, Lippman describes as a "temporal authority." The holder of this office was "chief executive of the Muslim community," and as such was required to defend Islam but had no divine authority to interfere in religious matters.²³¹

The fact that there is a lack of central doctrinal authority helps to explain the divergence of Muslim views on *jihad*. It also allows authors like Lippman to write that "those who count themselves Muslims are not, in their daily lives, any more prone to violence or aggression than non-Muslims."²³² This suggests that many Muslims downplay the call to *jihad* in its entirety, or prefer to work exclusively on the inner *jihad*, what the Muslim jurists call a *jihad* of the heart, and Ware calls a *jihad* of the heart and mind.²³³ A possible trend among Muslims is the adoption of what could be called a modernist approach to *jihad*. In this vein, Egyptian-born Islamic scholar Michael Youssef declares that "I have...known Muslims who feel that these texts [authoritative Islamic works mandating armed *jihad*] were for certain historical periods and that they are not binding upon them today."²³⁴

²³¹Lippman, 2, 4.

²³²Lippman, ix.

²³³See footnote 228, and Lewis Ware, in Blank, 68.

²³⁴Michael Youssef, *America, Oil, and the Islamic Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 66.

Apparently there are those Muslims who abide by a non-violent version of the doctrine of *jihad*, and alternatively those who accept the doctrine with its armed component,²³⁵ but the notion of struggle and conflict is never far removed from any version of Islam. Youssef admits that “not every Muslim would agree that *jihad* requires spilling the blood of infidels, but the struggle for the victory of Islam is a factor in the life of every faithful Muslim.”²³⁶ Many Muslim thinkers have picked up this emphasis on “struggle” and what they think it means for Islam.

Consider, for instance, the views of Muslim thinker Hasan al-Banna:

How wise was the man who said “force is the surest way of implementing the right and how beautiful it is that force and right should march side by side.” This striving to broadcast the Islamic mission, quite apart from preserving the hallowed concepts of Islam, is another religious duty imposed by God on the Muslims, just as he imposed fasting, prayer, pilgrimage, alms, and the doing of good and abandonment of evil, upon them. He imposes it upon them and delgated them to do it. He did not excuse anyone possessing strength and capacity from performing it.²³⁷

Al-Banna, considered the founder of the 20th century revivalist Muslim Brotherhood—an early attempt to foster pan-Islamism—is not alone in his attempt to shape contemporary *jihad* with classical Islamic teaching. Since no authoritative body exists to distinguish mainstream from militancy, whether today’s Muslims consider al-Banna and other like-minded thinkers militant depends upon the outlook of each individual Muslim.

²³⁵Majid Khadduri offers the view of *jihad* that its various components roughly correspond to two different periods in Mohammed’s life. Khadduri attributes teachings on the “inner *jihad*” to the Prophet’s time in Mecca prior to the *hijra*, or journey, to Medina in 622. Teachings on the armed component of *jihad* doctrine are associated with the Prophet’s experiences in Medina after his arrival from Mecca, and together these two elements of Mohammed’s prosthetytizing years comprise the correct understanding of *jihad*. See Khadduri, 56.

²³⁶Youssef, 64.

²³⁷Youssef, 64.

Islamic Militancy

Fortunately, Michael Youssef's discussion of "pure Islam" provides some assistance on the debate over these distinctions within Islam. His comments should sound familiar given the earlier treatment of bipolarity.

Islamic purists divide the world into two camps—believers and infidels. Infidels are to be humiliated, denied due process of law, and ultimately, converted or killed. Islam's simple vindication of this is found in the Koran: 'Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last day...' No genuine Christian reformer could pursue such a philosophy and remain true to Christian doctrine. But to follow such a strategy is precisely what makes a Muslim true to Islam.²³⁸

In light of Youssef's words, the distinction between pure or classical Islam and Islamic militancy begins to break down. In other words, Muslim adherence to a belief in universal peace and tolerance rather than a relentless defense of the faith in a world in constant conflict appears to be a non-doctrinal modification of classical Islamic teachings, a retreat from the original truths of Islam. Thus, when bin Laden and other Islamic militants urge the faithful to make armed *jihad*, whether or not they take Koranic verses out of context, Islam itself (at least doctrinally) invests their words with a good deal more weight than what might be expected for the radical fringe of another belief system. British scholar D.G. Kibble relates the following idea regarding this reality of Islam:

There are verses in the *Qur'an* [Koran] that can be interpreted as justifying violence and bloodshed in support of spreading the rule of Allah; indeed, such *Jihad* can be seen as a duty of the faithful Muslim. Fortunately, most revivalist Muslims stop short of accepting such an interpretation and instead adopt a more modernist approach to the Muslim scriptures, at least in part. It is only because they do so that the threat from Islam in practice is considerably reduced.²³⁹

Militant Muslims can therefore also be considered "literal" Muslims.

²³⁸Youssef, 107.

²³⁹Kibble, 363.

Kibble, though, does not go quite far enough in addressing the connection between militancy and a purist reading of Islamic doctrine. What Kibble addresses as a conflict-based interpretation of Islam, Michael Youssef reminds the reader is a purist understanding, not a misunderstanding, of the religion:

To Islamic purists...all other religions are either heretical or hopelessly corrupt. They tolerate no other view; they also believe that it is Allah's will for all societies to come under the Islamic flag and for Islamic law and religion to control and undergird all of life for all people. In other words, only a doctrinally pure, incorrupt Islamic nation can please Allah. Anything else must be redeemed or destroyed.²⁴⁰

Thus, it is a mistake to necessarily perceive militant Muslims like bin Laden merely as radicals, extremists, or mere exploiters of religious belief. One must admit the possibility that some militant leaders (and certainly some of their followers) not only sincerely believe in the militant ideology they espouse, but consider their views and behaviors to be ordained by Allah. As such, it would be premature without extensive analysis to dismiss their commitment to their cause as greed-based or otherwise insincere, capricious or fleeting. In this respect, bin Laden's abrupt departure in 1980 from the wealthy lifestyle of his family and a bright future including his own business for the caves of Afghanistan and the prospect of injury or death on the battlefield comes to mind. Biographer Bodansky recalls the words of one Arab *mujahid* who fought alongside bin Laden in Afghanistan, who perceived that bin Laden "not only gave his money, but he also gave himself. He came down from his palace to live with the Afghan peasants and the Arab fighters. He cooked with them, ate with them, dug trenches with them. That was bin Laden's way."²⁴¹ The *mujahideen* from the Afghan war describe bin Laden as

²⁴⁰Youssef, 109.

²⁴¹Bodansky, 19.

"fearless and oblivious to danger," one of them saying, "he was a hero to us because he was always on the front line, always moving ahead of everyone else."²⁴²

If it is possible for a Muslim with considerable resources and connections to engage in violence and believe he is acting in accordance with his faith, with Koranic verses and *jihad* doctrine to justify him, he represents not a transitory quack, but a potentially powerful force in the current struggle to define the future of Islam. So too, for that matter, does the determined opportunist whose ideology espouses a version of classical Islam appealing to enough Muslims to form a core of committed adherents. At a minimum, such instigators understand and are able to employ a literal application of Islamic teaching in the practice of their cause. The scholarly assessments of Bernard Lewis and Magnus Ranstorp support this contention that, with bin Laden as a poignant example, militant Muslims who successfully invoke themes deeply entrenched in Muslim group consciousness represent forces not to be treated lightly.²⁴³ Ranstorp, in particular, points this out when he notes bin Laden's message deliberately includes "core and emerging issues for Muslim activists," "taps into the collective Muslim psyche," and contains an "astute political analysis of accumulated Muslim grievances."²⁴⁴ Ranstorp concludes his assessment with the argument that the " 'Bin Laden phenomenon' represents the unfolding ethnopolitical and religious forces in the greater Middle East."²⁴⁵

²⁴²Bodansky, 19.

²⁴³Lewis, "License," 15-16, 19 and Ranstorp, "Fatwa," 326-327.

²⁴⁴Ranstorp, "Fatwa," 324-326.

Islam: The Inseparability of Life and Religion

One thing about *jihad* is clear—there is no evidence to suggest that the majority of Muslims, in spite of the large number of modern-thinking believers, simply “laugh it off” as ancient and intellectually backward doctrine. For many of today’s Muslims, decisions regarding *jihad* in any of its iterations have the potential to be a deeply personal and significant phenomenon, due to the inseparability of religion and life that pervades Islam. Bernard Lewis succinctly reinforces this interconnection when he writes:

In Western parlance the adjective ‘holy’ preceding the word ‘law’ is necessary, since there are other laws of other origins. In Muslim parlance, the adjective is tautologous. The *shari’a* is simply the law and there is no other. It is holy in that it derives from God.²⁴⁶

Theoretically there is no religious self or political self, or any other subdivision of man for that matter—under the Koran and *shari’a*, man is his religion to the utmost and minutest part of his being. This Islamic view of man’s nature is by no means a relic of the past, a point on which several authors agree. Magnus Ranstorp indicates that this phenomenon is still active in contemporary times, stating that even today “religion and politics cannot be separated in Islam.”²⁴⁷

According to Thomas Lippman, there is technically no division between church and state in Islam. Islam is more than a religion in that it also serves as the source of law and proper statecraft, as well as the ultimate authority on social behavior. As a consequence, Lippman argues, Muslims believe that every human act is a matter of

²⁴⁵Ranstorp, “*Farwa*,” 327.

²⁴⁶Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 72.

²⁴⁷Magnus Ranstorp, “Terrorism in the Name of Religion,” *Journal of International Affairs* 50, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 44.

faith.²⁴⁸ Other scholars agree on the strength of this Muslim dynamic. Michael Youssef concurs when he writes, "Islam has no doctrine of separation of church and state," and that "religion and society are merged" under Islam.²⁴⁹ Youssef also asserts the early origins of the idea of inseparability, pointing out that it was the "desire of Mohammed himself to create a society in which religion encompasses everything."²⁵⁰ This definition of man contrasts with typical Western practice, which tends to categorize religion and church attendance as one facet alongside one's job, family life, hobbies, and other behaviors. C.J. Bouchat demonstrates this point very well, arguing that under Islam "religion's inseparability from government illustrates both the pervasiveness of Islam in its society and the diverging views between Muslims and Westerners. The separation of church from state is a strictly Western notion rejected by Muslims as sacrilegious and impractical."²⁵¹ Michael Brown agrees, explaining that "the modern Western notion is that religion is voluntary or affiliational, an act of faith," whereas within many other non-Western groups "religion is not a matter of faith but a given, an integral part of their identity."²⁵²

The notion of inseparability in a contemporary, not just classical sense, is a point on which Western and Muslim scholars can agree. Revivalist and widely respected Muslim intellectual Dr. Hassan Abdallah al-Turabi put forth at a 1992 roundtable

²⁴⁸Lippman, viii.

²⁴⁹Youssef, 43.

²⁵⁰Youssef, 43.

²⁵¹ C.J. Bouchat, "A Fundamentalist Islamic Threat to the West," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19, no. 4 (October-December 1996): 340.

²⁵²Michael Brown, *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 50.

conference that the ideal of Islam "is not just that God is one, absolutely one, but also existence is one; also life is one. All life is just one program of worship. Whether it is economics, politics, sex, private, public or whatever [sic]. And society is also one. So unitarianism is a fundamental principle that explains almost every aspect of doctrinal or *practical* Islam."²⁵³

Islam's pervasive nature, then, has the potential to strengthen a bipolar worldview and militant attitudes. This ability is partly a function of religion itself, but is also related to the particulars of Islamic doctrine and history. The survival of the conflict-laden classical Islamic worldview through 13 centuries of history, and the special resonance it finds in the thoughts and writings of current revivalist and militant Muslims, is a powerful demonstration of the continuing importance of struggle in today's Islam.

The contemporary significance of classical Islam cannot be overstated. In fact, bin Laden's "us versus them" mentality closely resembles the classical Islamic worldview, which is not surprising because Islam in its pure sense does suggest a militant interpretation. Both classical Islam and bin Laden's mentality are based on the all-encompassing pervasiveness of religion, the existence of a world that is starkly bipolar, the permanence and obligatory nature of *jihad*, and the irrelevance of compromise and neutrality. Establishing this connection is important because there are strong indications that bin Laden's "War on America" derives its strength and its focus, not solely from a set of personal grievances, but also from a purist understanding of the religion of Islam. This connection does not preclude the incidence of adherents of other belief systems

²⁵³"Islam, Democracy, the State, and the West: Roundtable with Dr. Hassan Turabi," *Middle East Policy* 1, no. 3 (1992): 49. Italics added.

deriving a violent prescription from a literal interpretation of their system's accepted texts.

This recognition of the role of Islam in bin Laden's mentality is important since, as Eric Hoffer argues, one who adopts a holy cause to fulfill a need within himself often does so passionately, in an extreme or extravagant and uncompromising way. This passion can often be accompanied by a readiness to die,²⁵⁴ a rather extreme expression of an unwillingness to compromise one's beliefs. Often born in the midst of a major crisis in the Muslim community, past and present Islamic revivalist movements are powerful examples of this passion.

Although separated by centuries in some cases, these movements appear to share a belief in the malignancy of a society overrun with paganism and the need to fundamentally alter the current state of affairs.²⁵⁵ Bin Laden shares this view of the revivalists. A common thread which links bin Laden to many of these revivalists is the rejection of compromise that is fundamental to the nature of the true believer. The danger that the true believer presents is that the all or nothing approach inherent in extremism tends to legitimize the use of extreme violence. When revivalists, and militants like bin Laden, showcase Islam as a faith requiring total commitment and the highest degree of self-sacrifice, they not only reinforce Islam's pervasive nature, but forcefully justify in the eyes of some the use of any means to safeguard their religion.

²⁵⁴Hoffer, 24.

The Roots of Contemporary Islamic Revivalism

According to respected authority on Islam John Esposito, much of the basis for the entrenchment of a bipolar worldview in revivalist thought may be attributable to the Egyptian-born Muslim thinker Sayyid Muhammad Qutb. Qutb's teachings, which led to his execution in Egypt in 1965, justified a permanent state of war between true Muslims and all others. Qutb's concept of *jihad*, which despised the *dar al-harb* [the infidel world, literally "abode of war"] and admitted neither coexistence nor compromise, led militant follow-on thinkers to revoke the limited protection of "People of the Book" status from Jews and Christians and impose the duty of permanent armed *jihad* on every Muslim.²⁵⁶ "Islam," Qutb wrote, "cannot accept any mixing with *Jahiliyyah* [non-Muslim barbarity]. Either Islam will remain, or *Jahiliyyah*; no half-half situation is possible."²⁵⁷ Of course, this response to the non-Muslim world and its concomitant two-camp worldview did not originate with Qutb. Historically, during severe crises in the Islamic community, Muslim spiritual leaders would appear periodically, to charge that God was punishing the faithful for betraying Him. Esposito also asserts an integral component of the ideology of historical Islamic revivalism in general is the condemnation of everyone, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, who resists a return to strict Islam as enemies of God. These leaders also demanded the destruction of these enemies of God, since they were part of the problem. Esposito recounts many instances, particularly from the 18th and 19th centuries, of revivalist movements founded and practiced on these

²⁵⁵John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 48.

²⁵⁶Esposito, 135.

²⁵⁷Bodansky, 112.

tenets.²⁵⁸ This type of reaction to a perceived threat is certainly not unique to Islam, but Esposito nevertheless identifies it as integral to Muslim history and the basis for Islamic revivalism as a whole. There appears to be a rich heritage in the historical experience of Islam itself—not tied merely to a few key personalities—of an uncompromising bipolar worldview and an intolerance of unbelief.

Islamic Revivalism Today

Bin Laden, and others like him today, are in this context philosophical descendents of Qutb's, using the concepts of bipolarity and lack of compromise to stir up violence and the adoption of permanent *jihad*. According to Eric Hoffer and to history itself, the hate and anger these instigators incite within militant-minded Muslims are powerful forces ready to be exploited in the crucible of armed *jihad*.²⁵⁹ It is the generation of Muslims like bin Laden, skilled in merging violent rhetoric and wider Islamic themes with broad appeal, that today offer enraged Muslim militants venues of action for implementing their hatred.²⁶⁰

In view of the pattern of past Muslim revivalists, especially the more militant variety²⁶¹ that rose to prominence in the 1950's and 1960's, and considering their

²⁵⁸Esposito, 47-48, 50.

²⁵⁹Hoffer, 85.

²⁶⁰Bodansky, 296.

²⁶¹For instance: Turabi, the Sudanese revivalist and intellectual, the militant Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, who is stills serving time in a U.S. prison on conspiracy charges for alleged involvement in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and of course Qutb. Another noteworthy example is Hassan al-Banna, who, although he founded the Muslim Brotherhood back in 1928, was active through the Brotherhood until his 1949 assassination. Al-Banna's views and teacher-activist leadership style have had a significant influence on successive generations of Muslims, starting with Qutb and the men of his era. According to John Esposito, Qutb "transformed the ideological beliefs of al-Banna and [noted Muslim religious leader] Mawdudi into a rejectionist revolutionary call to arms." (Esposito, 135.) For more background on the

influence on bin Laden's generation, it is reasonable to characterize bin Laden as the protégé of such men. Like them, he consistently draws upon Islamic texts and traditions to reinforce the group cohesiveness he needs to bolster his network and empower his role as leader. Thus bin Laden's extremism, while it appears intensely personal at times, both uses and is empowered by Islamic revivalism and Islamic classical thought.

The increasing admiration shown bin Laden today not only by thousands of Muslim youths being trained in Pakistan's pro-militant schools, but by ordinary Saudis,²⁶² indicates the man has tapped into something deep in the Muslim psyche, stirring the consciousness of certain groups of people in the manner of the revivalists and militants that preceded him. Bin Laden is not the lunatic leader of a fringe element, he is in some sense the logical conclusion of an Islamic revivalism which stretches back to the eighteenth century and beyond, and was powerfully shaped by Muslim thinkers of the 1950's and 1960's like Qutb. If bin Laden chooses to see himself this way, as an heir and not an individual out for revenge or acting on some other personal motive (even if the latter is actually the truth), he is significantly more dangerous.

Islamic Revivalism and Violence

In the realm of perception, one's self-image as a true believer predisposes him to extreme acts, or as Hoffer says, "to plunge headlong into an undertaking of vast change."²⁶³ For he has attached his sense of self not to personal motives, but to a holy

significance of al-Banna, Qutb, and Turabi see Esposito, 85-91, 129-132, 135-138, 162-163. For information on Rahman, see Campbell, *Weapons*, 80-82, 95.

²⁶²For an eyewitness account of these schools—and their students' love for bin Laden—see Goldberg, 34-36. For the reference to Saudi opinion, see "Cult Hero," *Economist*, 44.

²⁶³Hoffer, 20.

cause which cleanses him and justifies his actions in the name of that cause. Of course, the same logic can be applied to all Islamic revivalists who have espoused or committed violence. On the strength of the contribution of Hoffer's work on the nature of mass movements, the connection between Islamic revivalism and violence is easier to understand. The adherents of any holy cause, in Hoffer's view, are susceptible to the lure of extreme action in defense of the cause and the absolution from any personal guilt that this cause bestows.²⁶⁴ So too are Muslim revivalists susceptible, as is the ultra-violent bin Laden, who is simply a strident new voice in this group and not a lone wolf or radical departure.

There is other evidence to support a causal link between Islamic revivalism and ultra-violent behavior. Robert Kennedy's work on the Islamic understanding of war further illustrates Campbell's link between the extreme views of these revivalists and extreme violence, as well as further supporting the deep entrenchment of a "zero-sum" attitude in Islam. Kennedy focuses on the evolution of two key terms in Muslim and Christian societies—*jus ad bellum*, or the doctrine of just war, and *jus in bello*, which refers to just behavior in a war. His thesis is that these two terms are subject to inverse variation, the notion that growth in the acceptance of one concept tends to lessen the influence of the other.

He first notes the key influences of Augustinian and Thomist thought on the Christian concept of war. These two men, together with the writer Gratian, enhanced the legitimacy of just war in Christendom, a view which peaked during the 13th, 14th, and 15th

²⁶⁴ Hoffer argues that the source of this guilt, while it in many cases may result from individual acts of which the true believer is ashamed, for Muslims as a group may be the growing contradiction between profession and practice. For decades the Muslim world has been occupied with, on the one hand,

centuries.²⁶⁵ This legitimacy tended to obscure the role of *jus in bello*. As scholar John Dugard writes,

When a belligerent's cause was deemed to be just, God was on its side, and the military action on its behalf became the instrument of God's will and retribution. Accordingly there was no room for a *jus in bello* (the humanitarian laws of war), and the most barbarous methods were permitted and used, to subject the unjust opponent to the imputed wrath of God.²⁶⁶

The connection between this religiously-based justification and the prosecution of the Crusades is clear. Kennedy also describes, however, the simultaneous development of *jus in bello* in Christendom, a trend of thought that formally began in the 13th century with the written classification of noncombatants and a declaration of their immunity from the sword. Then the effects of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 caused an advancement of *jus in bello* principles at the expense of *jus ad bellum* due to the increasing secularization of monarchical authority. People perceived their warring king or prince no longer as the righteous arm of God, but rather as acting in his own or the state's own interests. Thus the wrath of God could no longer be invoked in a political struggle. Christian thought turned to the regulation of war instead, a philosophical transition that bred the modern *jus in bello* concepts of proportionality (costs of conflict should not exceed the benefits) and discrimination (immunity of noncombatants from attack).²⁶⁷

There is a high degree of similarity between Christian and Islamic notions of *jus ad bellum*, such as agreement on the importance of "just cause" and "right intent." For

the incompatibility of classical Islam with modernity, and on the other hand historical attempts to reconcile the faith to the modern world. See Hoffer, 102-103.

²⁶⁵Robert Kennedy, "Is One Person's Terrorist Another's Freedom Fighter? Western and Islamic Approaches to 'Just War' Compared," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 5-6.

²⁶⁶John Dugard, "International Terrorism and Just War," in *The Morality of Terrorism: Religious and Secular Justifications*, eds. David Rapoport and Yonah Alexander (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), 78.

²⁶⁷Kennedy, 7-8.

Kennedy, the heart of the contrast between the Christian and Islamic concepts of war is a difference of views on *jus in bello*. A wide array of Muslim writers, extending back as early as the ninth century, urged the adoption of what now seems a very short list of immune noncombatants, despite some Muslim scholars' views that Mohammed's teachings prohibit, for instance, the killing of women, children, and the old.²⁶⁸ According to John Kelsay, Sunni scholars argue that the killing of non-Muslim children by Muslims during a battle against infidel forces is the fault of the non-Muslim political leaders, who are guilty of rejecting the "invitation" to convert to Islam.²⁶⁹ Kennedy also notes an absence of restrictions placed on the nature of use and types of weapons in Islamic tradition, although such an absence is by no means exclusive to Islam. Finally, there is a distinctive feature specific to the Shi'i branch of Islam which tends to contribute to a weakened sense of *jus in bello*. Kennedy writes that Shi'ites adhere more to personalities than to principles,²⁷⁰ which correspondingly allots a greater degree of influence to Shi'ite religious leaders over the behavior of their followers. This Shi'ite practice has infused the beliefs and writings of men such as former Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini, known for his tacit approval of terroristic violence, with significant weight in the arena of Muslim ideas.

Under this feature of Shi'i, Khomeini expanded the concept of a Muslim's Islamic duty to include the support of so-called national liberation movements of the deprived peoples without question or comment from respected Shi'ite scholars of the time. In

²⁶⁸Kennedy, 11-13.

²⁶⁹John Kelsay, *Islam and War: A Study of Comparative Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 32.

²⁷⁰Kennedy, 13.

sum, Kennedy notes an absence in some areas of the world of fully developed *jus in bello* traditions, a feature which certain Muslims have adopted and incorporated into their plans for an Islamic revival.²⁷¹ Part of the cause of this absence is an overall resurgence of *jus ad bellum* thinking, an "ends justifies the means" mentality which is omnipresent in today's international terrorist problem.

As Dugard describes it, this revival of just war thinking links the terrorist's level of guilt directly to the purity of his motives. This link contradicts past traditions in societal views of terrorism. The prevailing view until recently held that the act itself should be judged regardless of the motive. According to Dugard, the new thinking concludes that if a terrorist's stated goal is to fight colonialism or racism, or to assert the right of self-determination, then he is no criminal, but instead a hero engaged in a just cause.²⁷²

Dynamics of the Holy Cause

The Kennedy article implies that the revival of just war thinking is a recent phenomenon, spurred by the growth of modern international terrorism and rise of national liberation theology. The underlying truth is that the practice of atrocities in the name of a just war darkens every era of world history. Arguably, this art reached its peak more under the tutelage of Hitler and Stalin in the first half of the twentieth century, with their combined millions of casualties, than under today's international terrorists, so far. The common thread, whether it is called the "war on the Jews," the "war on the kulaks,"

²⁷¹Kennedy, 13, 17.

²⁷²Dugard in *The Morality of Terrorism*, 87.

or the "war on the Zionist-Crusader Alliance," is the sublimation of every other morality to the requirements of the cause. This thread reinforces the assertion that faith in a holy cause must be extravagant and uncompromising, that the hint of moderation, i.e. consideration of other loyalties, is intolerable.

Total, unquestioning commitment and devotion to the cause is both a matter of survival of the cause, and an excuse to commit any crime in the name of that cause. This issue of blame or guilt vice self-perceived absolution is of paramount importance for any group rallying around a cause. In this light, the decision for Muslims to use ultra-violence or WMD in the context of their "holy cause" may be tied to the extent to which Muslim revivalists and militants adopt the principles of just war thinking and are imbued with the dynamics of the holy cause as described by Hoffer.

It is readily apparent that even some of the most hardened users of violence seek justification of their behavior, particularly when group dynamics have united them and are guiding their direction. Even Charles Manson couched his group's murders in the context of a race war in which he would champion the downtrodden. In Hoffer's view, this urge to justify is a case of people wanting to believe, and in the end making themselves believe, they are in the selfless pursuit of a holy cause.

Other scholars also detect this trend among the violent. Stern, drawing on the work of Albert Bandura and Donatella della Porta, detects a strong thread of heroism and righteousness on the part of violent militants. Leeman notes the emphasis terrorists generally place on justification, given the illegitimacy of actual or even threatened violence.²⁷³ This attachment to a holy cause and its relation to self-legitimized violence

²⁷³Leeman, 46.

may be, as Hoffer contends, particularly strident where there is a significant presence of uncompromising, zealous, true believers in the group.

Another contribution of Hoffer's relevant to the cause of Muslim revivalists and militants is the role he ascribes to a wide gap between the profession and practice of a belief system in generating both a guilt, requiring expiation, and fervency among believers. Such an inner contradiction plays itself out every day in secular-led Muslim majority countries where political leaders confront, on the one hand, the practical exigencies of the state, and on the other the demands of an increasingly vocal revivalist population. Bouchat recognizes the inflammatory effects of this contradiction. He writes that "the present imperfect union between the expectations of Islam and the secular governments ruling the Muslim world is another means through which an Islamic revival may bring social and political upheaval to Muslim states, and thus become a danger to the West."²⁷⁴

The more passionate, the more zealous a follower is, the more likely he is to adopt stringent, fundamentalist interpretations of his belief system, his cause, and at the same time he may see sharper distinctions between fellow believers and infidels. Hoffer notes this connection when he writes that all forms of devotion represent a desperate clinging to concepts which might infuse one's life with worth and meaning.²⁷⁵ This desperation lends itself to the extreme adoption of a cause, with no room for compromise. Several religions, for instance, preach the value of self-denial, and have in the course of history exhibited many fundamentalist responses to this concept, ranging from self-flagellation to

²⁷⁴Bouchat, 341.

²⁷⁵Hoffer, 24.

sleeping on beds of nails. In the context of classical Islam, fundamentalist fervor is often turned outward, focusing on the forces of world infidelity and their rejection of Allah.

The Holy Cause Meets Globalization

A very illustrative example of this outwardly expressed fervor has occurred in the form of a vocal Muslim response to the recent threat of globalization and its generally weakening effect on group identities. This threat to the Muslim world first showed itself in the reverberations of the 1970's oil boom, which brought not only opulent wealth but also a concomitant increase in exposure to the West and its values.²⁷⁶ Contemporary militant Muslims at the time, perceiving the urgent need for such a response, sought to build a fundamentalist resurgence on the order of classical Islam. The weight of Muslim historical experience, infused with the Crusades and a centuries-long struggle to define its place in the world vis-a-vis Christendom, helped to crystallize the urgency of the crisis in the minds of these Muslims.

In many instances the focus of this resurgence was expunging the negative influence of the West from the Islamic world which, although requiring a cleansing within Muslim communities, often assumed the character of an outwardly directed fundamentalist fervor. The real threat for these and similar communities, is that the system of globalization carries with it a culture and values of its own.²⁷⁷ Eclectic, economically developed, modern societies characterized by a plurality of beliefs, such as the U.S., are less threatened and more likely to enable—and exploit—the new system.

²⁷⁶Bodansky, 4.

Traditional communities with a more pervasive belief system, especially those in less economically developed states—such as is often found in the Muslim world—are not well-positioned to exploit the global economy, and at the same time highly likely to feel the economic and cultural pinch of globalization.

Left behind by the global economy, yet naked to its forces and often the values that come with it, these communities are more inclined to lash out against globalization, and by extension against the U.S. that promotes it.²⁷⁸ They may also choose to defend their separate culture, which is the source of their roots and the principal definition of who they are. Indeed, for many such peoples their culture may be their only remaining source of pride. A desperate clinging²⁷⁹ to local, rather than global, beliefs, the notion of a people unsure of itself and its future and threatened by globalization, is clearly suggested in today's Islamic revivalism and rising militancy. The professed holiness of revivalist and militant causes, in this sense, may constitute an attempt by these groups to redefine themselves in a better light, to shrug off the yoke of the downtrodden and the marginalized by attaching themselves to the legacy of Allah's cause.

The notion of a cultural community defending itself and lashing out at a threat cannot help but evoke the imaginary battles foreseen in Samuel Huntington's "The Clash

²⁷⁷Dr. Mark Weisenbloom, "The Emerging Global Economic System," seminar presented at the Joint Military Intelligence College, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington DC, 10 April 2000.

²⁷⁸Benjamin Barber, in his article "Jihad Vs. McWorld," addresses the distinctly American face of globalization, especially in the form of popular art and consumer goods. Barber succinctly exposes the particular insidiousness of well-known brand names, arguing that these names "convey lifestyle images that alter perception and challenge behavior." See Benjamin Barber, "Jihad Vs. McWorld," *The Atlantic Monthly* 269, no. 3 (March 1992): 53-65. For more on the U.S. leading role in globalization see Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1999).

²⁷⁹Hoffer, 24.

of Civilizations?"²⁸⁰ Huntington includes in his work a persuasive study of civilizational identities, but overstates his case for the inevitability of civilization-wide armed conflicts. His arguments fail to emphasize the porousness of the civilizational fault lines he describes, a reality that weakens his characterization of civilizational bonds playing the most important role in future conflicts. Huntington also de-emphasizes the diversity and varying degrees of fragmentation within these civilizational groupings, a misrepresentation that hordes of Western and Muslim Islamicists are only too happy to point out in Islam's case.²⁸¹ Fouad Ajami, Kishore Mahbubani, and several other authors forcefully describe similar flaws in Huntington's argument,²⁸² which in reality testifies at once to the work's weaknesses and to the power and suggestiveness of its ideas.

One undeniable contribution of Huntington's is his emphasis on the height of tension that culture clashes produce. What authors like Benjamin Barber and Thomas Friedman astutely recognize is that globalization itself constitutes a culture, a civilization, and that the conflict to watch is between this plastic, materialistic, consumer-driven force and the traditional cultures it threatens. On the edges of this conflict are to be found many forms of a voice of protest against the homogenizing effects of a global culture. This voice of protest today has tended to exhibit itself at times in a rash of revivalism,

²⁸⁰Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49. Huntington subsequently turned his work into a book with the same name.

²⁸¹*Islamicist* is a term that generally applies to any scholar who specializes in the religion of Islam. John Esposito is representative of this trend among Islamicists, who as a Western scholar of Islam articulately defends Islamic diversity and castigates non-Muslim assumptions of Islam's monolithic character in *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*. See especially Esposito, 218-226 for a particularly scathing treatment of the "pan-Islamic myth." Also see David Kibble's article, "The Threat of Islam: A Fundamental Reappraisal," which showcases a fundamental reappraisal of the threats arising from Islam today.

²⁸²For the views of these authors on "The Clash of Civilizations?" see *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 4 (September-October 1993): 2-26. Also see Huntington's rebuttal to his critics, "If Not Civilizations, What?" in *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 5 (November-December 1993): 186-194.

militancy, and sometimes terrorism that appears to be centered on a policy of safeguarding various traditional cultures.

Mark Juergensmeyer's arguments reinforce the validity of this concept of a culture war of ideas rather than one involving armies, in other words less in the sense of Huntington and more akin to Barber's and Friedman's views on globalization. Juergensmeyer's article, "The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism," addresses the cultural concerns of many former Western colonies in the developing world. He describes the desire of these states' leaders to strengthen the expression of their own local cultures as even sharper "when confronted with the media assault of western music, videos, and films that satellite television now beams around the world, and which threaten local and traditional forms of cultural expression."²⁸³ Juergensmeyer effectively illustrates the emotive quality of the local backlash against globalization when he writes that "politicized religious movements [a familiar aspect of Islamic revivalism] are the responses of those who feel desperate and desolate in the current geopolitical crisis."²⁸⁴ Simon Dalby acknowledges the role of violence in this state of desperation, asserting that "the potential for violence remains a spectre haunting the search for identity."²⁸⁵

Thus Magnus Ranstorp argues the recent rise in terrorism associated with religion and the spread of globalization are closely connected:

The accelerated dissolution of traditional links of social and cultural cohesion within and between societies with the current globalization process...[has] led to an increased sense of fragility, instability, and unpredictability for the present and future. The current scale of religious

²⁸³Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 50, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 10.

²⁸⁴Juergensmeyer, "Religious Nationalism," 19.

²⁸⁵Simon Dalby, "Globalisation or Global Apartheid? Boundaries and Knowledge in Postmodern Times," *Geopolitics* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 147.

terrorism...is indicative of this perception that [the terrorists'] respective faiths and communities stand at a critical historical juncture.²⁸⁶

Bin Laden both recognizes and bitterly resents the effects of this culture war, not least because since his childhood he has so far been on the losing side, or at least the one which has been less able to resist the encroachment of the other, and has seen the inevitability of globalization's *blitzkrieg*-like advances on so many fronts. Bin Laden encapsulates this perception of the culture war in statements such as this excerpt from his 1996 "War Declaration": "There is no other duty after belief than fighting the enemy who is corrupting [our] life and [our] religion."²⁸⁷

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON BIN LADEN'S MESSAGE AND WORLDVIEW

The classical Islamic path to resolution of the tension between the faithful and the infidels, according to Bozeman, avoids all tinge of compromise. Peace for the *ummah*, writes Bozeman, "hinges, in the classical Islamic view, on the Islamization of all humankind."²⁸⁸ No one is exempt, ultimately, from the requirement to worship Allah.²⁸⁹ It is evident that a notion of inevitability guides the belief system of classical Islam, a sense that history must move in the direction of global Islamization, and that Allah's eventual supremacy is unavoidable. Arguably, inevitability often serves as a core

²⁸⁶Ranstorp, "Terrorism," 46.

²⁸⁷Bin Laden, "Declaration of War."

²⁸⁸Adda Bozeman, in Blank and others, 59.

²⁸⁹Dr. Jonathan Owen, "War and Peace in Islam," seminar presented at the Joint Military Intelligence College, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington DC, 27 April 2000.

concept in many millennial and apocalyptic belief systems. Moreover, as with other aspects of classical Islam, the fact that inevitability is a classical Islamic concept does not preclude its current salience. Turabi, the contemporary Muslim intellectual, recognizes the establishment of Islamic states as inevitable. Referring to the course of history, Turabi expects the West to realize that Islam cannot be stopped.²⁹⁰

There are elements of Islamic thought which are open to co-existence or compromise between Muslims and nonbelievers. C.J. Bouchat denies the existence of an antagonistic pan-Islamic bloc taking aim at the West, arguing for the presence of a wide diversity of Islamic thought when he describes the Muslim world as a collection of 45 Muslim majority countries containing one billion people with many differences among them. Critical of what he calls the West's unreasoned fear of Islamic fundamentalism, Bouchat argues that most of the fundamentalists themselves merely want to peacefully reshape their societies on the basis of the tenets of Islam. Bouchat presents an alternative characterization of today's Islamic revivalism, rejecting the notion that it represents an anti-Western offensive, and seeing it instead as an adaptable process, fitting the needs of diverse groups and encouraging a return to core Islamic values to solve economic and social ills. Bouchat highlights Islam's "underlying assumptions of peace and equality under God, ... justice, pragmatism, and a heritage as a very progressive force"²⁹¹ as a strong basis for compromise with the West, and clearly believes there is wide potential for constructive engagement between the West and the Muslim world.

²⁹⁰"Turabi," 56.

²⁹¹Bouchat, 345, 347, 350.

Lewis Ware, also addressing the issue of compromise with non-Muslims, contends that reformers and Sunni modernists were mostly responsible for introducing the notion of compromise, and that these men modified classical Islam primarily in response to externally imposed events such as colonialism. Colonialism stripped subject Muslim peoples of the opportunity to establish rule by *shari'a*, and of the military instruments of state power to raise *jihad*, encouraging some Muslim scholars to nurture the aforementioned concept of a greater *jihad* of the heart and mind. Thus *jihad* was still a practical goal for oppressed subject Muslims, who by internally purging themselves of all that was unclean, would advance Islamic values and encourage the West to accept the self-evident truth of Islam.²⁹²

These scholars, then, offered a reformed, alternate path to the creation of an Islamic world—an inner, consciousness-raising *jihad* rather than merely an armed struggle. Neither Ware nor Bozeman indicates that these scholarly proponents of an inner *jihad* excluded the validity of the armed *jihad*, or denied Muslims the opportunity of simultaneously pursuing both variants of *jihad*. Indeed, Ware writes that Islam leaves one with the impression that *jihad* is “forever, that it has revolutionary value, that it is waged on all levels of society and on all fronts simultaneously, and that it entails the use of whatever weapons are necessary to win the contest.”²⁹³ One is reminded here of Kennedy’s assertion of a weakened tradition of *jus in bello* in Islam. Koranic quotations such as “fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, seize them, beleaguer them,

²⁹²Lewis Ware, in Blank and others, 67-68.

²⁹³Lewis Ware, in Blank and others, 108-109.

and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)”²⁹⁴ provide some of the background for interpretations of Islam such as Ware’s. Richard Pipes’ comments support Ware’s assessment of the influence of reform and these Muslim reformers. “Before 1800,” Pipes writes, “the interpreters of the *shari’a* softened it somewhat. For instance, they devised a method by which to avoid the ban on interest. [Revivalists] reject such modifications.” Elsewhere Pipes adds that revivalists are pushing for a return to the ways of the past, which is to be achieved by the community’s total embrace of rule by *shari’a*.²⁹⁵

It is noteworthy that Bozeman describes the goal of universal Islamization as a classical, and not only a radical, Islamic view. Ware fluently asserts the classical, traditional nature of this goal when he writes that for Muslims, who are bound by their religion to assure Islam’s supremacy:

The idea of peace...achieves permanency only when Islam becomes the universal religion explicit in Koranic revelation. In the Islamic view, the world is thus divided into two spheres. Where *shari’a* holds sway and right belief is assured, the *dar al-Islam* [abode of the faithful] guarantees a perfect moral order of which *jihad* is the instrument of hegemony. Wherever disbelief is, the *dar al-harb* [abode of war] exists, implying an absence of liberty to embrace self-evident truths...In classical terms, then, *jihad* ceases when the *dar al-harb* is absorbed into the *dar al-Islam*, that is, when universal religious liberty is restored.²⁹⁶

The classical Islamic conception of the world is not just in harmony with bin Laden’s “us versus them” mentality—it appears to be strongly reinforcing this mentality, and was likely the basis for it as well, with roots in bin Laden’s youthful fear of and contempt for Western ways. The concept of inevitability undergirds both classical Islam

²⁹⁴The quotation is found in the ninth *sura*, or chapter, of the *Koran*, and begins with the fifth verse. For a scholarly treatment of the significance of these and other *Koranic* verses in Islam and in the doctrine of *jihad*, see Khadduri, 55-73.

²⁹⁵Richard Pipes, “Islam and Islamism: Faith and Ideology,” *The National Interest* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 89.

²⁹⁶Lewis Ware, in Blank and others, 63.

and bin Laden's mentality. At the core of these two belief systems is an acceptance of the inevitability of conflict, and of an eventual Allah-ordained victory.

Based on the above treatment of classical Islam, Muslims of various backgrounds may be susceptible to an acceptance of the goal of universal Islamization, whether they believe it should be achieved by armed struggle, an inner *jihad*—or both. Even regarding the Sunni-Shi'ite division, Bozeman writes that "both denominations reinforce the tendency towards Islamic universalism."²⁹⁷ If Islamists such as bin Laden, Sunni or Shi'ite, are operating on this basis, then they are forced to recognize the major structural revision of society in general that global Islamization would require.²⁹⁸ It is this very desire for a structural revision of the world that several experts identify as a key precursor to WMD use, whether the intended end-state is a new world order, akin to Shoko Asahara's vision of the future, or simply chaos.²⁹⁹

REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC PERSONA: HOW THE RESTRAINTS HOLD UP

1. *Is fear of public revulsion restraining bin Laden?*

Bin Laden demonstrates a basic disregard for public opinion, which indicates that the fear of public revulsion does not trouble him. In his statements, bin Laden displays an outright compulsion to redraw the act of terroristic murder as a noble deed. Killing the infidel, such as in the 1995 Riyadh and 1996 Khobar Towers explosions, is for bin

²⁹⁷Adda Bozeman, in Blank and others, 59.

²⁹⁸Youssef, 109. One recalls to mind Michael Youssef's description of the Islamic purist's insistence on the redemption or destruction of the non-Muslim world.

²⁹⁹Campbell, 6 and letter. See also Gressang, 13, 16-18 and Stern, 71.

Laden a "duty which God, Praise and Glory be to Him, decreed for us."³⁰⁰ Such outrageous declarations are an excellent example of bin Laden's disregard for the opinions of the general public.

Neither does the evidence reveal that bin Laden has a strong attachment either to a defined population, or to society in general, that might limit the boundaries of his violence. Bin Laden appears to speak for the suffering Muslim, but in reality this downtrodden individual becomes thoroughly idealized—in the text the suffering Muslim becomes a concept rather than a person. Nowhere in his statements does bin Laden demonstrate that he has considered the idea that his terror campaign might be counterproductive to the interests of everyday Muslims, or that he offends most Muslims with his words and actions. Nor does he appear to care that the bogeyman image of himself that he actively nourishes continues to feed worldwide anti-Muslim prejudice. For Usama, the majority of Muslims and their opinions, except in the usefulness of these people as one amalgamated, idealized victim, are just as irrelevant as the rest of society and its views.

The evidence also suggests bin Laden has an attachment to an esoteric audience. In several of his public statements, bin Laden issues direct prayers to Allah, asking for his guidance and blessings.³⁰¹ Another common theme of these statements is a steady stream of deferential phrases intended to glorify Allah. At times in these texts such phrases pepper almost every sentence of bin Laden's:

³⁰⁰Arnett interview with bin Laden.

³⁰¹See bin Laden, "Declaration of War," and Yusufzai interview with bin Laden for examples.

Hostility toward America is a religious duty and we hope to be rewarded for it by God, Praise and Glory be to him. Praise be to God for guiding us to do *jihad* in his cause. To call us enemy number one or number two doesn't hurt us. What we do care for is to please God, Praise and Glory be to him, by doing *jihad* in his cause.

The effect is as if bin Laden is in constant communication with Allah, and consequently does not dare risk offending his deity by failing to give Him the proper respect and courtesies.

These rhetorical fixtures suggest the importance of bin Laden's connection to an esoteric audience of one, namely Allah. Bin Laden, like many other users of violence, needs to convince himself of the purity of his cause, and knows exactly where he can turn to gain a blessing powerful enough to convince both him and his followers. In the specific context of his terror campaign, bin Laden seeks nothing less than the approval of Allah himself to demonstrate the rightness of his personal *jihad*.

The danger of this esoteric audience is that it would tend to enhance the imperative on bin Laden to commit himself fully to his interpretation of Allah's law. For bin Laden, if Allah's injunction is to kill the infidel, and Allah's law is the highest authority, than no other morality is relevant. Bin Laden will not be deterred by any fear from obeying this injunction.

Bin Laden is a transnational terrorist with an amorphous constituency, and one who publicly displays his approval of mass violence. The evidence suggests that bin Laden does not believe he is obligated to any large segment of an actual population, or to legitimate society as a whole. Instead, he perceives an obligation only to his cause and to Allah himself, and in the context of his strictly controlled worldview, neither of these higher authorities compels bin Laden to hold the public in any regard. Finally, bin Laden's willingness to openly countenance and even order the deaths of noncombatant

“collaborators” of the enemy, and to applaud violent acts of terrorism,³⁰² display all the more his strident disregard for public opinion as a whole.

2. *Is fear of retaliation restraining bin Laden?*

The evidence does not demonstrate that fear of retaliation is holding bin Laden back. Bin Laden’s public message calls for total obedience to Allah’s will, without exception. This message demands that a faithful Muslim completely disregard the potentially painful consequences of his actions—he must join in Allah’s cause with no thought of life or limb. Such extravagant and uncompromising fervency simply does not allow a believer the self-indulgent luxury of worrying about his personal safety.

A clear indication that bin Laden does not fear retaliation is seen in his public comments directly relating to WMD. He has never publicly disavowed an intention to acquire or use such weapons, in spite of numerous allegations that he owns WMD and intends to use them. By itself, this avoidance is not surprising, since terrorists may generally perceive such a public disavowal as showing weakness. On top of this tacit admission of his openness to the possibility of WMD acquisition and use, however, bin Laden has plainly stated that obtaining WMD is a sanctified religious duty if it assists the prosecution of *jihād*. “If,” says bin Laden, “I have indeed acquired [WMD], then this is an obligation I carried out and I thank God for enabling us to do that.” How his group chooses to use such weapons, is, according to bin Laden, “up to us.”³⁰³

³⁰²See bin Laden, “Text of World Islamic Front’s Statement Urging *Jihād* Against Jews and Crusaders (February 1998 *fatwa*),” in Ranstorp, “*Fatwa*,” 328-330. Cited hereafter as bin Laden, February 1998 *fatwa*. To read bin Laden’s own stated approval of terrorist acts, and his spoken displays of gratitude to the terrorists who committed them, see Yusufzai interview with bin Laden.

³⁰³Yusufzai interview with bin Laden.

Bin Laden's statements also display a fierce bravado and a love of danger and even death, which he explicitly reveals in his March 1997 CNN interview:

We see that getting killed in the cause of Allah is a great honor wished for by our Prophet. He said in his Hadith: "I swear to Allah, I wish to fight for Allah's cause and be killed, I'll do it again and be killed, and I'll do it again and be killed." Being killed for Allah's cause is a great honor achieved by only those who are the elite of the nation. *We love this kind of death for Allah's cause as much as you like to live. We have nothing to fear.*³⁰⁴

In this excerpt, bin Laden does not simply display a readiness to die. Death becomes an ideal state, a lofty goal that bestows everlasting honor on those who embrace it in Allah's name.³⁰⁵ Bin Laden's intention is to convince militants that only Allah is deserving of one's fear—not even death is worthy of this status.

Therefore, fighting in Allah's name is the only imperative. Anything less than total commitment becomes a compromise, which is intolerable to the true believer and finds little resonance in the tradition of Muslim revivalism to which bin Laden has at least partly attached himself. In the context of bin Laden's worldview, which is arguably a logical conclusion of some aspects of revivalist thought, Muslims only need worry if they are shirking their duty to perform *jihad*. A Muslim guilty of this aberrant behavior risks the eternal damnation of his soul, a far worse fate than mere physical death. Fear of retaliation, then, is a grievous sin because it is capable of deterring one from participating fully in the *jihad*.

Finally, bin Laden invokes the mantle of war in his statements to actually mitigate a fear of retaliation. Bin Laden consistently addresses the current Muslim crisis as a state of war—and in war casualties and enemy responses are generally unavoidable.

³⁰⁴Arnett interview with bin Laden. Italics added.

³⁰⁵See also bin Laden, February 1998 *fatwa* for bin Laden's use of Koranic quotations to legitimize his glorification of death,

Therefore, since Muslims are already at war, there is little point in maintaining the futile belief that one can stay immune from the violence. Hence a fear of retaliation is pointless, because retaliation by the enemy is itself inevitable.

3. *Is the unpredictability of WMD in the delivery phase restraining bin Laden?*

The evidence does not support any concern on Bin Laden's part over the unpredictability of the results of a WMD attack. First of all, bin Laden is well aware in general of his enemy's intolerance of casualties, and specifically of the political volatility any casualties produce for the U.S. and Israeli governments due to the reactions of their publics.³⁰⁶ Therefore, a poorly disseminated CW released in New York or Tel Aviv that kills only 10 infidels hardly constitutes a dud.

In fact, arguments proposing a fear of unpredictability tend to ignore the value of WMD as a panic weapon. A WMD panic attack, even when low in lethality, could still prompt mass evacuations, which would likely produce significant economic and psychological effects and facilitate the manipulation of the target government.³⁰⁷ The use of WMD in this manner on the domestic U.S. would easily fit a potential bin Laden plan to create enough terror to weaken U.S. national morale and possibly trigger a financial collapse. Jessica Stern emphasizes that merely the threat of WMD, because of the horror they invoke, can be enough to create a significant amount of terror in a target population.³⁰⁸ The degree to which WMD can serve as panic weapons, then, would

³⁰⁶Ranstorp, "Fatwa," 326.

³⁰⁷Stern, 57.

³⁰⁸Stern, 43, 46-47.

likely mitigate concern over their unpredictability in the eyes of those with a sufficient rationale to use them in the first place.

It is in terms of rationale that bin Laden is most strongly equipped to override this restraint. The notion of bin Laden's *jihad* as a zero-sum game is one of the most consistent threads in his message. Bin Laden's combined focus on militancy and classical Islam contribute heavily to the zero-sum nature of his rhetoric. In a zero-sum contest, one is predisposed to use any and all available means to achieve victory. Consequently, debates over the expected lethality of a weapon likely to kill at least a few of its intended targets, and certain to create dismay—and even mass panic—among the enemy are irrelevant.

4. *Is fear of the dangers of handling WMD restraining bin Laden?*

There is no aspect of Bin Laden's public persona that confirms any fears of the dangers presented by WMD. The same cultivation of a zero-sum attitude that mitigates fears of the unpredictability of WMD also fosters a disregard of the dangers of WMD to users. The ideological foundation of bin Laden's zero-sum game is, as his statements show, the demands of a cause so righteous that no sacrifice made in its name is too great. Human life is expendable, then, on both sides of a WMD attack—the receiving end, and that of the attackers. Bin Laden consistently enjoins Muslims to treat their earthly lives with little regard. To this end he quotes the Koran in his 1998 *fatwa*: "O ye who believe, what is the matter with you, that when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of God, ye cling so heavily to the earth! Do ye prefer the life of this world to the hereafter?"³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹Bin Laden, February 1998 *fatwa*.

The personal history bin Laden professes in his statements adds to the glorification of a reckless, risk-acceptant attitude. Bin Laden may perceive the need, if he is asking Muslim militants to sacrifice their lives for Allah, to demonstrate a similar willingness to lose his own life for the sake of Allah's cause. Bin Laden, in the sense of Bonnie Cordes' discussion of auto-propaganda,³¹⁰ may also want to believe he is capable of such a sacrifice on his own, so he could be using his statements to convince himself of his own willingness to offer everything—including his life—to Allah. To seek to justify oneself by such means is a textbook maneuver of the true believer desperate for a sense of self-worth.³¹¹

Bin Laden is reported to be quite proud of his war record during the Afghan War. Accounts vary on the actual extent of his battlefield experience, but his leading role in the fierce battle of Jalalabad is a recurrent theme in the literature. Bin Laden speaks often in his statements of his experiences in the Afghan *jihad*, where, he says, "one day...was like one thousand days of praying in an ordinary mosque."³¹² Bin Laden reports several instances of his standing alongside his fellow *mujahedeen* in desperate battlefield situations, very often seriously outnumbered. These recollections evoke the powerful themes of self-sacrifice, exposure to grave risk, and endurance. Indeed, it seems plausible that bin Laden was in fact exposed to significant danger during his tours in Afghanistan.

Having been on the battlefield and exposed, even for a short time, to the threat of overwhelming weaponry, and even CW, at the hands of the Soviets are likely to have

³¹⁰Cordes in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, 151.

³¹¹Hoffer, 21.

somewhat inured bin Laden to future risks when they are in the name of his cause. The 1998 U.S. missile strike on the Khost, Afghanistan complex represented yet another significant danger which bin Laden has survived. These repeated exposures to danger, and bin Laden's treatment of them in his public statements, also weaken the prospect that the dangers of WMD are restraining him from using them.

Therefore, according to the criteria outlined in Chapter One which are designed to suggest whether one or more of four generic restraints are causal factors in a group's decision to refrain from WMD use, none of these restraints applies to bin Laden as far as his public persona indicates. The study of this public persona did reveal, however, the ways in which bin Laden attempts to control his audiences through a carefully crafted message. In particular, the effect of bin Laden's persona on the militant core to which he speaks is extremely important, because the responses of this core are closely tied to bin Laden's fate and future plans. The next chapter analyzes the internal traits of the militant core, highlighting bin Laden's own followers, and suggests the reasons why this audience is so susceptible to the message analyzed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four looks at aspects of this group that empower bin Laden to guide and manipulate the actions of its members.

³¹²Bodansky, 10.

CHAPTER FOUR

AL QAEDA: A STUDY OF GROUP DYNAMICS

The purpose of Chapter Four is to determine, mindful of the evidence and conclusions presented in Chapters Two and Three, how the group dynamics of bin Laden's organization contribute to decisions regarding WMD. Aspects inherent to groups, their specific manifestation within terrorist organizations, and the specialized relationship that exists between leaders and followers all play important roles in this chapter. The group's origins and early history open up this treatment of bin Laden through the lens of group dynamics.

RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL ROOTS OF AL QAEDA

Origins of Al Qaeda: The Afghan War, Azam, and the Birth of "The Base"

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a defining historical moment in the contemporary Muslim world. Many Muslim communities expressed shock and outrage at the event, and in some cases these emotions transformed themselves into action. In the span of 10 years, from 1982 to 1992, about 35,000 foreign Muslim activists joined forces with the Afghan *mujahedeen* in their struggle to oust the Soviets.³¹³

Pakistan was one of several countries with strong motivations to eliminate Soviet influence in Afghanistan. When the anti-Soviet Afghan factions began their resistance

³¹³Rashid, 130.

campaign, the Pakistanis pitched in with significant financial and logistical support. Concomitant with the assistance Pakistan provided to the *mujahedeen*, the military government in Islamabad under Zia al-Haq established several Islamist teaching facilities—including a few next to the Afghan border—for the benefit of these arriving Muslims. From these two sources—recruits heading to the front and Muslims studying at the Islamist schools—it is estimated by one expert that over 100,000 Muslim activists had direct contact with the Pakistanis, the Afghans, and the *jihad* against Soviet forces.³¹⁴ These individuals hailed from at least 43 countries that run the gamut of the Eastern Hemisphere, extending from the Middle East and Africa through Asia and into the Far East. It was in the midst of this confluence of disparate Muslim fighters and activists that Al Qaeda was born.

Usama bin Laden was one of many enraged Muslims who cried injustice after the invasion took place.³¹⁵ However, certain aspects of his background distinguished bin Laden from the rest of the Muslim activists who flocked to Afghanistan and Pakistan during the war. He was a scion of one of the richest families in Saudi Arabia, had connections with the Saudi royal family, enjoyed access to a treasure trove of construction equipment due to his father's business, and had a personal fortune of several millions to offer. These distinct advantages allowed bin Laden to play a role long sought by the Afghan fighters and their Pakistani backers—that of an elite Saudi with royal ties to lead the peninsular contingent of *mujahedeen*, and thus put the Saudi regime's stamp

³¹⁴Rashid, 130.

³¹⁵Bodansky, 10.

of approval on the *jihad*.³¹⁶ Bin Laden's attributes and willingness to fill these shoes propelled him into leadership status, and gave him the opportunity to forge strong alliances with some of the prominent leaders and supporters of the *jihad*. One of these men, whom bin Laden had met during his studies in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and looked up to as a mentor, was a Jordanian Palestinian named Abdullah Azam.

Azam was an early "bag man" for the *jihad*, using his contacts to supply the *mujahedeen*.³¹⁷ One of the first Arab Muslims to join in the Afghan struggle, Azam brought with him the militant views on *jihad* he had formulated while teaching at Jeddah's King Abdul Aziz University—bin Laden's alma mater—in the 1970's. In the classroom Azam preached the centrality of *jihad* in the Muslim cause—"Jihad and the rifle alone: no negotiations, no conferences, and no dialogues."³¹⁸ It is entirely likely these views influenced Usama during his studies at the university.

In 1984, to better facilitate the flow of donated Saudi funds and new recruits to the front, Azam created the *Maktab al-Kidamat*, or "Services Center," which also accepted contributions from many Islamic charities. Bin Laden joined in the work of the Services Center, reportedly establishing as many as 50 worldwide recruitment centers for attracting new *mujahedeen*. Locations of the centers included Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Western Europe, and the U.S.³¹⁹ In 1986 bin Laden helped build the *mujahedeen* complex at Khost, Afghanistan. Reportedly backed by CIA funding, the Khost facility

³¹⁶Rashid, 131.

³¹⁷Rashid, 131.

³¹⁸Bodansky, 11.

³¹⁹Bodansky, 12.

served as a weapons storage depot, training camp, and medical center. At Khost, the Arab Afghans in particular learned to respect bin Laden as their leader.³²⁰

When assassins killed Azam in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1989, bin Laden put his financial assets and status to productive uses, establishing a successor organization to take over the functions of the Services Center. He called it Al Qaeda—"The Base"—and led its efforts to recruit and train incoming *mujahedeen*, and to serve as a point of contact and unifying force among the foreign fighters, who became known as the "Arab Afghans" because of the high number of ethnic Arabs among them. Bin Laden used these recruitment centers to seek out specialists for the *jihad*—medical doctors, engineers, drug smugglers, terrorists—anyone whom bin Laden felt had an important role to play in Afghanistan.³²¹

The Growth of Al Qaeda: Its Rebirth in Sudan

As the war came to a close, many of the foreign *mujahedeen* were living on bases in Afghanistan which bin Laden had helped to build. According to one author, Al Qaeda also maintained a charitable cover to hide its activities.³²² In fact, one Muslim source to this day claims that Al Qaeda was nothing more than a house of records on the foreign *mujahedeen* during the war.³²³

³²⁰Rashid, 132.

³²¹Bodansky, 12.

³²²Maria Do Ceu Pinto, "Some US Concerns Regarding Islamist and Middle Eastern Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 77.

³²³"Biography of Usama bin Laden," *Al-Hayah*, URL: <<http://207.27.16.21/FBISdata/2000/004/22/gmp20000422000025n.html>>, accessed 20 May 2000.

Directly following the Soviet withdrawal, the Arab Afghans fell out of favor with the indigenous *mujahedeen*, in many cases due to the strict Wahhabism of the foreigners.³²⁴ Leaving their bases in Afghanistan, the Arab Afghans dispersed, though as many as 4,000 followed bin Laden back to Saudi Arabia and with his help attempted to settle in Mecca and Medina. Once arrived, Usama established a welfare program for these veterans, and contributed money to the families of those killed,³²⁵ which surely increased the loyalty and affection many of these fighters already felt for him.

The Gulf War was a watershed for Al Qaeda as well as for bin Laden himself. Usama was already out of favor with Riyadh on account of his outspoken views on Gulf politics and his urging of *jihad* against the secular regime in South Yemen, which the Saudis actually favored over the allegedly less predictable North Yemeni Muslim leadership. After the Saudi regime chose the U.S. to liberate Kuwait and defend the peninsula, rejecting his offer to lead the Arab Afghans against Saddam, bin Laden left Saudi Arabia in disgust in 1991. It was during his six-year sojourn in Sudan that bin Laden began to attract the Arab veterans to his banner once more, establishing training camps and various operations with the consent of the Sudanese government and its spiritual leader, Hasan al-Turabi. Bin Laden and his followers resurrected the name Al Qaeda and applied it to their growing network of Afghan war veterans and Muslim activists. Al Qaeda's first suspected terrorist operation was to take place shortly after the Gulf War in the city of Aden, Yemen, in December 1992. The pair of hotel bombings

³²⁴Rashid, 132. Abdul-Wahhab, a Muslim revivalist, founded the puritanical Wahhabi sect in the early 1700's. Wahhabism's principal theme is a return to the strict application of Koranic doctrine, along with the adoption of an ascetic lifestyle.

³²⁵Rashid, 133.

that detonated successfully nevertheless missed the approximately 100 U.S. soldiers who were en route to Somalia to participate in Operation RESTORE HOPE, killing 2 civilian tourists instead.³²⁶

The Afghan *jihad* linked radical Muslim activists from around the world, and facilitated the formation of strong bonds among them, which were no doubt also enhanced by the duress of war. Ahmed Rashid writes that these men “forged tactical and ideological links that would serve them well in the future.” Rashid adds that the camps established by bin Laden and others “became virtual universities for future Islamic radicalism.”³²⁷ Samuel Huntington provides an even more chilling assessment of the alliances created among the various *mujahedeen*.

The war left behind an uneasy coalition of Islamist organizations intent on promoting Islam against all non-Muslim forces. It also left a legacy of expert and experienced fighters, training camps and logistical facilities, elaborate trans-Islam networks of personal and organization relationships, ...a heady sense of power and self-confidence...and a driving desire to move on to other victories.³²⁸

AL QAEDA'S CURRENT STATUS: WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY

Al Qaeda's Composition

Al Qaeda is comprised, on the one hand, of a committed core of hardline bin Laden adherents, and on the other, of an extremely broad and diverse cell structure, spread throughout much of Europe, Asia, and Africa with connections across the entire globe. The multinational composition of the Arab Afghans has proved invaluable to the

³²⁶Pinto, 85.

³²⁷Rashid, 130.

³²⁸Samuel Huntington as quoted in Rashid, 130.

breadth, diversity, and security of Al Qaeda and its affiliates. Al Qaeda has also forged many links with other terrorist groups—some enduring, and some transitory in nature. In fact, it is hard to determine who are the core members of Al Qaeda, who belongs to its affiliate organizations, and who has joined forces with Al Qaeda completely from the outside, with no definitive group ties.

Yet it is the vagueness and ad hoc nature of this terrorist environment that makes Al Qaeda so hard to dissect and understand, and according to some experts much more dangerous.³²⁹ Ad hoc groups may feel their lack of organization prevents their detection, protecting them from backlash. Also, since ad hoc groups typically have amorphous constituencies,³³⁰ they are likely to hold public revulsion towards their actions in less regard, and do not fear the severing of financial ties to the public in the same sense as the Irish Republican Army, which depends on its clear-cut constituency. The discovery of bin Laden cells from Nairobi to New Delhi to Manila suggests that Al Qaeda enjoys widespread appeal among likeminded groups and among a variety of Muslim extremists.

Al Qaeda greatly benefits from its affiliates, who can provide operatives, access, transportation, and supplies to bin Laden's group in many locations worldwide. Strong ties between Al Qaeda and the following terrorist groups have been established: Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, the Egyptian and Yemeni Islamic *Jihad* organizations, Egypt's Gamaa al-Islamiya group, Harkatul-Islam Al-Mujahid in several South Asian states, and Algeria's Armed Islamic Group.³³¹ Bin Laden's coordinating efforts among these

³²⁹Stern, 70, 78, 86.

³³⁰Stern, 78.

³³¹Pinto, 85-86 and John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 1999), 119.

groups, and the implications of his announced "Front" amount to a concerted plan on his part to strengthen the power of Islamic-based terrorism through a complicated, yet fluid, web of cooperation among groups such as these.

In spite of its disregard for public opinion, Al Qaeda is gaining broad appeal in legitimate Muslim society. Al Qaeda has no specific constituency, nor does it make a special effort to integrate into the Muslim community in the manner of HAMAS and Hezbollah. Scholars Bernard Lewis and Magnus Ranstorp both agree, however, that bin Laden's message reverberates among many Muslims, and not just among extremists. Both men argue that Al Qaeda's message derives its potential appeal from the drawing of historical parallels between the age-old conflict with the Crusaders and today's infidel encroachment in Arabia. Many Muslims see the Gulf War, the U.S. presence in Arabia, and UN sanctions against Iraq as continuations of this legacy.³³² An article in *The Economist* also testified to the extent of bin Laden's appeal, which he by extension confers on his organization. The *Economist*, reporting during the aftermath of the U.S. retaliatory strikes on the Al Shifa plant and bin Laden camps in Afghanistan, noted that bin Laden's words now resonate among many ordinary Saudis. "Mr. bin Laden," the report continues, "commands an increasing fascination for ordinary Arabs," and is a man "whose survival enhances his stature."³³³

The movement has its detractors. Many Muslims are sure to be offended at Al Qaeda's taking of life, an act proscribed in the Koran, and to especially object to the deaths of many Muslims in the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings, especially as a result of the

³³²Lewis, "License," 15-19 and Ranstorp, "Fatwa," 326.

³³³"Cult Hero," 44.

Nairobi explosion. Bin Laden's explanation that the accidental deaths of Muslims in the context of *jihad* are allowed is not likely to convince peace-abiding Muslims. However, there is evidence of an appeal that extends beyond the polyglot terrorist environment built by bin Laden and other extremists. A continuation of negative political and economic trends in the Muslim world, with its potential to increase the numbers of the disenfranchised and the poverty-stricken, could increase the broader popularity of movements like Al Qaeda.

Key Figures: The Circle of Leadership

There is little doubt that Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri has been one of the most influential militants to affect bin Laden's career in terror. Zawahiri, a top bin Laden associate, is a former leader of Egypt's radical Islamic *Jihad* terrorist organization, and also co-signed bin Laden's February 1998 *fatwa* against the U.S.³³⁴ Already sentenced to death for his suspected role in the assassination of Egyptian President Sadat,³³⁵ Zawahiri was an influential supporter of the *mujahedeen* during the Afghan War. At least two authors have suggested that, far from his being just another bin Laden adherent, Zawahiri—older, more educated, more knowledgeable of Islam—was both mentor to him and inspirer of his personal *jihad*.³³⁶ Sacrificing a rising career as one of Egypt's top

³³⁴New York federal prosecutors investigating bin Laden in the matter of his recent indictment assert that the Egyptian Islamic *Jihad* organization actually merged with Al Qaeda in February 1998—the same month as the signing of bin Laden and Zawahiri's joint *fatwa*. See Vernon Loeb, "As U.S. Targets Bin Laden, 2 Top Aides Also Draw Scrutiny," *Washington Post*, 3 July 2000, 2. Zawahiri is also one of 16 other militants (who are described in the text as Al Qaeda members) under indictment in New York alongside bin Laden for the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings.

³³⁵Pinto, 85.

³³⁶Bodansky, 309 and Rashid, 136.

pediatricians, Zawahiri is now bin Laden's right-hand man and top military commander, officially holding title as senior military commander of the *shura* (consultative council) which leads bin Laden's "International Islamic Front for the *Jihad* against Jews and Crusaders."³³⁷ The new "Front," apparently envisioned as an umbrella organization, is an attempt by bin Laden to coordinate efforts among various militant Muslim organizations.

There are rumors Zawahiri is being groomed to replace bin Laden at the head of Al Qaeda should Usama's health totally collapse. According to Bodansky, Zawahiri and Saudi militant Taseer Abdallah, also a close friend of bin Laden's, will co-lead Al Qaeda operationally should he die, although Usama intends his symbolic replacement to be his own eldest son, Muhammad. The 15-year old Muhammad has stayed close by his father's side, often traveling with him to visit other terrorist camps and hideouts, and is undergoing rigorous military and terrorist training in preparation for a future leadership role. Muhammad's succession, even nominal, would keep the bin Laden name in a prominent place in tomorrow's Islamist *jihad*.³³⁸

Zawahiri, Abdallah, and two other men, Mustafa Hamzah and Ahmad al-Islambuli appear to represent the very top of bin Laden's circle of power. These men reportedly live with him in a series of caves inside the mountains outside of Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan. Zawahiri and Abdallah have both stood at bin Laden's side during various televised appearances. Hamzah and Islambuli are both Egyptian Muslim terrorists of some repute, having played significant leadership roles in the failed 1995 attempt on Egyptian President Mubarak's life. Islambuli is also the brother of former

³³⁷Bodansky, 317.

³³⁸Bodansky, 309-310.

President Sadat's assassin—Khalid al-Islambuli. Bodansky writes that the five work very closely together, and over the years have developed strong personal bonds that cause this circle to function extremely efficiently.³³⁹ This description of the network's top echelon is reminiscent of Hoffer's assertion that the successful leader of a mass movement must win and hold the loyalty of a group of "able lieutenants," men who are "fearless, proud, intelligent, and capable of organizing and running large-scale undertakings." Hoffer esteems this quality above all others in the makeup of a successful leader, which emphasizes the need for productive "can-do" men over a hold on the masses.³⁴⁰

A final member of this inner circle appears to be Muhammed Atef. Reportedly a former Egyptian police official, Atef joined the Afghan *jihād* against the Soviets in 1983, and met bin Laden and Zawahiri at some point during this struggle. Former CIA counterterrorist official Vincent Cannistraro calls Atef an Al Qaeda operational commander, and other sources report he has handled bin Laden's personal security arrangements in the past. Bin Laden may have sent Atef to Somalia in 1992 with orders to find weaknesses among the U.S. and UN forces there, for the purpose of making plans to ambush and kill them.³⁴¹ Several analysts expect Atef to succeed bin Laden along with Zawahiri.³⁴²

³³⁹Bodansky, 13, 125-127, 309.

³⁴⁰Hoffer, 105-106.

³⁴¹Bin Laden is suspected of involvement in the killing of U.S. soldiers in Somalia.

³⁴²Loeb, 2.

Key Figures: Top Operatives

Several other of bin Laden's people have played important roles in his terror campaign. Perhaps not surprisingly, but certainly ironically, one of bin Laden's top aides got most of his superior training from the U.S. as an American soldier who also graduated from Special Forces Officer School at Fort Bragg.³⁴³ During his U.S. military service, Egyptian-born Ali Mohammed became involved in the Afghan War, eventually leaving the military in 1989 to help bin Laden oversee his Afghan-based training camps. Due to his background, he was put in charge of the logistics of bin Laden's travels to Sudan in 1991 and to Afghanistan in 1996, after Sudanese officials asked Usama to leave. The U.S. has charged Mohammed for helping to plan the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings.

Wadi el Hage, another senior Al Qaeda member, also spent time in the U.S. before coming to work for bin Laden in Sudan shortly after the Aden hotel bombings. El Hage became instrumental in building the roots of a terrorist infrastructure centered in Sudan, working through bin Laden cover organizations such as the Kenyan Help Africa Foundation he set up in 1995. El Hage gained significant media attention recently for being investigated about his role in attempting to acquire chemical weapons for bin Laden.

Two other senior bin Laden aides were also charged with involvement in the embassy attacks—Mamdouh Salim and Mohammed Odeh. Salim is acknowledged as a co-founder of Al Qaeda, and has managed bin Laden terrorist camps in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan. Salim has been accused of trying to purchase components for

³⁴³Pinto, 82.

nuclear weapons. Odeh is accused of directing the Nairobi bombing, and of building the bomb that exploded in the U.S. Embassy at Dar es Salaam.³⁴⁴

What Does Al Qaeda Want?

A major social thrust of Al Qaeda's, besides the sustaining of the Arab Afghans as loyal followers, is in the form of a body of desired reforms. Al Qaeda demands a strict adherence to *shari'a*, in both a social and a governmental context. The group requires all aspects of society to be of an "Islamic character."³⁴⁵ Western influence must be expunged from society, and Al Qaeda reinforces this rejection with a demand that all Muslims boycott U.S. goods. Al Qaeda, through bin Laden, also has made several statements demanding that governments of Muslim countries rebuild social services, discourage usury, and enjoin rich Muslims to offset the poverty of the underclasses. Thus, social, political, and economic programs of Al Qaeda are intertwined, united by a strict adoption of *shari'a* and literal Islam.

One unique Al Qaeda program is in the area of grassroots political activism, admittedly with a terrorist tinge. In an interview in May 1998 bin Laden announced the creation of his "International Islamic Front."³⁴⁶ Bin Laden was quick to point out the interest many leaders of other Islamic groups have shown in joining the Front, which he is likely to say whether this is true or not. This Front shares the same advantage as other many other current militant activities, which tend to operate under the benign covers of

³⁴⁴Pinto, 80.

³⁴⁵"Biography," 29.

³⁴⁶Pinto, 80.

charity or legitimate political intercourse. According to Steven Emerson, who in the 1990's conducted a two-year investigation of the inroads militant Islam has made in the U.S., militant Muslim groups have built extensive political, financial, and even operational infrastructures on U.S. soil. Emerson found that these groups use a legitimate cover to shelter themselves from law enforcement investigations, "often reconstituting themselves here as 'research,' 'charitable' or 'civil rights' institutions."³⁴⁷ From the Muslim world, Egyptian journalist and former diplomat Ahmed Said Nasr agrees with Emerson's findings. Militant groups, according to Nasr, "have carried out a major deception to the American public by masquerading as charities and religious or educational organizations."³⁴⁸

What concerned one expert is bin Laden's insistence that a higher council, a consultative *shura*, had already formed to lead the Front. Maria Do Ceu Pinto argues that the formation of the *shura* "confirms the seriousness of the threat posed by bin Laden's terrorist network. The new front combines the extremist organizations by establishing a *shura* that will coordinate its operational aspects."³⁴⁹ The extent of this "Front" is uncertain, although sources have documented meetings between bin Laden and other extremist leaders throughout the 1990's. However, the Front does represent a grassroots attempt by bin Laden and his network to forge a trans-Muslim campaign to further Islamist causes.

³⁴⁷Steven Emerson, "The Other Fundamentalists," *The New Republic* 212, no. 24 (12 June 1995): 21-22.

³⁴⁸Ahmed Said Nasr, as quoted in Emerson, 22.

³⁴⁹Pinto, 80.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT: FORCES THAT KEEP AL QAEDA TOGETHER

Isolation Breeds Cohesion

First bin Laden's group appears to be a many-headed hydra, then a shapeless amoeba, now a juggernaut—coalescing for a single violent attack only to disperse again. Such is the conventional view of bin Laden's organization—really more of a network—often known as Al Qaeda. Certainly the non-hierarchical cell structure that seems to have played a strong role in some of the recent attacks—the discovery of an alleged bin Laden cell in Nairobi which is said to be behind the U.S. Embassy attack there comes to mind—adds weight to this view.

There is also a pattern of activities indicating bin Laden's followers and several sister organizations, such as Egypt's Islamic *Jihad* and the Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines, tend to "outsource" to each other, trading money, resources, and operatives for short-term needs. The ad hoc nature of these operations, such as the failed December 1999 attempt by allegedly bin Laden-funded Algerian Armed Islamic Group operatives to bring bomb-making material into the U.S., speaks in favor of conventional wisdom as well. The more logical approach, however, is to persist in seeking to understand the nature of the group's cohesiveness, while recognizing that there are elements of a deliberately loose structure built into the organization.

There are several types of glue that appear to bind bin Laden's network together. They vary widely, but one of the most important binders is a product of Al Qaeda's—especially its hardline core's—relative isolation from any larger society than itself, even

the one it professes to defend. Al Qaeda has a dichotomous relationship with the Muslim world. On the one hand, it has avoided the classic Maoist strategy of integration with the populace to gain its sympathy and support. Yet there are indications bin Laden's network is nevertheless becoming more popular among ordinary Muslims.

Al Qaeda has comparatively few social action programs in the sense of HAMAS's and Hezbollah's wide success in community outreach. Their inclusion of weapons of mass destruction in their strategic thinking and the clandestinity of their leader and his chief lieutenants enhance Al Qaeda's isolationary posture in the societies of Afghanistan, of the South Asian and Middle Eastern regions, and of the Muslim community at large. Al Qaeda was founded among a warrior class that was already isolated from society, by men who had joined an armed struggle in a remote rural environment. Its origins were not among a dense and sympathetic urban population, but in the bleak Afghan hills.

Of course, many Muslims throughout the world cherished the cause of the *mujahedeen*. However, this admiration did not translate into conditions for the social integration of the Arab Afghan fighters upon the conclusion of the war. The first signs of societal disdain for these men showed themselves immediately after the withdrawal, when the Afghan people and the less Islamist of the Afghan *mujahedeen* such as Masood rejected the strict Islamic practices of the fighters.³⁵⁰ Without a mission and unwelcome in Afghanistan, the Arab Afghans dispersed, but did not find a great deal of acceptance abroad either. Their home countries were not anxious to find a place for these armed fighters, heroes or not. Some observers have likened this social response to the distaste

³⁵⁰Rashid, 132.

many American civilians felt for their Vietnam veterans.³⁵¹ Others among the foreign *mujahedeen* had criminal or subversive pasts, and stayed away from home rather than face prison sentences, and even executions in some cases.³⁵²

What proved the renaissance of the Arab Afghans was not their eventual acceptance by society, but their return to bin Laden's fold and resumption of paramilitary training at his terrorist camps in Sudan. Militaries, even non-state, exhibit very distinct social behaviors over time, often becoming a society of their own. This dynamic played an important role in bin Laden's fusion of a terrorist network. There is no evidence to indicate that his men spent a lot of time in Sudanese society during these formative years in Al Qaeda's history. Most of the literature focuses on their extensive training inside the camps. Clearly bin Laden's emphasis was not to reintroduce and reintegrate these men into society, but to mold a multi-limbed fighting machine, and one capable of brutal terrorist operations. This stark, even anti-social, environment likely accentuated the isolationist dynamic common to many militaries. Eventually the only society they were likely to be comfortable in or have any loyalty to was their own culture in the camps.

The principal social program Al Qaeda adopted after the Soviet withdrawal was the administering of aid to the Arab Afghans in the early days following the conflict, providing for their welfare and donating funds to bereaved families.³⁵³ This policy dovetailed with bin Laden's personal outlook on society. Before his rejection by the Saudi government in 1991, which Riyadh compounded by declaring him *persona non*

³⁵¹Fandy, 183.

³⁵²Cooley, 121.

³⁵³Rashid, 133.

grata in 1992 and revoking his citizenship two years later, bin Laden put some effort into the settling of some of the fighters in Mecca and Medina. However, after bin Laden's departure to Sudan, administering to the Arab Afghans became an invitation to join the camps, effectively joining bin Laden in his self-imposed exile.³⁵⁴ There was no longer any push to reintegrate the fighters into legitimate society, and the assistance bin Laden offered quickly transitioned from welfare and financial support into a terrorist recruitment campaign. In fact, any of the other examples of Al Qaeda's "social" outreach programs appear driven by circumstance and are entirely geared to satisfy political, rather than humanitarian motives. Bin Laden's financial support to the Sudanese, Yemeni, and Taliban governments³⁵⁵ is one such program, designed to bolster these regimes' abilities to support militant Islamist causes, provide assistance to bin Laden when needed, and to remain solvent as bin Laden's principal state supporters. Even bin Laden's generous campaign begun in 1998 to rebuild the city of Qandahar, Afghanistan—the Taliban's power center—is largely an attempt to restore a military infrastructure necessary for both bin Laden's and the Taliban's operations, and to secure a stronger foothold in that country for the terrorist. Recent reports indicate bin Laden has never ceased to fear that the Taliban will turn him over to the West to stand trial, or at least plan to expel him from Afghanistan.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴Rashid, 133.

³⁵⁵Bodansky, 314.

³⁵⁶Ismail Khan, "Terror Suspect Replaces Security," *Washington Times*, 29 May 2000, 13.

Complementary Psyches: The Leader-Follower Relationship

For the foreign *mujahedeen*, joining bin Laden complemented the evolving ideology of these men. Many of the fighters upon their return had become incensed at the secular practices of their home governments, having been inculcated with a radicalized Muslim attitude during the years of the Afghan War.³⁵⁷ When they found themselves still marginalized by their own societies, they no longer had a stake in the legitimate system, making bin Laden's terrorist camps even more appealing. The days of Muslim warriors fighting in Allah's name, then returning home in triumph to assume places of honor, if they ever existed, were gone.

In the camps, however, the fighters' warrior ways, bred of 10 years of bloody battles and brushes with death against a towering foe, and the glorious history of their victorious *jihad* were accepted and reinforced. Bin Laden thus fulfilled their need for meaning and purpose in lives, resurrecting their pride by cultivating their devotion to a holy cause. Of course, the devotion of the Arab Afghans fulfilled a need of bin Laden's, too.

The above discussion of the leader-follower relationship between bin Laden and his followers very closely resembles James Campbell's discourse on the personality of the mirror-hungry sociopath. In his words, drawing on the work of psychologist and terrorism expert Dr. Jerrold Post, "the mirror-hungry personality strives to make up for a sense of worthlessness," and "hunger[s] for confirming and admiring responses to counteract [a] lack of self-esteem."³⁵⁸ Bin Laden's intense need for loyal followers

³⁵⁷Rashid, 133.

³⁵⁸Campbell, *Weapons*, 18.

seemed to work excessively well with the likely psychological vulnerabilities of the Arab Afghans, as men without a mission or a home that welcomed them. Post writes, "On the verge of psychological collapse, some find comfort and meaning in and become intensely committed to a highly structured religious belief system. One the edge of meaninglessness, to find a faith which restores a sense of meaning and purpose, to become a true believer, can bring immense relief."³⁵⁹

Bin Laden's aggressive Islamism, "us versus them" mentality, rejection of legitimate society, and building of a military culture in the camps all have tremendous potential, then, to provide for the psychological needs of the purposeless, and indeed this dynamic seems to have occurred. The literature on group dynamics reinforces this assessment. Post argues here that group belonging heals psychological distress, and adds that "in their intense commitment, separation from the outside world, and intolerance of internal dissent, terrorist groups resemble religious sects or cults."³⁶⁰ Bin Laden's attempt to foster group cohesion has had the added advantage of his group's construction as a terrorist organization with a religious orientation, which suggests he has exploited the cohering forces supplied by both the terrorist and religious aspects of Al Qaeda.

In elucidating the nature of Al Qaeda's attractiveness to its followers, Post's studies on group dynamics dovetail perfectly with Eric Hoffer's work on holy causes. In *True Believer*, Hoffer closely studies what he calls "the passion for self-renunciation." In his words, "a mass movement, particularly in its active, revivalist phase, appeals not to

³⁵⁹Jerrold Post, psychologist and terrorism expert, interview by James Campbell in Campbell, *Weapons*, 18.

³⁶⁰Jerrold Post, "It's Us Against Them: The Group Dynamics of Political Terrorism," *Terrorism* 10, no. 1 (1987): 24.

those intent on bolstering and advancing a cherished self, but to those who crave to be rid of an unwanted self.”³⁶¹

There is a sense that it is in the nature of groups like Al Qaeda to draw people who have lost or never had a sense of purpose in their lives rather than those who have found other, more legitimate sources of fulfillment. Arguably this sense of purposelessness becomes aggravated for those whom legitimate society has never fully accepted, and indeed even for those whose local economies cannot provide them with reasonable employment.

For Hoffer, attachment to a holy cause is critical to the restoration of a sense of pride, confidence, and purpose in such individuals. From several angles it is possible to perceive the Arab Afghans in particular as having fallen into this dynamic. Many of them already existed on the margins of society prior to the Afghan War, as political prisoners, criminals, or simply as members of a repressed group under the thumb of governments such as Egypt’s secular regime. Arguably the war offered them a strong sense of purpose, especially in its manifestation as a holy cause rather than merely a political insurgency.

Iranian analyst Amir Taheri wrote of the war that “the Afghan resistance movement has not confined itself to a minimum program of securing the nation’s independence and territorial integrity, but openly advocates the creation of an Islamic society.” Therefore, “it is in the name of Allah, and not of nationalism in the Western meaning of the term, that Soviet troops are gunned down in the mountains of

³⁶¹Hoffer, 21.

Afghanistan."³⁶² Taheri's assessment is consistent with the argument that there is a balance of politically-oriented and religiously-inspired motivations for the rank-and-file foreign *mujahedeen* to join the Afghan cause. Of course, several of the *jihads* organizers, such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Pakistan's Zia government, and — clandestinely—the Saudi regime, as a category distinct from the individual *mujahid*, did indeed perceive strong political gains from a multinational resistance effort against the Soviets.

For the rank-and-file, however, the only conceivable political advantages gained by a long, self-imposed exile to the harsh conditions of Afghanistan and personal exposure to the full brunt of Soviet weaponry would have been a new set of militant friends, and access to the training offered by men such as bin Laden and Azam in guerrilla-style tactics. Although many of these fighters would take back with them both an expanded list of contacts and the skills they had honed in the camps and in battle, there is little evidence to suggest these served as the sole primary motivations. The literature persuasively asserts the romantic allure the *jihads* presented to a transnational contingent of angry, and often zealous, Muslims—whether criminals or not.³⁶³ The breadth and elasticity of the holy cause dynamic is centered on its appeal to various incarnations of the disenfranchised. The disenfranchised often consist of those forced to live on the margins of their culture due to their beliefs, a criminal or activist past, socioeconomic status, ethnic or religious affiliation, or some other trait. Just as easily, though, an entire culture can become disenfranchised internationally, such as the Germans of the interwar

³⁶² Amir Taheri quoted in Bodansky, 14.

³⁶³ Bodansky, 8-14 and Cooley, 119.

period and the Kurds of today. Others among the disenfranchised are merely the wayward, such as those who ascertain no purpose to their existence, or whom the system has been unable to absorb. The Arab Afghans and the other foreign *mujahedeen* sprang from several of these sources.

The 'Holy Cause' and the Charismatic Leader

This feature of the Afghan resistance emphasizes the value of Hoffer's contention that "faith in a holy cause is to a considerable extent a substitute for the lost faith in ourselves."³⁶⁴ What may strongly attract the disenfranchised is not the apparently untenable prospect of a successful individual career, but the purgation of an unwanted, unworthy self in the crucible of a sacrificial holy cause. As a result of this transition, the follower believes he has exchanged a self-centered life for a state of selflessness, which provides an immeasurable boost to his flagging self-esteem.³⁶⁵ A recent biography on bin Laden released by a London-based Islamic Center includes a remarkable comment which supports the applicability of this dynamic in the case of the Afghan War. According to the text, many of the Arab *mujahedeen* who came to bin Laden's and Azam's camps to fight in the *jihad* "had come to atone for their sins." These words acknowledge the cathartic effect that these men hoped to find in combat against the Soviets.³⁶⁶

Once the follower adopts the holy cause, the psychological dynamics that brought him to the cause make it difficult for him to leave. In fact, his need to draw on the cause for

³⁶⁴Hoffer, 22.

³⁶⁵Hoffer, 23.

³⁶⁶"Biography," 3.

his self-esteem requires his total commitment. As Hoffer says, "Take away our holy duties and you leave our lives puny and meaningless."³⁶⁷ The requirement of total commitment helps to explain the idea that devotion to such a cause must be uncompromising. Moderate commitment will not effectively purge the unwanted self.

Hoffer writes:

We cannot be sure that we have something worth living for unless we are ready to die for it. This readiness to die is evidence to ourselves and others that what we had to take as a substitute for an irrevocably missed or spoiled first choice is indeed the best there ever was.³⁶⁸

When a charismatic leader has orchestrated or exploited these dynamics, the true believer's unquestioning commitment and zeal is often squarely focused on this personage. Such a leader, usually viewed as infallible and somehow superhuman,³⁶⁹ becomes the embodiment of the self-negating cause. Mamoun Fandy's words suggest such a relationship exists between bin Laden and his core of adherents when he writes, "his 'Arab Afghan' followers gave him their allegiance and pledged to die for his cause."³⁷⁰ One Pakistani youth, in spite of his being crippled in the 1998 U.S. cruise missile strike on bin Laden's Khost complex said of him, "Of course, we know him as the greatest Muslim hero of our time."³⁷¹ Bodansky also describes the fierce loyalty these men, especially the first generation of foreign *mujahedeen*, have for bin Laden.³⁷²

³⁶⁷Hoffer, 23.

³⁶⁸Hoffer, 24.

³⁶⁹Campbell, *Weapons*, 18.

³⁷⁰Fandy, 193.

³⁷¹Bodansky, 405.

³⁷²Bodansky, 15.

The charismatic leader is arguably easier to idolize than a set of beliefs, and at the same time is a living source of affirmation and control. From this source, the follower derives additional strength and confidence to continue his fight for the cause, and also receives the parental control needed to correct his errancy and restore his sense of purpose. The charismatic leader may also exhibit extreme cases of narcissism and paranoia, both tending to be manifestations of low self-esteem.

The extreme narcissist is most afraid of being in a weak position, which would reinforce his inadequacy, and is often seeking to redress an early grievance tied to his parental or some other system of authority. At the same time, the narcissist identifies with the source of his early wounds, and may mirror the perceived brutality of this authority figure by engaging in acts of violence.³⁷³ Arguably the weakness of bin Laden's political and social position shortly after the Soviet withdrawal provided a powerful impetus to invent and pursue a "follow-on" holy cause, and one perhaps even more violent than the Afghan *jihad*.

Group Dynamics and Displacement of Responsibility

Another dynamic of charismatic leadership that deserves mention in this chapter is the facilitation of responsibility transference from follower to leader. Several authors discuss this dynamic as central to the prosecution of violence by the group, allowing followers to commit brutal acts in the firm belief that they are, in fact, not responsible for them. Faith in a charismatic leader is what allows them this luxury of self-perceived absolution.

³⁷³Campbell, *Weapons*, 23-24.

Albert Bandura warns that the most dangerous threats to human life stem not from unrestrained impulses but "deliberate acts of principle." To establish such principles is exactly what the charismatic leader seeks to achieve in a group setting. His followers, believing they are acting on a moral imperative, having been assured by their leader they are in the right, are then able to follow his immoral commands free from self-imposed moral restraints.³⁷⁴

Jessica Stern agrees with Bandura's study of displacement of responsibility, affirming that charismatic leaders are especially capable of convincing followers they are not responsible for their actions, and are merely "following orders."³⁷⁵ Stern also argues that a closed cell structure or the compartmentalization of group members can enhance responsibility transference.³⁷⁶ Stern suggests that, referring to a phenomenon also known as clandestinity, the higher the level of compartmentalization and isolation in a group, the more its members are insulated from reality, and from the consequences of their actions.³⁷⁷ The literature, interestingly, is replete with references both to bin Laden's innate charisma and the diffuse cell structure of his network.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴Albert Bandura, "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement," in *Origins of Terrorism*, ed. Walter Reich (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 163-164.

³⁷⁵Stern, 80-82.

³⁷⁶To establish the link between organizational structure and responsibility transference, Stern draws on Bandura's work on the diffusion of responsibility as a result of division of labor, group decision-making, and collective action.

³⁷⁷Stern, 81. See also Bandura in *Origins of Terrorism*, 176.

³⁷⁸On bin Laden's charismatic appeal see Bodansky 18, 405, Fandy 181, 193, and Raymond Tanter, *Rogue Regimes: Terrorism and Proliferation* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999), 263. On his network's diffuse structure see Bodansky 100, 385-386, 391-392, Pinto, 80, Stern, 78, and Tanter, 263. These citations are representative, not exhaustive.

Eric Hoffer's treatment of leadership corresponds very neatly with Stern and Bandura's view of responsibility transference. For the frustrated, a term Hoffer uses to describe those who are psychologically unfulfilled or in his words "feel that their lives are spoiled or wasted,"³⁷⁹ freedom from responsibility is more desirable than freedom from restraint. Even in the seemingly riotous behavior of the rank-and-file of a violent mass movement, Hoffer sees true discipline, not wanton lack of restraint as the inspiration. By wreaking vengeance on the targets of hatred of a mass movement, these rabble-rousers are exhibiting blind obedience, not individual lawlessness. There is, then, a connection between the Communist rioter and Nazi thug of the 20th century and today's militant Muslim terrorist—all apparent authors of random violence, but in fact giving testimony to the "union of minds" envisioned by Hoffer in any mass movement, a union which requires "not only a perfect accord in the one Faith, but complete submission and obedience of will."³⁸⁰

It becomes imperative for the frustrated to avoid being responsible for failure, a consequence that may tear in half their already battered self-esteem. This fear of failure, Hoffer relates, is commanding enough to induce the frustrated to willingly relinquish their independence, allowing a leader such as bin Laden to direct their lives for them. As for his followers, the author suggests that Al Qaeda members, and especially bin Laden's hardline core of adherents, are in fact morally disengaged, having willingly placed responsibility for their actions on bin Laden, who in turn perceives his own

³⁷⁹Hoffer, 152.

³⁸⁰Hoffer, 108-109.

righteousness, perhaps for himself and certainly for his followers' sake, as validated by the religion of Islam.

From the perspective of Hoffer, then, the "bin Laden phenomenon" clearly offers two of the three ingredients necessary for a successful mass movement—a charismatic leader, and a willing group of frustrated adherents. The author has presented his assessment of the highly interdependent psychological needs of Usama and his group, which suggestively fits Hoffer's leader-follower model. The missing piece of the triangle in Hoffer's dynamic—the holy cause—still needs to be discussed in greater depth.

Jihad as Holy Cause

There is no question that the doctrine of *jihad* in its revivalist and militant incarnation is a textbook example of a holy cause in the context of Hoffer's views. Hoffer's contributions illuminate both the commitment of the foreign *mujahedeen* to the thankless task of aiding a faraway, isolated Muslim insurgency against an overwhelmingly lethal enemy, and the return or adoption of many of these fighters to a terrorist career and to bin Laden's camps. The centrality of Algerian "Arab Afghans" in the excessively bloody and gratuitous terroristic violence of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in the 1990's is just one example of this trend. James Bruce wrote in 1995 that the GIA was "dominated by the 'Afghans.'"³⁸¹

Hoffer's work also speaks loudly to the need of these individuals, including bin Laden, to find a new enemy following the Soviet withdrawal. If indeed during the

³⁸¹James Bruce, "Arab Veterans of the Afghan War," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 4 (April 1995): 175.

Afghan War these men tapped into hatred, which Hoffer calls "the most accessible and comprehensive of all unifying agents,"³⁸² as a means of gaining a sense of purpose and thus securing self-esteem, than the sustainment of hate had to become at least as important as the cause itself. Hoffer writes that "mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil."³⁸³

In responding to the question of whether he thought the Jew should be annihilated, Adolf Hitler said, "No...We should then have to invent him. It is essential to have a tangible enemy, not merely an abstract one."³⁸⁴ The Soviets seem to have agreed with Hitler on this point when, following the conclusion of World War II, they immediately targeted the West and especially the U.S., substituting them for fascists as the all-pervasive enemy. One can also trace the demise of Chiang Kai-shek partially to his inability to erect for the Chinese people a suitable devil to replace Japan after World War II.³⁸⁵ Elements of this desire for a devil appear to explain many examples of the outgrowth of hate-filled nationalism seen in today's transitional states, as exemplified by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and his brand of Russian nationalism.

Bin Laden saw this need after the victory in Afghanistan. Seeking a sense of purpose, he spoke out on the threat to Arabia from the secular Iraqi regime and advocated aid to northern Yemeni Muslims in their conflict against southern Yemeni communists,³⁸⁶ actions both embarrassing to Riyadh and contrary to some of its policies. When King

³⁸²Hoffer, 85.

³⁸³Hoffer, 86.

³⁸⁴Hoffer, 86.

³⁸⁵Hoffer, 86.

³⁸⁶Fandy, 181.

Fahd rejected bin Laden's offer to lead a *mujahedeen* army in the defense of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in favor of the Americans, it was easy for him to suddenly become fond of the Iraqis and Saddam Hussein. Bin Laden learned to paint the Iraqis as the victims of anti-Muslim U.S. aggression because the U.S., along with its official Saudi collaborators, became the ideal devils in the next phase of his Islamist career. As Hoffer explains, the most useful type of devil in building a cohesive movement is one that is "omnipotent and omnipresent."³⁸⁷ In this light, America's leading position in globalization trends, especially seen in the American face of many of today's most sought after goods and technologies, and foreign perceptions of extreme arrogance in today's U.S. foreign policy overtures and its "imposition of American values" clearly make for a perfect devil.

Tapping into the guilt and anger of segments of the Muslim world over its multitude of secular regimes, bin Laden devised a powerful unifying agent for his holy cause by demonizing the U.S. and any of its facilitators who hailed from Muslim-dominated countries. These secular regimes are living representations of the gulf between profession and practice in contemporary Islam. The collusion between Riyadh and the U.S. gave bin Laden an outstanding opportunity to highlight this gulf, gaining strength from the strong feeling of guilt which such a divide tends to produce. Hoffer explains that this kind of guilt breeds hate and rashness,³⁸⁸ perfect ingredients for bin Laden's purposes.

³⁸⁷Hoffer, 87.

³⁸⁸Hoffer, 90.

WMD as Binding Force

While devotion to a holy cause can serve as a powerful catalyst for action, by itself this profession of faith requires still more to inspire the zeal and self-sacrifice required for a sustained mass movement. Hoffer argues that followers must perceive they have access to a source of irresistible power if they are to believe that they can meet the generally utopian goals of their group. Hoffer relates three forms that this source of power might take—a potent doctrine, an infallible leader, or “some new technique.”³⁸⁹ In Islam, Usama bin Laden, and WMD, Al Qaeda may be capitalizing on the combined effects of all three forms.

According to Hoffer, the principal source upon which the Bolsheviks drew to sustain their revolution was the spell of Marxist doctrine. The Nazis, in contrast, relied less on doctrine, placing the bulk of their emphasis on an infallible leader (Hitler) and new techniques (*blitzkrieg* and propaganda).³⁹⁰ In dissecting the “bin Laden phenomenon,” it is an elusive task to find evidence that Al Qaeda aggrandizes one of these three forms of irresistible power at another’s expense. For bin Laden and his followers, all three sources are important traits of a self-delusional belief in the inevitability of victory.

Bin Laden uses extremely modest language about himself in public discourse, and in his constant references to the omnipotence of Allah appears the very soul of self-effacing devotion. His worldview, craving for leadership roles, and relentless campaign to unify militant Muslims, however, demonstrate both his belief in the importance of

³⁸⁹Hoffer, 20.

³⁹⁰Hoffer, 17-18.

what he is doing, and the importance of his status as a militant leader to his self-perception. Of course, the militant movement, and Al Qaeda specifically, derive as many benefits from bin Laden's legend as Usama himself, which raises the value of his role as an infallible leader to the cause of Islamism. Together, these factors indicate the high degree of reliance Al Qaeda places on the power of bin Laden's legend and of the religion of Islam to bestow it with supernatural force. As to the influence of the third source—WMD—on Al Qaeda, and how these weapons fulfill group needs, Gavin Cameron's extraordinary in-depth essay on multi-track proliferation of WMD is a cutting-edge work.

Cameron notes Al Qaeda's willingness and capacity to use WMD. In analyzing Cameron's article, the conclusion is apparent that Al Qaeda is not only very committed to acquiring WMD, but that for the group WMD represents an end, not a means. Cameron makes a point of stressing that it did not matter to the group whether the weapon was nuclear, chemical, or biological—it simply needed to own such a device. The article makes a distinction between terrorist groups that seek WMD for tactical reasons, i.e. achieving political objectives, and Al Qaeda, which sought to fulfill strategic needs.³⁹¹

It is easy, however, to disagree with Cameron. Regarding Al Qaeda's strategic needs, Cameron writes that the group perceives WMD as vital to the successful outcome of its ultimate goals.³⁹² At face value, the statement is accurate. The flaw in this position is that Cameron does not distinguish between professed goals and ultimate goals. Clearly WMD is of critical importance to bin Laden and Al Qaeda, and just as clearly these

³⁹¹Cameron, "Proliferation," 297.

³⁹²Cameron, "Proliferation," 297.

weapons are very unlikely to achieve any of the group's stated goals. Therefore, when addressing Al Qaeda's and bin Laden's ultimate goals, one should consider other motivations, such as their need to survive, to maintain group cohesion, and to assuage their psychological afflictions. The relevance and power of these other, nontraditional motivations, hidden from the public eye and sometimes from the group themselves, are well supported by the collective scholarly efforts of experts such as Jerrold Post, Martha Crenshaw, Irving Janis, Jessica Stern, and James Campbell.

Jerrold Post's contribution to the role of WMD in a terrorist movement stems from his contention that the violence committed by such a group is not instrumental, but in reality is an end in itself. The cause, then, becomes merely a rationale for the group's terrorist acts. This marginalization of the ostensible cause has powerful implications regarding motivations to acquire or use WMD.

The traditional literature on terrorism often regards the escalation of WMD use as unlikely because terrorists will continue to perceive these weapons as harmful to their goals.³⁹³ However, this line of reasoning depends on the terrorists' professed goals being the top item on their true agenda. Both Martha Crenshaw's organizational process approach to terrorism, which highlights the bureaucracy's (and the terrorist group's) need to survive, and Post's psychological approach, which regards group belonging as critical to members' psyches, refute this traditional thinking. Post pointedly illustrates this

³⁹³ Among the scenarios the conventional wisdom envisions is the terrorist group too afraid of massive retaliation by a government to acquire or use WMD. Another scenario is the group whose needs for public sympathy prevent it from *risking the public revulsion that might ensue from its connection to WMD*. See Campbell, *Weapons*, 27, and Muir, 80, for references to conventional thinking on the acquisition or use of WMD. Also refer to Chapter One of this thesis, specifically the author's use in his hypothesis of traditional restraints against WMD use.

dynamic when he writes that "*individuals become terrorists in order to join terrorist groups and commit acts of terrorism*,"³⁹⁴ not primarily to redress social injustices.

If, in fact, the need to commit violence, the need to avoid splintering, or some other objective is more important to the group than its stated goals, WMD and other forms of "ultra-violence" become a much more likely option, because the potential of doing harm to the group's ostensible agenda is of less concern. In this regard, one can reflect on the excessive, and quite superfluous, violence perpetuated by the GIA in Algeria. The counter-productivity of GIA violence clearly shows in the group's lack of public support, even among the population it professes to be championing, and the rise in successful government interdiction of GIA activities.

In interviews with Argentine guerrillas, one researcher found that over time their group completely dropped its stated objectives in favor of pursuing violence for its own sake. In fact, the guerrillas' violence became more extreme as they transitioned further from their professed goals and increased their focus on survival. Hence, when the military dictatorship they were fighting was replaced by constitutional rule, rather than disband the guerrillas continued their "struggle."³⁹⁵ This study finds resonance in the views of James Campbell and Thomas Kissane. Both authors note the more extreme violence that results when a terrorist group substitutes the needs of survival and group cohesion for its original *raison d'etre*.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 35. Italics in the original.

³⁹⁵Stern, 83.

³⁹⁶Campbell, *Weapons*, 25-26. An interesting debate is whether the original goals of a terrorist group are ever at the heart of its formation, or does "the cause" merely provide an excuse *ab initio* for the psychologically afflicted to assuage their inner wounds. The answer is likely a mixture of the two, although a review of the literature indicates that with the progress of time, psychological needs tend to reduce the group's professed goals to a veneer.

Also relevant is the case of the Basque separatist movement in Spain, and its terrorist component—the ETA. While the movement has not secured the complete independence it seeks, one can argue it has achieved significant autonomy, to a degree Post calls “remarkable.” Yet ETA has continued to prosecute and at times it has escalated its terror campaign, often to the dismay of Basque politicians who now see their actions as counter-productive. In fact, the group still demands nothing less than total independence for the Basques—an outlandish and impractical goal given the current situation in Spain. These examples illustrate what Post calls the “threat of success.”³⁹⁷

In this dynamic, the fear of disbanding drives the terrorist group to continually place its ostensible goal out of reach, and thereby necessitate its survival. It must demonstrate enough success in its terror campaign and holy cause rhetoric to attract members and sustain itself, but still avoid a victory that will put the group out of business. A key trait of groups exhibiting this dynamic is an absolutist ideology, one that is often recognized in a group’s associated rhetoric.³⁹⁸

The concept that terrorist groups might deliberately choose unreachable ostensible goals by no means indicates a lack of rational decision-making, but merely that the group

³⁹⁷Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 37-38. Post wrote about ETA’s inability to disband in spite of successes in 1990. Ten years later, the author still found references to the ongoing terror campaign of ETA. In fact, two articles translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) directly refer to ETA stepping up its attacks as late as July 2000. See “Spanish Daily Views Secessionism of Basque Nationalists,” Madrid ABC, 0000 GMT, 17 July 2000. Document ID EUP20000717000188, accessed on Intelink, 17 July 2000. Also see “Spain: Authorities See Recent Violence as Start of New ETA Terror Offensive,” Madrid ABC, 17 July 2000. Document ID EUP20000717000013, accessed on Intelink, 17 July 2000.

³⁹⁸One can argue that bin Laden’s goal of the universal application of *shari’a* (Islamic religious law according to the Koran and *hadiths*) in the Muslim world is such an absolutist objective, as is even the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Arabian peninsula, given current and foreseeable geopolitics and U.S. security needs.

does not need to meet, nor may it really intend to meet, its stated objective.³⁹⁹ Indeed, it suggests that another, hidden motivation is actually driving the group to commit violence. If such a group perceived WMD as an important tool in achieving this hidden objective, this group would be a prime candidate for acquiring or even using such weapons. Jerrold Post clearly agrees with this line of reasoning in his essay "Terrorist Psychology," and in the same work persuasively asserts that within terrorist groups there is significant pressure to commit violence of an ever-riskier nature.

An analysis of Post's provocative article suggests that terrorist groups retain their status and cohesion not through inaction and moderation, but through violence, which explains why the group would value bolder leaders over the advocates of caution. The bold leader's frequent calls to action appear to demonstrate his devotion to the ostensible cause, which is enough to secure the loyalty of followers. Yet these calls to action are better described as sound management policy. "The wise leader," according to Post, "sensing the building tension, will plan an action so that the group's membership can reaffirm their identity and discharge their aggressive energy. Better to have the group attack the outside enemy, no matter how high the risk, than turn on itself—and him."⁴⁰⁰ This need for continuing violence suggests a trend toward "creeping normalcy," in which as the group acclimates itself to a certain level of violence, particularly if the group begins to fracture, heavier risks and worse violence are required to keep the group together and focused.

³⁹⁹The author does not preclude that such terrorists may have an ardent desire for this unreasonable goal.

⁴⁰⁰Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 36.

Post cites several sources to bolster his argument that terrorist groups will consider ever-riskier acts of violence due to their internal dynamics. One source is J.K. Zawodny, who, based on his analysis of WWII underground resistance groups, concludes that the primary determinant of clandestine group decision-making is the internal psychological climate, not the external reality. Zawodny's conclusion reinforces the preeminence of internal needs such as maintaining cohesion and viability over the ostensible cause of a group.⁴⁰¹ Post also cites a 1979 sociological study of U.S. military officers, which demonstrated that groups inherently make riskier decisions than individuals.

Another very important source is Irving Janis, the renowned exponent of "groupthink." One very revealing observation Janis makes is that it is characteristic of groups to have illusions of their own invulnerability, which can be seen as the concept of "strength in numbers" run rampant.⁴⁰² A product of this sense of invulnerability is the incidence of excessive optimism and excessive risk-taking, which leads Post to conclude that a major contribution to the increase in the threat of WMD terrorism is the group dynamics inherent in terrorist groups, which promote rising levels of risk-acceptance.⁴⁰³

Jessica Stern, after reviewing documented evidence of this trend in group dynamics within disparate organizations such as Argentine guerrillas and European left-wing terrorists, strongly agrees with Post. Various researchers Stern cites note that survival becomes the group's preeminent goal, that violence becomes an end rather than a

⁴⁰¹J.K. Zawodny, as quoted by Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 36.

⁴⁰²Irving Janis, as quoted by Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 36.

⁴⁰³Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 36-37.

means to a professed goal, and that risk-taking increases. These findings prompted Stern to write that “terrorists might employ WMD, not to pursue political objectives, but to maintain the integrity of the group or to meet their own psychological needs.”⁴⁰⁴

Similar thinking on the willingness of some terrorist groups to consider WMD prompted James Campbell to write, “though use of WMD by a non-state group might result in their annihilation, the slim chance that such use could help to ensure group survival, on their terms, may be all that is needed to rationalize WMD use.” Campbell cites several historical examples in which groups resorted to extraordinary means as their only perceived hope of an acceptable existence or of redemption, including Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and the Sicarii Zealot campaign against the Roman Empire.⁴⁰⁵

Arguably, one can see in bin Laden’s persistent, almost decade-long search for WMD similar signs that internal needs are responsible for this hunt, and not what would best serve his professed goals. His search for, or acquisition of, WMD may boost his status as a militant leader in the eyes of some Muslims, but this is clearly an internal need and by no means a stated goal of his, especially given the veneer of modesty that runs through his public discourse. Such weapons cannot be perceived as assisting the imposition of rule by *shari’a* throughout the Muslim world—one of his two major professed goals. Any attempt of bin Laden’s to intimidate a Muslim country with the threat or use of WMD would be met with resistance, and quite likely retaliation,⁴⁰⁶ if his

⁴⁰⁴Stern, 82-83.

⁴⁰⁵Campbell, *Weapons*, 27-28. Note: both incidents carry with them more than a little fatalism on the part of the aggressors.

⁴⁰⁶When the author speaks of retaliation here, he is not suggesting bin Laden would fear for his life or his comrades, so much as he would fear the ending of his ability to achieve his professed goals were his group stamped out.

identity were discovered. If he were not discovered, these regimes would blame the appropriate devil to suit their political designs. In neither case would these governments turn to *shari'a* rule in the aftermath.

Only were bin Laden to exterminate every last U.S. soldier on the Arabian with WMD would he have met his second stated goal—the withdrawal of American forces from Arabia. The threat of his use of WMD on these forces already exists, and it hasn't shaken Washington's resolve to continue its extended deployment there. As for completely eradicating these forces with a CW or BW, first of all, it is a near impossibility to use even the most lethal WMD to accomplish such a task. Second, this brief tactical victory could never compensate for the major strategic defeat that would follow. The U.S. can neither afford to lose this foothold in the Arab world, nor can it accept such a loss without heavy, focused retaliation against bin Laden's interests. In the meantime, bin Laden would likely face higher numbers of U.S. troops and reinforcements—better prepared, better equipped, and angry—on the peninsula following this attack. In this light, Al Qaeda's relationship with WMD bears the stamp of the scholarship of authors such as Post, Crenshaw, Stern, and Campbell on the internal dynamics of terrorist organizations. Such views go a long way toward explaining why bin Laden would expend so much effort on acquiring weapons both ill-suited to achieving his stated goals, and likely to bring excessive retaliation down on his head were he to use them.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON GROUP DYNAMICS

Various opinions on bin Laden's current health status regularly make the U.S. and foreign press, and scholars have begun to hotly debate the significance of his demise to Al Qaeda and to militant Islam in general. The reporting on his condition ranges from visions of him storming through the desert on horseback to firsthand accounts of him allegedly wheezing over a cane, simultaneously suffering from kidney failure, cancer, and depression.⁴⁰⁷ Regardless of the amount of time bin Laden has left, Al Qaeda must prepare for one of two alternatives after his death or incapacitation—either to continue as an organization or to dissolve.

Clearly the question of group dynamics is critical to Al Qaeda's future. The need to belong to Al Qaeda under the psychically restorative effects of bin Laden's leadership is unlikely to dissipate for these members in the wake of their leader's death. What is absolutely necessary for his successor, however, is to offer the same psychological rewards, the same sense of allegiance to a self-negating holy cause, in order to maintain the loyalty of the group.

One of the most troubling prospects the new leadership faces is the likelihood of there being no sole successor to receive bin Laden's sceptre. The literature offers pairs of successors,⁴⁰⁸ suggesting that no one top lieutenant is capable of filling bin Laden's shoes. Even Ayman Zawahiri, with an illustrious background in terror, and who in his own right successfully led a large terrorist organization for years, is consistently paired

⁴⁰⁷Loeb, 2.

⁴⁰⁸See the author's section earlier in this chapter on key figures in Al Qaeda.

up with another militant. While Zawahiri would no doubt prove an efficient administrator, if he is incapable of assuaging the psychological afflictions of followers, he would certainly fail as the successor of bin Laden—a man who appears to have demonstrated both strong administrative skills and a commanding aura.

The difficulty is that manacling another militant to Zawahiri as a co-leader is unlikely to produce the magnetism required to maintain group cohesion. If anything, a two-headed hydra in the leader's spot may come to more closely resemble a pair of bureaucrats than the ascetic, pure warrior's image in which bin Laden so successfully draped his own leadership. One of the appeals of monotheism is the freedom from having to keep accounts on more than one deity, from worrying about which issues are the province of which god, and from trying to determine which of them is more powerful than the other. Similarly, the allure of Al Qaeda is the perceived purity of its cave-dwelling leader. No adherent is confused as to whose shoulders are chosen to take the blame for his misdeeds. Nor is the group forced to choose from among multiple interpretations of their holy cause—in its members' eyes bin Laden is the sole articulator. Future co-leadership of Al Qaeda, which would enjoy few of the simplifying advantages bin Laden has exploited, could kill the movement.

An outside possibility which promises to better safeguard the survival of the group is the passing of the sceptre to bin Laden's son Muhammad. Although the 15-year old boy is still young, according to Bodansky's account of him he appears determined to prove himself a worthy scion of his father, acting every part the ascetic warrior-type.⁴⁰⁹ If bin Laden survives to witness the boy's arrival to manhood, he would have the

⁴⁰⁹Bodansky, 309-310.

opportunity to make a very symbolic show of transferring his authority onto Muhammad's shoulders. Of course, the son must be able to successfully convey an aura of infallibility, of piety, and of ascetic militancy similar to the father. Through his physical appearance, demeanor, and personal charisma, he must seem large enough in persona to inherit the bin Laden legend and at the same time inspire the loyalty of his top aides as Usama has done. While his father had the advantage of his experiences in the Afghan *jihad* to cultivate the total loyalty of his lieutenants, even without such a glorious past this task is not beyond Muhammad. A few bold strokes early in his leadership, such as further mobilizing militant elements for *jihad*, or successfully planning or leading one or two terrorist operations, would bode well for Muhammad's tenure and Al Qaeda's future. He might not even need to go this far in order to ensure the group's survival.

An effective Zawahiri-Atef or Zawahiri-Abdallah co-leadership of Al Qaeda, with Muhammad as the group's resident poster boy and symbolic head, could exert a powerful cohering influence on Al Qaeda. The group would benefit from the efficient management of a couple of experienced terrorists, and from the inspiration and psychological balm Muhammad could offer were he to facilely play the part of the "Sword of Allah." This is a less ideal arrangement, no doubt, than the one under Usama's rule, for the loyalty of Al Qaeda's top aides might be in serious jeopardy should the boy remain merely a symbol, and not at some point prove himself deserving of their respect. Zawahiri and his cohort would then face the challenge of having to find another means of securing the devotion of these top aides, or risk the organization's dissolution.

One trait that will surely distinguish a successor from bin Laden is the new leader's freedom of movement. A complication for Zawahiri and a few of the other key

figures in Al Qaeda's is their indictments alongside bin Laden for the U.S. embassy bombings, which might restrict their travels a bit. Still, for many of these contenders, their access to other countries and militant strongholds would dwarf bin Laden's. For a newcomer like Muhammad, there would be no restrictions, at least at first. Such freedom of movement opens greater possibilities of mobilizing support, aiding operations, and building solidarity among terrorist and militant forces.

Of course this tactical advantage should be balanced against the propaganda value of a harsh lifestyle. One can argue bin Laden's exile in Afghanistan has by no means rendered him impotent, and indeed, by allowing him to publicize his ascetic existence in the caves of this bleak country, he has added significantly to his image as a pure, uncorrupted, warrior of Allah. In contrast, spending his time flitting among his family's estates in Saudi Arabia and vacation homes abroad would likely have an opposite effect. Also, this isolated existence has enhanced the effects of clandestinity on bin Laden's core, keeping members pure from the corruption of outside society, cut off from the opportunity of building a successful individual existence, and reliant on bin Laden for their self-esteem and sense of purpose.

It is unlikely that these men will soon transition to a rewarding individual existence in "legitimate" society, even if the group dissolves. For such militants fighting in the name of their holy cause, a life based on self-interest is irremediably tainted.⁴¹⁰ For some of them, their terrorist records make a return to their former society impossible. Indeed, joining Al Qaeda and practicing the violence it espouses may have been for some of these men symbolic of the chasm they sought to build between their new, redeemed

⁴¹⁰The author has adapted this concept from Eric Hoffer and his exposition on the self-negating effects of joining a mass movement. See especially Hoffer, 21.

collective identity and their failed former self. The act of pursuing the path of violence under bin Laden's rule then made the chasm so deep and wide that they effectively barred themselves forever from making a return trip. Creating this distance also has the effect of reinforcing the idea that their former life is hateful to them. Iranian Amir Taheri includes in his book *Holy Terror* eight letters written by militant Muslims indicative of this dynamic.

A common thread all these letters share is a virulent criticism of the infidel's love of his individual life on earth. The polar opposite, and therefore desirable, state for these militants is a craving of death in Allah's name. Inherent in this belief system is a rejection of individual needs and pleasures for the sake of a collective, self-negating holy cause, a cause that often calls on its devotees to carry their self-negation to its fullest expression, that of a martyr's death. Rewards are achieved, not through self-indulgence, but by enduring hardship, by undergoing a purifying process which is necessary, even if it results in death. Hence a few representative titles of these letters are "The Infidels Who Cherish Life," "Death Is Not an End But a Continuation," and "The Emancipation of Man From His Attachment to This World."

In his letter "The Day Divine Light Opened My Eyes," Rada Muhammad N'eman provides a powerful example of the militants' self-negating attitude and virulent hatred of their former existence.

For what [was] I? A mere speck of dust in a whirlwind, shoved this way and that and never knowing why. This was my state as long as my eyes were closed with the leaden weight of dark ignorance...I knew not that my foolish concept of life had been inculcated in me by the vicious propaganda of those enemies of Islam whose corrupt culture of Cross-worship has dominated and polluted our land for too long...[After my eyes were opened] Only then did I realize that throughout the previous twenty years of my life I had only crawled. I had crawled in the filth of humiliation...We were turned into walking piles of filth...And yet, Khomeini showed us the

path...those who had the good fortune to hear his voice first were taken away from the dirt of this world and led to the gate of the garden whose key is martyrdom. I am at the door now.⁴¹¹

The power of this rejection of one's former life leaves little room for a confident return to it. The self-negation that group terrorism produces, the tendency among such groups for violence to become self-perpetuating, and the blood oaths many of bin Laden's core have sworn to die defending him are examples of the many elements that reinforce the need for Al Qaeda members to continue a life of terrorism shrouded in the façade of a holy cause.

Should a post-Usama version of Al Qaeda fail to meet this need, through inaction or the inarticulation of a viable holy cause, rather than change professions members will probably join up with other Islamic-based terrorist groups capable of fulfilling this need. Former Al Qaeda members would bring these other groups not only their unsatisfied needs, but also their experiences as bin Laden's followers. These men are likely to first seek out a charismatic leader they can respect, and then work hard to once again achieve the acceptance and redemption they require. Their "holy" duties will also continue to be a vitally important aspect of their new memberships, thus the veneer of Islam over their new group must be convincing enough, otherwise these men risk feeling worthless again,⁴¹² a state of mind uncomfortably close to their former hated existence. If WMD has as much of a binding influence on Al Qaeda as the author suggests, some of these militants may also feel compelled to seek out groups with similar access to a source of irresistible power.

Indeed, WMD may be the sole means any of bin Laden's successors possess to maintain Al Qaeda's group cohesion. Having harnessed the lethality of these weapons in

⁴¹¹Taheri, 247-249.

⁴¹²As previously quoted, Hoffer relates that to "take away our holy duties" leaves our lives "puny and meaningless." See Hoffer, 23.

a group setting is surely a heady feeling, and this may compensate somewhat for the absence of a leader of bin Laden's stature. The threat that one cannot afford to overlook is that a successor may feel it necessary to proactively test or even employ WMD in order to boost his own leadership, thereby proving once and for all he is no bureaucrat.

REVIEW OF AL QAEDA AND GROUP DYNAMICS: HOW THE RESTRAINTS HOLD UP

1. Is fear of public revulsion restraining Al Qaeda?

This group, similar to bin Laden himself, has a basic disregard for public opinion. Bin Laden has constructed a worldview for this group that deliberately isolates members from society in general. The way of Allah's warriors is in a sense a solitary one, before which all other loyalties must dissolve. Devotion to the cause requires the severing of one's connection to corrupt societal influences, unfaithful family members and friends, and even to one's former pleasures and diversions. The only real comradeship open to these members derives from each other, which enhances the clandestinity of the group. Typically, the effects of clandestinity accentuate a group's loss of connection to reality, to the ethos of cooperation produced by living in general society, and to the social mores that influenced members' past lives.

Group dynamics in general tend not only to exacerbate a sense of separateness and unreality, but also heighten presumptions of the chosen enemy as evil incarnate.⁴¹³ A major tenet of bin Laden's message is that, hand-in-hand with the infidel, society itself is irremediably corrupt because both in the West and in Muslim countries it is the infidel's

⁴¹³Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 36.

ways that are upheld.⁴¹⁴ This characterization of society reinforces the group's disregard for public opinion, for what can this corrupt voice say of importance compared to the sacred word of Allah?

The group dynamics affecting Al Qaeda also make it unlikely that members will rejoin legitimate society. The cleansing process that has allowed members to purge themselves of their pasts tends to require that any bridges that could aid one's return to society be burned. Many of bin Laden's followers had already begun this separation from society during the Afghan War. Bin Laden has facilitated this process of separation and self-purgation in his role as the charismatic leader, helping to bind members more closely to the "cause of Allah." Bin Laden has aided the dynamic whereby members become dependent on the expression of their devotion to this cause for their sense of self-worth.

In violence-espousing groups acts of violence also become self-perpetuating. These acts necessitate a state of obedience, dependency, and often the continuation of violent behavior. The requirement of a continued life of terrorism, to justify the righteousness of members' actions to themselves, and to protect against the sudden loss of their sense of self-worth, completes members' detachment from and disdain for the public.

⁴¹⁴Bin Laden sometimes holds up Taliban-ruled Afghanistan as the sole exception to this all-encompassing condemnation. Conveniently, in terms of a WMD attack on "corrupt society," the Taliban-controlled portion of Afghanistan is where bin Laden currently resides.

2. *Is fear of retaliation restraining Al Qaeda?*

None of the evidence suggests fear of retaliation would restrain the group. As noted, the self-perpetuating nature of terroristic violence tends to keep group members in the terrorism business, often long after their actions have become counterproductive to their professed cause. Eventually, the need to commit acts of terrorism can eclipse the group's stated objectives, and the goal of maintaining group cohesion predominates.

Al Qaeda has strong motivations to survive, since the evidence indicates the self-worth of its members depends on these individuals' ability to participate in terrorism. Rather than worry about their future in terms of physical safety, which might indeed give way to a fear of retaliation, group members tend to feed off the danger of being active terrorists. The visceral presence of the external threat, usually imposed by the target government, actually enhances the cohesiveness and solidarity of the group.

Since it is the act of belonging to the group that infuses members' lives with meaning, arguably the members may fear the group's disbanding more than death. Group dynamics tends to even further enhance acceptance of the risk involved in courting danger, since group processes often bestow illusions of invulnerability.⁴¹⁵ The clarion call of a holy cause completes the embracing of risk, because it demands one sacrifice everything in its name. Bin Laden and other Afghan *jihad* leaders had already exposed at a minimum the fiercely loyal Arab Afghan core of Al Qaeda to these dynamics even before the group's formation. During the war, when Azam and bin Laden were recruiting

⁴¹⁵Post in *Origins of Terrorism*, 36.

Muslim fighters, one of their principal techniques was to urge these men to sacrifice their wealth and their lives for the cause.⁴¹⁶

3. *Is the unpredictability of WMD in the delivery phase restraining Al Qaeda?*

None of the evidence supports the applicability of this restraint to Al Qaeda. Concern over the unpredictability of an event such as a WMD attack indicates the presence of anxiety over the consequences. One of the principal features of group dynamics, especially when a charismatic leader is involved, is the members' displacement of responsibility onto the leader.

Whether individual members are more swayed by bin Laden himself, as in the case of Al Qaeda's Arab Afghan core, or by the cause he articulates, this dynamic is a facile means for members to purge themselves of the immorality of their behavior. For the loyal core that has sworn a blood oath to die defending bin Laden, this responsibility transference is extremely likely. For others who wish to relieve themselves of the task of bearing the burden of their acts, there is still tremendous appeal in this transference. Even among Muslim youth currently training in Pakistan's militant schools, there is a collective inability to blame bin Laden or criticize any of his words or actions.⁴¹⁷ The success of the bin Laden persona in cloaking Usama with the mantle of infallibility increases the lure of responsibility transference.

⁴¹⁶"Biography," 3.

⁴¹⁷Goldberg, 35-36.

4. *Is fear of the dangers of handling WMD restraining Al Qaeda?*

No evidence on the group demonstrates the applicability of this restraint. The increased willingness to take risks that groups naturally display is certainly borne out among terrorist groups, and Al Qaeda is no exception. This group's extensive search for WMD already exhibit a collective inclination to use all available means to continue the fight, regardless of the personal dangers involved. Indeed, if WMD, as several authors suggest, is also acting to increase or salvage Al Qaeda's group cohesion, many of its members would likely be willing to entertain the risks involved in handling WMD. It is also worth considering that the psychic healing which membership in Al Qaeda offers its members may be so compelling that, compared to it, the risks of handling WMD are as nothing. Accordingly, the criteria designed to suggest whether one or more of four generic restraints are causal factors in group's decision to refrain from WMD use do not apply as far as bin Laden's group and his relationship with it indicate.

CHAPTER FIVE

SYNTHESIS

As the term implies, a narcissistic injury is defined as massive, profound, and permanent damage or harm to an individual's self-image or self-esteem.

The role of deeply felt rejection by significant others in precipitating narcissistic injuries has been widely noted. This rejection causes a particularly keen insult to self-image or sense of self-esteem when rejection is accompanied by actual or perceived manipulation by that extremely valued object.

When narcissism is threatened, we are humiliated, *our self-esteem is injured*, and *aggression* appears.... To redress the balance—to restore our self-esteem, assert our value—in the face of this condition, the defensive functions of aggression are invoked.... From our earliest years narcissism and aggression are found to be linked in an indivisible bond.

Although ultimately counterproductive from a political standpoint, nuclear, chemical, or biological terrorism might be extraordinarily satisfying from a psychological perspective.

Above quotations from Richard Pearlstein in *The Mind of the Political Terrorist*. Italics in the original.

This study considered three major categories of available information on bin Laden and the bin Laden phenomenon: bin Laden's personal history and psyche, his public persona, and finally the leader-follower relationship between him and his group. On the basis of this evidence, one can conclude that in the majority of instances the four restraints specified do not apply to bin Laden. Analysis of these restraints produced 12 separate conclusions. The evidence was slightly ambiguous in only two cases. The other 10 conclusions revealed no evidence of known restraints on bin Laden. Reviewed as a whole, the 12 conclusions suggest that none of these restraints can be said to be a serious factor in bin Laden's decisions regarding WMD. Therefore, another unknown restraint appears to be holding back bin Laden. This restraint may be as ephemeral as a question of timing.

Bin Laden has suggestively expressed the intention, and has a reasonable motive, to use WMD against the U.S. This study has also shown that there is considerable evidence that he may already possess some form of WMD, or at least owns the resources and has the access to acquire such an arsenal. Bin Laden's search for a WMD capability is well-documented. There is also good reason to assess that he has many similarities to what some have identified as the modern terrorist, given his breadth and depth of organization and resources, the sophistication, cell structure, and transnational character of his group, his legitimate business activities, and his proclivity for ultra-violence.

From his personal history, it is not difficult to trace the origins of his terroristic behavior. The Afghan war was a birth in blood for bin Laden, whose years as a privileged youth and economics student in Saudi Arabia did little to protect him and his fellow *mujahedeen* from Soviet artillery and chemical gas attacks. The bonds bin Laden formed under the threat of war included many associations with a worldwide assortment of militant Muslims. A natural outgrowth of this experience would be a militant, militarized view of religion, an attitude regarding Islam that bin Laden's rhetoric repeatedly reflects. The crowning moment of bin Laden's early *mujahedeen* days, the triumphant period after the defeat of the Soviets, turned into one of his darkest hours—rejection as savior of Arabia and of the Gulf in favor of the infidel Americans.

An analysis of bin Laden's religious background demonstrated two salient points about Islam—its ability to give strength and meaning to a bipolar worldview, and its pervasiveness in all aspects of life. These features, to some degree a consequence of religion itself, but perhaps more highly cultivated in certain interpretations of Islam, impart a measure of inflexibility and unwillingness to compromise. The outgrowth of

Muslim militancy and its rooting in classical Islam also appear to play important roles in bin Laden's worldview. Mark Juergensmeyer neatly sums up the relationship between violence and religion which is central to bin Laden's worldview, attributing to religion both the ability to domesticate violence and to transcend the state's monopoly on morally sanctioned killing.⁴¹⁸

Muslims of various backgrounds may be susceptible to an acceptance of the goal of universal Islamization, whether they believe it should be achieved by armed struggle, an "inner *jihad*"—or both. Even regarding the Sunni-Shi'ite division, Bozeman writes that "both denominations reinforce the tendency towards Islamic universalism." As stated, if Islamists such as bin Laden, Sunni or Shi'ite, are operating on this basis, then they are forced to recognize the major structural revision of society in general that global Islamization would require.⁴¹⁹ It is this desire for a structural revision of the world that several experts identify as a key precursor to WMD use.⁴²⁰ Bin Laden may not be able to convince more than a core of followers with his aura of infallibility. In cases where his personality does not suffice to gain loyalty and respect, however, the fierce devotion of many Muslim militants to the idea of Islam's ultimate triumph, to which bin Laden has attached his persona, appears to be empowering bin Laden as a compensatory measure for his shortcomings. This two-pronged force, the union of man and idea, will continue

⁴¹⁸Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Logic of Religious Violence," in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, ed. David Rapoport (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 177.

⁴¹⁹Youssef, 109. One recalls to mind Michael Youssef's description of the Islamic purist's insistence on the redemption or destruction of the non-Muslim world.

⁴²⁰Campbell, *Weapons*, 6 and letter. See also Gressang, 13, 16-18 and Stern, 71.

to be a significant force in the Muslim world—and a considerable threat to the entire world.

The study also brought to bear the clash of values between Western and non-Western cultures—a conflict powerfully exacerbated by the forces of globalization. The fact is that globalization wears a distinctly American face, one that many non-Westerners find galling. Thomas Friedman's characterization of bin Laden as a "Super-Empowered Angry Man"⁴²¹ scores a bullseye, describing him as motivated and well-prepared to use the tools of Western technology to strike at the heart of the culture that promulgates it—lashing out at the ubiquitousness and elusiveness of the fruits of Western progress.

Finally, this study addressed relevant aspects of current work on terrorist and WMD terrorist psychological profiling. On the issue of "psychic wounds," potentially the hardest for bin Laden to bear appears to have been his rejection by the Saudi government in favor of the U.S. to liberate Kuwait and defend the peninsula. Details on his earlier life are characteristically sketchy, but the early loss of his father and then the loss of his charismatic and powerful older brother Salim, both of whom died in plane crashes, may have been sharp blows for the young Usama. In fact, the escalation of bin Laden's activities in Afghanistan coincides with Salim's death and the rise of the influence of the Saud royal family over the bin Laden family.

Although most of the family was irked by the interference of the Saud regime in its affairs, the bin Ladens still benefited from close contact with its rulers. Moreover, Usama counted himself a true son of Riyadh, faithful to the Saudi government and King Fahd until the time of his betrayal during the Gulf War. It is possible bin Laden looked

⁴²¹Friedman, 325.

up to the royal family a great deal, both as guardians of Islam's holy sites and protectors of his family fortunes. The subsequent betrayal could, in this context, have amounted to something akin to parental disapproval, particularly given the emotive conception of the state as protective parent that many cultures hold. Certainly the degree of hatred he holds for the U.S. in all cases is indicative of an externalized loathing far out of proportion to the dictates even of a healthy militant interpretation of *jihad*.

Whether or not one can substantiate the claim of psychic wounds, bin Laden's post-Afghan War appeal, the persona he projected as victorious Muslim zealot, and the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Afghan *mujahedeen* who personally owe allegiance to and clearly, in their own way, worship bin Laden certainly are all suggestive of the mirror-hungry sociopath. In the same way that the rise of Islamic terrorism after 1967 is attributed by some to the search for self-worth following a devastating loss,⁴²² the bonding of the Afghan fighters to bin Laden and his cause could have been a function of lack of mission, a realization by many they were unwelcome in their home states, and a general sense of insecurity and uncertainty over their role in the post-Cold War world. Bin Laden clearly may have had similar needs, such as finding a sense of purpose after Afghanistan, but this may have merely combined with a larger need for praise and admiration, which the *mujahedeen* were only too happy to supply. Other bin Laden behaviors suggest the applicability of the mirror-hungry sociopath model. Journalists on their way to interview him endure hazardous mountain climbs, hundreds of guns pointed at them, and extreme security measures leveled at them as well. Another outward

⁴²²Campbell, *Weapons*, 17.

indication of paranoia is bin Laden's insistence that six or seven lookalikes follow him wherever he is.

All the above features, rooted in fantasy and rationalization rather than reality, are susceptible to being enhanced by the condition of clandestinity. Bin Laden's separation from legitimate society, which began shortly before the Gulf War, peaked not only since his implication in the Dhahran and U.S. Embassy bombings, but originally skyrocketed in 1994 when the Saudi regime revoked his citizenship and froze his financial assets. Aside from accentuating the parental betrayal noted above, Riyadh's rejection emphasized his exile status, eventually compelling him to seek refuge in the bleak desert hills of Afghanistan under the Taliban's protection. Here he resumed the nomadic life he had adopted during the Afghan War, adding geographic isolation to the formal political isolation imposed by Saudi Arabia and most of the world community. These conditions do not have to, but arguably can lead to a high degree of inflexibility, lack of compromise, and separation from legitimate society. These traits could be expected to enhance an "us versus them" attitude, and a concomitant lack of remorse for "them." Society becomes a sea of people less and less likely to resemble faces and personalities, and perhaps growing closer in appearance to the perception of society as an inhuman machine that Richard Leeman says terrorists use to further justify violence against that society.⁴²³

⁴²³Leeman, 49.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A final note of caution in addressing the seemingly improbable notion of a WMD attack against the U.S. is warranted. Japanese authorities were so convinced of their own security from a WMD-type attack like the kind Aum envisioned, that when Aum first struck an undefended area with CW, namely the village of Matsumoto in June 1994, the event failed to register. Tokyo made meager attempts to discover the perpetrator, and took no precautions against further attacks—the March 1995 subway attack was a fine case of Japanese sitting duck.

Japan made the dangerous assessment that, in spite of growing evidence about the suspicious activities of Aum, since it never happened before, it would never happen at all. In the intelligence business this is known as habituation—the enemy has always done it this way, so he will continue doing it the same way. To place the same trust in bin Laden that he will kindly stick to conventional attacks, that he feels WMD attacks would be counterproductive, indeed that he would never dream of innovating in spite of his aggressive search for WMD throughout the 1990's and his hatred of and declared war against the U.S.—is inexcusable. The costs of even one WMD attack are too high for any country, least of all the U.S., to pay comfortably.

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