

Al-Qaeda and the Nature of Religious Terrorism

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This article examines the nature of religious terrorism, principally with reference to al-Qaeda. It argues that a distinction must be made between the ultimate aims and the immediate objectives of 'religious' terrorists, and that while the ultimate aims will be religiously formulated, the immediate objectives will often be found to be almost purely political. This distinction is illustrated with reference to such pre-modern religious terrorists as the Assassins and Zealots. Immediate objectives, are for many purposes more important than ultimate aims.

Although the immediate objectives of al-Qaeda on 9/11 cannot be established with certainty, it is highly probably that the intention was to provoke a response from the US that would have a radicalizing impact on al-Qaeda's constituency. Reference to public opinion in the Middle East, especially in Egypt, shows that this is indeed what has happened. Such an impact is a purely political objective, familiar to historians of terrorism from at least the time of Errico Malatesta and the 'propaganda of the deed' in the 1870s. While no direct link between Malatesta and al-Qaeda exists, al-Qaeda was certainly in contact with contemporary theories that Malatesta would have recognized, and seems to have applied them.

Even though its immediate objectives are political rather than religious, al-Qaeda is a distinctively Islamic group. Not only is its chosen constituency a confessional one, but al-Qaeda also uses—and when necessary adapts—well-known Islamic religious concepts to motivate its operatives, ranging from conceptions of duty to conceptions of ascetic devotion. This is demonstrated with reference to the 'Last Night' document of 9/11. The conclusion is that terrorism which can be understood in political terms is susceptible to political remedies.

Al-Qaeda is the most famous recent example of an older phenomenon: 'religious terrorism', sometimes called 'sacred terrorism'.² The question which this article addresses is whether organizations such as al-Qaeda are best understood in terms of the sacred or in terms of the terrorism. The article argues that while the sacred element in al-Qaeda matters, an understanding of the nature and history of terrorism matters more. Al-Qaeda is more easily explained in terms of classic theories of terrorism as developed by nineteenth-century Italian anarchists than in terms of the religion in the name of which it acts, and with which it is generally identified.³

Religion defines several important aspects of al-Qaeda: its ultimate aim (a state or states ruled by its favored form of Islam), the constituency to which it seeks to appeal (the world's Muslims), and the well-known religious concepts which it uses to motivate its operatives (duty, ascetic devotion, and piety). Its immediate

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objectives, however, are almost certainly political rather than religious, just as are those of any other terrorist group.

This article uses David C. Rapoport's 'wave' theory to place al-Qaeda within the contemporary wave of religious terrorism. After making a distinction between the religious and political aspects of Islam, it refers to three instances of premodern religious terrorism to establish the difference between ultimate aims and immediate objectives, arguing that while the ultimate aims of religious terrorists are invariably religious, immediate objectives may well be purely political.

The article then considers four possible explanations of what al-Qaeda was hoping to achieve on 9/11. Some explanations would mean that al-Qaeda's immediate objectives, as well as its ultimate aims, were purely religious. The article argues that the most likely explanation, however, is that al-Qaeda hoped to provoke the US reaction that it did, in fact, provoke, with the radicalizing consequences for its primary constituency that did in fact follow. It may be rash to argue that the actual consequences of any action were those originally intended, but there is some evidence that al-Qaeda did intend these consequences. While it might be objected that the theory of provocation is the heritage of Western radicalism, not of Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda, this article shows how al-Qaeda must have been exposed to such theories.

Once the political objectives of al-Qaeda have been established, the article ends with a discussion of in what ways al-Qaeda is distinctively Islamic.

Religious Terrorism: The Fourth Wave

A useful starting point for the analysis of al-Qaeda is provided by David C. Rapoport,⁴ who groups modern terrorism into four 'waves', a term he prefers to 'cycles' because he sees the waves as slowly building up and then decaying.⁵ Rapoport developed his wave theory before 9/11, but al-Qaeda is clearly part of the fourth wave that he already identified as that of religious terrorism. Since this article will later compare al-Qaeda with groups and individuals from Rapoport's first wave, a brief presentation of his theory is in order.

According to Rapoport, 'a different energy drives each wave' of terrorism. His first wave starts in the 1880s in Russia with Narodnya Volya, and encompasses the 'golden age' of international terrorism in the 1890s,⁶ when anarchist terrorists assassinated many high profile targets, including the French president, the Spanish prime minister, the empress of Austria, the king of Italy, and finally the US president.⁷ It is to this first wave that I will return for the classic theory of terrorism. His second wave is the anti-colonial terrorism of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.⁸ His third wave is the leftist terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s, the wave with which people of my own generation grew up and see as quintessential terrorism. As has been said, his fourth wave is contemporary religious terrorism, including al-Qaeda.

This schema is clearly right in its essentials. Each wave does indeed last about one human generation,⁹ and has its own characteristic technique—the first wave was distinguished by assassination, the second wave by military targeting, and the third wave by hostage-taking. The current, fourth wave is distinguished by 'suicide bombing'.¹⁰ Each wave does indeed start with a political event 'which excite[s] the hopes of potential terrorists and increase[s] the vulnerability of society to their claims',¹¹ though Rapoport's identification of the political events at the start of more recent waves might be disputed.¹²

Rapoport dates the fourth wave from three almost simultaneous events: the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the start of the fifteenth century in the Islamic *hijri* calendar, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—when the violence really started. Of these, I would dismiss the start of the fifteenth *hijri* century, which was important for the armed occupation of the Kaaba in Mecca by a Saudi group about which little is known, but was irrelevant elsewhere. Similarly, while the Iranian Revolution was significant, it was more significant in America than in the Middle East. It was the Iranian Revolution that alerted the television viewers of America to the resurgence of Islam, but the resurgence of Islam in the Arab world is generally agreed to date not from 1979 but from 1967.¹³ It was the shockingly sudden and complete defeat of the Arab armies by Israel in that year that began the shattering of the Arab nationalist dream incarnated in Egypt's President Nasser, a process completed by President Sadat's concessions at Camp David in 1979. Just as European radicals had to turn away from Communism after the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, so Arab radicals had to turn elsewhere after 1967. And they did: it was after 1967 that the re-Islamization of Egyptian society started. The Arabs who went to fight for Islam in Afghanistan were in the middle of a wave, not at the start of it.¹⁴ The fourth wave, then, started not in Iran or Afghanistan, but in Palestine and Israel, in almost the same year that the third wave started in Europe and—to a lesser extent—in America.

Religious Terrorism and Political Events

Before proceeding, it is necessary to confront the oft-repeated but misleading maxim that in Islam politics and religion are inseparable.¹⁵ The conventional wisdom is that 'Islam has always been preeminently dedicated to delivering a moral message aimed at transforming social existence in *this* world'.¹⁶ It is true that Islam has never generally embraced the formal separation of church and state,¹⁷ perhaps because church and state were never in conflict in the way that they were for much of Europe's history.¹⁸ This does not mean, however, that church¹⁹ and state in Islam have never been separate in practice. There have been countless religious groups in Islamic history that have taken no interest whatsoever in politics and countless political groups that have taken no real interest in religion. Certainly, most political groups have in one way or another used religion in their construction of legitimacy and few political groups have ever explicitly denied the authority of religious norms,²⁰ but this does not mean that politics and religion are one. The idea that politics and religion are inseparable in Islam has been promoted by groups that believe that they *should* be inseparable, and has been accepted by some scholars (especially in the past), but that does not mean that they actually *are* inseparable.

Religious and political factors should be distinguished in the analysis of al-Qaeda, then, as in the analysis of other religious terrorist groups. This requires making a further distinction, between ultimate aims and immediate objectives. Ultimate aims are often intangible, and are generally defined by religion or ideology. For Stalin, the establishment of world communism was an ultimate aim. Immediate objectives are generally more concrete. For Stalin, the installation of a people's republic in Poland (for example) was an immediate objective. In Stalin's case, the ultimate aim was ideological, while the immediate objective in Poland was political.

Before returning to al-Qaeda, this article will explore the distinction between ultimate aims and immediate objectives in the case of three groups of religious

terrorists discussed by Rapoport in an article published in 1984: the Kali-worshipping Thugs, the Nizari-Isma'ili 'Assassins', and the Sicarii 'Zealots'.²¹ Rapoport himself did not make a distinction between ultimate aims and immediate objectives in his 1984 article,²² but a comparison between these three groups gives a good basis for making this distinction, and so for distinguishing between the religious and the political in 'religious' terrorism in general.

Of these three groups, the Thugs are the most clearly religious. An offshoot of a wider movement devoted to the Hindu goddess Kali, the Thugs waylaid travelers, strangling them to offer their blood to Kali, believing that in so doing they were transmitting the energies that allowed Kali to keep the universe in balance. Their victims' terror was deliberately prolonged for the benefit of the goddess. Both their immediate objectives and their ultimate aims, then, were entirely other-worldly, and the Thugs thus illustrate one variety of religious terrorism, that in which—in Rapoport's words—'the primary audience is the deity'.²³ Other scholars also refer to this audience in their examinations of religious terrorism. Bruce Hoffman writes that 'whereas secular terrorists attempt to appeal to actual and potential sympathizers, religious terrorists appeal to no other constituency than themselves'.²⁴ For Audrey Cronin, religious terrorists act 'directly or indirectly to please the perceived commands of a deity'.²⁵ This is why, for Hoffman and Cronin, religious terrorism is uniquely destructive and uniquely dangerous.²⁶ In Cronin's words, 'The whims of the deity may be less than obvious to those who are not members of the religion'.²⁷ The Thugs, then, might be the archetype of religious terrorism—except that there is a question whether the Thugs can really be considered terrorists in the first place.²⁸ I would suggest that the Thugs may make more sense as a religious movement practicing human sacrifice than as a terrorist group.

The second group, the Assassins, flourished in what is today Syria during the twelfth century. They assassinated many of their leading opponents, thus both eliminating their most vocal critics and discouraging others from replacing them. The authority that they hoped and failed to establish by these (and other) means was that of their form of Islam,²⁹ which in practice meant their own political authority. In this objective they differ little from the Fatimids or the Abbasids, or indeed from the Soviet Union in Poland. That ultimate aims are religiously defined—or in the case of the Soviet Union ideologically defined—does not mean that immediate objectives are not political. The immediate objectives of the Soviet Union, the Fatimids and the Assassins ultimately differed little in kind from those of most other states.³⁰ Unlike the Soviet Union, however, the Assassins, cannot be understood without reference to religion, since their operatives actively sought martyrdom, martyrdom being highly prized in the Shi'i branch of Islam from which the Assassins derived.

The third group, the Zealots, was also a religious group in the same way that the Assassins were, using assassination as part of a broader strategy and welcoming martyrdom. Religion was probably more important to the Zealots than to the Assassins, however. Although the immediate objectives of the Zealots were generally political, on at least one occasion these objectives became as religious as their ultimate aims. During one of their final actions—defending besieged Jerusalem against the Roman army—they deliberately burnt their own food supplies, evidently hoping by this means to hasten divine intervention and the millennium. At this point, the Zealots' immediate objective was not political or military but other-worldly,³¹ just like the Thugs' immediate objectives.

Of these three groups, the Thugs emerge as purely religious (but perhaps not as terrorists), the Zealots emerge as religious and political, and the Assassins emerge as political and religious. Although the immediate motivation of *individual* Assassins seeking martyrdom was religious, and although the ultimate aims of the Assassins as a whole were religiously defined, their immediate objectives always remained firmly this-worldly and political. Of the three groups, the closest to al-Qaeda is the Assassins, which may be no coincidence given that both al-Qaeda and the Assassins are Islamic. Like the Assassins, al-Qaeda's ultimate aim is religiously defined—the establishment of one or more states ruled by al-Qaeda's favored form of Islam. Like the Assassins, it will now be argued, al-Qaeda's immediate objectives are political rather than religious, even though its operatives welcome martyrdom, just as those of the Assassins did. A major difference is as Rapoport indicates that the Assassins read the Islamic tradition to mean that only one sort of weapon, the dagger, could be used against Muslims.

Al-Qaeda's Objectives

This article will not examine al-Qaeda's ultimate aims in detail,³² but will focus on immediate objectives. In examining these, it will move from theory to speculation, a move made necessary by the lack of reliable information on al-Qaeda.³³ This lack of information partly reflects the priorities and organization of academia,³⁴ but also reflects the nature of al-Qaeda as an activist rather than a theoretical group. None of its members has written much, and none have made any significant contributions to theory. Al-Qaeda has been a consumer of theory, not a producer.

A question which many people—scholars and members of the public—asked themselves after 9/11 is this: what did al-Qaeda think it was going to achieve by destroying the World Trade Center and other targets with such appalling loss of life? Four plausible theories have emerged to answer this question, none of which can at present be properly tested, though there is growing evidence to support the conclusion this article comes to. In considering these theories, it must be recognized that the intentions of the operatives involved may have been different from those of the operation's planners and financiers.

All four explanations assume that America is the enemy of Islam. This is not a view that I myself hold, but it is a view that has been firmly established in the Middle East for decades. Quite how America came to be seen as the enemy of Islam is a question that falls beyond the scope of this article, and involves factors that have nothing to do with America, but it also involves Palestine and Israel. For complex reasons, Israel—or rather, 'the Jews'—are seen as the number one enemy of the Muslims, and America is seen as the number one supporter of the Jews. Ayman al-Zawahiri (b. 1951), the Egyptian physician who may have been an even more important figure in al-Qaeda than Bin Laden himself, wrote in 1998 that 'America is now controlled by the Jews completely, as are its news, its elections, its economics, and its politics'.³⁵ Many would read this as crude anti-Semitic propaganda, and deny that it was possible that a well-traveled physician from a family of physicians, university professors, and lawyers could possibly believe it. Similar views, however, are held—entirely seriously—by most Egyptians of al-Zawahiri's background.³⁶ That their analysis would not get much of a grade in a political science class does not mean that it does not have to be taken very seriously.

The first plausible explanation of what the perpetrators of 9/11 thought they were going to achieve is that they all believed that they were fighting the final battle

of the last days, at the end of time. This would mean that al-Qaeda is a millenarian movement. There is no direct evidence to support this conclusion, but neither is there any direct evidence to disprove it. Many Arab Muslims of all classes are today convinced that they are living in the last days, since the weakness of Islam and the corruption and decay they see all around them can easily be explained in eschatological terms.³⁷ If al-Qaeda (or any of its sections) is a millenarian movement, it is more similar to the Zealots than the Assassins, and more religious than religiopolitical.

The second plausible explanation is that the perpetrators of 9/11 were simply not thinking very hard. Many of 9/11's operatives and some of the planners doubtless supposed they were 'fighting for Islam', without asking any more questions, rather as soldiers in World War II might have fought for France or Germany against an enemy about whom they knew little, asking no difficult questions about political systems or international relations. 9/11's perpetrators may have stumbled into an attack on America without much thought for its consequences, through an escalating series of actions, starting with domestic political targets in Egypt, moving through US military targets in Saudi Arabia to US civilian targets abroad, and finally coming to US civilian targets in America.³⁸ Though not impossible, this explanation is unlikely. The logic of events can sometimes overtake strategy, but it seems unlikely that none of the people involved in planning 9/11 could think strategically. If the planners of 9/11 believed themselves to be in the last days, of course, the time for strategy would have been past, but outside al-Qaeda even the least strategically skilled Arabs realized that an attack on America was not a wise move. I will never forget watching the twin towers burn on an Arabized version of CNN—the CNN transmission had been hastily patched onto Egyptian state television with extempore commentary in Arabic—among a crowd that had gathered around a television in a car showroom in Cairo. The prevalent mood seemed to be one of amazement tinged with fear. 'What would happen now?' was the question on every Cairene's lips over the following weeks. Some form of retaliation was expected, and feared. It was not expected that 9/11 would in any way benefit the Muslim community.

The third plausible explanation accepts strategic thinking on the part of 9/11's planners, but supposes a misreading of America. Having observed that a suicide bomb in Beirut could send the US army home from Lebanon,³⁹ that the destruction of two helicopters in Mogadishu could send the US army home from Somalia, and that a series of such attacks could send the Israeli army home from South Lebanon, it might have been possible to suppose that a series of events like 9/11 would send US military, diplomatic, and commercial and cultural interests and influence home from the whole of the Middle East, rather as the March 2004 subway bombs in Madrid caused Spain to falter in its commitment to US policy in Iraq.

The fourth and most likely plausible explanation is provocation, the 'propaganda of the deed'. Many readers of this journal will already be familiar with the logic of provocation, but for the sake of those who are not, this article will review this logic, returning to the first wave of international terrorism, to the Italian anarchists of the nineteenth century. In summary, the fourth explanation would be that al-Qaeda was guided by a strategy that has been well known in certain circles for over a century, and that the primary objective of the 'deed' of 9/11 was not its direct impact on America but rather its indirect propaganda impact on al-Qaeda's potential supporters. A secondary objective would have been to 'provoke' America into actions that would alienate al-Qaeda's potential supporters from America, thus turning more of them into actual supporters.

Provocation and Irregular Warfare

Unlike al-Qaeda, late nineteenth-century Italian anarchists were theorists as well as activists. To understand their contributions to theory, we need to take one further step backwards, and think not in terms of terrorism but of 'irregular warfare', sometimes termed 'small war' or 'war in the shadows',⁴⁰ the sort of conflict that the Afghan *mujahidin* waged against the Soviet Union. My intention here is not to engage in a sterile debate about 'freedom fighters' versus 'terrorists', but to place terrorism within its larger theoretical context.

There is nothing new about irregular warfare, which one historian found the Hittite King Mursilis complaining about in the fifteenth century BC.⁴¹ It had been recognized since the time of Sextus Julius Frontinus (d. 104), author of the earliest known Western work on irregular warfare,⁴² that the support of the local population was necessary for the success of any guerrilla campaign, and that relations between guerrillas and local civilians therefore mattered enormously.⁴³ In this sense, politics has always been more important to irregular warfare than it has been to regular warfare.

What is comparatively recent is the combination of irregular warfare with political theory. During the Italian nationalist struggle, the Risorgimento (1831–61), the political aspect of irregular warfare became not a means to an end, but an end in itself. For Giuseppe Mazzini, guerrillas were 'the precursors of the nation, which they would rouse to insurrection'.⁴⁴ This understanding was taken up by anarchists, among them Errico Malatesta (1853–1932), who is credited with inventing the description of terrorist actions as the *propaganda dei fatti*, 'propaganda of the deed'⁴⁵ (though Kropotkin is also credited with the phrase).

How the 'propaganda of the deed'—the act of provocation—is meant to work can be understood through one of Malatesta's first attempts at using it, in 1877. Malatesta had been involved in planning an unsuccessful socialist insurrection in 1874, but he and others were arrested by the police before the insurrection had even started. Three years later, he and a colleague, Andrea Costa (1851–1911), tried again. The two men—both in their mid-twenties—arrived in a remote mountain village, Letino (some sixty miles north of Naples), and announced the deposition of King Victor Emmanuel II by the Socialist Revolution. Presenting themselves as the agents of the Revolution, they required the local mayor to hand over to them the funds under his control, which he did, against a receipt they signed in the name of the Revolution. Malatesta and Costa distributed the funds they had taken to the inhabitants of the village, and destroyed the local tax records. They then spread the revolution to the neighboring village, Gallo, again distributing sequestered funds and destroying tax records. At this point, troops arrived.⁴⁶

In theory, the villagers should have been convinced by the 'deed' they had previously witnessed that the government's authority was vulnerable, and should have been further alienated by the troops' repression. They should have resisted the troops, so starting an insurrection that would perhaps have ended with the overthrow of the monarchy. In practice, none of this happened. Though the village priest had made what Malatesta called 'a nice speech' welcoming them to Letino after they had taken over there in the name of the Revolution, no general resistance to the troops was forthcoming. Nineteen peasants followed Malatesta and Costa into the mountains, but after a few days the small band was betrayed and arrested, cold and hungry, their powder wet and their weapons useless.⁴⁷

Even though this operation ended in failure, the principle behind it was accepted. The consequence for the anarchists of this and similar disappointments was not the abandonment of the idea of the propaganda of the deed, but the abandonment of the idea of *rural* insurrection. Especially during the 1880s and 1890s, deeds designed to demonstrate the vulnerability of authority were carried out in urban and higher-profile contexts. The targets of these deeds were sometimes individuals, and sometimes groups of individuals associated with the structures of power. The anarchist movement of which Malatesta was a part was responsible for an unprecedented wave of global terrorism between 1884 and 1905. In 1884, the German Kaiser Wilhelm survived a bomb attack against him, but in 1886 eight policemen were killed and 76 injured by a bomb thrown by an anarchist during a demonstration in Haymarket Square, Chicago.⁴⁸ In 1892, a Spanish anarchist threw a bomb into Barcelona's smart Liceo theater, killing twenty bourgeois men and women and injuring many more.⁴⁹ In 1894, French President Sadi Carnot was killed by one Santo Caseiro, in response to the execution of a colleague of Caseiro's who had thrown a bomb into the chamber of the French parliament two years before. In 1897, Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas was killed, and in 1898 the Empress Elizabeth of Austria. In 1900, King Umberto I of Italy was shot dead by an Italian anarchist from New Jersey, Gaetano Bresci. Finally, in 1901, US President William McKinley was shot dead in Buffalo, New York by Leon Czolgosz, the anarchist son of Polish immigrants in Detroit.⁵⁰ Then, in 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was killed in Sarajevo—not by an anarchist but by a Serb nationalist who subscribed to theories similar to those of Malatesta. This deed famously started not an insurrection but a world war.

World War I put a temporary end to the propaganda of the deed. The anarchists had concluded that the technique was ineffective. In the words of a contemporary anarchist, 'it led to the public associating violence with the ideals of anarchism. People had difficulty relating to someone they viewed as a murderous fanatic'.⁵¹ The anarchist movement was anyhow eclipsed by the success of its rivals, the Bolsheviks, who had a low opinion of the usefulness of insurrection in general,⁵² and reserved the use of terror for internal purposes.

Irregular warfare on Malatesta's model, however, did not disappear. The propaganda of the deed—provocation—is found in all subsequent waves of terrorism, as is the emphasis on political gain rather than on destroying enemy forces. The Irish Easter Rising of 1916 became the classic demonstration of the fact that military defeat may still bring political triumph, i.e., that the resulting propaganda is more important than the deed itself. The actions of the British in defeating the rising created so many republicans that the British loss of Ireland was thereafter almost a foregone conclusion.⁵³

The Easter Rising, of course, was not a 'terrorist' enterprise: the Irish fought in uniform and obeyed the rules of war. In this they were close to Malatesta's relatively innocuous activities in the Italian mountains. Twentieth-century terrorists in contrast developed their own version of the doctrine of 'shock and awe'. Human societies evolve 'conventions or boundaries . . . to regulate coercion'.⁵⁴ Principally, these norms govern the use of violence by states or their agents, but they also govern the use of violence by non-state agents. Everyone has a rough idea of how much violence is appropriate for a regular grocery-store hold-up. It became characteristic of later terrorists, however, that the violence used would exceed all conventions and transgress all boundaries.⁵⁵

After 9/11

The consequences of 9/11 have so far been much as Malatesta would have wished.⁵⁶ For Malatesta, and so perhaps also for al-Qaeda, 'deeds' such as 9/11 have two audiences, neither of them the deity: the group attacked, and the potential opponents of the group attacked. Of these two audiences, the potential opponents of the group attacked is the most important one, since it contains the potential supporters of the insurrection, and it is to them that the propaganda is primarily addressed. The potential supporters of al-Qaeda's desired insurrection (against regimes such as the Saudi one and against the United States)⁵⁷ are, of course, the world's Muslims, or at least the world's Arabs. To the world's Arabs, 9/11 certainly demonstrated the vulnerability of the United States in the most dramatic fashion. By its responses in Afghanistan and—especially—in Iraq, the United States then alienated al-Qaeda's target audience from the United States, just as Malatesta would have hoped. There were many justifications for those responses, but their impact on the Arab world has been reminiscent of the impact of British policy on Ireland in the aftermath of the Easter Rising. To the average Arab, the toppling of the Taliban in Afghanistan appeared as an act of revenge on the people of Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq appeared as an unprovoked attack on a long-suffering people whose only crime was to be Arab and Muslim.⁵⁸

I am not suggesting that these views were either accurate or justified.⁵⁹ What matters is not what was actually happening, but what most Arabs *perceived* to be happening. It was as a result of these perceptions that during 2003 volunteers crossed the Syrian border to help their Iraqi 'cousins'. In Egypt, a country where Saddam had had almost no supporters at the time of his invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi resistance to the invasion of 2003 became a general source of pride—could Arab soldiers, after so many defeats and humiliations, really be holding their own against America?

It turned out that Arab soldiers had not been holding their own. A shocked silence fell over Cairo on 7–8 April 2003, as the television showed pictures of Saddam's statue being pulled down in Baghdad. Egyptians immediately began to search for excuses to justify those Iraqis' behavior. They were not *real* Iraqis, or if they were, they were hungry. Perhaps Saddam had been betrayed by senior commanders who had made a secret deal with the Americans. Despite all the excuses, however, there was a sad awareness that the insurrection had failed, and that—though no-one quite put it in these terms—the Iraqi people had failed, had failed Saddam. This was an astonishing reversal of logic, given that the general line in Egypt during the run-up to the invasion had been that while no-one cared for Saddam, everyone sympathized with the long-suffering Iraqi people.

In general, it is a dangerous fallacy to suppose that people intend the consequences of their actions. This is not always the case: clearly, it was never the intention of the US administration to foment near insurrection in the Middle East. That the consequences of 9/11 came close to fomenting insurrection, then, does not mean that this has to have been the intention of al-Qaeda, and there is no direct evidence that it was the intention of Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, the former *mujahid* identified by the *9/11 Commission Report* as the key planner of 9/11.⁶⁰ It is, however, the most plausible explanation of al-Qaeda's objective, especially since it is much the explanation given by Bin Laden himself for an earlier operation,

the 1995 bombings in Riyadh. Asked about the consequences of this attack by a sympathetic interviewer in 1996, Bin Laden said:

Most important among them [the consequences] is people's awareness of the significance of the American occupation of the land of the two sacred mosques [Saudi Arabia], and that the decrees of the regime are a reflection of the wishes of the American occupiers. People became aware that their main problems were caused by the American occupiers and their puppets in the Saudi regime, both from the religious point of view and from other points of view in their daily lives. People's sympathies . . . led people to support the General Rectification Movement, which is led by scholars and Callers to Islam [i.e. the religious opposition to the Saudi regime].⁶¹

Bin Laden's somewhat hopeful description of the impact of those bombings can certainly be taken as evidence of what he had hoped would be their impact.

From Europe to Peshawar

One objection to this explanation of the intentions of al-Qaeda on 9/11 is that al-Qaeda is an Islamic movement that has nothing to do with European radicalism, an objection that will now be addressed.

The Arab world is often supposed to have been untouched by globalization. This is true economically for many Arab countries during the current round of globalization, but was not true during the nineteenth century, when the Middle East was drawn into the expanding world system. It was not true that the Arab world was untouched by globalization intellectually during the nineteenth century, nor is it true today. Since the 1840s, all the major global political movements have been echoed in the Arab world—from constitutionalism and nationalism through socialism, communism and fascism—though often with a delay of one or two decades, and sometimes in distinctive forms. One difficulty in the Middle East has always been how to define the 'national' community. A territorial definition similar to that adopted in France and America was tried, and ultimately became established in Turkey. Elsewhere it failed. A linguistic-ethnic definition similar to that adopted in Italy and Germany underlies the pan-Arab nationalism that was defeated in 1967. A third possible definition of the community, never tried in Europe,⁶² is a religious or confessional definition. In these terms, it might be argued that today's radical Islamism is no more than a further attempt at adapting nineteenth-century nationalism to Middle Eastern conditions—nationalism with a confessional definition of community.

Unlike the Assassins and other premodern instances of religious terror, al-Qaeda is not a product of the premodern world but of today's interconnected world. Many of its operatives had personal experience of the wider world;⁶³ Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, for example, was a graduate of the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.⁶⁴ Al-Qaeda itself came into being in Peshawar during the Afghan war against the Soviet army. Peshawar was then a city overflowing with radicals, opportunists, soldiers, and intelligence operatives. I have no direct evidence of what the Arabic-speakers among them were reading and discussing, but certain influences must have been present. For the future

leaders and operatives of al-Qaeda, Saudi Wahhabism and the theories of the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb must have been of greatest importance, and certainly defined their ultimate aim, which was and is religiously defined (so-called 'Sharia' states).⁶⁵ Neither Wahhabism nor Qutb have much to say about ways of achieving this aim, however, beyond recommending *hijra* [withdrawal] to a place from which Muslims can return to restore—by force if necessary—a pure Islamic order. The model is the *hijra* of the Prophet Muhammad to Medina, in advance of the return of the Muslims in triumph to Mecca. Afghanistan itself must have seemed to many to be a new Medina. For more detailed objectives and strategy, however, one has to look to other sources.

During the Afghan war, the *mujahidin* were assisted by members of the intelligence agencies and militaries of both Pakistan and America, who were necessarily familiar with the theories of irregular warfare—including later developments since Malatesta—as this was the technique in which they were training the *mujahidin*. Other routes for the transmission of theories of irregular warfare to al-Qaeda in Peshawar pass through Palestine and Egypt. Bin Laden first worked in Peshawar with Abdullah Azzam (1941–89), a former PLO activist,⁶⁶ as did Khalid Shaykh Muhammad.⁶⁷ Azzam was not a major intellectual, but was more of an intellectual than Bin Laden,⁶⁸ and senior to Khalid Shaykh Muhammad. It is not clear in what faction of the PLO Azzam had belonged, but he can be assumed to have been familiar with the theories then current in PLO circles.⁶⁹

After Afghanistan, Bin Laden worked with Ayman al-Zawahiri, again not a major intellectual, but more of an intellectual than Bin Laden.⁷⁰ Al-Zawahiri had an established interest in fomenting insurrection, which had been the objective of the first Islamist group to which he had belonged. In the late 1970s, this group had planned a small-scale military coup in Cairo, which was expected to be followed by popular insurrection.⁷¹ Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, in turn, worked with the group that planned the first attempt on the World Trade Center in 1993,⁷² a group that received training from a former instructor at Fort Bragg, Ali Muhammad (subsequently a leading member of the team that planned al-Qaeda's 1998 Nairobi operation).⁷³ Ali Muhammad and men like him must have been familiar with theories of irregular warfare. Any number of networks similar to these might have connected Khalid Shaykh Muhammad and Bin Laden to European radicalism and so to theories derived ultimately from Malatesta.

The Islamic Nature of Al-Qaeda

That al-Qaeda's objectives were almost certainly political rather than religious and owe more to European radicalism than to Islam does not mean that Islam is of no importance in explaining al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is clearly marked by Islam, and not only in its ultimate aims. Al-Qaeda's potential constituency is the world's Muslims, and the means it uses to mobilize support in this constituency are derived from Islam.

Many political movements have to create their constituency. One of the major tasks of a nationalist or leftist movement is to encourage national or class consciousness (as the case may be), since it is only when a movement's chosen constituency recognizes that it exists that a movement can begin attracting support and recruits from it. An Islamic movement can skip this stage, since its chosen constituency—Muslims—is already very conscious of its existence; it only needs to be made into a *political* constituency.

Secondly, a nationalist or leftist movement has to teach its constituency new concepts and vocabulary, whether ‘national character’ or ‘class war’. An Islamic movement has an easier task, since it can use concepts that are already very well known,⁷⁴ adapting them where necessary to its own purposes. Every Muslim knows of the Prophet Muhammad’s *hijra* from Mecca to Medina, and his return in strength through *jihad*. To replace Mecca with ‘corrupt Jewish-Crusader puppet Arab regimes’ and Medina with Afghanistan is easier than explaining social justice to the semiliterate.

When it comes to mobilizing support from within its constituency, mainstream Islamic concepts of duty, ascetic devotion, and piety may be used to political ends. Every Muslim knows that there are two sorts of duty, the individual and the communal. Every individual has the duty of praying, while every community has the duty of keeping alive the scholarly skills required for Quranic exegesis. It is widely agreed, if not universally known, that when the community fails in its duty, that duty passes to every capable individual. If I am a Muslim computer scientist, and there is almost no-one left in the community equipped to do Quranic exegesis, I am personally duty-bound to shift from computer science to Quranic exegesis. In 1998, Bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and others argued that since the community was failing in its duty of *jihad* against the Zionists and the Americans, *jihad* had become a personal duty of all capable Muslims.⁷⁵ A nationalist may argue that a patriot should fight for independence, and a leftist may argue that a proletarian should fight for class justice, but both have a harder task in formulating that argument. Of Muslims worldwide, 95 per cent were and are unaware of Bin Laden’s argument, and 95 per cent of those who are aware of it are probably unconvinced by it. With a potential constituency of one billion, however, even 5 per cent of 5 per cent gives a pool of 2,500,000—say one million young men as potential recruits.

Suicide bombing also makes use of an established Islamic concept, that of martyrdom. Many religions honor martyrs, but none have as well established a concept of martyrdom as Islam does. Every Sunni Muslim knows that a martyr who falls fighting for Islam is automatically rewarded with a place in heaven. Every Shi’i Muslim knows the stories of the great Shi’i martyrs, retold and even reenacted annually at Ashura. There is a subtle difference, since the great Shi’i martyrs were usually murdered while the classic Sunni martyrs fell in battle, and since the emphasis on participation in martyrdom is greatest in Shi’i Islam. Shi’i Islam first developed the systematic application of martyrdom to modern conflict, adding to its own emphasis on participation in martyrdom a quasi-Sunni definition. After the Iranian Revolution, the Revolutionary Guards encouraged mass martyrdom during the Iran-Iraq war. Self-sacrificing heroism is to some degree encouraged in all armies, but it proved far easier to send thousands of young Iranian soldiers to die for Islam than to die for Iran or for the revolution. This new application of the concept of martyrdom seems to have passed from Iranian Shi’is to Lebanese Shi’is during the Lebanese Civil War. Iranian Revolutionary Guards went to Lebanon to train the Hezbollah militia, and it was the Hezbollah militia that carried out the first suicide bombing attacks in the Arab world.⁷⁶

These attacks were spectacularly successful. When American and French troops entered the Lebanon on peacekeeping missions, Hezbollah wanted them to leave so that it could finish off its enemies. And leave they did: one single suicide bombing operation got rid of the French, and another single such operation got rid of the Americans. These spectacular successes encouraged the adoption of the same

technique by Sunni groups in the Lebanon, then next door in Palestine, and finally across the Sunni world. The Sunni groups in question quickly adopted the emphasis on martyrdom that had previously been found mostly in Shi'i Islam, adding this to the pre-existing Sunni definition.

The subtlest use of mainstream Islamic concepts by al-Qaeda is visible in the hand-written document of which copies were found in the luggage of Muhammad Atta and in the wreckage of flight UA 93 in Pennsylvania after 9/11, sometimes called the 'Last Night' document. This is a startling document, mixing the devotional and ascetic with the technical and operational, but with an emphasis on the former. I have never been a soldier, and I have no idea what it takes to approach an enemy machine-gun nest with a grenade in one's hand. It must be even harder to walk down an ordinary shopping street and pull the detonation cord on an explosive waistcoat. To fly an airplane full of people into a building must be even more difficult—an act any human being might be expected instinctively to shy away from. How, then, to prepare oneself mentally for such an act, how to keep on target until the last seconds? By using the established spiritual and mental tools of Islam, tested and improved over millennia.

Islam has an ascetic tradition, commonly identified with Sufism. Mainstream Islam has fasting, which is itself an ascetic exercise. Sufis sometimes fast on alternate days (a lot harder than fasting every day), stay awake all night, live in voluntary destitution, or—in rare cases—stick knives into themselves. All these are also acts that the human mind shies away from. Mastering the ego—as Sufis would put it—sufficiently to perform the easier ascetic acts prepares one to attempt the more difficult, and also opens one to God: the space that the ego vacates can be filled with divine grace. The soul can be strengthened in its struggle with the ego not only by prior experience of spiritual combat, but by prayers and ritual. There is nothing sinister about this, all of which has been in the mainstream of Sufi spirituality for millennia, and has produced countless saints. These concepts and techniques, however, were put to most sinister use on 9/11.

In the 'Last Night' document, the operatives of 9/11 were instructed to concentrate on their intentions, to shave, and to make the ablutions required for a state of ritual purity before leaving for the airport. This is approximately the ritual preparation for a major act of worship such as the pilgrimage. Having thus so-to-speak crossed the threshold into ritual space and time, the operatives were then instructed to make supplications at various points, and 'always be remembering God' [*dhikr*], a standard technique of the Sufis. Much emphasis was put on *sabr* [steadfastness or patience], a major Islamic virtue. Even toward the end, purity of intention was required: 'Do not seek revenge for yourself. Strike for God's sake', admonishes the document, following this admonition with an exemplary tale involving Ali ibn Abi Talib.⁷⁷ In short, the whole 9/11 operation was ritualized to the greatest extent possible, and the operatives did not shy away from their task. They kept on target until the last moment.

This application of mainstream Islamic concepts is, to many, shocking. Juan Cole correctly noted with perplexity the Sufi nature of the 'Last Night' document, wondering at it given the historical animosity between Sufism and the Salafi and Wahhabi interpretations of Islam that al-Qaeda follows.⁷⁸ To my mind, the sudden Salafi adoption of Sufi methods was as utilitarian as the Sunni adoption of the Shi'i emphasis on martyrdom. Muslim observers reported, almost with shudders, the way in which the document is inspirational as one reads it: the formula used have

their impact on any even slightly pious Muslim, despite their context.⁷⁹ To find oneself inspired by a text that has been a means of mass murder cannot be a pleasant experience.

Conclusions

Al-Qaeda's ultimate aims are defined religiously. Al-Qaeda is also a distinctively Islamic—or rather, a distinctively religious—movement in that it addresses and recruits from a ready-made, self-conscious constituency, and does not need to create one. Al-Qaeda is also distinctively religious in that its potential constituency is vast, as is that of any major world religion. Finally, al-Qaeda is distinctively religious in that it makes use of well-established, mainstream religious concepts.

Despite these religious elements, however, al-Qaeda's immediate objectives are as much political as are those of any other terrorist group. It follows that its activities are neither irrational nor incomprehensible. This is good news for those working against terrorism, since it is necessary to understand one's enemy, and it is hard to understand the incomprehensible. If religious terrorism has political objectives (and roots) just like any other variety of terrorism, it is probably as susceptible to political solutions as is any other variety of terrorism.

Just as religious terrorism turns out to have important political elements, 'secular' terrorism also has important religious elements. Many nationalists have spoken of their cause as 'sacred', and it is not hard to conceive of a leftist speaking of the 'sacred cause of the oppressed masses'. A Russian terrorist of the first wave wrote of terrorism as 'uniting the two sublimities of human nature, the martyr and the hero'.⁸⁰

Many of the most alarming characteristics of religious terrorism identified by counter-terrorism experts are in fact characteristic of terrorism and radical politics as a whole, not just of religious terrorism. Religious terrorists, according to Cronin, 'feel engaged in a Manichaean struggle of good against evil'.⁸¹ This may also be true of many non-religious terrorists. Similarly, though religious terrorists 'seek to eliminate broadly defined categories of enemies',⁸² 'an open-ended set of human targets',⁸³ so did the nineteenth-century anarchist who threw a bomb into a smart theater in Barcelona, and so did the Nazi and Soviet regimes in the middle of the twentieth century.

Hoffman suggests that 'whereas secular terrorists regard violence as a way to instigate a flaw in a system that is basically good, religious terrorists see themselves . . . as outsiders seeking fundamental changes in the existing order'.⁸⁴ The distinction being made here is not so much one between secularism and religion as one between reformism and revolutionary radicalism, at least as the distinction was understood by the nineteenth-century Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. In the words of Octavio Paz, the reformer 'respects the structure of the system, and never descends to the roots . . . the revolutionary is always radical, by which I mean that he does not yearn to correct abuses, but [to change] the uses themselves. [The criticisms of reformers] leave social or cultural structures intact, and aim only to limit or perfect this or that procedure'.⁸⁵ All those who use the propaganda of the deed, surely, are radicals rather than reformers. Similarly, it is not only religious terrorists who 'consider themselves to be unconstrained by secular values or laws',⁸⁶ and are 'undeterred by political, moral or practical constraints'.⁸⁷ For Malatesta as well as al-Qaeda, the illegitimacy of the values and laws of the society to be overturned was the central point of the whole enterprise. Neither Malatesta nor

Bin Laden were prepared to accept many constraints. The problem is not with religion, I would suggest, but with radicalism.

Audrey Cronin concludes her article on 'Globalization and International Terrorism' in *International Security* with the following observation: 'The strongest response that the United States can muster to a serious threat has to include political, economic, and military capabilities—in that order; yet the U.S. government consistently structures its policies and devotes its resources in the reverse sequence'.⁸⁸ Cronin's 'consistently' may be unduly harsh,⁸⁹ and it made a lot of sense to take military action in Afghanistan.⁹⁰ Military action, however, is not enough, as was recognized in the *9/11 Commission Report*.⁹¹ As the Easter Rising in Ireland showed, the military defeat of an insurgent group may, under some circumstances, contribute directly to its political success. Mao Zedong emphasized that the most important element in the success of any insurgency is remembering the political objective—that the local population must be mobilized as supporters, rather than alienated. Even if mobilizing support is not possible, alienation must be avoided at all costs. In a textbook insurgency, whoever alienates the local population most will lose.

Insurgents, too, can alienate a population, however, as the Anarchists ultimately did. For every one person who could give even the most basic explanation of what the anarchist political philosophy actually was, thousands can summon up mental pictures of a man in a black cloak carrying a round bomb. This is what started to happen to al-Qaeda in May 2003, when five suicide attacks in Casablanca killed thirty one bystanders and injured more than one hundred others. Demonstrations in Casablanca and Rabat attracted over 100,000 protestors. These welcomed representatives of Morocco's Jewish community, and rejected the participation of Morocco's Islamist groups.⁹² In Rabat, according to one report, Islamists were pelted with tomatoes by protestors.⁹³ Malatesta would not have approved.⁹⁴

Notes

1. This article is based on a paper, 'Al-Qaeda, Islam and Italian Anarchism', originally delivered to the Eastern International Region annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 30 April–1 May 2004.
2. See for example Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) pp.90–5, and Hoffman, 'Old Madness, New Methods: Revival of Religious Terrorism Begs for Broader U.S. Policy', *Rand Review* 22, no. 2 (Winter 1998/99) p.12. See also Magnus Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', *Columbia International Affairs Online* working paper (1996), available <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/ram01/>. I refer to 'al-Qaeda' rather than to Qa'idat al-jihad, as it should now properly be known, because the distinction is immaterial for the purposes of this article, and because a failure to use the established term would appear excessively pedantic.
3. This is a point made explicitly by John Gray, *Al-Qaeda and What It Means To Be Modern* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003) p.2. It is also implicit in David C. Rapoport's analysis, discussed below.
4. David C. Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism', in Audrey Cronin and James Ludes (eds), *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004) pp.46–73. Where no other source is given, my version of Rapoport's analysis derives from his 'Generations and Waves: The Keys to Understanding Rebel Terror Movements', paper delivered at a seminar on global affairs held at the Burkle Center for International Studies, UCLA, 7 Nov. 2003. An earlier version of this paper was published in *Current History*, Dec. 2001, pp.419–25.

5. His waves are in the middle of the ocean, not crashing onto a beach. 'Cycle' was used in Rapoport's 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions', *American Political Science Review* 78 (1984) p.672, and 'wave' adopted for 'Generations and Waves'.
6. Rapoport refers to the 'Golden Age of Assassination' in 'Generations and Waves'.
7. Details are given below. Although not usually included in this list, the Shah of Persia might also be added.
8. The earliest instance of this wave, however, was in Ireland after the First World War.
9. Rapoport in fact says about forty years, recognizing that some waves may be shorter.
10. This is a misleading term, since the technique has almost nothing to do with suicide in its central meaning of the hopeless surrender of life to defeat. Again, however, the use of any other term would appear irritatingly pedantic.
11. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling' p.672.
12. For the third wave, Rapoport points to Vietnam. I would prefer the 'events' of 1968 in Paris and Czechoslovakia. Vietnam was more significant in America than in Europe, and third-wave groups were more active in Europe than America. The third wave gathered force very quickly, and the crucial years were clearly 1968–69. Both were during the Vietnam era, but 1968 was important in European history for two other reasons: the student uprisings in France, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Before 1968, angry young West European intellectuals often turned to Soviet Communism, and although Soviet Communism sponsored second wave terrorism outside Europe, it rarely sponsored terrorism in Western Europe. The Soviet Union was thus in a sense protecting Western Europe from its own dissidents. After 1968, dissident Europeans turned away from Soviet Communism to other ways of rejecting authority. This probably has more to do with third wave terrorism than Vietnam did. Certainly, as David C. Rapoport points out, third-wave terrorists refer to Vietnam and not to Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia explains reorientation away from Soviet models, including Marxism-Leninism; Vietnam provided an alternative justification to Marxism-Leninism for condemning the Western status quo.
13. Of course, the Muslim Brotherhood engaged in what is often seen as religious terrorism in Egypt in the 1940s. This might however be reclassified as second-wave, anticolonial activity.
14. One objection to my selection of 1967 as the key political event for the start of the fourth wave is that this wave did not really become visible until the 1980s. This objection might be answered by pointing to the delay of forty years, to which Rapoport admits, between the political event at the start of the second (anti-colonial) wave—President Wilson's fourteen points—and that wave's crest. Nationalism existed before the second wave became visible; the resurgence of Islam, similarly, existed before 1979.
15. Found, for example, in Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion'.
16. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling' p.664.
17. Pre-Khomeini Shi'ism, with its instance on the necessary illegitimacy of any government pending the return of the Imam Mahdi, might be considered an exception to this.
18. This argument is advanced in L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) pp.43–51.
19. There is, of course, no real 'church' in Islam, but there are established bodies of authoritative texts, and (until very recently) a defined body of religious experts associated with them. 'Church' can thus be used as shorthand for 'textual and institutional structures of religious authority'. See Mark Sedgwick, 'Is There a Church in Islam?' *ISIM Newsletter*, no. 13 (Dec. 2003) pp.40–1.
20. Those political groups that did explicitly deny the authority of religious norms were radical leftists of the early twentieth century, and suffered for this to the extent that even Moscow-aligned Communist parties in the Arab world subsequently steered clear mentioning religion.
21. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling'.

22. Rapoport recognizes, however, that all waves involve nationalism and ethnicity, and so is close to making this distinction. He also emphasizes that religious terrorism is not necessarily indiscriminate.
23. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling' p.660.
24. Hoffman, 'Old Madness' p.15.
25. Audrey Kurth Cronin, 'Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism', *International Security* 273 (Winter 2002/03) p.41.
26. Hoffman, 'Old Madness' p.12, and Cronin, 'Behind the Curve' p.30.
27. Cronin, 'Behind the Curve' p.41.
28. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling' p.660. Rapoport does not suggest an answer to this question.
29. An offshoot of the 'severer' Shi'ism of the Fatimids, itself an offshoot of the mainstream 'twelver' Shi'ism familiar in contemporary Iran and Iraq, which is itself seen by Sunnis (though not by the Shi'a themselves) as an offshoot of mainstream, Sunni Islam.
30. Some scholars argued that Soviet objectives during the Cold War were different in kind from American ones, notably Henry Kissinger in passing in *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957). This difference was more evident to participants such as Kissinger than to later historians. To respond, as I do, that both Soviet and American objectives were equally political does not need to imply any moral equivalence between the two sides.
31. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling' p.672.
32. As has been said, these are the establishment of one or more states ruled by its own favored version of Islam, in which al-Qaeda differs little from the Assassins. Like many similar groups, al-Qaeda has not been explicit about the precise nature of its vision of utopia. This is partly because revolutionary groups commonly worry more about the means to power than about the details of what they might do once in power, and partly because a religiously defined utopia can be designed only with great difficulty. It is also because Muslims see Islam as a single, unchanging and final truth (unlike scholars from outside, who insist on identifying historical development, continuity and change, and multiple perspectives). The nature of the perfect Islamic state is thus in theory well-known and beyond debate. Again, it is outsiders who insist on multiple possibilities.
33. The organizational nature of al-Qaeda is not widely understood, but there is growing recognition (implicit in the *9/11 Commission Report*) that it is closer to a network than a monolithic organization under strong central command. For an excellent description, see Benjamin Orbach, 'Usama bin Laden and al-Qa'ida: Origins and Doctrines', *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 54 (Dec. 2001) pp.58–61. Another excellent work (that unfortunately could not be consulted before this article went to press) is Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
34. Al-Qaeda was formed in Peshawar and Afghanistan, areas on which scholars have done little work. There are hundreds of journalistic accounts of al-Qaeda's emergence, of which the best is probably Ahmed Rashid's *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords* (London: Pan, 2001), but only one scholar got anywhere near them—Larry Goodson, author of *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001). Middle East scholars who do not specialize in such matters have also generally kept away from security issues and terrorism.
35. Al-Zawahiri, in *Al-Mujahidun* (1998), quoted in Lawrence Wright, 'The Man Behind Bin Laden: How an Egyptian Doctor became a Master of Terror', *New Yorker* 16 Sept. 2002.
36. This conclusion is based on countless informal discussions over several years with many Muslims in Egypt and other Arab countries.
37. These views are not often spoken aloud, and are even more rarely put in writing, but careful if unscientific research confirms their currency, though it cannot indicate the extent of their spread. Such views are found in the history of all three monotheistic

- religions—unsurprisingly, since they share much the same eschatology—but are probably more frequent and widespread in Islam than in Christianity or Judaism.
38. This sequence starts with al-Zawahiri's jihad group, which probably killed the speaker of the Egyptian parliament in 1990, and used a motorcycle suicide bomb against the Egyptian minister of the interior in 1993. In 1995, it used a motorized suicide bomb against the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad. In the same year it was probably al-Qaeda that bombed a Saudi military communications facility containing US soldiers in Riyadh, and in 1998 al-Qaeda carried out the well-planned simultaneous bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, causing massive casualties.
 39. There were of course other attacks, but the Marine barracks bombing was the decisive event.
 40. This is the title of Robert B. Asprey's massive work on the subject, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History* (New York: William Morrow, 1994).
 41. Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla: A Historical and Critical Study* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976) p.3.
 42. His *Strategemata* was read with appreciation by European military theorists during the eighteenth century. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p.101.
 43. This was also emphasized, for example, by Johann von Ewald in his *Abhandlung von dem Dienst der Leichten Truppen* (Schleswig, 1796). Laqueur, *Guerrilla* p.106.
 44. Laqueur, *Guerrilla* p.140.
 45. Different people were thinking along much the same lines. An alternative candidate as originator of the phrase is Johannes Most, certainly the inventor of the letter-bomb. Most was a German anarchist who moved to the United States, where he published *The Science of Revolutionary Warfare: A Handbook of Instruction Regarding the Use of Nitroglycerine, Dynamite, Gun-Cotton, Fulminating Mercury, Bombs, Arsons, Poisons, etc.* (New York, 1885.) Laqueur, *Guerrilla* p.147. Most's book is still in print (and editions may be purchased from specialized websites in the United States).
 46. Hippolyte Havel, *Errico Malatesta: The Biography of an Anarchist. A Condensed Sketch of Malatesta, from the Book Written by Max Nettlau* (New York: Jewish Anarchist Federation, 1924). Text available online at *Anarchy Archives: An Online Research Center on the History and Theory of Anarchism*, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/malatesta/nettlau/nettlauonmalatesta.html (Accessed 16 July 2003).
 47. Havel, *Errico Malatesta*.
 48. John Simkin, 'Anarchism', online at *Spartacus Schoolnet*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAanarchist.htm> (Accessed 19 July 2003).
 49. Gerald Brenan, 'El terrorismo en la España del siglo XIX', (2002), online at *Historia del Anarquismo*, <http://ateneovirtual.alasbarricadas.org/historia/index.php?page=El+terrorismo> (Accessed 17 July 2003).
 50. Simkin, 'Anarchism;' 'Propaganda by Deed', *Workers Solidarity* 55 (Oct. 1998); and similar reference sources.
 51. 'Propaganda by Deed', *Workers Solidarity* 55 (Oct. 1998).
 52. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, pp.144, 173–5.
 53. Laqueur, *Guerrilla* pp.179–81. There were, of course, other factors.
 54. David C. Rapoport, 'Messianic Sanctions for Terror', *Comparative Politics* 20 (1988) p.196. Rapoport does not use the phrase 'shock and awe'.
 55. Rapoport, 'Messianic Sanctions for Terror' p.196.
 56. He would have approved of its tactical success, at least. I have no idea what Malatesta's actual views on the Arabs and Islam were, though there were various links in the nineteenth century between European anarchists and early Arab and Islamic nationalists. Islam was widely seen in such circles as a progressive—because anti-imperialist—force. Some time around 1878, Malatesta was in Egypt, but Havel (in *Errico Malatesta*) admits ignorance of what he did there. He probably concentrated on the Italian and Greek communities, which seem to have been those most receptive to political radicalism.

57. There is some disagreement as to whether the United States is a direct target of al-Qaeda or an indirect one, with most opinion tending toward the second view—that the United States is incidental to the real struggle, which is against the established regimes in the Middle East. See, for example, Gray, *Al-Qaeda* p.75, and Fawaz A. Gerges, 'Eavesdropping on Osama bin Laden', *Columbia International Affairs Online* October 2001, http://www.ciaonet.org/cbr/cbr00/video/cbr_v/cbr_v_2b.html. See also Feher, 'Robert Fisk's Newspapers', though Feher perhaps puts his argument too strongly. In one sense, it hardly matters; in the political analysis of people such as Bin Laden, the Zionists, Israel, Accessed April 2004. America and regimes 'friendly' to America are all equally 'oppressors of the Muslims'.
58. While public opinion in areas such as Europe generally made a clear distinction between Afghanistan and Iraq, Arab public opinion on the whole did not. These comments and similar comments below are based on discussions with various Arabs in Egypt during the period in question, and on the Arab media and Egyptian mosque sermons (*khutbas*). The majority Arab view included the conviction that 9/11 was not the responsibility of Arabs anyhow. There were several hypotheses regarding alternative actors; what matters is not how plausible these were, but how widely they were accepted. A straw poll of university students in Cairo on 11 September 2002 suggested that less than ten per cent were inclined to accept that Arabs had been behind the events of the previous year.
59. To some extent, these are valid questions, but they fall outside the scope of this article.
60. Indeed, Khalid Shaykh Muhammad told his interrogators that the World Trade Center was chosen as a target as a way of attacking the US economy. *9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004) p.153. Such a motivation would fit with the 'second plausible explanation' considered above, that the perpetrators of 9/11 were 'simply not thinking very hard.' It hardly seems likely, however, that the name 'world trade center' could be taken quite so literally. Of course, 9/11 did indeed have an adverse impact on the U.S. economy, but Khalid Shaykh Muhammad would have to have been an unusually smart market analyst to have anticipated its actual impact on the Dow Jones index.
61. 'The New Powder Keg in the Middle East: Mujahid Usamah Bin Ladin Talks Exclusively to 'Nida'ul Islam''. *Nida'ul Islam* 15 (Oct.-Nov. 1996), <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/LADIN.htm>. (Accessed 17 Sept. 2001). I have edited *Nida'ul Islam's* translation to remove stylistic peculiarities. The quotation may be from Bin Laden as claimed, or may perhaps have been invented by *Nida'ul Islam*; even in that case, it still establishes familiarity with Malatesta-type theories among some of Bin Laden's followers.
62. Except, perhaps, by Herzl and his followers—but that is a complex argument.
63. Sageman even suggests that certain experiences in the West are among of the key factors in explaining their participation in al-Qaeda. Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.
64. *9/11 Commission Report* p.146.
65. In this context, 'Sharia' has almost lost its original meaning of canon law and instead denotes a form of political ideology.
66. Jonathan Fighel, 'Sheikh Abdullah Azzam: Bin Laden's Spiritual Mentor' (27 Sept. 2001) online at the Institute for Counter-Terrorism, Herzliya, <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=388>. Accessed April 2004. Azzam ran the Office of Services (Maktab al-khidamat), a name ironically reminiscent of the prototype of the CIA (the Office of Strategic Services), the focus of Arab assistance to the Afghan insurgency. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords* (London: Pan, 2001) pp.131–32.
67. *9/11 Commission Report* p.146.
68. Those who knew Bin Laden as a young man did not regard him as particularly clever. Anonymous informants, Cairo, 2002.

69. See, for example, Soeid, 'Taking Stock: An Interview with George Habash', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 281 (Autumn 1998) p.90. It is unlikely, however, that Malatesta-type ideas actually reached al-Qaeda or Khalid Shaykh Muhammad through Habbash and Azzam, since Habash's own explanation of the PFLP's terrorism concentrates on generating publicity rather than on fomenting insurrection. Soeid, 'Taking Stock' p.93.
70. A friend from student days describes passionate discussions with al-Zawahiri about the nature of Arab, Muslim, and Egyptian identity. The friend in question was then a leading member of the Muslim Brothers, but has since passed through Communism to the academic study of psychology. Interview with anonymous informant, Cairo, April 2004.
71. Wright, 'The Man Behind Bin Laden'.
72. *9/11 Commission Report* p.147.
73. *9/11 Commission Report* p.68.
74. Rapoport makes a similar point in 'Fear and Trembling,' p.673.
75. Usamah Bin Ladin and others, World Islamic Front Statement, 23 Feb. 1998, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm> (Accessed 17 Sept. 2001).
76. Martin Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996) pp.231–43 and 539–56, <http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/Calculus.htm> and <http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/Sacrifice.htm> (Accessed 4 April 2004).
77. 'Notes Found After the Hijackings', *New York Times* 29 Oct. 2001 p.B3. Comparison with photocopies of the Arabic text posted by the FBI confirm the accuracy of the *Times's* translation.
78. Juan Cole, 'Al-Qaeda's Doomsday Document and Psychological Manipulation', paper presented at a conference on 'Genocide and Terrorism: Probing the Mind of the Perpetrator', Yale Center of Genocide Studies, New Haven, 9 April 2003, <http://www.juancole.com/essays/qaeda.htm> (Accessed 19 Jan. 2004).
79. Various informants, Cairo, Sept. 2001.
80. Stepniak, in *Underground Russia*, quoted in Rapoport, 'Generations and Waves'.
81. Cronin, 'Behind the Curve' p.41.
82. Hoffman, 'Old Madness' p.15.
83. Cronin, 'Behind the Curve', p.41.
84. Hoffman, 'Old Madness' p.15. See also Cronin, 'Behind the Curve' p.41, for a similar view.
85. Octavio Paz, 'El pachuco y otros extremos', in *El laberinto de la soledad* (Mexico, DF: Cuadernos Americanos, 1950) p.21.
86. Cronin, 'Behind the Curve', p.41.
87. Hoffman, 'Old Madness' p.15.
88. Cronin, 'Behind the Curve' p.56.
89. During the Cold War, for example, the United States made relatively less use of military means than did the USSR, and was much more imaginative in the use of alternative means.
90. It is generally agreed that the factors contributing to the success of any guerrilla campaign include a base, money, and outside support. Given this, military and diplomatic action aimed at denying al-Qaeda bases, money and outside support makes complete sense. It is also, of course, the sort of action that a powerful sovereign state can take most easily. The logic of military action in Iraq is a different question.
91. *9/11 Commission Report* pp.364 and 375–77.
92. Nicolas Marmie, 'Hundreds of Thousands March against Terror after Deadly Suicide Bombings', AP despatch from Morocco, 25 May 2003.
93. 'Moroccans Turn Out Against Terrorism', Reuters despatch from Casablanca, 25 May 2003.
94. It is not clear to what extent, if any, al-Qaeda has alienated potential supporters in other parts of the Muslim world. Unfortunately for US policymakers, Morocco may be something of an exception.