

Winning the Unwinnable War

America's Self-Crippled Response to Islamic Totalitarianism

Edited by
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INTRODUCTION



An Unwinnable War?

Elan Journo

“I don’t think you can win it. . . . I don’t have any . . . definite end [for the war]”

—President George W. Bush¹

The warriors came in search of an elusive Taliban leader. Operating in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan, the team of Navy SEALs was on difficult terrain in an area rife with Islamist fighters. The four men set off after their quarry. But sometime around noon that day, the men were boxed into an impossible situation. Three Afghan men, along with about one hundred goats, happened upon the team’s position. What should the SEALs do?

Their mission potentially compromised, they interrogated the Afghan herders. But they got nothing. Nothing they could count on. “How could we know,” recalls one of the SEALs, “if they were affiliated with a Taliban militia group or sworn by some tribal blood pact to inform the Taliban leaders of anything suspicious-looking they found in the mountains?” It was impossible to know for sure. This was war, and the “strictly correct military decision would still be to kill them without further discussion, because we could not know their intentions.” Working behind enemy lines, the team was sent there “by our senior commanders. We have a right to do everything we can to save our own lives. The military decision is obvious. To turn them loose would be wrong.”

But the men of SEAL Team 10 knew one more thing. They knew that doing the right thing for their mission—and their own lives—could very well mean spending the rest of their days behind bars at Leavenworth. The men

were subject to military rules of engagement that placed a mandate on all warriors to avoid civilian casualties at all costs. They were expected to bend over backward to protect Afghans, even if that meant forfeiting an opportunity to kill Islamist fighters and their commanders, and even if that meant imperiling their own lives.

The SEALs were in a bind. Should they do what Washington and the military establishment deemed moral—release the herders and assume a higher risk of death—or protect themselves and carry out their mission—but suffer for it back home? The men—Lt. Michael Murphy; Sonar Technician 2nd Class Matthew Axelson; Gunner’s Mate 2nd Class Danny Dietz; and Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Marcus Luttrell—took a vote.

They let the herders go.

Later that afternoon, a contingent of about 100–140 Taliban fighters swarmed upon the team. The four Americans were hugely outnumbered. The battle was fierce. Dietz fought on after taking five bullets, but succumbed to a sixth, in the head. Murphy and Axelson were killed not long after. When the air support that the SEALs had called for finally arrived, all sixteen members of the rescuing team were killed by the Islamists. Luttrell was the lone survivor, and only just.²

The scene of carnage on that mountainside in Afghanistan captures something essential about American policy. What made the deadly ambush all the more tragic is that in reaching their decision, those brave SEALs complied with the policies handed down to them from higher-ups in the military and endorsed by the nation’s commander-in-chief. Their decision to place the moral injunction to selflessness ahead of their mission and their very lives encapsulates the defining theme of Washington’s policy response to 9/11.

Across all fronts U.S. soldiers are made to fight under the same, if not even more stringent, battlefield rules. Prior to the start of the Afghanistan War and the Iraq War, for instance, the military’s legal advisors combed through the Pentagon’s list of potential targets, and expansive “no-strike” lists were drawn up.³ Included on the no-strike lists were cultural sites, electrical plants, broadcast facilities—a host of legitimate strategic targets ruled untouchable, for fear of affronting or harming civilians. To tighten the ropes binding the hands of the military, some artillery batteries “were programmed with a list of sites that could not be fired on without a manual override,” which would require an OK from the top brass.⁴ From top to bottom, the Bush administration consciously put the moral imperative of shielding civilians and bringing them elections above the goal of eliminating real threats to our security.

This book shows how our own policy ideas led to 9/11 and then crippled our response in the Middle East, and makes the case for an unsettling

conclusion: By subordinating military victory to perverse, allegedly moral constraints, Washington's policy has undermined our national security. Only by radically rethinking our foreign policy in the Middle East can we achieve victory over the enemy that attacked us on 9/11.

But from the outset the Bush administration had insisted that we're in a new kind of war—an unwinnable war. To scale back people's expectations, it told us not to wait for a defeated enemy to surrender, in the way that Japan did aboard the USS *Missouri* in 1945.

This much is true: the “war on terror” is essentially different from our actions in World War II. Back then, we brought Japan to its knees within four years of Pearl Harbor—yet eight years after 9/11, against a far weaker enemy, we find ourselves enmeshed in two unresolved conflicts (Iraq and Afghanistan) while further mass-casualty attacks and new flashpoints (such as Pakistan) loom. Why?

It is not for lack of military strength and prowess; in that regard America is the most powerful nation on earth. It is not for a lack of troops, or planning, or any sort of bungled execution. Our soldiers have amply demonstrated their skill and courage—*when* they were allowed to fight. But such occasions were deliberately few; for as a matter of policy Washington sent them, like the SEALs in Afghanistan, into combat but prohibited them from fighting to win. This underscores how Bush's war indeed differs from the triumphant, all-out military campaign against Japan—and how it is far from a new kind of war. It is in fact an eerie replay of Vietnam.

The philosopher Ayn Rand observed, at the time, that in the Vietnam War “American forces were not permitted to act, but only to react; they were to ‘contain’ the enemy, but not to beat him.” Nevertheless Vietnam—like the fiascos of today—was seen as discrediting military action, even though (as Rand observed) U.S. soldiers in Vietnam were thrust into “*a war they had never been allowed to fight*. They were defeated, it is claimed—two years after their withdrawal from Vietnam. The ignominious collapse of the South Vietnamese, when left on their own, is being acclaimed as an American *military* failure.”²⁵

For good reason Vietnam was called a “no-win” war. Rand properly laid the blame for the disaster at the feet of American politicians and their intellectual advisors. The entire “war on terror” is likewise a no-win war. His words redolent of the Vietnam era, President Bush told an interviewer on NBC's “Today” show that “I don't think you can win [the war],” and that he blithely envisioned no definite end for it (see the epigraph). His words have been self-fulfilling. In the current conflict—as in Vietnam—the disaster is due not to a military failure. We are in an unwinnable war, but only because of the ideas setting the direction of our foreign policy.

Irrational ideas have shaped the Mideast policy not just of George W. Bush, but also of earlier administrations that had to confront the Islamist movement—from Jimmy Carter on. And although President Obama glided into office as the candidate of “change,” his administration brings us full circle to the appeasing policies that characterized the run-up to 9/11 (see chapter 1). The irrationality of American policy all but guarantees that the Islamist movement will continue to menace the American public and that this conflict will figure prominently in foreign-policy thinking for years to come.

But the overarching message of this book—that certain dominant ideas about morality subvert American policy—should not be taken as a rejection of the need for morality, *per se*, in foreign policy. Far from it. Trying to implement a foreign policy unguided by the *right* moral principles is like trying to cross an eight-lane freeway blindfolded and with your ears plugged. Seat-of-the-pants amoral temporizing does not a policy make, and practically it is inimical to achieving U.S. security. What we demonstrate in the following pages is that the United States needs to challenge the specific morality that currently dominates our policy—and instead adopt better, more American, ideas.

To that end, we offer a new vision and specific policy recommendations for how to address ongoing problems and threats deriving from the Middle East. Those suggestions—and, broadly, all the critiques offered in this book—originate neither from a liberal, nor a conservative, nor a libertarian, nor a neoconservative outlook. Their frame of reference, instead, is the secular, individualist moral system defined by Ayn Rand. Taking U.S. policy in this new direction would enable us properly to conceptualize and achieve America’s long-range self-interest: the safeguarding of our lives from foreign aggressors.

No one can predict with certainty what will unfold in the interval between the writing of this book and your reading of these words. But given the entrenched policy trends described in these pages, the lessons of the last eight years will likely go unlearned—much to the detriment of our security. My hope is that this book will counteract those trends by awakening Americans to the actual nature of the war we are in, and that in fact, if we’re guided by the right ideas, the war against Islamic totalitarianism is winnable.



The book’s central argument is developed across seven essays. Although each essay is self-contained, I encourage you to read them all in sequence because they are parts of a thematic whole. To aid the reader in integrating the steps of the argument, I offer the following outline of the topics covered and their logical progression.

Part 1 considers the nature of the Islamist threat, its origin, and the role of U.S. policy in empowering that menace. Chapter 1 demonstrates how unprincipled U.S. policy—from Carter through Clinton—worked to galvanize the enemy to bring its holy war to our shores on 9/11. Chapter 2 explores the widely evaded nature and goals of the enemy, and indicates how that should figure in America’s military response.

Part 2 focuses on the change in policies that were the impetus for Washington’s military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chapter 3 exposes the nature of Bush’s crusade for “democracy”—sometimes called the Forward Strategy for Freedom—and the destructive moral ideas that informed it. Chapter 4 identifies the ruinous impact on U.S. self-defense of “Just War Theory”—the widely accepted doctrine of morality in war. Chapter 5 brings out the profound opposition between neoconservative thought (a major ideological influence on Bush’s war policy) and America’s true national interest in foreign policy.

Taken together, what these three chapters argue is that America effectively renounced the fully achievable goal of defeating the enemy—for the sake of a welfare mission to serve the poor and oppressed of the Middle East. With the goal of victory abandoned, war certainly becomes unwinnable.

Part 3 looks at what Bush’s policies have wrought in the Middle East—and what the Obama administration should do. Chapter 6 surveys Afghanistan, post-surge Iraq, and the broader Islamist threat emanating from Pakistan, Iran, and elsewhere. Bush’s policy, it is argued, has actually left the enemy stronger than before 9/11. The enduring threats we face and the depressingly inadequate policy options being considered underline the pressing need for a real alternative to the conventional mold in foreign policy. Although the enemy grows stronger, chapter 7 argues that victory remains achievable. The way forward requires that we adopt a radically different approach to our foreign policy in the Middle East—one founded on a different moral framework.



A word on the genesis of the essays in this collection. All but three of the essays originally appeared, in somewhat different form, in *The Objective Standard* between 2006 and 2007. The exceptions are chapters 1, 6, and 7. These were written in winter 2008–09, and are published here for the first time.

Elan Journo
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PART I



THE ENEMY

What exposed America, militarily and economically the most powerful nation on earth, to the aggression inflicted on us on 9/11? Who or what are we up against? Why did this enemy come after us? What can we do to end this threat? The goal of victory presupposes knowing whom we must target, demoralize, and kill, so that we can judge when we have in fact defeated the enemy. There is no hope of successfully defending ourselves from its predations, without a clear definition of the enemy and a grasp of its motive.

To arrive at that necessary understanding, we must begin with history. The enemy's war against us began decades before 9/11. That campaign is distinguished not by a particular tactic—terrorism—but by the ideological goal motivating it: the establishment of a global, totalitarian Islamic regime. The following two essays consider the nature of the Islamic totalitarian movement, its ideological goal and inspiration—and how our policymakers have responded to the jihad on America.

CHAPTER ONE



The Road to 9/11

Elan Journo

No Stone Left Unturned?

One evening about eight years ago, a group of men sat lounging around their camp in the forbidding mountains of Afghanistan. Their leader had told the men to expect something big, soon. Among their few possessions the men had a satellite dish and television set. That night they tried to pick up a broadcast signal, but couldn't get much more than static. One of them fiddled with a radio and tuned in the BBC World Service in Arabic. They sat, and they listened.

“A newscaster was just finishing a report when he said there was breaking news: A plane had struck the World Trade Center in New York! The members of Al Qaeda, thinking that was the only action, cried in joy and prostrated themselves. But bin Laden said, ‘Wait, wait.’” Moments passed. Another jet had rammed into the World Trade Center. The leader wept and prayed to Allah. Then, before “his incredulous companions, bin Laden held up three fingers. . . . When news came of the Pentagon strike, bin Laden held up four fingers to his wonder-struck followers” signifying United 93 (which crashed into a Pennsylvania field, rather than its intended target, the U.S. Capitol).¹

Add to this macabre scene a few items from the paper trail—notably the passport photos of the nineteen suicide-hijackers and the airport security footage—and you have many people's idea of the force behind 9/11. The hijackers, a kind of vanguard, were minions of the reclusive master-terrorist, Osama bin Laden. It's a straightforward picture of what we're up against—but is it right?

The landmark investigation into the attacks, the 9/11 Commission, definitely left that impression. The commission was celebrated for its bipartisan make-up: five Republicans, five Democrats. The panel correctly felt itself obligated to leave no stone unturned. And above all things it was painstaking, if crudely indiscriminating in its focus. The investigation sucked in an ocean's worth of facts about the attacks: some 2.5 million pages of documents were sifted, and there were interviews and testimony from more than 1,000 individuals, including scores of officials from intelligence, aviation, border control, and a host of other government agencies. Practically every significant bureaucrat, cabinet member, and elected official was hauled in to be drilled with questions.

In its tone and attention to the tiniest details, the commission's final report suits the approach you might expect from a police crime-scene investigation. CSI teams painstakingly sweep for finger prints, scrape up bloodstains for DNA sampling, and calculate a bullet's angle of entry. So, from the commission's report we learn—to take some examples at random—the biography of each hijacker, where he went to school, what he majored in; we learn about Al Qaeda's hopscotching from one base in Sudan to another in Afghanistan; we are offered a by-the-minute recounting of the flight path of each jet, with diagrams, from take-off to crash; we learn how the FAA and Norad handled the crisis. On it goes, for pages—585 to be precise, including three appendices and 119 pages of source notes.²

The report offered many concrete policy recommendations on sharing data between U.S. intelligence agencies; on biometric identification of travelers at border checkpoints; on disrupting the flow of money to terrorist groups; on fortifying homeland security; on locating and shutting down terrorist sanctuaries; on funding emergency preparedness for future terrorist atrocities; on public diplomacy (to name just a few). In Congress the enthusiasm to act on this advice was palpable. And why not? Laid out before the nation, in legalistically specific detail, we had an official yet bipartisan account of what happened, and what we must do next.

Except that the commission skirted the fundamental issue, the one on which our security crucially depends.

An investigation into the events leading up to 9/11 is essential. We need to understand the origin and identity of the enemy that carried out the attacks against us. Without that knowledge, we cannot tell what to do going forward; how we define the enemy (or neglect to define it) necessarily shapes the actions we should take in response. If we classify the attackers as criminals, for example, the obvious implication is to round them up, along with any accomplices, and put them all on trial (the remedy taken after the 1993

car bombing of the World Trade Center). By contrast, the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 was recognized as an act of war carried out by the imperialist Japanese regime. So the United States responded—on the waves, in the air, and on the land—with a devastating retaliatory war.

The cardinal responsibility of the 9/11 Commission was to figure out the nature of the force that struck us. But the panel's investigation occupied itself with microscopic details—to the exclusion of the most important object of inquiry. That is evident in the commission's focus on Al Qaeda as the chief foe and in the blinkered view of 9/11 as occurring in a historical vacuum. In the commission's report we learn that Al Qaeda had carried out a few attacks prior to 2001, and that the organization proved itself a formidable threat with the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. But missing is a recognition of the much longer progression of attacks predating even the formation of Al Qaeda in the early 1990s. Missing also is an assessment of the U.S. policy response to three-plus decades of persistent aggression—and the effect of that policy on the morale of the aggressors.

These conspicuous omissions reflect a kind of cognitive myopia. It's symptomatic of a prevalent approach to the formulation and practice of U.S. foreign policy, afflicting both conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats. This myopic outlook spurns any serious concern for the past—on the idea that no lessons from the past can have a bearing on the new situation, event, or crisis of the moment. Each crisis stands apart from what came before, and it is dealt with in isolation. This approach yields conclusions that ignore deep-rooted problems while grasping for surface-level fixes. And so, true to form, the 9/11 Commission told us that America's intelligence agencies had failed to piece together their data and recognize that an attack was imminent. The solution adopted was to unify them under the new Cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security. But the ones ultimately culpable for failing to recognize the long-standing threat against us were our political leaders and their advisors.

This charge goes way beyond the damning fact that prior to 9/11 President George W. Bush shrugged off intelligence briefings warning of imminent Al Qaeda attacks on U.S. soil. It also goes beyond the bitter recriminations against President Bill Clinton for failing to bring bin Laden to justice when attractive opportunities presented themselves (e.g., capturing him when he was within grasp in Sudan). When we consider the attacks of 9/11 in context, it becomes clear that they were a part of a trend, an escalating pattern of attacks. They were salvos in a war—a war prosecuted by a particular enemy.

The abdication of our leaders today correctly to identify that enemy is in keeping with the ingrained practice of U.S. foreign policy. Since

America's first confrontation with that enemy, it has gone unidentified and therefore unopposed.

But connect the dots, and the enemy comes into sharp focus: Islamic totalitarianism, an ideological-political movement seeking a global regime under Islamic law (or sharia). Its modern origins lie in Egypt, with the Muslim Brotherhood; the movement's paramount exponent, financial backer, and intellectual inspiration is the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamist movement holds that achieving its moral-political ideal requires a holy war, or jihad. The regime in Tehran exemplifies this totalitarian ideal in its domestic rule and in its militant quest to export the rule of sharia internationally. Islamists have long been hostile to the United States (reviled by Iran as the "Great Satan") and they attacked us as part of their jihad. (We will return to examine the motives of Islamic totalitarianism in chapter 2.)

Facing the Islamist onslaught, our policymakers aimed, at most, to manage crises with range-of-the-moment remedies—heedless of the genesis of a given crisis and the future consequences of today's solution. Running through the varying policy responses of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton there is an unvarying motif. In the four major episodes that we will explore (one in the tenure of each president), our leaders failed to recognize that war had been launched against us and that the enemy is Islamic totalitarianism. This cognitive failure rendered Washington impotent to defeat the enemy. Owing to their myopic policy responses, our leaders managed only to appease and encourage the enemy's aggression.

Fueling a Spiral of Aggression

Episode one began on a November morning in 1979. The diplomats and guards at the American embassy in Tehran saw a crowd gathering outside the gates, chanting. The vehemently anti-American slogans were commonplaces in revolutionary Iran. Some in the crowd wore placards, suspended with string around their necks, bearing pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini was the wildly popular spiritual leader of the Islamist movement in Iran. It looked like yet another demonstration, no different from the many previous ones, a run-of-the-mill affair. But on this occasion the crowd of demonstrators stormed the embassy compound. Breaching the gates and security fence, they engulfed the grounds and got into the office buildings. They took the diplomats and guards hostage.

To invade an embassy is to flout a bedrock convention of diplomacy. It is tantamount to invading the sovereign territory of a foreign country. It is an act of war. To hold more than fifty Americans in captivity and subject them

to torment is unconscionable. The hostages endured a living hell. They were, by turns, humiliated, threatened, beaten, terrorized.

Take just one incident. The captors dragged a group of male hostages into a room, lined them up against a wall, forced them to pull down their pants and stand before a firing squad. They were made to stand there, waiting, wondering if the next few breaths would be their last. Would the firing squad follow the gruesome practice of some groups in the Middle East? Would they spray the hostages with bullets, starting from the feet and working upward slowly—to prolong the agony of the victims as they bleed out to a certain death? Imagine standing, waiting for the bullets to pierce your flesh, waiting for the gunmen to take aim, waiting—until, suddenly, instead of a burst of gunfire, the guns are put away. This was a mock execution. The terror was real.³

The hostage-takers justified their actions, in part, as reprisals for America's past support for the deposed Shah. For many years Washington had worked to keep the Shah in power. The regime was brutal, but it was also aligned with Washington, and backing the Shah appeared to some policymakers to be a useful, even if morally questionable, arrangement. After leaving Iran, the Shah was allowed to enter the United States for medical treatment, and the militants demanded his expulsion. Yet they evidently had a larger agenda for which the Shah served as a pretext. It may well be true that they chafed under his oppressive regime, but the cause animating their violence was not liberty but the quest for an even worse form of tyranny: Islamic theocracy. Whether the militants invaded the embassy at Khomeini's explicit command remains open to question. But it was clear that Khomeini, who was working to solidify clerical rule, gave the hostage-takers his blessing and reaped benefits from the crisis.

How did Washington respond to this outrage? If there were any truth in the critique of U.S. policy as assertive and calculatingly self-interested, the Iranian hostage situation, if it had arisen at all, would have ended within days. Who, after all, would dare affront a fearsome giant capable of squashing your cause underfoot; who would venture to magnify the insult by rubbing Washington's nose in the dirt as the hostage-takers did? A nation single-mindedly committed to protecting the lives of its citizens would be expected to have immediately threatened, and if necessary deployed, military force to release the hostages. Taking such action would affirm its reputation as a nation that none dare menace. But what America in fact did had the opposite effect.

The response from Washington was foreshadowed by orders given to the American guards on the day of the embassy takeover. Facing the invading militants, the guards were instructed not to fire their weapons—lest they

anger the mob.⁴ Such reluctance to stand up to aggression pervaded the response of Carter's administration. When Carter took office, America was still reeling from the unhealed wounds of the war in Vietnam. That trauma, a painfully drawn-out campaign lacking a clear purpose, had demoralized the nation, sapped its self-confidence, and left many in government with the fallacious conclusion that military self-assertion, as such, should be taken off the table as an option. With the specter of Vietnam looming in the background, the Carter administration quickly sidelined military options.

The prevailing fear was that a self-assertive military operation would upset the Iranians. A rescue mission, reports one of Carter's policy advisors, was deemed to involve unacceptably high risks of civilian casualties, and might prompt the Iranians to kill the hostages. (Not taking this step, as history would show, cost far more American lives in the following decades.) The worry was that a retaliatory strike might be seen as punitive, rather than simply a means of releasing the hostages (as if retaliating against such aggression were an illegitimate goal). There was talk of mining Iranian harbors and even imposing a military blockade. But these and similar steps were to be held in reserve as "sticks" that might be brought out, if and only if all non-military avenues were exhausted. The main thrust of the administration's approach was to tempt Iran with diplomatic "carrots."⁵

Diplomatic engagement is one name for that policy; a more honest name for it is appeasement.

Laying the groundwork for that appeasement, Carter assured the Iranians that "the United States has done nothing and will do nothing that could be used to justify violence or imprudent actions by anyone."⁶ What followed was an embarrassing game in which America acted on the (self-deluded) premise that its adversary was not an aggressor, that it had not committed a flagrant act of war, and that it could be bought off. The administration would not denounce Iran or commit itself publicly to any retaliatory steps, beyond meekly repeating its expectation that Iran live up to its assurance to release the hostages unharmed. Even from Carter, known for his submissive foreign policy, one would have expected at least the expulsion of Iran's ambassador, in protest and in rebuke. But that was far too bold a step: Carter's administration requested that Iran reduce the size of its staff (it was deemed desirable to keep this line of communication open). Months would pass before the United States broke off official diplomatic relations. Carter did freeze some Iranian funds in U.S. banks, and impose some trade sanctions, such as an embargo on shipments of military products—but not on food.⁷

Carter's team of advisors and strategists scrambled to come up with proposals to give Iran a face-saving way out of the crisis. In the initial stages,

Washington took the astonishing step of reaching out to the Palestinian Liberation Organization for assistance. Yasir Arafat's terrorist group, which had ties to Khomeini, was asked to serve as a go-between. The PLO, it must be remembered, was an outlawed organization in the United States stained with the blood of American victims. Why should it help? There was apparently no formal quid pro quo offered to the PLO, but it was winkingly understood that Washington would remember this favor later, when it was time to pressure Israel to make concessions to the PLO. Thus Carter's team sought to bribe this band of killers to open doors for us so that we could then bribe Tehran. This conduit to Iran, however, proved fruitless. Another proposed idea entailed asking the U.N.'s secretary-general, Kurt Waldheim, to approach television networks and have them film a one-hour presentation by the militants, effectively giving them an international stage from which to denounce the West and justify their aggression. Fortunately this scheme did not get far.⁸

The back-room negotiations, for a while through the PLO and later other intermediaries, went in fits and starts. Predictably, with time Iran's position hardened. There was even, late in the game, an abortive U.S. military rescue mission. It was a failure and an embarrassment. Soon the diplomats returned to the negotiating table. And after the fifty-two American hostages had endured imprisonment in Iran for 444 days, the crisis finally ended without bloodshed. They were released as part of a diplomatic bargain.

This seemed like a win-win resolution. We got what we wanted—the hostages back, alive. The Iranians got what they wanted—the unfreezing of some \$7 billion in funds held in U.S. banks; respect for their new theocratic regime; a promise to revoke American economic sanctions; a promise to drop legal action against Iran for damages or breaches of contract resulting from the revolution (an international tribunal would handle such claims).

Advocates of engagement saw this as a triumph. The diplomats, not the Marines, had carried the day! Warren Christopher, the secretary of state at the time, wrote to the Algerian foreign minister who mediated the final settlement, celebrating the resolution: "You and your government have demonstrated an inspiring commitment to humane values, and have provided the world with a singular example of the art of diplomacy." Harold H. Saunders, who served in the administration's crisis group, echoed that sentiment: "Indeed, the entire experience had 'provided the world with a singular example of the art of diplomacy.'" Carter had wanted to demonstrate the superiority of solving crises through non-violent means. Behold the proof.

But it was Khomeini and his underlings who drew the correct lesson. Like all acts of appeasement, the vaunted triumph of diplomacy was a total victory for the aggressor, Iran.

Washington followed a pseudo-sophisticated policy calibrated to send Iran the right carrot-and-stick message. Our people would dangle just enough carrots while also mumbling empty hints at the presence of a stick—even as they went out of their way to accommodate Iran. Epitomizing that sham toughness, Carter feebly warned that “the authorities in Iran should realize, . . . that the availability of peaceful measures, like the patience of the American people, is running out”—this, after the hostages were in captivity for *five months*.¹⁰ Such timid threats were abundantly refuted as the coward’s bluff by the fact that our willingness to appease never ran out.

Iran forcibly kept American citizens hostage, it extorted from Washington a ransom—and we capitulated. The financial cost: roughly \$154 million for each of the remaining fifty-two hostages (counting funds in U.S. banks that were unfrozen and doled out to the new regime as part of the settlement). But that price pales in comparison to the moral meaning and destructive consequences of Washington’s surrender. Our first response to Iran’s act of war was to assure the aggressor that we had no intention of taking military action in retaliation; afterward, the settlement acquitted Iran from any guilt and required Washington to abjure any retribution. So Iran was to be held blameless. And by condescending to negotiate with Iran at all, we conferred on it the undeserved status of a civilized, moral equal. The Algiers Accord, spelling out the terms of the U.S.–Iranian settlement, runs to fourteen pages of legal prose. But its import can be summed up simply: it was a license and invitation to further aggression.

Speaking of the hostage crisis, Khomeini famously observed that America cannot do a damn thing. He was half-right: we could, but our policymakers advised otherwise.

Khomeini had additional reasons to rejoice. By the time that crisis was winding down, the Islamist transformation of Iran was building momentum. The rule of clerics took root in the universities and in government. Sharia, or Islamic holy law, crept in. Islamists undertook murderous purges to rid themselves of political rivals.¹¹ Khomeini and his followers were bringing into reality what other elements of the Islamist movement in Egypt, in Pakistan, and elsewhere had never achieved: an actual regime founded on the principles of Islam as a total state. Iran thus embodied the movement’s ideological vision, it proved the feasibility of the political ideal for which jihad was a means, and it provided a model of what the pious could achieve even when taking on better-armed infidels. After having slapped the vastly stronger United States in the face, how potent the Islamic Republic now looked!

The new Iran not only inspired hope of future advances; it was committed to hastening them. Its 1979 constitution states that the army and the

Revolutionary Guards Corps “will be responsible not only for guarding and preserving the frontiers of the country, but also for fulfilling the ideological mission of jihad in God’s way; that is, extending the sovereignty of God’s law throughout the world.”¹² In the ensuing years, Iran has made good on this mission of exporting its Islamist revolution by means of jihad.

A major target of that holy war is America. If Iran could collect a reward for taking Americans hostage, why not try something even more aggressive? In the streets of Tehran the crowds chanted “Death to America”: the time was now ripe to strike at what Khomeini had vilified as the “Great Satan.”

Eager to be seen as the standard bearer of a global jihad, the Iranian regime was emboldened to escalate from taking Americans hostage to taking American lives.



Episode two unfolded during Ronald Reagan’s watch. The hostages in Iran were released on the day of his inauguration in January 1981. Many hoped that Reagan would restore America’s reputation by standing up to aggressors. He was contemptuous of Carter’s appeasement of Iran, arguing that we should not make deals with “barbarians” who take our people hostage.¹³

Once in office, Reagan conveyed that he held a black-and-white view of morality, and that this should inform U.S. policy. In a famous speech about the Soviet threat, the president admonished his audience not to give in to the “temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”¹⁴ (Many people sharply criticized Reagan for this mild intimation of moral absolutism, betraying their degraded conception of what a tough foreign policy looks like.)

Was this professed commitment to U.S. security, seemingly on moral principle, the real thing? On April 18, 1983, one month and ten days after that controversial “evil empire” speech, the Reagan administration was put to the test. The scene: Beirut, Lebanon.

The roar sounded like thunder, but there were no storm clouds in the sky; it sounded like the dynamite used by fishermen working the waters off the nearby coast, but far louder and closer. When the explosive-laden truck rammed the building and blew up, the blast tore away much of the building’s facade. A fine dust of glass and debris clouded the air. Broken pipes spewed out jets of water. Employees inside the U.S. Embassy in Beirut felt the entire building sway; they were the lucky ones. The guards at the front entrance

were obliterated by the force of the explosion. Sixty-three people died, seventeen of them Americans.¹⁵

For the driver of the truck, a jihadist, this was a suicide mission. The attack had been orchestrated on the ground in Lebanon by Hezbollah, an Islamic totalitarian outfit that Iran had helped organize, train, direct, and finance. Hezbollah's mandate was to establish an Iran-style regime in Lebanon. It was Tehran's proxy force, part of the jihadist vanguard, working to expand the Islamic revolution. But Washington did nothing to retaliate against or deter Iran. So this attack became merely a prelude.

Six months later, on October 23, what seemed to be a water-delivery truck making a routine visit approached the barracks in Beirut where U.S. Marines were sleeping. At a little after 6 a.m., the truck sped past the perimeter barrier and into the compound. Ismalal Ascari, an Iranian, was at the wheel. The resulting explosion, according to experts who testified in court,

was the largest non-nuclear explosion that had ever been detonated on the face of the Earth. The force of its impact ripped locked doors from their doorjambes at the nearest building, which was 256 feet away. Trees located 370 feet away were shredded and completely exfoliated. At the traffic control tower of the Beirut International Airport, over half a mile away, all of the windows shattered. The support columns of the Marine barracks, which were made of reinforced concrete, were stretched, as an expert witness described, "like rubber bands." The explosion created a crater in the earth over eight feet deep. The four-story Marine barracks was reduced to fifteen feet of rubble.¹⁶

The carnage was unspeakable. Murdered were 241 servicemen. Many who lost their lives suffered in protracted agony before they succumbed. Hundreds were injured and maimed. (Almost simultaneously another suicide bomber struck the barracks of French armed forces in Beirut.)

Who was behind this atrocity? The sophistication of the attack outstripped what Hezbollah and other pro-Iranian Islamist groups could have pulled off by themselves: without material and technical help from Iran, the operation would have been a non-starter. Loaded in the truck-bomb was an explosive material (pentaerythritol tetranitrate, or PETN) in a form that was not commercially available in Lebanon, but was in production in Iran. The culpability of the Islamist regime in Tehran was confirmed by an intercepted kill-order sent by Iran to its ambassador in Syria. U.S. Naval intelligence intercepted a message instructing the ambassador to instigate Iran's proxies in Lebanon to strike against Western forces in Beirut, and to "take a spectacular action against the United States Marines" in particular.¹⁷ (Iran has left little

doubt about its role: at a cemetery in Tehran there stands a shrine honoring the “martyrs” responsible for the 1983 barracks attack.¹⁸)

Washington had sent the Marines into Lebanon to “provide a presence” as peacekeepers in that country’s civil war. Their mission was to help the Lebanese lift themselves out of anarchy and (as Reagan put it) determine their own destiny. That so-called humanitarian mission was reflected in the rules of engagement governing the Marines: They were forbidden from carrying weapons with live rounds in their chambers, and were not allowed to load the chambers unless ordered to do so by a commissioned officer (with the exception of being under immediate deadly attack). It has been observed that they were more restricted in their use of force than an ordinary U.S. citizen walking down a street of practically any American city.¹⁹

Seeing the U.S. Marines it had put in harm’s way savaged by an Islamist act of war, how did Washington respond? This time around the tough-sounding Reagan, not Carter, was in the White House. Reagan’s administration had previously committed itself to “swift and effective retribution” against terrorists. Whoever harbored such hopes about the administration was soon disappointed.

Conspicuously missing from Washington’s response to the attacks was an explicit recognition of Iran’s central role in the massacre—and that it was the motor of the Islamist proxies on the ground. Our leaders diligently avoided even the merest hint of using military force to punish Iran for massacring Americans. That option was off the table.

Instead, U.S. forces fired some inconsequential shells against Syrian forces that were besieging Lebanon. As Reagan explained at a press conference, however, “the most recent shelling was not because of attacks on the Marines at the airport [barracks]; it was because of shelling of our Embassy.” Despite return fire, Reagan explained that “we have not responded, because we think this is a time for restraint and for hoping to cool things down.”²⁰ Seeming resolute, Reagan had vowed that the attacks would not deter America from its mission. The Marines would stay in Lebanon, dauntless. But not long afterward, he ordered the “redeployment” of the Marines to the USS *New Jersey* off the coast of Lebanon. Reagan spun this as something other than “cutting and running,” since they were just offshore, not back in America. But it was a transparent retreat.

Islamists wanted America out of Lebanon. We let their aggression go unopposed. And then we fulfilled their wish. New crisis, same appeasing outcome. To Khomeini this was an affirmation of the lesson drawn after the hostage crisis.

The American retreat only encouraged Iran and its Islamist brothers-in-arms across the world. Watching all this play out was Osama bin Laden. “We

have seen in the last decade,” he said in 1998, “the decline of the American government and the weakness of the American soldier who is ready to wage Cold Wars and unprepared to fight long wars. This was proven in Beirut when the Marines fled after two explosions.”²¹ Like Khomeini, bin Laden was half-right: it is not our brave soldiers who are weak, but our political leaders who send them into the line of fire, disarm them, and then refuse to retaliate after Americans are pulverized in their beds.

The grotesque spectacle of American military superiority but moral weakness spurred the jihadists to venture farther afield and to feel that they could operate with practical impunity.

In Lebanon, Iranian-backed Islamist militants went on a spree of abductions and murders of Westerners. The victims included Malcolm Kerr, president of the American University in Beirut (murdered in a drive-by shooting); William Buckley, the CIA’s station chief in Beirut (abducted in 1984, murdered in captivity, his mutilated remains dumped by a roadside); Terry Anderson, a correspondent for the Associated Press (taken hostage in 1985 and held until 1991). In Europe, a jihadist group hijacked U.S. airliners. In West Berlin, a discotheque popular with off-duty American soldiers was devastated by a bomb. In Naples, the USO club was attacked with a car bomb. All sorts of opportunistic, anti-American militants also felt emboldened to pile on. Palestinian terrorists hijacked an Italian cruise ship in the Mediterranean Sea; the terrorists murdered Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound American passenger, by rolling him overboard. It was open season on Americans.

Occasionally, Washington lurched from its passive mode of appeasement to fits of punch-drunk crisis management. The order of the day: to “do something,” anything, in response to such outrages. In 1984 the Reagan administration put the Islamic Republic of Iran on the blacklist of terrorist-sponsoring states. That had all the retributive force of fining a mass murderer for an overdue library book. Predictably, with time the problem worsened. The Reagan administration tasked the CIA for a study on what could be done about the wave of terrorism. Robert Gates, a CIA veteran and the Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush and Barack Obama, recounts the process of deliberation.

We focused especially on Iran, the worst offender. The downsides of an attack on Iran, to everyone’s regret, outweighed how much Iran deserved punishment. We pointed out that failure to hit Iran would ensure that Iranian-sponsored terrorism would continue and even grow, but terrorist-connected targets were near cities and attacks against them would, by themselves, have little impact.²²

Despite regarding it as “the worst offender,” analysts counseled against confronting Iran, and instead for selecting an alternate target. By a process of

elimination, the CIA settled on Libya. Why? “[B]ecause it was in the poorest position to sustain itself against U.S. actions—military or economic—it became the target for U.S. retaliation against all state-sponsored terrorism.”²³ So in April 1986, American bombers fired on some military targets in Libya, and on one of Qaddafi’s homes. The damage inflicted, Gates recalls, was less than hoped for, but made Qaddafi more cautious “and probably inhibited others as well—at least for a while.”²⁴

Yet unsurprisingly attacks against Western targets continued and so did abductions in Lebanon; within two years, Libya instigated the mid-air bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland (killing 270). America’s meaningless retribution was in itself encouraging to Iran and other Islamists. By taking on the weakest menace, Washington presumably hoped to send Iran and others a cautionary message. The actual effect of that token strike on Libya was to certify America’s lack of self-confidence and its fear of confronting the chief enemy. More still: it certified Khomeini’s belief that America was fundamentally impotent.

It is worth remembering that, as was uncovered later, the Reagan administration was then actively arming the regime in Tehran. Spectacularly myopic, this clandestine scheme was supposed to help extricate a number of American hostages held in Lebanon by Iranian-backed groups. In exchange for its “help” in freeing hostages, Iran received powerful U.S. missiles. This was exposed to the light of day in the so-called arms-to-Iran scandal. Here, then, we find America, a powerful and innocent victim, on its knees, appeasing and laboring to strengthen its own destroyer.

So much for standing up to the “barbarians.”



Episode three. In his inaugural speech in 1989, President George H.W. Bush made an overture toward Tehran. Alluding to the remaining American hostages held in Lebanon, he suggested that “Assistance can be shown here, and will be long remembered. Good will begets good will.”²⁵ Translation: if Iran would be so kind as to give the order to release the hostages, Washington would reward it. Like Carter and Reagan before him, Bush conformed to the pattern of appeasement. And by the late 1980s, Islamists understandably came to feel licensed to make outrageous demands of us—and to expect us to comply.

They felt licensed do this in the open, flagrantly. That was evident in the international scandal over Salman Rushdie’s novel, *The Satanic Verses*. The novel portrayed the prophet Muhammad in a manner that some Muslims felt was unflattering. A minor controversy over the book simmered for a while

after its publication; it boiled over into a major crisis on Valentine’s Day, 1989, when Ayatollah Khomeini issued a decree, or *fatwa*:

I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book *Satanic Verses*—which has been compiled, printed, and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur’an—and those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death.

I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities. God willing, whoever is killed on this path is a martyr.²⁶

This was not some shadowy plot to blow up Marine barracks; this was not some hidden contract-hit; this was a public, self-righteous call to *murder*.

Furthermore, this was a demand that America, and other nations, suspend a crucial principle of secular society: the freedom of speech. This right protects an individual’s freedom to express his ideas—in whatever medium and regardless of what others feel or think of his ideas—without fear of physical retribution. Khomeini’s edict commanded that the West totally nullify this freedom.

This fit with the broader goal of the Islamist movement: to establish the supremacy of its ideology upon all mankind. Khomeini had imposed Islamic law, sharia, within the frontiers of Iran. “The struggle will continue,” he had stated, “until the calls ‘there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah’ are echoed all over the world.”²⁷ By commanding us to bow in deference to the medieval notion of slaughtering whomever he accuses of offending Islam, Khomeini presumptuously asserted global jurisdiction for his moral-political ideal.

Did Washington declare that an individual’s freedom of speech is sacrosanct, regardless of who finds it objectionable? Did Washington vow to hunt down and bring to justice anyone who dares to act on Khomeini’s death decree? No, any suggestion that we might use military force to uphold our ideals and protect American lives—that would just irritate the Iranians even more.

Washington instead extended to Iran a token of our “good will.” When President Bush finally commented publicly on the death-decree, he said: “However offensive that book may be, inciting murder and offering rewards for its perpetration are deeply offensive to the norms of civilized behavior.” With that shameful statement, Bush implied that Khomeini and Rushdie were equally objectionable. He added the pro forma warning that America would hold Iran “accountable” should any action be taken against U.S. interests, a warning no one in Tehran had reason to tremble over.²⁸ Rather than take a stand, our leaders opted to keep their heads down, to show that

they had no intention of flouting Khomeini's will, in the vain hope that Iran would back off and the issue would go away, somehow. By such appeasing passivity, however, Washington bowed in deference to a blood-lusting cleric and sacrificed the freedom of Americans.

Zealous Muslims had heard the fatwa. With bounties of \$2.5 million on his head, Rushdie was driven into hiding under twenty-four-hour police protection; his American publishers were inundated with threats. His Italian translator was assaulted so badly he almost died; his Japanese translator was murdered. Two bookstores in Berkeley, California, were firebombed. In March 1989 alone, the FBI received word of more than seventy threats to bookstores; Waldenbooks received forty anonymous threats. The climate of fear led some stores to withdraw the book from display. A store at Dulles International Airport posted a sign, by way of an insurance against threats: "We Don't Stock the Satanic Verses." One American publisher canceled the contract for a book deemed too incendiary;²⁹ the number of other projects that publishers avoided out of fear of retribution is incalculable.

Unprotected by their government, many Americans were left with little choice but to submit and crouch in fear of Khomeini's fatwa. By the default of our leaders, that death-decree against a supposedly blaspheming author was a wholesale attack on the freedom of speech in America and across the world. Our leaders demonstrated that they did not believe we had a moral right to assert ourselves against those who seek to murder Americans and subjugate us under dictates of sharia. Yet again Washington handed Islamic totalitarianism a triumph—one that Islamists went on to exploit seventeen years later in the furor over Danish cartoons of Muhammad. (We explore aspects of that crisis in chapter 2 and chapter 6.)

For Islamists, having abducted, intimidated, and murdered Americans, the next step in the escalation was to bring the terror-war to our shores.



Episode four opened with the *first* attack, in 1993, on the World Trade Center, an attack obviously meant to inflict catastrophic harm. The truck-bomb was supposed to topple one of the towers onto its twin. Though unsuccessful, the blast did manage to kill six and injure more than 1,000. Think of this as a rough draft of 9/11. Clues indicating that this was another salvo in the broader jihad against America went unexplored. The newly inaugurated Clinton administration dealt with the bombing as a criminal matter.

Then came a sequence of major attacks—in Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Yemen—each inflicting serious casualties and probing to see how much aggression America would tolerate. The probing elicited from the

United States the familiar pattern. Clinton's time in office reflected all the salient aspects of that pattern: blatant appeasement—sporadic, toothless reprisals—evasive passivity.

Consider the bombing in 1996 of the Khobar Towers apartment complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The building housed U.S. forces involved in protecting that country from Iraq. The blast wave emitted by the truck bomb pummeled the eight-story building and killed nineteen Americans. Investigations revealed that the bombers had been trained by Iran in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley; they had been given passports at the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria; they had received \$250,000 in cash to pay for the operation from an Iranian general; and afterward, some were living in Iran. According to Louis Freeh, who headed the FBI at the time, the Clinton administration purposely dragged its feet to slow down the investigation, lest it be revealed that Iran was behind the Khobar attack. Eventually, when that was established with certainty, Freeh reports that the administration's interest in the case "translated into nothing more than Washington 'damage control' meetings held out of the fear that Congress, and ordinary Americans, would find out that Iran murdered our soldiers."³⁰

No action was taken against Iran, because that would endanger plans for improving relations with Tehran and pursuing a dialogue. Clinton had called for a genuine reconciliation between the U.S and Iran. Echoing that message, at the time that the Khobar investigation was being stonewalled, Secretary of State Madeline Albright offered that "As the wall of mistrust comes down, we can develop with the Islamic republic, when it is ready, a road map leading to normal relations."³¹ To that end the administration progressively lifted previously imposed economic sanctions on Iran (piddling restrictions easily breached and often suspended through waivers). More goodies, Washington suggested, might be forthcoming.

Behind this appeasing maneuver was a rationalization that many found tantalizing. Within Iran, it was claimed, there was a new crop of leaders seeking "reform." Notable among them was Mohammad Khatami, who in 1997 became president of Iran. For a brief spell there seemed to be some kind of ferment, some modest loosening of social restrictions (e.g., men and women "felt freer to move about, to mix and mingle; university students of both sexes dared to address one another on campus"; women "did not hesitate to expose a bare wrist, ankle, painted toe, or even a bit of bare neck"; the regime licensed a few more newspapers).³² In reality these superficial changes were evanescent, and soon there followed a crackdown. Khatami himself was uninterested in anything like "a secular government on the Western model," observe the scholars Patrick Clawson and Michael

Rubin. Rather, he “was dedicated to perfecting the Islamic Republic, not to replacing it.”³³

Nevertheless the Clinton administration desired a rapprochement with Iran, and to make that happen it pushed out of mind the reality of the regime’s character and its ongoing proxy war against us. Thus after Khobar, the latest attack in that war, Washington went out of its way to refrain from retaliation, and busied itself with trying to purchase Iranian good will.

While our diplomats tried to coax the Islamists in Iran to dance a waltz, other Islamists pounded U.S. interests in Africa. In August 1998 massive bombs went off outside the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. One of the explosions leveled a three-story building and incinerated dozens of passengers in a nearby bus.³⁴ Thousands were injured. The death toll climbed into the hundreds.

But on this occasion, Washington *did* take military action. Clinton told the nation that “There are no expendable American targets”—but this rhetoric was belied by his actions in the Khobar case and again in the meek retaliation that was about to unfold.³⁵ U.S. Navy ships in the Red and Arabian Seas sprinkled seventy-odd Tomahawk cruise missiles into Afghanistan and Sudan. Their targets were primitive boot camps for Islamist holy warriors in the Afghan wilderness and a purported chemical weapons factory in Sudan that turned out to be no such thing.³⁶ Far from seriously disrupting the Al Qaeda bases in those countries (as the administration claimed) these strikes were pinpricks. Just as in 1986 America opted to confront the runt among the threats before it, striking at Libya instead of Iran; so again Washington appeased Iran (which had helped train Al Qaeda’s bombers) and gingerly wagged an admonishing finger at Al Qaeda.

The boot camps reconstituted, the training resumed, and the holy warriors marched on—galvanized at seeing America’s timidity.

Hard on the heels of the bombings in Africa came the attempt to sink the USS *Cole* in Yemen. The warship had stopped at the port of Aden to refuel. Two suicide-bombers came alongside it in a small fishing boat loaded with explosives. The explosion opened up a forty-foot-by-forty-foot hole in the hull, and killed seventeen servicemen.³⁷ Neither Clinton, nor his successor, George W. Bush, deemed it worthwhile responding to that attack. They sat by passively.

A young man interviewed after the attacks at the port of Aden eloquently stated a view that, affirmed over and over by U.S. policy, had become gospel in the Middle East. Looking at the gaping hole in the side of the mighty USS *Cole*, he put it simply, with satisfaction and perhaps even pleasure: “You have big boats, and look, they are nothing!”³⁸ True enough. Lacking a conception

of who the enemy is and lacking the certainty of our moral right to permanently eliminate that enemy, the United States is impotent.

Observe how, after the storming of an embassy in Tehran and the kidnapping of its personnel, we then faced the wholesale murder of Americans, blown up in their beds, at cafes, in night clubs, on airliners. Observe how continual appeasement served, not to diminish the enemy's ardor, but to inflame it—not to placate the enemy, but to infuse it with audacity, the audacity to put a bounty on the head of a novelist and his publishers. Observe how America's perpetual evasion of the enemy's nature empowered the jihadists.

Observe how this pattern paved the way from an attack on our embassy in Tehran one November morning, to a catastrophic morning in downtown Manhattan.

The Pattern

There is a common outlook in foreign policy that generates this pattern: "realism." Proponents of realism tell us that morality is a hindrance to achieving results in foreign policy. Getting hung up on moral distinctions (for example, between friends and foes) would mean severely constricting the range of actions open to our policymakers. Moral ideals and other broad principles, therefore, are pushed aside in the name of a hard-boiled commitment to "practicality." But the inexorable result of this aversion to principles is intellectual myopia.

The realist mindset shuns the need to sort through the data and discern the nature of events. It spurns the process of cognitively digesting past events and abstracting out the patterns and trend lines. The many distinct dots, in other words, are left unconnected and their significance unidentified. In this regard, recall how after the Beirut bombings, the Reagan administration secretly worked to bribe Tehran with missiles, in order to release American hostages in Lebanon. Or recall how following 9/11 Washington organized an anti-terrorism coalition and (in all seriousness) invited Iran, the arch-sponsor of Islamist terror, to join. On the realist outlook, each crisis, each problem, each situation is dealt with on its own perversely narrow terms.

This myopia also means that so-called realists cannot project the future consequences of actions taken in the present. And while proponents of this outlook profess a devotion to advancing the national interest, they cannot define what is in America's interest, since formulating that definition requires the long-range perspective that realists abandon. Take, for instance, the policy that began in Carter's administration, and continued under Rea-

gan, of supporting jihadists in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Why do this? We were against the Soviets, who had invaded Afghanistan, and so were the holy warriors—even though they were equally anti-American. History has shown us the results of that scheme. We have suffered grievously at the hands of some of those holy warriors—a bearded, willowy man from Saudi Arabia being prominent among them.

Disaster is the inevitable result of following realist policy in the face of an enemy driven by a moral ideal and committed to fighting a generations-long struggle to realize that ideal. The operating assumption for realist policymakers is that (like them) no one would put an abstract, far-off ideal ahead of collecting some concrete, immediate advantage (money, honor, influence). So for realists, an enemy that is dedicated to a long-term goal—and thus cannot be bought off with bribes—is an enemy that must remain incomprehensible.

So it was and remains.



In the wake of 9/11, proponents of realism moved to the sidelines. To a significant extent the policy of the Bush administration came to reflect the influence of neoconservative thinkers, particularly their idea that moral principles must inform U.S. foreign policy. In part 2, we will explore this brand of principled policy, one that proved no less destructive to our security.

CHAPTER TWO



What Motivates the Jihad on America

Elan Journo

Fathoming the Atrocities

On that cloudless Tuesday morning in September, downtown Manhattan was engulfed by an eerie fog. It was a fog of dust and ashes. From the top floors of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center plumes of smoke billowed, and inside an inferno raged. The courtyard at the foot of the towers was strewn with aircraft debris, shattered glass, and corpses. These were the bodies of suicides who had sought escape from the intense flames, fed by hundreds of gallons of airplane fuel, that were ripping through the towers. Hundreds of other desperate souls, hurrying down fire-escapes, were pulverized under tons of buckling girders and cement.

The massacre of September 11, 2001, claimed nearly 3,000 lives.

But it was calculated to kill many more. Of the other hijacked airplanes, one rammed into the Pentagon; the intended target of the fourth plane was the U.S. Capitol. By seeking to destroy the headquarters of the Department of Defense, the nation's legislature, and the global hub of financial markets—by striking at organs crucial to the security and prosperity of America—the attacks were an assault on everything that depended on those organs. The attacks intended to devastate the entire country.

The hostility unleashed against America on that day has extended also to our allies. On March 11, 2004, bombs on commuter trains in Madrid transformed the vibrant bustle of rush hour into a scene of unspeakable carnage. Human limbs and random chunks of flesh lay on the ground amid pools of blood. Nearly 200 individuals perished, but as with the attacks on American

soil thirty months earlier, the killers had hoped for a higher death toll. Police found and safely detonated three further explosive devices. Then London, in the summer of 2005, was hit by suicide bombings on three Tube trains and a No. 30 bus in the center of town. On one of the trains, the explosion left remains so mutilated and burned that they were scarcely recognizable as ever having been human. Fifty victims died, and 700 were injured; some had massive burns, some had limbs blown off. (Three weeks later another team of bombers attempted to strike the Tube system again, albeit unsuccessfully.)

The hostility of the killers is fierce. They diligently toil for our destruction. Human life, to them, is cheap. Not merely the lives of their victims, but also their own. Unlike soldiers risking death in hopes of living to see their nation's army triumph, the attackers who strap on dynamite vests, who drive trucks laden with explosives into buildings, and who deliberately crash airplanes into skyscrapers, do so certain of their own annihilation. They have no hope of surviving to see the success of whatever goal they are working to achieve. This perverse willingness to kill themselves in order to kill Americans makes the atrocities all the more bewildering.

Who are these killers? What drives their gleeful slaughter of human beings? What motivates their rabid hostility to America? Putting an end to this threat entails knowing what impels our enemy.

One commonly accepted explanation blames U.S. policy in the Middle East. The massacres, on this view, are supposedly retaliation against what the killers regard as American hostility and "imperialism." Echoing statements by some of the killers, Western advocates of this notion paint them as rebels against America's "arrogant power," and its "sanctimoniously munificent support not only of Israel but of numerous repressive Arab" regimes.¹ The idea is that the killers are incensed and frustrated and desperate to break the U.S.-endorsed chains that oppress them; terrorism somehow expresses their fury.

The killers, it is true, do seek to overthrow certain regimes in the Arab-Islamic world, and they do want to transform their culture; but they are avowedly hostile to political freedom. Instead, they want to institute a form of religious servitude. The killers do regard themselves as avenging supposed injustices, but their implied or stated moral criterion derives from Islam. The killers are incensed that infidel American troops, by their mere presence, befoul the holy land of Islam (specifically, Saudi Arabia). They oppose America's support for the infidel state of Israel, which has usurped lands they believe ought to belong to Islam.

The killers believe that the West, led by America, is somehow leading a war on their religion. In a videotaped statement, the leader of the London bombings attested that "Our drive and motivation doesn't come from

tangible commodities that this world has to offer. Our religion is Islam, obedience to the one true God Allah and following the footsteps of the final prophet messenger. This is how our ethical stances are dictated.” His stated rationale for the attack was “protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters.”²

Millions of people around the world despise U.S. policies, but they do not become mass murderers of Americans (and Westerners). Nineteen Muslims did on September 11—as did the London and Madrid bombers, and countless others. The hijackers deliberately chose a manner that assured their own “martyrdom.” The ringleader of the 9/11 attacks wrote a detailed note instructing his warriors how to prepare themselves: “Remember that this is a battle for the sake of God. As the prophet, peace be upon him, said, ‘An action for the sake of God is better than all of what is in this world.’ . . . Either end your life while praying, seconds before the target, or make your last words: ‘There is no God but God, Muhammad is His messenger.’”³

The key to understanding what impels the killers—and what can be done to stop them—is to listen to what they themselves confess as their motive.

What They Tell Us

The nineteen suicide-hijackers were part of an ideological movement. Followers of this cause proclaim themselves holy warriors in the path of Allah. They believe that there is a fundamental problem afflicting the world—and that they must solve it.

The problem: the dominion of Islam, like the rest of the world, has fallen into sordid impiety. Religious law, or sharia, no longer governs men’s thought and action. Muslims in particular are failing to live up to the dictates of Islam; unbelief and godlessness abound across the face of the earth.

Sayyid Qutb, an intellectual leader of the movement, diagnosed the situation in stark terms. *Jahiliyya* is the state of supposedly barbaric ignorance that obtained in pre-Muhammadan times, and for Qutb, “Everything around us is *jahiliyya*—people’s beliefs and ideas, habits and traditions, culture, art, and literature, rules and laws, to such an extent that much of what we consider Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic thought are also constructs of *jahiliyya*!” But in the modern *jahiliyya* mankind is not merely ignorant of the truth, it has rejected universal subjugation to Allah’s will. For Qutb, therefore, the modern world is even lower than the pre-Muhammadan barbarism; unlike that first *jahiliyya*, men now claim that “the right to create values, to pass laws and regulations, and to choose one’s way in life rests with man, in disregard of what Allah has prescribed.”⁴

The solution: Bring about a global sharia regime enveloping the totality of human life and society. The apt designation for this movement is Islamic totalitarianism (Islamist and jihadist are terms used interchangeably in this book to denote a member of the movement).

Instructing the faithful in how to realize that ideal, Qutb writes that “The establishment of Allah’s kingdom on earth, the elimination of the reign of man, the wresting of sovereignty from its usurpers and its restoration to Allah, and the abolition of human laws and implementation of the divine law [sharia] cannot be only achieved through sermons and preaching.”⁵ The righteous fighters “must employ Jihaad.”⁶

It is immaterial, Qutb argued, “whether the homeland of Islam—in the true Islamic sense, Dar ul-Islam—is in a condition of peace or whether it is threatened by its neighbors.” The movement’s goal is not merely to preserve one small corner of the world as a domain for Muslims; it is to ensure “that the obedience of all people be for God alone,” everywhere.⁷ For the “object of this religion is all humanity and its sphere of action is the whole earth.”⁸

Prolific and articulate, Qutb served as a driving force behind the Muslim Brotherhood. This Egyptian group began in 1928, and mushroomed across the Middle East. It is the ancestor of Al Qaeda, Hamas, and many other jihadist outfits across the world. In Pakistan, another element of the Islamist movement sprang up; its theoretician and organizing impetus was Abul Ala Mawdudi.

Starting from the same moral-political ideal, Mawdudi came to the same practical conclusion. Society must be brought under a sharia regime, but it “cannot evidently restrict the scope of its activities. Its approach is universal and all-embracing. Its sphere of activity is coexistent with the whole of human life.” And achieving it necessitates a sustained jihad to “destroy those regimes opposed to the precepts of Islam and replace them with a government based on Islamic principles . . . not merely in one specific region . . . but [as part] of a comprehensive Islamic transformation of the entire world.”⁹

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an enormously influential figure in the movement, was the architect—and until 1989, the supreme leader—of Iran’s totalitarian regime. In his book *Governance of the Jurist*, Khomeini argued that anyone “who has some general awareness of the beliefs and ordinances of Islam will unhesitatingly give his assent to the principle of the governance of the *faqih* [cleric]”¹⁰ as a self-evident necessity. The lamentable fact that this principle needs to be demonstrated, he observed, is due to the decadence prevailing in Muslim society, a society that has strayed from the path of Allah. The clerical regime that Khomeini envisioned—and established—would serve merely as an earthly conduit to the Almighty, for “in Islam the legis-

lative power and competence to establish laws belongs exclusively to God Almighty. . . . In this form of government, sovereignty belongs to God alone and law is His decree and command.”¹¹

Many decades prior to the eruption of the ferocious Islamist revolution in Iran, Khomeini told audiences that “those who study *jihad* will understand why Islam wants to conquer the whole world. All the countries conquered by Islam or to be conquered in the future will be marked for everlasting salvation. For they shall live under [God’s law].”¹²

The 9/11 hijackers understood the imperative of fighting a jihad to implement the rule of sharia. They were enforcers of that principle. If Allah is the only God and if His law is absolute, then unbelievers must be put to the sword. They must learn that their vices are hateful to Him. The razing of the World Trade Center was thus a grand-scale meting out of justice to the infidels who refuse to submit to the authority of Allah. There was no other way to correct the wickedness of those who made their careers reaping profits for themselves in the fields of finance and commerce.

And if killing infidels in Allah’s name means forfeiting one’s own life, that should not be regarded as a loss. Khomeini had observed:

We do not fear giving martyrs. . . . Whatever we give for Islam is not enough and is too little. Our lives are not worthy. . . . Martyrdom is a legacy which we have received from our prophets. Those should fear death who consider the aftermath of death to be obliteration. We, who consider the aftermath of death a life more sublime than this one, what fear have we?¹³

Qutb lionized fallen jihadists: “Those who risk their lives and go out to fight, and who are prepared to lay down their lives for the cause of God are honorable people, pure of heart and blessed of soul.”¹⁴ He is here merely echoing Islamic sacred texts. “Allah has bought from the believers their soul and their possessions against the gift of Paradise; they fight in the path of Allah; they kill and are killed . . . and who fulfils his covenant truer than Allah? So rejoice in the bargain you have made with Him; that is the mighty triumph.”¹⁵ Martyrs are promised sumptuous rewards in the afterworld.

To varying extents, Islamic totalitarianism has gained power in parts of the world. The brutality of its rule has stunned many people, but there’s a logic behind its notoriously harsh enforcement of sharia law. Its quasi-medieval political practices follow from its moral ideal. Massive coercion is necessary to ensure the public’s total obedience to Islam. Consider the practice of sharia in Iran, Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria.

With the advent of Islamist rule in Iran, taverns were destroyed and movie theaters closed. Khomeini noted that “We no longer allow boys and girls to

undress and go bathing in the sea.” Islam, he continued, “has put an end to means that lead our young men into corruption. Islam wants fighters to stand up to the unbelievers, to those attacking our country. Islam wants to create mujihad [holy warriors] . . . Islam is a serious religion. There is no debauchery in Islam.”¹⁶ The Iranian regime banned music and poetry, and it censors films, books, and newspapers. Dissenters or critics of the regime are deemed enemies of Islam and their murder is considered justified. Iran forbids “prohibited acts”—a term so vague it can encompass simple association between two individuals of different sexes, such as walking in the park, sitting next to each other in a car, or anything the ruling clerics decide is irrereligious, blasphemous, or somehow un-Islamic.¹⁷

Upon rising to power in Afghanistan, Taliban leaders pulled down satellite TV dishes and ordered such “corrupting” devices as televisions, radios, and VCRs “hanged” publicly. The Taliban’s infamous “Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prohibition of Vice” patrolled the streets in search of Muslims violating moral law or otherwise engaging in un-Islamic behavior. Movie theaters were shuttered; the wearing of Western-styled suits and the playing of music were banned. Women were compelled to wear all-encompassing veils as a mark of their modesty and lest they provoke lust in the men around them. Women caught wearing robes that were deemed immodest were flogged (in one incident, an enforcer summarily ripped the antenna from a nearby car and thrashed a woman for her immodest attire). The draconian penalties prescribed by the sharia code included flogging for the consumption of liquor and stoning to death for adultery.¹⁸

Like Iran and the Taliban regime, Saudi Arabia also has its own government-sanctioned vigilante force to foster virtue. These shock-troops assault people for failing to attend mosques at the five daily prayer times. In one notorious case, the morality thugs prevented female students from leaving a burning school in Mecca, because they were insufficiently covered up when they tried to escape the flames; more than a dozen students burned alive.¹⁹ Crimes like apostasy and blasphemy are punished by death, “often by stoning or beheading on a Riyadh plaza . . . popularly known as ‘chop-chop square.’”²⁰

Several years ago sharia was imposed in certain provinces of Nigeria, in a depressingly predictable way. The spread of sharia in that country began in Zamfara province, which “sexually segregated all buses and taxis. Men are not allowed to use most taxis and instead must get rides on motorcycles. Women are forbidden to ride these motorcycles, and some who have tried have been stoned.” Alcohol was banned, women were forbidden to wear

trousers, and vigilantes were licensed to enforce divine law. “Just beyond the boundary sign welcoming travelers to ‘Zamfara, the home of farming and Sharia’ are two burned out trucks whose drivers made the mistake of carrying beer over the border.”²¹

And of course, true to the ideal of Islam’s universal purview, the quest to subjugate people under sharia has spread beyond national borders. Iran and Saudi Arabia are infamous for exporting their ideology. Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars to build mosques worldwide, to publish tracts, and to dispatch missionaries that disseminate the regime’s Wahhabi strain of Islamic totalitarianism. Saudi wealth helped build up the Taliban regime (which in turn hosted Al Qaeda) and has financed terrorist groups in the Balkans and across the Middle East.

“The Iranian revolution,” declared Ayatollah Khomeini, “is not exclusively that of Iran, because Islam does not belong to any particular people. . . . We will export our revolution throughout the world because it is an Islamic revolution. The struggle will continue until the calls ‘there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah’ are echoed all over the world.”²² Iran’s constitution commits the regime to expanding “the sovereignty of God’s law throughout the world.”²³ And for three decades Iran has sustained its jihad on America and other nations by means of a terrorist proxy war, spearheaded by Lebanese Hezbollah (see chapter 1).

Underwriting and inspiring such aggression serves a dual purpose: it is a means of ridding the world of unbelievers and of compelling wholesale submission to Allah’s will.

What motivates the jihadists, if we judge by their words and deeds, is their belief in Islam.

Deviating from Islam?

Despite the decades of explicit statements, in books and speeches, by jihadist ideologues naming their political-cultural ideal—

despite Osama bin Laden’s praise of 9/11 as a righteous act in the path of God—

despite the declaration by Ayman al-Zawahiri that the jihad against the West aims to “restore [the Muslim nation’s] fallen caliphate and regain its lost glory”—

despite the declaration by Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, mastermind of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, that Muslims “must terrorize the enemies of Islam and frighten them and disturb them and shake the earth under their feet”—

despite the unrepentant bloodlust of Zacarias Moussaoui, charged with complicity in 9/11, who told prosecutors of his desire to “inflict pain on your country,” and of his willingness to kill Americans “any time, anywhere” in the name of Allah—

despite all this and more, we are asked to believe that the jihadists’ motivation is decidedly *not* the religion of Islam.²⁴

This notion came to the fore remarkably fast. Long before the torrent of editorials and books exculpating Islam, while the ruins of the World Trade Center were still blazing, President Bush invited a Muslim cleric to speak at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. A couple of months later he invited fifty Muslim ambassadors to the White House to break the fast of Ramadan. His purpose, evidently, was to underscore his belief that “the terrorists have no home in any faith.”²⁵ Voicing the feelings of countless people, Bush insisted ardently that “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don’t represent peace. They represent evil and war.”²⁶

Many serious scholars have labored, in print and on television, to distance Islam from terrorism. Bernard Lewis, an eminent historian and an advisor to the Bush administration, has argued that terrorist groups like Al Qaeda “sanctify their action through pious references to Islamic texts, notably the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet.” But they are “highly selective in their choice and interpretation of sacred texts,” and accept or reject texts “according to whether they support or contradict their own dogmatic and militant positions.”²⁷

Clearly, among Muslims there are differences on how to understand the Koran and the sayings attributed to Muhammad (or *hadith*). There are rival sects, most notably Sunni and Shiite, and multiple schools of thought on the body of laws known as sharia. Within the religion there are competing lines of doctrinal interpretation. It may well be true that the jihadists have an interpretation distinctive to them. But is theirs a “hijacking” of the religion, a rank perversion of it—or an interpretation understandably flowing out of Islam?

It is helpful to think about this from a wider perspective. In all of the major religions of the world there are disputes about interpretation. For example, devout Catholics and equally committed Protestants have disagreed violently on the meaning of Christianity (and of course Protestants are themselves splintered into countless subgroups). Catholics have denounced Protestants for deviating from the one true interpretation of the Bible; Protestants have denounced Catholics for losing sight of the authentic teachings

of Christ. They have reviled each other as heretics and fought devastating wars over their beliefs.

Protestants and Catholics may wish to regard their line of thinking as truer to the faith, but from the outside looking in, there's no basis to anoint either side as hewing to the definitive interpretation. To say that one side or another has "hijacked" or "perverted" Christianity would mean that it advocates some view with manifestly no relevance to or intelligible basis in the religion's teachings and sacred books. That sort of charge might be plausible if, say, the Pope issued an edict that believers must henceforth emulate, not the humility of Jesus, but the pride of Zeus, and exalt, not the virginal purity of Mary, but the keen sensuality of Aphrodite. Such an edict would not intelligibly follow from, but flout two millennia of Church doctrine and practice. But, despite the many theoretical differences that separate Catholics and Protestants, it would be absurd to claim that the sermons of Pope Benedict XVI and those of evangelical pastor Rick Warren have no bearing on Christianity. Rather: they represent two groups differing over how to interpret Christianity.

The same argument applies to Islam. To say that jihadists have "hijacked" the religion would mean that their interpretation flies in the face of Islam. It would mean that Qutb, Khomeini, Mawdudi, bin Laden, and other Islamists embrace goals and means that are as alien to Islam as Zeus is to Christianity. That's essentially how President Bush has portrayed followers of the jihadist movement:

Whatever it's called, this ideology is very different from the religion of Islam. This form of radicalism exploits Islam to serve a violent political vision: the establishment, by terrorism and subversion and insurgency, of a totalitarian empire that denies all political and religious freedom. These extremists distort the idea of jihad into a call for terrorist murder against Christians and Jews and Hindus and also against Muslims from other traditions, who they regard as heretics.²⁸

Contained in this statement are three assertions: (1) that Islam and the creed of the jihadists are fundamentally dissimilar; (2) that their totalitarian political goal has no basis in the religion; and (3) that their conception of holy war is antithetical to Islam. Let's ponder each of these in turn.

Islam vs. Islamic totalitarianism

"Despite the rich diversity in Islamic practice," writes John L. Esposito, a noted scholar of Islam at Georgetown University, "the Five Pillars of Islam remain the core and common denominator, the five essential and obligatory practices

all Muslims accept and follow.” Esposito is rightly viewed as something of an apologist for Islam, and his widely-adopted college text, *Islam: The Straight Path*, is an openly sympathetic account of the religion. From his discussion of the Five Pillars, we can observe that the sum of these supreme values is to effect and demonstrate the believer’s complete submission to authority.

The first pillar is the call upon a Muslim (“one who surrenders”) to proclaim: “There is no god but the God [Allah] and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” With this acknowledgement, “a person professes his or her faith and becomes a Muslim,” writes Esposito.²⁹ This profession of absolute commitment is reaffirmed at daily prayers (the second pillar). Five times a day, every day, believers must drop whatever they are doing, face the direction of the holy city of Mecca in a mosque (“place of prostration”), at home, or elsewhere, and then pray—on their knees, bowing their heads to the floor.

A Muslim is obligated to make payments of *zakat*, a kind of tithe that goes to support the community, specifically orphans, widows, the poor; it also goes to support the spread of Islam (the third pillar). But this is not charity, because the giving is not optional; the money is regarded as a due owed to the poor and the suffering. The giver is not the rightful owner of the wealth, but merely the trustee of what Allah has deigned to provide from His bounty.

The fast of Ramadan is the fourth pillar. For one month every year, from dawn to dusk, Muslims must deprive themselves of the pleasures of food and drink and sexual intercourse. The fifth pillar is the duty to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, incumbent on males. At least once in his lifetime, the Muslim must set aside his work and any other responsibilities and invest time and money to make his way to Islam’s holy city.³⁰

Consider some of the implications of these tenets. The believer is duty bound to bow continually before Allah; he is duty bound to cross oceans and continents in pilgrimage to prove his unwavering submission; he is duty bound to sacrifice fruits of his labor for the sake of Muslims who suffer in his community; he is duty bound to efface his desires—for food, drink, and the pleasure of sex—in a show of devotion; he is duty bound to proclaim, by his words and deeds, that he subordinates himself to his supernatural master.

The belief that man must obey Allah rests only on faith—an emotionally induced belief in the absence of facts and evidence. The believer is commanded to will his mind to believe—based not on what he himself can see or hear, nor on what he himself can infer logically from the evidence of his perception. To believe, he must put aside his rational faculty and accept blindly the mystical revelations of Muhammad; he commits, on principle, to put the dictates of an authority—the Koran, the local cleric—above his own grasp of facts.

The believer's surrender must be complete. The moral principle of Islam (as of Christianity) demands the sacrifice not only of *mind*, but also of *self*. A Muslim's wealth, his own pleasures, his goals—none of these are important. The only will that matters belongs to God. Thus a believer is forbidden from “hoarding” goods or services that are in demand, and from lending money out on interest. Were he to charge interest, he would benefit by increasing his wealth, gaining the means to better serve his health and comfort. And were he to “hoard” water or rice, he would gain the means to survive a famine (“hoarding” carries an additional complication, since it might also betray his doubt in the unfailing providence of Allah to take care of His people). The believer's duty is to sow the money back into the Muslim community without gaining by it; likewise, if he has an abundance of water when it is scarce, he must surrender his claim to it for the sake of others in the community. The beneficiary of his sacrifice is always something or someone other than the believer himself—Allah or His divine law; his neighbors; the community. His own life is of no significance or value, except to the extent that he surrenders his mind and values obediently.

Morally, the believer must learn that he is not a sovereign individual; his life is not his own to dispose of as he sees fit; he belongs to Allah, who alone is sovereign. And he must serve the interests of his master. A believer's determination of what's true or false is inconsequential; he must accept unreservedly the ideas, beliefs, commandments handed to him—never questioning authority. What this moral code offers is guidance on how one can achieve the ideal of becoming a slave to Allah.

Now listen to Sayyid Qutb.

The theoretical foundation of Islam, in every period of history, has been to witness ‘La ilaha illa Allah’—‘There is no deity except God’—which means to bear witness that the only true deity is God, that He is the Sustainer, that He is the Ruler of the universe, and that He is the Real Sovereign; to believe in Him in one's heart, to worship Him Alone, and to put into practice His laws. Without this complete acceptance of ‘La ilaha illa Allah,’ which differentiates the one who says he is a Muslim from a non-Muslim, there cannot be any practical significance to this utterance, nor will it have any weight according to Islamic law.

Theoretically, to establish it means that people should devote their entire lives in submission to God, should not decide any affair on their own, but must refer to God's guidance through only one source, that is, through the Messenger of God—peace be on him. Thus, in the second part of the Islamic creed, we bear witness ‘Wa ashhadu anna Muhammadar Rasul Allah’—‘And I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.’³¹

If the Five Pillars form the core of Islam, is not Qutb's one intelligible interpretation of their meaning and application?

Organizing Society and Government

Integrity to Islam's moral principles implies a certain kind of social order. Politically, believers must obey Islamic law, or sharia—a body of rules derived from the Koran and the *hadith*. Under such laws, Muslims can practice their faith without compromise; the laws that govern them protect and foster piety, while exacting punishments for offenses against Muslims—such as theft or murder—and against their creed.

Just as there must be a unity within the believer between his life and belief; so, politically, state and religion are one, indivisible. The concept of separating state and church is a distinctively Western innovation that was long unknown, and then shunned, in Islam. The purpose of such a barrier wall is to limit the scope of religion over life. Such a wall is a value if one regards man as a rational, sovereign being, and wishes to protect individuals from the imposition (or proscription) of ideas by religion. But if one holds that sovereignty belongs only to Allah, the state must be an extension of the authority of Islam.

The dominion of Islam, many Muslims hold, must encompass all of a believer's existence—but also the existence of all nonbelievers. Since the Koran is the Truth of Allah, as communicated by His final messenger, it purports to answer the universal needs of man. Islam's embrace therefore must span all of Allah's creations. The Koran states: "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which has been forbidden by Allah and His messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, [even if they are] of the People of the Book, until they pay the *jizya* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."³²

Those who carry out this command, according to the Koran, rank highest among believers:

Do ye make the giving of drink to pilgrims, or the maintenance of the Sacred Mosque, equal to [the pious service of] those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and strive with might and main in the cause of Allah? They are not comparable in the sight of Allah: and Allah guides not those who do wrong. Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might and main, in Allah's cause, with their goods and persons, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah: they are the people who will achieve [salvation].³³

On their interpretation, a boundless sharia regime is the organization of men and of society that Islam demands—and the one that Islamic totalitar-

ians have made their mission to realize. Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, observed that “Islam is a comprehensive system which deals with all spheres of life.

It is a country and homeland or a government and a nation. It is conduct and power or mercy and justice. It is a culture and a law or knowledge and jurisprudence. It is material and wealth or gain and prosperity. It is Jihad and a call or army and a cause. And finally, it is true belief and correct worship.³⁴

Jihad

In their embrace of holy war, Islamic totalitarians consciously try to model themselves on the religion’s founder and the figure who is held to exemplify its virtues, Muhammad. He waged wars to impose, and expand, the dominion of Islam.

The prophet told the faithful that he “was ordered to fight all men until they say ‘There is no god but Allah.’”³⁵ Assuring Muslims that the “gates of paradise are under the shadow of the swords,” Muhammad urged that “A morning or an evening expedition in God’s path is better than the world and what it contains, and for one of you to remain in the line of battle is better than his prayers for sixty years.”³⁶

In the last nine years of his life, Muhammad is “recorded as having participated in at least twenty-seven campaigns and deputized some fifty-nine others—an average of no fewer than nine campaigns annually.”³⁷ The successors of Muhammad embarked on further campaigns (occasionally vying with Christian holy warriors). Their expeditions, reports the historian Efraim Karsh, were considerable:

Within twelve years of Muhammad’s death in June 632, Iran’s long-reigning Sasanid Empire had been reduced to a tributary, and Egypt and Syria had been wrested from Byzantine rule. By the early eighth century, the Muslims had extended their dominion over Central Asia and much of the Indian subcontinent all the way to the Chinese frontier, had laid siege to Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantines, and had overrun North Africa and Spain.³⁸

They sought also to penetrate Europe, reaching as far as northwest France, but were then repelled.

Jihad, the armed striving in the path of Allah, became a fixture of Islamic culture. For centuries scholars have written treatises glorifying jihad and defining the proper conduct of such warfare—for example, the propriety of deploying certain weapons and the terms under which Muslims might be

exempt from the duty of fighting in a jihad. (There is another conception of jihad—understood as an internal struggle against desires and temptations. Many Western apologists eager to whitewash Islam have trumpeted this notion. This essentially metaphorical meaning, advanced by some sects, is not the term’s primary meaning. The dominant meaning of jihad throughout the substantial body of Islamic literature on the subject is that of religiously motivated war.)³⁹

By means of the sword, an Islamic military empire arose. Some conquered peoples were forced to convert, others were left to choose among death, conversion, or a subhuman existence as subject-peoples. Those who chose the last were required to pay special taxes to their rulers and lived as humiliated inferiors of Muslims, subject to minimal legal protections and at times open persecution. The scholar Bat Ye’or, in *Islam and Dhimmitude*, and Andrew Bostom, in his comprehensive *The Legacy of Jihad*, have described the wretched fate of non-Muslim peoples in lands ruled by Allah’s warriors. Whether converts or subjugated men, all were made to enslave their mind and life to Allah’s authority.

In the fourteenth century, to take one example, Muslim forces launched a jihad on the Indian subcontinent. A chronicler at the time reports how the sultan leading the war “ordered the massacre of all the chiefs of Hindustan out of the pale of Islam, by his infidel-smiting sword, [and] that if in this time it should by chance happen that a schismatic should claim his right, the pure Sunnis would swear in the name of this Khalifa of God, that heterodoxy has no right.”⁴⁰ Some years later the same author recounted: “The whole country, by means of the sword of our holy warriors, has become like a forest denuded of its thorns by fire. . . . Islam is triumphant, idolatry is subdued.”⁴¹ After a battle in 1305, the jihadists had laid waste to the land; so far “as human eye could see, the ground was muddy with blood.” Muslim holy warriors were known on some occasions to celebrate their triumphs by erecting a pillar of pagan heads.⁴²

Returning to the holy warriors that now confront the West, we hear Khomeini explaining: “Islam says: Whatever good there is exists thanks to the sword and in the shadow of the sword! People cannot be made obedient except with the sword!” And: “The great prophet of Islam in one hand carried the Koran and in the other a sword; the sword for crushing the traitors and the Koran for guidance.”⁴³ In the view of Ali Benhadj, who led a jihadist campaign in Algeria, the enforcers of Allah’s law must never shrink from the need of massacres and butchery. “If a faith, a belief, is not watered and irrigated by blood, it does not grow. It does not live. Principles are reinforced by sacrifices, suicide operations and martyrdom for Allah. Faith is

propagated by counting up deaths every day, by adding up massacres and charnel-houses.”⁴⁴

Abdullah Azzam, an ideological mentor to Osama bin Laden, extolled slaughter in the path of Allah:

History does not write its lines except with blood. Glory does not build its lofty edifices except with skulls. Honor and respect cannot be established except on a foundation of cripples and corpses. Empires, distinguished peoples, states and societies cannot be established except with examples. Indeed, those who think that they can change reality or change societies without blood, sacrifices, and invalids—without pure innocent souls—do not understand the essence of this din [Islam] and they do not know the method of the best of Messengers [Muhammad].⁴⁵

In the jihadists’ attempt to emulate Muhammad, their record of atrocities speaks for itself.

The warriors of Islamic totalitarianism are undeniably motivated by an interpretation of Islam. And it is this interpretation that leads Islamists to the notion that their archenemy is America.

Wrath against America

We have already noted how the Islamists decry the impiety of the Muslim world. Seeing decadence all about them, they claim that the House of Islam is a community besieged. The force assailing their society, according to this diagnosis, is the influence of Western secularism—a force that drives a political wedge between religion and life.

The contours of this alleged problem were identified long ago. Assorted Muslim traditionalists bewailed the oncoming of modern technology and secular ideas as threats to Islam. When the first telephone was introduced into the kingdom of Ibn Saud, in 1927, observes one historian, “there was a great theological debate before the *ulema* [religious scholars] were persuaded of the lawfulness of this infidel invention.”⁴⁶ A gloomy mood beset some Muslim thinkers, for they felt that the foundations of the House of Islam were in peril. In the schools, the advent of a modern curriculum provoked fears about the piety of future generations. The teaching of science, which claims rationally knowable, demonstrable, objective truth, threatened to sideline Islam’s revelations on the nature of man and of the universe. According to some, the teaching of Islam had become perfunctory; others believed that the innovation of teaching it as a distinct subject was anathema, because doing so reinforced the growing dichotomy between life and religion.⁴⁷

The accelerated pace of life diluted piety, because as one thinker explained, “work hours hamper people from praying during the daytime [for lack of special time slots for it] and entertainment programs divert them from it at night.”⁴⁸ In the economy, the introduction of both socialistic and vaguely capitalistic policies came as blows to Islam’s traditions: The first asked Muslims to identify themselves with an economic class, rather than their religious community; the second brought with it infidel practices such as charging interest on loans. The coming of foreign laborers and investment threatened a further loosening of morals, through the influence of infidels on Muslims.⁴⁹

For the totalitarians, there is no middle ground between Islam and secularism; Qutb asserted that “In any time and place human beings face that clear-cut choice: either to observe the Law of Allah in its entirety, or to apply laws laid down by man of one sort or another. In the latter case, they are in a state of jahiliyya.”⁵⁰ The initial targets of Islamists were modernizing states in the Middle East. Because such regimes limited the scope of Islam over life, they were deemed complicit in the decadence of Muslims—and qua apostate regimes, they had to be overthrown.

The Muslim Brotherhood sought to topple Egypt’s regime. Hassan al-Banna reviled the regime, because (in the words of one historian) it used the newly invented radio “to corrupt the minds and souls of ordinary Egyptians with songs about love and sex rather than to inculcate them with the virtues of death and martyrdom in the quest for Allah’s universal empire.”⁵¹ Among Egypt’s other evils, the Brotherhood held, was its espousal of socialist and Arab-nationalist policies. Such doctrines, though laced with Islamic ideas to make them palatable, frayed the bond of faith that subsumes all classes, sects, and national borders. By elevating loyalty to Arab nationalism above Islam, the regime compromised the principle of total submission to only one authority, Allah.

From the 1950s until the latter decades of the century, the obsession of Islamic totalitarian groups was combating apostate Muslim regimes. They focused particularly on those “poisoned” by the influence of former European colonial powers, such as Britain and France. But some Islamists recognized that the wellspring of poison lay elsewhere.

It was America that surpassed all the former colonial powers as an influence on global culture in general, and on the Middle East in particular. It had emerged as the only superpower. America, moreover, was the embodiment of what Islamic totalitarians abhor. It was the antithesis of their moral ideal.

Born with an act of audacious revolt against authority, America was the nation that accepted nothing as higher than the inalienable rights of the individual. Neither a monarch nor an established religion governed men. The

laws and principles of America's government were defined not by clerics, but by men who shared the Enlightenment's reverence for reason. They created a system of government grounded in objective facts accessible to all men who chose to observe and think.

These laws protected each man's moral entitlement to pursue his own earthly happiness, as he deems proper and as conditioned by the principle of individual rights. The government was the servant of the people, not its master. If the government breached the defined limits of the powers delegated to it, the people recognized their right to dissolve such a government and establish one that better served their lives. Man was left free to advocate and practice any ideology, including religion, without fear of being forced to submit to the ideas of another. And to this day Americans are freer than any peoples. They are free to earn fortunes and to spend their wealth on their own chosen values.

The United States is the culmination of the Enlightenment's anti-authoritarian ethos and its concomitant esteem for the sanctity of man's rational mind. It was this legacy that enabled America's standard of living to skyrocket. Because men are free to invest their wealth, energy, and ideas as they see fit, the United States has become a nation unsurpassed at the task of producing values that sustain human life—that make it longer, safer, and more enjoyable. Across the globe people gaze up, far up, in admiration at the stunning luxuries and life-saving technologies that even the poorest American workers can afford.

Yet these are precisely the reasons that, for Islamic totalitarians, America is the embodiment of evil. With his signature perverseness, Osama bin Laden stated: "You are the nation who, rather than ruling by the Sharia of Allah in its Constitution and Laws, choose to invent your own laws as you will and desire. You separate religion from your policies, contradicting the pure nature which affirms Absolute Authority to the Lord and your Creator. . . . You are the worst civilization witnessed by the history of mankind."⁵²

Obviously other nations embrace Western values—science, secular government, individual rights, economic freedom—to varying degrees. But what distinguishes America, and what fans the hatred of Islamic totalitarians, is that it has been so spectacularly successful. This makes it all the more objectionable, and singles it out as a focus of their hostility.

Islam teaches its followers that they are a chosen group, that their piety will be rewarded, and that in this world they will enjoy superiority over the infidels who reject Allah and his prophet. But in actuality, the Arab-Islamic world is weak and woefully poor, whereas infidel America is strong and fabulously wealthy.

This fact raises awkward questions.

The twentysomethings who dropped out of grad school to launch Google and reaped billions in wealth—were they right to have studied computer science rather than memorizing the Koran? Can the middle-class American parents who buy their teenager a car afford to do so because they live under a better political and economic system? Is America's status as a lone superpower a consequence of its un-Islamic ideas? Whether or not Muslims dare answer these questions honestly, the spectacle of America's comprehensive preeminence undermines the totalitarian goal of creating an Islamic empire.

So long as the splendors of America multiply—from vaccines and ubiquitous personal computers to moon landings and routine global air travel—so long as American advances in science and technology spur its galloping prosperity, honest men will resist the calls to surrender their minds to faith. Amid the omnipresent evidence of what man's rational mind can produce when left free to function, religionists face a considerable challenge to induce men to follow a creed of blind obedience to mystical authority.

And, implicitly if not explicitly, Islamic totalitarians recognize that. Qutb, like his intellectual heirs, acknowledged the obvious temptation of secular culture—and desperately sought to impugn the West. He contended that in “the most affluent and materially advanced” of Western societies such as America, people lead “the most miserable lives.”⁵³

We must not be deluded by false appearances when we see that nations which do not believe or implement the Divine method are enjoying abundance and affluence. It is all a temporary prosperity which lasts until the natural laws have produced their effects, allowing the consequences of the miserable split between material excellence and spiritual fulfillment to appear in full.

Because Westerners “have lost touch with their souls,” the West and the Westernizing Middle East were heading for disaster.⁵⁴ Misery and anxiety and suffering, Qutb claimed, would result from secular society. He prophesied rampant deaths from mental disease, suicide, and heart failure. Such diatribes painting secularism as the road to ruin eloquently betray that Islamists feel themselves on the defensive—that they feel obliged to explain away the allure of secular life.

Totalitarians denounce America as barbaric, because it is tremendously civilized. They denounce America as vicious, because it is in reality luminously virtuous: It is an exemplar of what men can accomplish when they are free to achieve their own happiness, earn unlimited wealth, and live by their own convictions. It is, to the holy warriors, an abomination that cannot be allowed to endure.

It must be brought down.

But these despicable killers—we often hear—are just a fringe group. What is more significant, they are supposedly bereft of ideological support among what they take to be their constituency, the global population of about one billion Muslims. Drawing on such premises, some people reach the soothing conclusion that the threat from Islamic totalitarians is much less formidable than it might appear to be.

Magnitude of the Threat

What is the constituency of the Islamic totalitarian movement? Who, if anyone, in the Muslim mainstream supports the movement's ideals and its actions? What is the opposition to it, and of what consequence are such opponents? Is there indeed a fundamental ideological gulf between the mainstream and the totalitarians?

Consider the beliefs and practice of the Muslim mainstream. How would most Muslims respond to Sayyid Qutb's statement that Islam is a "declaration that sovereignty is God's alone"?⁵⁵ The overwhelming majority would resoundingly agree. Every day, five times a day—from Morocco to the Sudan, Egypt to Bosnia, Afghanistan to Indonesia—millions of Muslims prostrate themselves in obedient prayer. Every year millions walk, sail, drive, and fly to reach Mecca to fulfill their duty of the *hajj*, or religious pilgrimage. Every day during the month of Ramadan, Muslims deny themselves food, drink, sex. In word and deed, mainstream Muslims attest that Islam is a supreme value in their lives.

Internecine hostilities—both sectarian and racial—divide Muslims, but one fundamental bond unites them. For Muslims, observes Bernard Lewis, "the basic division—the touchstone by which men are separated from one another, by which one distinguishes between brother and stranger—is that of faith, of membership in a religious community. . . . What is meant is. . . religion as a social and communal force, a measure of identity and a focus of group loyalty."⁵⁶ Belonging to the community of Allah's followers confers on the believer his self-worth—not his individual accomplishments and character. Their religion is a source of personal identity.

Even under Middle East regimes that are putatively secular, Islam is a sacred value. In Syria, under a Baathist regime (modeled on European fascism), impugning Islam is anathema. In 1967, a Syrian army magazine published an article condemning God and religion as "mummies which should be transferred to the museums of historical remains."⁵⁷ There ensued large demonstrations, reports one commentator, "in all the major Syrian cities . . . ,

leading to widescale strikes, the arrest of many religious leaders, and considerable violence.”⁵⁸ The Syrian regime sentenced the writer and two editors to prison, in hopes of mollifying the agitated public. Devotion to Islam runs deep throughout the Middle East. Note that Khomeini’s Islamic revolution in 1979 succeeded in what was at the time one of the Middle East’s more Westernized nations.

Because mainstream Muslims take their religion seriously, pious subservience to authority is the norm. Muslims unthinkingly believe and comply with the say-so of authority. They unquestioningly swallow fantastical conspiracy theories,⁵⁹ and they willingly do as they are commanded to do. That dutiful obedience was on display in the so-called Danish cartoon crisis of 2006.

The crisis began after a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, published twelve cartoons pertaining to Islam and Muhammad, some of which were satirical. (The purpose was to test whether the fear of offending Muslims had created a climate of self-censorship in Europe.) Violence erupted across the Islamic world. Mobs invaded and torched Danish embassies in Lebanon, Libya, and Syria; elsewhere, mobs attacked other embassies using grenades and guns. Muslims called for the beheading of the cartoonists and offered bounties to whoever could execute the blasphemers. More than one hundred people died in riots across the world, with nearly 1,000 injured. All of this havoc came to pass, according to the standard account of the crisis, because Muslims had been outraged by the Danish cartoons of Muhammad. These alleged affronts to their prophet impelled Muslims to rush into the streets and demand blood.

But this ignores a crucial aspect of the Muslim reaction. Observe that *Jyllands-Posten* had published the images in September 2005. Those images, however, were far from self-evidently offensive to Muslim sensibilities. Just two months later in Egypt—the most populous Arab country—the newspaper *Al Fajr* republished six of the cartoons.⁶⁰ The Egyptian response? There was none. In Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country on earth, a Web site also published the cartoons—to indifferent yawns.⁶¹ The riots in the Islamic world began only in January and peaked in February. Why the delay? Being subservient to authority, Muslims reached no conclusions of their own and had no reaction, until told what reaction to have.

Those orders soon came. The leaders of the world’s fifty-seven Muslim nations had gathered for a summit in Mecca in December, and decided to stir up their people into a religious fervor over the cartoons.⁶² When the masses were made to believe that a slight had been done to Islam, when they were handed Danish flags to burn, when they were ordered into the streets—they duly obeyed. They raged. Many rioters had not even seen the images; few

newspapers published them in the Middle East. The mobs who ran amok were mindlessly obeying authority in the name of defending Islam. Were it not for the authorities that instigated the outrage, were it not for the mass of believers taking on faith the dictum of authority, there would have been no riots, no uproar, no death threats. Nothing.

Such obedience is consonant with the ideal of the totalitarians. They enjoin making Islam the all-embracing value in human life. This principle conditions what is to be regarded as a legitimate source of knowledge: the dicta of authority. It also conditions what kind of knowledge is to be regarded as worth pursuing: that which reinforces piety. On this point, a Taliban publication explained the movement's credo: "Any study besides that of the Quran is a distraction, except the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) and jurisprudence in the religion. Knowledge is that He narrated to us, and anything other than that is the whispering of Satan."⁶³ Conforming with this notion means *not* asking questions, *not* challenging the received wisdom, *not* exploring nature, *not* investigating the world. Do mainstream Muslims in the Arab-Islamic world rebel against so preposterous a notion?

No. They evince a wholesale indifference to learning. A listing of twenty-seven countries ranked according to book sales—beginning with the United States and ending with Vietnam—does not include a single Muslim state. In 2002 the United Nations issued a report, prepared by a committee of Arab intellectuals, that stated: "The Arab world translates about 330 books annually, one-fifth of the number that Greece translates. The accumulative total of translated books since the Caliph Maa'moun's [*sic*] time [the ninth century] is about 100,000, almost the average that Spain translates in one year."⁶⁴

Practically nonexistent in the Islamic world is the outlook of the scientist. Scientists must be willing to defy authority and tradition for the sake of truth. But a culture that prizes passive conformity with dogma militates against the individual who asserts himself cognitively in a systematic quest for knowledge. When, despite his culture, some budding scientist nevertheless emerges, his prospects of engaging in research might appear to be good. There is plenty of oil wealth available to underwrite scientific research. Yet in Saudi Arabia—one of the richest Muslim countries—there were just 1,915 active research scientists in 1987. (By comparison, at that time in the Western nation of Israel, whose population is about four times smaller than that of Saudi Arabia, there were 11,617 research scientists.) Scientific and technological advances emanating from the Islamic world are negligible.⁶⁵

But in this culture one book is ever in demand and universally cherished: The Koran. Clerics are superstars whose sermons are sold on tape and air regularly on television. Piety is a virtue that the masses aspire to. Because

the mainstream's commitment to Islam is so profound, there is considerable popular support for the totalitarians' ideal.

Jihadists are not vilified as reprobates or loathed for besmirching the peaceful reputation of Islam; they are widely lionized. Posters memorializing "martyred" young men bedeck street corners in Beirut, Gaza, and the West Bank; their horrific deeds are eulogized in fulsome obituaries posted on the Internet. Osama bin Laden and his deputies are celebrated as heroes. Stroll through downtown Sarajevo, and in bookstalls you can find on sale Saudi-sponsored books promoting absolute rule by sharia.⁶⁶ Hop into a taxi in Beirut, and instead of music from the radio you are as likely to hear speeches by Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, the religious leader of Hezbollah. "Lines from his speeches are popular ring tones on cellphones. His face is a common computer screensaver. Wall posters, key rings and even phone cards bear his image."⁶⁷

The holy warriors fight for an Islamic regime, and an overwhelming mass of Muslims support and endorse them, because they regard that ideal as virtuous. This is why jihadists are able to broadcast their message, recruit fighters, run training camps, acquire weapons, and mount hugely expensive attacks that take years to orchestrate.

Untold numbers of Muslims do far more than condone the vile deeds of jihadists.

Consider the Muslim reaction to 9/11. While a spasm of mourning shook even stridently anti-American countries in Europe, in the Islamic world there was euphoria. In the southern Philippines, in Pakistan, in Bangladesh, in Saudi Arabia, in Nigeria, in Indonesia, and elsewhere, thousands of Muslims took to the streets in solidarity with bin Laden.⁶⁸ Palestinians handed out candy, set off firecrackers, and fired pistols into the air (as they typically do after suicide-bombings against Israel). That admiration persists. A journalist wandering through a McDonald's in Egypt, several years after the attacks, reports the reaction of some locals: One "eighteen year old university student volunteered . . . that she called up all her friends to share her joy after learning that thousands of Americans had died in Washington and New York. 'Everyone celebrated,' she said, dipping her French fries into ketchup, as her girlfriends giggled. 'People honked in the streets, cheering that finally America got what it truly deserved.'"⁶⁹

Dissent from this prevalent sentiment was appallingly scarce. An Islamic scholar at the most prestigious Islamic university in Egypt, Al Azhar, publicly condemned the attacks; but he acknowledged that he was a lone voice.⁷⁰ There were no spontaneous mass rallies condemning the atrocities. Although some Muslims told pollsters that they considered the attacks to be acts of "terrorism," they maintained that these were acts of political defiance.

They may not embrace the means, in other words, but they nevertheless admire the cause.⁷¹

Critics of the totalitarian movement itself may be few, but they are not unheard of in the Islamic world. Abdul Rauf is the imam of the Herati Mosque, located in one of Kabul's most modern neighborhoods, and is reputed to be one of the few clerics in Afghanistan who dared oppose the Taliban when it was in power. "It is true," he told the *Washington Post*, "I criticized the Taliban because they were so harsh and tortured people." Considering the punishments inflicted on those who ignited the Taliban's wrath, such resistance seems impressive (perhaps even a sign of hope for the future of Afghanistan).

But in March 2006, when an "Afghan man was put on trial for converting to Christianity, Rauf led the emotional charge to demand his execution under Islamic law. The public would 'cut him [the convert] to pieces' if the authorities failed to act, Rauf said." This imam hardly fits the profile of a stern Talibanesque prig; he is described as "a cheerful man who rides his bicycle to his mosque each day," and who proudly showed the reporter an itinerary of a trip he had made to the United States, visiting mosques and churches. It is possible that Rauf rejects the totalitarian quest for a global caliphate, and it is possible that his criticism of the Taliban's methods was in earnest, but in explaining his campaign, he evinces a fundamental commitment to the ideal animating the totalitarians. He noted that "ours is the complete and final religion. If you leave it, that is like throwing God away. . . . [I]f you leave Islam, our law says you must be killed. If Abdul Rahman [the convert] stood before me right now, I would kill him myself."⁷²

In the Arab-Islamic world, there is no countervailing *ideological* opposition. We do not hear advocates for reason and individualism in opposition to faith and submission. Absent is a counterpart to Thomas Jefferson bearding religious and royal authority—an intellectual force urging men to "Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear."⁷³ There is no voice sonorously declaring that sovereignty belongs only to the individual, that each man exists not by permission, but by right, and ought to be free to pursue his own happiness.

Where the mainstream and critics diverge from the totalitarians is only over the question of means, not ends.

Nevertheless, some Western observers pin their hopes on "moderate" Muslims. The term does not mean "liberal or democratic but only anti-Islamist" Muslims (i.e., Muslims who are not totalitarians).⁷⁴ We cannot hear these voices of real opposition, because they lack the wherewithal to disseminate

their ideas and are often suppressed. If only we gave them a chance, however, supposedly they could serve as credible proxies for the West in the effort to tamp down the influence of Islamic totalitarians. But such an enterprise is worse than futile.

The only intelligible meaning of “moderate” advocates of religion are those who try to combine devotion to faith with concessions to reason. They obey the dictates of Islam in some areas and not others, fencing off certain issues or areas of life from the purview of religion. Let us grant the premise that the West can find moderate Muslims and support them in a way that does not discredit them in Muslim eyes as saboteurs conspiring to undermine Islam. Could moderates really steer their culture away from the totalitarian movement?

The holy warriors hold that Islam must shape every last detail of man’s life. The moderates accept the ideal of Islam but shy away from the vision of total state. Moderates might agree to allow sharia to govern schools, say, but not commerce; to dictate marriage laws, but not punishments for blasphemy, apostasy, or adultery. Yet in doing so, moderates ultimately advance the agenda of the totalitarians, since even delimited applications of Islam to government constitute an endorsement of it as the proper source of law.

The tension between moderates and the totalitarians is unsustainable. What happens when the totalitarians push for expanding the scope of sharia a bit more? If sharia can govern banking and trade, for example, why not other aspects of life? Why not also institute Islamic punishments, such as beheading apostates? Having accepted in principle the ideal of sharia, moderates have no grounds to reject further means to that end. They can offer no principled opposition to the slaughter of infidels who refuse to submit, or of apostates who claim the freedom to choose their own convictions. In the face of the incremental or rapid advance of the totalitarian goal, the moderates are in the long run impotent. If Islam is the ideal, why practice it in moderation?

Nor, unsurprisingly, is “moderation” the rallying cry that is rousing Muslims to action.

The cause galvanizing many Muslims is jihad. And the appeal of Islamic totalitarianism is not confined to nations that have Muslim majorities. Three of the four suicide-bombers in the 2005 attack on London were second-generation British citizens. Several of the terrorist plots foiled in the United States since 2001 involved American-born jihadists.⁷⁵ The killers are attracted by a moral ideal that they believe is worth dying for: the vision of righteously obliterating enemies of God and, on the ruins of the Western world, establishing a global Islamic regime. This vision appeals to Muslims from every walk of life, because it serves and is justified by their religious beliefs.

Because fidelity to Islam is entrenched and fundamentally unopposed in the culture, so too is support for the zealous killers aching to destroy America. That support is deep and wide; the recruitment pool, large and growing. With the passage of time, the enemy has grown fiercer, more confident of its eventual victory.

What will it take to defeat this enemy?

Defeating the Enemy

The trauma of 9/11 should have awakened our political leaders to a frightening truth. But they slept on.

Those heinous attacks constituted an act of war—and it was not even the opening salvo. Islamists had marched into battle decades ago (see chapter 1). Washington should have connected the dots—from 9/11 to the USS *Cole* to the embassy bombings in Africa to the Khobar Towers, all the way back to the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979—but our policymakers did no such thing. To the extent that this spiral of escalating attacks came to mind, it was regarded as a string of isolated crises—just one damn thing after another.

Consonant with that disintegrated, minutely concrete mindset, our leaders kept their minds firmly shut to another crucial fact. They failed to recognize that behind the wending trail of bloodshed there was a specific enemy—the Islamic totalitarian movement; and that all of its aggression served a specific ideal—the imposition of a global sharia regime. Absent from our foreign policy was the crucial recognition that Islamic totalitarians had launched a holy war against us. The catastrophe of 9/11 heightened the need to conceptualize the menace. But our intellectual and political leaders only clouded the issue further: they evasively latched on to pseudo-explanations of what actuates the jihadists.

All of this precludes any hope of taking effective action to defend ourselves. But when we properly define the enemy and its motivation, we arm ourselves with the necessary means of achieving victory. This knowledge enables us to determine the steps required to defeat the enemy. (We will return to this question in later chapters.)

The warriors, we have already seen, are committed idealists, though not the conventional sort who regard their ideal as good in theory but not in practice. It is precisely because they consistently unite their ideas and actions that they constitute such a deadly threat. They believe that their vision of enshrining Allah's dominion on earth is both just *and* achievable. The promise of earthly success gives their mystical ideal (a notion utterly

divorced from facts) the semblance of reality—and the potent visceral rush that inspires men to give up their lives for an abstract vision.

We cannot uproot the threat merely by thwarting a few terrorists, here and there. Those who join the battle are endorsed and supported, cheered on and revered, by vast numbers of mainstream Muslims. What matters most is *why* the fighters fight—and why their abettors support them. The killers act on their convictions; capturing or killing Osama bin Laden is necessary but woefully inadequate. So long as the moral ideal remains viable in the minds of its adherents, some new leader will emerge, hydra-like, to perpetuate the struggle. Shut down a cluster of safe houses, or a major channel of arms trafficking, or a dozen training grounds—and new ones will open thanks to the undeterred abettors of jihad.

Victory requires breaking the enemy's will to fight. To render Islamic totalitarianism a nonthreat, we must obliterate the idea that their moral ideal is achievable. The enemy must suffer a punishing military onslaught, so that its ideal is demonstrated to be an unrealizable fantasy. The purpose of crushing the enemy's spirit is twofold: to end the present threat and to deter future aggression. When men have abandoned all hope of success, they lay down their arms and renounce the struggle. When men are convinced that whoever seeks to harm Americans will be ground to dust, they will be paralyzed by fear. To renew the struggle would be to assure their own destruction. Although some may continue to daydream of destroying "the Great Satan" and enforcing universal submission to Allah, few will join (or dare aid) their patently impossible quest. No ideal that is obviously futile attracts men who will fight and die for it.

Inseparable from the military aspect is the need to articulate our moral justification for fighting back. The precondition of marching into battle is knowing clearly what one is fighting for and knowing that it is morally good. That knowledge is the fount of moral confidence, the confidence that it is right to kill and to fight to the death for one's cause. Demonstrating our moral strength is crucial also for destroying the enemy's spirit. By broadcasting through our actions and in proud declarations that we know destroying the enemy is morally just, that we judge the enemy as thoroughly corrupt, and that we stand committed to our values—we can demoralize the enemy's forces and supporters.

To discredit the enemy's ideal, we must begin by targeting its inspiration and archpatron, Iran. Since the revolution of 1979, Iran has been the standard-bearer of Islamic totalitarianism. The revolution was the movement's first triumph. The Western world was left reeling in disbelief at the eruption of religious militancy; the Islamic world marveled at the spectacle and was galvanized. Far less powerful than the army or the police, the revo-

lutionaries nevertheless overcame the Shah's "impious" regime. What made this all the more rousing to Muslims is that the toppled government had long enjoyed close ties with Washington.

Sparks from the Iranian revolution ignited fires in the souls of Muslims far and wide. Nationalism had dominated politics in the Middle East, but it was losing momentum, and after the revolution it was supplanted by Islam. Around that time, the Palestinian cause was almost routed, its moral ideal of nationalism practically discredited. But the revolution helped reinvigorate the Palestinian movement as a *religious* struggle. For one Palestinian activist who had soured on nationalism, Iran's revolution "demonstrated that even against an enemy as powerful as the Shah, a jihad of determined militants could overcome all obstacles." That young activist had written the widely-circulating book *Khomeini: The Islamic Alternative*; he was later a founder of Islamic Jihad, one of the most ferocious Palestinian groups.⁷⁶

The fervor spread. Islamist activists from Southeast Asia, Western Europe, and some communist countries embarked on pilgrimages to Khomeini's regime. In Europe, some activists sought to foment Islamic militancy. A group of young Senegalese intellectuals visited post-revolution Iran, and on their return an Islamist passion rippled through Senegal. One of those intellectuals observed, "The face of the world is transformed, and mankind's very foundations have been shaken since the project of an Islamic society has emerged as a practical and viable alternative to all others."⁷⁷

Tehran worked diligently to sustain this notion by sponsoring terrorists. It helped found, organize, train, proselytize, and direct Lebanese Hezbollah. For a time, senior Hezbollah leaders reported directly to Iran's government, while Iranian officials sat on the organization's governing council. Iran has often given Hezbollah more than \$100 million a year. We saw in chapter 1 how the group functioned as a proxy force for Tehran's jihad against America (and the West). In April 1983, a suicide attack by Hezbollah on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut killed sixty-three, including seventeen Americans. Six months later, a massive suicide truck-bombing claimed the lives of 241 U.S. Marines. After that massacre, America withdrew from Lebanon.⁷⁸ That attack—like the terrorism that followed it—proved that Iran's jihadist militia could repel and coerce the world's most powerful nation.

Iran has come to symbolize the power that comes from comprehensively implementing Islam. Washington's decades of passive, appeasing responses to Iranian aggression has (correctly) taught Islamists that we are weak. This realization has emboldened their cause.

Many in the Islamic world have come to believe that Allah's faithful were able to rise to power in Iran, just as Iran's proxies succeeded in punishing the

infidel Americans again and again, precisely *because of their fidelity to Islam*. It confirms a lesson of the Koran: “O Apostle! Rouse the believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred; if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the unbelievers: For these are a people without understanding.”⁷⁹ Iran makes the ideal actuating the jihadists appear righteous, potent, practical—and Washington’s policy encouraged this belief.

Defining the nature of the enemy and crushing its standard-bearer—the jihadist regime in Tehran—are necessary steps toward defeating it.

(Further military action may be needed to snuff out whatever remains of the jihadist cause. In later chapters, we will explore what should be done to defeat the movement; see part 2 and chapter 7.)



Common is the view that after 9/11 the Bush administration went to war to defend the United States and uphold our ideals. Many people now believe, however, that under Bush we tried the military option and it was shown to be futile, because it resulted in a fiasco. But in its conception and implementation, Bush’s policy was a travesty of what a genuine war to uphold our values should look like. That policy (as the next three chapters argue) made a mockery of what it truly means to fight a war in self-defense.