

DANIEL PIPES

**A New Round
of Anger and
Humiliation**
Islam After 9/11

“THE WORLD HAS CHANGED,” Westerners often say, commenting on the events of September 11, but few Muslims echo that view. In dueling statements issued on October 7, the day the war in Afghanistan began, President George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden exemplified this contrast. While the former referred to the “sudden terror” that had descended on the United States just twenty-seven days earlier, the latter reported that the Muslim world had experienced more than eighty years of “humiliation and disgrace” at American hands, during which its sons were killed and its sanctities defiled. Twenty-seven days versus eighty years sums up the difference between a stunned American sense of ruptured innocence and the brooding militant Islamic feeling of epochal betrayal and trauma. For this and other reasons, the Muslim world was not nearly so jolted by the death of over three thousand Americans as was the West.

More broadly, to understand the impact of September 11 on the Muslim world requires putting aside the response in the West and immersing oneself in Muslim sensibilities. The best place to begin is with an understanding of the deep resentment against the West that bin Laden articulates and so many Muslims share.

ISLAMIC HISTORY AND HOSTILITY TO THE WEST

This anger has deep roots. From the Islamic religion's origins in the seventh century and for roughly the next millennium, the career of Muslims was one of consistent worldly success. By whatever standard one judged—power, wealth, health, or education—Muslims stood at the pinnacle of global achievement. This connection between accepting the Islamic message and apparent reward by God endured in so many aspects of life in so many places for such a long time that Muslims readily came to assume that mundane well-being was their due as a sign of God's favor. To be Muslim meant to be on the winning team.

But then, starting about 1800, things went awry. Power, wealth, health, and education moved elsewhere, and specifically to Europe, a place long scorned as backward. For two long centuries, Muslims have watched as other peoples, especially Christians, surged ahead. Not only did France, England, and the United States do so on the grandest scale, but more recently East Asia has outpaced the Muslim world. As a result, a sense of failure has suffused Muslim life. If Islam brings God's grace, many Muslims have asked themselves, why then do Muslims fare so poorly? This trauma of things going all wrong is the key to understanding modern Islam.

It has spurred deep questions about what needs to be done

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to find the right direction, but few satisfying answers. Despite extensive soul-searching, Muslims have not yet found an answer to the question “What went wrong?” Instead, they have bounced from one scheme to another, finding satisfaction in none of them. A succession of false starts has left Muslims deeply perplexed about their predicament, and not a little frustrated. In all, Muslims sense their own conspicuous lack of success in emerging from the humiliation of their current circumstances.

This sense of failure goes far to explain the acute hostility to the West that prevails in most Muslim societies. Muslims vaguely realize that a thousand years ago, as Martin Kramer puts it, “the Middle East was the crucible of world civilization,” whereas today it “sulks on the margins of a world civilization forged in the West.”¹ That sulking has translated into anger, envy, hostility, irrational fears, conspiracy theories, and political extremism. These emotions go far to account for the appeal of a host of radical ideologies, both imported (fascism, Leninism) and homegrown (Pan-Arabism, Pan-Syrianism). Each of these movements in turn confirms the sense that the West is the enemy.

These days, the strongest vehicle for such emotions is militant Islam (also known as Islamism), a political movement that takes the religion of Islam and turns it into the basis of a totalitarian ideology that shares much with prior versions, namely fascism and Marxism-Leninism. Like them, for example, it seeks to replace capitalism and liberalism as the reigning world system. The appeal of militant Islam goes far to account for the anti-Western hatred coming from Muslims in many places around the world, including Muslims resident in the West itself.

Islamists discern a long list of countries—Algeria, Turkey,

1. Martin Kramer, “Islam’s Sober Millennium,” December 31, 1999.

Egypt, and Malaysia are prominent examples—where they believe local Muslim rulers are doing the West’s dirty business in suppressing their movement. They also have another list—Kashmir, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Sudan rank high here—where they see the West actively suppressing noble Islamist efforts to establish a just society. Whenever Muslims move toward the emergence of an Islamic state, an Islamist explains, the “treacherous hands of the secular West are always there in the Muslim world to bring about the defeat of the Islamic forces.”² Islamists see themselves surrounded and besieged by the West. Around the world, they feel, they are stymied by an arrogant and imperialist West.

HATRED OF THE UNITED STATES

In particular, Islamists see the United States as an aggressive force that seeks to steal Muslims’ resources, exploit their labor, and undermine their religion. A wide consensus exists that Washington and Hollywood have joined forces to establish a hegemony over the world (the “new world order”). In the words of Ayatollah Khomeini, perhaps the most influential modern interpreter of Islam: “The danger that America poses is so great that if you commit the smallest oversight, you will be destroyed. . . . America plans to destroy us, all of us.”³ In the words of an Egyptian, the Americans “have us by the throat.”

This outlook has the crucial implication that violence against Americans is viewed as defensive in nature. That in turn justifies Muslim attempts to harm Americans or even destroy the United States. Ikrama Sabri, Yasir Arafat’s man run-

2. Shamim A. Siddiqi, *Methodology of Dawah Ilallah in American Perspective* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Forum for Islamic Work, 1989), pp. ix–x.

3. Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1981), pp. 286, 306.

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ning the Palestinian Authority's religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, often inveighs against the United States in his Friday sermon at Al-Aqsa mosque, a prestigious and influential position. For example, he made this choice plea to God in 1997: "Oh Allah, destroy America, her agents and her allies!"⁴

To dehumanize Americans, fundamentalists portray them in beastlike terms—vermin, dogs, and bacteria—thereby turning them into enemies deserving of extermination. The Westerner, in the view of 'Adil Husayn, a leading Egyptian writer, is "nothing but an animal whose major concern is to fill his belly."⁵ Immoral, consumerist, and threatening, he deserves to die. The conspiracy theories that so many Middle Eastern religious establishments espouse also dehumanize Americans, depicting them as cunning plotters grasping at Muslim lands, wealth, and women.

One result is the expression of delight on hearing about American fatalities. Ahmad Jibril, a Palestinian leader, publicly shared his joy on hearing about the loss of life due to the San Francisco earthquake in 1989, then added, "I don't know how I would have managed to take revenge on the United States, but it seems that God did it for me."⁶ One also finds such vicious views expressed by Muslims living in the United States itself: Responding to the news of a U.S. Air Force accident not long after, *Islam Report*, a San Diego-based publication, published a headline that read, "O ALLAH, LOCK THEIR THROATS IN THEIR OWN TRAPS!"⁷

This litany of statements points to two facts: Osama bin Laden is not a unique figure but echoes views promoted by

4. Voice of Palestine, on September 12, 1997.

5. *Ash-Sha'b* (Cairo), July 22, 1994.

6. *The Sunday Independent*, November 26, 1989.

7. Quoted in Steven Emerson, "The Other Fundamentalists," *New Republic*, June 12, 1995, p. 30.

some of the most authoritative and influential Islamic authorities; and this viewpoint resonates among Muslims around the world, even including some living in the West.

This context helps explain why the Muslim world responded as it did to the September 11 atrocities, even before it was clear who had perpetrated them. In most of the world, initial reaction to this news was mournful. Peoples and governments alike responded with heartfelt grief and with the sense of common humanity. But among Muslims, the killing of thousands of Americans prompted less a sense of grief than one of pleasure.

“Bull’s-eye,” commented Egyptian taxi drivers as they watched reruns of the World Trade Center collapse. “It’s pay-back time,” said a Cairene. Other Egyptians expressed a wish for George W. Bush to have been buried in the buildings or exulted that this was their most happy moment in decades. And so it went around the Middle East. In Lebanon and the West Bank, Palestinians shot guns into the air, a common way of showing delight. “We’re ecstatic,” said a Lebanese. In Jordan, Palestinians handed out sweets in another expression of joy.

Outside the Middle East, a good many Muslims expressed the view that Americans got what they deserved. Nigerian papers reported that the Islamic Youth Organization in Zamfara province organized an event to celebrate the attacks. “Whatever destruction America is facing, as a Muslim I am happy,” came a typical quote from Afghanistan. A Pakistani leader said that Washington is paying for its policies against Palestinian, Iraqi, Bosnian, and other Muslims, then warned that the “worst is still to come.”

Around the Muslim world, nearly identical anti-American slogans were heard over the next weeks: “U.S., Go to Hell!” (Indonesia), “Go To Hell America” (Malaysia), “Death to America” (Bangladesh), “Death to America” (India), “America

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is the enemy of God” (Oman), “America is a great Satan” (Yemen), “U.S. go to hell” (Egypt), “Down, down USA!” (Sudan).

Most Muslim governments were on best behavior after September 11, decrying the loss of American lives. But here, too, there were cracks. Iranian officialdom, for example, found it very hard to be sympathetic to Americans and insisted on bringing the Arab-Israeli conflict into the discussion. Some analyses connected the terrorism to America’s “blind support of the Zionist regime” and others actually accused Israel of organizing the attacks, in a supposed effort to deflect world opinion from its own conflict with the Palestinians. (This subsequently became an accepted verity in many Muslim countries, with elaborate conspiracy theories about the Mossad’s role.) In Iraq, not surprisingly, the state-controlled media approved of the violence, commenting that the “the American cowboys are reaping the fruit of their crimes against humanity.” It also announced that the “myth of America was destroyed along with the World Trade Center.”

LOVE OF BIN LADEN

Even before September 11, Osama bin Laden enjoyed a very high reputation owing to his unremitting hostility to the United States. His biographer, Simon Reeve, wrote in 1999: “Many who had never met him, whose only contact was through one of his interviews, a radio broadcast or Internet homepage, pronounced themselves ready to die for his cause.”⁸ Hasan at-Turabi, the powerful Sudanese leader, found that bin Laden

8. Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama bin Laden, and the Future of Terrorism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), p. 203.

had developed “as a champion, as a symbol of Islam for all young people, in the whole Muslim world.”⁹

When bin Laden emerged as the man behind the September 11 attacks, his reputation soared to extraordinary heights around the Muslim world. “Long live bin Laden,” shouted five thousand demonstrators in the southern Philippines. In Pakistan, bin Laden’s face sold merchandise and massive street rallies left two persons dead. Ten thousand marched in the capitals of Bangladesh and Indonesia. In northern Nigeria, bin Laden had (according to Reuters) “achieved iconic status” and his partisans set off religious riots leading to two hundred deaths.¹⁰ Pro-bin Laden demonstrations took place even in Mecca, where overt political activism is unheard of.

Everywhere, the *Washington Post* reported, Muslims cheered on bin Laden “with almost a single voice.”¹¹ The Internet buzzed with odes to him as a man “of solid faith and power of will.”¹² A Saudi explained that “Osama is a very, very, very, very good Muslim.”¹³ A Kenyan added: “Every Muslim is Osama bin Laden.”¹⁴ “Osama is not an individual, but a name of a holy war,” read a banner in Kashmir.¹⁵ In perhaps the most extravagant statement, one Pakistani declared that “Bin Laden is Islam. He represents Islam.”¹⁶ In France, Muslim youths chanted bin Laden’s name as they threw rocks at non-Muslims.

Palestinians were especially enamored. According to Husam Khadir, a member of Arafat’s Fatah party, “Bin Laden

9. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 213.

10. Reuters, October 18 and 14, 2001.

11. *Washington Post*, October 9, 2001.

12. Reuters, October 8, 2001.

13. *Time*, October 15, 2001.

14. *New York Times*, October 13, 2001.

15. Reuters, October 11, 2001.

16. *New York Times*, September 30, 2001.

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today is the most popular figure in the West Bank and Gaza, second only to Arafat.”¹⁷ A ten-year-old girl announced that she loves him like a father.¹⁸ Nor was she alone. “Everybody loves Osama bin Laden at this time. He is the most righteous man in the whole world,” declared a Palestinian woman.¹⁹ A Palestinian Authority policeman called him “the greatest man in the world . . . our Messiah” even as he (reluctantly) dispersed students who marched in solidarity with the Saudi.²⁰

Survey research helps understand these sentiments. In the Palestinian Authority, a Bir Zeit poll found that 26 percent of Palestinians considered the September 11 attacks consistent with Islamic law.²¹ In Pakistan, a Gallup poll found a nearly identical 24 percent reaching this conclusion.²² Even those who consider the attacks on September 11 an act of terrorism (64 percent of both Palestinians and Pakistanis) showed respect for these as acts of political defiance and technical prowess. “Of course we’re upset that so many died in New York. But at the same time, we’re in awe of what happened,” said a young Cairene woman.²³ An online survey of Indonesians found 50 percent seeing bin Laden as a “justice fighter” and 35 percent a terrorist.²⁴ More broadly, I estimate that bin Laden enjoyed in those first weeks the emotional support of half the Muslim world.

With the exception of one government-staged anti-bin Laden demonstration in Pakistan and very few prominent Is-

17. *Boston Globe*, October 10, 2001.

18. *The Independent*, October 11, 2001.

19. *The Guardian*, October 9, 2001.

20. *The Independent*, October 11, 2001.

21. IRI, October 11, 2001.

22. *Newsweek*, October 14, 2001.

23. *Washington Post*, October 9, 2001.

24. Reuters, October 17?, 2001. <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/asia/story/0,1870,77031,00.html>.

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lamic scholars, hardly anyone publicly denounced him in September or October 2001. The only Islamic scholar in Egypt who unreservedly condemned the September 11 suicide operations admitted that he is completely isolated.²⁵ Further, not a single Muslim government came out publicly in support of the American bombings against him. American officials were waiting in vain for Muslim politicians to speak up. “It’d be nice if some leaders came out and said that the idea the U.S. is targeting Islam is absurd,” noted one U.S. diplomat.²⁶ They did not do so because to do so meant to contradict bin Laden’s wide adulation.

But then a remarkable change took place.

DISAPPOINTMENT WITH BIN LADEN

The U.S. government began its military campaign in Afghanistan on October 7. For a month, there were no visible results. As late as the morning of November 9, the Taliban regime still ruled the territories that had been under its control for several years—or almost 95 percent of Afghanistan. But then the Taliban rule collapsed. Days later it controlled just 15 percent of the country, and by December 7 it had lost control of Kandahar, its last city, and was on the run in the hills and the caves of Afghanistan, a spent force repudiated widely by joyous Afghans.

This quick change of fortunes resulted in large part from the powerful use of air power by the United States, but also from the lack of perseverance on the part of Taliban troops. Awed by American power, many of them switched sides to the U.S.-backed Northern Alliance. According to one analyst, “De-

25. *Newsweek*, October 15, 2001.

26. *Washington Post*, October 9, 2001.

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fections, even in mid-battle, are proving key to the rapid collapse across Afghanistan of the formerly ruling Taliban militia.”²⁷ American muscle and will made militant Islam a losing proposition. The force that had ruled their country was disintegrating before their eyes and the Taliban’s own forces realized they were on the losing side, having no desire to go down with it, and decided to do something.

This readiness to switch sides fit into a larger pattern that became evident within days of November 11; Muslims around the world sensed the same shift of power away from militant Islam and they responded similarly.

This was especially evident in Pakistan, where enthusiasm for the Taliban cause had been extremely high in September and October 2001. Here is a report, in the *Los Angeles Times*, starting with an account of the scene in Quetta, near the border with Afghanistan, on October 8, or one day after hostilities began: After demonstrators “burned effigies of the American and Pakistani presidents, set fire to cars, stormed the police station and smashed shop windows,” firebrand religious leaders addressed 10,000 people in Ayub Stadium each Friday. They had vengeance in their bellies, they had outrage in their hearts, their anger came out in such a flood of words that some of them got hoarse. “The time will come when the American heads are on one side and our guns are on the other!” one shouted. “Prepare yourself for jihad, and I assure you that success will be ours!”

But then, as American military success became clear, the anti-American zealots lost their nerve. The same stadium that a month earlier held 10,000 two months later had less than 500 people. “A lone, badly wrinkled poster of Osama bin Laden bobbed in the front row. After a parade of religious leaders

27. Associated Press, November 17, 2001.

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fumed at the microphone about jihad, or holy war, the crowd, which had sat almost silent through two hours of speeches, could barely muster a chorus of *Allahu akbar* (God is great) at the end.” In Swat Valley, some 20 percent of the 10 to 15 thousand men who were inspired by cries of *jihad* to go off to fight the United States in Afghanistan did not return. In some cases, the losses were much higher: one Pakistani reported that 41 out of 43 of his comrades lost their lives in Afghanistan.²⁸ These losses generated intense resentment of the militant Islamic leaders who prodded them to go off to war, unprepared and even unwelcome, while they themselves stayed back in the comfort of their native villages.

Pakistanis turned against the militant Islamic groups, especially those that encouraged devout Muslims to travel to Afghanistan and help the Taliban. For example, Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-e-Mohammedi has acknowledged that two to three thousand of its volunteers are missing and feared dead; the organization’s leader, Sufi Muhammad, found himself jailed by the Pakistani authorities when he returned from Afghanistan in November. There is also a widespread anger against him. “We curse Sufi Muhammad for sacrificing so many innocent lives,” said one tribal elder. “It is because of him that so many children have become orphans and women widows.”²⁹ More broadly,

The battle fervor that swept this region at the beginning of the war has largely evaporated, as thousands of foreign volunteer fighters—many of them Pakistani—were left in the gun sights. . . . In these frontier communities, where the mullahs have always had more pull than the government, there is a deepening

28. *New York Times*, January 27, 2002.

29. Associated Press, December 11, 2001.

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resentment of the religious leaders who called away so many young men to a certain death.³⁰

To put it mildly, this is hardly the expected reaction to the American air campaign in Afghanistan, which many analysts predicted would convulse Pakistani society and perhaps even lead to an overthrow of the government by those sympathetic to militant Islam. Instead, a convincing demonstration of U.S. power led to the cowering and retreat of militant Islam.

A similar sequence can be seen in the Arabic-speaking countries. Martin Indyk, the former U.S. ambassador to Israel, noted that in the first week after the U.S. airstrikes began on October 7, nine anti-American demonstrations took place. The second week saw three of them, the third week one, the fourth week, two. “Then—nothing,” observes Indyk. “The Arab street is quiet.”³¹ This is all the more remarkable given that the Arab-Israeli conflict, perhaps the most emotional touchstone of Arab life, heated up considerably at about the same time. A well-traveled reporter came to a similar conclusion:

nearly two months into an intense military campaign, and half-way through the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the Arab “street,” or public opinion, appears to have responded to bin Laden’s call for an anti-Western uprising in the same way it has reacted to similar calls in the past from Islamic militants, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and others—by changing the channel and proceeding with business.³²

In fact, the mood rapidly shifted in the opposite direction. For example, in Kuwait, where the law code was close to being brought into line with Islamic requirements and punishments

30. *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 2001.

31. Newhouse News Service, November 16, 2001.

32. Howard Schneider, “Arab ‘Street’ Unmoved by News,” *Washington Post*, November 30, 2001.

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before September 11, the reality of U.S. strength led to a rapid change in mood. “America’s swift reaction to the Sept. 11 terror attacks, and the scenes of Afghan joy at abolishing the very same religious restrictions, quickly damped enthusiasm” for such changes, reported the *Wall Street Journal*.³³ “Now, the secular people want to abolish all Islamic rules that are applied in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. There are even some voices about permitting alcohol.”

In similar fashion, the Arab media turned on bin Laden when he began looking like a loser. Generalizing about this trend, the *Washington Post* found that “there has been a clear effort to discredit bin Laden in religious terms and shed light on his criminal bent, political aspirations and pretensions of piety.”³⁴ Indeed, some analysts went so far as to suspect that the damage bin Laden had caused Islam was an Israeli plot! “If world Zionism spent billions of dollars to tarnish the image of Islam, it will not accomplish what the terrorists have done with their actions and words.”³⁵ So far had bin Laden fallen that he was now no better than a tool of the alleged Jewish conspiracy.

The same patterns can be found throughout the Muslim world, in such countries as Indonesia, India, and Nigeria, where the overwrought passions of September quickly became distant memories.

American military success so encouraged the authorities that they began, finally, to crack down. This was again most evident in Pakistan. “There has been a profound shift in the politics of religious extremism in Pakistan over the last few weeks,” reported the *Los Angeles Times* on December 10, 2001, which went on to explain that the government for years had

33. December 31, 2001.

34. *Washington Post*, November 23, 2001.

35. Nabil Luka Bibawi in *Al-Ahram*, cited in *ibid*.

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permitted militant Islamic groups to operate with almost total freedom, but seeing which way the wind was now blowing, it began to “rein in the jihad organizations and check their pervasive influence on the nation’s educational, political and social welfare systems.” Those Swat Valley preachers, for example, found themselves behind bars. The most significant step came on January 12, 2002, when President Pervez Musharraf attacked militant Islam in a major speech (“The day of reckoning has come. Do we want Pakistan to become a theocratic state?”) that one observer suggested “has the potential—the potential—to be the kind of mind-set–shattering breakthrough for the Muslim world that has not been seen since Anwar el-Sadat’s 1977 visit to Israel.”³⁶ Making good on his word, in just the first week after this historic speech, Musharraf had government forces close hundreds of religious offices and arrest over two thousand people. Militant Islamic groups aired much displeasure with these steps but did almost nothing to obstruct them (“We cannot fight against our own state, we can only wait for a better time”).³⁷

This pattern was replicated in other countries. The effective ruler of Saudi Arabia admonished religious leaders to be careful and responsible in their statements (“weigh each word before saying it”)³⁸ after he saw that Washington meant business. Likewise, the Egyptian government moved more aggressively against its militant Islamic elements. In Yemen, the government cracked down on the Islamist foreigners coming into the country. Similarly, in China, the government prohibited the selling of badges celebrating Osama bin Laden (“I am bin

36. Thomas L. Friedman, “Pakistan’s Constitution Avenue,” *New York Times*, January 20, 2002.

37. Reuters, January 18, 2002.

38. *Arab News*, November 15, 2001.

Laden. Who should I fear?”³⁹) only *after* the U.S. victories began. Ironically, the same strengthening of resolve could be seen in the United States itself; after monitoring the Holy Land Foundation, an Islamic “charitable” foundation, since 1993, the federal government finally closed it down in December 2001 when it felt the confidence that came from its own successful military campaign.

9/11 VS. 11/9

The events of the brief three-month period following September 11 send a powerful and unambiguous message about the fortunes of militant Islam and the exercise of power.

If militant Islam achieved the acme of its achievement on 9/11, then 11/9 could be when the movement began its descent. The first date marked the peak of militant Islam, its day of greatest success in humiliating the West, causing death and panic. The second date, when the Taliban lost their first major city, marked an apparent turning point, with the West finding its resolve and its strength to deal with its new main enemy.

The marked contrast between these two dates has several implications for understanding the Muslim world. First, public opinion in the Muslim world is volatile, responding to developing events in an emotional, superficial, and changeable way. Second, as the *Los Angeles Times* notes, “popular support for militant Islam is not nearly so broad as was once believed.”⁴⁰ The movement is loud and it is vociferous, but it does not command more than a small minority of the Muslim world’s active support. Third, that militant Islam is a bit of a paper tiger—ferocious when unopposed but quite easily intimidated.

39. Associated Press, November 17, 2001, quoting *Beijing Youth Daily*.

40. *Los Angeles Times*, December 3 and 10, 2001.

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Fourth, the so-called “street” has little bearing on developments. It rises up with much noise but without much consequence, unable to force governments to take its preferred actions. It dies down when its favorite causes fare poorly.

This is not to deny that much anger continues to be directed against the United States (“Jihad will continue until doomsday, or until America is defeated, either way”)⁴¹ or that in some circles bin Laden retains his appeal (one Afghan: “to me, he is a god”).⁴² It is only to say that American strength and resolve make these sentiments less likely to become operational.

U.S. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For two decades—from the time Ayatollah Khomeini reached power in Iran in 1979 with “Death to America” as his slogan—U.S. embassies, planes, ships, and barracks were assaulted, leading to hundreds of American deaths. These attacks took place around the world, especially in the Middle East and Europe, but also in the United States itself. In the face of this persistent assault, Washington barely responded. The policy through those years was to view the attacks as no more than a sequence of discrete criminal incidents, and not as part of a sustained military assault on the country. This approach had several consequences. It meant:

- Focusing on the arrest and trial of the dispensable characters who actually carried out violent acts, leaving the funders, planners, organizers, and commanders of terrorism to continue their work unscathed, prepared to carry out more attacks.

41. *New York Times*, January 27, 2002.

42. *The Times* (London), January 19, 2002.

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- Relying primarily on such defensive measures as metal detectors, security guards, bunkers, police arrests, and prosecutorial eloquence—rather than on such offensive tools as soldiers, aircraft, and ships.
- Seeing the terrorists’ motivations as criminal, ignoring the extremist ideologues involved.
- Ignoring the fact that terrorist groups (and the states that support them) have declared war on the United States (sometimes publicly).
- Requiring that the U.S. government have levels of proof that can stand up in a U.S. court of justice before deploying military force, assuring that in the vast majority of cases there would be a subdued response to the killing of Americans.

As Muslims watched militant Islam hammer away at Americans and American interests, they could not but conclude that the United States, for all its resources, was tired and soft. Not knowing the nature of democracy—slow to be aroused but relentless when angered—they marveled at the audacity of militant Islam and its ability to get away with its attacks. This awe culminated in the aftermath of September 11, when Osama bin Laden and the Taliban leader called openly for nothing less than the “extinction of America.”⁴³ At that time, this did not seem beyond reach.

These ambitious claims shed light on the goals of the September 11 attacks. Although one cannot be sure of their purpose, it makes sense that they were intended severely to weaken the United States. Judging from militant Islam’s previous successes, al-Qaeda must have thought that it would get

43. Associated Press, November 15, 2001.

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away with this attack with no more than the usual criminal probe. Further, having seen both the American unwillingness to absorb casualties and the damage the Afghanistan-based Islamists did to the Soviet Union a decade and more earlier, al-Qaeda probably thought that its hits would demoralize the American population and lead to civil unrest, perhaps even beginning a sequence of events that would eventually lead to the U.S. government's collapse. If this was their thinking, they probably counted on the American police protecting government buildings, not tracking down al-Qaeda operatives.

How could bin Laden and his colleagues know that their acts would lead to a rousing call to arms? Why should 240 deaths in a Beirut barracks lead to no retaliation and just over three thousand deaths on the East Coast mobilize the country in a way not seen since Pearl Harbor? One can hardly fault them for not having foreseen this shift. It has something to do with the mysterious forces of democracy and public opinion, about which they are highly ignorant.

Even less could they have understood that a paradigm shift took place on September 11, whereby terrorism left the domain of criminality and entered that of warfare. This change had many implications. It meant no longer targeting just the foot soldiers who actually carry out the violence but the organizations and governments standing behind them. It meant relying on the armed forces, not policemen. It meant defense overseas rather than in American courtrooms. It meant dispensing with the unrealistically high expectations of proof so that when reasonable evidence points to a regime or organization having harmed Americans, U.S. military force can be deployed. It meant using force so that the punishment is disproportionately greater than the attack. It also meant that, as in conventional war, America's military need not know the names and specific actions of enemy soldiers before fighting them. There is no

need to know the precise identity of a perpetrator; in war, there are times when one strikes first and asks questions later.

It might seem mysterious that the military model was not adopted earlier, it being so obviously more appropriate than the criminal one. But the fact is, it is also much more demanding of Americans, requiring a readiness to spend money and lose lives over a long period. Force works only if it is part of sustained policy, not a one-time event. Throwing a few bombs (such as was done against the Libyan regime in 1986 and against sites in Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998) does not amount to a serious policy. Going the military route requires a long-term commitment that demands much from Americans over many years.

The pattern is clear: So long as Americans submitted passively to murderous attacks by militant Islam, this movement gained support among Muslims. When Americans finally took up arms to fight militant Islam, its forces were overwhelmed and its appeal quickly diminished. Victory on the battlefield, in other words, has not only the obvious advantage of protecting the United States but also the important side-effect of lancing the anti-American boil that spawned those attacks in the first place.

The implication is clear: There is no substitute for victory. If the U.S. government wishes to weaken its strategic enemy, militant Islam, it must take two steps. First, continue the war on terror globally, using appropriate means, starting with Afghanistan but going on to wherever militant Islam poses a threat, in Muslim-majority countries (such as Saudi Arabia), in Muslim-minority countries (such as the Philippines), and even in the United States itself. As this effort brings success, secondly Washington should promote moderate Muslims. Not only will they represent a wholesome change from the totalitarianism of militant Islam but they, and they alone, can address

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the trauma of Islam and propose ideas that will ease the way for one sixth of humanity fully to modernize.

Ironically, while Muslims did not feel the impact of September 11 as intensely as did Westerners, it is they in the long run who might well be far more profoundly affected by it.