Asian Affairs

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/raaf20

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Published online: 15 Jul 2010.

To cite this article: Gilles Kepel (2003) The origins and development of the Jihadist movement: from anti-communism to terrorism, Asian Affairs, 34:2, 91-108
To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0306837032000118198

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THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE JIHADIST MOVEMENT: FROM ANTI-COMMUNISM TO TERRORISM

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An earlier version of this article was published in *Ramsès*, 2003

The outrage of 11 September 2001 was the climax of actions by the radical Islamist movement from the mid-1980s, when *jihad* militants had coalesced to confront the Red Army in Afghanistan. Under the sponsorship of the United States and oil-rich monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula, the most determined activists came from Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and South East Asia. Indeed, even European suburbs provided personnel for the international Islamic brigades. They focused their militant activism on “the atheistic communists” of the Soviet Union, persuading people to turn a deaf ear to the Khomeinist siren voices inciting the Islamic world to rise up against “the great American Satan”. As far as the US and the conservative Muslim states allied to the US were concerned, this Afghanistan *jihad* entrapped the Soviet Union, inflicting a lethal ‘Vietnam’ on it, and, at the same time, it prevented revolutionary Iran from acquiring the leadership of an Islamist movement that was spreading all across the world.

These two objectives were achieved. On 15 February 1989, the Red Army withdrew ignominiously from Afghanistan, the prelude to a final meltdown of the communist system for which the fall of the Berlin Wall in the autumn of that year sounded the knell. As for Iran, it did not succeed in exporting its revolution through the Muslim world with the notable exception of Shi’ite South Lebanon. In the summer of 1988 Khomeini had been obliged to sign an armistice with Saddam Hussein, then a client of the West and the oil-rich Arab states, at the end of eight years of murderous trench warfare. With this signature, Khomeini renounced his dream of setting up a sister Islamic republic in Baghdad.
Seen from Washington, the Afghanistan *jihad* seemed a double triumph, an excellent outcome. The US Army was not involved. No soldiers were killed in combat. There were no prisoners of war, no soldiers’ mothers or conscientious objectors applying pressure on the executive. This was the antithesis of what had happened in Vietnam. The combatants in Afghanistan were bearded foreigners, described as ‘freedom fighters’ in this struggle against the ‘Evil Empire’. They represented no political faction in the internal American scene. Indifferent to their fate, the US opened offices in America to recruit militants to go to Afghanistan. These collected donations, recruited among Muslim students on the campuses and organized tours for preachers from the Middle East. This final battle against the Soviet Union by means of an indirect *jihad* cost the American tax-payer next to nothing. Generally accepted estimates of costs are in the order of $US1.2 million a year, of which half were covered by the Arab Gulf states: a derisory figure when the stakes are considered.

However, the US victory carried within it a fearful ambiguity: US leaders thought they could manipulate the *jihad* and control the actors, and then wash their hands of them once the Soviet danger had disappeared. Thus, from 1989, the freedom fighters, so celebrated yesterday, switched – as we read in the US press – to being vilified as drug traffickers. Subsidies to them were stopped. You might think they had disappeared through lack of financial support from Washington; but Pandora’s box had been opened. The shock of September 11 which the US experienced was partly a consequence of their own policies in the 1980s. They paid the price for no Americans killed in the *jihad* against the Red Army with the death of thousands at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon a decade later.

The chain of events that led the Islamist radicals of the *jihad* against the Soviet Union to the *jihad* against the US is complex: doctrine and geopolitics are entangled in a web of intrigue by intelligence services on all sides. In this last respect, we have at hand only fragments of information that offer more questions than answers. However, it is possible to reconstruct, with caution, the series of events that ended up in the unprecedented act of September 11.

**The ambiguous legacy of the *jihad* against the Red Army in Afghanistan**

The *jihad* is a central concept in Islamic doctrine, but its application has seen vicissitudes in the course of history. Literally, it means ‘exertion’. For the individual believer, it is a spiritual exertion that makes him better and more pious; for the mystic it is the ecstasy that leads towards a fusion with God. This interpretation has connotations in basic religious culture – Jihad is used as a personal name – and many Muslims object when *jihad* and terrorism are used as synonyms. But the term also has a socio-political dimension with belligerent overtones that are evident in precise legal definitions. Traditionally there has been a distinction between an offensive *jihad* – giving a religious cover to the military expansion of the Islamic world, to conquest and then
exploitation of the land of the unbelievers – and a defensive *jihad*, proclaimed by the *ulama* (the Islamic religious establishment) and jurists: a general mobilization for the ‘homeland under threat’, whenever the country is under attack from the infidels.

The first is within the realm of political authority and has no relevance for Muslims as a whole. Soldiers take part in it, and also volunteers fired by a pious zeal or attracted by the expectation of legitimate plunder.

The second does not tolerate the desertion of any believer, and overturns the hierarchy of social values and obligations. A defensive *jihad*, when proclaimed, has supreme authority. It can dispense with fasting in Ramadan, or with obedience to a prince in opposition. It is a matter of the survival of the community of believers. Each person, under threat of mortal sin, must take part in a manner appropriate to his means, by arms, if not with funds, or at the very least, by acts of charity, or by prayer. Fighting becomes the supreme virtue, and regulates the mobilization of all energies. All means justify the end, the safeguarding of the community. But this supreme arm of Islam can become a two-edged weapon. The *ulama* have always taken great care to restrict *jihad* in time and space. If it slips out of their control, it imperils the established order. It can unleash violence that can lead the community of believers to sedition and chaos, making it a sitting target for those enemies at whom this violence should be directed.

The *jihad* of defence is an obligation for each person (in Arabic, *fard ayn*) and was proclaimed immediately after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Red Army in December 1979. In Islam there is no supreme authority comparable to the Pope in Roman Catholicism. It is the prestige or charisma of this or that doctor of law, the erudition attributed to him, the network through which he operates with his sermons distributed by video and audio cassettes, that give his juridical opinion, or *fatwa*, a greater or lesser resonance. Actually the first *ulama* to be involved belonged to the *salafi* or *wahhabi* tendency, a hardline and conservative current in Islam that represents the Saudi Arabian religious establishment. They were also connected with the Muslim Brothers, a transnational organization founded in Egypt at the end of the 1920s and firmly established among the god-fearing Arab middle class. It is also represented in the *jama'at-e islami*, the Muslim Brothers’ equivalent in Pakistan and the Indian subcontinent. All these movements worked for the establishment of an Islamic state based on the *shari'a*, the law inspired by sacred texts, and co-operated in a genuine anti-communism, earning them the early sympathy of Washington. In proclaiming a *jihad* against the Soviet infidels who were invading the Islamic land of Afghanistan, they were offering an alternative to the anti-Americanism propagated by the Iranian revolution. They were a safety valve for more radical movements in the Islamic world as a whole that were beginning to threaten the stability of a number of regimes.

In November 1979 the Great Mosque of Mecca was attacked and seized by militants who condemned the ruling Saudi’s dependence on the USA. In October 1981, President Sadat of Egypt was assassinated by an Islamic group called Organisation of the Jihad, and in Algeria, from 1982, an Islamic
underground movement inspired by Mustafa Bouyali backed an armed struggle against the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) state.

In Afghanistan the *jihad* had provided a foreign theatre for all these activists, to the great relief of the regimes concerned. Thus, in Egypt, most of those condemned to the most lenient punishments after Sadat’s assassination – including Muhammad al-Zawahiri, bin Ladin’s right-hand man – were released in 1984 and sent to Mecca in order to perform the lesser pilgrimage (*umra*) before being put on the next flight to Peshawar. The Egyptian government saw advantages in these arrangements. Subversive elements left the Nile valley to fight for the US ally who was providing Egypt with crucial aid and military funds. If by chance they died on the battlefield, then that would be so many fewer radical Islamists.

It was much the same for the Algerian Bouyalist underground militants who had been ‘exfiltrated’ in the direction of Afghanistan after being arrested by the gendarmerie, or who had chosen to go into exile in order to evade repression. But the short-term political calculation of the regimes in power turned out to be mistaken. Most foreign Jihadists did not die in battle. In contact with Pakistani instructors, and under CIA supervision, they were toughened up and acquired the latest techniques of warfare, handling and discharging explosives, guerrilla warfare, tracking people, infiltration and subversive activity in general, all designed at that time to be used in the struggle against the Soviets. Later they would put them into operation in wide-ranging terrorist acts in the 1990s against those very people who had given them instruction.

Estimates of the number of foreign *Mujahidin* who passed through the training camps situated in the Pakistani tribal areas between Peshawar and the Afghan border, where the Tora Bora is situated, and in certain areas of Afghanistan beyond Soviet control, vary between several thousands to several tens of thousands of individuals. These figures are extremely imprecise and estimates are conflicting for several reasons. No reliable administration has monitored the data – the arrivals and departures. The definition and the purpose of the camps changed: most remained active between the official end of the *jihad* on 1 April 1992 (the date of the taking of Kabul by a mixed alliance of Afghan *Mujahidin*) and the US offensive against the Taliban in the autumn of 2001. It is difficult to know how far the services of the ISI (Inter Service Intelligence, the Pakistani military intelligence services), even after 1992, were carrying out activities of liaison and training. It is similarly difficult to know what was passed on to their US counterparts.

To make up for these uncertainties, the quite varied testimonies provided by the memoirs of former *Mujahidin* and statements and confessions given under interrogation or at trials, allow us to conclude that time spent in the training camps was of two kinds. Most, it seems, did not spend a long time in the camps. They were made up of a large fringe of sympathizers who were the targets of bursts of gunfire and would pose for photographs dressed in Afghan headgear and in combat fatigues, with a Kalashnikov over their shoulders. They set off full of enthusiasm, ready to provide reserves and
support, hiding places and financial support as required, without having to be formed into direct operational units. Among them were sons of good Saudi families turning up with their air-conditioned jeeps and their hunting gear that they would leave as presents when they departed. There were also Islamists coming from the suburbs and inner cities of Western countries, without any material resources, who were taken care of by the organizations specialising in da’wa (missionary work) and humanitarian activity. Those staying for longer, by contrast, constituted a core of determined militants, much smaller in number than the ‘birds of passage’. The first who tried to gather the data, in order to keep contact with those still staying on and to form them into a network, was ‘Usama bin Ladin. The term, al-Qa’ida (al-Qaeda), arose from US intelligence sources and was taken up by the international press. (There is no source that confirms that the militants themselves call their organization by this name.) In Arabic it means ‘base’: in this case, database. It designates a database of those who had known the camps and who scattered afterwards throughout the world, forming groups with whom contact was maintained by e-mail, internet and websites. The name is probably a metaphor, but it does show the unique capacity bin Ladin has had in turning the random and temporary gathering of militants in one physical place – the camps – into a network with lasting global potential. It indicates a remarkably sophisticated management system, applying communication techniques to political and subversive activity. From the early 1980s, the Mujahidin militants who were regrouped in Pakistan and Afghanistan anticipated the expansion of their activity world-wide in the forthcoming 10 years.

We do not have available writings or declarations from bin Ladin referring to this period. Instead, there are texts of his mentor – ‘Abdullah ‘Azzam, a Palestinian Islamist militant from Janin – according to whom the Afghan jihad was just the start of a long process. After victory, all the lands of Islam occupied by the infidels – from Mindanao in the Philippines to the Soviet Central Asian republics and including Andalusia – would be reconquered. But, beyond this millennial rhetoric, for ‘Azzam, the principal objective of the jihad after the inevitable fall of Kabul would be the taking of Jerusalem and the restoration of Islamic rule in a Palestine liberated from Zionist occupation. This project was thwarted by ‘Azzam’s assassination on Friday 24 November 1989 at Peshawar on his way to the mosque. This happened during the bloody spell following the Soviet retreat from Kabul when rival sects of Afghan Mujahidin were arguing over the strategy of taking the capital before wasting their forces in bloody ethno-religious wars. This mysterious assassination echoed the assault in October 1988 on Zia ul-Haqq, the Pakistani dictator. Responsibility for this assassination is also still unclaimed. Zia had changed his country into a conduit for foreign aid to the jihad.

In each case we face one of a large number of actions from the start of the jihad to the autumn of 2001, none of which can be attributed precisely to any one identifiable group, either by the world of intelligence services or by university researchers. All this leaves considerable areas of doubt when one tries to make sense of it all. Nevertheless, the assassination of ‘Azzam led to
Palestine being deferred on the agenda of the jihad, not to return until after the second Intifada. Other countries took its place in the 1990s – the Arabian Peninsula, Bosnia, Egypt, Algeria, Tajikistan, Chechnya and Daghestan, Kashmir, the Philippines, the Albanian issues and the first far-reaching anti-American activities.

The jihad in Afghanistan possessed another fundamental characteristic that would have many consequences, and that has been little studied: a psychological change of heart in the Islamist movement because of the bias of the specific indoctrination undergone inside the camps. It is probably there that we must look for the origin of the brainwashing of the activists who committed the suicide missions of September 11, among others. Their written or recorded testimonies, those that have been recovered, indicate an extreme religious fanaticism of a medieval and obscurantist character, coupled moreover with a very high level of operational sophistication. In the absence of documents or of precise evidence about this aspect of life in the training camps, we have to rely on the abundance of writings that have subsequently been produced by refugees in ‘Londonistan’. This is what the British capital was called when it provided a sanctuary throughout the 1990s to a number of ideologues who had passed through Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1980s. These texts, attributed for the most part to writers like the Palestinian Abu Qatada, the Syrian Abu Mus’ab or the Egyptian Abu Hamza, appeared in the London magazine al-Ansar, during the Algerian jihad between 1993 and 1997, and provide, up to now, the best evidence of the evolution of Islamist ideology in the camps. This literature is written in a very difficult style, full of allusions and the specialized technical vocabulary of medieval ulama. In contrast to Islamist ideologues, such as the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, the Pakistani Mawdudi and even Ayatollah Khomeini, who wrote to be read, discussed and easily understood by the new educated generation who were around 20 in 1970, these pamphlets have a tone of unquestionable authority, reinforced by their incomprehensible character for non-specialist readers. This authority is invested with a mystique and a religious power that are strengthened by the accumulation of countless injunctions taken from the Qur’an and above all the hadith – the sayings and exemplary deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.

At the present time, the Wahhabi and Salafi trend has usually provided a religious legitimacy for socially conservative regimes, like those of most of the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. There was hardly any opportunity to advance the jihad there, for the states that favoured this trend took part, as allies of the US, in a world order from which they benefited. Now this school was revived by the leaders of the Afghan Pakistan camps, who stressed the theory of jihad. They combined this with the more ‘modern’ movement of Islamists who were readers of Qutb, the Egyptian hanged in 1966 by the Nasser regime or Mawdudi, the Pakistani founder of jama’at-e islami (died in 1979), and who emerged from the ranks of the Muslim Brothers. For the latter, the jihad had priority too, but it was incorporated into a whole programme of activities – social and humanitarian work, student activism, participation in elections, etc – that had a broader and more varied base. The convergence of
the two trends produced a new ideology – Salafi-Jihadism – with the emphasis on the *jihad*. In this intellectual context and in the environment of military training in the camps, the *jihad* was understood in its most violent and fanatical sense. There was to be a ruthless armed struggle against the infidels whose scope could be endlessly extended. The *jihad* became a focus of fascination, the panacea for the world’s ills and even the essence of Islam.

Such, in all probability, was the vision of the world that would provide the framework of the international combatants who passed through the camps in 1989 when the Soviet retreat gave them comfort beyond all expectations: one of the post-Yalta superpowers had suffered a lethal military defeat, thanks to a handful of *Mujahidin*, ragged partisans in the mountains confronting aerial warfare. Certainly, the ground-to-air Stinger missiles, provided by the USA, counted for more than faith in determining the military outcome. But there was no alternative but for the missiles to be carried by men. These were the Afghan *Mujahidin* – hardly ever, it seems, the foreign Jihadists – but, globally, they shared the same mystical concept of *jihad* as the famed international warriors who had emerged from the training camps. These people had been conditioned by a literalist reading of sacred texts, with minds for which the Prophet, his Companions and their immediate successors were the sole role models, and their era the just age of Islam, the paradigm for all history. They saw themselves as the ones who had shattered the Soviet empire in the same way that the first Muslims had destroyed the Sassanid Empire, opening up the lands of the East to the champions of Allah. Once this had been achieved, the first *khalifas* were able to carry the war against the other great infidel empire that dominated the known world: Byzantium. Now, the Salafi-Jihadists were ready to fight the Byzantium of today: the United States of America.

The retargeting of the *jihad* on the West

The retargeting of the *jihad* on the West reached its apogee with the attacks of September 11. It was marked by two very distinct stages. Until the mid-1990s, it was manifest mainly in guerrilla activity in Egypt, Algeria and Bosnia: these were military setbacks. The first terrorist operation on US soil was the attack against the World Trade Center in February 1993. This was also a setback which left an unpredictable future. In the second half of the decade, a series of terrorist operations had a wider, more lethal impact, which offset the lack of guerrilla success: the attacks against the marine barracks at Dhahran on Saudi territory in June 1996, against the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya on 7 August 1998, against the destroyer *USS Cole* off Aden in October 2000 – and, finally, September 11. They bore witness to another tactic. Unable to recruit the masses in a *jihad* led by guerrillas who wished to be seen as heroes fighting infidel regimes, the more militant chose to strike at the very heart of US power. They, thereby, exposed US weaknesses. They were hoping to galvanize the Muslim masses through enormous media coverage of simultaneous actions which would inspire them to take part
in the *jihad*. But from their point of view, in spite of their murderous consequences and their devastating symbolic impact, the terrorist operations failed to achieve their aim – the uprising which they anticipated. Indeed, the Taliban regime was eliminated by US military action. Even the *jihad* in Palestine, which assumed the mantle of a Holy War, finally rebounded on its activists, in spite of the numerous Israeli civilian deaths, victims of the suicide bombers.

*The spread of Jihadist guerilla warfare and its failure 1992–1997*

A consequence of Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 was to open up an irreparable fault line in the heart of the Islamist movement that was to create an opposition to the moderate bourgeois tendency linked to Saudi interests. The movement opened up to more radical groups among whom were revolutionary intellectuals and militants emerging from the young urban poor. On 7 August 1990, King Fahd, Custodian of the ‘Two Holy Places’ (Mecca and Medina), summoned the assistance of the US Army and its allies. In the eyes of the radicals he was committing the unforgivable sin: infidel soldiers, accompanied by their Christian and Jewish clergy, would be sullying the sacred soil of the Arabian Peninsula and threatening the Holy Places. We find a clear sign of this gulf between the two tendencies of the Islamist movement in the timing of the assault that destroyed the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania: 7 August 1998, the actual anniversary of King Fahd’s appeal. For the radicals, the arrival of the infidel US Armies and their allies on Saudi soil and then their attack on Iran were of the same nature as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In both cases, *dar al-Islam*, the land of Islam, was being invaded and it was legitimate to call for a *jihad* of defence against the invader. They did not succeed in finding a consensus of *ulama* as broad as at the time of Afghanistan to proclaim a *jihad* but this did not prevent the militants getting involved in action. Their minority status was offset by the utter determination and professionalism on the part of the combatants, indoctrinated and hardened in the Afghan-Pakistani training camps.

In the aftermath of the arrival of the foreign troops on Saudi land in the summer of 1990, there emerged a movement against the House of Saud in the name of Jihadi-Salafism, which called itself *Sahwa* (Awakening). The movement attracted some preachers, generally young, locally well-educated who were also in contact with Syrian and Palestinian Muslim Brother migrants in Kuwait and well-established there. The best known were Shaykh Auda and Shaykh Hawali, who were sent to jail from 1994 to 1999, and also a media-wise opponent exiled in London, Muhammad al-Masari, whose influence was, however, of short duration.

These dissidents preoccupied the Saudi regime because they challenged its legitimacy. More and more concessions were demanded for the legal and juridical powers of the *ulama* in order that the tight alliance between the monarchy and the USA could be legitimised in the name of Islam. The seizure of a large part of the educational system by the most conservative religious
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authorities, just as Saudi Arabia was experiencing a demographic explosion estimated (in the absence of credible statistics) as one of the most important in the world, was one of the main advantages gained by the ulama. They had control over a large area of study – even non-religious matters – and they planted their vision of the world into the minds of a younger generation that was beginning to feel, from the beginning of the 1990s, the effects of the drop in oil prices, exacerbated by the increase in the number of beneficiaries of oil revenues. By the end of the decade this younger generation turned out 100,000 graduates a year, of whom it was estimated that under a third found employment. It constituted, at the very heart of Saudi society, a core of disaffected young people, who were very concerned for their future, but poorly equipped. Many of them nourished resentment against the very extensive Royal Family who had privileged access to the oil revenues.

However, the religious dissidents Shaykh (Sheikh) Auda and Shaykh Hawali were unable to exploit this discontent, because a ferocious repression ensured that there was no contact between the most active preachers and the mass of young people. Moreover, the regime had to tolerate Salafi preaching, as it was always difficult to differentiate between senior ulama and their far-flung disciples who had been attracted by jihad. Shaykh bin Baz, the Mufti of the Kingdom (died 1997), and Shaykh bin ‘Uthaimin, a very well-known man of religion (died 2001), ensured a balance between conservatives and radicals.

Throughout the 1990s dissidence spread, even though it was not out in the open because the most prominent militants were imprisoned after 1994. A wave of sympathy was fostered for ‘Usama bin Ladin who was stripped of his Saudi nationality in 1994 and who took as a slogan a hadith attributed to the Prophet on his deathbed, “Chase the Jews and the Christians out of the Arabian Peninsula”. In the interpretation adopted by the militants, this meant that they had to chase out the US marines stationed near the oilfields in the eastern barracks of the Kingdom and to liberate the Kingdom from US influence that had reduced it to a protectorate. This objective remained a strategic priority for the radical tendency throughout the 1990s, just as the hadith itself was declared in each proclamation coming from the bin Ladin network, and then from communiqués attributed to al-Qa‘ida. It was impossible to achieve this objective in the Kingdom because of internal repression. This led to anti-US terrorism in the region, especially in the second half of the decade, and to the spread of jihad elsewhere.

When, in April 1992, Kabul finally fell into the hands of a coalition of Afghan Mujahidin, the jihad in Afghanistan was over. With the assassination of ‘Abdullah ‘Azzam the short-term hope of transferring it to Palestine disappeared. Fronts soon opened up in Egypt, Algeria, Bosnia and then in Tajikistan and Chechnya, not to speak of the switch of the Pakistani jihad to Kashmir, where the Islamabad authorities controlled military operations. This gave the impression that jihad was spreading world-wide, ensuring much enhanced publicity. According to the militants, just as Afghanistan was taken over simply by armed force, soon the infidel regimes of targeted countries had
to collapse under the impact of the Jihadist-Salafist fighters and groups of sympathizers who would be formed and recruited on the spot.

In Egypt, attacks were directed at senior officials, the police, Copts and tourists. Until 1995 the forces of repression seemed to be helpless in the face of a most effective violence that reflected the quality of training in the camps. But very soon the Jihadists became cut off from their popular base. In December 1992, the Imbaba quarter of the Cairo suburbs – stronghold of the radical Islamists of the gama’a islamiyya – was surrounded by the army and cleansed of its militants. They no longer came to build up a base, a sanctuary, in the urban area. They had to seek refuge in the Upper Nile Valley where they carried out a guerrilla war that closed the region to foreign tourists. Their objective was to deprive the state of tourist revenue and to bring about its downfall. However, the local population, whose income depended largely on tourism and who were the first victims, turned against the rebels, preventing further Jihadist mobilization in the rural areas. At the same time, attempts to unite the Islamist movement met with no success. The devout middle class and professional liberals maintained their links with the Muslim Brothers who dreaded being drawn into violence. The followers of this organization did, however, show their solidarity with the radical militants and the gama’a islamiyya when their members were victims of repression and they denounced the brutalities to which they were submitted in prison. The persistence of this divide allowed the state to reclaim the initiative. From 1996, the security forces made up for their operational delays by acquiring anti-guerrilla techniques and equipment and, in Upper Egypt, inflicted severe damage on the Islamist combatants whose demoralized troops embarked on a strategy of violence. The horror created by the massacre of dozens of tourists at Luxor by gama’a islamiyya activists in the autumn of 1977 marked the defeat of armed dissidence. As a strategy of seizing power on the Afghan model, guerrilla jihad failed in the Nile valley.

In Bosnia the jihad strategy was of another kind: it was to take part in a civil war between Serbs, Croats and Bosnians, and to transform the war into a religious conflict. In their eyes, Bosnia was a land of Islam that had been invaded by infidels. This justified a defensive jihad on the pattern of Afghanistan. The combatants who came to the area were not from Bosnia – there had been no Bosnians in the Afghan-Pakistani camps. Many came from the Arabian Peninsula where, in contrast to Egypt and Algeria, it had not been possible to open up an active jihad front. Brought in successive batches by the Islamic humanitarian organizations that distributed relief through the mosques, they disbursed a great deal of funds. At first they were appreciated by the Bosnian population, who were encircled and suffering ethnic cleansing and massacre by the Serbian militia. But the transplant did not take root. The ferocity of the Jihadists, who had themselves been photographed brandishing recently severed heads, and their intolerance of the popular traditions of Bosnian Islam that they denounced in the name of salafi purity, prevented them from being absorbed into the local scene. The Dayton Accords of December 1995 signalled the end for foreign Jihadists, making their expulsion
an essential condition of the Pax Americana. Further attempts to graft a jihad onto the troubles of Albania and then the war in Kosovo were nipped in the bud, after militants who had been sent there were captured and then sold by the Albanian authorities to the Egyptian and Saudi governments.

The jihad in the Balkans had been a major symbol for those in the movement who had graduated from the Afghan-Pakistani training camps. Increasingly, the camps were associated with the personality of bin Ladin. The struggle was launched on European soil and involved genuine Europeans, Islamized Slavs with blond hair. They were supported by those activist militants who were Muslim immigrants to western Europe and mainly to the United Kingdom, France and Germany. For these reasons the European states and the USA were unable to disregard the issue when confronting a challenge unfolding on the frontiers of the West. Victims of a combination of unfavourable factors, the Jihadists were unable, unlike in Afghanistan, to rely on the support or even the tolerance of the West.

Even more serious and more significant than these two setbacks was that affecting the jihad in Algeria. The Jihadists there were hoping to acquire power in the wake of the remarkable successes achieved under the banner of the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) between 1989 and 1992. After its creation in 1989, the Islamist movement effectively and rapidly rallied the support of the numerous poor urban youth who were disillusioned. They were joined by the middle classes who were denied access to the political sphere and to oil revenues by the bosses of the only political party, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). The absence of religious dignitaries and a credible ulama had very quickly allowed the ideologues and the preachers of the Party to monopolize the Islamist discourse and, consequently, the FIS scored great success in the local and municipal elections in June 1990, the first free elections in Algeria since independence.

In Iran, in 1978 Khomeini had succeeded in becoming the sole representative of the Islamist discourse. He appealed simultaneously to all the social elements that made up the movement, even attracting the secular opposition to the Shah’s dictatorial regime, and keeping them all united until he had taken over power. By contrast, Algeria in 1990–1991, saw the FIS split into two branches, represented respectively by Abbassi Madani and Ali Benhadj. The former, spokesman of the religious middle classes, was initially in alliance with Saudi Arabia when Saddam Hussein attacked Kuwait in August 1990. The second, the idol of the poor urban youth, was ranged on the side of Iraq and promised to put an end to all those who had “sucked the poisonous milk of France” when the FIS took power. The unity of the movement suffered as it proved incapable of holding the constituency that had swung towards them in June 1990 against the regime, without actually sharing the Islamist vision of the world. The francophone secular middle classes, now with no illusions as to the fate promised them by Ali Benhadj, gave their support to a coup d’état: the army intervened between the two rounds of the legislative elections on 12 January 1992 that were about to be won by the FIS. The majority of the electorate had voted for the Islamists, providing thereby a huge popular base
of disaffected people who wanted to dismantle, by force if necessary, the regime that had snatched away their expected victory. Such circumstances were very favourable to the jihad and were quickly exploited by the Afghanistan veterans around whom the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) was formed. From early 1993 they were to achieve some significant military victories. Parts of the country were outside the control of the state and declared themselves “liberated Islamic zones”. These were in the mountainous areas where an underground resistance was formed (in the same places as during the War of Independence) as well as in the urban suburbs and well-populated city centres. Until the end of 1994 various ultra-radical amirs (emirs) who followed one another at the head of the GIA managed to isolate the regime and to attract Islamic leaders from the middle classes who saw in the GIA the future leadership of Algeria.

Algeria became the great cause of the Salafi-Jihadist ideologues who had taken refuge in the British capital, the ‘Londonistan’ of militants. They talked of the military feats of the Islamist resistance in the countryside, making them universal heroes of the cause. They edited al-Ansar, publishing their tales of glory and distributing their propaganda cassettes, etc. The victory in Afghanistan had ultimately left a bitter taste. By 1994 the various Mujahidin factions were killing each other, giving the world a wretched image of the Islamic state emerging from the triumphant jihad of the 1980s. Algeria would become the new Islamist promised land: rich in petroleum, close to Europe, providing a bridgehead for a global expansion of the faith – just as it had provided, in the first years of Independence, a distinctive model of a pro-Soviet Third World country. In spite of these promising beginnings, from 1995 the jihad in Algeria embarked on a path that would lead to failure. That year saw Jamal Zituni become the amir of the GIA in mysterious circumstances.

The struggle also spread to France, with assassinations attributed to a network of young Islamists who had arrived from abroad or who were French converts to Islam. From this time, the movement gave itself up to a series of atrocities that ended up in alienating all popular support and bringing it into utter discredit, even among potential supporters. There were two arguments explaining the evolution of the GIA: for the Islamist moderates who had been with FIS and certain observers, the radical group had been infiltrated by agents provocateurs from the Algerian secret services who pushed them into making mistakes. The attacks in France, according to this logic, had been aimed at strengthening the French grip on power in Algiers which they saw as the sole barrier against barbarism, in spite of their poor democratic credentials. As for others, the radical logic of Salafi-Jihadism that had come out of the Algerian experience was all that was needed to explain the atrocities. The attacks against France were intended to put pressure on Paris to withdraw its support for Algiers in return for peace in France itself.

In the absence of unequivocal evidence, it is difficult to be absolutely clear about terrorist operations extended to the territory of a Western country. We are similarly in the dark about many other cases during that decade, when radical Islamists and secret services seemed to be in collusion. Whatever the
situation, from the beginning of 1996 and the emergence of groups of ‘Patriots’, armed by the Algerian state, the GIA began a decline that ended up in large-scale massacres in the suburbs of Algiers in the autumn of 1997, at the same time as the massacre of tourists by the Egyptian gama’ a islamiyya at Luxor. After this act of barbarism, which some analysts have attributed to acts of provocation, the GIA was no longer a significant factor. It gave way to tiny armed groups that had only a limited impact and did not prevent the state taking back control of more or less the whole of the territory.

The military failure of the Algerian jihad was a bitter blow. The reason for failure lay in the policy of spreading guerrilla warfare on the model of the struggle against the Red Army in Afghanistan. The collapse took place in 1996: in that year all hope was lost in Bosnia and in Egypt as well as in Algeria, and the balance of forces swung in favour of established authority. Only the Chechen front remained promising, but that was marginal as far as the fight against the West was concerned. It was rather in the interests of the West to weaken Russia and to prevent the export of oil from Central Asia through this region. The failure of the guerrilla strategy at this time coincided with the first of the major terrorist operations attributed to ‘Usama bin Ladin. It could be said that one strategy was substituted for another.

The terrorist phase 1996–2002

From 1996 terrorism became the main tactic of the Salafi-Jihadist movement, and the figure of ‘Usama bin Ladin became its supreme icon. However, he clashed with ‘Abdullah ‘Azzam on the action to take after the jihad in Afghanistan. Bin Laden also stressed the emancipation of Saudi Arabia from being an American protectorate, believing this issue should take precedence over the liberation of Palestine from the Israeli occupation. From 1989 he was regarded with suspicion by the authorities. His passport was withdrawn and he found himself under house arrest in his own country when he made a journey there from Peshawar. He managed to escape in 1991 and, until 1996, made his home in a Sudan under the influence of the Islamist ideologue Hasan al-Turabi. Opponents of Riyad and Washington mingled in a Khartoum that had adopted a sort of international Islamist radicalism. For Salafi-Jihadists evacuated from Afghanistan in the early 1990s it became a crossroads facilitating the Egyptian activists to return home after illegally crossing the frontier.

The proximity of Sudan and Somalia was probably a factor relating to the October 1993 operation Restore Hope that forced the US army, trapped by Jihadists, to withdraw from Somalia. Above all, it was the failed assassination of President Mubarak at Addis Ababa in June 1995 that made Sudan a pariah in the international community. It was accused by Egypt of being, if not an instigator, then a refuge of conspirators. Khartoum had just handed over the international terrorist Carlos to France and wanted to rid itself in the same way of bin Ladin, in order to regain some respectability. The refusal of the US to take him when he was offered to them leaves open a number of questions. Saudi Arabia had no wish either to accept this embarrassing gift – the
execution of bin Ladin would present too many internal political problems. So, in the summer of 1996, he apparently returned to Afghanistan which the Taliban controlled as far as Kandahar, with Pakistani and American support. Just at this time they were encouraged by their patrons to seize Kabul in September.

The events of 1996, the ins and outs of which are not known in detail, were a watershed. They marked the transition from the phase of Jihadist guerrillas to the phase of sensational terrorism involving massacres. At the end of June, while the fate of bin Ladin was being discussed, a terrorist act involving a mined lorry caused many deaths among US soldiers based at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia. This operation was reminiscent of the actions against the US and French barracks in Lebanon in October 1983, attributed to Shi’ite extremists under the influence of Tehran. In spite of the accusations made immediately after Dhahran by Riyadh against Iran, many today attribute the responsibility of this action to bin Ladin’s network. It was particularly significant that from Afghanistan, where he was now based, he proclaimed a jihad against the Americans who were in the ‘Land of the Two Holy Places’. Without explicitly claiming responsibility for the action, the text provided a rationale for it, and for the assaults that were to follow against the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998, and also against the destroyer USS Cole on the seas off Aden in 2000. In their eyes, the US presence was tantamount to an invasion of the lands of Islam by infidels, and justified a defensive jihad by any means.

Beyond the fervour of religious terminology, we have to examine the objectives of these threats against the USA. Terrorism, with fanatics carrying out such misdeeds as suicide attacks, is an extremely rational tactic with specific aims. Without doubt, the destruction of the USA, the general Islamization of the whole world and other messianic visions were part of the dreams of the starry-eyed activists who emerged from the crucible of the Afghan jihad. But they were not achievable in the short term. Instead, one of the principal claims of bin Ladin’s proclamations was regime change in Saudi Arabia, the elimination of a dynasty that controlled the country’s petroleum resources. It was to be replaced by other socio-economic groups, in particular the wealthier merchants and ordinary entrepreneurs, the class to which bin Ladin belonged and from whom he had found support and whom he praised in his statement. The failure of Islamist dissidence in the Kingdom at the beginning of the 1990s showed that it was futile to expect internal change. The Saudi regime was protected by the USA, which regards it as the regulator of the oil market, guaranteeing the provision of an accessible and relatively cheap source of energy to the world. The terrorist logic was to put increasing pressure on the USA by a chain of incidents whose social and political cost would become unbearable to the US administration. This would persuade them to shift their policy towards Saudi Arabia in favour of a regime change. It is reminiscent of the strategy attributed to the GIA at the time of the murderous incidents committed in France in 1995. The social and political cost would become so high that Paris would have no other choice but to relax its policy
on Algeria. In the short term this calculation proved ill-founded. The French
and US authorities in both cases did not sacrifice vital interests under pressure.
Such a policy would have disastrous consequences. However, in the medium
term, some political circles in Paris and Washington did re-evaluate the
political implications of supporting the Algerian and Saudi regimes. We will
see later how this was expressed in the USA after September 11.

The four waves of anti-US attacks between 1996 and 2001 were all carried
out by ‘suicide bombers’ (though not the attack on the World Trade Center in
1993). This is a new phenomenon in contemporary Sunni Islamist activism.
Research on suicide as a political act – and we find earlier examples of this
in medieval Islam, especially among the Assassins – reveals that it was
originally used by Shi’ite Islamists. It was first employed on a large scale
during the war launched by Saddam Hussein against the Islamic Republic of
Iran in September 1980. The young Iranian bassij volunteers, death-defying
zealots, leapt into Iraqi minefields, convinced that they would ascend into the
martyrs’ Paradise. The aim was to open up a route for an offensive by the
regular army. This practice passed to the Arab world through the Lebanese
Shi’ites of the Hezbollah and their tiny allied groups. It proved to be
unstoppable. US and French contingents of the multilateral force left Lebanon
following the suicide attack of 1983 and, even more, the Israeli army
abandoned southern Lebanon in May 2000, reckoning that the sacrifice of the
Tsahal soldiers, victims of these attacks, was too high a price to pay for the
occupation. From this time, the practice of suicide bombing acquired consider-
able prestige beyond the Shi’ite environment in which it had been nurtured.
The Israeli retreat from southern Lebanon was interpreted in the Middle East
as the first Arab military victory in memory. At Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam on
7 August 1998 and at Aden in October 2000, suicide bombings threw the US
security systems into confusion. It seemed that, in the Middle East, where
there was a huge imbalance of conventional and nuclear military force
unquestionably favouring Israel and the USA, this tactic was re-establishing
some kind of ‘balance of terror’.

Thus, the tactic of terrorism worked on two fronts. In the first place, it put
pressure on Tel Aviv and Washington, in the hope of forcing concessions from
them – the most obvious of which were the US and French withdrawals from
Beirut in 1983, the departure of US forces from Somalia in 1993 and, finally,
the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon after the decision of Prime
Minister Barak in 2000. At the same time, the resulting prestige and aura of
martyrdom of the suicide bombers, strengthened the Jihadist camp even within
Muslim society. This forced the Islamists from the middle classes to follow
those whom the masses saw as heroes facing up to US and Israeli enemies. It
also constituted a major challenge to the Arab states whose military failure in
confronting Israel seemed all the more outrageous. It threatened their legiti-
macy that was based on their role in defending the Arab nation, a role that was
the keystone of most of these regimes. They continued forbidding any
expression of pluralism, preventing any change in political élites, preserving
power in the hands of the same families or the same ethnic groups.
In spite of the special character of these terrorist operations and the enormous impact of destabilization, they had not been able to force the USA to modify its policy on the Middle East, particularly on the Saudi monarchy. It was in this context that an operation was planned that would be of an entirely different order, an action that was directed at its heart.

The turning point of September 11 can only be understood in relation to two causes, two fronts under one banner: jihad – the American presence in Saudi Arabia, which was the pretext for the attacks of 1996, 1998 and 2000 at Dhahran, Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam as well as Aden; and the Palestine issue after the launch of the second Intifada in autumn 2000. Bin Ladin made that explicit in the declaration issued on Al-Jazeera television on 7 October 2001. It also helps us to understand the popular support bin Ladin enjoyed as an icon of the resistance among the Arab youth and a wide section of society until the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The launch of the second Intifada came at the moment when certain political actors considered that a renewal of limited confrontation with the other side would unblock the deadlock of the Oslo peace process. This was as much on the side of the Palestinian Authority as in part of the Israeli establishment. Arafat, whose administration was under attack for its authoritarianism and the corruption of his circle, remained impotent in the face of the relentless advance of Israeli settlements. The mystique of a new Intifada allowed him to improve his image with a younger generation that was disenchanted. It also curtailed the development of Hamas that had strengthened its influence through a range of well-organized charitable activities. These welded society together and distributed aid and subsidies, the money coming from the Arabian Peninsula. On the Israeli side, Ariel Sharon saw in the logic of confrontation with the Palestinian Authority the chance to take over the leadership of the Likud Party and then to win the elections. That was the purpose of his much publicized walk under heavy security surveillance around the mosques on Temple Mount in Jerusalem in Autumn 2000. This was the beginning of the second al-Aqsa Intifada, named after the mosque he went to during his walk, which deliberately provoked Palestinian anger.

The launch of the Intifada and the first attacks allowed Ariel Sharon to take effective power during the elections of February 2001. As for Yasir Arafat, the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon had persuaded him that the Jewish state was ready for concessions. In order to avoid the spectre of violence against its civilian population, they would allow the Palestinian Authority to reassert its prestige and power with its own population. Until the summer of 2001 the situation remained unresolved. Gradually the Authority lost control of the violence, and the first suicide bombings against civilians took place, imitating the Lebanese Hezbollah and instigated by the Islamists of Hamas and the Islamic jihad organization. The Israeli response took the form of the destruction of the infrastructure and of targeted assassinations, carried out by missiles fired from helicopters or aeroplanes, demonstrating an immeasurable military superiority thanks to American support. All this, relayed by television, built up resentment among people throughout the Arab
and Muslim world and revealed the powerlessness of the Arab populations. Their governments were unable to engage their own armies in the confrontation because of their patent technological inferiority.

Such was the context of September 11. The attacks on New York and Washington leave their mark, in terms of symbolic and spectacular images, in two ways. First there was the suicide ‘bombing’, on the pattern of those carried out by the radical Palestinian activists, but on a vastly greater scale. Whereas the Jenin ‘martyrs’ could only massacre a few dozen victims in a bus or a café in Tel Aviv, the 19 air pirates killed several thousands. The number of dead and wounded was due to the use of sophisticated tactics – the hijacking of aeroplanes. Second, this tactic would show that Israeli and US military technology that could again and again wipe out its conventional targets was not impregnable. It was vulnerable when confronted by audacious and determined adversaries who could not be traced to any one state.

For these two reasons, September 11 has gained enthusiastic support among a section of the population in the Arab and Muslim world, especially the youth, whereas the attacks of 1998 and 2000 had met with only limited approval. Bin Ladin has appeared as a hero, because he has restored the Palestine issue even though he had never before shown any interest outside the Arabian Peninsula. Nevertheless, an uneasy feeling gradually appeared that the scale of the massacre of innocents in the US transformed the attacks into a crime against humanity. As for Arab opinion, people tried to disassociate their ‘hero’ bin Ladin from the crime, which they attributed to the Israeli Mossad or to sinister activities of the CIA or the FBI. Some even went so far as to claim that the majority of the dead were Muslims! This was an attempt to use victimhood to the benefit of the Arab-Islamic cause. It was the first sign that it was not so easy to transform the initial response into a mass *jihad* against the West. September 11 would not be the first step in this *jihad*. This monumental provocation against the USA was bound to result in retaliation – it did lead to the invasion of the Afghanistan of the Taliban, the sanctuary of bin Ladin. By instigating the assassination of Commander Massoud on 9 September, the Salafi-Jihadists were hoping to deprive the US offensive of its principal pillar of support on the ground, and to draw the US Army into the same lethal trap as the Red Army. This would have been the third phase of the operation, when the Muslim world, galvanized by the *jihad*, would pursue their victorious attacks against a USA that had been incapacitated. This bold plan evaporated immediately following the speedy elimination of the Taliban regime by the US Army and the forces of the Northern Alliance. Although al-Qa’ida still seemed effective in spite of the tracking down of its leaders, its capacity was reduced.

With the failure of bin Ladin’s partisans to transform September 11 into a mass *jihad*, some charismatic *ulama* who had supported the Afghan *jihad* against the Soviet Union condemned the attacks on American soil. The perpetrators were denied the designation of ‘martyrs’, their cause apparently lost. To make up for that, these same religious people followed the example of Shaykh Qardawi, who had emerged from the Egyptian Muslim Brothers...
and had achieved star quality with his weekly preaching on al-Jazeera television. They praised the suicide bombers in Israel as ‘martyrs’ within the ranks of a legitimate jihad. The Jewish state had, in their view, illegally occupied a portion of the land of Islam and all means to expel them were justified, including the assassination of civilians. This was based on the pretext that, in Israeli society, there were no civilians, as everyone, including women, wore military uniform.

Thus the jihad for the Palestinian cause was restored to centre stage. As compensation for the failure of the Jihadists in Afghanistan, it supported the second Intifada in its most bloody form. Furthermore, there emerged a widespread movement of solid support manifested by street demonstrations. Thus, Arab political leaders, even those tied to the USA, had to justify the suicide bombers, or at least to find excuses for them. However, in spite of blows delivered against Israel, the end result of the jihad into which the second Intifada was transformed raised a growing number of questions in Arab circles themselves. Each new outrage gave comfort to Ariel Sharon who presented himself as a representative of the West facing terrorism. The fund of sympathy for Palestinians in Europe and the USA was largely depleted, even amongst those who were most sympathetic to their national claims. The campaign to discredit Yasir Arafat found considerable support, despite the fact that the ra’is was received as recently as the autumn of 2000 by the American President. The Israeli bombing has more or less wiped out the administrative machinery of the Palestinian Authority. The political cost of the campaign of the suicide bombers seems to be considerable and its gains questionable. There is only the exaltation of a small minority who have locked themselves into a mentality where terrorism becomes an end in itself.

*Translated from the French by Peter Clark*

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