CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES
CSC 28 / CCEM 28

EXERCISE/EXERCICE NEW HORIZONS

Whither Islam in the War on Terrorism?

By /par Major A.E. Scheidl

INTRODUCTION

The West[1] has been engaged since September 11th 2001 in a "War on Terrorism". Having the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon as its genesis, the war has naturally focussed on their author, the Islamist Al-Qaeda terrorist organization and its supporters. As US troops expand operations beyond Afghanistan and into the Philippines, Yemen, and Pakistan, the Islamist[2] character and worldwide interconnection of al-Qaeda has become increasingly obvious. Parallel legal and financial investigations are yielding a steady stream of arrests, seized assets, and intelligence. All seems to be on track for a relentless rolling-up of Al-Qaeda and its allies.

But while partially successful, the strategy behind the "War on Terrorism" merits rethinking. A sound strategy must stem from a comprehensive understanding of the adversary, and define a clear path to an achievable endstate. Examining the rhetoric and publicly known efforts, one finds the actual strategy limited to the manifestations of terrorism rather than its causes. In other words, the US-led coalition is fighting terrorists, not terrorism. A strategy that relies solely on battlefield success (in the current legal, financial, or military sense) - without grappling with the source of the danger - courts defeat. Moreover, in combating Islamist terrorists, even the tactical victories may exact a long-term cost of inspiring follow-on terrorists, while delivering only short-term security benefits. It is this dilemma that renders a military-centric strategy inadequate for defeating Islamist terrorism. A long-term strategy must be as concerned with the spontaneous popular support shown for bin Laden in various Muslim countries following al-Qaeda's attacks, as with the assurance of immediate security through the tactical defeat of identified terror cells

Those who have undertaken terrorism in the name of the Islamic god have done so deliberately, and with evidently strong faith. While Western leaders may separate the terrorists' religious fervour from their acts of violence, that separation remains merely an intellectual construct in long-secularized Western minds. To doubt the faith or to ignore the religious doctrines of those terrorists is to misunderstand their motivation, and to miss the mark in crafting an effective response. Just possibly, it is also to disregard the most effective tool in fighting them: the mainstream of their own faith.

The West – and the US in particular – is faced with the radical, angry, and volatile progeny of an intense, popular faith. Though growing quickly, that faith lacks a central authority to exert moral and doctrinal discipline over its members. Consequently, the Islamist terrorists can commit their violent acts not only on *behalf* of their faith, but safely *within* that faith, courtesy of sympathetic clerics religiously empowered to endorse their acts. Detractors of the terrorists within Islam can only voice their own localized interpretations of the *Qu'ran* or *Hadith*[3] in opposition to the terrorists' religious edicts, or *fatwas*. If Islamist terrorists are truly motivated by Islam itself, through the literally interpreted doctrines of jihad and martyrdom, then a Western

---

[1] A US-led coalition of US, Canadian, British, Australian, and French forces.
[2] Although commonly referred to in the Western press as Islamic fundamentalists, the bulk of the literature refers to those wishing or working to live in an Islamic state, under the Islamic law, or Shar'ia simply as Islamists. Similarly, those terrorists whose purpose they share are referred to in this paper as Islamist terrorists, reflecting not the community they come from so much as their intended purpose in their terrorism.
[3] The Qu'ran, of course, is the holy book of Islam; the Hadith is the collection of sayings and practices of the Prophet Mohammed

response based on military action alone can only serve their cause, giving them both the struggle and the glorious death they seek. Thus, the very act of suppressing Islamist terrorists encourages others to follow them. To undertake a purely tactical campaign of military attacks, then, without a supporting strategic initiative to address the Islamist engine that produces such martyrs is to invite an endless cycle of attrition that may eventually sap the will of the West to continue.

It is the thesis of this paper that the West will fail to defeat Islamist terrorism unless it acknowledges and addresses Islam itself as the principal motivational force behind the phenomenon of Islamist terror.

The paper will first examine the philosophical bases, and structural weaknesses of Islam that contribute to Islamist terrorism[4]. Next, the West's willful blindness to those effects of Islam will be discussed, followed by an analysis of the West's consequently flawed strategy. Finally, the paper will discuss some of the key issues to be considered in revising Western strategy to address Islam.

PART I - Islam as a Part of the Problem

In the aftermath of any Islamist terrorist attack against the West, there is a tendency for many Muslims to declare that Islam is not the problem. Al-Qaeda's attacks on September 11th were no exception. An American Muslim Council spokeswoman declared: "[Islam] is a religion of peace. These types of acts are not Islam"[5], and a prominent Cairo Imam recited: "Muslims are gentle and Islam is Peace"[6]. Without doubting the sincerity of such declarations, they are obviously in complete discord with the views of the terrorists who claim to be acting *for* Islam:

> For...acts of aggression and injustice, we have declared jihad against the US, because in our religion it is our duty to make jihad so that God's word is the one exalted to the heights and so that we drive the Americans away from all Muslim countries[7].

Similarly, the thousands of Palestinian, Nigerian[8], Bangladeshi[9], and Indonesian[10] Muslims who celebrated the attacks or expressed enthusiastic support for Osama bin Laden could hardly be labelled gentle or peaceful. How can such diametrically-opposed beliefs over such shocking events, be held by groups professing the same faith? The answer lies at the convergence of Islam's ambiguously inflammatory theology with its weak, decentralized structure.

---

[4] For want of space, the paper deals explicitly with the central subject of the War on Terrorism, Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organization. However, much of it applies directly to other prominent Islamist terror groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah.

[5] Farkhunda Ali, American Muslim Council, quoted in "The New Wahhabi Movement", October 17, 2001, www.msnbc.com/news/643005.asp, 22 October 2001

[6] Shiekh Nasser Abdelrazi, Imam of Cairo's Mustafa Mahmoud Mosque, quoted in Jeffrey Goldberg, "Behind Mubarak: Egyptian Clerics and Intellectuals Respond to Terrorism", The New Yorker, October 8, 2001

[7] Osama bin Laden speaking in 1997, quoted in Peter Bergen, Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden, (New York: The Free Press, 2001) p 19.

[8] Anonymous, "Reaction from Around the World", The New York Times Late Edition, Sep 13, 2001, 2 May 2002.

[9] Anonymous, "Bin Laden: Puppet of a Muppet?", New York Times Upfront, Nov 26, 2001, 2 May 2002.

[10] Jay Solomon, "Indonesian Islamic Groups Support bin Laden – Fallout From Us Attacks Could Begin to Spread to Moderate Muslims", The New York Times Eastern Edition, Sep 21, 2001, 2 May 2002.

Philosophical and Theological Basis for Conflict

       The theological doctrine at the heart of the conflict between Islam and the West is, of course, that of *jihad*. At the birth of Islam in the seventh century, the Arabic word 'jihad' simply meant 'effort'[11]. The Prophet Muhammad adopted jihad to describe war intended to "spread the faith and increase the territory under Muslim control"[12]. Over the centuries, Jihad has been invoked and adapted frequently, so that today its meaning is open to the interpretation of both speaker and listener. It is employed to describe any number of obligations: to struggle internally for a pure relationship with God; to

Iraq[20]. Despite its growing power, the Sa'ud kingdom was destroyed in 1818 by an Egyptian army, acting for the Ottoman Sultan.[21]. In the 1920s, again with Wahhabi help, the Saudi leader 'Abd al-'Aziz finally re-established the kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the Wahhabi faith. Shortly afterward, the Wahhabis revolted against Aziz for failing to adhere strictly to the tenets of Wahhabism. Aziz put down the revolt by killing and imprisoning the Wahhabi leadership[22]. It was in this historical context that Osama bin Laden was later raised in the Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam, explaining his natural distrust of the Saudi family for its apostasy and betrayal.

The contemporary philosopher that most profoundly shaped the world in which bin Laden moves was Sayyid Qutb (1906 – 1966). An Egyptian Islamist, Qutb was for many years the chief ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood[23]. As a young man, he experienced Western culture and was disgusted by the "godless materialism in the spiritual, social, and economic life of the people"[24]. Qutb wrote extensively, mostly from prison[25], of his views of jihad, Islam and the world. He argued that the world was in the same state of ignorance and chaos that had preceded the original coming of the Prophet Muhammad. He rejected democracy, nationalism, and pan-Arabism as anti-Islamic[26], and advocated offensive jihad to bring the world back to the path of God[27].

It was near the end of this chain of influential intellectuals that Osama bin Laden entered the scene. While studying at Jeddah's King Abdul-Aziz University in the late 1970s, he became closely acquainted with two professors of Islamic Studies. One was Muhammed Qutb, brother of Sayyid Qutb, and the other, Palestinian Abdullah Azzam[28], through whom he would later go to fight in Afghanistan, and whom he would succeed as leader of Al-Qaeda[29]. The influence of these two men upon bin Laden's formation was considerable[30]. Qutb espoused the views of his executed brother, while Azzam was a staunch proponent of physical participation in jihad. Given his influence over bin Laden, a sample of his rhetoric shortly before his death is of value. While in the US in 1988, he exhorted:

> "Every Moslem on earth should unsheathe his sword and fight to liberate Palestine. The Jihad is not limited to Afghanistan...Jihad means fighting...You must fight in any place

---

[20] The clashes concerned the most fundamental of Sunni-Sh'ia differences, the Shi'ia's veneration of saints and the use of shrines. Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples, p 256-258.

[21] Abdullah ibn Sa'ud was taken to Istanbul and executed .William Dietl, Holy War, p 17.

[22] Sue Lackey, "The New Wahhabi Movement", 17 Oct 01 www.msnbc.com/news/643005.asp, 22 October 2001.

[23] The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in the late 1920s by Hassan al Banna as a means to restore Islamic morality and culture to Egyptian society. Originally purely social and religious in outlook, the Brotherhood developed in increasingly militant political directions through the 1950s and beyond.

[24] Wilhelm Dietl, Holy War, p 35.

[25] Qutb was eventually executed after many years of imprisonment on suspicion of involvement in a Muslim Brotherhood assassination attempt on Nasser.

[26] Robert Worth, "The Deep Intellectual Roots of Islamic Terror", The New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast), Oct 13, 2001.

[27] Peter Bergen, Holy War Inc, p 48.

[28] Peter Bergen, Holy War Inc, p 47.

[29] Azzam's organization, Alkhifa, was primarily engaged in fundraising, recruiting and the administrative support of jihad recruits arriving in Pakistan. After Azzam's death in a car bomb attack in 1989, Osama bin Laden took it over and began to transform it into al-Qaeda, Steven Emerson, American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us (New York: The Free Press, 2002) p 64 and 127.

[30] Peter Bergen, Holy War Inc, p 47.

you can get...Whenever jihad is mentioned in the Holy book, it means the obligation to fight. It does not mean to fight with the pen or to write books or articles in the press or to fight by holding lectures". [31]

And later the same year:

"Oh brothers, after our experience in Afghanistan, nothing in the world is impossible for us anymore! Small power or big power, what is decisive is the willpower that springs from religious belief".[32]

Hence, although Osama bin Laden and his colleagues may come from a minority within Islam, it is a minority at the heart of pedigree, unmodernized Islam. Although united by modern events such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the wars with Israel and the US, these terrorists and their less active Muslim supporters trace their beliefs through a long philosophical and theological tradition closely tied to the holiest lands and beliefs of Islam. That tradition continues to be openly preached throughout Sunni Islam, including in the US[33]. Outraged Western observers tend to label the Taliban, bin Laden and his followers, 'fundamentalist' or even "fascist"[34], but they consider themselves simply true Muslims, following and *acting* upon what is arguably the form of Islam closest to that practised in Muhammad's time.

Structural Weakness of Islam

Islam literally means the surrender of oneself to God's will. It has always been a personal religion of supplicants interacting directly with their God, with little intervention by clergy. However, Islam's greatest strength and glory was experienced under strong religious-political leadership, initially under Muhammed himself, and then under the Caliphs that succeeded him for 650 years. The later Ottoman Caliphate-Sultanate restored the powerful Islamic tradition of a unified theological-temporal authority. The blend of Ottoman imperial power and Islamic piety with the non-Arab venue of Constantinople greatly enhanced the legitimacy and reach of pan-Islamic relations[35]. Through elaborate strategies of diplomacy, propaganda, and occasional military forays, the Ottoman Caliph helped to generate a strong sense of Muslim community or *umma* that transcended the Ottoman Empire[36] and nearly culminated in establishment of an Islamic bloc and army in the early 20th century[37]. Then calamity struck. First, the Russian

---

[31] Speaking at the Al-Farook Mosque in Brooklyn in 1988. As quoted in Steven Emerson, American Jihad, p 130.

[32] Speaking in December 1988 at a conference of the Muslim Arab Youth Association in Oklahoma City, Ibid, p 130.

[33] Sheikh Kabbani, head of the Islamic Supreme Council of America has estimated that 80% of all mosques and charitable organizations in the US have been taken over by extremists who do not represent the mainstream of Islam. Steve Emerson, American Jihad, p160.

[34] In his address to the US Congress on 20 Sep 2001, George W. Bush associated the Islamic terrorists with the fascists of the Nazis and other 20th century totalitarians.

[35] Jacob M. Landau, The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) p 22-23.

[36] Ibid, p 60.

[37] Ibid, p 160.

Revolution replaced the weakened Czar's apparatus in the Islamic Russian south, truncating the coalescence of Muslims there.[38] At the same time, the Ottoman Empire found itself first on the losing side of World War I, and then dismantled. Ataturk Kemal, despite appeals from wider Islam[39], eliminated the Sultanate and the Caliphate in 1924, leaving world Islam captainless. The post-war rise of political ideology rapidly eclipsed what was left of political Islam and Pan-Islamism. Later, the continued dominance of political ideology during the de-colonization of Muslim lands after World War II placed those newly independent countries firmly in the hands of secular nationalists beholden to foreign superpowers. Islamists were without power, structure or leadership.

Today, a decade into the decline of political ideology, Islam finds itself still deprived of a Caliph[40]. Newly freed from super-power dominance, the inclination of Muslim populations under declining nationalist governments has been to turn toward either Islam or Western secular society[41]. For Islamists, the possibility of being shut out of power yet again by foreign dominance is likely unbearable. But in their very hour of desperation, Islamists find themselves championing an Islam politically weaker and more divided than it has been for centuries. Internationally, Islamic power and solidarity has been emasculated by the Western tradition of separating church and state. Any potential for pan-Islamic power is split in stalemate between the Muslim World League[42], a non-governmental council of Muslim clergy or *ulema*, and the political Organization of the Islamic Conference[43], populated by the mainly nationalist heads of state of Muslim countries. A frustrated Islamist might recall the words of Ibn Taimiyah: "Unity is a sign of divine clemency, discord is a punishment of God" [44].

Bin Laden and his comrades, the founders and heirs of the two most successful pan-Islamic initiatives of modern time (the Afghan jihad and al-Qaeda itself) may have concluded something else entirely: that they are the best and only hope for unifying and restoring Islamic power. The danger for the West is that significant numbers of frustrated Islamists and ordinary Muslims around the world might agree. As has been seen, some do agree, and will assuredly do their best to promote pan-Islam and the resurgence of Islamic power, while battling Western influence.

Unfortunately for both Islam and the West, there is no universal, Islamically-legitimate authority to challenge bin Laden and his followers before the world umma, nor to present a more moderate Islamic face to the world. With so many localized clerics of the many sects of Islam yielding so many interpretations of Islam's most potent doctrines, Muslims can rightfully aspire to almost any degree of militancy or conciliation toward the West, without risk of authoritative

---

[38] Later, mass internal deportations of entire populations of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Chechens and Tatars would suppress Russian Muslims for the duration of the Soviet Union.

[39] Jacob Landau, The Politics of Pan-Islam, p 210 and 235.

[40] This, despite repeated attempts or proposals since 1924 to re-establish the Caliph under various regimes, beginning with Husayn of Arabia, who would later be defeated by Sa'ud before the project could be complete, ibid p 236.

[41] Bernard Lewis, "What Went Wrong?", The Atlantic Monthly, January 2002, p 45.

[42] Jacob Landau, The politics of Pan-Islam, p 283.

[43] Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) p176.

[44] Ibn Taimiyah, as quoted in Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples.

clerical sanction or binding, communal discipline. Thus, Islam's inflammatory doctrines and tradition, combined with its current lack of internal structure and discipline do indeed make Islam a problem, and perhaps the central problem, in the current struggle against Islamist terrorism. Hence, the conclusion of an otherwise insightful 1995 RAND study, that "Islam as a theology is not the real issue. The true issue is...[the] interpretation given to Islam by Muslims...to serve their own political ends"[45] is really moot. Reminiscent of the slogan of the American pro-gun lobby of the 1970s: 'Guns don't kill people; people kill people.', Lesser and Fuller are really saying: 'Jihad is not the problem; undisciplined jihadists are the problem.' Ignoring for the moment Lesser and Fuller's omission of religious beliefs in preference for "political ends", it is still Islam, and belief in Islam's doctrines that lie at the heart of the problem.

PART II – Western Blindness to Islam as Problem

The same 1995 RAND study by Fuller and Lesser applauded that: "declaratory US policy rightly does not seek to declare war on Islam or even Islamism, so much as confront unacceptable acts by Muslim groups or states that violate international norms"[46]. In effect, the authors were advocating military or diplomatic responses aimed only at the immediate manifest threat, and more or less ignoring Islam. Since September 11th, Western political leadership, with only one exception[47], has consistently denied the connection of Islam with Islamist terrorism. Great pains have been taken to stress that the war is against radical terrorists, and not Islam. President George W. Bush referred to Islamic teachings as "good and peaceful", and declared that "those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah"[48].

Longtime Middle East observer Daniel Pipes has researched the evolving defence of Islam by the US government over the past decade. He has concluded that "in adopting a determinedly apologetic stance [and]...by dismissing any connection between Islam and terrorism...they have turned the US government into a discreet missionary for the [Islamic] faith.[49]

Certainly there is value to convincing ordinary Muslims[50] that the decision to engage in anti-Western terrorism is merely a very bad choice, rather than the immutable, inherited destiny of all Muslims that Osama bin Laden would have them embrace. However, there is more at work here than mere message-passing. Western political leadership is secular, and has been for centuries. The compartmentalization of religion from politics comes naturally to our

---

[45] Lesser and Fuller, A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West, A RAND Study, p 99.

[46] Fuller and Lesser, A Sense of Siege, p 167.

[47] The exception was Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who, interpreting the war on terrorism as a crusade, declared: "We should be confident of the superiority of our civilization". He was soundly shouted down by the media and his peers. Michael Meyer and Barbie Nadeau, "Bad, Bad Boy", Newsweek: New York, Jan 21, 2002, 2 May 2002.

[48] George W. Bush, Address to Joint Session of Congress and the Nation, Sept 20 2001, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress 29 April 2002.

[49] Daniel Pipes and Mimi Stillman, "The United States Governement: Islam's Patron?", Middle East Quarterly, Winter 2002, Volume IX: Number 1, p 25-35.

[50] Estimated to make up more than 20% of the Earth's population, Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order, p 117.

governments. Historically, this has cleared the way for the traditional Westphalian instruments of international power: diplomacy and straight talk between opposing sovereign states. However, Islamist terror groups like bin Laden's al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Indonesia's Liskar Jihad are inherently and inextricably both political and religious. Peeling away the context of Islam leaves only terrorists, with no rational explanation or predictor of their behaviour, and therefore no viable path toward a solution. Thus the strategy of the current War on Terrorism is constrained almost entirely to defeating terror*ists*, rather than terror*ism*.[51]

PART III – The Resulting Western Strategy and its Failure

President George W. Bush laid out the goals for the "War on Terrorism" in his speech to the US Congress on 20 September 2001, just nine days after Al Qaeda's attack on the World Trade Center. Given the assumptions discussed above, his strategy naturally focussed on identifying, locating and destroying terrorist cells, facilities, and resources. Bush identified *civilization's* enemy as "a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them"[52], and declared that the war would "not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated." and that the only way "to defeat terrorism as a threat [is]...to destroy it where it grows"[53]. In announcing the start of military strikes against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan a few weeks later, he detailed the rest of the strategy:

> "This military action is...another front in a war that has already been joined through diplomacy, intelligence, the freezing of financial assets and the arrests of known terrorists by law enforcement agents in 38 countries".[54]

Endless Attrition in Afghanistan

The following month, US and Western coalition forces began fighting in Afghanistan, alongside local troops, first to topple the Wahhabi Taliban regime, and then to destroy al-Qaeda terrorists and their resources. Although the first goal was achieved faster than even the most optimistic military experts expected, the second goal remains elusive. It is at this point, barely into the fight, that an observer might ask, as columnist Serge Schmemman did: "what would 'victory' mean?"[55] Is it an endless tactical engagement that keeps the terrorists off balance and unable to mount their own attacks? Is it the destruction or capture of every terrorist? Or only

---

[51] A couple of dangerous but unrelated sovereign states, North Korea and Iraq, have been misguidedly thrown in for comfort or opportunity, but have only served to dissipate focus or to dissipate coalition support for the US. A tenuous connection between the World Trade Center attacks and Iraq was attempted, but eventually discredited. Patrick Tyler, "Czechs Confirm Iraqi Agent Met With Terror Ringleader", The New York Times Late Edition, Oct 27, 2001, 2 May 2002, and Anonymous, "Sept 11 Hijacker Didn't Meet With Iraqi Agent", CNN.com World, April 30, 2002, www.cnn.com/2002/04/30/us.iraq.atta.ap/index.html, 2 May 2002.
[52] George W. Bush, Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of the US Congress, September 20, 2001, The Washington Post, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress , 29 April 02
[53] Ibid.
[54] George W. Bush, Transcript of President Bush's Address Following Strikes Against Military Installations...in Afghanistan", The Washington Post, 7 Oct 2001, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress, 29 April 2002
[55] Serge Schmemman, "What Would 'Victory' Mean?", The New York Times, September 16, 2001.

every terrorist leader? While those questions linger unanswered, the war has continued. With only the destruction of Taliban and al-Qaeda personnel and weapons as a goal, and the sums of that destruction as the measure of success, Western coalition forces have inevitably found themselves in a low-intensity war of attrition. In an eerie allusion to the Vietnam War[56] they have even been in the very unpleasant position of attempting to defend themselves "against accusations [of having]...exaggerated the enemy 'body count'"[57].

Repetition in the Philippines

Already, operations have begun in the Philippines, where US Special Forces are training the Philippine Army to better prosecute its decades-long struggle against the Abu Sayyaf[58]. Founded by alumni of the Afghanistan jihad against the Soviets, and closely associated with both Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda, Abu Sayyaf has conducted a campaign of terror on behalf of the Muslim minority, the Moro. The US interest in the fight is to prevent al-Qaeda from setting up a new base in the Philippines, "seen as a potential haven for terrorists because of its somewhat tenuous grip on law and order"[59]. Here, one can clearly see the long-term futility of a military-only strategy, for the struggle against the Moro is not new to the US. From 1898 to 1913, the US fought a spectacularly one-sided war against the Moro, inflicting massive casualties[60]. A century later, nothing has been resolved, and the strategy remains much the same.

The Collateral Effects of Limited Strategy

Any military action will inevitably produce collateral damage. Every belligerent naturally minimizes collateral damage, but in modern times it is avoided not just because of its undesirability, but because its visible effects can be exploited by a savvy enemy to undermine one's domestic or international support. A drawback of the purely tactical strategy[61] being pursued in the War on Terrorism, is that there is no strategic payoff for the risk taken of inflicting collateral damage. Thus, just as in Vietnam, every tactical action might well be won, but the physical collateral damage cumulatively alienates local populations and international support, while enemy deaths merely deepen the enemy's resolve and swell his ranks with fresh recruits bent on vengeance – all without any higher strategic good being achieved. Given recent

---

[56] The parallels between the attritionist Vietnam War and the current War on Terrorism strategy are striking on several levels. Tactically superior, but decisively constrained at the strategic level, the American military in Vietnam was reduced to comparing enemy body counts with their own casualty figures to measure success: the very definition of attrition. The strategic centre of gravity of North Vietnam was never decisively engaged; only the periodic manifestations of enemy forces appearing in South Vietnam were engaged. Eventually, with restrictions against attacking North Vietnam still in place, the war spread to the neighbouring countries of Laos and Cambodia.

[57] Michael Petrou, "Bombing Shredded Bodies, General Says: Enemy Casualties in Doubt", National Post, 20 March 2002, p A15

[58] Conflict with the Moro has been nearly continuous since the original Spanish claim of the Philippines as part of the Spice Islands in the 17th century, David S. Woolman, "Fighting Islam's Fierce Moro Warriors", Military History April 2002, p34

[59] Deidre Sheehan, "A War Grows", Far Eastern Economic Review, Hong Kong, Oct 11, 2001, 2 May 2002.

[60] Woolman, "Fighting Islam's Fierce Moro Warriors", p40

[61] deliberate oxymoron

polls conducted in Muslim countries, the West need not make many mistakes to completely radicalize already alienated populations[62].

In the unique case of combatting Islamist terrorists, it is important to understand how a strategy of tactical engagement plays particularly to their strengths. The generic effect of enemy casualties producing enemy recruits still holds true, but it is heightened by the prospect of martyrdom. For Islamists, death in battle is not just highly-respected; it is preferred. It is therefore likely that Islamists welcome the West's current tactically-oriented strategy. It does not threaten the Islamist centre of gravity, the support of the wider Islamist umma. Instead, it provides the prospect of inflicting casualties on an otherwise unreachable West or of achieving a glorious death trying, with a place in heaven to boot. Thus, every military attack by the West against Islamist terrorists, however necessary, and whether or not it yields tactical victory, brings with it a cost in encouraging other Muslims to become jihadists[63]. Finally, as might be expected of sects practising historically pure religion, the community of Islamists has a long memory for historical events. The current tactical war, particularly if lost by the Islamists, will therefore likely serve as fodder to inspire new Islamist terrorist leaders and movements, just as past events inspired bin Laden. In the future, at some yet-to-be-defined endstate in the War on Terrorism, all of the pieces will have been put in place for a repetition. Without addressing Islam in concert with the tactical military actions, little of real and lasting value can be achieved, and much damage can be done.

PART IV – Revising Western Strategy.

Should the West come to realize the shortcomings of its current strategy and revise its approach to combatting Islamist terrorism, it should first acknowledge that the nature of Islamist terror does indeed include a strong and historical motivational influence from Islam itself - an influence that could, perhaps, be countered by an internationally-empowered, moderate, Muslim mainstream. Secondly, the West should acknowledge that Islam is growing rapidly, such that any current threat from Islam now, will only grow in scope[64] and magnitude[65] if left inadequately addressed. Third, the West should accept that the current crop of declining secular nationalist governments in Muslim countries is most likely to be succeeded by Islamist governments of some form[66] and through mechanisms that may or may not be democratic, depending on current tendencies of Western-supported[67] nationalist governments toward repression.

---

[62] A Gallup poll of 10,000 Muslims in nine Muslim countries revealed that only 9% of Muslims thought that US military action in Afghanistan was justified, and only 18% believed that arab men carried out the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, Anonymous, "Improving Our Image", Montreal Gazette, Mar 04, 2002, www.canada.com/news 4 March 2002

[63] this is not an argument against attacks, but a reminder of the need to consider their longer term costs.

[64] Almost inevitably to one day include nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction under the control of an Islamist regime.

[65] Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, p 84-85.

[66] Fuller and Lesser, A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West, p 166.

[67] For example, Egypt receives roughly US $2 Billion annually from the US in aid, and has a less than Western standard of human rights and democracy, Jeffrey Goldberg, "Behind Mubarak: Egyptian Clerics and Intellectuals Respond to Terrorism", The New Yorker, October 8, 2001, p 50

Accepting the above conclusions, the West should be addressing the Islamist terrorist threat now through a *strategic moral line of operation* to reach, in the long term of 30-50 years, a positive relationship of mutually respectful coexistence with Islam as a civilization fundamentally different from the West. The revised strategy should therefore be designed around three thrusts: to champion democratic transitions to Islamist power; to strengthen the international authority of mainstream Islam; and to improve the West's own relations with the umma on the foundation of sound theological, political, legal and philosophical protocols for mutual coexistence.

Championing Democratic Transitions to Islamist Power

The thrust to help Islamists to rise to political power would seem counter-intuitive to anyone versed in the history of Islam and the West in recent decades. However, given the choice between a populist Islamist regime coming to power through revolution and in a mood hostile to the West for its complicity in containing Islamism and denying it power (such as Iran); and an Islamist regime confidently focussed on bettering social conditions and coming to power through Western-sponsored democratic elections; the likelihood of a better outcome for the West lies clearly with the second.

Such a thrust could take a form as simple as advocating truly democratic elections in certain Muslim-majority countries currently governed by undemocratic, repressive nationalist regimes. A palatable solution to the unpopular nationalist government and the West's desires to promote its own values could be had by using Western aid - in this case, not more aid, but less. The withdrawal of aid could be used to pressure target governments into holding democratic elections while avoiding the usual failure of Western policy of being seen to manipulate Muslim governments for Western gain. Regardless of the outcome of such elections, there must not be a repeat of the hypocritical silence in the West at the annulment of Islamist victory democratic elections as in Algeria.[68]

Strengthening International Mainstream Islam

In a bid to help recreate the unifying and stabilizing effect of the long defunct Caliphate, possible new centres of comparable Islamic power need to be identified and somehow cultivated. Three broad options present themselves. First, there is the heir to the theological authority of the Caliph, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Cairo's thousand-year-old Mosque and university that serves as Sunni Islam's theological authority in the absence of a Caliphate[69]. Unfortunately, Al-Azhar lacks sufficient political power in itself and, as the Grand Sheikh is actually appointed by the Egyptian President, Al-Azhar may be seen as politically too close to a current nationalist Muslim government.

---

[68] Algerian elections in 1990 garnered the opposition party, Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) fully 70% of the vote. A military coup ensued to prevent the FIS from forming the government. A decade of brutal massacres and more electoral shams has followed. Fuller and Lesser, A Sense of Siege", p49.
[69] Al-Azhar's influence is not strictly limited to Sunni Islam. Many of its rulings are equally widely read and accepted in Shi'ia Islam, Wilhelm Dietl, Holy War, p 108.

Second, there is the combined political and theological power of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Muslim World League (MWL), which with an eventually stronger Islamist membership of the OIC, could be combined and expanded to provide the required depth and leadership. The West could begin to cultivate the power of these organizations by seeking to appoint religiously astute ambassadorial missions to their offices and assemblies, and using those conduits for substantive issues.

Third, a newly Islamist power, based on a natural leader of the Sunni Islam world, say Egypt or possibly Saudi Arabia, could provide the combination of theological and political leadership in a fashion more closely approximating the traditional Caliphate. Again, sophisticated, custom-designed ambassadorial staffs from Western nations could assist in cultivating the power.

Theological/Philosophical Rapprochement

The most challenging of all of the required initiatives in such a moral line of operation would also be the most strategically and historically necessary. The development of inter-faith and inter-civilizational protocols to support mutually respectful coexistence and interaction will require the formation of a possibly permanent, body of authoritative scholars and jurists from multiple faiths and sects to conduct *theological*, *philosophical*, *legal* and *political* research, debate, and negotiation over a period of years. This in itself will be difficult enough, but the first challenge for the West would be to overcome the centuries of deliberately areligious political institutional development to reintegrate religious and moral authority, even on this small a scale. The solution might be to compose the Western body on an ambassadorial level, or in the form of some other isolated, unique body.

To be accepted as authoritative by Islamic authorities, the Western contribution to such a multi-faith body would have to be centred on 'people of the book', that is Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, although ultimately there may be value in incorporating Hindus as another major religion bordering on and in conflict with Islam. The politically-savvy Vatican, already a widely-respected world religious authority, would be a key participant. With its record of finding common ground with Islam at the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo[70] and at its own recent hosting of an assembly of world religious leaders at Assisi[71], the Vatican might even serve as the nucleus about which to assemble the Western clerics, philosophers, legal and political scholars needed for a Western delegation.

On the Muslim side, principal representation would be required from the influential Al-Azhar. Some pre-conditioning would have to occur to bring the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohammed Tantawi around to a negotiating mood as he and his institution have been radicalized by the Palestinian situation. Tantawi is on record as having repeatedly sanctioned suicide

---

[70] Anonymous, "Population Wars", US News and World Report, Sep 12, 1994, p54

[71] The purpose of the assembly was to call for peace and to censure those who commit violence in the name of God. The assembly included participation from various Christian sects, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and various African animist religions. Raymond de Souza, "From Assisi, a call for Peace", National Post, January 26, 2002, p A16

bombing against combatant targets[72], and did not see fit to attend the Vatican's Assisi conference, sending an emissary with a pro-Palestinian message rather than participating in the message banning violence in the name of God[73]. Representation from the less influential, but parallel Shi'ia institutions in Qom, Iran, as well as the OIC and MWL would also be required.

Risks and Challenges

The risks and complexity of such a line of operation are enormous. Allowing former client states to 'go Islamic' would present ethical and political dilemmas for the West, particularly as regards Western standards of human rights and democracy under Shar'ia. However, if in democracy one gets the government one deserves, and if the West is a proponent of true democracy, then the West must be prepared to accept genuinely democratic results, including even an Islamist victory that may develop into 'one man, one vote, one time'[74]. The wider risk to the US is the political fallout of being seen by its other allies as having 'betrayed' a client to an adversarial dominance. For this reason, such transitions must be - and must be seen to be - borne of populist desire, and carried out through the democratic process so central to declared US and Western values.

The more physical risks to the West relate to the risks of renewed terrorism and the risks to the sources of the world oil supply, and the strategic maritime transit routes by which the West and its allies receive that oil. The possibility exists that some newly minted Islamist regimes will go through a particularly radical stage as did Iran, whose first decade of foreign policy was centred on exporting Islamist terror and revolution to its neighbours and Western enemies. Western assistance of the Islamists to power, on a gradual timeline, will likely go some way to taming[75] the anti-Western flavour of the endstate regimes. The possibility of oil embargoes or sharp price hikes by newly Islamisized oil producing countries must be anticipated and mitigated, perhaps by the pre-establishment of increased Western oil reserves. The potential risk to the Muslim-dominated choke points such as the Suez Canal, the Straits of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca must also be anticipated.

Finally, an absolute pre-condition to launching such a moral line of operation is the separate requirement to first achieve a satisfactory settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian quagmire that so thoroughly dominates the Muslim political agenda domestically and internationally at present.

PART VI – Conclusion

The current strategy of the West's 'War on Terrorism' is flawed as it is based on an artificial Western perception that Islam is not a part of Islamist terrorism, when Islam is in fact the political, cultural and religious power behind it. Some of Islam's more inflammatory

---

[72] Anonymous, "Suicide bombers who kill civilians not martyrs, cleric rules", National Post, February 7, 2002.
[73] Raymond de Souza, "From Assisi, a call for Peace", National Post, January 26, 2002, p A16.
[74] Fuller and Lesser, "Sense of Siege", p 121.
[75] Fuller and Lesser discuss the tendency of politically isolated Islamists to demand outrageously unattainable and unrealistic policies. With gradually introduced exposure to the reality of the complex responsibilities of government, the need to compromise eventually has a taming effect on their policies as in Turkey, Pakistan or makes them politically unpopular and irrelevant as in Jordan, p 120-121.

doctrine, and the lack of a central religious-political Islamic authority have combined with long-standing traditions of strict, fundamentalist belief to motivate some Muslims to extremes of terrorism. The West's deliberate dismissal of Islam as a key motivational factor in Islamist terrorism has produced the current, flawed strategy based almost entirely on attacking and isolating identified terrorist cells. Such a military-only strategy dooms the US 'War on Terrorism' to an endless, cycle of attrition by playing directly into the strengths of Islamist terrorists, and indirectly encouraging more Muslims to engage in anti-Western terrorism - all without strategic gain for the West. Islam must therefore be addressed. Broad goals and approaches for doing so have been presented, along with the associated risks to Western governments. Adequately addressing Islam promises to be extremely difficult, complex, and lengthy. It may involve challenges to the West's key values, and the requirement for compromise. Forceful attacks against terrorists must remain a part of the West's strategy. However, in the War on Terror*ism*, given the demonstrated potency, historical persistence, and likely growth of Islamist terror, conducting only tactical engagements while allowing the strategic threat to grow unhindered is not an option.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anonymous,"The New Wahhabi Movement", October 17, 2001, www.msnbc.com/news/643005.asp, 22 October 2001

Anonymous, "Reaction from Around the World", The New York Times Late Edition, Sep 13, 2001, 2 May 2002

Anonymous, "Bin Laden: Puppet of a Muppet?", New York Times Upfront, Nov 26, 2001, 2 May 2002.

Anonymous, "Sept 11 Hijacker Didn't Meet With Iraqi Agent", CNN.com World, April 30, 2002, www.cnn.com/2002/04/30/us.iraq.atta.ap/index.html, 2 May 2002

Anonymous, "Improving Our Image", Montreal Gazette, Mar 04, 2002, www.canada.com/news 4 March 2002

Anonymous, "Population Wars", US News and World Report, Sep 12, 1994

Anonymous, "Suicide bombers who kill civilians not martyrs, cleric rules", National Post, February 7, 2002

Peter Bergen, Holy War Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden, The Free Press: New York, 2001

George W. Bush, Address to Joint Session of Congress and the Nation, Sept 20 2001, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress 29 April 2002

William Dietl, Holy War, MacMillan Publishing Company: New York, 1984

Steven Emerson, American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us, The Free Press: New York, 2002

Timothy Furnish, "Bin Ladin: The Man Who Would Be Mahdi", Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2002

Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West. A RAND Study, Westview Press: Boulder Colorado, 1995

Jeffrey Goldberg, "Behind Mubarak: Egyptian Clerics and Intellectuals Respond to Terrorism", The New Yorker, October 8, 2001

Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples, Belknap Press: Cambridge, 1991

Mark Huband, Warriors of the Prophet: The Struggle for Islam, Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado, 1998

Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, Simon & Schuster: New York, 1996

Michael Ignatieff, "Ethics and the New War", Canadian Military Journal, Winter 2001-2002, Royal military College Kingston

Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order, Simon and Schuster: New York, 1996

Sue Lackey, "The New Wahhabi Movement", 17 Oct 01 www.msnbc.com/news/643005.asp, 22 October 2001

Jacob M. Landau, The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1990

Bernard Lewis, "What Went Wrong?", The Atlantic Monthly, January 2002, p 45.

Michael Meyer and Barbie Nadeau, "Bad, Bad Boy", Newsweek: New York, Jan 21, 2002, 2 May 2002

Michael Petrou, "Bombing Shredded Bodies, General Says: Enemy Casualties in Doubt", National Post, 20 March 2002

Daniel Pipes and Mimi Stillman, "The United States Government: Islam's Patron?", Middle East Quarterly, Winter 2002

Serge Schmemann, "What Would 'Victory' Mean?", The New York Times, New York, September 16, 2001

Stephen Schwartz, "The Arab Betrayal of Balkan Islam", Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2002

Deidre Sheehan, "A War Grows", Far Eastern Economic Review, Hong Kong, Oct 11, 2001, 2 May 2002

Jay Solomon, "Indonesian Islamic Groups Support bin Laden – Fallout From Us Attacks Could Begin to Spread to Moderate Muslims", The New York Times Eastern Edition, Sep 21, 2001, 2 May 2002.

Raymond de Souza, "From Assisi, a call for Peace", National Post, January 26, 2002

Patrick Tyler, "Czechs Confirm Iraqi Agent Met With Terror Ringleader", The New York Times Late Edition, Oct 27, 2001, 2 May 2002

David S. Woolman, "Fighting Islam's Fierce Moro Warriors", Military History April 2002, p40.

Robert Worth, "The Deep Intellectual Roots of Islamic Terror", The New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast), Oct 13, 2001

Robin Wright, Sacred Rage: The Wrath of Militant Islam, Simon and Schuster: New York, 1985