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## Research Articles

### **A Cultural Models Approach for Investigating the Cognitive Basis of Terrorism**

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#### **Abstract**

Terrorists attempt to communicate specific aspects of their ideological frameworks to shape the common perspective of their intended audiences. For the approach to be successful, the ideas they are promoting must fit within the cultural meaning systems shared across the population they are addressing. Knowing what messages will effectively persuade their constituents is likely intuitive for terrorists operating within their own cultural environment, but not necessarily for researchers who come from distinct cultural backgrounds. A method is thus described for studying in detail the common perspective that members of a culture bring to a situation. The method results in models of the culture that provide a basis for outsiders to begin to frame events from the cultural-insider point of view. The cultural models can then be used as an aid to anticipate how messages will be interpreted and evaluated by terrorists and their audiences.

*Keywords: Cultural epidemiology, mental models, political violence, terrorist mind, jihad, Islam*

The purpose of this paper is to describe an approach to cultural modelling, cultural network analysis (CNA), and its application to terrorism research. Cultural network analysis builds on a foundation of research practices drawn from the fields of cognitive anthropology, cultural and cognitive psychology, and decision analysis. It improves upon current cultural research techniques by providing a systematic method for constructing *cultural models* for groups, organisations, or wider societies. The essential idea is that, by studying in detail the common perspective that members of a culture bring to a situation, a model of the culture can be constructed that provides a basis for an outsider to begin to frame events from their point of view. The model can then be used for a variety of purposes, such as an aid to anticipating how messages will be interpreted and evaluated by members of the culture. Cultural models derived by CNA are represented graphically as a network of the culturally-shared concepts, causal beliefs, and values that influence key decisions in a particular context[1]. In their most fully



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developed form, cultural models also convey detailed quantitative information about the prevalence of their specific components. In order to establish a context for addressing contributions that cultural modelling can make to terrorism research, we briefly review progress made in understanding terrorism more generally.

Advances in understanding the reasons behind jihadist terrorism have been made in the last several years, though the evidential research base remains thin[2]. Generally, terrorist support and recruitment are not due to any single causal factor, but instead stem from the interplay between political aspirations of terrorist groups, vulnerable individuals, employment of jihadist ideology, and wider social support for terrorism. These latter components increasingly depend on a variety of modern modes of communication that are used to propagate the group vision of the world to a broad set of constituents. The overall communication strategies of jihadist terrorist organisations can be generally characterised as to:

1. motivate ordinary persons to carry out terrorist acts to meet the organisation's objectives;
2. exploit moral outrage and feelings of humiliation based on political events;
3. convince by means of religious texts used on behalf of terror ideology.

We discuss each of these components of terrorist strategy in turn. First, with respect to profiles of individuals, what research there is indicates that suicide terrorists have no appreciable psychopathology and are at least as educated and economically well-off as their surrounding populations[3]. Furthermore, education does not appear to be correlated with support for terrorism. Finally, although economic despair may provide a partial answer, it does not offer a complete explanation[4]. Importantly, individuals who are vulnerable to terrorist recruitment are not motivated to take part in suicide terrorism without some form of ideology to guide them, as well as an overall organisation to support their activities[5].

The balance of evidence suggests that terrorists tend to be from at least moderately religious backgrounds. For example, interviews with terrorist recruits in Pakistan indicated that, "None were uneducated, desperately poor, simple minded or depressed," and "all were deeply religious." They believed that their acts were "sanctioned by the divinely revealed religion of Islam"[6]. Furthermore, it also seems clear that religiosity is fostered as a part of the indoctrination process and those external events can trigger greater attention to religion. For example, Bosnian Muslims typically report not considering religious affiliation a significant part of identity until seemingly arbitrary violence forced awareness upon them[7]. This is not to suggest that the root of terrorist motive is religion, only that religious beliefs and values form an important component of jihadist groups' descriptions of their world.



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The second component of jihadist terrorist strategy is exploitation of public emotional responses to political events. Terrorist organisations appear to be quite sophisticated in their use of modern media, including use of the World Wide Web to disseminate vivid imagery of moral wrongdoing by Americans and other agents of the West. Furthermore, humiliating and morally outrageous events are not considered isolated or random, but rather are interpreted within an overarching framework that a unified Western strategy exists to promote a “war against Islam”[8]

The third component of terrorist strategy is ensuring that recruits are so thoroughly convinced that they won’t consider backing out, let alone feel any mercy or remorse about their actions. For a suicide terrorist in particular, this means they will act with no doubt about their decision to die in order to kill others[9]. For example, the fully indoctrinated terrorist has been described as being completely free of any ambiguity or doubt about the mission or the means to accomplish it [10]. This religious conviction includes a fundamental belief that the terrorist knows the mind of God. Such a belief justifies a complete lack of tolerance for divergent ideas, even of other believers who disagree with the terrorist group on specific issues (i.e., the true believer exists apart from all others).

Each of these strategies relies heavily on terrorist communication of specific aspects from their ideological framework to shape the common perspective of their intended audiences. For the approach to be successful, the ideas they are promoting must fit within the cultural meaning systems shared across the population they are addressing. One application of cultural modelling to terrorism research is to explicitly map out the relevant cultural meaning systems in order to better understand how and why various messages appear to be effective in influencing people’s attitudes and garnering their support. Before addressing culture in terrorism, however, we first need to define *culture*.

## **Concept of Culture**

There is a somewhat natural tendency to talk about culture as if it were a concrete, material thing. It is sometimes described as something people belong to, or as an external substance or force that surrounds its members and guides their behaviour. Although it is sometimes difficult to avoid speaking in these metaphorical terms, such an ethereal view does not provide a useful basis for a technical definition. An alternative approach begins by defining culture in terms of the widely shared ideas (such as concepts, values, and beliefs) that comprise a shared symbolic meaning system [11]. Within this conception, approximately equivalent and complementary learned meanings are maintained by a population, or by identifiable segments of a population. In this statement, ‘approximately equivalent’ acknowledges that no two people within a culture share exactly the same ideas, but rather highly-similar meanings are shared by most members of



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a society. The ‘complementary’ component refers to the fact that sharing of specialised knowledge depends on status and roles within a society (e.g. an imam and farmer).

Taking this conception a step further, it is currently popular within cognitive science to draw on a disease metaphor for understanding cultural ideas, describing the ideas that spread widely through a population and persist for substantial periods of time as especially ‘contagious’[12]. This theoretical framework is often referred to as the epidemiological view of culture, drawing on the general sense of epidemiology as describing and explaining the distributions of any property within a population. The starting point for working from this epidemiological view is the individual idea as an atomic unit. People typically use the word *idea* to refer to any content of the mind, including conceptions of how things are and of how things should be. For instance, individuals may hold the concept that Western nations are joined together in a covert war against Islam. Their minds may also contain the value that imported Western ideals, such as the separation of religious and state affairs, are generally bad and so should be avoided. Ideas are often treated as independent units by social scientists, or grouped together into categories of belief for simplicity. A key premise of the current approach is that cultural knowledge consists of shared networks of ideas, and that there is value in explicitly considering clusters of ideas and their interrelationships. Networks of causally-interconnected ideas are often referred to as folk theories or *mental models* [13]. Such networks constitute people’s explanations for how things work, and result in judgments and decisions that influence their behaviour.

From this perspective *culture* refers to mental models, and other contents of the mind, for which there is some level of concordance across members of a population over a period of time. A potential issue associated with this definition of culture is how, then, to define the population of interest. The term *cultural group* refers to a population or sub-population of people that largely share the interconnected ideas of interest. The issue is that cultural groups are distinct from, but related to, demographic groups (i.e. groups based on nationality, educational status, etc.) in that the demographic delineations relevant to a particular cultural group will depend on how widespread the cultural ideas of interest are. For example, Sunni and Shia sectarian distinctions make little difference if the idea of interest is, “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet.” However, if the relevant common beliefs include those pertaining to the 13<sup>th</sup> Imam, then that demographic does become important. Hence, the relevant cultural group for a study will depend on the *cultural domain*, that is, the kind and topic of knowledge of interest.

## **Sunni Jihadist Cultural Model**

Consider a Sunni Muslim extremist conception of socio-political relationships between Islam and the West. A mental model of such relationships contains an individual person’s concepts as well as their understanding of the causal relationships between concepts, i.e. the antecedents and

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consequences of political activities and their outcomes. This mental model influences the individual’s expectations for how socio-political relationships will unfold and provides a framework for selecting behaviours and goals within this context. Figure 1 provides a network representation that might describe a Sunni Muslim’s mental model of current political events. The set of ideas represented in Figure 1 were extracted from articles that describe jihadist narratives, and is presented here for illustrative purposes [14] [15]. Figure 1 depicts a number of ideas using circles, lines, and colour. These ideas include simple concepts such as “Western arrogance” and “Muslim honour” represented as circles. It also includes causal ideas, such as that development of a new Islamic caliphate would decrease the extent of Western dominance and bring about a return of past Islamic glory. These are represented as lines in the figure, with +/- indicating the direction of the causal belief. Finally, Figure 1 portrays ideas of desired states or value using colour, as well as a logical flow across desired states. Developing an Islamic caliphate is a good thing. Maintaining (and enhancing) Muslim honour is likewise valued.

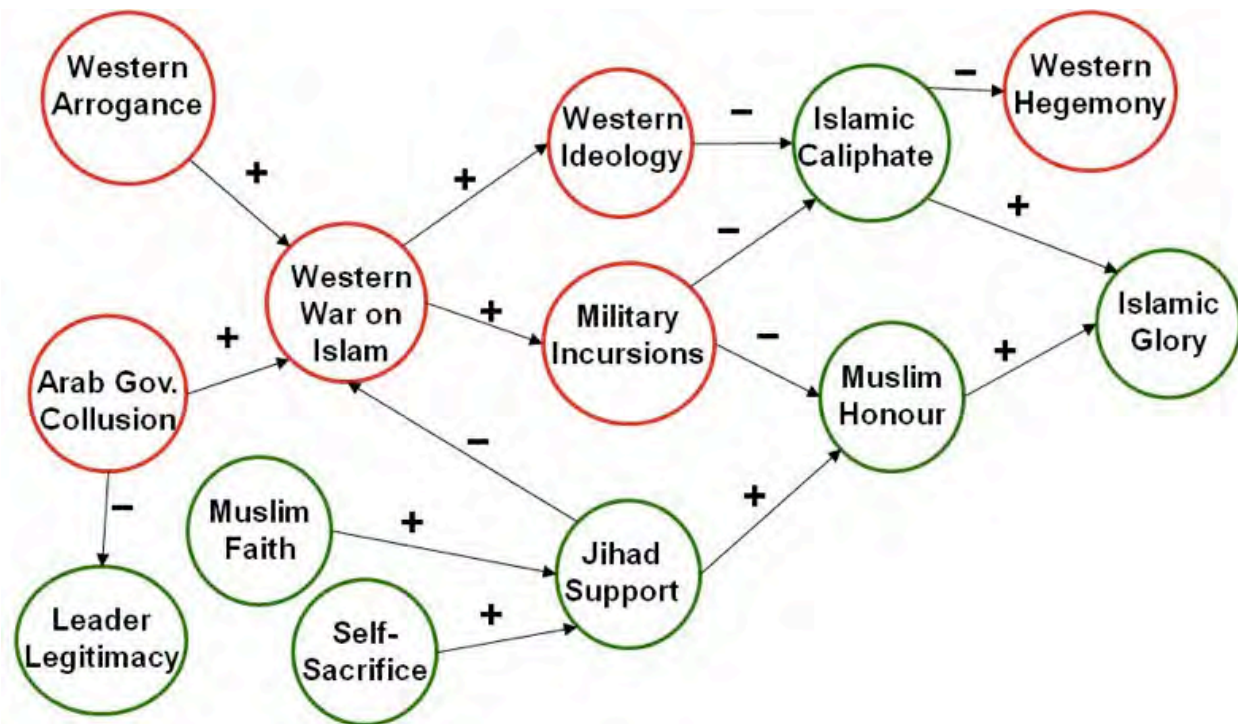


Figure 1. Sunni jihadist cultural model of political relationships





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According to the model, jihad is viewed positively and should be supported by the model's adherents due to the perceived anticipated consequences for Muslims. Most directly, support for jihad decreases the chances that the West will continue its war against Islam, and enhances collective Muslim honour. Holding the beliefs described by this mental model is likely to have fairly strong consequences for how a person will decide and act in a number of specific, relevant situations.

As implied by the name, mental models reside inside the heads of individuals. However, when people communicate with each other in any variety of modes, they develop mental models that may begin to resemble one another. Mental models can spread widely throughout a population, becoming 'cultural' in the sense of being shared by many of its members. A *cultural model* refers to an external representation of a set of culturally-shared mental models that is constructed by a researcher. A cultural model represents a consensus of the mental models for a particular cultural group and domain. Hence, for the Sunni Muslims who hold beliefs similar to the elements in this model, Figure 1 serves as one of their *cultural models* in the domain of socio-political relationships.

Considering Figure 1 as a cultural model gives us a precise way of identifying cultural transmission and cultural change [16]. For example, suppose the prospect of return to a glorious Islamic civilisation is the most salient perceived outcome that is positively influenced by the concept of supporting jihad. A change in the causal belief chain so that jihad in the present situation is seen instead as decreasing the chances of a glorious Islamic revival could affect a change in the value (or attitude) associated with acts that support jihad. That is, we might observe a change in the overall cultural model resulting from this shift in the specific causal chain of beliefs that link jihad to Islamic glory. Such an attitude change might then result in a re-examination and reinterpretation of Islamic texts, or at least the salience of such messages. This example highlights the interrelation between causal beliefs and values, in addition to illustrating how cultural models can represent cultural transmission.

## **Cultural Values, Models and Domains**

Cultural psychologists have often conceptualised culture in terms of lists of domain-general, stable traits, such as individualist-collectivist value orientations [17]. Researchers operating within this programme aim to find a core set of dimensions for characterising cultures that they believe to be important across a wide variety of domains. The idea is to provide purely analytical predictions, a priori, about cultural groups that are widely applicable to many particular problems. For example, cultural researchers from this perspective might attempt to understand popular support for jihad in Middle Eastern countries by considering the general level of disparity of power held by members of those societies. An important assumption about



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culturally-shared mental models, in contrast, is that they are highly specific to particular domains [18]. That is, activities such as participation in a rally for Hezbollah are supported by mental models that are tailored to those specific activities. Hence the culturally-shared mental models comprise values, beliefs, and concepts that are salient to members of a particular culture in particular contexts, and may well not generalise to other situations. Multiple cultural values are reflected in people's mental models, and certain values may be more important than others depending upon the situation, a phenomenon sometimes known as *value trumping* [19]. For example, Americans typically place a high value on freedom of speech; however, they may also support censorship or restricted access to information at certain times (e.g., extremely violent or sexually-explicit content). Hence, from the cultural models perspective it is difficult to understand the cultural considerations that are relevant within a particular context by starting with pre-existing lists of "domain general" cultural values. This suggests that it is preferable to begin cultural analysis of a new domain in a more exploratory fashion, allowing values to emerge from the analysis along with their related cultural concepts and causal beliefs [20].

Mental models are naturally domain specific because they are explanations of the workings of particular artefacts and natural processes. Furthermore, mental models can vary across cultures in ways that are constrained only by the domain itself and any cognitive universals that ground shared understanding across humanity [21]. Most work on mental models has focused on the physical domain, though people also possess mental models that pertain to the psychological and social domains, as exemplified in Figure 1 [22]. A cultural model represents a consensus of mental models within the context of a particular domain.

One specific approach to cultural modelling begins by identifying the judgements or decisions of primary interest for study, such as a decision to engage in suicide terrorism. The decisions chosen arise in specific contexts as defined by critical incidents or scenarios. They are made by members of the cultural group being investigated, typically in a way that is surprising or confusing to members outside the group. Once the key decisions are identified, investigators build models of the cultural ideas that directly influence those decisions. This approach, called "cultural network analysis" ensures that the aspects of culture investigated are relevant to the decisions of interest.

## **Cultural Network Analysis**

Cultural network analysis is a method for describing ideas that are shared by members of cultural groups, and relevant to decisions within a defined situation [23]. CNA discriminates between three kinds of ideas: concepts, values, and beliefs about causal relations. The cultural models resulting from CNA use network diagrams to show how all the ideas relate to one another. The CNA approach also includes the full set of techniques needed to build cultural model diagrams. This consists of specific methods to elicit the three kinds of ideas from people in interviews or



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survey instruments, extract the ideas from interview transcripts or other texts, analyse how common the ideas are between and within cultural groups, and align and assemble the common ideas into complete maps. CNA shares aspects with other approaches to cultural analysis, especially cognitive approaches developed by anthropologists [24]. However, it offers some specific aspects as a complete method that distinguishes it from other ways of examining cultures. These aspects include an emphasis on ensuring relevance of cultural models to key decisions to provide a more direct link to actual behaviour, portrayal of the cultural insider or 'emic' perspective, modelling interrelated networks of ideas rather than treating ideas as independent entities, and by seeking to directly estimate the actual prevalence of ideas in the network rather than relying on more vague notions of sharedness.

Cultural Network Analysis comprises an exploratory phase and a confirmatory phase. In the exploratory phase, concepts and mental models are extracted from qualitative sources, such as interviews and open source media (web news, blogs, email), with little presupposition regarding the elicited contents. One goal of this phase is to develop an initial understanding of the concepts and characteristics that are culturally relevant within the domain. A second objective is to obtain initial graphical representations of people's mental models in forms that closely match their own natural representational structure. Qualitative analysis and representation at this stage yield insights that can be captured in initial cultural models. Often, qualitative analysis may be all that is needed for applications. The exploratory phase also generates a wealth of material for constructing subsequent structured data collection in a confirmatory phase. In the confirmatory phase of CNA, structured interviews, field experiments, and automated semantic mining of web-based sources are used to obtain systematic data that is more amenable to statistical analysis. Statistical models used by cognitive anthropologists and market researchers are employed to assess the patterns of agreement and derive statistics describing the distribution of concepts, causal beliefs, and values. Finally, formal representations of the cultural models are constructed that illustrate the statistical and qualitative information in diagrams. Influence diagrams are an important representation format for cultural models, as illustrated in Figure 1. Formal representation makes it possible to use cultural models in a variety of applied contexts.

## **Cultural Models and Terrorist Cognition**

Cultural modelling and the epidemiological view of culture can help to further understand the shared cognition of terrorists and their audiences. From the epidemiological view, culture is made up of contagious ideas, that is, ideas that propagate effectively within a population [25]. Two broad objectives of research from this cultural epidemiology viewpoint are to characterise the current distribution of mental models within cultural groups, and to understand the dynamics of culture.



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Fundamental cultural research programs from this perspective seek to address why some ideas are more infectious than others, and to explain the most widely distributed and long-lasting ideas within a population. Research for practical purposes has a slightly different focus. From a decision-making standpoint, for example, we recognise that many ideas may be pervasive but inconsequential to decisions of practical interest [26]. Hence, a decision-centred approach to culture and cognition begins with critical judgements and decisions that are made by members of a cultural group. For example, we conceive of the decision to accept the terrorist group's worldview as the central node within the highest-level of a hierarchy of terrorist cultural models. Using Cultural Network Analysis, we can study the networks of causally-interconnected ideas that are relevant to those decisions in order to answer a host of questions, such as:

1. What is the distribution of mental models shared among particular terrorist groups and their potential supporters?
2. How did the distribution get to be that way?
3. How stable are those distributions?
4. In what ways are the distributions changing over time?
5. How do individual ideas influence one another in these cultural belief networks?

Resulting cultural models and descriptions of their dynamics from such studies can provide considerable insight into the thinking behind communications that stem from terrorist groups. They also provide a basis for developing effective counter-communications by aiding in the determination of what makes for culturally meaningful messages. Cultural models would allow for making predictions concerning the effectiveness of a message by providing the opportunity to assess potential unintended inferences that individuals with a certain knowledge structure might make. Specifically, in a cultural models diagram, each concept and causal belief represents an opportunity to effect a change in beliefs or concepts. Hence, such diagrams can provide an orderly basis for determining the content of communications. Messages are created so as to affect the values of the most vulnerable concept nodes (i.e., those for which there is the least consensus) which then propagate across perceived influences to affect the values of other concepts. These effects spread through the cultural belief network, ultimately changing the value in overall perceptions or cognitions. With this CNA approach, information efforts focus on transmitting the most relevant information to effect conceptual change in a way that makes sense within the cultural group's understanding.

If the cultural group's understanding is mapped out in this way using their culturally relevant concepts and causal beliefs, then it can be relatively straightforward to identify critical concepts for targeting messages. Pursuing this strategy requires the following steps:

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- create a cultural model relevant to the action or belief of interest;
- obtain relevant quantitative estimates of parameters in the model;
- simulate the cultural change effects of changes to detail-level concept values;
- identify the most vulnerable concepts and concept values as those for which the most disagreement exists;
- compose messages to affect the values of those concepts.

In sum, the results of CAN studies can provide valuable input to the development of accurate models of terrorist decision making, as well as for the cognitive characterisation of groups based on their ideological commitments. A critical aspect of establishing an environment unfavourable to extremist ideas is to begin to take apart the rhetoric of terror-sponsoring organisations, and address their ideologies through communication [27]. In doing this, we may find ways to remove the appeal of religious-inspired myths of terrorist acts as the glorious correction of moral wrongdoing [28].

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## Why Sacred Lands Are Not Indivisible: The Cognitive Foundations of Sacralising Land

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### Abstract

Numerous political analysts have argued that conflicts over sacred land are intractable. These scholars maintain that sacred lands are psychologically perceived as indivisible, or alternatively, in the sociological tradition, their indivisibility is a social fact. Moreover, religious beliefs are viewed as stagnant and resistant to change. Consequently, resolving such conflicts is fraught with difficulty, and even if a truce could be imposed, it would be unstable and violence would eventually erupt. A cognitive and evolutionary account offers a less pessimistic view. Individuals do not conceive of sacred lands in the same way that they conceive of sacred space, such as cemeteries or houses of worship, or sacred objects, such as holy water or prayer beads. Unlike sacred space and objects, whose boundaries are clearly defined, conceptions of sacred land are typically abstract and may bear little resemblance to the contested physical land. While abstract notions of sacred land are indivisible and must remain intact, the physical land is not indivisible, and therefore there is often greater room for negotiation of sacred lands than is generally appreciated.

*The map is not the territory.*

Alfred Korzybski, 1931

Humans sacralise countless things, including water, wine, cows, dung, trees, books, buildings, and rocks. The types of item that humans sacralise appear unbounded, but possibly the most recurrent thing that humans have sacralised throughout history is land. Some have even claimed that sacralising land is nearly universal among traditional peoples.[1] Despite its prevalence across time and space, there is a notable lack of research addressing why humans sacralise land.

The importance and urgency of understanding why humans sacralise land are painfully obvious. Sacred lands are at the heart of numerous recent and current violent conflicts such as Israel

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–Palestine, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, and bin Laden’s campaign against the United States. Not all lands deemed sacred are involved in conflict, and many territorial disputes, in fact most, do not involve sacred lands.[2] But those conflicts which arise from disputed sacred territories have been particularly devastating and many of them, such as Israel–Palestine and Kashmir, have proven frustratingly difficult to resolve.

It has been argued that sacred land and related territorial conflicts, such as ethnicity-based homeland conflicts,[3] are particularly difficult to resolve because lands are viewed by disputants as indivisible. As Goddard describes, “So intractable are conflicts in Jerusalem, Kosovo, Kashmir, and Ulster that their indivisibility appears natural, an inevitable result of clashing identities and attachments to the land.”[4] If contested land is genuinely indivisible, such disputes are expected to escalate toward military conflict more quickly than other disputes and to be more difficult to peacefully resolve.[5] Here I offer a more optimistic assessment of sacred-land conflicts based on evolutionary and cognitive approaches to the study of religion.

In a significant paper on the problem of indivisibility, Hassner describes two primary types of policy response to religious conflicts generally, and sacred land conflicts specifically.[6] The first, which we can refer to as the rational actor approach, assumes that political actors are rational and respond predictably to incentives. This approach “seeks to strip conflicts of their symbolic pretences to expose underlying material interests.”[7] It assumes that sacred values can be negotiated like other resources; in other words, sacred land has a price and conflict resolution should concentrate on determining the price of land for disputant parties. The second approach is less optimistic about any form of negotiation and is associated with the work of influential political theorist Samuel Huntington.[8] This “irrational religious actor” approach assumes that political involvement in sacred land disputes is hopeless, since religious forces are mysterious, capricious, and beyond the control of political influence.

Here I pursue a third approach, one that recognises religious behaviour as a product of cognitive mechanisms shaped by our evolutionary history.[9] This approach considers sacralising land an evolved strategy that emerges because of the net benefits that accrue to individuals and groups who pursue it, relative to alternative behavioural strategies.[10] While sacralising land is highly visible and contentious in the contemporary world, sacralising land has a long history in the human lineage and is a strategy with deep evolutionary roots in our species. All terrestrial species, including humans, rely on land to furnish the resources necessary for survival and reproduction, and many species of course vigorously defend their territories. Human territorial conflicts, however, differ from non-human ones in important ways. As various authors have noted, the value humans ascribe to land is often unrelated to the value of its material resources, and, notably, wars are fought over lands with little inherent value, including deserts,

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swamplands, and other barely habitable environments.[11] In these conflicts, 'value' is often measured in intangible currencies, such as identity and sacredness, rather than in material benefits. Only humans sacralise their territories; the goal of evolutionary analyses is to understand the selective pressures that have shaped this unique human strategy.

The approach taken here is similar to the irrational actor approach in that it recognises that the behaviour of religious actors often deviates considerably from the predictions of rational choice models. To understand this discrepancy between behaviours and models, we must examine the underlying cognition that motivates behavioural decisions involving sacred things. Psychologists have shown that sacred values can outweigh the economic incentives that are at the heart of rational choice approaches.[12] Atran et al. urge researchers to study the role of sacred values in political conflicts, and scholars who have done so have opened up new avenues for conflict resolution.[13] For example, Ginges et al. have shown how symbolic concessions with little economic value, such as apologies, carry significant weight among conflicting parties.[14] While evolutionary and cognitive approaches to conflict resolution eschew rational choice models, in contrast to the irrational actor approach, they do not maintain that religious actors are beyond the control of political forces. On the contrary, religious actors only appear capricious and mysterious because they are studied with models that fail to consider their genuine emotional attachments to religious and sacred values.[15]

There are various analytical strategies that evolutionary scholars have employed to understand political conflict, including ethology,[16] evolutionary psychology,[17] and evolutionary biology.[18] A broad evolutionary analysis of why humans sacralise land, which can address fundamental questions such as the conditions under which such a strategy is adaptive, is beyond the scope of this article.[19] Rather, here I focus on the underlying cognitive foundations of sacralising land. Understanding the cognitive mechanisms that shape our conceptions of sacred land should enhance our ability to offer effective policy recommendations to resolve what are often viewed as intractable conflicts.

## **Defining Sacred Land**

Before examining the cognitive foundations of sacralising land it is necessary to define "sacred land." According to Durkheim, "sacred things are things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which the prohibitions are applied and that must keep at a distance from what is sacred".[20] For Durkheim, sacredness is a characteristic of something physical, a place or an object. Alternatively, Rappaport defines sacredness as a characteristic of discourse, specifically discourse that is unverifiable and unfalsifiable.[21] Among adherents 'the sacred' is unquestionable. The distinction between the object of sacralisation[22] and the discourse that surrounds such an object is important because sacred things are humanly

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constructed. Humans must *do something* to make a material item sacred. To the naïve but objective observer, sacred and profane water look the same, feel the same, taste the same, and of course have the same chemical constitution. And even once a ritual act confers sacred status on an item such as water, it is only via discourse that we can express the changed and special status of the object. Thus, here I draw from both Durkheim and Rapaport's definitions and define sacred as that which is distinguished from profane things and associated with unverifiable and unfalsifiable discourse.

Land is physical geographic terrain. Sacred land refers to land which is distinguished from profane land and is associated with unverifiable and unfalsifiable discourse. Sacred land is not just land that is special; in some way the land is connected to supernatural agents – either it is the home of ancestral spirits, given by a supernatural agent, created first by a supernatural agent, or it is a gateway to a supernatural realm – all of which are unverifiable. Also, sacred lands often have counterintuitive and/or counterfactual attributes. For example, many myths recount a glorious past in which the sacred land was home to extraordinary prey or produce, claims which are also generally unverifiable.[23]

One intentional consequence of this definition is that sacred land is not limited to the domain of religion, however one might define religion.[24] The environmental movement's appeal to the sacred status of land is the most obvious example,[25] but others exist as well. For instance, the accounts of the early Israeli kibbutznik farmers all describe the mystical relationship they maintained with the land, despite being passionate rationalists and secularists.[26] And, notably, one of the most common ways to sacralise land, to recall ancient connections to land beyond the verifiable reach of history, is employed by religious and secular groups alike. Toft, for example, describes homelands as an indivisible attribute of group identity and offers various examples of ethnic groups whose ancestral connections to lands are unverifiable, but deeply internalised.[27] It is also worth emphasising that sacredness is not a dichotomous status that can be ascribed to land; sacred lands must be considered along a continuum in which at one end are lands that are highly sacralised, and on the other end are lands that are not sacralised at all. Moreover, because the sacredness of land is always humanly constructed (i.e., it is not inherent in the land), the sanctity of a land must always be defined relative to a particular population.

## **Intractability of Sacred Land Disputes**

Walter observes that the “most intractable civil wars in the last half of the twentieth century... were those fought over territory.”[28] And there is a widespread assumption among scholars and policy makers, regardless of their approach, that among territorial conflicts those involving sacred lands are the most intractable. Hassner argues that “[c]ontingent processes create competition over sacred space[29] that, combined with the problem of indivisibility, create



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conflict over sacred space that cannot be resolved by negotiation or compromise.”[30] The intractability of sacred land disputes is invariably characterised as the consequence of two factors: the inflexibility of religion and the indivisibility of sacred land.

If one listens to the rhetoric of sacred land conflicts, it is easy to understand why scholars have taken a desperate view of these disputes. Statements such as “Jerusalem shall remain eternally united” and “Can we change God’s will?” do not seem to leave much room for negotiation. Nonetheless, there is considerable room for optimism. Here I argue that sacred lands are not indivisible. I maintain that one reason that sacred lands have been incorrectly perceived by scholars to be indivisible is that they have been conflated with other sacred things, particularly sacred space and sacred objects, which are indeed generally indivisible. A closer examination of how we cognitively understand and behaviourally relate to sacred land reveals that it is more divisible than other sacred things. I support the argument developed here using examples from various sacralised lands, but I rely primarily on my own ethnographic fieldwork and experiences in Israel.[31] Sacred land conflicts are the result of multiple complex factors. The cognitive approach offered here is not a panacea for these challenging conflicts, however, it is hoped that this perspective can open new and productive avenues for negotiation.

## **Inflexibility of Religion**

As mentioned above, one of the primary stumbling blocks in conflict resolution over sacred lands is the characterisation of religion (and religious actors) as inflexible. This is simply incorrect. Often, religious sanctity is conceived by insiders and outsiders to be permanent and eternal. Pioneering scholars of religion, such as Durkheim, repeatedly asserted that “there is something eternal in religion”[32] and modern commentators have made similar claims.[33] In describing the sacralisation of space, Hassner states, “Once a religious presence, a *hierophany*, has been identified in a place, it grants the place permanent sanctity.”[34] But religions are not eternal and sanctity is not permanent; religions are flexible, malleable, and often respond adaptively to changing environmental conditions, and Hassner is fully aware of this. For example, in other work Hassner (2006) carefully describes how mosques in Iraq were targeted and recklessly destroyed when U.S. troops were inside, suggesting a temporary suspension of their sanctity. [35] Also, during the first Gulf War, despite laws preventing Jews from entering Saudi Arabia because their presence would defile the sacred land, Jewish-American soldiers were reluctantly permitted to enter Saudi Arabia. To replace their Jewish dog tags, Jewish soldiers were given dog tags labelled “Protestant B”.[36] Pragmatism trumped sacred values. And, since 1972, successive Israeli governments have consistently proclaimed Gaza as eternally united with Israel;[37] nonetheless, governance was transferred to the PLO in 1993, and in 2005 Israeli settlements were dismantled and the remaining settlers relocated to Israel.



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Religion is not inflexible and the sacred status of lands is clearly not eternal. But why does religion appear to be resistant to change? One of the remarkable features of religion is its ability to adapt to local environmental conditions while adherents experience partaking in an eternally consistent and changeless tradition. Rappaport argues that religion achieves this through a hierarchy of religious discourse.[38] He claims there is an inverse relationship between the material specificity of a religious claim and the durability of the claim. Religious ideas are hierarchically organised within communities and at the apex of a community's conceptual hierarchy is what Rappaport refers to as ultimate sacred postulates, such as the *Shahada*, *Shema*, or *Vandana Ti-sarana* for Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist communities respectively. These ultimate sacred postulates lack material specificity and are highly resistant to change. However, below ultimate sacred postulates in the religious hierarchy are various cosmological axioms, ritual proscriptions, commandments, directives, social rules and other religious assertions that do experience varying levels of change, depending on their material specificity.

The religious norms and practices change all the time but it is understood by those who experience it as an intensification of acceptance.[39] Religions rarely invalidate the old completely; change occurs by adding to previous practices and beliefs and elaborating upon them, while other beliefs and practices slip away unnoticed. Once sacralisation is internalised, it is indeed very difficult to convince adherents that something consecrated is no longer holy. Hence, when undergoing change, religions often retain the most sacralised elements and augment them. Missionaries often retain the dates of pagan celebrations, Jewish prayers appear in the Catholic Mass, and in Micronesia, where I've conducted fieldwork, they have held onto their pantheon of gods and ancestral spirits by incorporating them into the Biblical myths that are now prominent in their lives.

Two other misconceptions about the inflexibility of religion are worth mentioning. First, religious communities, even fundamentalist communities, are not homogeneous in their beliefs. In interviews I've conducted amongst Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Jews, some have confided that they are agnostics or atheists, but they remain in their communities despite their lack of belief because they view the Ultra-Orthodox way of life positively, or at least better than the alternatives. Other researchers have reported similar experiences. [40] Goody has shown that doubt is widespread in world and indigenous religions and he argues that doubt is an inherent part of religious belief. [41] Theologians have made similar claims.[42] Second, outsiders expect religious actors who have articulated and ritually displayed their priorities – typically implying that their religious commitments are their ultimate concern – to behave in ways that directly reflect this ordering of priorities. Religious cognition, however, appears to be strongly encapsulated, preventing most religious actors from pursuing fitness-destroying behaviours.[43] Thus, while many may express

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extreme commitments to their sacred land, even martyrdom, the actions of most who articulate such views do not match the enthusiasm of their rhetoric.

To summarise, viewing religion as inflexible is not only inaccurate, but it impedes productive conflict resolution.[44] Religions are complex adaptive systems that respond effectively to changing socioeconomic and ecological conditions.[45] One of religion's vital adaptive features is its ability to appear timeless and unchanging to adherents, yet be responsive to varying circumstances.[46] Religions achieve this sleight of hand by retaining core religious elements while readjusting social rules to accommodate new realities. Change for adherents is not experienced as something radically new; it is experienced as increased acceptance of eternal truths that have always been part of their religious tradition.

## **Indivisibility of Sacred Land**

The primary reason that sacred land disputes are characterised as intractable is that sacred lands are assumed to be indivisible. Scholars have taken two approaches to conceiving the problem of indivisibility, one sociological and the other psychological. The sociological position sees indivisibility as a social fact. As Goddard describes, "Indivisibility is a construction; it is neither an objective, "inherent" property of territory, nor subjective and reducible to individual consciousness." [47] On the other hand, the psychological approach focuses on the subjective perceptions of individuals; the indivisibility of a territory is an internalised belief. As Hassner describes, "beliefs constitute the identity of agents and create the structural constraints within which they act." [48]

To generalise, social constructivists such as Goddard have been more optimistic about the resolution of sacred land conflicts than those who take a psychological approach to the problem, such as Hassner. Constructivists recognise that all sacred things are humanly constructed, and some have argued that if humans can construct it, they can deconstruct it as well. This position has been attacked for various reasons; [49] most importantly, this position fails to appreciate the synergistic effects of human sacralisation. Sacralisation results in emergent properties; sacralised lands are not simply puzzles that can be put together and then taken apart. Naïve constructivists have also been attacked for not taking people's beliefs about the indivisibility of land seriously enough. Toft has argued that there is little difference between something which is naturally indivisible (King Solomon's baby is the classic example) and something which is socially constructed to be indivisible, such as land:

Unless one can support the claim that constructed realities are relatively easy to alter, there is, in short, no good reason to suppose an operational or causal difference between

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issues that are naturally divisible and those whose indivisibility is the product of human social construction.[50]

The analysis I offer here is based on the psychological approach, but I maintain the optimism of the sociological constructivists. While various scholars, such as Hassner and Toft, have asserted that beliefs and perceptions of sacred lands need to be taken seriously, there has been little research investigating the underlying psychology that produces sacred land beliefs. The analysis below aims to initiate this important area of study. Constructed realities are not easy to alter, but I argue that the way in which sacred lands are cognitively understood makes them easier to alter than other sacred items, and consequently easier to divide than formerly appreciated.

## **Comparing Sacred Land, Space, and Objects**

One of the primary reasons that policy makers and scholars alike have claimed that sacred lands are indivisible is that they have implicitly assumed that sacred lands are like other sacred things, particularly sacred space and objects, many of which are indeed indivisible. To develop this argument more fully, I compare sacred land to sacred space and sacred objects across three dimensions: physical qualities, internalisation mechanisms, and cultural conceptions. This comparative analysis will highlight the unique features of sacred land, many of which suggest that sacred lands are more divisible than previously recognised. The discussion is summarised in Table 1.

I have defined ‘sacred’ and ‘sacred land’ above, but it is important to define sacred space and objects as well. Objects are physical things and sacred objects include items such as phylacteries, prayer beads, and holy books, but also tables, forks, instruments, animals and their products, and countless other objects that humans sacralise and treat differently than profane objects. Sacred spaces consist of humanly defined areas in which particular behaviours, typically ritual, are expected. [51] It is a place which “focuses attention on the forms, objects, and actions in it and reveals them as bearers of religious meaning.”[52] Sacred spaces include houses of worship, ritual baths, and cemeteries. There are often many sacred spaces (Via Dolorosa, Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, al Aqsa Mosque) within a sacred land (Jerusalem).[53] And sacred spaces also occur within lands that are not sacralised (e.g., the sanctuary of any church in Newark, New Jersey). Sacred space and land are occasionally lumped into one category (intentionally and unintentionally), but, as will become apparent below, there are good reasons to keep them separate.[54]

### *Physical Qualities*





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I begin by comparing sacred land, space, and objects along three dimensions of physical quality: construction, permanence, and size. The differences that I highlight are obvious, but I point them out because they all contribute to the distinctiveness of how we cognitively process land.

*Construction:* One of the fundamental characteristics of sacred space is that it is humanly constructed. Temples are erected, shrines are built, and cemeteries are dug. Even when using part of the natural landscape as sacred space, such as turning a cave into a house of worship or using natural springs as a ritual bath, humans rarely leave the site unmodified; humans construct markers and gates to help define an area as sacred and facilitate ritual activities.

How sacred objects are constructed varies widely. Most sacred objects, such as chalices, beads, and scrolls, are of course humanly constructed. There may be a few exceptions, such as crystals, but even these objects are often shaped by humans to distinguish them from profane objects. In contrast to sacred space and objects, sacred lands are not humanly constructed. They are of course mentally constructed (see below), but no human construction is required to make or define the land as sacred. Sacred lands are typically designated as sacred by supernatural agents, without human assistance. Supernatural agents primarily act within a religious context, but even in secular contexts agents such as Mother Nature or Gaia can bestow sacredness upon land.

*Permanence:* Sacred spaces can be bulldozed, foreclosed, incinerated, washed away in a flood, and in countless other ways simply destroyed. Demographic changes can also transform sacred spaces. For example, as American Jews left their urban dwellings for the suburbs, their synagogues were converted into restaurants, department stores, and concert venues. Sacred objects of course can also be crushed, burnt, torn, and physically destroyed. Sacred lands, however, cannot be physically destroyed. A fire may raze the land and consequently change the landscape, or a nuclear bomb may eliminate the population, but the sacred land would remain, however altered it may be. The perceived permanence of land is a cognitively odd feature and likely makes land receptive to supernatural conceptions and notions of eternity.

*Size:* Sacred lands are larger than sacred spaces and objects. Even grand sacred spaces, such as the Taj Mahal, are considerably smaller than even the smallest sacred lands. It is rare that sacred lands can be seen by one individual in their entirety at once. With the advent of aviation and space travel, lands no longer seem as immense as they once must have. Nonetheless, the massive size of land, beyond one's own eyesight, probably elicited a sense of awe that made land historically receptive to supernatural conceptions and associations.

## *Internalisation Mechanisms*

Sacred things are not inherently sacred; they must be transformed from mundane to sacred things. Belief that things are sacred must be internalised and culturally shared, and indeed

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religions employ various internalisation strategies to ensure that adherents cognitively and emotionally distinguish the sacred from the profane. Here I examine four primary mechanisms of internalising the sacred: symbol, myth, discourse, and ritual. I do not explore the dynamics of each of these internalisation strategies,[55] but rather focus on the differences in how these strategies are employed to internalise the sacred status of objects, space, and land.

*Symbolisation:* Symbols are commonly employed when the *significata*, that which is being signified, is abstract and needs to be physically or cognitively represented. Symbols are effective in reducing the sizes of things which are difficult to observe in their entirety, or impossible to manipulate. Symbols can also connect the present to the past.[56] Physical symbols, such as flags and crosses, can become sacred objects themselves.

Land is highly symbolised, either due to its abstract nature, a point we will return to below, or simply because of its size. Land is most commonly symbolised through flags, but iconic symbols such as maps can transform mundane items into charged political objects as well. Otherwise, identical maps alternately labelled Israel or Palestine, depending on the consumer market, appear on T-shirts, key chains, place mats and other items throughout the Middle East. The intensity of symbolisation and the sanctity of the symbolic objects are likely to be associated with the sacredness of the land symbolically represented.

Sacred space and sacred objects are not commonly symbolised, or at least less so than sacred land. If one wishes to evoke a connection to phylacteries, there is no need to develop a symbol as the object itself can serve the same purpose. Symbols that are employed to represent sacred spaces tend to be iconic, such as the pictures of the Kaaba or *Kotel* that adorn the walls of Muslim and Jewish homes respectively. Symbols of sacred space tend to be reserved for the most sacred spaces within a community; the local church is rarely the object of intense symbolisation. The power of symbols is that among the initiated they can evoke potent emotions[57] and this aspect of symbols is vital for internalising the sacredness of land. When living in sacred lands, one is often too mired in the mundane for the land to directly evoke feelings of commitment, thus symbols become powerful tools for internalising commitments to the land. Entering sacred space is usually sufficient to evoke such emotions, thus symbolic representations of sacred space are only needed when access to particular sacred spaces are limited.

*Myth:* The sacredness of things is also internalised through myth. Myths provide reasons and rationalisations for why items are sacred, and a history, even if not entirely factual, connecting sacred items to ancestors. Similarly to symbols, myths help internalise the sacredness of things by evoking emotions, but they additionally tap into our apparent need for narratives. [58] Sacred lands are always surrounded by myth, and in traditional populations myth is often the primary mechanism used to internalise the sanctity of the land. The importance of myth in internalising



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sacred-land beliefs suggests that sacred lands generally demand justification. Myths invariably assert a population's priority to the land, through their ancestors, and 'earliest' residence is a compelling justification for land ownership across cultures. Interestingly, there is emerging evidence of a cognitive 'first owner bias' in human children and adults; we assume that individuals who first possess an item are the true owners of the item.[59] Others have argued that the well-documented human tendency to place greater value on things one might lose than one might gain, known as the endowment effect, may help to account for the origins of private property, including human territoriality.[60] If a culture asserts that their ancestors originally possessed a territory, psychological biases such as the endowment effect may make such beliefs particularly potent. [61] In addition to ancestral connections to the land, myths often place lands at the centre of the universe, recount how a supernatural agent gave the land to the people, or suggest that it was the first land created, elevating its status. Myths provide unfalsifiable connections to the land.

In Judaism, the land of Israel is believed to be "more sanctified than any other land" (Mishnah Kelim 1:6) and plays a central role in its foundational myths. God promises the land of Israel to Abraham, and a later ancestor, Moses, brings the people to the edge of the land. The foundational myths are genuinely internalised and used to assert political positions. During fieldwork among religious Jews in Israel, I would often hear, "We have no right to give the land back; it is God's and He gave it to us." [62]

There are countless authoritative myths outside of the Torah, developed by the Rabbis in what is known as *Midrashic* literature. One popular Midrash claims that Israel is the gateway to heaven.

Another Midrash places Israel at the centre of the world: "Just as the navel is found at the centre of human beings, so the land of Israel is found at the centre of the world..." (Midrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim 10). Other Midrashim (pl. of Midrash) describe that the land of Israel possesses extraordinary qualities such as producing enormous produce, including peaches that fill the stomachs of six men.

Myth typically connects a people to a land historically, but the *Midrashic* literature also connects Jews to the land in the future. Midrashim relate that in the time of the Messiah all Jews will return to Israel. These Midrashim are not mere stories – they are genuinely internalised. For example, there are apartments in Israel, owned by American Jews, in which the rental leases stipulate that should the Messiah arrive the renters would have to vacate the apartments because the owners would be moving to Israel.

Sacred objects and space also evoke myths, but cross-culturally there appears to be much greater variance in the number of myths related to objects and space than sacred land. It is likely that the

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intensity of myth development will be a function of how contested an item is. Contested sacred spaces, such as the Temple Mount/*Haram al-Sharif*, have generated abundant myths as each side aims to give its people a narrative basis for ownership claims. Less contested spaces and objects are likely to develop far fewer myths.

*Discourse:* Sacred things are also sacralised through discourse. There is some sanctified discourse which surrounds very special sacred places and objects, but it is minor compared to that which occurs about sacred lands, which often evoke numerous expressive poems and songs. Contemporary cultures also internalise the holiness of land through sanctified expressions. In Israel, for example, “If I forget thee Jerusalem, let my right hand wither” (Psalm 137) is a well known expression, and it surfaces repeatedly in art and song. Colloquial discourse in Israel also internalises Israelis’ connection to their sacred land. While the Torah and liturgy generally refer to ‘Israel’ as *Eretz Yisrael*, the land of Israel, in Modern Hebrew ‘Israel’ is simply referred to as *HaAretz*, the land.

*Rituals:* Rituals are often employed to internalise the sacred status of land. Rituals in indigenous societies not only reinforce the sacred status of land, but they are also used to demarcate territories.[63] In Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and other world religions, pilgrimage rituals connect dispersed communities to sacred lands.[64] In Judaism, worship historically revolved around three pilgrimage holidays – Pesach, Shavuoth, and Sukkot – on which Jews were expected to travel to Jerusalem with their sacrifices to be offered at the Temple. While these holidays are no longer celebrated as pilgrimages, worship and other rituals play a significant role in how Jews interact with the land of Israel. Wherever they are, Jews face Jerusalem during prayer, and Jerusalem and the land of Israel are mentioned more than 100 times in the daily liturgy. And the land of Israel is distinguished from diaspora lands through numerous agricultural laws, such as the harvest sabbatical known as *shmittah*, that apply only within the land of Israel. Modern Israelis have also instituted or re-established holidays to connect them to the land. For example, *Tu B’shevat*, the celebration of the trees which was historically a minor holiday primarily observed among small groups of Kabbalists, has witnessed a rebirth in modern Israel in which even secular Israelis customarily plant a tree in honour of the day. And new holidays have been established, such as *Yom Yerushalim* (Jerusalem Day), celebrating the reunification of Jerusalem after the Six Day War in 1967. In 2000, ceremonies and festivities commemorated 3000 years since King David conquered the city.

While pilgrimages and memorial ceremonies play a significant role in sacralising many lands, not all sacred lands are pilgrimage sites, and in some sacred lands rituals play only a minimal role in internalising the sacredness of the land. In contrast to this variance, ritual is vital for internalising the sacredness of sacred objects and space. Ritual does not merely identify sacred



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objects and space; it creates them. Holy water, for example, is not simply water that has been discovered to be holy, or water that has been rationally demonstrated to have special qualities. It is, rather, water that has been transformed through ritual.[65] Ritual is the primary method of internalising the sacred status of sacred objects and space. Ritual is the means through which we interact with sacred objects, and it guides our behaviour in sacred space. Thus, while ritual is sometimes important in reinforcing the sacred status of land, it is always vital in internalising the sacredness of space and objects.

The fact that ritual is not the primary internalisation method of sacralising land, as it probably is with sacred space and objects, is fortunate when considering sacred-land conflict resolution. Rituals are simply more difficult to change than symbols, myths, and discourse. It is remarkable how quickly humans will gravitate toward new group symbols, as social psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated.[66] Myths and discourse can also change rapidly. But rituals appear to be religion's conservative mechanism. Consider the awkwardness experienced when confronting a new ritual. Rituals of course do change, but they are more stable than religion's other internalisation methods.

### *Cultural Conceptions*

The final dimension this comparative analysis of sacred land, space, and objects focuses on is cultural conceptions of how individuals and groups construct and perceive sacred things. It is within this last dimension, our cultural conceptions, that we find the most important differences between sacred land, space, and objects for understanding the divisibility of sacred land.

*Desecration:* Human effort, through ritual, sacralises things. Not surprisingly, human effort can also desacralise things. We can, for example, contaminate sacred objects, such as kosher dishes, by placing them in contact with profane items, such as non-kosher food. It is also clear that sacred spaces can be desecrated, such as when idols were brought into the Second Temple of Jerusalem. The desecration of sacred land is less obvious. One traveller in 1901, for instance, describes Jerusalem as "The Holy City" despite observing that

Dung litters every corner, the offal of the shops is heaped in the midst of the streets. Filth of every description is accumulated here for years.[67]

While the Torah does not explicitly discuss garbage in the Holy Land, the Torah seems to suggest that the land of Israel could be desecrated through the improper behaviour of its inhabitants (Leviticus 19:2). However, the rabbis resisted such an interpretation. They viewed the purity of the land to be impervious to human whim. Indeed, the land was holy despite the profane behaviour of the Canaanites, and although the Israelites are harshly warned that they will be spit out from the land if they stray from the commandments, the land itself will remain sacred. In

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contrast to sacred objects and space, defiled land does not have to be resacralised. Whereas human conceptions of sacred objects and space require human action to create, maintain, and re-establish sanctity, the sanctity of land appears to come from elsewhere; most typically it is a status conferred by supernatural agents.

*Danger / Monitor Behaviour:* The sacred is often defined as that which is forbidden and dangerous.[68] Accordingly, sacred things must be monitored to ensure appropriate behaviour, and there are consequences for improper behaviour. In many indigenous populations, objects touched by the chief possess a power (mana) and sacredness that can harm others.[69] And sacred space can be equally dangerous. For example, the Talmud (*Yoma*) describes the increasing risks involved, including death, as one moves closer to the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. The *kohen gadol* (high priest), the only individual permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, is closely monitored to ensure his purity prior to his entrance. Indeed, he is observed and prevented from sleeping on the evening before his entrance for fear of contamination through a nocturnal emission. Unlike sacred space and objects, sacred lands generally do not demand the ritual purity of inhabitants, nor is there intense monitoring of behaviour.

*Exclusivity:* Sacred lands tend to be much less exclusive than sacred space and objects. There are many examples of certain classes of people, within and outside particular religions, that are forbidden to enter certain sacred areas, such as the Jerusalem Temple described above, the sanctuaries of Mormon churches (for non-members of The Church of Latter Day Saints), and women are excluded from men's houses throughout Micronesia. Many sacred objects, including religious garb, food offerings, and ritual pipes, are similarly taboo for the uninitiated or impure. Sacred lands, however, rarely exclude entire classes of people.[70] It is likely that the necessity of material trade and exchange of knowledge has made the complete exclusion of outside groups on grounds of impurity rare across cultures.

*Boundaries:* One reason that sacred lands are less exclusive than sacred spaces and objects is that their boundaries are more ambiguous. Hassner maintains that sacred spaces have unambiguous boundaries.[71] Indeed, sacred spaces tend to have humanly constructed and defined entrances and exits which demarcate boundaries. The boundaries of sacred objects are also clear (i.e., it is obvious where an object begins and ends). The boundaries of sacred lands, however, are far from certain. The boundaries of Jerusalem, for example, constantly change depending on the political winds, [72] and what constitute the Biblical borders of Israel are also open to interpretation. Sacred lands that consist of an explicit environmental feature also have ambiguous boundaries. When approaching a sacred mountain or river, at what point is one stepping on holy ground? Unless there is humanly constructed demarcation, essentially turning the land into sacred space,

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it is difficult to determine. Even the boundaries of sacred islands are unclear since the coastlines change daily with the tides and the coastal waters often maintain elements of holiness.

Two anecdotes from my fieldwork in Tzfat, Israel, illustrate this point. First, religious Jews in Tzfat commonly remarked how the air in Israel is holy. Such conceptions of air, however, rarely consider geography. For instance, when I would ask if the air became holy when it crossed the Jordanian border, blank stares of confusion were the typical response. Second, throughout the Second Intifada many interviewees claimed that Tzfat and the neighbouring town of Meron were protected from terrorist attacks because of the many holy people buried in both places. On August 4, 2002, a suicide bomber killed nine passengers on a bus at the Meron junction. When I returned to interviewees who had previously mentioned the towns' divine protection to ask them about the bombing, they invariably replied that the bombing was not within the historical (and thus protected) borders of Meron. In other words, interviewees did not eschew their belief in divine protection; rather, they simply altered the borders of Meron to fit the new reality.

*Mundane activity:* The sacred and profane must be separated. Consider Durkheim's classic discussion of the sacred:

The mind experiences deep repugnance about the mingling, even simple contact, between the corresponding things, because the notion of the sacred is always and everywhere separate from the notion of the profane... The sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity.[73]

This separation of the sacred and profane is carried out carefully in sacred space, where appropriate ritual activities dominate and inappropriate behaviours are shunned. And sacred objects are also carefully kept from profane and impure items, including shadows, carcasses, excrement, or simply unwashed hands. The separation of the sacred and profane is impossible, however, in sacred lands. Profane things exist in sacred lands (rats, garbage dumps, sewage, etc.) and to live in sacred land one must partake in mundane activities. The rabbis were well aware of this conflict for the land of Israel. They creatively circumvented it by transforming profane things into sacred things and profane behaviour into sacred behaviour. For example, consider the following statements from the Talmud and Midrash:

- All spittle found in Jerusalem is pure (Mishnah Shekalim 8:1).
- No fly was ever seen in the slaughterhouse [in Jerusalem] (Mishnah Avot 5:5).
- One who lives in the land of Israel leads a sinless life (Ketubot 110b-111a).
- Even the gossip of those who live in the land of Israel is Torah (Midrash Rabbah 34).

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These rabbinical claims attest to the tension between separating the sacred and profane within sacred lands. If people reside in sacred lands, mundane and profane activities within the lands are inevitable; the physical mixing of the sacred and profane makes sacred lands notably different from sacred objects and space. Such contact with the profane would render sacred objects and space defiled. Sacred land, however, retains its sanctity because the sacred conception of the land is cognitively separated from the mundane conception of the lived-upon physical land. We now examine the cognitive separation of these conceptions more closely.

*Abstraction:* All of the above discussed cultural conceptions of sacred land (imperviousness to desecration, absence of behavioural monitoring, lack of exclusivity, ambiguous boundaries, and tolerance of mundane activities) all point to what I take to be the most important feature of sacred land with regard to conflict resolution: sacred lands have abstract qualities. What people conceptualise when they consider or discuss sacred land is not the land itself, but rather an abstract idealised sacred concept of the land. For example, after major festivals, Jews proclaim “Next year in Jerusalem”, but they never say “Next year in West Jerusalem”, although this would surely be more accurate; since the Intifada, Jews rarely venture to East Jerusalem. Regardless of this geographical discomfort, remarkably few get on a plane and spend next year in any part of Jerusalem. This is because when Jews mention Jerusalem, they are envisioning an abstract conception of Jerusalem, specifically, one expected during the time of the Messiah. As anthropologist Samuel Heilman describes,

Jerusalem: it is not one, but many. It is a place in which people actually live; it is a place that lives in them. It is a figment of the imagination, an idea. It is visible, open to discovery; it is unseen, hidden to all but insiders. It is constructed of mortar and stone and inhabited by flesh and bone; it is formed of spirit and faith and filled by belief and memory.[74]

This is an extreme representation of the sacred/mundane distinction, but it is useful. I am not denying that sacred land is real, I am simply pointing out that those who sacralise land hold two conceptions of sacred land in their heads – one is indeed real, the other is an idealised abstraction. Jews are unlikely to ever proclaim “Next year in West Jerusalem” because when considering Jerusalem in a religious context they are accessing their sacred abstract conception of Jerusalem, which is indeed indivisible. The physical Jerusalem, however, is already divided with separate elections and constrained social and economic interactions between the two halves of the city. [75] The distinction between the abstract conception of sacred land and the physical land itself is critical, because to resolve sacred land conflicts it will be prudent to keep the abstract sacred land concept intact, even if the real land is divided.

## Discussion and Conclusion





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The underlying theme of all the above comparisons is that sacred land conflicts are not intractable because sacred lands are not indivisible. The physical characteristics of sacred land – that it is not humanly constructed, maintains a sense of permanence, and is incomparable in size – make sacred land receptive to abstract, symbolic, and supernatural associations. These characteristics contribute to the dual perception of sacred land that humans maintain: one of a physical territory, the other of a sacred and symbolic land with supernatural associations. Moreover, the internalisation mechanisms employed to sacralise land – symbolisation, myth, and discourse – are more amenable to change than ritual, which is indeed challenging to change. Rituals often do play a role in the sacralisation of land, but rituals are a much more important internalisation mechanism for sacred objects and space. Most importantly, cultural constructions of land suggest that, unlike sacred space and objects, sacred land is divisible. Its immunity to desecration, the absence of ritual danger and behavioural monitoring, lack of out-group exclusivity, its ambiguous boundaries, tolerance of mundane activities, and dual conceptions – one idealised and one real – all suggest that land is not indivisible.

As Eliade observes, there is an irony inherent in sacralising things: anything that manifests the sacred becomes something else, while at the same time remaining itself.[76] This irony suggests that we cognitively encapsulate sacred things and keep them separate from the mundane. It obviously takes a fairly complex psychology to cognitively juggle this paradox, but we seem to do it effortlessly. When holding sacralised wine, one fully understands that if the wine is dropped the glass will shatter, the wine will stain, and the mess will need to be cleaned up. It may be sacralised wine, but it still maintains all of the typical features of mundane wine. This encapsulation of sacredness is also why nobody is existentially troubled when they copulate, defecate, or engage in various other ‘profane’ activities within a sacred land. Indeed, it is likely that selection favoured an encapsulation of religious cognition to prevent it from encouraging behaviours that could have negative fitness consequences.[77]

In the above analysis I have largely relied on the Jewish relationship to the land of Israel as a case study, but future work must explore whether the ethnographic data from other sacred lands support the arguments developed here. Subsequent analyses would benefit from comparisons between the internalisation methods of modern religions and indigenous religions. For example, indigenous populations tend to maintain a connection to their lands via their ancestors, ancestors with whom they are in regular communication. Contemporary world religions also assert that their ancestors once roamed their territory, but they are generally not a source of direct worship; they are more likely to be a source of inspiration rather than veneration. Moreover, world religions undoubtedly rely more on theological argument and justification for the sustained holiness of their land than indigenous populations. The doctrinal mode of world religions is also



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more dependent on repetitive ritual than the imagistic mode of religion that characterises indigenous populations.[78] Reciting the name of a sacred land over 100 times a day, as observant Jews do, is unheard of in traditional populations. World religions symbolise their sacred lands to a much greater extent than indigenous religions do, presumably to rally diaspora populations that do not reside within the sacred territory. Finally, there is less orthodoxy in indigenous populations, which may make it easier to settle territorial disputes among traditional populations. These differences between indigenous and world religions suggest that sacralising land in the modern context may have stronger mechanisms of internalisation than in the past. Sacralising land may be an old strategy, but it may be a particularly potent one in its modern manifestation.

While I have focused on the cognitive perceptions of sacred land, this approach needs to be complemented by sociological and economic perspectives for a more comprehensive understanding of land sacralisation. Future work must also explore the determinants of land sacralisation and its association with warfare. Why are lands sacralised in some disputes but not in others? What conditions favour land sacralisation? We also have little understanding of the social process of land sacralisation.[79] How does the initial impetus for land sacralisation arise – is it a result of grass-roots movements or the manipulations of elites? And most importantly, we need more detailed studies on the ways in which external constituencies can encourage religious change that would open avenues for productive conflict resolution.

As captured in his famous quote which opened this paper, philosopher Alfred Korzybski convincingly argued that an abstraction derived from something is not the thing itself. Indeed, the abstract conception of land that emerges when it is sacralised is not the land itself. That abstract conception is sacred and indeed indivisible. However, that should not be confused with the land itself. The analysis presented here does not claim that attachments to the physical land are not real; they are. However, the notion that particular lands are indivisible because they are sacred needs to be reconsidered. Sacred lands are both a physical reality and an idealised abstraction; successful negotiations will divide the physical reality, but they will need to respect religious commitments and keep sacred abstractions of the lands intact.

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Table 1: Summary of comparison between sacred land, space, and objects.

<i>Characteristics of Sacred Things</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>Space</i>	<i>Object</i>
<i>Physical Qualities</i>			
Construction	Natural	Human	Human
Permanence	High	Low	Low
Size	Large	Medium	Small
<i>Internalisation</i>			
Symbolised	High	Low	Low
Myths	High	Low-Med-High	Low-Med-High
Discourse	High	Medium	Low
Ritual activity	Medium	High	High
<i>Cultural Conceptions</i>			
Desecration	Yes / No	Yes	Yes
Danger / Monitor behaviour	Low	High	High
Exclusivity	Low	Medium-High	Medium-High
Boundaries	Ambiguous	Unambiguous	Unambiguous
Mundane activity	High	Low	Low
Abstraction	Med-High	Low	Low



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## **Decentralised Leadership in Contemporary Jihadism: Towards a Global Social Movement**

**by Romain Bartolo**

On October 19<sup>th</sup> 2003, nearly six months after the outset of the invasion of Iraq by US troops, a video was released by al-Qaeda media arm *al-Sahab* showing Osama bin Laden directly threatening Spain. In his words, Spain, then governed by Prime Minister José Maria Aznar from the *Partido Popular* (PP), may face a terrorist attack should Spanish military forces continue to be part of the coalition that invaded Iraq[1] and toppled the Saddam Hussein regime. Less than six months later, on March 11<sup>th</sup> 2004, Madrid was shaken by coordinated bomb attacks in several commuter trains at peak hours, killing 191 people and wounding thousands. The “first well-known al-Qaeda-inspired terrorist conspiracy in Europe”[2] had been in preparation for years thanks to the long-term presence of radical Islamists on Spanish soil. The first jihadist bombing on this continent since 9/11[3] seemed to have answered Osama bin Laden’s warning call. Those who later claimed responsibility for these attacks pointed out Iraq as their main source of motivation. Symbolically the bombings were carried out a few days before the first anniversary of Iraq’s invasion. On the national scene, because “terrorism is meant to terrify”[4] and affect an audience, terrorists clearly intended to affect the outcome of the national general elections scheduled three days later. The Madrid terrorists were not self-starters, nor were they members of al-Qaeda who had performed an oath of allegiance to bin Laden. Instead, they were mostly first-generation immigrants from Northern Africa or the Near East who had been settled in Spain for years, had decent jobs and for some of them wives and children[5]. The setting up of the Madrid bombings was an illustration of the rising context of the contemporary jihadist movement, targeting a country and blaming it for what was happening thousands of kilometres away. This example is highly valuable to describe the continuously evolving nature of the jihadist movement up to now.

### *A splinter group within Islamism*

The contemporary jihadist movement, be it nicknamed “leaderless jihad”[6], “jihadi international”[7], “neojihadism”[8] or the “global social movement”[9], has progressively broken away from modern Islamism as embodied by Hasan al-Banna[10], Sayyid Qutb, Mawdudi or Ayatollah Khomeini. Islamism was conceptualised as a political ideology that aimed to Islamise society and state through the enforcement of sharia and to revive the value of Islam as a cornerstone of socio-political life[11]. By the time Islam had become a powerful rallying

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tool to oppose governments, most Muslim countries had secular and nationalist regimes such as Egypt, Iraq or even Indonesia[12]. In the wake of the successive waves of independence in the second half of the twentieth century, radical Islam progressively affected other Muslim countries. Over the last thirty years, radical Islamist groups have extensively referred to the concept of jihad. Jihad has increasingly been conceived by these groups as armed struggle wherever Muslims are oppressed. Islam is not a monolithic block[13], like Islamism and its various subcategories[14]. There has been growing disagreement and opposition between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, a socio-political mass organisation that has engaged in politics when not banned by successive Egyptian regimes, and Salafi-jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda or Algerian Islamic Armed Group (GIA)[15]. The opposition lies on various points that nurture heated debate within Islamist circles, and illustrates perfectly that a wide array of schools of thought exists in political Islam. Indeed, mainly symbolised by the showdown between the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda, disagreements lie in issues such as democracy, *takfir* (declaring Muslims to be apostates), or the carrying out of indiscriminate violence towards civilians on American and European soils[16]. The Muslim Brotherhood condemned the 9/11 attacks, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's call to kill Shia in Iraq and more generally al-Qaeda terrorist agenda[17]. The fact that al-Qaeda deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahiri went online in April 2008 to answer questions and criticise the Muslim Brotherhood[18] strikingly shows that, within a broad Islamist movement united by the promotion of a pro-Islamist political agenda, tactics and strategies differ highly from one organisation to another.

*Jihadism* in its current form is not homogenous either. Most jihadist groups are of Salafi-Wahhabi tradition, an extremist branch of Sunni Islam that is known for its "selectively literal interpretation of [Islam's] sacred texts"[19]. It is essential to bear in mind that the Salafi movement is heterogeneous and made up of different factions and schools of thought. As illustrated by Quintan Wiktorowicz, "the Salafi movement [...] reflects a broad array of positions regarding issues related to politics and violence"[20]. Particularly, three different factions are to be distinguished within Salafism: "purists" who are nonviolent, do not engage in politics and who focus on *da'wa* and religious education; "politicos" who "emphasize the application of the Salafi creed to the political arena"[21]; and jihadis favouring violence to establish Islamic states [22]. Nevertheless, all factions share common beliefs such as the concept of *tawhid*, or the unity and uniqueness of God. They unanimously reject religious innovation and interpretation, and consider the Koran and Sunna to be the only legitimate sources of law. Referred to as *aqida*, this "common religious creed revolves around strict adherence to the concept of *tawhid* and ardent rejection of a role for human reason, logic, and desire"[23]. Besides this, there is a common rejection of Western culture, and a willingness to avoid interactions with non-believers[24].

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Where factions disagree is on the context and the interpretation of contemporary affairs, also illustrated by the words of a Jordanian jihadi leader, “the split is not in thought; it is in strategy”[25].

The contemporary jihadist movement does not follow the legacy of modern Islamism and is in fact a violent and “extremist splinter group within Islamism”[26] that makes jihad a necessary and individual task. According to Petter Nesser, jihadist terrorists:

see terrorism as a legitimate and necessary means of struggle in a campaign aiming to: 1. Re-Islamize the Muslim world by toppling local regimes they accuse of having become too secular and too dependent on the West, and, 2. Rid Muslim lands of Western influences[27].

Indeed, jihadists have been fighting two enemies at the same time, the “near enemy”[28] and the “far enemy”. The near enemy was until recent times the most important target in the eyes of Islamists. However, the gradual failure to topple secular regimes has led them to embrace a more international type of struggle.

## *The Afghan catalyst*

The Salafi-Wahhabi jihadist movement is particularly embodied by al-Qaeda[29], and a wide array of associated groups across the world. Members of these extremist groups were galvanised by the defensive jihad in Afghanistan when thousands of foreign fighters came to this mountainous country to fight the Soviet forces and defend what they perceived as a collective duty to protect their brothers of Islam. Despite a relatively poor role in defeating the Soviet military, the ‘Afghan Arabs’ boasted about having successfully brought to its knees one of the world’s two superpowers. While it united mujahideen in the 1980s, its aftermath led to heated debates within jihadist circles regarding the tactics and the strategy to embrace for the future[30]. Some Afghan veterans brought the experience and taste of jihad home, to Indonesia, the Philippines, Algeria, Bosnia, the West and many more places throughout the Muslim world[31].

Firstly, in today’s era, the jihadist movement would certainly be well described as a global social movement that has nurtured radicals around a common ideology. French sociologist Alain Touraine defines a social movement as “an answer either to a threat or a hope that is directly linked to the control that a social group has over its capacity to make decisions, to control changes and so on”[32]. Following 9/11, the threat of jihadism has spread out, gained a global



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audience, widened the theatre of actions[33] and threatened an increasing number of targets. Contemporary jihadism truly defines itself as a global social movement. As Michel Wieviorka pointed out in his study of global anti-movements in the globalised age, the preparation of the 9/11 attacks involved individuals located on four different continents. The 9/11 hijackers, except for one, were born in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Four hijackers had socialised in Germany during their university education and had formed the Hamburg cell, later moving to the United States in order to learn how to fly planes. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda Central had settled in Sudan in the 1990s before moving to Afghanistan and setting up training camps for jihadi candidates[34]. The major change suffered by the jihadist movement deals with the huge structural shift undergone by al-Qaeda, the main spokesperson of global jihadism, into a rallying cry for radical Islamists and angered Muslims. Secondly, due to the decentralised nature of jihadism, leadership has been affected. It has become less centralised[35] and relied on Osama bin Laden, at least until his death was announced on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, as a strategic leader and a uniting spiritual figurehead rather than a military commander that sends direct orders to jihadists on the field. Nonetheless, less centralised leadership does not imply 'leaderless jihad'. Instead, accounts of the most recent terrorist attacks carried out in the name of al-Qaeda in its loosest sense since 9/11 suggest they were the result of radical local groups and networks linked through friendship, kinship and word of mouth contacts rather than the outcomes of individual self-radicalisations.

## **The appeal of al-Qaeda ideology: a driver of franchised jihadism**

Following increasing contacts and collaborations between al-Qaeda and like-minded groups in the 1990s, the contemporary jihadist movement evolved into a more decentralised and fluid network. Jihadist groups have undergone a severe crackdown on their operational base since 9/11 but have managed to cope with it well. As Jason Burke asserts, "al-Qaeda has become more lethal as an ideology than as an organisation"[36]. As a "vanguard"[37] of Islamist international terrorism, al-Qaeda symbolises the evolution of the jihadist threat in the post-9/11 environment. In this new era, there is no central hub that serves as the main operational link between cells. Instead, cells do not cooperate with each other and do not generally know about the existence of other cells so as to reduce the likelihood of getting the whole picture if one cell is broken down. Consequently, "having no 'hub' to answer" contributes to minimise the impact of the destruction of individual cells on the organization as a whole"[38].

*Al-Qaeda, from a hierarchical organisation to the vanguard of jihadist terrorism*



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First of all, as a major player within the jihadist movement, al-Qaeda has transformed itself from a hierarchical terrorist organisation into something that has more to do with an appealing ideology than a structured paramilitary organisation. Before 9/11, jihadist attacks such as the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings and the 2000 *USS Cole* in Aden were directly linked to the core al-Qaeda spiritual and military leadership based in Afghanistan. Those who had set up the operations were al-Qaeda operatives who followed orders of the al-Qaeda shura, the organisation's decision-making body. At that time, jihadism had a clear command-and-control apparatus emanating from the top leadership. Besides, between 1996 and 2001, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan provided al-Qaeda with a safe haven for jihadist leadership. Meanwhile, about an estimated 20,000 estimated jihadists trained in al-Qaeda camps[39]. The loss of the Afghan safe haven following the wave of US bombings from October 2001[40] put al-Qaeda as an organisation under great pressure. Financial assets were frozen, training camps were destroyed, and militants as well as senior al-Qaeda members were tracked down, captured or killed. Al-Qaeda has survived the capture or death of "80% of its global leadership structure"[41], such as military chief Mohammed Atef[42], Khalid Sheikh Mohammed[43], and al-Qaeda-Jemaah Islamiyah operative Hambali[44]. The organisation has proved to be highly resilient[45] and has successfully turned into a mass social movement attracting thousands of radicalised Muslims across the world. Indeed, the persistence of al-Qaeda as a terrorist threat does not lie in its military capabilities, which have been greatly hampered since 2001. Rather, it goes well beyond these and deals with the attractiveness of jihadism to extremists, making al-Qaeda just part of a broader extremist Salafi-Wahhabi movement[46].

## *The globalisation of jihadist militancy*

Owing to this new hostile international security context where most Western and non-Western states adopt a tough stance against terrorism, the form of jihadist terrorism has become more complex to deal with. While jihadist militancy remained mainly local and confined to national boundaries in the 1990s, jihadism over the last ten years seems to have moved beyond borders thanks to increasing cooperation between associated groups. Global jihadism advocates were able to accomplish what had failed in the 1990s in local jihads such as in Algeria and Bosnia[47], that is to say, the submission of local conflicts in which Islam plays a part to a global narrative that puts Islam at the core. Back in the 1990s, local jihadist groups had waged war on their national governments but had been reluctant to join al-Qaeda's global struggle. These unsuccessful local jihads and "the subsequent failure to establish an Islamic state in a given country"[48] may have "pushed the Islamists to go 'global'"[49]. What can be said is that Osama bin Laden became a uniting point in jihadist militancy by gathering a large number of terrorist



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groups into his sphere of influence. Jihadist groups have adopted brand-new names that symbolically refer to the allegiance they pledged to the al-Qaeda agenda[50], such as *al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula* (AQAP), *al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers* and even *al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM), an Algerian-based terrorist group formerly called *Salafi Group for Call and Combat* (GSPC)[51]. Leaders of these organisations swore their allegiance to Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda and their strategic objectives. In his analysis of the GSPC as a “glocal terrorist organisation”[52], Jean-Luc Marret shows how internal debate within this group sparked tensions between on the one hand, those who wanted to keep the struggle local and, on the other hand, those who advocated going global. The contemporary jihadist movement has evolved thanks to the growing appeal of al-Qaeda ideology and personal links between high-profile terrorists. This naming illustrates the franchising of jihadism in the “age of networked terrorism”[53]. This mix of ideology and individuals has made the jihadist threat successful in its attempt to go global. Indeed, al-Qaeda and other extremist terrorist groups have all found common grounds to subscribe to this mutually beneficial relationship. By doing so, al-Qaeda offsets its operational disability to carry out another large-scale attack[54] and has increasingly relied on various affiliated terrorist groups, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, Pakistani Lashkar-e-Toiba or other European terrorist networks. Al-Qaeda, as a label, provided all these movements with the global audience they were looking for. It increases “public awareness”[55] of groups who are willing to publicise their cause. It is particularly relevant regarding the complicated relationship between terrorism and the media sphere. Because al-Qaeda-related terrorism has been, in general, defined as the most serious non-state threat to governments[56] lately, subscribing to al-Qaeda’s worldwide agenda has given jihadists the opportunity to hit the headlines because of the media’s attraction towards a “dramatizing effect”[57]. By the same token, the vanguard of jihadism benefited from this cooperation by claiming responsibility for the attack once it had already happened. Al-Qaeda strives to retrieve the political message sent by the terrorist attack and confer retrospectively its approval or refusal. The case of Nigerian ‘underpants bomber’ Omar Farouk Abdulmutallab may well fit the description of al-Qaeda’s willingness to bless the failed plot. Marc Sageman’s following words illustrate this trend:

Their [adherents’] official acceptance into al-Qaeda comes after the fact, [...] al-Qaeda Central does not know who its followers are, and is reduced to accepting them after the adherents declare themselves in an act of terrorism[58].

This structural shift in the jihadist movement was made possible because al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden had managed to create “a narrative”[59]. According to French scholar Olivier Roy:



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The success of Osama bin Laden is not to have established a modern and efficient Islamist political organisation, but to have invented a narrative that could allow rebels without a cause to connect with a cause[60].

## *The “glocal” organisational structure of contemporary jihadism*

The jihadist movement has been torn between globalism and localism. Nowadays, it seems that the tendency is leaning towards globalism but it is not an entirely pure global trend. Rather, we should adopt what Zygmunt Bauman conceptualises as “glocalisation”. The contemporary jihadist movement fits the definition of a social movement given by Brian Jackson, who asserts that a social movement is “a group of people with a common ideology who try together to achieve certain general goals”[61], well. Despite being broad, this definition illustrates how today’s jihadism has evolved – the original al-Qaeda network, by uniting around an openly violent ideology, into “ad-hoc terrorist networks, imitators, emulators and a strategic union of like-minded companies”[62]. Assuming that the globalisation of jihadism has reduced the importance of leadership may be misleading. The new face of contemporary jihadism still depends on leadership at some point and “it would be wrong to conclude that the central al-Qaeda organization is no longer a threat”[63].

## **From the end of a clear command-and-control leadership to a divided and decentralised leadership**

Although Osama bin Laden gave the 9/11 hijackers his approval to go ahead with their plans, one cannot but notice that nowadays the jihadist movement goes well beyond him and al-Qaeda in terms of operational leadership and spiritual guidance. What Western and Muslim countries have dealt with for the last ten years differs from an organisation with a genuine command-and-control apparatus assessing targets, providing funds and carrying out the attack. Contemporary jihadism has shaken a large number of countries. The choice of targets has diversified, ranging from police stations and embassies in Pakistan, religious buildings in Djerba to hotels in Jakarta, oil pipelines in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, or public transport in Madrid and London. In the same period of time, terrorist plots were foiled in Singapore, Scotland and Canada, and thousands of jihadist sympathisers were arrested in a dozen countries[64]. Clearly, post-9/11 jihadism does not rely on a small number of leaders, so “the death or incarceration of [its] leadership and severe losses to [its] membership [...] is not terminal to [its] struggle”[65]. The persistence of al-Qaeda as a common narrative has succeeded because leadership does not solely lie on the shoulders of

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high-profile international terrorists. Rather than a global one, leadership has become more local and fragmented at the operational level.

However, strategic leadership rested upon the shoulders and aura of Osama bin Laden, who, despite having been described as a modest and soft-spoken man by Western journalists[66], was an essential figurehead. Leadership within contemporary jihadism still matters, hence the limited ability of Internet self-radicalised individuals to go ahead with their self-organised plans. Leadership has expanded thanks to the use of the Internet[67], which has proven to be an efficient recruiting tool for de-territorialised jihadists - individuals that will cross the violence threshold based on an array of overseas events. Abu Musab al-Suri's plan is to urge would-be jihadists to train autonomously wherever they can in order to create "a system, not an organisation"[68]. Examples of "autonomous jihad"[69] are to be found in the cases of self-proclaimed cell leaders Abdul Nacer Benbrika in Australia and Mohammed Siddique Khan. Local imam in a Melbourne suburb, Benbrika was a "spiritual sanctioner"[70] of both Melbourne and Sydney cells, whose targets were official government buildings and a nuclear plant[71]. Trends in autonomous jihad are symbolised by Benbrika's own sanction of a suicide attack after the question was asked by a cell member[72]. In Khan's case, his decision to visit Pakistan[73] and engage in training with extremist groups in 2004 and 2005 illustrates his commitment to jihad and consequently his leadership within the four-man commando. These individuals "are not 'name-brand' terrorists or part of any known terrorist group" but rather "are like-minded individuals"[74] who were inspired by al-Qaeda, radicalised, indoctrinated and who progressively embraced jihad.

## *The influence of jihadist leadership on European soil*

Many terrorist attacks were claimed to be carried out by self-starters, such as the London bombers or the murderer of controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Further evidence showed a much deeper commitment to the global jihadist cause and decentralised leadership. Mohammed Bouyeri, van Gogh's murderer, belong to the Hofstad Group, a Dutch jihadist group led by Syrian radical preacher Abu Khatib[75]. The very same group had plans to bomb Amsterdam international airport and government buildings[76]. The London bombers were all British citizens educated within the framework of the British system. Contacts with Pakistani groups were easily made through family acquaintances, given that cell leader Mohammed Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer were of Pakistani descent and still maintained close links with their relatives in Pakistan. These two individuals kept contact with extremists in Pakistan and the UK "up until the attack itself"[77]. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that these attacks



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were solely grounded in a European context. To a certain extent, it shows how global the jihadist movement has become. British-born citizens[78] bombed their own country and killed their fellow citizens, blaming them for their indirect involvement in the killing of thousands of innocent Iraqis. The issue of leadership in this case clearly shows a cell leader, Mohammed Siddique Khan, an influential person, leading young radicals in their early twenties. More generally, dealing with the leadership of the contemporary jihadist movement has become as complex as dealing with the global jihadist ideology. Leadership has become more diffuse, whether it is operational, ideological, or due to the charisma of an individual. Osama bin Laden's success was grounded on his ability to co-opt like-minded terrorist groups and also to inspire a certain number of radical individuals or religious authorities to embrace his violent agenda and ideology. Since 9/11 and the structural change undergone by al-Qaeda into the franchising of Islamist terrorism, authority in the jihadist movement has been divided. Leadership and authority do not solely emanate from high-profile terrorists but also from radical imams who have extensive links with extremist groups overseas in Pakistan, Iraq or the Maghreb. In all instances of jihadism in post-9/11 Europe, "the Iraq war was a significant motivational factor for the Islamist terrorists"[79].

### *Osama bin Laden, a uniting guide rather than a military leader*

Until early May 2011, Osama bin Laden remained a figurehead of the jihadist movement, even though authority and leadership have become less personalised. In a certain way, and despite the fact that contemporary jihadism does not solely deal with interpersonal links, Osama bin Laden gained a highly charismatic profile within the movement, making him a naturally powerful leader. His videos and statements still resonate in the ears, hearts and minds of extremists and sympathisers. Following the announcement of his death, the various online testimonies aired by sympathisers and jihadist websites revealed that bin Laden strongly mattered and that his death, in one way or another, is a watershed[80]. Even if al-Qaeda can no longer conduct a large-scale terrorist attack, "al-Qaeda leaders continue to highlight potential targets and transmit operational directives"[81]. Terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia[82] and the Madrid bombings occurred months after Osama bin Laden had himself threatened those countries with the likelihood of a bombing.

### *Kinship and friendship as a first step into global jihad*

Furthermore, increasing evidence shows that friendship, kinship and word of mouth contacts are becoming an increasingly essential feature of the contemporary jihadist movement's organisational structure. Further police investigations in the wake of terrorist attacks have



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unveiled the very nature of these “home-grown” networks, especially in Europe. In the case of the Madrid bombings and Theo van Gogh’s killing, initial descriptions of “self-financed, self-sufficient and self-radicalised”[83] cells turned out to be partially wrong or at least too short-sighted. The Madrid bombers were not home-grown terrorists. Mostly from Moroccan, Algerian, and Syrian backgrounds[84], these extremists were in fact all linked through the Abu Dahdah[85] network. As an al-Qaeda operative in Spain[86], he had extensive contacts with European jihadist circles in London such as influential al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Musab al-Suri[87] and *al-Ansar* editor Abu Qatada[88]. Further evidence shows that this network was also closely collaborating with the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group[89], itself linked to jihadists in Europe, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan[90]. This complex web of links shows the global aspect that shapes the jihadist movement. Terrorist cells in Europe in the post-9/11 environment are defined by Jordan, Manas and Horsburgh as “grassroot jihadist networks”[91]. In their view, these networks embody “individuals that operate within the country that they reside and share the strategic objectives of the Global Jihad Movement (GJM) but do not formally belong to the ‘Al-Qaeda organisation’ or other associated groups”[92]. Unquestionably they are part of “a wider hierarchical organization, and depend on the directives of that organization at strategic and operational levels”[93] and embrace this jihadist narrative. This definition of “grassroot jihadist networks” fits the descriptions of the Madrid bombers’ network, the 7/7 London suicide bombers and the Hofstad Group well. These individuals, either European-born or European immigrants, were radicalised in Europe through friendship and kinship. Indeed, political violence and terrorism may not be embraced by a personal move towards radicalism. One’s grievances, whether social, religious, political or economic, have to be framed into a narrative that resonates. All potential causes of terrorism, such as anger, political frustration, feelings of humiliation or despair may impact on one’s behaviour, particularly if these beliefs are commonly shared and felt. Terrorism clearly is a group process. Framing terrorism into a “group adventure”[94] may contribute to an understanding of how individuals turned their backs on their own societies or their countries of residence. For instance, an account of the formation of the Hofstad Group in the Netherlands indicates that most group members originated from the Rif Valley in Northern Morocco. An analysis of the Madrid network members similarly illustrates that the group grew by word of mouth. Some members, radical Muslims, encouraged their friends who felt some degree of alienation to join this terrorist cell[95]. In the meantime, European governments conducted hundreds of arrests of would-be jihadists across the continent[96], showing that the continent is not immune to the threat of “Europe’s angry Muslims,”[97] in Robert Leiken’s words. The same thing can be said about the deadliest terrorist cell that emerged from Europe, the Hamburg cell. In the late 1990s, Hamburg was the place where Mohammed Atta, Ziad Jarrah and Marwan al-Shehhi met, socialised and were radicalised during their university years. In the



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case of those three 9/11 pilots, they had become involved in radicalism in Europe, and sought al-Qaeda guidance. They, typically, offered al-Qaeda their skills, not the other way around. Therefore, it can be said that within the contemporary jihadist movement “the main groups did not recruit individuals. Rather, they entered the movement”[98].

This divided type of leadership, social bonds between individuals and Osama bin Laden’s charismatic authority have characterised the evolution of the jihadist movement towards a highly decentralised structure after the 9/11 attacks. Contemporary jihadism on the global scale as it has been previously defined differs from the hierarchical terrorist organisation that directly planned the 1998 East Africa embassy attacks, the *USS Cole* attack in Aden and 9/11. Over the last decade, the franchising of jihadism has been embodied by the growing use of affiliated terrorist groups or less importantly inspired sympathisers who crossed the violence threshold to carry out deadly acts on behalf of this extremist, violent and deviant ideology. In other words and despite the post-9/11 global crackdown on al-Qaeda leaders and operatives, al-Qaeda has managed to maintain its resilience in the international system by subcontracting its deadly acts of terror to individuals and groups ready to take up the challenge on its behalf. Bouyeri, Khan, the Madrid bombers, Indonesian and Pakistani terrorists among many others all put into practice bin Laden and Zawahiri’s various calls for indiscriminate violence against their numerous identified enemies, ranging from Western military personnel to Muslim and non-Muslim innocent civilians.

To conclude, leadership in the contemporary jihadist movement has been dispersed well beyond its most visible spokespersons like late Osama bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri. It has become more elusive to deal with. As a consequence, the complex structure of contemporary jihadism has reinforced its resilience and made the fight against jihadist violence more difficult for governments, security departments and intelligence agencies. The fact that leadership still matters shows that at some point hierarchy and personal authority remain a critical feature of the jihadist movement too. Despite its highly decentralised nature, today’s global jihadism still requires leadership so that the movement’s followers can move forward with their plans and fulfil the agenda. Should Osama bin Laden and the extremist ideology he stood for stop being an inspirational force for radicals, campaigns of terrorist violence in the name of jihad could possibly wane in the medium term. Now that the ten-year-long manhunt for the capture of Osama bin Laden came to an abrupt end, the issue of leadership within the jihadist movement has become all the more essential. Still regarded as an operational success, the targeted killing of Osama bin Laden has now widened the window of opportunity for commentaries and predictions about the next command-and-control structure that al-Qaeda is likely to adopt. Despite it is too early to draw some definite conclusions, what now needs to be discussed in the coming weeks



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and months are the possible scenarios[99]. The death of Osama bin Laden is not synonymous to the end of contemporary jihadism, as hierarchy in al-Qaeda did not essentially matter as much as it would for other traditional terrorist organisations that suffered a clear decline after the killing or the arrest of their leader, such as Shoko Asahara in Aum Shinrikyo. Nevertheless, this targeted killing, after dozens of senior al-Qaeda operatives, military commanders and militants were arrested or killed over the last decade, symbolises the loss of impetus taken by contemporary jihadism. Whether al-Qaeda central has the ability to perform a transfer of leadership to a new leader in order to survive his founder's death is still unknown and hard to guess. The two most visible scenarios that might emerge for the future of the jihadist movement depend on the view one has about global jihad, as represented summarily by the 2008 debate between Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman. Thus, from an al-Qaeda central perspective, the next phase of jihadism depends on the possibility for al-Qaeda to name a new leader, such as bin Laden's long-time deputy and al-Qaeda ideologue Ayman al-Zawahiri, propaganda chief Abu Yahya al-Libi, or less prominent contenders, to continue to send orders and provide general guidance[100]. From a more networked approach, the resilience of jihadism will be assessed on whether the seeds of terror have sufficiently been diffused among the wide jihadist circle of sympathisers globally to sustain the struggle in this post-bin Laden era.

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## Notes

[1] Bergen, P. (2008) 'Al Qaeda, the Organization : A Five-Year Forecast' / *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* / (618) p. 17

[2] Nesser, P. (2006) 'Jihadism in Western Europe After the Invasion of Iraq : Tracing Motivational Influences from the Iraq War on Jihadist Terrorism in Western Europe,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (29:4), p. 329

[3] Nonetheless, the Madrid bombings were not the first terrorist attacks carried out by radical Islamists in Europe. In 1995, France had been the target of a severe wave of public transport bombings carried out by the Algerian GIA (*Groupe Islamique Armé*) whose operations were led by Algerians as well as French-born citizens of Algerian descent, such as Khaled Kelkal for instance.

[4] Juergensmeyer, M. (2000) / *Terror in the Mind of God : The Global Rise of Religious Violence* / p. 5

[5] Of the forty-five members of the Madrid network, twenty-two were married and twenty-two were single. The forty-fifth's marital status remains unknown. In Jordan, J., Manas, F. M. & Horsburgh, N. (2008) 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Grassroot Jihadist Networks: The Madrid Bombings,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (31:1) p. 22

[6] Sageman, M. (2008) / *Leaderless Jihad : Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* / (Philadelphia) University of Pennsylvania Press

[7] Statement credited to Jason Burke in Jackson, B. A. (2006) 'Groups, Networks, or Movements: A Command-and-Control-Driven Approach to Classifying Terrorist Organizations and Its Application to Al Qaeda,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (29) p. 256

[8] Statement credited to Pete Lentini. See Lentini, P. (2008b) 'The Transference of Neojihadism : Towards a Process Theory of Transnational Radicalisation' / in Khatib, S., Bakashmar, M. & Ogru, E. (eds), *Radicalisation Crossing Borders : New Directions in Islamist and Jihadist Political, Intellectual, and Theological Thought in Practice* / Global Terrorism Research Centre, Monash University, 2009. Refereed Proceedings from the GTReC International Conference, 26-27 November 2008, Parliament House, Melbourne, Victoria / pp. 1-32.

[9] Jordan, J., Manas, F. M. & Horsburgh, N. (2008) 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Grassroot Jihadist Networks: The Madrid Bombings,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (31:1) p. 17

[10] In 1928, Hasan al-Banna founded the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as the first Islamist political organisation in the Muslim world.

[11] Roy, O. (2004) / *L'islam mondialisé* / p. 33

[12] After gaining independence in 1945, Indonesia was mainly defined by a state ideology called *Pancasila* under Sukarno's rule. While acknowledging six official religions, Indonesia remained a secular regime. Shortly after the toppling of the Egyptian King, President Nasser as well as his successor President Anwar al-Sadat had cracked down on Islamist militants. The hanging of Sayyid Qutb in 1966 and President Sadat's assassination in 1981 illustrate this harsh showdown. As a general rule, Islamists became the only viable and serious alternative to secular governments because of rampant corruption affecting traditional opponents. For instance, the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and Syria were by far the only viable political force to oppose nationalist and secular governments.

[13] Fawaz Gerges claims that "Muslims and 'Islamists' do not agree on what Islam is", in Gerges, F. A. (2007) / *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy* / p. 12

[14] Some Islamist movements are mainly devotional, such as the revivalist *Tablighi Jamaat* founded in 1925 by Mohamed Ilyas in India, which emphasises the role of *da'wa* (proselytism). Others are explicitly political. Many Islamists entered politics in order to achieve their goals: in Iran, the *Refah* movement in Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist Salvation Front in Algeria, *Hizbullah* in Lebanon, *Hamas* in Palestine... For a more detailed list, see Roy, O. (2004), *op. cit.*, p.34

[15] Lynch, M. (2010) 'Islam Divided Between Salafi-jihad and the Ikhwan,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (33:6)

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 474

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 471

[19] Lentini, P. (2008a) 'Antipodal terrorists? Accounting for differences in Australian and 'Global' Neojihadists,' / in Devetak, R. & Hugues, C. W. (eds), *Globalization's Shadow : The Globalization of Violence* / p.183

[20] Wiktorowicz, Q. (2006) 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (29:3) pp. 207-239

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 207 & p. 225



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- [23] Ibid., p. 207
- [24] Ibid., p. 218
- [25] Ibid., p. 208
- [26] Zabel, S. E. (2007) / *The military strategy of Global Jihad* / p. 1
- [27] Nesser, P. (2008) 'How did Europe's Global Jihadis Obtain Training for their Militant Causes ?' / *Terrorism and Political Violence* / (20:2) p. 251
- [28] The near enemy includes Muslim states that are not governed according to sharia law. Some countries fought in alliance with the 'far enemy', for example the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia, or the 1978 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. The near enemy mainly aims at toppling these Muslim regimes. The far enemy includes particularly the US and Israel, then European countries and other international actors that are defined as enemies of Islam.
- [29] Al-Qaeda was founded in 1988 in Peshawar, Pakistan, by Abdullah Azzam. See Filiu, J-P (2009) / *Les Neuf Vies d'Al-Qaïda* / p. 46
- [30] The most prominent al-Qaeda affiliated groups are al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Islamic Army of Aden, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Jemaah Islamiyah.
- [31] Kepel, G. (2004) 'Striking at the faraway enemy,' / in *The War for Muslim Minds, Islam and the West* / p. 71
- [32] Touraine, A. (2002) 'The Importance of Social Movements,' / *Social Movement Studies* / (1:1) p. 89
- [33] Please refer to Nasiri, O. (2006), / *Inside the Global Jihad: How I Infiltrated Al Qaeda and was Abandoned by Western Intelligence* / And particularly to "The Land of Jihad is Wide", p. 234.
- [34] Wieviorka, M. (2005) 'After New Social Movements,' / *Social Movement Studies* / (4:1) p. 14
- [35] Hoffman, B. (2004) 'The Changing Face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (27:6) p. 556
- [36] Burke, J. (2004) 'Al Qaeda,' / *Foreign Policy* / (142) p. 18. Similarly, Bruce Hoffman stated that "Al-Qaeda today [in 2004] has become more an idea or a concept than an organization". See Hoffman, B., op. cit., p. 552.
- [37] Gunaratna, R. (2003) 'The New Face of Al-Qaeda : Understanding the Generational Gradient in Local and Global Jihad Campaigns,' / *Pointer Journal* / (29:4) p. 12
- [38] McAllister, B. (2004) 'Al-Qaeda and the Innovative Firm : Demythologizing the Network,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (27:4) p. 302
- [39] Hoffman, B (2004), op. cit., p. 553
- [40] 'The international mobilisation against terrorism, from Autumn 2001, has deprived global jihad of its Afghan sanctuary', / in Poncet, J-F & Cerisier-benGuiga, M. (2009), 'Où en est Al-Qaïda?' / *Rapport d'Information n°630 du Sénat français sur la situation au Moyen-Orient* / p. 108. Personal translation of « La mobilisation internationale contre le terrorisme, à partir de l'automne 2001, prive le jihad global de son sanctuaire afghan ».
- [41] Sawyer, R. & Foster, M. (2008) 'The Resurgent and Persistent Threat of al Qaeda,' / *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* / (618) p. 203
- [42] Mohammed Atef was killed in Afghanistan in a US bombing in 2001.
- [43] 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was arrested in Pakistan in March 2003.
- [44] Jemaah Islamiyah operational leader Hambali was captured in Southern Thailand in 2003. He was also the only non-Arab member of al-Qaeda's shura and the main middleman between al-Qaeda and South East Asian Jemaah Islamiyah.
- [45] Sawyer, R. & Foster, M. (2008), op. cit., p.197
- [46] 'Al-Qaeda is only one part of a larger Salafist constellation', Ibid., p.204
- [47] Kepel, G. (2004), op. cit., p.91
- [48] Roy, O. (2009) 'Al-Qaeda in the West as a Youth Movement : The Power of a Narrative,' / in Emerson, M. (ed.), *Ethno-Religious Conflict in Europe: Typologies of Radicalisation in Europe's Muslim Communities* / p. 19
- [49] Ibid.



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- [50] Between 2005 and 2008, forty terrorist organisations swore allegiance to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. In Sawyer, R. & Foster, M. (2008), *op. cit.*, p.207
- [51] In September 2006, the GSPC swore allegiance to Osama bin Laden. The GSPC became al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in January 2007 and remains the largest jihadist network in Western Europe. See Bergen, P. (2008), *op. cit.*, p.17
- [52] Marret, J-L (2007) 'Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb : A 'Glocal' Organization,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (31:6) p. 549
- [53] Gunaratna, Rohan (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 12
- [54] McAllister, B. (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 308
- [55] Marret, J-L (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 549
- [56] In Shaul Mishal and Maoz Rosenthal's view, "al-Qaeda remains one of the most significant threats to the Western world in general and to US national security in particular". In Mishal, S. & Rosenthal, M. (2005) 'Al Qaeda as a Dune Organization: Toward a Typology of Islamic Terrorist Organizations,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (28:4) p. 276
- [57] Marret, J-L (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 543
- [58] Sageman, M. (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 136
- [59] Roy, O. (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 12
- [60] Ibid.
- [61] Jackson, B. A. (2006) 'Groups, Networks, or Movements : A Command-and-Control-Driven Approach to Classifying Terrorist Organizations and Its Application to Al Qaeda,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (29:3) p. 248
- [62] Ibid., p.250
- [63] Bergen, P. (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 15
- [64] Sageman, M. (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 133
- [65] Gunaratna, R. (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 3
- [66] CNN journalist Peter Bergen interviewed Osama bin Laden in 1997.
- [67] Stenersen, A. (2008) 'The Internet : A Virtual Training Camp ?' / *Terrorism and Political Violence* / (20:2) pp. 215-233
- [68] The Arabic translation is 'nizam, la tanzim'. In Lia, B. (2008) 'Doctrines for Jihadi Training,' / *Terrorism and Political Violence* / (20:4) p. 533
- [69] Silber, M. & Bhatt, A. (2007) / *Radicalisation in the West: The Homegrown Threat*
- [70] According to the authors, the "spiritual sanctioner" is the main character behind the radicalisation and indoctrination phases. Consequently, he disposes of a certain leverage to convince fellow individuals who are radical but still undecided about whether or not to embrace the call for violence. Ibid., p. 38
- [71] Ibid., p. 27
- [72] Ibid., p. 51
- [73] Ibid., p. 43
- [74] Ibid., p. 87
- [75] Nesser, P. (2006) 'Jihadism in Western Europe After the Invasion of Iraq : Tracing Motivational Influences from the Iraq War on Jihadist Terrorism in Western Europe,' *op. cit.*, p. 334
- [76] Ibid.
- [77] Hoffman, B. (2009) 'Radicalization and Subversion : Al Qaeda and the 7 July 2005 Bombings and the 2006 Airline Bombing Plot,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (32:12) p. 1102
- [78] Only Germaine Lindsay was born overseas in Jamaica. Mohammed Siddique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer and Hasib Hussain were all British-born and second-generation immigrants from Pakistan.
- [79] Nesser, P. (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 337-338



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- [80] Some testimonies have been put online by FREERad!cals, the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation blog. See Maher, Shiraz, & Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander, 'ICSR Insight - Jihadist Forums React to Osama bin Laden's Death', *FREERad!cals*, available at <http://icsr.info/blog/ICSR-Insight---Jihadist-Forums-React-to-Osama-bin-Ladens-Death->
- [81] Jordan, J., Manas, F. M. & Horsburgh, N. (2008), op. cit., p. 24
- [82] Similarly, a video of Osama bin Laden was released in December 2004. His speech focused on attacking Saudi oil facilities. Over a year later in February 2006, the Abqaiq facility was targeted by a bombing. In Bergen, P. (2008), op. cit., p.17
- [83] Sageman, M. (2008), op. cit., p. viii (preface)
- [84] Thirty-two of the forty-five Madrid network members were Moroccan, six were Syrian and five were Algerian. See Jordan, J., Manas, F. M. & Horsburgh, N. (2008), op. cit., p.21
- [85] Abu Dahdah was arrested in Spain in November 2001.
- [86] Jordan, J. & Horsburgh, N. (2005) 'Mapping Jihadist Terrorism in Spain,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (28:3) p. 172
- [87] In the 1990s, Abu Musab al-Suri settled in London as did many other Islamists in what was then called "Londonistan" by French intelligence services. Furthermore, al-Suri links to the GIA show how complex the web of jihadism was in Western Europe. In Cruickshank, P. & Ali, M. H. (2007) 'Abu Musab Al Suri: Architect of the New Al-Qaeda,' / *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* / (30:1) p. 4
- [88] Jordan, J. & Horsburgh, N. (2005), op. cit., p. 176
- [89] Nesser, P. (2006), op. cit., p. 327
- [90] Ibid., p. 328
- [91] Jordan, J., Manas, F. M. & Horsburgh, N. (2008), op. cit., p. 17
- [92] Ibid.
- [93] Ibid., p. 19
- [94] Sageman, M. (2008), op. cit., p. 70
- [95] Jordan, J., Manas, F. M. & Horsburgh, N. (2008), op. cit., p. 19
- [96] Jihadists and would-be terrorists were arrested in many European countries following 9/11, such as in France, the UK, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands... See Sageman, M. (2008), op. cit., p. 133
- [97] Leiken, R. S. (2005) 'Europe's Angry Muslims,' / *Foreign Policy* / (84:4)
- [98] Lentini, P. (2008a) 'Antipodal terrorists? Accounting for differences in Australian and 'Global' Neojihadists,' op. cit., p. 190
- [99] Farrall, L. (2011), 'Wanted. Charismatic Terror Mastermind. Some Travel Required.' / *ForeignPolicy.com*
- [100] Roggio, B. (2011), 'After bin Laden: who will lead al Qaeda?' / *The Long War Journal* /



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## Opinion Pieces

### Electoral Politics and ETA's ceasefire

by Javier Argomaniz

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The recent Euskadi ta Alkartasuna (ETA) ceasefire declaration has been received with much interest and fanfare by the international media. The same announcement was met instead with a tangible lack of enthusiasm by Spanish and Basque political figures. The Spanish president Zapatero, the Basque president Lopez and Urkullu, the leader of the most voted Basque nationalist party (PNV), agreed that the communiqué was a 'step forward' but ultimately 'insufficient' and 'not the news the country had been hoping for'. Such mix of scepticism and disappointment is partly a product of the previous failed experience with the 2006 ETA truce. Months of painstakingly slow negotiations between ETA and government representatives were then shattered with a bomb attack at Madrid airport that killed two people. The outcome left the Zapatero's government frustrated and unwilling to get their fingers burnt again.

Yet there are in fact a few interesting divergences from the 2006 ceasefire. The use of words 'general' and 'verifiable by the international community' are new and help to separate this statement from the 2006 declaration, which was also 'permanent'. The latter has already been rejected by the Spanish Deputy Prime Minister Rubalcaba: Spain will not accept the involvement of international mediators and any hypothetical disarmament process would be verified by the Spanish security forces. The former is more relevant in practice as it would involve the termination of 'kale borroka' (street fighting) activities and the extortion of Basque businessmen under the so-called 'revolutionary tax'. There is an additional novelty: a commitment for a 'lasting resolution towards an end to the armed confrontation'. This phrase has never been used by ETA before but it comes with the *caveat* that the dissolution of the group should follow the fulfilment of political conditions such as territoriality and self-determination.

So it is not quite a familiar case of 'more of the same' and the government's response may be viewed by some, not least by Gerry Adams, as a missed opportunity 'for a lasting peace and a



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new beginning in the relationship between the Basque people and the Spanish state'. At the same time, it is not hard to understand this response if we examine the current security and political context. There is a clear strategic logic behind the Spanish government decision: from their point of view, the current approach is working. ETA is terminally ill, having been hit hard by not only hundreds of arrests in recent years product of close French-Spanish cooperation but also the impact of the judicial investigations that since the late 1990s have dismantled their intricate support network. The general view within the socialist party and the state's judicial and police authorities is that they have the upper hand and there is little need for a change in tactics. Proof that the pressure has not wavered comes from the recent arrests of two alleged ETA members in France and, in a separate operation, 10 members of EKIN, ETA's political apparatus.

However a much less talked about motive for the government's reaction is rather more pedestrian: electoral politics. Opening negotiations again is seen as a politically very risky move in a context where the economic crisis is rapidly eroding the party's support amongst the Spanish electorate. The socialists are not willing to lose ground on this matter and will attempt to out-toughen the opposition and play hard-ball with ETA's demands.

Importantly, electoral politics not only helps us to contextualise the Government's response, they are also crucial to understand ETA's decision to announce a ceasefire on the first place. It is clear by now that ETA is militarily very weak, totally incapable to bring the independence of the Basque region by force of arms alone. A November 2010 poll by Basque Country University puts the backing of ETA's violent methods down to about 3% of the Basques. Incidentally, support for independence comes to 28% of the population. Whereas ETA's young ranks continue with their enthusiastic advocacy of violent action, the older generations have grown disenchanted and dissension within imprisoned members means that the numbers of those supportive of a political solution within the group are growing. The future prospects look bleak for the terrorist organisation.

On the other hand, the main source of pressure for the 2011 declaration has not come internally but from Batasuna, the group's political wing. The explanation again comes from political calculations: banned since 2003 following a court ruling that provided evidence of operational support to ETA, Batasuna leaders have grown concerned of losing ground to other pro-independence Basque political parties. After losing a third of their support, the fear is that these



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legal parties that work within the institutions and oppose ETA violence would continue attracting the votes of their traditional electorate while they stand in the wilderness outside the normal political process. Eusko Alkartasuna (EA) would benefit much from the continuation of the present situation: a party that has participated in several Basque regional governments in coalition with PNV, it supports similar economic policies and political goals. Alternatiba and Aralar, a scion of the old Batasuna, are other potential beneficiaries. Trapped and increasingly irrelevant, Batasuna needs to return to the institutions in the next elections and they can only do so by renouncing their support for violence and severing their operational links with ETA. A legalised Batasuna could then establish a united pro-independence left-wing political front with EA and Alternatiba and regain their footing in Basque politics. The imprisoned leadership's strategy is backed now by a majority of the Batasuna base and it is obvious that an inactive ETA would greatly assist in the process.

In sum, the banning of Batasuna has eventually encouraged their leaders to put pressure on ETA for a ceasefire that would facilitate their legalisation and subsequent participation in the next local and regional elections. Attention will be shifted then to whether the Spanish judicature rules the new name, lists and rules compliant with the Ley de Partidos. If so, this would help to validate their strategy and encourage Batasuna's leadership to impose their views on ETA's leadership for the very first time. If Batasuna's proxy is rejected –as with other previous attempts- there will be a renewed internal debate: will this strengthen the desire of Batasuna's top-ranks for a non-violent path to the independence of Basque country? Or will this give arguments to the more hardcore elements in ETA and the dissenting minority within the party that a return to terrorism is necessary?

*This was originally published on the 24/01/11 at <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/opinionpieces/opinionpieces/files/electoral-politics-and-etaceseafire.html>*





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## The Need for Situational Awareness in a CBRNE Attack

by Jordan Nelms

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Six years before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and eight years before the United States went to war with Saddam Hussein for his alleged concealment of chemical and biological weapons caches, Japan's Tokyo subway was struck by one of the most vicious terror attacks in modern history. The 1995 Sarin terrorist attack represents an important case study for post-9/11 emergency managers because it highlights the key issues first responders and public health officials face when confronted with a CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive) mass-casualty attack.

The after-action reporting following the Tokyo Sarin attack noted serious deficiencies in the identification of the threat, and the escalating confusion about why so many obviously sick people were coming out of the subway station. First responders arrived on the scene quickly – but, because Sarin is an invisible gas, fire and EMS units were unaware that the scene was *hot* and did not know the nature of the threat they were facing. Although they did an effective job evacuating and getting people out of the subway station, their failure to take precautionary measures specific to a CBRNE attack caused the unnecessary contamination of hundreds of first responders themselves as well as innocent bystanders. Hospitals became a primary decontamination area by default, putting emergency room doctors and other hospital workers and patients also at risk for contamination.

Recognizing these challenges, in 1995 the U.S. Department of Energy embarked on the research and development of an Autonomous Pathogen Detection System (APDS), the purpose of which is to pre-position detection devices in high-threat environments, increasing the situational awareness of first responders and emergency managers dealing with a CBRNE incident.

### *PROTECTing the Responders – The First Priority*

Sandia National Laboratories initiated testing, in 2000, of an APDS specifically designed to meet the need of U.S. subway systems by simultaneously detecting a number of chemicals, viruses, and toxins. Meanwhile, the Program for Response Operations and Technology Enhancements for Chemical/Biological Terrorism (PROTECT) was being piloted by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). In 2003, after three years of testing, PROTECT



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became a permanent program at WMATA, and now operates in over a dozen high-volume stations along the Authority's Metro system.

An important responsibility of an emergency manager is to protect the safety and health of first responders. Increasing the emergency managers' ability to make informed decisions in the face of a CBRNE attack not only has a critical impact on the first responders' ability to save the lives of attack victims, but also protects them from personally becoming victims. The success of the PROTECT program has the potential to become a mainstay in the homeland security programs of other major metropolitan cities. The APDS technology is now well established, and in wide use by the Department of Defense. The PROTECT program, on the other hand, because of its relative infancy and much higher cost, faces considerable barriers before national implementation would be possible.

The fact is that, as in many other homeland security initiatives, federal funding does not match the realistic cost of capability implementation. Nor can these high technology programs be paid for from the subway operators' general funds. A key theme of the DHS (Department of Homeland Security) UASI (Urban Area Security Initiative) and Transit Security Grant programs focuses on the protection of critical infrastructure, including the nation's subway systems. Ninety-six percent of the Transportation Security Administration's Tier I funds awarded to the National Capital Region, and seventy-one percent of the funds awarded to the New York Region, were allocated to infrastructure protection projects. Those projects served as pilot programs for the rollout of many critical technology solutions – and the subway systems of both cities, according to DHS, are at the highest risk of a CBRNE attack. Associations and subway operators are continuing to lobby DHS for additional funding in this area, hoping to expand the PROTECT system beyond Washington, New York, and Boston. It is clear that operators see the benefit in such a system, and understand that the only way to procure the technology is through federal grants.

Subway operators are hopeful that, after the PROTECT program becomes standardized in its technology and implementation requirements, it will be expanded to other major metropolitan cities. At present, however – almost 15 years after the Tokyo Sarin attack, and 11 years since the inception of PROTECT – operators are increasingly anxious to know DHS's intentions for a national rollout. At present they can only hope, though, that after that happens there will be not only clear guidance provided but also the development of the technology standards required and an infusion of follow-on grant funds.

In the competitive grant environment that DHS facilitates, emergency managers, first responders, and subway patrons alike are hopeful that the department's risk-based awards are increased, and the PROTECT system be allowed to proliferate in major cities around the nation.



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## **Repairing the Cracked lens: Redefining British Muslim Identity in Conservative Britain**

by **Abdul Haqq Baker**

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The recent landmark election results in 2010 witnessed the end of an era for Labour under Gordon Brown and the herald of a new political landscape with the Coalition government of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The challenges for the new coalition are no less daunting than they were under the former government. The need to examine aspects of British identity from political and cultural perspectives has never been more poignant, especially in the face of continuing threats from domestic and international extremism – both far right and religious. The defeat of the BNP in Dagenham last year, resulting in all of its twelve councilors failing to be reelected can be considered a positive outcome for British politics so far as right wing extremism is concerned. The increase in Muslim MPs is also considered by many as another positive for British politics. While these apparent achievements may reflect the more appealing façade of the political climate, a redefining of who and what represents Muslim identity in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain is necessary in view of the increasing misunderstanding and rictus gap between wider non-Muslim society and Muslim communities.

### **A question of legitimacy: Who can and should speak on behalf of British Muslims?**

It can be argued that the very question of legitimacy is what underscored part of the Liberal Democrats' reasoning to align themselves with the Conservatives and form a coalition government. Labour was no longer considered a legitimate representative for this country's government in view of the losses inflicted upon them in the recent election. Brown was an unelected Prime Minister assuming the mantle of Tony Blair. The transfer of leadership was on the basis of Labour parliamentary protocol and while it may be argued that the Conservatives did not win unanimously, Labour lost unequivocally.

Legitimacy should also be the yard stick to measure those claiming to represent sections of British society. The BNP were resigned to defeat in east London as a racist, bigoted party, unrepresentative of the vast majority they claimed to represent. They placed emphasis on anti-Muslim sentiment in order to garner support from various communities, religious and irreligious, on the premise of creating resentment and fear of the 'alien other.' To some degree they have succeeded in attracting support from communities that were previously considered antithetical to their manifesto and objectives. For example, a few members from Black and Ethnic Minority



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(BME) communities now bolster the BNP's 'anti-Muslim' support. Claims of legitimacy are not confined to these groups alone; Muslim led organisations have emerged post 9/11 and 7/7 with claims of representing the 'silent majority' of Muslims etc. However, a closer look at the lens through which these groups claim self-legitimacy will reveal the cracks and inconsistencies that tends to permeate their often polemical positions which in themselves are unrepresentative of the very communities they allege to represent.

Indeed, the failure to examine and challenge the legitimacy of self-publicised stories or claims can be damaging to some of the communities from where these individuals or groups first emerge. In fact, such negligence in ascertaining the legitimacy of claims for the moral high ground have led to a proliferation of personalities either claiming a return from extremism, a return within the fold of democratic society as 'prodigal sons' or as experts in the field of counter-radicalisation and extremism. Prior to the emergence of an extensive budget for the previous government's Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Fund many of these voices were largely non-existent. Much criticism has been leveled against the PVE Funding; indeed, to a certain degree it is valid, especially insofar as it relates to the ineffectiveness of some organisations that received funding. The author of this account has himself been criticised for an altogether different reason; namely, that being a so-called 'non-violent radical' is part of the problem and not the solution. A direct response to such criticism can be in regard to the issue of legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness in tackling violent extremism at grassroots – are the entities involved succeeding or not? Another response to such criticism is the simple observation on the additional but important factor relating to consistency - such entities have been consistent over the past 15-20 years combating violent extremist propaganda. There have been no rudimentary shifts in either ideology or methodology unlike more recently established organisations whose founders have completely metamorphosed into more societally palatable groups in order to join the ever evolving counter-radicalisation arena. Is there anything to determine whether further transformations will occur in the future to accord with changing government policies and if so, what shape will they take? The chameleon-like characteristic of adapting to new environments and circumstances in order to fit either public or government perceptions or agendas should be a warning sign to policy makers and practitioners alike, particularly in the latter's race to provide 'quick-fix' solutions to counter violent radicalisation and terrorism among British Muslims today. The tendency to '*stir up anti-Muslim sentiment in an attempt to confer self-legitimacy*' [1] should be another clear indicator to err on the side of caution when attempting to identify credible voices or partners among Muslim communities.

## **Shared beliefs, shared values and social conservatism**



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The socially conservative practices of some Muslims are increasingly being regarded as anti-social and a precursor to violent radicalisation. Yet many of these values held by such Muslims are akin to those of our parents and grandparents in 1940s-50s Britain. In fact, the values and beliefs held are not too dissimilar from those of the other Asiatic religions - Judaism and Christianity - yet there is no current discourse available which accuses these faiths of anti-socialism or violent – radicalism.

Indeed, there are many adherents to various aspects of social conservatism from different walks of life in the UK today and they are not marginalised for aspects of their beliefs or values that do not concur entirely with society. Indeed, they possess beliefs and values that accord more with traditional societal beliefs than those at odds with it. This is the same with the vast majority of Muslims. Many socially conservative Muslims have accepted a religious pluralism in Britain where they do not seek to impose their beliefs on others and, at the same time, not have some societal values – that have changed with the passage of time – imposed upon them as a requirement to prove their Britishness. Until now, the issue of religious social conservatism has been largely a one sided affair, dominated by the usual suspects who are the most vocal in seeking to define Muslim identity in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. There is a need to redress this imbalance.

## **Bridging existing areas of dissonance between Muslim communities and the wider majority society**

British Muslim converts have an even more important role to play today in society in view of their dual identities. Their voices have, on the whole, been muted in part due to more vocal representations by the larger, predominant South Asian Muslim populace in Britain. While this is unsurprising due to the multifarious and complex social dimensions of this largely progressive section of Muslims, their representation of almost everything that is supposed to reflect Muslim ‘Britishness’ should now be reexamined in view of the existence and growing influence of British converts to Islam. Roald raises the following question when examining the impact of converts in a Scandinavian context:

How important is the role of new Muslims as intermediaries between Muslim communities and Scandinavian society? Is the particular position of new Muslims who have ‘one foot in each culture’ beneficial for a fruitful dialogue between the two cultures?

Muslim converts traverse all spheres of British society and yet their voices are seldom heard against the backdrop of socio-economic, political and religious issues that by and large relate to the predominant South Asian (and of late, increasingly Somali) culture.



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Converts may have greater empathy with non-Muslims because of their non-Muslim past and ongoing relationships with their family of origin. They often have a heightened awareness, compared to other Muslims, of how Muslims are viewed by outsiders, so there can be a strongly reflexive element to their discourse.

Without ignoring or marginalising the overwhelmingly positive contributions of these more predominant communities, British converts can play an invaluable role as conduits or bridge-builders between the wider non-Muslim society and the more culturally orientated Muslim communities. To varying degrees, some converts are already playing such roles, however not on the scale of their European counterparts:

New Muslims function on various levels in society and...[those] who have a role as intermediary between Muslim immigrant communities and wider Scandinavian society are mostly highly educated. As academics they have the ability to promote a balanced view of Islam and Muslims that might be accepted by majority society. They also tend...to distinguish between 'ideal Islam' and 'Muslim practice'...By this, non-Muslims might more easily understand the complexity and the problematic issues of Muslim communities in Western society.

The importance of converts' potential contribution between wider society and Muslim communities can no longer be ignored when considering the challenges of far right and religious extremism in society today.

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*This was originally published on the 14/03/11 at <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/opinionpieces/opinionpieces/files/repairing-the-cracked-lens.html>*

## Notes:

[1] Bjorgo, T & Horgan, J: 'Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and collective disengagement,' Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009, p.19  
Ibid, citing Zubeck, P. 'Cadets' guest speaker will focus on Christianity', Colorado Springs Gazette.

[2] Roald, A. S: 'New Muslims in the European context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts', Brill, 2004, p. 289

[3] Zebiri, K: 'British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives', Oneworld, Oxford, 2008, p.39

[4] Roald, A. S: 'New Muslims in the European context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts', Brill, 2004, p. 295



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## What do ‘middle class’ terrorists tell us about the link between poverty and terrorism?

by Joel Busher

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Introduced in 2006, the Prevent workstream of the UK’s counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) has provided a focus for often heated debates about what drives people to support or take part in violent extremism and terrorism in the UK. Six months after the new Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition government announced an extensive review of Prevent, David Cameron used his speech to the Munich Security Conference 2011 [1] to set out his position in relation to these debates. He distanced himself from what he referred to as the ‘hard right’ and the ‘soft left’. He criticised the ‘hard right’ for their failure to distinguish between Islam and Islamic extremism. He then criticised the ‘soft left’ who, he claimed,

compil[e] a list of grievances and argue that if only governments addressed these grievances, the terrorism would stop. So they point to poverty that so many Muslims live in and say, ‘get rid of this injustice and the terrorism will end’. *But this ignores the fact that many of those found guilty of terrorism in the west and elsewhere have been graduates and often middle class.* [2]

I do not intend to comment here on the position that Cameron outlined in his speech. I don’t propose to argue that there is a link between poverty and terrorism [3], or that we should not be interested in the fact that many of those convicted of terrorism offences are university educated and middle class. [4] Instead, I focus on the argument that Cameron made use of in this excerpt from his speech. I want to point out why such comments about ‘middle class’ terrorists tell us little about the lack of links between poverty and terrorism, and rather more about the ongoing problems we face with the way evidence is marshalled to support competing grand narratives about the ‘roots’ and ‘origins’ of extremism and terrorism.

The argument Cameron makes is that, since a considerable proportion of people arrested under terrorism laws in Western countries are well educated and not from poor backgrounds, it cannot be claimed that poverty is one of the main factors that push people towards extremism and terrorism. This is not a new argument. It has been raised by Laqueur [5] and was mentioned in discussion several times during a recent government-run review of the evidence linking various social, psychological, political and economic factors to an increased risk of participation in





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terrorism [6]. The main problem with this argument is that it knocks down a straw man. It attacks only the crude proposition that there is a *correlation* between being poor and participation in terrorism – that poor people are more likely to become terrorists than more wealthy people (presumably because they are angry or frustrated by their relative lack of wealth). Yet this is certainly not the most credible argument linking poverty to extremism and terrorism. Indeed, such an argument would be a relic from the increasingly outdated practices of trying to produce terrorist profiles or enumerate the factors that most accurately predict who is likely to support or take part in terrorism [7].

Any relationship between poverty and terrorism is likely to be far more complicated [8]. It is plausible for example that when it can be claimed that poverty is concentrated within a particular population, this can give credence to narratives of systemic injustice, which in turn might be used to legitimise political violence by some of the people who identify with or claim to represent that population [9]. The existence of highly educated and middle class terrorists would have no bearing on such an argument because in this argument poverty is not conceived of as a measurable category to which individuals can be objectively allocated and which then impacts on that individual. Instead, poverty is understood as a ‘social status’ [10] that is of symbolic value because it has the potential to connote injustice and provide a grievance around which to construct a shared identity and mobilise support. Based on this understanding of the relationship between poverty and terrorism, the relevant question would not be whether a person has grown up in a ‘poor’ household, but whether they identify with populations that they perceive to be disproportionately affected by poverty.

It seems then that the existence of ‘middle class terrorists’ tells us nothing about *whether or not* poverty contributes to extremism and terrorism, although it might tell us something about *how* it does (or does not). The persistence of the ‘middle class terrorists’ argument does however provide a worrying example of the way that information about terrorists and terrorist organisations is sometimes converted into evidence and used to support or discredit arguments about how we should respond to extremism and terrorism. In the last few years there have been growing calls within terrorism studies to shift the discourse away from ‘root causes’ of why people become terrorists [11]. This is because the evidence that we have highlights the complexity and heterogeneity of the causal mechanisms in operation, with different factors becoming salient among different groups of people for different reasons at different times. However, as Cameron’s speech well illustrates, there is still considerable political capital to be gained from talking about and setting out plans to address the ‘roots’ and ‘origins’ of extremism and terrorism. Unfortunately, such endeavours and the pressure that they create to convert



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information into evidence risk undermining efforts to achieve genuinely evidence based counter-terrorist strategies.

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*This was originally published on the 07/04/11 at <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/opinionpieces/opinionpieces/files/busher-what-do-middle.html>*

## Notes:

[1] 5<sup>th</sup> February 2011

[2] My emphasis

[3] Several authors have expressed doubts about a direct link between poverty and terrorism. See Krueger, A. and Malečková, J., (2003) 'Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?' *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, (17:4) pp. 119-144; Schmid, A.P. (2004) 'Statistics on Terrorism: The Challenge of Measuring Trends in Global Terrorism', *Forum on Crime and Society*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (4:1) pp. 65-6

[4] This might for example tell us something about the intersection between terrorist organisations and class identities, or about claims that extremist or terrorist organisations seek to recruit in universities.

[5] Laqueur, W. (2004) *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (Continuum) London.

[6] The Counter Radicalisation Policy Intervention Assessment (CoRPIA), delivered by the Defence Science Technology Laboratory

[7] Horgan, J. (2008) 'From Profiles to *Pathways* and Roots to *Routes*: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism,' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (618: 1) pp. 80-94

[8] Gurr, T. (2005) 'Economic Factors,' in *Addressing the Causes of Terrorism*, Club de Madrid <http://www.safe-democracy.org/docs/CdM-Series-on-Terrorism-Vol-1.pdf>. Accessed 11/2/2011

[9] Krueger, A. and Malečková, J., *op. cit*

[10] Sahlins, M (1974) *Stone Age Economics* (Tavistock Publications) London

[11] See for example Horgan, *op. cit.*; Silke, A (2004) 'The Road Less Travelled: Recent Trends in Terrorism Research,' in *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements, and Failures*, ed. Andrew Silke (Frank Cass) London, pp.186-213



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## **Revolts in the Arab world: is it bad news for Islamic terrorists?**

**by Eugenio Lilli**

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Everything started when a young man set himself on fire in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. Mohamed Bouazizi, this was his name, was selling fruit and vegetables on the street without a license. After a policewoman stopped him and confiscated his cart and produce, he felt so angry and desperate that he took that drastic decision. It was December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Since then a long series of demonstrations, riots and revolts have quickly and unabatedly spread from Tunisia throughout the Arab world. Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Oman and Bahrain, among others, were all affected in one way or another by these events. Tunisia's President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted and Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak experienced the same fate.

Should the West be worried that the events currently unfolding in the region will jeopardize its global effort in fighting international Islamic terrorism?

The common argument is that the chaos created by these revolutions will play into the hands of fundamentalist Islamic groups, who will seize the opportunity to fill the resulting power vacuum. This fear has been fuelled for decades by authoritarian regimes in order to obtain support from the West, and above all from the United States, to prolong their iron-fist rule. Recently, former Egyptian President Mubarak complained during an interview that he was fed up of ruling Egypt, "but if I resign now, there will be chaos. And I'm afraid the Muslim Brotherhood will take over". His counterpart in Libya, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, warned that "It is obvious now that this issue is run by al Qaeda" and that the protesters are young people who are being manipulated by al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden. The intended audience of these statements is clearly not the Arab masses but rather the Western governments.

There are several reasons why the grim scenarios foreseen by Arab dictators and some of their Western supporters will not be likely to materialize. First of all, jihadist violent rhetoric has not ranked, so far, as one of the main reasons that brought so many people into the streets. Poverty, economic inequality, unemployment, greater political freedom, oppression and disgust for officials' corruption are all more pressing issues than any fundamentalist religious one. A second young man in Tunisia who killed himself in protest allegedly shouted "no for misery, no for unemployment" before he electrocuted himself. In addition, neither al Qaeda nor any other Islamist terrorist group has played any relevant role during these demonstrations. Osama bin



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Laden has been silent. While the statements issued by his Egyptian deputy, Ayman al-Zawahri, apparently had no significant resonance.

On the contrary, there are promising elements suggesting that these revolts in Arab countries will strike severe blows to terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda. In fact, two critical tenants of the Islamist terrorists' narrative are that change in the Arab world can be only achieved by violent action and that Arab dictators are puppets controlled by the West, namely by the United States.

As far as the first tenant is concerned, the nature and the outcome of these protests have hitherto disavowed such a claim. Most of the demonstrations were peaceful in nature and those which turned violent, and eventually resorted to the use of force, did that mainly in response to governmental crude repression- Libya being a clear example. Although not all the demonstrations have brought substantial political change, to date two succeeded in toppling dictators. In particular, Egyptian protesters through largely peaceful actions achieved in a few weeks the goal of driving Mubarak out of office; a goal that al-Zawahri and other like-minded terrorists could not achieve in decades of bloody and violent jihad.

As for the second tenant, the West, and the United States in particular, is indeed responsible of cutting deals with oppressive and autocratic regimes in the naïve hope of keeping at bay the spread of fundamentalist Islam. However, although slowly and cautiously, some may argue too slowly and too cautiously, the United States eventually took side with the protesters. US President Barack Obama publicly stated in February that he was "deeply concerned by reports of violence in Bahrain, Libya and Yemen", and that "the United States condemns the use of violence by governments against peaceful protesters in those countries and wherever else it may occur". Then, after additional evidence about extremely repressive actions, he also bluntly urged Colonel Gaddafi "to step down" from power. Some public statements of support are certainly not enough to delete years of funding and the propping up of corrupt and cruel dictatorships but they are undoubtedly a first step in the right direction.

Al Qaeda, and Islamic fundamentalists in general, should be extremely worried about another aspect of these revolts. From what we hear and read, protesters are calling for the institution of some form of democracy in their countries. Democracy is bad news for terrorists. Democracy, in fact, offers institutional and peaceful channels to express public grievances, whether these be political, economic or social in nature. A democratic political system, therefore, noticeably reduces the appeal of violent terrorist strategies and markedly dries up the pool of new recruits. Indeed, the necessity of killing someone, or even to kill yourself in the process, in order to achieve a specific goal looks less and less evident.



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Make no mistake, democracy is no panacea. It will not necessarily resolve economic and social problems, thus generating disillusion and frustration likely to lead to new social unrest. Revolutions may be also hijacked by illiberal forces and therefore derailed from their original democratic program. However, democracy in Arab countries is still one of the best weapons to fight the threat of Islamic terrorism. This is why the West should take the lead in helping these recently born-again states to grow prosperous and stable. Although, it is critically important that Western assistance be consistent, whole-hearted and without any hidden strings attached.

*Eugenio Lilli is currently a PhD student at the King's College's War Studies Department. His research focuses on the history of US foreign policy and on the impact of the Obama administration on the US Global War on Terror.*

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## **Gangs and Terrorist: Dangerous Classmates in Minnesota's Somali Community.**

**by Christopher Brown**

US Navy

### *School Bells to Police Sirens*

Morning television programs are suddenly interrupted across the world as pictures of frightened people running panicked through downtown city streets fill the airwaves. In the background, smoke and flames billow from a towering icon of the cityscape. Panic grips the US as security goes on high alert across the nation, bringing a virtual standstill to transportation and commerce. The Commodities Exchange closes during the middle of the day sending shockwaves through the global financial establishment.

Hold the presses. This is not the World Trade Center of New York City on 9/11/01 or 2/26/93 nor is it the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City on 4/19/95. The cameras focus on the former Sears Tower of Chicago in the not too distant future. Al-Queda linked Al-Shabab has attacked the tallest building in the US in the middle of the heartland. More terrifying, the ground work was laid not in the training camps of Sub-Saharan Africa, but the playgrounds of Minneapolis, MN.

### *Somali Gangs Come of Age*

Somali refugees began settling in Minnesota in the early 1990's to escape the turmoil of their native land as the government failed and militants took control. While the community as a whole was welcoming, the inner city schools where the children found themselves were not. Born out of the need for self protection from existing gangs, the Somali teens formed loosely organized gangs beginning in 2000. The Somali gangs eventually turned to criminal activities, beginning with muggings and burglary. Recently, the gangs changed revenue streams to sex trafficking and credit card fraud due to lower risk with a higher profitability. [1] The Somali gangs are driven by monetary gain and show a high adaptability to new opportunities.

### *Term Papers to Terrorism*

While gangs are not uncommon to modern urban America, a more disturbing trend has beset the same community. Beginning in 2007 and continuing through January of 2009 [2] as many as



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two dozen Somali teens have disappeared from the Minneapolis community. [3] Of the missing Minnesotan Somali teens, 5 have been killed [4] in actions including suicide bombings. [5]

NPR's Dina Temple-Raston reports that some of the young men have returned from Somalia. [6] Community leaders say that the youth were disillusioned by what they saw and do not pose a threat. [7] However, their return poses a more disturbing issue than their departure. No one knows how they were able to re-enter the country. Their documentation was confiscated at the training camps. [8]

### *BFF: Bomb-transporting For Funds*

Looked at in a vacuum, the troubles with the Minnesota Somali youth populations raise concern for any local and state government. But across the country on the opposite border, trends are developing that should raise the Minneapolis trouble to the level of National Security Risk.

Mexican drug trafficking organizations maintain the overland routes for drugs and other illicit materials. Although, the Mexican drug traffickers produce little heroin and cocaine, they account for a large share of heroin and an estimated 90% of cocaine transported into and distributed throughout the US. [9] With money as their motivation, drug traffickers have set their sights on an industry worth \$15 to \$20 billion a year in Mexico. [10] Drug traffickers are diversifying into human smuggling. [11]

At the same time the US Customs and Border Patrol has seen a significant increase in the numbers of Other Than Mexicans (OTMs) caught crossing border. In 2001, OTMs numbered only 5,251. [12] By 2006 the number had soared to 108,025 and included individuals from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. [13] Beyond the increasing numbers of prayer rugs and Arabic marked trash, Border Patrol agents found a book titled, "In Memory of Our Martyrs." This treatise celebrates the lives of Islamic suicide bombers and other militants who died carrying out jihadist attacks. [14] The Mexican drug traffickers are demonstrating an affinity for transporting anyone across the border that pays the price irrespective of ideology.

Furthermore, half way across the world, evidence has surfaced of Al-Shabab doing business with Somali Pirates. During a recent interview, Saeed Yare, a Somali pirate from Bosasso stated, "(Pirates) in other towns give cash to Islamist in order to continue their business. Al-Shabab is just another pirate group." [15] Like the Mexican drug traffickers, Al-Shabab does business with anyone who can forward their cause without consideration for ideology.

### *Head of the Class*



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Back on the Minneapolis playground, gang members and jihadists have been classmates and friends for years. No need exists for introductions through seedy business partners and possible federal agents. No discussions take place to establish a tense partnership between two organizations that don't completely trust each other. The gang members and jihadists feel a kinship; both chose a different path to deal with the same disenfranchisement that they feel towards the larger community around them. The fire was lit long ago, the water is already to a boil, if the situation is not handled quickly and carefully, the pressure cooker will explode.

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## **The Peril of Hasty Triumphalism and Osama bin Laden's Death**

by **Eugenio Lilli**

**King's College London**

On May 1, 2011 the headlines of a large number of newspapers and TV channels around the world were saying "justice has been done". Those were the words used by the US President Barack Obama to announce to the world the killing of Osama bin Laden, the number one terrorist on the US most-wanted list.

Exactly eight years earlier, on May 1, 2003, another US President, George W. Bush gave a famous speech declaring the end of major combat operations in Iraq. President Bush delivered the speech on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln under a banner titled "Mission Accomplished".

Hasty triumphalism turned out to be profoundly misleading in the case of Iraq. It may be wise not to make the same mistake regarding the fight against international terrorism in general, and against Al-Qaeda in particular.

The killing of the Arab Sheik Osama bin Laden obviously represents an extremely important achievement in the global effort against international terrorism. First and foremost, it puts an end to one of the major criticisms to the US military intervention in Afghanistan. "Osama bin Laden was why the United States went to war in Afghanistan" correctly writes the Washington Post[1]. The disturbing fact that bin Laden was still free and alive would have prevented the United States to consider the Afghan War a complete success, no matter the possible significant results in other areas, such as, for example, the democratic stabilization of the country. Secondly, the death of the leader of the terrorist organization responsible for the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks bears with it a certain sense of justice and retribution for those directly or indirectly affected by such attacks.

Osama's demise may also result in a morale boost for the United States. A positive shake after a decade during which the conflict in Afghanistan has dragged on and on without substantial improvements. In addition, it generates a widespread sense of unity at a time of harsh partisan division within US politics. As reported by The New York Times, the US administration "drew praise from unlikely quarters", even from Republicans such as former Vice President Dick Cheney, New York's former Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, and a likely challenger for the 2012

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presidential election Donald J. Trump[2]. As far as electoral politics are concerned, the killing of the Arab Sheik represents a great accomplishment for President Obama. And although it will not make disappear other, mostly economic, challenges lying ahead, it will probably increase Obama's chances of re-election for a second term next year.

However, there are several reasons to be skeptical about the far-reaching effects of Osama's death on the global effort against international terrorism. As pointed out by several studies[3], Al Qaeda has developed into a loose and decentralized network of independent cells, with no clear hierarchical chain of command. After 9/11 bin Laden, in fact, has mostly been acting as a source of inspiration for other terrorists, which have been independently planning and carrying out their plots, as it apparently was the case in the March 11<sup>th</sup> 2003 attacks in Madrid. Therefore, cutting the head of an organization which has no head may have little or no significant effects on the ability of such organization to strike again in the future.

Moreover, the killing of Osama bin Laden may have the unintended consequence of making him a martyr and to increase the appeal of his figure and his message. According to the Al Qassam website, which is closely associated with the Islamic movement Hamas, Ismail Haniya, the Palestinian Prime Minister of the Gaza government, strongly condemned Osama's assassination and mourned him as an Arab holy warrior[4]. A better solution would have probably been to capture the Sheik, give him a fair trial and imprison him for crimes he had already claimed to be responsible for. That would have depicted Bin Laden as a criminal and not as a martyr.

Finally, by eliminating Osama bin Laden the United States addressed only one, although highly important, *symptom* of international terrorism. In fighting terrorism the distinction between symptoms and underlying causes is critical. Experts generally agree that both elements of the terrorist threat should be dealt with[5]. Individual terrorists, terrorist organizations, sponsor states and host states are all examples of symptoms of terrorism. The underlying causes, instead, could be defined as the reasons why people make the decision to turn to the strategy of terrorism. A policy of counter-terrorism strictly focused on the cure of the symptoms may be effective in the short term but not in the long one. Indeed, if the underlying causes are dismissed the terrorist threat would be stopped until a new generation of terrorists will start to fight for the same reasons. A more effective response, therefore, should deal also with such underlying causes, as for example with the enabling environment from which the terrorists draw support and recruit new members.

All that considered, President Obama's satisfaction in announcing the death of Osama bin Laden and the subsequent joyous and relieved response of the American people is both understandable



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and legitimate. However, as in the past, hasty triumphalism could prove deceptive, in so far as it could lead the United States to believe that the global effort against international terrorism is close to an end.

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*This was originally published on the 13/05/11 at <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/opinionpieces/opinionpieces/files/lilli-the-peril-of-hasty.html>*

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## Book Reviews

Donald Liddick. *Eco-Terrorism: Radical Environmental and Animal Liberation Movements*. Westport, Connecticut, Praeger Publishers, 2006. Hardcover \$39.95, pp. 300. ISBN-13: 978-0-27598-535-6 Reviewed by Michael Loadenthal, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., US

Since the “eco-terrorism” movement was first identified by the United States government as presenting the ‘number one domestic security threat,’ a number of books and academic articles seeking to address the issue have emerged. Generally these scholarly pieces of work have tended to examine these movements through only their most extreme manifestations (e.g. bomb attacks, large scale arsons), failing to contextualize such incidents within a larger political praxis. Though ample literature discussing the movement’s ideological development, historical roots and tactical overview exist, Donald Liddick’s 2006 book, *Eco-Terrorism: Radical Environmental and Animal Liberation Movements*, is one of the lone examples which aims to develop an *incident-based* picture of the movement. Liddick’s book is broken down into seven distinct units, and while all deserve unique attention, Chapter 6 “Structure and Modus Operandi of Radical Movements,” presents the widest breadth of new contributions to the field.

In this chapter, Liddick utilizes a methodology which aims to describe the larger “eco-terrorist” movement via an incident-based analysis focused on tactics, geographic distribution and group claim. This approach is commendable as previous studies have supplemented such a measured analysis with broad strokes bordering on sensationalism and alarmist rhetoric. The problem present in Liddick’s study, however, is that the author’s dataset is small to the point of limitation, and additionally, his categorical taxonomy is exceedingly inclusive. Liddick’s methodology leads to the determination that “the vast majority of [“eco-terrorist”] crimes...are not properly classified as terrorism” (p. 74). Though Liddick’s findings are not contested, the limitations to this finding require further interrogation.

First, the Liddick dataset contains only 2,836 incidents occurring between 1956 and 2005, amounting to nearly 58 incidents per year. This sampling is exceedingly limiting, when for example, a single group like the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) can claim up to five hundred attacks in a single year. As Liddick’s study includes data from the ALF as well as over 100 additional groups, one is forced to inquire why his annual samples are so small. Liddick’s book reports that the larger “eco-terrorist” movement produces thousands of attacks, yet when those attacks are tallied, the numbers consistently show a propensity for the overrepresentation of the



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dramatic (e.g. assault, explosives), and a wholesale disregarding of the mundane (e.g. vandalism, sabotage). This patterning begs the question: if this movement is responsible for such a large scale of attacks, why is the study's dataset based on such a selective pool?

The Liddick dataset is based on "the most readily accessible online sources...[and] Ron Arnold's 1997 book *Ecoterror*" (p. 72), and although the author states that the dataset is not "exhaustive," a tacit acknowledgment of this oversight does not equate to a more accurate movement portrayal. Liddick makes it clear that the dataset represents "only a fraction of all animal liberation and radical environmental actions," but fails to explain why such a selective pool is chosen beyond convenience (p. 73).

Not only is Liddick's sample small, containing for example, six UK incidents per year, he also fails to separate clandestine, cell-based activities from that of public militant protest and civil disobedience. For example, included in the tactical scope of Liddick's study is "protesting without a permit," "hanging banners," and "staging demonstrations at private homes," activities which are prevalent but typically excluded from such discussions, as such actions are effectively carried out by identifiably public groups such as Greenpeace, and in the case of home demonstrations, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC). Because these tactics are employed by membership-based groups, and not ALF-modeled, clandestine cell networks, to include their activities in a combined discussion incorrectly represents distinct tendencies as a singular movement. This mixing of the illegal and legal, clandestine and publicly disruptive, creates a conflation between groups such as the ALF which explicitly do not engage in public events, and those of Greenpeace which engage in disruptive civil disobedience and occasional sabotage. Traditionally, groups such as Greenpeace are excluded from discussions of "eco-terrorism" due to divergent strategy, tactical constraints and the nature of group membership. Liddick's study attempts to utilize an extremely limited dataset to draw conclusions applicable to diverse strands of the political spectrum that share only a basic motivational base, yet are radically separate in terms of means and goals.

Liddick's incident-based analysis and quantitative research makes numerous important contributions to the literature of "eco-terrorism", although it is disappointing in the scope and scale of its inquiry. He also offers a unique and extensive movement history focusing on ideological development and group splintering (Chapters 2-5), as well as ethnographic profiles of individual activists (Chapter 7), that are of value to both academics and practitioners. However, while Liddick's quantitative research portions represent an attempt to correct the methodological gaps in the wider field's production of academic literature, much of the book serves as a retelling



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of the oft-cited history of ideological formulation, movement factionalization and future predictions.

*This review was originally published on the 13/01/11 at [http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/bookreviews/files/liddick\\_ecoterrorism.html](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/bookreviews/files/liddick_ecoterrorism.html)*



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Graham Fuller. *A World Without Islam*. London: Little, Brown and Company, 2010. Paperback £13.99; pp. 336. ISBN-13: 978-0316041195, Reviewed by Gilbert Ramsay, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, UK

Is Islam inherently in conflict with democracy, with liberalism, with ‘the West’? Or is Islam just a façade for the real issues that are at stake? This question has been asked and answered so many times in the past twenty years or so (usually in favour of the latter view) that authors now have to work ever harder for new angles on the subject. In *A World Without Islam*, Graham Fuller takes the big question to its logical conclusion. What if Islam had never existed at all?

The idea is, if nothing else, provocative. Interesting counterfactuals abound in Middle Eastern history. Islam took over a Late Roman Levant which was already theologically at odds with Constantinople. Does that mean that government agencies might today be warning of the prospect of suicide attacks by radical ‘home grown’ Syriac Orthodox? Had Genghis Khan converted to Nestorian Christianity (as it was rumoured he might), and thus evaded assimilation by conversion, would we now be told that the Mongol inheritance of Middle Eastern countries predisposed them to tribalism and violence?

Fuller acknowledges such possibilities. But – perhaps a bit deceptively – this isn’t really a book of alternative history. This may be for the best. Such thought experiments make for fun essays, but it seems questionable that the exercise could offer the basis for a whole book. The problem, however, is that Fuller also fails really to seize on the important questions that his speculation might raise. Instead what we get is wishy-washy history and bland apologetic.

Fuller’s intentions are interesting. He perceives the chance to creatively reappraise the history of the region by starting with everything left once Islam itself is subtracted. Is the contemporary relationship of Western countries with the Middle East really the legacy of ancient, pre-Islamic history? Or is this invented tradition which merely clothes geopolitical interest? Or are the enduring geo-strategic situations of the Middle East and Europe products of some fundamental engine of history which has, in turn, become written into culture? These are questions which have provoked some of the greatest minds on both sides of the putative divide right back to Ibn Khaldun and even (perhaps in itself evidence for Fuller’s case), Herodotus. Moreover, simply asking them challenges us to think about what it really means to be anti-essentialist. Is it actually determinism by ‘Islam’ which we are concerned about, or is it ‘Islamic culture’ (an argument whose circularity Roy has usefully drawn attention to).[1]

Unfortunately, Fuller seems almost afraid of exploring the big ideas his premise invokes. Instead of the bold argument we are promised, what we mostly get is narrative history - of a rather

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sweeping, opinionated kind. For example, we learn on page 80 that Sixth century Syrian resentment of Byzantium had everything, apparently, to do with long-term cultural hatreds, and nothing to do with more immediate factors (such as brutal, draining wars with the neighbouring Sassanian Persian Empire). Indeed, a few lines later (p. 81), we are told about the third century warrior queen Zenobia's hostility to Rome that 'tellingly, she was descended from nobility in Carthage - another city that famously nurtured historical hatred of its chief Mediterranean rival, Rome'. Firstly, there is no evidence that Zenobia was really of Carthaginian ancestry. She liked to claim descent from the mythical queen Dido, but this says more about her *contemporary* rivalry with Rome (framed, incidentally, in terms of *Roman* mythology) than any real feelings of cultural animosity. Secondly, for what it is worth, Carthage (a completely new city, built on the site of Rome's one time rival, which had been razed to the ground), had at this time been a loyal Roman city and capital of the imperial province of Africa for four hundred years. It is perhaps this casual attitude to the telescoping of history and the reifying of retrospectively invented tradition which leads Fuller to subtitle a chapter on Russia's present day relations with its Muslim minorities 'Byzantium lives!'

Whether substituting cultural determinism for theological determinism is really much of a step forward is, of course, moot. After all, Western popular culture seems perfectly capable of dreaming up the same negative orientalist stereotypes for pre-Islamic periods as for post-Islamic ones. But having set off down this road, one might at least expect some interesting scenery on the way. Unfortunately, Fuller goes on to miss many of the more interesting points that this line of argument might suggest. He is eager to point out that Islam shares many similarities with Christianity and Judaism. No one denies it. But such is his reverence for orthodox Muslim accounts of Islamic history that he largely bypasses a whole school of important, if controversial, revisionism which might, at the least have added some zest to his case. According to this, Islam did not spring fully formed from the revelations and deeds of its prophet, but rather in a process of accretion, taking place over roughly two centuries, in which an elite of Arab conquerors gradually combined elements of Christianity and Judaism, together with a miscellany of their own oracular heritage, to produce a partially retrofitted tradition which, expediently, helped guard against cultural assimilation into the conquered. If so, the very origins of Islam might be said to have their roots in the underlying political culture of the Middle East, rather than vice versa. Fuller is happy to note similarities between some strands of late antique Christian thought and Islam. But he prefers to use this as a jumping off point for lambasting the small mindedness of those who would fight over mere details in religion. This might be useful rhetoric, but it seems like poor argumentation. After all, even the most dyed in the wool essentialist would hardly deny the *similarities* between monotheistic religions. The question is where the *differences* come from, and whether they actually matter.



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Indeed, for a book with such an imaginative premise, the fundamental flaw in this work is lack of imagination. Ironically, given his liberal vision, Fuller seems so wrapped up in his own world view that he cannot even countenance the possibility that there could be any truth to the position against which he is arguing. As a result, he seems not to see the need to actually make his case. For instance, he flatly asserts on numerous occasions that where religion seems to be a source of unpleasantness, it is inevitably the result of political interference. ‘It is really the *cultural glue of theology* - any theology - that sustains a community on an ethnic and religious basis’, he tells us. ‘The religion can be Judaism, Christianity or Islam; it doesn’t really matter’ (p. 37). True religion is all about ‘personal life, philosophy and conduct’ (p.38). If it gets nasty, then it must be ‘the exploitation of religion for secular ends’. (p.12). Without the state, theological decisions would merely be about ‘obscure proceedings of theologians sitting solemnly in council’ (p.48) and, in any case, these wouldn’t matter very much as ‘heresy gets a bad rap’, but is actually ‘in the eye of the beholder’ (p.38). Fair enough. But Fuller offers no explanation for why things must be this way round (though much later he nods to the issue as a ‘chicken and egg problem’- p. 62). Nor does he recognise any possible objection. After all, if the specificities of religion matter so little, if politics always trumps it, then why did the Roman emperor Diocletian’s attempt to impose an official version of paganism fail, while his successor, Constantine, was able to establish an already unstoppable looking tide of Christianity as the state religion of the empire? For scholars like Rodney Stark monotheistic religions like Christianity have built-in sociological characteristics which help to ensure their viral success.[2] Fuller barely even recognises that such views exist.

By parts two and three of the book, Fuller has – it seems – more or less abandoned the entire project. In presenting sweeping chapters on the status of Muslims in rival Huntingtonian ‘civilisations’ of Russia, India, China and the West and on Islam’s troubled encounter with modernity, Fuller offers a decent synthesis, but very little that is original. The bold imaginary of a ‘world without Islam’ has decayed to yet another well-meaning refutation of essentialist claims about Islam. What would the world be like without this book? Not much different, one has to assume.

*This review was originally published on the 13/01/11 at [http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/bookreviews/files/fuller\\_aworldwithoutislam.html](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/bookreviews/files/fuller_aworldwithoutislam.html)*

## Notes

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[2] R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997



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John Calvert. *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. vii+377, (Hardback). ISBN978-0-231-70104-4, Reviewed by Mohamed Daadaoui, Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma City, O.K., US

John Calvert's *Sayyid Qutb and The Origins of Radical Islamism* is an ambitious investigation into the life and thoughts of Sayyid Qutb at a distance from al-Qaedaism and similar radical Islamism. The book is a contextualized approach to the life and thought of Sayyid Qutb, which seeks to go beyond points of similarity between Qutb's fiery and uncompromising ideas and contemporary militant violent Islamism. For Calvert, Qutb's Islamism is a function of the post-independence Egypt caught between crises of modernization and subsequent authoritarian regime. Calvert's biographical book is chronologically organized to mirror the trajectory of Qutb's ideas and views of the state and society from early rural upbringing to his eventual execution at the hands of Nasser's state in 1966.

British occupation of Egypt would serve as one of the main points of contest in Qutb's early discourse and foment his early nationalist zeal. In this period, Calvert weaves a seamless intellectual mosaic of Qutb's thought from the early years in *Dar al 'Ulum*, where he studied teaching and education methods to his later revolutionary Islamist discourse most exemplified in his treatise *Milestones*. Qutb's early literary aspirations spawned of his close association with Egyptian literary stalwart 'Abbas Mahmud al- 'Aqqad. In this period, Qutb seemed less radical and more conciliatory, for instance, in his argument for a limited role for religion in the arts (pp. 72-73) and for his literary muses with romantic poetry and criticism of neoclassic poets.

The end of WWII period saw Qutb's early creative and aesthetic analyses of the Qur'an, which will later provide the basis for his seminal commentary on the Qur'an, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*. Qutb's literary approach to Qur'anic studies is less preoccupied with semantics and grammar and more with the hidden artistic qualities of "rhythm, the sound of words, and the symmetry of images" in the holy book (p.113). This approach reawakened Qutb's inner Islamist long perched beneath the modern Cairene *Effendi* look.

Faithful to his contextualized approach, Calvert points out to two main factors that contributed to the early radicalization of dissident *effendis* like Qutb. First the general post-WWII self-determination/anti-colonial movement, and the growing Zionist project in Palestine, which will become the cause célèbre for generations of Arab nationalists and Islamists alike (pp.116-117). Qutb viewed western colonialism as the source of all socio-economic ills and cultural corruption of Muslims societies. Themes that Qutb punctuate in his *Social Justice in Islam's* sharp call for Muslim reform and a return to a pre-modern Islamic concept of justice to restore balanced order



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in society away from western manifestations of materialism and decadence. Qutb's anti-western views will find their affirmation during his "American Sojourn."

Studying education methods in Greeley, Colorado in 1948, Qutb's lamented the social inertia, decay and sexual permissiveness in US society. A man of dark complexions, Qutb was particularly critical of racial segregation at the height of "Jim Crow" laws in the US (pp. 148-149). His cultural and ethical rebuke of the US amounts to what Calvert, through Syrian cultural critic Sadiq al-'Azm terms as "Orientalism in Reverse," which is the tendency of Easterners to "validate the Self in relation to the Other in the modern period" (p.153).

Upon his return to Egypt in the early 1950s, Qutb wrote his commentary on the Qur'an (In The Shade of the Qur'an) in 1954, two years after the Free Officers Movement coup d'état against King Farouk. Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1953 and endorsing and working with the Free Officers during the early post-putsch days. However, as Nasser moved to exact his authoritarian control of Egypt, Nasser would view the Muslim Brotherhood as subversive agents. Consequently, the Muslim Brotherhood was banned and Qutb imprisoned after a botched assassination attempt against Nasser.

In jail, Qutb becomes more radicalized in his discourse vis-à-vis the police state of Nasser. During this period, Qutb authored several books that culminated in his *Milestones* in 1964, in which he condemned Jahili societies, a reference to the pre-Islamic age of "ignorance," and modern Muslim societies, that which have subverted God's sovereignty to a man-made form of governance. Qutb advocated a return to the contentions concept of Jihad as a struggle against Islam's enemies, including the Egyptian state.

Such views will serve as a template for later generations of radical Islamists, and would seal Qutb's fate as Nasser's regime moved to quell the subversive effect of Qutb's ideas under trumped up charges of complicity with anti-government forces. Despite offers of clemency in exchange for Qutb's admission of guilt, he steadfastly embraced his fate to the very last minute when he was executed in 1966. Qutb's "Martyrdom" will serve as rallying force for generations of radical *takfirist* Islamists that took advantage of Qutb's *Jahiliyya* concept to "excommunicate" millions of Muslims and launch a global terror campaign.

Calvert's book is judicious as he painstakingly sketches out a portrait of the making of a revolutionary Islamist. As Calvert shows, Qutb's intellectual progression is gradual and has to be disaggregated from the common quick association with modern militant and violent Islamism of al-Qaeda et al. The narrative Calvert writes is masterful in its contextualization of Qutb's views as a response to the tumultuous times of post-colonial Egypt and the brutal dictatorship of Nasser.



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Buried in Calvert's rich details of the contentious Nasserite regime in Egypt is an inexplicable reference to polemical Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan, son of Said Ramadan, who fled Nasserite persecution in 1956. The reference is tangential and appears ad hoc and irrelevant to the chronological flow of events. Calvert seems to reduce the intellectual worth of Tariq Ramadan to that of "da'wist" finishing the Brotherhood's work from the 1950s and 60s in Europe. Perhaps Calvert is guilty of the same guilt by association that many critics of Tariq Ramadan are, questioning the motives of Ramadan in light of his ancestors' Muslim Brotherhood credentials.

Less important are some problems with transliteration. In two cases, Calvert mis-transliterates first the word *Jahili* as *Jalili* (p.58) and *Hadith* (present/contemporary) as *Hadir* (p. 67). Despite these few shortcomings, Calvert's book is a well-researched and written biography of arguably the most important figure in modern militant Islam. It is recommended for both its depth and breadth, and novel Qutbist-centric approach at a distance from modern linkages to al-Qaedaism.

This review was originally published on the 24/01/11 at [http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/bookreviews/files/calvert\\_sayyidqutb.html](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/bookreviews/files/calvert_sayyidqutb.html)



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Gilles Kepel. *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom: The Future of the Middle East*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008. Paperback \$27.95, pp. 336. ISBN: 9780674031388, Reviewed by Scott Nicholas Romaniuk , University of Aberdeen , Aberdeen, United Kingdom

Gilles Kepel, French analyst of the Muslim world, and one of the foremost experts on political Islam, delivers a detailed analysis of divergent strategies and objectives within the contemporary war on terror. His critique of the subject matter is based on two “grand narratives” – President George W. Bush’s “global war on terror” and Al Qaeda’s murderous *jihad*. The Bush administration’s war against the “axis of evil” was a deliberate reprise of the Regan administration’s struggle against the Soviet “evil empire” implemented in 1983. However, as Kepel demonstrates with stunning precision, “in formulating this analogy between the war on terror and the Cold War, the Bush administration ignored several fundamental differences between the former Eastern bloc and the Middle East” (p. 4).

The general portrayal of Al Qaeda operations rarely tells the story of opposition to the most comprehensive campaign against global terror. Kepel reasons that, in challenging President Bush’s war on terror, “Bin Laden and his followers sought to perpetuate the strategy of ‘martyrdom operations’ that had shocked the world on 9/11” (p. 5), and that Bin Laden’s followers would “accomplish their aims through voluntary death in combat, in a sublime, phantasmagorical act of self-sacrifice on the part of believers” (p. 5). Transcending the grand narratives presented within this work, Kepel argues that *jihadism* was an abortive attempt to coalesce the forces of global Islam. Based primarily on secondary sources, this book provides a framework with which political officials and many within the analytic community might further understand America’s war on terror as an articulation of the very policy objectives put into practice by the United States in the Middle East since the end of the Second World War.

Comprised of six chapters, Kepel begins with an evaluative approach of United States operations in the Middle East, and what was expected to be a “new American century” (p. 1). Chapter two synthesizes martyrdom operations among Shiite Islamists, Sunnis, and “Third Worldists” while drawing parallels between earlier crises and America’s debacle in Iraq. It addresses Ahmadinejad’s use of Quranic parlance to depict the violent writhe between “oppressors and oppressed” (p. 64). Chapter three explores Islamist resistance following the American occupation of Iraq. It underscores the growing “base of *jihad*” and allegiance to Bin Laden’s malicious campaigns launched against New York, Madrid, and London, as well as those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chapters four and five examine Al Qaeda’s vehement action in Europe, the global



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Islamic resistance, and international opposition to the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. In doing so, Kepel asserts that, “if the grand narrative of the war on terror saw the proliferation of *jihad* as leading Europe’s decline, its mirror image – the grand narrative of *jihad* through martyrdom – also saw Europe as decadent, but in a difference way” (p. 175). Chapter six considers forces that underpinned neo-conservative ideology during the Bush era, the transformation of the United States’ role, and Europe’s part in the growing crisis in the Middle East. It exemplifies the growing multi-polarity in an increasingly complex global corridor, and poses the argument that the United States “has no choice but to abandon ideology and go back to politics” (p. 278).

One of the major strengths of this book is the linkage established between a mutual failure on both sides to formulate enduring democracy on one side and Islamic unity on the other. Operating in a very familiar environment of scholarly inquiry, Kepel remarkably weaves together cultural perspectives, the dynamic forces of religion and fundamental extremism, and the practice of political strategy regionally and internationally.

The principle gap in this book is evident through its lack of focus on other democratic and Islamic nation’s occupations and motivations in the global war on terror and the subsequent response to it. As a consequence, identifying the fundamental changes taking place elsewhere political, socially, and culturally, is evident. Kepel equally does not discuss how the practice of other players, such as state actors and international organizations integrate with other forms of determination and potential resolution on practical levels.

These shortcomings aside, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom* represents a valuable contribution to the literature of political science and international affairs, and will serve as a vital tool for analytical inquiry by academics and students. Far from dictating the need to follow the paths of X, Y, and, Z, Kepel’s provocative reflection serves as a critical calling for policymakers to assume a more realistic approach and constructive policy platform for engaging with issues that plague an exceedingly volatile region and uncertain time.

This review was originally published on the 02/02/11 at <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/bookreviews/files/92d1d3a25dab4f35a4543a76e244b2aa-5.html>



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Justin Gest. *Apart: Alienated and Engaged Muslims in the West*. London, Hurst & Company, 2010. Cloth, 256 pages, ISBN: 978-0-231-70188-4, \$35.00 Reviewed by Alison McConnell, Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO), Gulu, Uganda

*Apart* examines the differences between young European Muslims that operate within the democratic system and those that actively oppose it or withdraw completely. Gest finds traditional Structuralist accounts of alienation and engagement insufficient for two reasons. First, sociological conditions have evolved since these accounts were created; and second, these accounts fail to explain different methods of engagement from people of similar socio-economic statuses.

To fill this void, Gest puts forth a new model which differentiates between those that actively engage with the democratic system and those that he refers to as anti-system. "To put it simply, anti-system behavior entails the belief that the democratic society and the referent individual no longer hold convergent interests- I call this belief 'apartism'" (Gest, 2010:64). Gest divides anti-system behavior into two types of engagement: active and passive. Active anti-system behavior is aimed at defeating the existing system while passive anti-system behavior involves a complete rejection or withdrawal from the existing system.

To test his model and examine the differences between individuals and their method of engagement, Gest compares two case studies based on over 100 interviews. The first case study is the Bangladeshi community in London's East End and the second case study is the Moroccan community in and around Lavapies, Madrid. Strengths of Gest's work include his in-depth analysis of both cases and his extensive methodology section which outlines and addresses all possible weaknesses and limitations of the study.

Gest concludes that the main differentiating factor between those that are anti-system and those that actively engage is perception. "...I find that what distinguishes democratic activists from both forms of anti-system behavior is the nature of their individual expectations and perceptions about shared socio-political realities" (Gest, 2010:178). Perception includes their expectation of the government, whether these expectations are attained and any discrepancy between expectation and attainment. This perception/discrepancy argument is similar to the argument made by Gurr in his book *Why Men Rebel*. However, in *Apart*, Gest applies this argument to individual activism more generally rather than solely to violent action.



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The book could have benefited from clarifying the difference between violent and non-violent active anti-system behavior. Or, if Gest believes that active anti-system behavior inherently involves violence, then this assumption needs to be clearly stated. Often, as we see with the concepts of radicalization and extremism, this difference is not emphasized despite being an important one.

Overall, *Apert* is a well written book whose findings have important policy implications for current counter-terrorism initiatives in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Indeed, from the results of this study, we see that the best way to predict the political behavior of individuals is to understand the way they interpret the world and its challenges. And worldviews are simply not demarcated physically. In fact, it is arguable that physical profiling does significantly more harm than good (Gest, 2010:219).

Arguments such as these, concerning the effectiveness of counter terrorism policy and physical profiling are not unique. What makes Gest's work stand *APART* is his level of qualitative analysis, his theoretical model and his call for counter terrorism policy makers to measure "...the security effect of eliminating or mitigating those policies that most damage Muslim citizens' faith in the political system"(Gest, 2010:219). Gest argues "[i]t is possible that the marginal increase in vulnerability is microscopic if other more effective policies are left subtly in place" (Gest, 2010:219).

*This review was originally published on the 02/02/11 at <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/journal/bookreviews/files/gest-apert-alienated.html>*





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