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ABSTRACT

Suicide bombing and other forms of terrorism are tactics, not goals or strategies, and since the Afghanistan War began in 1979, the main political, religious and ideological purpose of men like Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki was to overthrow the regimes in Muslim countries that were allied with the Western powers and restore the medieval Islamic Caliphate based on Sharia law. They used terrorist methods at any time and in any countries that they thought would best accomplish their overall purpose, and also searched for countries in Africa, East Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia where they could establish bases. Even after bin Laden's demise, these efforts are still ongoing, although the mass membership recruited in Muslim countries all over the world may not necessarily have shared all the same religious and political concerns as bin Laden. Terrorism's method is to promote fear and insecurity in the public mind all out of proportion to the actual military and economic damage that terrorist groups can inflict. This is why they depend heavily on mass media publicity to spread anxiety and fear, and if the perception of the threat is great enough then there will be greater repression and destruction of civil liberties. Terrorists also understand that dramatic televised images of their acts have a greater impact and shock value than print stories. Airline passengers will demand more intensive security screenings, while at the same time become irritated at the delays, long lines and invasion of privacy.

According to the 9/11 Report, the World Islamic Front proclaimed by Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki in Afghanistan in 1998 declared war on the United States. It asserted that America was already at war with Islam and “

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called for the murder of any American, anywhere on Earth.” In 1996, bin Laden had also issued a fatwa or religious edict demanding that all Muslims attack U. S. troops stationed in Saudi Arabia and drive them out, using suicide attacks like those employed against the U. S. embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983. He also claimed credit for helping drive the Americans out of Somalia just as he had supposedly driven the Soviets out of Afghanistan. Bin Laden promised to “ restore the pride to people who consider themselves victims of successive foreign masters”, and was hostile to U. S. support for Israel and the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the first Gulf War. He demanded the restoration of the Sunni Caliphate, which had been abolished by Ataturk in 1924. One of the right-wing Islamists who most influenced his thinking was the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, a Muslim Brotherhood member who had been hanged in 1966 for plotting to overthrow the Nasser regime. Qutb had visited the United States in the 1940s then written a book denouncing the country as godless and materialistic.

Bin Laden argued that the U. S. and its allies in India, the Philippines, Israel and other countries were conducting a worldwide war of extermination against Muslims. America was the most evil civilization in history, and could only be saved by conversion to Islam and abandoning its satanic foreign policy of imperialism and aggression. Most of the corrupt monarchies and dictatorships were backed by the U. S. as well, and by the 1980s and 1990s these governments were morally and politically bankrupt, lacking all popular support. This was also the era of the Iranian revolution and the expanding influence of Saudi Wahhabism, competing for the allegiance of the disaffected youth of the Middle East. Right-wing Islamists assassinated

Anwar Sadat in 1981, for example, out of opposition to his alliance with the U. S. and Israel. Even so, Egypt and Pakistan conceded control over education and cultural life to these groups in hopes of appeasing them, but “opponents of today’s rulers have few, if any ways to repudiate the existing political system.” Muslim education systems left young people with little knowledge about the outside world and few skills applicable to the modern economy, and these disaffected youth became the recruiting ground for Al Qaeda and similar groups.

Bin Laden and other Islamic jihadists were armed, trained and funded by the U. S., Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in the Afghan War of 1979-89. This conflict against ‘atheistic;’ Communism gave the nascent Al Qaeda movement an initial target, and bin Laden was there with part of his enormous family fortune. Virtually no one in the U. S. had heard of him at this time, but he was known by the Bush’s as a member of one of the wealthiest and most powerful elite families in Saudi Arabia. His group was funded by various charities from the Kingdom and the Gulf States, and these remained an important source of money up to the attacks of September 11th. Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence played a key role in supporting the jihadists as well, and the Taliban regime that took power in Afghanistan after the war. Omar Abdel Rahman, the blind Egyptian cleric who inspired the assassination of Sadat and the first World Trade Center bombing, was also heavily involved in recruiting Islamic extremists for the war in Afghanistan. When he moved to Jersey City he also regularly “distributed messages calling for the murder of unbelievers.” Anwar al-Awlaki, who fought in Afghanistan, was also one of the leaders of Rahman’s Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

After the Afghan War, bin Laden moved to Sudan in 1989, where a friendly Islamic government was already in power. Using this country as a base, he helped the government in its wars against African Christian separatists in South Sudan and Darfur, and also had contacts with Islamic jihadist movements in northern and western Africa. When U. S. troops arrived in Saudi Arabia during the 1990-91 Gulf War he denounced the monarchy for permitting it and instead called for a jihad against Saddam Hussein. During this period, he organized an “ international jihad confederation” that had organizations in Bosnia, Chechnya, Indonesia, Malaysia, and even Western Europe and the United States. Bin Laden supported the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines and aided Islamic separatists in Kashmir, and Al Qaeda organized attacks against U. S. forces in Aden, Somalia and Saudi Arabia, including the shoot-down of the two Black Hawk helicopters. Due to increased pressure from the U. S. and Saudi Arabia, he fled to Afghanistan in 1996 where Pakistan was helping to organize the Taliban regime. The Pakistani ISI “ facilitated his travel” and almost certainly assisted his escape from Afghanistan in 2001 and with providing him with safe haven in Pakistan for the next ten years. From here, Al Qaeda trained 10-20, 000 foreign fighters, organized the bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam in 1998, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000, and of course the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon the next year.

Suicide terrorism is a tactic, not a strategy, religion or an ideology, and has been used to oppose foreign occupations of Islamic countries like Iraq rather than being an integral part of Islam or even Islamic fundamentalism. For this

reason, the Bush administration was wrong in its policies and “spreading democracy across the Persian Gulf is not likely to be a panacea so long as foreign combat troops remain on the Arabian Peninsula.” For the U. S. and other Western powers, oil supplies are the only real interest in this part of the world, and other than that they have no reason to be involved in the Middle East at all. Maintaining troops and bases there is also counterproductive, while a policy of offshore balancing would best serve American interests, not nation building or democratization and gunpoint. Most suicide terrorists are also “shadowy, hard-to-find creatures whose existence is rarely noticed until they strike”, such as Mohammad Atta, who was not even an Al Qaeda member until he visited Afghanistan. Clumsy attempts at Muslim transformation by outsiders will only inspire many others like him to join the jihad against the West.

Nation building and remodeling societies in the Middle East is therefore the completely wrong policy to pursue, when the West should be minimizing its visible presence as much as possible. Since Muslim fundamentalism is not the real cause of terrorism, attempting to change these countries will only generate more attacks against the West. Left to their own devices, most of these groups would not attack the U. S. at all, since Hamas and Hezbollah operated mainly in Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank, directing almost all of their attention against Israel, while Al Qaeda never launched any attacks against Israel at all, despite its extremely hostile rhetoric against Jews. All of these groups, including the ones funded and inspired by Al Qaeda, are “driven by essentially nationalist goals to compel target democracies to withdraw military forces from their particular homeland.” Almost all Muslim

suicide bombers are inspired by hatred of American military and foreign policies in Islamic countries rather than by bin Laden's pure hatred of America and Western civilization as a whole. Public opinion polls in Turkey, Morocco, Jordan and Pakistan showed majority support for Western political and economic ideas, including democracy, but opposed U. S. foreign policy in Iraq because they believed it to be motivated by oil or support for Israel. Islamic fundamentalism is never going to take over the world as bin Laden imagined, but attempting regime change through military force would only inspire another generation of terrorists.

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