

# AL QAIDA: THE IDEOLOGY OF KILLING IN THE NAME OF GOD

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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April 2004

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## **Introduction**

Terrorism demands the abandonment of ordinary conceptions and experiences where the victims are not defined as individuals or persons but symbols of corruption and injustice. Those who profess terrorism have a special view of the world and a specific consciousness. However, this special view and consciousness owes its existence to a doctrine or an ideology<sup>1</sup>. Quite often these requisite doctrines or ideologies are derived from a selective interpretation of religious beliefs. Religion for some has been a source of spirituality, peace of mind and an inspiration for self-improvement and there are others who have used it to push through their vested interests and agendas. This paper is dedicated to the latter.

Extremist ideologies are as old as the religions themselves. Their history goes back to the Jewish Zealots who had a different interpretation of Judaism from the mainstream Jews. Traces of them can still be found in the present Israeli society in the form of political parties like Shaas and Kach. Christianity too has its extreme elements that were very visible during the crusades and today we find the remnants of that ideology in the evangelical priests who claim to be the 'born again Christians'. Proof of Islamic extremism has also existed in the form of assassinations of the early Caliphs and whether the Muslims like or not, after September 11, Osama Bin Laden has become the face of Islamic extremism. Although violence was not part of the message in all three of the religions, unfortunately it has always been part of these religious societies. Therefore the question arises that when does violence and such intolerance become part of these

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<sup>1</sup> David C. Rapoport, *The Morality of Terrorism*, xiii

societies? Is it their response to modernity or a pursuit of gains and interests that are very political and material in nature?

September 11 has not only redefined the nature of terrorism and the threat it poses to the civilized world, it has also highlighted the lethality of extremist ideologies that are used to justify such acts of terror. Another important point that must be kept in mind is that although Islamic extremism has given birth to numerous radical groups, a direct relationship between the teachings of its architects and present day radical groups cannot be established without incorporating the study of environments these groups emerged from. Extremist ideologies may not be a new phenomenon but unique socio-political factors have created a spectrum that ranges from religious political parties to militant terrorist groups like Al Qaida.

Religious extremism today is more popularly known as religious fundamentalism, a term that has become quite debatable and contentious due to its varying definitions. Although the term 'fundamentalism' has an obvious Protestant origin where it was used to describe the literal interpretation of the bible<sup>2</sup>, the term has become a label to describe a way of thinking where a group tries to "derive political principles from a timeless divine text".<sup>3</sup> Karen Armstrong has described these movements to be the failure of the marriage between religious traditions and modernity. According to her it is a very modern phenomenon and is the 20<sup>th</sup> century rejection of modernity out of fear of contamination and extinction. However, it is interesting to note that she has used the term 'extremists' for those who constitute these movements yet continues to describe the movements as

fundamentalist and not radical or extremist.<sup>4</sup> Bruce Lawrence on the other hand is not very persistent on the description of these movements by a particular term. He has interchangeably used terms like radicals and fundamentalists to describe these elements.<sup>5</sup> The ulema<sup>6</sup>, however, are opposed to the use of the term ‘fundamentalism’ for in their view the literal translation of the term points to the concept of ‘usuliyah’ which is the Islamic science of tracing the sources of Islamic Law. They contend that the source of inspiration and the motives of these groups have nothing to do with this science. The use of the term fundamentalism thus becomes misleading.

Similarities may exist between the Protestant and the Muslim movements aspiring to preserve a divine text but ‘the lack of a better term’<sup>7</sup> is not strong enough an argument to describe radical or extremist Muslim groups with the same term. Moreover, the ulema who have their own definition of fundamentalism, would not like to be put in the same compartment either with militant Muslims or Protestant groups. Yousaf M Choueiri has aptly described fundamentalism to be ‘a vague term, currently in vogue as a catch-phrase used to describe the militant ideology of contemporary Islamic movements’.<sup>8</sup>

The debate on the mere description of these elements may not seem very significant but the effects become significant due to the communication gap they create. The term fundamentalism has a positive connotation for the ulema but when used in the west to

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<sup>2</sup> Yousaf M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 9-10

<sup>4</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence*.

<sup>6</sup> A term used for Islamic Scholars.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Islam- A Short History*, 168.

<sup>8</sup> Yousaf M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 9.

describe people who are considered fanatics by the main stream Muslims, it creates a negative perception of stereotyping and does not help the already dilapidated channels of communication between the western scholarship and the conservative Muslim ulema.

The paper attempts to trace the ideological roots of Islamic extremism to understand how they help Al Qaida prepare and sell a narrative that justifies indiscriminate killing in the name of God. It concludes with some thoughts for the future.

### **Historical Background**

Islam does not recognize the separation of the church and state and so Muhammad was both the religious and the political leader of the ummah<sup>9</sup>. The caliphs that followed him maintained this role. Immediately after the death of Mohammed enclaves of dissent began to emerge in the form of a struggle for succession and tribal revolts. There were some who believed that Mohammed's cousin Ali should succeed him and not Abu Bakr who was one of his closest companions. The tribal chiefs, on the other hand, presumed that their alliance had come to an end with the death of Mohammed. Abu Bakr ultimately emerged as the consensus candidate and became the first Caliph. He also managed to control the revolts but died soon after.

Omar, the second Caliph and Abu Bakr's successor, had to come to terms with the political realities outside Arabia. He was faced with the challenges of dealing with non-Arabs and the maintenance of unity in the Muslim ummah. His tenure is credited with some of the most memorable victories that resulted in the expansion of the Muslim

Empire. His campaigns however were not religious but more pragmatic and political in nature as they were also aimed at avoiding a repetition of domestic revolts that had occurred during his predecessor's reign. As he was both the temporal and the spiritual leader of the empire, the conquests were thus not just political but assumed a religious meaning also.<sup>10</sup> But by now political turmoil and dissent had become a permanent feature of the Muslim Empire. Omar became the victim of an assassination attempt and died succumbing to his injuries.

Usman, the third Caliph, succeeded Omar. Although a very pious and respected figure, he was subsequently accused of nepotism as most of his appointees to important portfolios were his fellow tribesmen and were accused of corruption. Usman's reign also ended with his assassination. Ali succeeded Usman as the fourth caliph and he tried to rectify the situation by appointing new governors in order to restore faith in his governance and heal dissent in the ummah. It must be kept in mind that Ali was the first Caliph from Banu Hashim<sup>11</sup>, a tribe different from Banu Ommayyah to which his three predecessors belonged. Dismissal of governors thus brought in the aspect of tribal rivalry also. Most notably, the governor of Syria, Muawwiah, refused to either give up his position or endorse Ali as the caliph until the assassins of Usman were brought to justice.

During all this turmoil a new militant group known as the Kharajites was coming to the forefront. Although Ali was initially successful in quelling the leadership of this group but the movement managed to survive. The Kharajites formed their own community and

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<sup>9</sup> A term used to define the Muslim community all over the world and is the same community that Bin Laden aspires to revive.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Islam- A Short History*, 27.

had zero tolerance for anyone who had a differing interpretation of the Koran. According to the Kharajites “the ruler of the Islamic community should not be the most powerful but the most committed Muslim”.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Kharijites**

Very little is known about the Kharijites primarily because it was a closed community and the limited research available about them has mostly been compiled by the Sunnis and the Shiites scholars who were not very sympathetic towards them<sup>13</sup>. The origins of this community, therefore, cannot be ascertained very accurately but its early leadership was present during Mohammed’s lifetime. . The Kharijites first become visible in the Islamic text as a fanatic but a sincere group of Muslims who were known for their piety, self-restraint and a modest lifestyle. But their enthusiasm in the practice of Islam sometimes embarrassed Mohammed himself<sup>14</sup>.

The community comprised of two distinct groups, the Qurra and the Bedouins. The Qurra were men known for their vigorous recitation of the Koran with a firm conviction in its literal interpretation. The Bedouins were basically nomads consisting of militant warriors and together the two groups completed the dangerous combination of theological sophistication and militant zeal<sup>15</sup>. This symbolic combination of the pen and the sword continues to exist in modern day fanatic groups like Al-Qaida and deserves special attention as the structure of such movements rests on these two pillars.

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<sup>11</sup> Mohammed's tribe.

<sup>12</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Islam- A Short History*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Adib, *Political Theory and the Institutions of the Khawarij*, 7

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 18



The earliest known leader of this community was a man by the name of Hurqus Ibn Zuhair who went on to become the community's first Ameer after the battle of Siffin. But he had already invited Mohammed's anger earlier when he accused him of injustice in distributing the booty after the battle of Hunain<sup>16</sup>. At the time Mohammed is reported to have said, "There will come a time when a group of people will leave our ranks. They will recite the Koran with fervor and passion but its spirit will not go beyond their throats. They will leave our ranks in the manner of an arrow when it shoots from its bow."<sup>17</sup>

The political struggle that followed the death of Mohammed had little to do with the Kharijites. Although some view the Kharijites as a political movement but most of the scholars agree that it was a theological movement and the reasons for its existence were religious<sup>18</sup>. The community separated from the rest of the Muslims due to its insistence on a literal and a rigid interpretation of the Koran. In Arabic they became known as the 'Khawarij' which means 'the ones who go out'. After Mohammed the Kharijites recognized the first two caliphs Abu Bakr and Omar but only the first six years of Usman, the third caliph, as he was accused of nepotism in the latter years of his reign. The existence of this community thus becomes more pronounced during Usman's time<sup>19</sup>. It is important to remember that the Kharijites were not an excommunicated group at that

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<sup>16</sup> Hendricks, *The Kharijites and their Impact on Contemporary Islam*, 1

<sup>17</sup> Sahih Muslim 1776

<sup>18</sup> Adib, *Political Theory and the Institutions of the Khawarij*, 18

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 15

time and their membership included some of the renowned war heroes of the time<sup>20</sup> who had settled around Kufa and Basra, cities that today form part of modern day Iraq.

As Usman's reign progressed the Kharijites became the most vociferous in the movement against him and repeatedly accused him of nepotism. It was the same community that was termed as the chief offender of the assassination of Usman<sup>21</sup>. After Usman's assassination Ali was chosen as the fourth caliph but Governor Muawia of Syria, a relative of Usman, refused his allegiance to Ali and made it conditional to the apprehension of Usman's killers. The dispute led to armed confrontation in the shape of the battle of Siffin and resulted in the emergence of Kharijites as a distinct community<sup>22</sup>.

During the battle of Siffin when Ali's forces were about to prevail, Muawia's forces nailed pages of the Koran to their lances and Ali stopped the fighting and agreed to an arbitration. The companions of Ali and the latter day Shiites have interpreted this arbitration as one of the biggest betrayals. This was part of the reason why during the Iran-Iraq war Khomeini initially rejected any arbitration efforts but when ultimately left with no option to accept UN arbitration, he equated it with drinking a bowl of poison<sup>23</sup>. The Kharijites' response to the arbitration was one of fierce protest and rejection. They threatened Ali of the same fate as Usman<sup>24</sup>. Interestingly the Qurra that were the ideologues of this group were in favor of halting the battle and the fierce opposition to any reconciliation came from the militants or the Bedouins. The community thus left

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 18

<sup>21</sup> Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, 13

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>23</sup> Hiro, *War Without End*, 14

<sup>24</sup> Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, 15

Ali's camp on the slogan that "judgement belongs to none save God; no arbitration in the religion of God"<sup>25</sup>. In their opinion the Koran cannot be the arbitrator due to its varying interpretations. They also concluded that the arbitrators were not for God but for Ali and Muawia<sup>26</sup>. Due to this dispute many scholars have described them as a breakaway Shiite faction<sup>27</sup>.

While the efforts to arbitrate were in progress Ali confronted the Kharijites at the battle of Nehrawan. Prior to the start of the battle Ali was successful in convincing many of them to defect but the rest vowed to fight to the end and sought martyrdom. The Kharijites suffered heavy casualties and were defeated as a military force but those who survived vowed revenge. Ali's assassination thus occurred at the behest of those who had lost family members during the battle of Nehrawan<sup>28</sup>.

### **The Kharijite Ideology**

The Kharijites were basically nomads who decided to give up their way of life and live in an imposed garrison. This lifestyle was a result of their strict commitment to an ideology. One gets an impression that it is a group seeking security in the knowledge that the community it belongs to is the true and the most committed community<sup>29</sup>. The Kharijites in some way resemble the Jewish zealots who also discredited the mainstream Jews and

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<sup>25</sup> Adib, *Political Theory and the Institutions of the Khawarij*, 16

<sup>26</sup> Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, 19

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 28

<sup>29</sup> Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 4-6

became a fanatic community. However, the difference is that the Zealots fought for the fatherland while the Kharijites fought for God<sup>30</sup>.

The most distinguishing factor of the Kharijites was their branding of all other Muslim sects as unbelievers. Opposed to orthodox thinking they believed that there is no forgiveness for a sin. There are four doctrines that seem to define the Kharijite ideology. First, they believed that all the non-Kharijites were nonbelievers. Second, they believed that a believer cannot reside amongst the infidels and he must undertake a 'hijra'<sup>31</sup> like Mohammed. Third, that an infidel had no legal basis of existence except the people of the book i.e. Jews and Christians and therefore it was legal to kill and loot the infidels. And fourth, that the pagan existence was an affront to God so they must either be converted or exterminated<sup>32</sup>. Interestingly their puritanical views of a literal interpretation of the Koran forced them to make an exception in the case of the Jews and the Christians who have been designated as people of the book in the Koran. Present day extremist groups like Al-Qaida, however, do not make that distinction.

The Kharijites were known for their mastery in oratory and poetry that attracted a number of recruits<sup>33</sup>. Once again this aspect highlights the importance of the combination of the pen and the sword. Another important distinguishing factor was the fact that the Kharijites welcomed non-Arabs into their community as long as the individuals were committed to their ideology<sup>34</sup>. Keeping in view the strong tribal culture of the then Arab

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<sup>30</sup> Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, 20

<sup>31</sup> Mohammed migrated from Mecca to Medina. The date is also the start of the Muslim calendar.

<sup>32</sup> Crone and Zimmerman, *The Epistle of Salim Ibn Dhakwan*, 212

<sup>33</sup> Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 7

<sup>34</sup> Adib, *Political Theory and the Institutions of the Khawarij*, 28

world this was no ordinary thing. Stark similarities can be observed between the Kharijites and Al-Qaida as one recalls Bin Laden reciting a poem commemorating the September 11 attacks and the diversity of his recruits that are recruited by Al-Qaida.

The ideology dictated that the world has to be divided in Dar-al-Islam<sup>35</sup> and Dar-al-Harb<sup>36</sup>. According to the Kharijites it was the duty of Muslims to either fight to establish a Dar-al-Islam or migrate to one if they were not in a position to establish one. They also believed that those who choose to stay in a Dar-al-Harb and not migrate were nonbelievers too<sup>37</sup>. The fanaticism of the Kharijites can be seen from the fact that they would leave a battlefield to offer prayers at the risk of complete annihilation. When the assassin of Ali, Ibn Muljam, was being punished he cried as Ali's men cut his tongue. When asked as to why he did not cry when his nose, ears and legs were being cut he said "I praise God with my tongue, it is not easy for me to loose it"<sup>38</sup>.

This puritanical ideology became a justification for sheer terrorism and massacres. No distinction was made between men, women or children. Accounts even suggest that a potential member of the community had to execute a prisoner in order to prove his loyalty to the community<sup>39</sup>. Such fanaticism that continues to exist in some present-day groups also explains the difficulty in penetrating them.

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<sup>35</sup> The Land of Peace

<sup>36</sup> The Land of War

<sup>37</sup> Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 12

<sup>38</sup> Adib, *Political Theory and the Institutions of the Khawarij*, 37

<sup>39</sup> Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 12

## **The Kharijite Concept of Leadership and State**

The basic theory of the Kharijites dictates that judgement belongs to God and a leader can only supervise a literal imposition of His words<sup>40</sup>. The theory strongly recommends deposing a ruler that deviates from this path. Moreover, the ideology goes further to make it an obligation for a Muslim to oppose a leader who is not enforcing the word of God literally<sup>41</sup>. According to the Kharijites the Imam should have absolute powers and must not accept any arbitration in judicial matters. In addition to imposing Koranic law literally he must lead his troops in battle and had the duty to justly distribute the spoils of war. But most importantly he had the duty to prohibit 'heretic ideas' that endangered the purity of their doctrine amongst those whose faith was not 'strong'<sup>42</sup>.

The Kharijites also opposed kingship. They believed kingship to be sacrilegious and this partly explains their persecution as all the Muslim empires that followed Ali were monarchies that viewed this community as a genuine threat. Moreover, the community also believed that transgressions of a leader demanded immediate condemnation<sup>43</sup>. There was no preference for cast or creed when it came to the selection of an Imam<sup>44</sup> but there was strong insistence on piety and simplicity. The residence of Ibn Rustam, one of the early Kharijite Imams, only contained a bed, a sword, a spear and a horse. The Kharijite leadership thus frequently criticized the succeeding Muslim rulers for their

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<sup>40</sup> Adib, *Political Theory and the Institutions of the Khawarij*, 49-50

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 56-60

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 59-60

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 62

extravagance<sup>45</sup>. These accusations are not very different from Bin Laden's calls to depose the present Muslim leadership accusing them of both moral and material corruption.

The Kharijite concept of a state consisted of an unattainable and intolerant nomocracy where the Koranic law was applied literally and without any consideration for the community. Obedience to God was the only relevant duty. Religion, therefore, was the starting point of their political theory and entering paradise the ultimate aim of their socio-political effort<sup>46</sup>. On the whole the Kharijite theory of the state is altogether religion and there is no room to improve or adapt through trial and error. This not only prevents a mature development of a state but also leads to social and intellectual stagnation. This absolute codification of political theory in times when politics itself was in infancy was not only inferior but was dangerous for the conduct of human life. The theory's ineptness was compounded by the rigidity in formation and application of law<sup>47</sup>.

In terms of legal jurisprudence too the Kharijites believed in a literal application of Sharia law. They rejected the concept of consensus and analogy adopted by other Muslim sects. They contended that this right was limited to the companions of Mohammed who had seen him make decisions and interpret the Koran<sup>48</sup>. Their puritanical posture, however, did earn them respect for their accurate reporting of the hadith<sup>49</sup>. The Kharijites in this way do impact other Muslim Schools of jurisprudence. However, the Kharijites limited the use of hadith to compliment the Koranic teachings only and objected to any

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 47-49

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 67

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 68-69

<sup>49</sup> Traditions of Mohammed

independent application of hadith in jurisprudence<sup>50</sup>. This rigidity in legal jurisprudence manifested itself in the form of literal imposition of punishments without considering the changing times or the social environment<sup>51</sup>.

### **The Kharijites and Jihad**

The literal meaning of the term jihad is ‘to struggle’ and even Mohammed gave it a broader definition by terming the pursuit of knowledge as jihad also. However, the Kharijite had no broad definition for jihad and limited it to an armed struggle and the use of force was the corner stone of their definition of jihad. In their doctrine jihad was a physical imposition of Islam<sup>52</sup>. The community thus believed in jihad fanatically and defined it to be an individual obligation binding on of every Muslim man and woman. Their vision of a state was thus that of a ‘garrison state’ that was in constant preparation for jihad or war<sup>53</sup>. They also practiced the doctrine of ‘Istirad’ that basically was asking someone to endorse their views at the point of a sword. A disagreement by the other person resulted in his execution. Literally the doctrine meant to let someone express his views but in reality the practice became execution in the name of religion. This doctrine also became the Kharijite law of war and was practiced indiscriminately. The result was utter confusion in war rather than bringing discipline and convention<sup>54</sup>. Moreover, there were no rules or laws concerning prisoners of war that remained at the mercy of the leadership of the community. They frequently killed women and children inspite of the fact that it was in direct contravention to Mohammed’s policies who forbade any such

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<sup>50</sup> Adib, *Political Theory and the Institutions of the Khawarij*, 69

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 74

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 82

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 85-88

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 90



acts<sup>55</sup>. Although some of the later Kharijite sects objected to the killing of non-Muslim children but the most fanatic of them, the Azariqa sect, considered them to be a future threat and advocated their execution<sup>56</sup>.

The Kharijites amongst them had a strong desire to die and embrace martyrdom<sup>57</sup>. They acquired this desire from a literal translation of a verse of the Koran where it is said that life is beautiful for the non-believers in this world while it would be beautiful for the believers in the world of eternity<sup>58</sup>. Interestingly this particular verse of the Koran is not about armed struggle but about resisting the temptations of life, a theme that has been repeated in many other religious scriptures.

Overall, the Kharijites were knowledgeable intellectuals but no analysts or philosophers because of their narrow and literal interpretation of a religious text. They were the first Muslim community to recognize the dangers of alien influences that could threaten their beliefs and their way of life. It was this fear of change that moved them to become so puritanical and cling to their past<sup>59</sup>, a trend that was repeated in several succeeding puritanical movements. Although militarily the Kharijites were dealt a deathblow at the battle of Nehrawan, the ideology survived for quite sometime. One of their sects was also successful in establishing their Rustamid Kingdom in Algeria during the 8<sup>th</sup> century. However, disagreements within the movement and active persecution by successive Muslim rulers forced them to be on the move. Today they survive in the form of small

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 91

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 102

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 95

<sup>58</sup> Koran 2:212

<sup>59</sup> Adib, *Political Theory and the Institutions of the Khawarij*, 106

insignificant groups in Algeria, Libya, Zanzibar and Oman. Their strong conviction of seeing themselves as the only true believers and all other sects of Islam and non-believers deserving destruction led them to fanaticism and their ultimate political and social death<sup>60</sup>.

The emergence of the Kharajites is a very significant events because this was the first time in Islam that a group, though a minority, had questioned the morality of the Muslim ummah which led to a new theological development.<sup>61</sup> The Kharajites were also the first to force the debate over the definition of a Muslim. They were the first to brand Muslims outside their community as non-believers. The Kharajite ideology can be defined as the first Muslim extremist/radical movement and they themselves can be termed as the first Islamic terrorist group. It is therefore important to note that such radical groups have existed from the early days of Islam and are not a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomena or Islam's response to modernity as suggested by Karen Armstrong.

### **Islamic Schools of Jurisprudence**

Western jurisprudence on the whole relegates the historical method of inquiry to a subordinate role as it is primarily concerned with what the study of law as it is or as it ought to be and not as it has been. The historical school of western jurisprudence also believed that law grew out and developed with the life of a community. Islamic jurisprudence, in its traditional form, is a legal science divorced from historical consideration. This does not mean that there have been no legal developments in Islamic jurisprudence but that law in Islam is an ordained and divine will of God preceding the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 22

Islamic community or state and not preceded by it. Sharia Law is thus a perfect expression of law that all Muslims must aspire to achieve<sup>62</sup>.

While the Koranic laws are ethical in quality they are limited in quantity. A small fraction of the verses of the Koran deal specifically with law and amongst them specificity about issues is limited and thus leaves the basic tenets to a wide array of interpretation. But a bigger problem arises out of issues about whom the Koran is silent. Although the Koran clearly established the supremacy of God as the supreme lawgiver but it does not create a codified charter of laws for the Muslim community<sup>63</sup>.

During the life of Mohammed the Muslims did not face the problem of interpreting the Koran as he was considered the legitimate source of all explanations and interpretations. After his death the Muslim scholars faced the problem of interpreting the Koran for the changing times and an ever-expanding Muslim Empire that no longer comprised solely of Arabs. The scholars, therefore, had to discover other avenues of jurisprudence to meet the challenges of social change and growing cultural diversity within the Muslim Empire<sup>64</sup>. The Koran and the Hadith were already recognized as the guiding principles for the Muslim community. It was soon realized that the Koran and hadith too did not contain all the answers and the principle of Qiyas (analogy) and Ijma (consensus) were developed. The practice of Qiyas resulted in analogous decisions with an aim to stay as close to the Koran and Hadith as possible. The principle of Ijma (consensus) basically means the consensus of the Muslim scholars on a particular issue. The source of this principle was a

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<sup>61</sup>Karen Armstrong, *Islam- A Short History*, 35

<sup>62</sup> Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law*, 1-2

<sup>63</sup> Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law*, 12-20

hadith where Mohammed is reported to have said that ‘My community will never agree on error.’ Together the four form the basic pillars of Islamic jurisprudence or fiqh. It is also important to note that even after the death of Mohammed the succeeding four caliphs made no effort to establish any judicial institutions. The main reason for this was the fact that in addition to an absence of the separation of the church and state there was no separation of the executive and the judiciary and all the three institutions were embodied in the institution of the Caliph. The Caliphs, therefore, made and enforced law on an ad hoc basis without institutionalizing any legal principles. Meanwhile, due to the emergence of various factions, each faction recorded its own version of the Hadith.<sup>65</sup> Resultantly, there was not one but four main schools of Sunni Islamic Jurisprudence. These schools regard the Koran and the Hadith as the prime sources but then assign different emphasis to the remaining two principles.

During the times of the Abassid Caliphate two schools of jurisprudence gained prominence. These schools were located in Medina and Kufa. The former being the seat of power of Mohammed and the latter that of the Abassids. Although the schools developed in a manner not different from each other but due to the different environments in the two cities, their interpretation of law frequently contested each other. The school in Kufa is said to have developed earlier (767 A.D) due to the sponsorship of the Caliphate. Developed by the renowned scholar, Abu Hanifa, the Hanafi School is the most flexible of the four schools with a heavy leaning towards analogy. It is followed by majority of the Muslims in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Iraq and Turkey. The madrassahs in Pakistan that produced the Talibans mainly prescribe to this school of jurisprudence. The

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<sup>64</sup> Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 35-36

school in Medina was founded by Malik ibn Anas (795 AD) and is thus referred to as the Maliki School. It had the distinction of being founded in the home of the first Muslim community. This school thus relies heavily on the traditions of Mohammed and the first Muslim community. The school has a wide following in North Africa and Sudan. The third school is the Shafi School founded by Muhammad Idris al- Shafi (819 AD). Shafi was a student of Malik and realized not just the importance of the traditions of the Prophet but also the authenticity of those traditions. The school thus recommends the verification of every link in the chain of transmission of those traditions. In addition, it was Shafi that advocated systematic reasoning and consensus that was adopted by many of the succeeding scholars. The school dominates Muslims in Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The fourth school is the Hanbali School founded by Ahmad Hanbal (855 AD) who was a conservative and a radical religious thinker. He based Islamic practices strictly on the Koran and verifiable traditions of the Prophet. The school rejects both consensus and reasoning as sources of law and is also the least tolerant towards other schools of jurisprudence. After Hanbal, Ibn Tamiyya also emerged as one of the most prominent jurists and scholars belonging to this school. The Hanbali School is the recognized school of Islamic law in Saudi Arabia<sup>66</sup> and is in a way the alma mater of Osama bin Laden.

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<sup>65</sup> Yousaf M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 17.

## **Islamic Movements**

Yousaf M Choueri has classified Islamic fundamentalism into three distinct movements in different periods. He talks of a revival movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a reformist movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a radical movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>67</sup> This definition of fundamentalism becomes more acceptable because on one hand the author acknowledges the fact that the tools and standards derived from the study of Christian movements are being applied to Islam and on the other hand he differentiates radicals from the rest of the Muslim community.

Revivalism is not a new phenomenon. There have been revivalist movements in Judaism and Christianity also. These movements emerged as a response to the decline of a society with an inspiration to purify and restore a religion to its glorious past. Islamic revivalism emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in response to the decline of the three great Muslim empires of the time. They were the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, the Safavid Empire in Persia and the Mogul Empire in India. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century these empires were in decline due to “financial crises, demographic dislocations and agricultural stagnation.”<sup>68</sup> The strategic locations of these empires on important trade routes were no longer significant as Europe had mastered the seas. As a result there was a fight for diminishing resources within these empires. This not only brought about fragmentation and subsequently the colonization of these regions but it also gave birth to religious movements that aspired to purify Islam and restore the lost glory of the Muslim Empire of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Although there were strong economic reasons contributing to the emergence of these movements but the

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<sup>66</sup> Bogac Ergene, *Sources and Schools of Islamic Law*, Professor Resources, University of Vermont.

<sup>67</sup> Yousaf M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 9-10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

leaders of these movements always projected themselves to be the standard bearers of restoring Islam to its pure and original state.

One of the early revivalist movements was launched in Central Arabia, which was an alliance between a religious leader Mohammed bin Abdal Wahab, and a tribal chieftain Ibn Saud.<sup>69</sup> This movement came to be known as ‘Wahabism’. Although the Wahabis did manage to eradicate some the pagan traditions that the Arabs of Najd had resorted to but the teachings of Abdal Wahab were also radically intolerant of any other form of interpretation of the Koran and Hadith. Due to these characteristics they were often compared to the Kharijites.<sup>70</sup> Like the Kharijites the Wahabis too declared those outside their community to be non-believers. Moreover, they believed that the power that has been seized is legitimate and all its subjects must show unconditional obedience to it. Their teachings also professed that the right of Imamate<sup>71</sup> too belonged to the holder of the power irrespective of his status.<sup>72</sup> They based this on the tradition of Mohammed who said that the community must obey the Imam even if he is a slave provided he keeps the community on the right path.

The Wahabis draw their inspiration from the Hanbali scholar Ibn Tamiyya who restricted the concept of Ijma or consensus to the companions of Mohammed and rejected it in the context of modern day Muslim scholars. The aim of the movement was to restore the 7<sup>th</sup> century Muslim Empire ruled by Mohammed in its purest form. Ibn Tamiyya’s strict teachings have been consistently contested all over the Muslim world. The rigidity of his

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 21.

<sup>70</sup> Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islam and Modernites*, 104.

<sup>71</sup> Leadership.(Derived from the word Imam that means leader)

teachings can be seen from the fact that he was opposed to sanctioning the consumption of tobacco and coffee because it was not done so during the times of Mohammed inspite of an absence of a law that prohibited any such practice<sup>73</sup>.

However, the source of inspiration for Wahabis was not just restoring Islam to its pure form but there were strong economic and political factors at play also. The political factor included the absolute and unquestionable dominance of the House of Saud over this community, which was facilitated by the fact that the British had little interest in the area before the discovery of oil. The economic dimension was important too as these tribes earned their living through taxing or looting the trade convoys. With the trade shifted towards the seas, Wahabism managed to rally the most adversely affected tribes under its banner.<sup>74</sup> This movement, therefore, fixed its gaze on a glorious past, ignored all the achievements of historical developments and believed that a true Islamic state can only be established in the form of a fossil of the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>75</sup>.

Wahabism today is nothing but a marriage of convenience, but a marriage that has stood the test of time. This puritanical form of Islam is still enforced in Saudi Arabia. The House of Saud continues to rule and claims legitimacy through the power it wields. The interesting phenomena is the fact that the royal family or the successors of Saud are above and beyond the reach of the radical clergy that enforces this brand of Islam on the common citizen. It has been a delicate balancing act and whenever there has been the danger of extremist taking over, the house of Saud has always sought help from their

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<sup>72</sup> Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islam and Modernites* 107.

<sup>73</sup> Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 242-3

<sup>74</sup> Yousaf M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 21.



western allies<sup>76</sup>. The royal family largely owes its existence to the support provided by the US; a country considered 'dar al kufr'<sup>77</sup> by the clergy of Saudi Arabia. Another important aspect of Wahabism is that the movement is no longer limited to the borders of Saudi Arabia. Due to tremendous wealth earned from their oil, the Saudis have been successful in exporting this radical brand to other parts of the world including the religious schools in Pakistan. It thus extremely critical to note the transmission of an extremist ideology from a group like the Kharijites to a school of jurisprudence that educated the religious scholarship of a modern nation state which in turn helped groom a dangerous non-state actor.

As we move to India we find that due to the Mogul influence the Muslims had either continued or adopted many Hindu customs. Shah Wali Allah and his son Shah Abd al Aziz wrote commentaries for the purification of Islam and the removal of Hindu customs from the lives of the Muslims of India. These writings inspired Syed Ahmad Shaheed to spearhead a militant movement aimed at removing Hindu customs from the daily life of the Indian Muslim. He was briefly successful in establishing a small foothold in Northern India, the same general area that today has assumed center stage in the hunt for Bin Laden. This foothold however did not take long to crumble, as it was a loose tribal confederation. The Sikhs dealt this outpost a final blow and Syed Ahmad died in the last battle at Balakot in 1831.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 245

<sup>76</sup> Jane Corbin, *AL Qaida: The terror network that Threatens the World*, 9.

<sup>77</sup> 'The land of the Infidel' a term frequently used for west in general and the US in particular.

<sup>78</sup> Yousaf M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 21.

The weakening of the Safavid Empire brought the Shiite scholars to an internal jurisprudential debate between the Akhbaris and the Usulis. The former advocated strict adherence to existing and recognized texts whereas the latter pressed for the “necessity of a mujtahid (practitioner of independent legal judgement)”.<sup>79</sup> Although the Usulis won the battle, the results that emerged from this victory were unexpected. Instead of liberating jurisprudence from stagnation, the Usulis vested this power in a new deputy of the hidden Imam called the Ayatollah. The conservative clergy in present day Iran represents the Usulis.

The revivalist movements had four similar characteristics:

1. To purify Islam and remove all unauthorized additions like pagan customs and foreign influences. This principle had an inherent hostility towards change and non-Muslims.
2. Favoring ‘ijtehad’ or independent reasoning in legal judgements.
3. The concept of hijra and jihad (in this case armed struggle) where they would encourage migration from areas ruled by non-Muslims to the areas under Muslim rule and then launch an armed struggle from there. They thus divided the world into two geographic domains known as dar al kufr and dar al Islam (the house of Islam).
4. The belief of the return of a just Imam or a Mahdi.<sup>80</sup>

The disintegration or transformation of the revivalist movements set the stage for the emergence of the reformist movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These movements were perhaps the most positive development in the history of modern day Islam. The reformist realized and openly brought to the forefront the idea of a degenerating Muslim society

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 27.

that had failed to keep pace with the changing times. They shed light on the lack of progress in the fields of military power, political organization and technology. Basically an urban movement initiated by the central Ottoman establishment, its participants were opposed to the traditional interpretations of Islam. They were in favor of carrying out a dialogue with the west and advocated a diagnosis of the Muslim decline. They wanted to study the emerging European powers and formulate modern political and economic structures for the Muslims.

The reformists had to fight their battle on two fronts. On one hand they had to face internal opposition from the ulema who would not tolerate any reformulated interpretation of the Koran and on the other hand they had to answer critics like Renan and William Muir who thought of Islam as a “ Bedouin phenomenon alien to reason and tolerance”.<sup>81</sup> Their two pronged efforts were thus aimed at convincing their internal critics that reform is needed to prevent the religion from becoming redundant and clearing the misperception of the western scholars that there is no contradiction between Islam and reason.

Two of the earliest thinkers for this movement were the Persian scholar Jamal Aldin Afghani and Syed Ahmad Khan in India. Both of these men highlighted the decline of the Muslim civilization and emphasized the importance of the intellectual growth of a society. They strongly encouraged the study of modern sciences and defended the position that Islam did not reject but accommodated reason. Afghani traveled extensively and engaged in debates with western scholars including Renan. He believed that the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 23-4.

question was not how to make the Muslims strong and successful but how to convince them to acquire the true understanding of their religion? He believed that if this were achieved strength would be a natural outcome.<sup>82</sup> He also highlighted the fact that the strength of Europe was its knowledge base backed by a system of thought and social morality. He contended that the Muslims could not acquire this strength through imitation because it would not be backed by the requisite social morality lacking in the decaying Muslim society.<sup>83</sup> Syed Ahmad also encouraged the Muslims of India to acquire modern education in order to stay in competition with the Hindus. He established the Aligarh University where Muslims were educated in modern sciences.

The reformists judged liberty, constitutionalism and public interest as the way forward that would rescue the Muslims from their progressive decline. They rediscovered ‘shura’ or mutual consultation that had no clear laid down institutional or procedural guidelines, as parliamentary democracy. ‘Ijma’ or consensus amongst jurists was redefined as public opinion. “Maslaha”, a legal term meaning the necessity of a new interpretation of Sharia due to the absence of a previous conclusive one, was developed into the concept of utility. ‘Bayait’, the allegiance shown by new community members to a new Caliph was equated with the right and the process of voting and ‘ahl-hall wa al-aqd’ (prominent respected members of the society) were transformed into a body of elected representatives. Finally, ijtehad was now to represent freedom of thought.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Fazlur Rehman, *Islam*, 265.

<sup>82</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 113.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

<sup>84</sup> Yousaf M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 33-4.

The reformists argued that in the absence of Mohammed the Muslim schools of jurisprudence emerged to deal with the new social and legal problems as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Why then are the Ulema so opposed to reform in order to deal with the problems of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? The miserable conditions of the Muslims became the driving force for the reformists as they highlighted the lack of adaptability that had crept into Islam due to the stagnation of the thought process. They warned that Islam would become redundant without transformation.

Fazlur Rehman, a modern day reformist from Pakistan, defined the challenge facing the Muslim society to be at the level of social institutions and ethics. According to him the 7<sup>th</sup> century Muslim society had a clean slate and had no past to relate to. It created social institutions and ethics that were as workable as any other system of the time. The Muslims are now faced with the dilemma of how much of the glorious past should be retained and what proportion should be adjusted and transformed to match the challenges of today.<sup>85</sup>

Contrary to western perception, one of the brightest rays of hope to reform Islam remains in Iran. It is one of the very few Muslim countries where the reformers are engaged in a political struggle with the radicals. The upheaval caused by the death sentence awarded to a reformist professor Aghajari is very significant.<sup>86</sup> He challenged the radical clergy of Iran by contending that every generation has the requisite intellectual qualification to interpret Islam and they should not be forced to blindly accept old interpretations. The commutation of his death sentence on the intervention of the supreme leader Ayatoallah

Khamenei indicates that the hard-liners are aware of the gathering discontent among the younger generations of Iran. Although the recent engineered victory of the hard-liners in the parliamentary elections is seen by some as a serious blow to the reformers, others see it as the calm before a gathering storm. Iran therefore is a Muslim theocracy struggling to become a modern Muslim nation state. The future of reformers in Iran will greatly influence the future of the reformist movement all around the Muslim world.

The middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about the emergence of modern nation states all over the Muslim world. This phenomenon overshadowed both revivalist and reformist movements. It overshadowed revivalism because the reigns of these states were mostly handed over to a westernized local elite that relegated Islam to the private sphere of life and pursued western models of public life. The reformists were pushed into the background for two reasons. First, they lost the internal battle to the puritanical ulema who would not tolerate any reform in Islam. Second, some of the reformists moved from reforming Islam to studying western ideologies and thus were judged to be too ‘secular’. The nation state was a new concept and the Ulema were not prepared for it. They now faced a bigger challenge in the form of nationalism and democracy that were gaining popularity with the passage of time.

These conditions gave rise to Islamic Radicalism. The two main architects of this movement were Mawdudi and Qutb. Mawdudi was of the view that although there were dangers of contamination of the Muslim society, Islam and its doctrines were too strong

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<sup>85</sup> Fazlur Rehman, *Islam*, 264.

<sup>86</sup> Dareini, *The Boston Globe*, 12/13/02.

to be annihilated.<sup>87</sup> Mawdudi's also identified other levels of jihad that can be waged in case one is not able to engage in an armed struggle. However, he was in favor of systematic toppling of governments to establish a "theo-democracy".<sup>88</sup> Mawdudi even wrote that secular legislation lacks moral sanction and is not voluntarily obeyed. This results in the use of force that disrupts social life.<sup>89</sup> This argument however has been muted by the fact that secular legislation in the west has produced some of the most law-abiding societies in the western world where hardly any force is used to enforce these laws. Disrupted social lives ironically are the hallmark of Muslim societies and not the western world.

However, when it came to defining Islam Mawdudi always interpreted it to be a revolutionary ideology that aimed at changing the social order of the whole world to the tenets of Islam. He also terms the Muslims to be the International Revolutionary Party that struggles through Jihad to fulfill that mission. In his book 'Jihad in Islam' he clearly stated that Islam wishes to destroy any Government or State that opposes the transformation of this world according to the tenets of Islam. Moreover, Islam aims at establishing an Islamic State that would act as the standard bearer for this movement<sup>90</sup>.

According to Mawdudi Islam believes in the annihilation of any system that is manmade and seeks to enforce its own laws, which it deems best for all mankind. The aim of Islam, therefore, is to bring about a universal revolution. Although Mawdudi accepted that Islam did not advocate forced conversion or an imposition of its ideology on non-Muslims, he

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<sup>87</sup> Yousaf M Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 93-6.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 134-8

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 106

categorically stated that those non-Muslims do not have the right to administer state affairs<sup>91</sup>. Mawdudi thus classified the non-Muslims as second class citizens.

Qutb was an Egyptian scholar who became the ideological father of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. He was greatly influenced by Mawdudi's writings and believed that revolution was the only way to transform the world that was living in jahaliyya (a state of ignorance). Jahaliyya for him was a conceptual framework that included the Muslim and the non-Muslim societies of the world that were not living according to laws of Sharia<sup>92</sup>. Muslim Ulema had used the term 'jahaliyya' to describe the ignorance and the pagan traditions of the western world. Qutb, however, extended this definition to include Muslims who were leaning towards western ideologies.<sup>93</sup> This extended definition was quite similar to that of the Kharijites and Wahabis branding Muslims outside their community as non-believers. Different names can be given to different movements but the emergence of radical elements as a reaction to their environments is not a new phenomenon in Islam.

Qutb also traveled to the US to pursue his graduate studies in 1948. He studied at some of the most prestigious educational institutions including the Stanford University in California. During his stay in the US he was impressed with the material progress but was quick to highlight a lack of social and moral progress in the American society. In his book *Amrika allati Ra'aytu* (America as I saw it) he cited materialism, racism and sexual permissiveness as his main reasons to reject the American social order. In his own words

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<sup>90</sup> Mawdudi, *Jihad in Islam*, 8-9

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 19-28

<sup>92</sup> Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Qutb*, 19-20



‘the Americans are not a people without virtues. But their virtues are those of production, organization, reason and work’. He, therefore, contended that the leadership of the US was focused on the attainment of material goals instead of a pursuit of moral objectives<sup>94</sup>. The late 1940s and the early 1950s were especially hard for Qutb due to the creation of Israel in the Muslim heartland. He defined these developments to be a well thought out plan and went to the extent of branding western campaigns against Muslim states as attempts to annihilate Islam and its doctrines<sup>95</sup>.

Qutb also believed that the Muslims not only have to transform their society according to the Sharia but also stop treating Islam as a religion defined by man. He advocated Sharia to be the divine law ordained by God and everybody in this world was to be judged by those laws<sup>96</sup>. It is interesting to note that Qutb in his book ‘Social Justice in Islam’ has used the verse of the Koran that says that “Judgement belongs only to God; ----” that was the same verse used by the Kharijites to oppose arbitration agreed by Ali<sup>97</sup>.

Qutb’s book ‘Milestones’ gave an intriguing insight to his vision of the world. This vision was not only dangerous but also very pragmatic. Qutb accepted the material progress of the west and confessed that it would take the Muslims centuries to catch up with the material progress of the western world. However, he recommended a two pronged strategy to achieve the goal of Muslim supremacy in the world. First he strongly advocated the pursuit of modern technologies so that ultimately the Muslims have the

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<sup>93</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Islam- A Short History*

<sup>94</sup> Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Qutb*, 24-5

<sup>95</sup> Qutb, *Milestones: Chapter 2* available at [http://www.masmn.org/Books/Syed\\_Qutb/Milestones/](http://www.masmn.org/Books/Syed_Qutb/Milestones/)

<sup>96</sup> Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism*, 278

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 278

same resources to overpower the rest of the world as it did in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The pragmatism is highlighted by the fact that Qutb forwarded a religious justification to achieve material or technical progress. Second, while accepting the material progress and creative genius of the West, Qutb argued that the Muslims as a community must possess something that is lacking in the 'jahaliyya'. He proposed that possession to be spiritual comfort. He thus argued that there was a dire need for a leadership of mankind that can rule on the basis of moral ideas and values and make optimal use of the material progress of the western world. He firmly believed that the Muslims qualify for that leadership of the world, as they possess the moral ideals and laws in the form of the Koran.

In order for this two pronged strategy to succeed Qutb advocated that his followers take over one Muslim State and establish such a community that would achieve spiritual and material comfort. That state would then act as a vanguard for this movement to spread throughout the ocean of jahaliyya and ultimately rule the world on the principles of Islam. However, he accepted the fact that this vision cannot be fulfilled overnight and thus advocated the setting up of milestones to succeed in this mission. He then openly professed that he had written his book 'Milestones' for that particular vanguard<sup>98</sup>.

Qutb's definition of Jihad is also an important insight to his thinking and ideology. Once again his strategy to wage Jihad was an extremely pragmatic one. He based his argument on the strategy adopted by the Muslims of the early days and explained four aspects of Jihad where careful attention was to be paid to the practical conditions and the prevailing environment. The first aspect recognized that the jahaliyya had an edge in terms of

material resources and so Jihad must commence through the preaching of an ideology while resources to start a military campaign are being amassed. The second aspect highlighted the need for a stage by stage progress and recommended that not only the stages should compliment each other towards the mission but the progress from one stage to another must be in keeping with the available resources. Here he severely criticized the Muslim scholars who advocated a ‘defensive war’ and accused them of showing a defeatist attitude. The third aspect deals with the acquisition of new resources to progress in various stages. However, Qutb cautioned that these new resources should not lead the community away from its mission and original ideology of establishing a Muslim order. The fourth aspect argued by Qutb is that Islam provided a legal basis for relationship between Muslims and other groups. No material power or political system should be allowed to impede the preaching of Islam and it is the duty of the Muslims to overpower any such impediment<sup>99</sup>.

Qutb’s definition moved Jihad from a theological concept to a twentieth century practical and a proactive strategy to conduct war. His ambition to take over a state and transform it into a vanguard reflected his acceptance of the modern international system based on modern nation states. Unlike many Islamic theologians who still dreamt of a Muslim empire of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Qutb was astute enough to realize that the international system may be penetrated but cannot be changed. More important is his emphasis on the acquisition of resources for the movement to progress to future stages. He, therefore, realized the need for modern technology in general and armaments in particular to wage

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<sup>98</sup> Qutb, *Milestones: Introduction* available at [http://www.masmn.org/Books/Syed\\_Qutb/Milestones/](http://www.masmn.org/Books/Syed_Qutb/Milestones/)

<sup>99</sup> Qutb, *Milestones: Jihad in the Cause of God*, available at [http://www.masmn.org/Books/Syed\\_Qutb/Milestones/](http://www.masmn.org/Books/Syed_Qutb/Milestones/)

his Jihad. Another interesting aspect that comes to light from this commentary is the fact that he also appreciated that with modern weapons and resources there is a danger of losing focus from the main mission and getting entangled in the pursuit of worldly or personal gains. This apprehension indicated the importance given to the age-old combination of the pen and the sword that has remained part of these ideologies since their origins. Qutb thus emphasizes that while the sword is necessary, as it becomes sharper and bigger, it must still be controlled and guided by the pen. Finally, by advocating the destruction of any political system or material power that opposed the spread of Islam, Qutb anointed Islam as the only acceptable system in the world where non-Muslims would have to live as second class citizens until they converted to Islam.

Islamic radicalism thus advocates the establishment of a totalitarian Islamic State and places 'jihad' or armed struggle as one of the most important tenets of Islam. Both Qutb and Mawdudi recommended armed struggles to establish a theocracy that would be the vanguard or standard bearer for this revolution. Both, therefore, also realized that the revolution could not progress without seizing political power, which in turn raised the need to acquire material and technical power also. It is important to mention here that it was the writings of Qutb that groomed Abdullah Azzam, the chief architect of Al Qaida's ideology<sup>100</sup>.

## Al Qaida

The ideology of Al Qaida assumes tremendous importance, as it is the first terrorist group that has moved terrorism beyond the definition of being a technique of protest. It has transformed terrorism into a global instrument to challenge western influence in the Muslim world<sup>101</sup>. The ideology undoubtedly has its roots in the teachings professed by the architects of Islamic radicalism in general and Sayyed Qutb in particular. Abdullah Azzam, the ideological father of Al Qaida, and Mohammed Qutb the brother of Sayyed Qutb would have a profound influence on Osama bin Laden and his philosophy. Qutb asserted his brother's concept of including the governments around the Muslim world as being part of the 'jahaliyya' and Azzam with his fiery rhetoric called for toppling them. Together they concluded that an Islamic government couldn't be established with peaceful means, as there were too many powerful forces at work to prevent such an outcome. They therefore contended that it was only through waging a jihad with the pen and the bullet that this dream could be realized. The pen symbolized a call on Muslims to wage a jihad while the bullet, the undertaking of an armed struggle. Once again the combination of the pen and the sword formed the foundation for another radical movement. They also believed that it was imperative to challenge the might of the US before any success in toppling regional governments could be achieved<sup>102</sup>.

Two events that precipitated the rise of several radical movements across the Muslim world were the revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The radicals defined these events as momentous occasions that motivated Muslims to rise and wage

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<sup>100</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaida: Global Network of Terror*, 2

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 1

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 5

jihads against the injustices of the west. Azzam was greatly inspired by the war in Afghanistan and became the rallying cry to invite Muslims all over the world to join this 'Jihad'. Azzam's writings urge the Muslims to develop a strong desire to die and achieve martyrdom. His book 'Join the Caravan' actually invited Muslims to join the caravan of martyrs going to heaven from Afghanistan, a call no different from that of the Kharijites. Azzam argued that once a Muslim land is occupied by non-Muslims jihad becomes an obligation for every Muslim man. However, he made four exceptions regarding people who were exempted from participating in the Afghan War. First, anyone who had a family and was the sole provider for them was excused from Jihad. Second, a person unable to obtain a visa to travel to Pakistan. Third, somebody who was denied a passport by his government. Fourth, anyone who was responsible to take care of his old parents<sup>103</sup>. Throughout his books Azzam also extensively quoted from the writings of the renowned scholar of the Hanbali School of jurisprudence, Ibn Tamayyia.

Azzam divided the concept of Jihad into offensive and defensive Jihad with the latter taking precedence over the former. In his opinion the defensive Jihad is waged to expel non-Muslims from a Muslim land or to liberate Muslims in bondage. An offensive Jihad is waged to bring the world into the folds of Islam but it can only be waged when there is no requirement to wage a defensive Jihad. However, Azzam made it very clear that it was compulsory for a Muslim leader to initiate a defensive Jihad and in the absence of a requirement for a defensive Jihad, an offensive Jihad must be waged at least once a year

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<sup>103</sup> Azzam, *Join the Caravan: Conclusion*, available at <http://www.islamistwatch.org/texts/azzam/caravan/caravan.html>

to ‘terrorize’ the opponents of Islam<sup>104</sup>. Azzam was also aware of the patriarchal nature of the Muslim society and the importance assigned to the wishes of the parents. He, therefore, also made a case that participation in the jihad in Afghanistan is a mandatory obligation of every Muslim that did not require permission from one’s parents<sup>105</sup>.

Following the teachings of Qutb, Azzam also believed that every movement needed a vanguard that would lead that ideology into the society. He argued that no ideology could succeed without this vanguard that must lead the way through the hardest of times and thus inspire others and motivate them to join in. He therefore termed Al Qaida to be that vanguard for the new society he aspired to create<sup>106</sup>. Al-Qaida was thus the standard bearer for this movement until Afghanistan was liberated and converted into a larger vanguard. Here Azzam can be seen following the step by step strategy advocated by Qutb. Azzam finally defined this ideology in an article printed in Al Jihad and laid down the guiding principles for Al Qaida, his vanguard. It is therefore worth quoting in detail. He advocated that:

- The vanguard must jump into the fire of the toughest tests and into the wave of fierce trials.
- The training leadership shares with them the testing march, the sweat and the blood. The leadership, like a motherly warmth of a hen whose chicks grow under its wings, throughout the long period of hatching and training.
- This vanguard has to abstain from cheap worldly pleasures and must bear it distinct stamp of abstinence and frugality.

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<sup>104</sup> Azzam, *Defense of Muslim lands: Chapter 1* available at <http://www.islamistwatch.org/texts/azzam/defense/defense.html>

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. Chapter 3

- In the like manner it must be endowed with firm belief and trust in the ideology, instilled with a lot of hope in victory.
- There must be a strong insistence on continuing the march no matter how long it takes.
- Travel provisions are amongst the most important items on this march. The provisions consist of meditation, patience and prayer.
- Loyalty and devotion.
- They must be aware of the existence of anti-Islamic machinations all over the world<sup>107</sup>.

These guidelines became the hallmark of Al Qaida ideology and these qualities can be seen in its membership, which are significant proof of faith in this ideology and their conviction of being a vanguard for creating a new social order. However, Azzam was not an advocate of indiscriminate killings of unarmed civilians. His concept of jihad was close to the conventional definition of an armed struggle against the military of the enemy<sup>108</sup>.

After Azzam's controversial assassination, Osama became the flag bearer and a symbol of this struggle. His behavior and his demeanor showed how religiously he had followed Azzam's guiding principles. He was different from other Arab terrorists. His ideology was not limited to hate for Israel but was more pan-Islamic in nature<sup>109</sup>. The war in Afghanistan had a profound effect on him and he considered it to be a spiritual

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<sup>106</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaida: Global Network of Terror*, 3

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 86



experience where the myth of super power was shattered in front of him and his companions who fought with him<sup>110</sup>. He therefore genuinely believed that a jihad waged with true conviction could overcome any adversary.

According to bin Laden 'the acme of this religion is jihad'<sup>111</sup>. However, the definition of jihad in this ideology has been limited to an armed struggle against the infidels. Moreover, the concept of martyrdom has been embedded in the culture of al Qaida like it was embedded in the Kharijite community. The recruits are indoctrinated in this cause and convinced that the ultimate aim of a Muslim mujahid is martyrdom and that a better alternative does not exist. The training of the recruits emphasizes repeatedly that they are preparing or participating in a jihad. The text of the Koran has been frequently used to authenticate this ideology and the significance of martyrdom e.g..

'Never think that those who were slain in the cause of God are dead. They are alive and well provided for by the Lord'<sup>112</sup>.

Older religious men had always influenced Bin Laden. In his early days it was his father and later it was Azzam whom he referred to as 'a man worth a nation'<sup>113</sup>. The Egyptian doctor Aiman al Zawahiri filled the void left by Azzam. Zawahiri was a veteran terrorist from the Egyptian Islamic jihad and had decades of experience in assassinations and terror plots. His association with the Islamic Jihad also meant that he too was greatly influenced by the writings of Qutb, the ideological father of that organization. His

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<sup>109</sup> Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc.*, 37

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 41

<sup>112</sup> Koran 3:169

<sup>113</sup> Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc.*, 51-2

alliance with Osama also brought about an ideological shift towards terrorism. It was basically two swords getting together under the guidance of the same pen.

The Gulf War and the stationing of US troops in Saudi Arabia became a significant event for Bin Laden who was angered by the thought of a non-Muslim army on Islam's holiest land. He used this development to call for a jihad to oust the US troops from Saudi Arabia and thus purify the Holy Land. After his alliance with Zawahiri a war was declared on America and more significantly this declaration included, for the first time, a call to kill US citizens indiscriminately and irrespective of their status. He used the text of the Koran to issue a fatwa<sup>114</sup> justifying the killings of Americans in order to rid the Holy Land of the non-believers and help the Muslims who were being oppressed.

To understand how the idea of killing unarmed civilians is sold to the recruits of Al Qaida, it is imperative that one should first analyze the recruits themselves. During the Afghan war thousands of religious schools or madrassahs were established all around Pakistan and thousands from all over the Muslim world were enrolled in those madrassahs. After the war there was neither a strategy to rehabilitate those who had graduated nor any attempt to reform these religious schools. The raw recruits that Osama got for his training camps were thus already conditioned with a radical education in these schools. On top of this the ratio of those recruited was extremely low, as Al Qaida is very selective in granting full membership of the organization. In 2001 out of an estimated 110,000 that received training in Afghanistan, it is estimated that only 3,000 (3%) were granted full membership. Availability of such a vast pool of manpower thus enables Al

Qaida to choose the most dedicated and loyal members. The global nature of the organization ensured ample diversity amongst the recruits. September 11 not only proved that the ideology appeals to all classes as the hijackers were from well to do families but the global pool of operatives allows them to easily fit in the targeted societies<sup>115</sup>. Full membership of the organization is considered a great honor amongst the recruits and they strive to go to any extent to show their allegiance to the ideology<sup>116</sup>. In addition to this the curriculum of training has three levels. The first level involves basic guerrilla training and knowledge of a particular brand of Sharia law<sup>117</sup>. The second level is where advanced assassination techniques and the use of heavy weapons and explosives is taught. It is the third level that filters the most devout and dedicated members and trains them in suicide missions<sup>118</sup>. These rigorous courses and training levels have thus institutionalized suicide terrorism<sup>119</sup>. Through a carefully monitored and controlled filtering process the organization thus graduates members that do not question the morality of killing but to the contrary are willing volunteers.

The strength of an ideology is not just in the cause or its source. A lot depends on the leadership that presents and maintains that ideology. Moreover, the ideology also needs success stories to reassure the followers and supporters that the struggle is making its way towards the objective. As far as leadership is concerned Bin Laden has been very effective on almost all fronts. In his personal capacity he is not at all a traditional terrorist leader. He is not emotive in his outlook and presents a very calm and patient personality.

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<sup>114</sup> A religious decree or call

<sup>115</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaida: Global Network of Terror*, 10

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 8

<sup>117</sup> The Hanbali School which is the least tolerant of the four main schools of jurisprudence.

<sup>118</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaida: Global Network of Terror*, 71-2

He speaks softly and writes poetry to commemorate his suicide operations. In spite of his wealth he leads a simple life devoid of luxuries. He symbolizes humility for his followers who consider him a leader who gave up millions and left his palaces to come and live with them in the caves of Afghanistan. According to his followers he cooked, ate, dug trenches and fought with them and they call it the 'Bin Laden way'<sup>120</sup>. Stark similarities can be observed in his description by his followers and the Kharijite's description of an exemplary leader. Finally with the repeated failures of the US attempt to assassinate him, he has emerged with a higher stature and with an image of a man who stood up to a super power for the second time. In sharp contrast to the leaders of other radical groups, Bin Laden has been successful in creating an image that convinces his followers of his devotion and sincerity to the cause and hence has evaded capture through betrayal from within Al-Qaida.

Osama has also showed that not only is he capable of setting an example for his followers but he is politically astute also. He was aware of the fact that the legitimacy of his fatwas to wage a jihad would be questioned around the Muslim world. He therefore made sure that he used the radical clerics all around the Muslim world to issue similar calls for jihad to protect the Holy Land. The issuance of a fatwa by the 40 Afghan clerics that it was the duty of Muslims to rid the Holy Land of non-Muslim presence was thus a vindication of his stand and neutralized his critics<sup>121</sup>. As mentioned earlier the Wahabi clerics of Saudi Arabia may not interfere in the affairs of the royal family but they have amongst them strong support for Osama's cause. Their fiery sermons on Friday prayers across Saudi

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 46-7

Arabia thus act as Bin Laden's campaign slogans. He therefore was aware of the fact that the media could exploit Arab civilian casualties to hurt his image. It is for this reason that he initially convinced Zawahiri to terminate operations that involved assassinations of Arab leaders, which may result in civilian casualties and consequently tarnish the image of Al Qaida in its base of support<sup>122</sup>.

Bin Laden has justified killing US civilians because he holds the US government responsible for the death of thousands of Muslims including those in Palestine. He claims to make them taste the same bitter fruit. He also contends that the real reason for the US presence in the Middle East was to protect the interests of Israel<sup>123</sup>. This actually was a clever tactic aimed at exploiting the strength of public opinion in the Arab world. He also exploited the grievances of Muslims all over the world to suite his pan-Islamic vision and the global nature of his terror network. His speeches regularly mentioned the sufferings of the Palestinians, the Kashmiris, the Chechens and the Iraqis.

Finally the success stories were also very important to show that the ideology was not just rhetoric but had met success on ground also. The most powerful story of success was the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Although the success of the Afghan resistance would not have been possible without military assistance from the US, this part of the story is missing in Al Qaida's version. The war is projected as a victory of the faith and dedication with which a jihad was waged by true believers. This war was endorsed as a true jihad both by Muslims and the western world. Following the Afghan war there were a number of terrorist attacks aimed at killing US civilians. The first attempt to bring down

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 38

the World Trade Center by Ramzi Yousef did not succeed but the attack was still hailed as a success by Al Qaida for reaching the American soil and killing American civilians. Then in Somalia 18 US soldiers died fighting the militias. Bin Laden would later claim the credit for those deaths and use that incident as a propaganda tool to highlight that the US did not have the stamina to fight a protracted conflict<sup>124</sup>. The Khobar tower bombings in Saudi Arabia took the lives of 18 US servicemen. The attack on USS Cole was also unique in nature, as this was the first time that a suicide operation was launched against a US navy ship. The attack cost the US the lives of 17 sailors. But the biggest attack before September 11 was the operation code named 'Holy Kaaba' that resulted in the bombing of US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania within minutes of each other. The death toll included 12 Americans, 201 Kenyans and 11 Tanzanians. More than 4,000 were injured<sup>125</sup>. September 11 was the deadliest terrorist attack in history that claimed the lives of more than 3,000 people belonging to more than 40 different countries. Although the event may have damaged Al Qaida as an organization, its followers would still look at it as a great success achieved against the 'big Satan'. It also realized Osama's dream of creating a global organization that was capable of launching attacks by land, sea and air.

The events in the post September 11 period have muted two arguments. First, that Al-Qaida as an organization has been dealt a deathblow in Afghanistan. The attacks in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, Spain and possibly Iraq clearly show that the organization is still capable of launching attacks almost anywhere in the world. Second, the perception that the September 11 attacks have somehow set a bar

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<sup>123</sup> Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc.*, 95-99

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 83

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* 110-113

and that the next attack is going to be at least as spectacular may be an erroneous one. The attacks following September 11 have not been as intense but have certainly been consistent. Moreover, one must also keep in mind that the pattern for attacks on a smaller scale is identical to the period preceding September 11 that raises the question if these attacks on a smaller scale are there to keep the organization motivated while another big one is being planned for the United States.

Bin Laden's activities in Afghanistan before September 11 indicated his strong belief in the ideology and strategy laid down by Qutb and Azzam. He aided the Taliban in taking control of Afghanistan. The vanguard of Azzam was thus successful in seizing political power in a Muslim State and transforming it into the broader vanguard defined by Qutb. The next stage was the establishment of a Muslim community on the basis of Sharia law. Rigid and brutal imposition of Sharia law thus followed in an attempt to create the Muslim community that would provide 'spiritual comfort' to the rest of the world. Once again it is important to note that although the Taliban were educated according to teachings of the Hanafi School the strict laws they promulgated were more reflective of the Hanbali School of jurisprudence. The situation thus indicates the inadequate education of the Taliban and the overpowering influence of Al-Qaida over them.

The next stage dictated by the ideology was turning this state into a vanguard or standard bearer for a universal revolutionary Islamic movement dreamt by the ideologues of Islamic radicalism. Bin Laden did this by setting up training camps in Afghanistan that fed recruits to radical movements all over the Muslim world. Mujahids trained in his camps participated in militant struggles in Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia, Philippines,

Somalia and China. Al-Qaida successfully established cells in Europe and North America. The ideology and culture formulated by the ideologues over the years was now being executed by Bin Laden like an efficient CEO.

Another critical subject that demands deeper understanding is the relationship between Bin Laden and Aiman Al Zawahiri. In the past terrorist and militant movements have seen internal rivalries and disagreements that caused them to splinter over a period of time. The relationship between Bin Laden and Zawahiri interestingly has remained devoid of any jealousy or disagreement. Al-Qaida due to its unique organizational structure has never had a disgruntled splinter group. There is no Bin Laden or Zawahiri camp or faction within Al-Qaida. The credit for this relationship can be awarded to the same ideology that has groomed them and has been their source of inspiration in this movement. As mentioned earlier that at the beginning of their alliance Bin Laden convinced Zawahiri not to attack Muslims but as this relationship matured there is a clear indication of an increase in Zawahiri's influence. He started appearing in every video released by Bin Laden and in some of those videos it was Zawahiri doing the talking while Bin Laden sat humbly next to him. This fact was further strengthened by the pattern of attacks that followed Operation Enduring Freedom. Majority of the attacks in the post September 11 period has been in Muslim countries that Qutb defined as part of the jahaliyya. Zawahiri has thus been successful in convincing Bin Laden to revert to the tactics adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood. Contrary to the perception of many, these attacks may not just be to punish these Muslim countries for their support in the war on terror. A careful analysis of the ideology would show that it may once again be a quest to establish another vanguard that was lost in Afghanistan.



## **Islam and Violence**

Although the texts and literatures of Al Qaida extensively quote verses from the Koran and hadith that obligate them to wage an armed struggle, their stance can be contradicted from the same sources. This, however, does not mean that these sources are self-contradictory but that the contradiction exists due to the quotation of the text out of context and conflicting interpretations. Moreover, many verses in the Koran are time or event specific. Lessons may be drawn from their interpretations but universal application of the literal meaning cannot be accepted.

First of all Al Qaida subscribe to a very narrow definition of the concept of jihad as it suites their designs. The literal meaning of the word jihad is 'struggle'. According to Islamic teachings the life of a Muslim is a jihad. This certainly does not mean that a Muslim is only obligated to participate in an armed struggle throughout his life. Infact armed struggle is just one of the struggles advocated by Islamic teachings and has defined rules for both the initiation and the conduct of a conflict. The biggest jihad in Islam is the jihad against one's own temptations. Mohammed has also termed the pursuit of knowledge as a jihad also. Modern day leaders like Muhatir of Malaysia asked his people to wage an economic jihad. The definition of jihad thus is more than just an armed struggle<sup>126</sup> and certainly does not include terrorist activities.

In order to ascertain whether Islam advocates violence or not, one must go back to the origins of Islam and understand the social environment prevalent at the time. Islam is a religion that brought the message of peace and humility at a time and place where only

might was right and there was no value for human life or any desire to seek self-improvement. During such times of intellectual and social darkness, Islam brought ideas that were so revolutionary and futuristic compared to the norms of the day that with the exception of a slim minority, the Arabian society responded with outright rejection and violence.

Islam therefore advocated a change from the existing norms that were initially unacceptable to the society. Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century was so futuristic that the society was hesitant to accept such progressive and sudden changes. Unfortunately the extremists in Islam have always fought any type of reform in the religion and now want to enforce a 7<sup>th</sup> century Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are still obsessed with the glorious past and do not realize that a portion of the “slate”<sup>127</sup> needs to be rewritten in order to meet the challenges of today.

The first discrepancy in the Al Qaida narrative is the unilateral branding of the Christians and the Jews as infidels while in the Koran they are still referred to as the people of the book. Muslims are allowed to share food with them and are asked to live in peace with them. Islam allows Muslim men to marry women of the Christian and the Jewish faith<sup>128</sup>. Mother of Mohammed's only son Ibrahim (Abraham) was his Coptic Christian slave maid. All the text and quotations used by Al Qaida are those that were used for the idol worshippers and not for people of the book.

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<sup>126</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 93

<sup>127</sup> Fazlur Rehman, *Islam*, 264

<sup>128</sup> Koran 5: 5

Bin Laden has tried to emulate his exiles to those of Mohammed when he undertook 'hijra' to go from Mecca to Medina. He however has overlooked the fact that the first hijra in Islam was undertaken by a group comprising of people that Mohammed thought were too weak and would not be able to sustain the atrocities of the opposition in Mecca. He therefore ordered his cousin Jaffar to take them to Ethiopia, which at the time was ruled by Christian King Negus. Mohammed believed him to be the follower of the true faith and a just ruler. This group received protection from the King who even refused to hand them over once demanded by the powerful elite of Mecca. King Negus is held in great respect amongst Muslims. Unfortunately by Osama's definition followers of the same faith today are branded as idol worshippers and infidels.

The texts that have been used to justify killing Jews are event specific verses of the Koran and dealt with certain Jewish tribes of Medina that had conspired with the Meccans to defeat the Muslims and thus had violated a peace pact<sup>129</sup>. One of the most popular verses about the Jews and Christians quoted from the Koran by the radicals is,

‘O you, who believe, take not the Jews and the Christians as friends. They are but friends to each other. And if any amongst you take them as friends then surely he is one of them. Surely, Allah guides not those people who are unjust’<sup>130</sup>.

The above quoted verse was revealed in Madina after Mohammed had migrated to that city to escape persecution at the hands of the Meccans. Madina was inhabited by both Christian and Jewish tribes whose loyalties were suspect in case of a war with Mecca. This verse actually is interpreted by many scholars as a warning against trusting them.

The verse, therefore, is for a specific group of Jews and Christians and has to be put in the correct time frame. To punish all the Christians and the Jews by using this verse is no different from punishing the Jewish race due to the presence of some Jews at the crucifixion of Jesus. The argument for universal application of this verse is further muted from the fact that Mohammed cannot on one hand trust a Christian King to protect the weakest of Muslims and then within a few months recite another verse forbidding placing any trust in them. The extremists, therefore, either have to accept a contradiction within Islam or confess to the misuse of this text out of context. Unfortunately, the Muslim scholars across the Muslim world have failed to ask such questions bluntly and expose the misuse of Koranic text.

Another important point to remember is that there is no provision in Islam that mandates any restriction on non-Muslims to travel or stay in Saudi Arabia. The only case that can be made is the restriction on non-Muslims to enter the mosque in Mecca and the Kaaba. Moreover, the text quoted by Al Qaida asks to rid the Holy mosque of Mecca from the idol worshippers and not the people of the book. Once again a text that directed the Muslims to rid the Kaaba of idols refers to the pagan statues that were placed in the Kaaba before the Muslim conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The same verse is now being misused in a universal manner to legitimize the demand for withdrawal of US troops from Saudi Arabia. And once again the Muslim scholars have failed to highlight this misuse of Koranic text.

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<sup>129</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 15.

<sup>130</sup> Koran 5:51

Islam assigns great value to human life and unnecessary bloodshed is against the teachings of Islam. Like all other religions its aim is to be an inspiration for self-improvement and peaceful and meaningful co-existence. However, it definitely gives the right of both individual and collective self-defense, which is no different from the Charter of the United Nations. Even during the course of these defensive actions it lays down clear parameters governing the rules of engagement and the conduct of a war.

“And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly Allah likes not the transgressors<sup>131</sup>.”

At another point in the Koran, peace is preferred over war.

“But if they incline to peace, you also incline to it, and trust in Allah.

Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower<sup>132</sup>.”

The Muslim armies had well defined instructions of not attacking women and children and preserving the lives of those who had surrendered. Personal vendettas were not allowed and there were instructions laid down to ensure a humane treatment of prisoners of war. In addition to the instructions in the Koran, Mohammed also declared that any prisoner of war that teaches ten Muslims to read would be granted freedom thus highlighting not just humane treatment of prisoners of war but also the importance of education in the Muslim community.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 2:192

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 8:61

One of the most appropriate examples is the conquest of Mecca by the Muslim Army in 630 AD. The army had clear instructions regarding the rules of engagement upon entry into Mecca.

“Whoever enters into the Masjid (the mosque) he is safe, whoever enters into the house of Abu Sufyan (the Governor of Mecca) he is safe, whoever enters his own house and closes the door he is safe<sup>133</sup>.”

Khalid-bin Walid was one of the most revered and celebrated generals of Islam and was famous for his military campaigns. Osama had also named a training camp in his name. Some of his campaigns were fought against heavy odds but his military tactics and strategy always brought him victory in the end. Mohammed had awarded him the title of “Saif Ullah” meaning the “Sword of Allah”. In spite of his numerous military campaigns and his strong desire for martyrdom he died a natural death and had over sixty battle wounds that had left marks on his body at the time of his death. Islam therefore does not in any way advocate throwing away one's life for martyrdom and suicide does not lead to martyrdom by any form or definition.

“----- And do not kill yourselves (nor one another). Surely, Allah is most merciful to you<sup>134</sup>.”

Mohammed when asked about suicide said,

“Whoever purposely throws himself from a mountain and kills himself,

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<sup>133</sup> Sahih Muslim, vol3, p997

<sup>134</sup> Koran 4:29

will be in the (Hell) Fire falling down into it and abiding therein perpetually forever; and whoever drinks poison and kills himself with it, he will be carrying his poison in his hand and drinking it in the (Hell) Fire wherein he will abide eternally forever; and whoever kills himself with an iron weapon, will be carrying that weapon in his hand and stabbing his abdomen with it in the (Hell) Fire wherein he will abide eternally forever<sup>135</sup>."

It is very interesting to note that these militants proclaim to be the followers of great military figures like Khalid-bin Walid and still commit forbidden acts of terror through suicide missions. Moreover, they are hailed as martyrs by their mentors when all they did was kill innocent civilians, something that is already outside the rules of engagement laid down in the teachings of Islam even in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

The aim of Al Qaida, therefore, is not to preserve the religion but to preserve the environment of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The terrorists have very few answers when it comes to the 21<sup>st</sup> century problems of economics, unemployment and standards of living. The Muslims are no longer the dominant military or economic power in the world. The radicals are not in a position to follow the path of winning political power peacefully and then enforcing Islam. The western powers have left the stagnant Muslim world far behind when it comes technological and economic expertise. Moreover, there is a significant majority of Muslims who do not prescribe to the radical brand of Islam and want to uplift their living standards. Osama may claim that his organization is a result of globalization but his

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<sup>135</sup> Sahih Bokhari 7:670

vision of a Muslim State is still primitive. The trade practices between tribes in the 7<sup>th</sup> century cannot be used as a blueprint to compete in the global trade market of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The problem is not with Islam being unable to provide solutions for all these challenges. It is the forced stagnation of Islamic thought by these radicals that prevents the religion from entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is thus easier for them to go back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century in order to keep control of the religion and to shy away from coming up with solutions to the problems facing the Muslims of today. They find it convenient to refer matters of dissent to the sword and thus push their political agendas under the veil of religion.



## **Thoughts for the Future**

The preceding discussion highlights the fact that extremist movements progress on two basic tenets, the pen and the sword. However, it is the pen that provides the inspiration for the acquisition and the use of that sword. Whenever the sword has tried to control the pen, ideologies have collapsed and movements disintegrated. The narrative for these movements thus is of utmost importance. One can trace it back to the Qurra of the Kharijites that were succeeded by Hanbal, Tamiyya, Wahab, Mawdudi, Qutb and Azzam. Fiery poetry is another integral part of this narrative that inspires a culture of martyrdom, as it is hard to forget Bin Laden on that infamous tape reciting poetry to glorify the murder of 3,000 innocent souls. Al-Qaida, therefore, has been conscious of this threat from the sword becoming too powerful and has organized itself in a manner to ensure that the ideology controls the violence and not vice versa.

Interestingly the most effective strategy to counter an extremist movement lies nowhere else but in Islamic history itself. When Ali went to Nehrawan to confront the Kharijites, he challenged them on ideological grounds prior to the battle and was successful in attracting many of them back into his ranks. It was only after using the pen that he dealt the deathblow to the movement with his sword. Unfortunately, those fighting extremist movements from time to time have repeatedly ignored this effective strategy.

Gunaratna has aptly described the terrorists as 'men of violence wearing the cloak of religion who advance their objectives by corrupting and misrepresenting the religious

texts<sup>136</sup>. Although the US operations against Al Qaida have borne fruits and the organization is struggling but these measures would only work in the short run. As long as Al Qaida continues to look legitimate and the feeling that the Muslims have been wronged prevails, the recruitment and its support would survive. Therefore, In the long run its ideology has to be attacked and there is a need to discredit its leadership, ideology, strategy and tactics. The organization's interpretation of Islam must be challenged through Muslim Scholars and a question must be posed that 'is Al Qaida Koranic or heretical?' There is a need to publicize, in the Muslim world, the death of non-Americans and Muslims who became collateral damage from various Al Qaida operations<sup>137</sup>. Moreover, there is a need to mobilize the Muslim scholarship to openly declare Al-Qaida a movement against the principles of Islam by using the same Hadiths of Mohammed that were used to discredit the Kharijites.

Another critical aspect highlighting the need to fight the ideology is the fact that Al-Qaida has set a trend of waging asymmetrical warfare through terrorism directed against innocent civilians. If the ideology is not discredited it is bound to be used by groups that follow Al-Qaida's path. There is also a possibility that some of the post September 11 attacks may have been perpetrated by groups with no prior affiliation with Al-Qaida in which case a military campaign solely directed against Al-Qaida would not achieve the objectives of the 'Global War on Terror'.

Support and empowerment of the moderates and the reformers should be the next step. It must be kept in mind that autocratic regimes and monarchies are neither moderates nor

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<sup>136</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaida: Global Network of Terror*, 237

are they interested in any type of reforms. They will only talk of moderation and reform as long as their power is not threatened. It is political /religious moderation and reform that must be supported and encouraged in the Muslim world. Political reform to ensure freedom of speech and a just society with a free media and religious reform to ensure that the religion is brought upto date and not left to the whims of a few who would use it to serve their lethal ideologies.

The US needs to put pressure on the autocratic governments of the Muslim world to promote freedom of expression and political franchise. The argument that it would lead to the political rise of extremists groups in the region is a mute one. In today's age of globalization and communication the populations of the Muslim world have access to all types of information and values. An overwhelming majority of them does not subscribe to hard-line ideologies. Religious reform can only come by empowering the reformers who would counter the radicals. Reformers like Fazlur Rahman who said that 'one has to secularize the religion in order to make the secular religious' have been hounded across the globe under charges of blasphemy and death threats. As far as reformism is concerned, it has not died but has certainly lost the battle of control to the radical ulema who do not tolerate any kind of reform in Islam. However, in today's age of communication, reformers outside the Muslim world have kept the movement alive. People like Mohammed Arkoun are still doing a great service to Islam. Ironically it is the freedom of expression enjoyed in 'dar al kufr' that has kept this movement alive.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 236-8

The extent of backwardness of the radicals can be judged from the fact that their Islam today has very little to explain the centuries old concept of a modern nation state. Osama still aspires to establish a State comprising of all the Muslims in the world<sup>138</sup> and emulate the Muslim Caliphate of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The rule of the Talibans has proved that it is not only incompatible with the international system of today but it does not have any support amongst the Muslims either. This education drive in the Muslim world would go a long way when they are given a choice to either live as free citizens enjoying the freedoms of democracy or live under a regime like the Talibans. The Muslim world needs to realize that unless Islam adapts to the changing times, it would become redundant and left to produce more Bin Ladens and Al Qaidas.

In addition to countering the ideological challenges, states that aspire to move in the direction of moderation must be supported vigorously. The end of the war in Afghanistan, the defeat of the Talibans and the banning of Kashmiri militant groups have created a nightmare for a country like Pakistan. There is a frustrated crop of trained militants who see no future in the country. They are ripe to be recruited by anyone who can sell his agenda to them. The Afghan war created a cottage industry for weapons in the tribal areas of Pakistan. These weapons are now readily available to all these militant groups.

Another problem facing the government is that the madrassahs have also instituted themselves as a large welfare network for orphans and the children of the poor. The schools may preach radical Islam but they also provide free boarding and lodging through

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<sup>138</sup> Jane Corbin, *Al Qaida: The Terror Network that Threatens the World*, 23.

endowments received from their respective interest groups. Due to limited economic resources the establishment is neither in a position to outrightly take over or abolish these madrassahs nor is it in a position to offer a viable alternative immediately. The Government of Pakistan has instituted a Madrassah Reform Program that will stretch over a period of about 5 years. The program will attempt to reform about 8000 religious seminaries by adding subjects like English, Social Studies, Economics and Computer Sciences. The Government will pay the salaries of teachers teaching these subjects. The aim is to integrate these schools into the national education system<sup>139</sup>. However, this effort seems to be a halfhearted effort for two main reasons. First, the program deals with only 8000 ‘willing’ madrassahs. This means that madrassahs that are either receiving sufficient funding from their support groups or do not agree with the policy of reforming themselves can choose not to be part of this program. Second, the subjects introduced by the Government may improve employment prospects but would do little to reform the mindset. Moreover, the program does not ask the seminaries to reform the religious curriculum that moulds the ideological mindset of its students.

There is also the problem of limited and inaccurate information available about the madrassahs. Information about the teachings and culture of these religious schools aside even the number of madrassahs in Pakistan is disputed. Peter Chalk at the RAND Corporation estimates it to be between 40,000 and 50,000<sup>140</sup>. Other estimates quote even a higher figure and these are estimates about Pakistan only and do not take into account other Muslim countries. This lack of information over two years after September 11

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<sup>139</sup> *Madrassah Reform Brief* available at <http://www.embassyofpakistan.org/pb7.php>

<sup>140</sup> Peter Chalk, *Pakistan's Role in Kashmir Insurgency* available at <http://www.rand.org/commentary/090101JIR.html>

highlights a major weakness in the strategy being pursued to prosecute the Global War on Terror. The situation indicates that although tremendous resources are being expended to fight the terrorists but almost nothing is being done to crack down on the system that is producing them on a daily basis. Hundreds of thousands of indoctrinated youth are still graduating every year from Pakistan. The figure can thus easily be quoted in millions if we include other Muslim nations like Egypt, Bangladesh, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The resources required to reform the madrassahs or provide alternatives are miniscule when juxtaposed with the resources being expended on the military campaign to fight terrorism. Moreover, in the long run, it is the ideological indoctrination of the Muslim youth that needs to be stopped in order to win the Global War on Terror. Any effort to reform these religious schools has to begin with first identifying them and creating a database to ascertain their actual number across the Muslim world. This in itself would be a tall order requiring tremendous resources and sustained commitment but one cannot plan an effective strategy without accurately assessing the magnitude of the threat. This has to be followed by vetting the interpretation of the Koran that is being taught in them. However, it is important to understand that the effort must be indigenous rather than creating an impression of an imposition of another kind of Islam. The program to reform these schools must also include money to pay handsome salaries to the religious teachers who join in the effort. In case of Pakistan, including scientific or job oriented subjects in the curriculum is not enough. It is crucial to gradually introduce liberal arts in the early stages of the curriculum to broaden the mental horizon of these students and encourage

them to think about alternate ways of life and political systems. Pakistan can be used as a test case for this effort but the effort must proliferate to the rest of the Muslim world.

All these steps, however, cannot be taken in isolation and in total disregard of the prevailing environment in and around the Muslim world. Unfortunately, Islam today has been made synonymous with violence and militancy but if we look at the disputes involving Muslims all over the globe, we realize that in all of these disputes the Muslims are mostly at the receiving end. The United States spends billions of dollars every year to fight the drug trade but the drugs still find their way to the streets because there is a demand for them. Similarly, no matter how hard is the effort, militancy cannot be eradicated as long as there is a demand for it. The Afghan war and the Kashmir Dispute created the demand for militancy in Pakistan. Atrocities committed by the Russian Army in Chechnya have bred militants in that region. However, it is the Israeli-Palestinian dispute that poses the biggest challenge, as the US is perceived to be directly involved in the dispute and favoring Israel. The territorial dispute also involves Islam's third holiest site under Israeli occupation and thus has generated extreme anti-American sentiments in the Muslim world in general and the Arab world in particular.

The root cause of militancy therefore is not in Islam or the Koran but in these political disputes which have converted their surrounding areas into fertile breeding grounds for militants. It is these grievances that play a major role in the success of a militant ideology. Resolution of these disputes has to be one of the components of any strategy to counter militancy and groups like Al Qaida. It is also the vigorous pursuit of this strategy that will prevent Al-Qaida from establishing another vanguard like Afghanistan.

The future of Afghanistan is another critical factor in the ideological war against Al-Qaida. The final shape of Afghanistan would have a profound effect on the Muslim world that has repeatedly blamed the US for abandoning the Afghans. Unfortunately, the present strategy in Afghanistan is threatening a déjà vu of the past. Instead of moving towards a civil society Afghanistan is regressing back into tribal warfare and narcotics trade. The same warlords who were guilty of crimes against the Afghans are now Governors and US allies in the campaign to find Osama Bin Laden. It is extremely important to realize that the prevailing conditions in Afghanistan are identical to those that forced the Afghans to welcome the Taliban and restore some sort of order just a decade ago. A status quo in Afghanistan would actually favor Al-Qaida rather than help the war on terror.

Any strategy to counter groups like Al Qaida must have both military and non-military or ideological components that must be pursued simultaneously. Sole emphasis on one would weaken the other and would ultimately be counterproductive. Right now only the military component is being pursued and little is being done on the ideological side. The US effort against terrorism had tremendous support in the aftermath of September 11 attacks but there is now a growing feeling in the Muslim world that there is a different standard for Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya and Iraq, and a different standard for non-Muslims in Israel and North Korea.

This sense of alienation poses two fundamental problems for the United States and has the potential to stall almost all of the above mentioned recommendations. First, the



religious scholarship in the Muslim world may not like the extremists but they also perceive the US as being biased and not an honest broker in disputes involving Muslims. They, therefore, would not be willing to join any movement focused on openly discrediting Al-Qaida. Second, the institution of democratic reforms in the Middle East might not bring the extremists to power but one should also not expect American friendly governments to be elected as the sentiments on the Arab street are not hard to ascertain. Democracy in the Middle East, in the absence of a resolution of the Palestinian problem, would thus run counter to US interests in a region that controls over 60% of the world's known oil reserves. The situation warrants an immediate attention to allay this sense of alienation by supporting political processes where the Muslim world begins to perceive the US as an honest broker. It must be realized that ideological battle is much more than just 'winning the hearts and minds'. It is also about empowering and befriending those who can discredit and reject the doctrine of hate and killing.

Although the US administration has tried hard to emphasize that this is not a war against Islam but it has not met a lot of success either in the Muslim world or amongst the US population. A case needs to be made that a religion cannot be held responsible for the indiscriminate killing of the innocent. Just like Judaism cannot be blamed for the acts of Goldstein, Christianity cannot be blamed for the crimes of Christian Militias in Lebanon, similarly, Islam should not be held responsible for the terrorist activities of Al Qaida. The history of Islamic radicalism is littered with tales romanticizing broken swords. The time has now come to target and break the pen. It is only through a concerted attack on both

the pen and the sword that one can send groups like Al Qaida to 'history's unmarked graves of discarded lies'<sup>141</sup>.

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<sup>141</sup> President Bush's address to the joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001.

**Remarks**

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