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Introduction

What we are seeing now is a radical international jihad that will be a potent force for many years to come.  


Islamism is nothing new. It is rooted in long-standing currents within modern Islamic history. Alongside democracy, socialism, communism, monarchy, and autocratic authoritarianism, Islamism is one of modernity’s most influential political and religious ideologies. Islamists, also known as “Islamic fundamentalists” and “Islamic revivalists” (among other designations) – assert that the literal truth of the Quran, Islam’s most sacred text, together with its legal and ritual injunctions based on Islamic law (Sharia), must be applied to all Muslims and to religious minorities living in majority-Muslim countries. Islamists also believe that: (1) Islamic principles must dictate every aspect of life, both personal and societal; (2) Islam contains the truth and that other religions are either false or of limited validity; (3) traditional rules must govern sexual relations (i.e., sex may only take place within heterosexual marriage and licit concubinage); and (4) Western and secular cultures promote a range of consumerist and permissive lifestyles which are antithetical to Islam. Thus, Islamism – the complex current which is this book’s focus – is the reinflection and reaffirmation, in substantially changed political and socio-cultural settings, of time-honored forms of understanding and behavior. Yet, Islamists are not utterly opposed to every kind of change; rather, they maintain that change must be regulated by traditional beliefs and practices.
Islamist groups comprise one part of a modern trend, known as fundamentalism, which is also present within religions other than Islam. Broadly speaking, fundamentalism is the activist affirmation of specific beliefs and practices that define a religion in an absolutist and literalist manner. Among other characteristics, fundamentalism involves an effort to reform and implement the historical and textual interpretations, doctrines, and behaviors of religious persons in accordance with what the fundamentalists believe to be the essentials of their religion. Typically, fundamentalists attempt to formulate these ideas and then apply these ideals to themselves, to others within their religion, and to society at large.

Within this context, Islamists including Usama bin Laden (1957–2011), members of his movement, al-Qaida, and other Islamists have reinterpreted the main ideals of Islam while mobilizing themselves – in the context of a well thought-out religious and political worldview – to subvert what they perceive to be the West’s imperialism and hegemony in the majority-Muslim world and elsewhere, and to create a global Islamic state under Islamic law. Islamism is not only a significant feature of the modern international religious and political landscape, it is one of the most influential forces within modern Islam.

The religio-political justifications for the September 11 attacks and the Islamic organizational structures which catalyzed them will dominate international affairs for the foreseeable future. In the aftermath of September 11, the United States government made dramatic long-term changes in its domestic budgets and legislation, law enforcement and intelligence services, foreign policy and military doctrines which – together with the opposing strength of Islamism – will drastically change the global political map for many years to come. This book examines the histories, worldviews, structures, and religiously-based rationales for violence within Islamist groups; it will explore various Islamist groups and their historic grievances against the West with a long time-horizon in view. Particular attention is devoted to the formative relationship between Islamist and Islamic intellectual trends from the eighteenth century until the present.

An Islamic Lexicon

There are approximately 1.57 billion Muslims in the world and 96 percent of them live in developing countries. Muslims form a majority in almost 50 nations, most of which stretch within a wide band from Morocco to Indonesia. The four countries with the world’s largest Muslim populations are Indonesia with approximately 203 million Muslims, Pakistan with 174 million, India with 161 million, and Bangladesh with 145 million. At the same time, more than 38.1 million Muslims live in Europe and roughly 2.5 million live in the
United States. Within this vast ethnic, linguistic, national, and regional diversity, there are aspects of Islamic history, practice, and belief which Sunni Muslims, who constitute roughly 90 percent of all Muslims worldwide, affirm as the basis of the religious tradition. Shiite Muslims, who comprise roughly 10 percent of the Muslim population worldwide, adhere to many of these principles as well. Muslims believe that one sovereign and merciful God of the entire universe (who revealed himself to all the prophets from Adam to Jesus) gave his final, supreme, and perfect revelation to the Prophet Muhammad from 610 to 632 in what is modern-day Saudi Arabia. This revelation is recorded in the Quran, Islam’s most important sacred text. The Hadith, which also holds considerable authority, contains, among other things, what Muslims believe to be the sayings and actions of Muhammad, and these are models for Muslims collectively and individually.

Muslims believe in the oneness of God, the power of angels, the importance of the Jewish and Christian prophets and holy books, God’s final judgment, and his complete sovereignty over the universe, all of which comprise the Five Pillars of Belief in Sunni Islam. Muslims also hold a number of practices in common. These Five Pillars of Islam (distinct from but related to the Five Pillars of Belief) consist of a public confession of faith which initiates a person into Islam (shahada), five prayers per day (salat), an annual offering of 2.5 percent of one’s assets to be paid to a mosque or Muslim charity (zakat), fasting (sawm) during the daylight hours of Ramadan, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a person’s lifetime if she or he is able (hajj). The months of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca fall during different times from year to year because the Islamic calendar is lunar, not solar like the Western Gregorian one.

The term Islam comes from the Arabic words for submission and peace (salaam). Muslims frequently say they have an individual and corporate obligation to submit to God and God’s commands as found in the Quran, Hadith, and the example of the Prophet, find peace with God and within themselves, and create peace with each other and the world through submitting themselves completely to God and his commands. Indeed, for Muslims life is a gift that God has given earthly creatures. Thus, humans are to live in a spirit of submission to God, peace, and respect for life. As evidence of Islam’s teachings on peace and mercy, Muslims often cite the Quran chapter 6 verse 54 (Quran 6:54) which states, “Peace be upon you. Your Lord has decreed mercy. If anyone among you commits evil through ignorance and then repents and mends his ways, he will find God forgiving and merciful.” Yet, in spite of the unity which Muslims share, they vociferously debate issues such as Quranic interpretation, the role of Islam in political systems, and Islamic responses to modernity. Ideological groupings in the majority-Muslim world can be divided into the following
categories: Islamists, Muslim liberals, secularists, and “the floating middlers.”

These viewpoints function as ideal types, based on complex and ambiguous realities in which the moral stances and dispositions of any single person may contain a combination of all, tending to gravitate toward one or the other viewpoint according to the issue involved.

Al-Qaida’s form of Islam is one of the newest extensions of Islamism. One of several sources of al-Qaida’s origins was as an outgrowth of forms of Islamism present in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, soon after the Soviets retreated from there and as Bin Laden established al-Qaida during that time using Afghanistan as his headquarters. Al-Qaida has its intellectual roots in the thought of: (1) the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Egyptian Muslim scholars Ayman al-Zawahiri and Muhammad Atef; (2) the Saudi Muslim scholars Sheikhs al-Bahrani, Ulwan, and al-Rayan; and (3) a number of Islamic schools (madrasahs) in Pakistan. While members of al-Qaida agree with other Islamists in almost every area, the members of al-Qaida emphasize a significant point to their ideological manifesto. They, like some other Islamists, have constructed arguments founded on their interpretation of the Quran, Hadith, and early Islamic history which justify violent attacks against the West and Western institutions.

Two of several interrelated Islamist organizations are al-Qaida and the Taliban. Although the Taliban and al-Qaida are separate organizations, the Taliban became the Islamist government in Afghanistan during the 1990s and al-Qaida is Bin Laden’s international guerrilla organization. These groups often cooperated with each other before and even after September 11; the Taliban provided al-Qaida a base of operations in Afghanistan, while Bin Laden and al-Qaida gave the Taliban financial and military support. The Taliban attempted to defeat the anti-Taliban Afghan rebels during that country’s civil war in the 1990s in part in order to create an Islamist state there, while al-Qaida’s main objective was to operate as an international Islamic guerilla organization which wanted to expand Islam in Afghanistan, Pakistan and throughout the rest of the world while launching violent attacks against Western interests with the hope of eventually establishing a global Islamic state.

Liberal Islam constitutes an alternative interpretive stance to Islamism and, much like other Muslims, including the Islamists, liberal Muslims take seriously the most important foundations of Islam: the Quran, Muhammad’s life, the example of the first Muslims, and the Sharia. However, liberal Muslims reaffirm and reevaluate the significance of all these principles for modern life, viewing the Quran as God’s supreme revelation and believing it calls for human progress. They point to the Quran’s restrictions on slavery, its enhancement of women’s status, its limitations on the right of private vengeance, and its commands for beneficence, justice, equality, liberty, and social solidarity. For liberals, these ideals have propelled Muslims to make great leaps forward, beginning from Islam’s origins in the seventh century.
until today. They do not want literal interpretations of the Quran to block Muslims from perceiving its most relevant meanings as God’s perfect revelation. They believe Muslims must seek the underlying moral purposes of the Quran and Hadith, and that of the lives of Muhammad and early Muslims – grounding contemporary daily belief and conduct on that ethical thrust.14

In contrast, secularists maintain that individuals’ religious or non-religious affiliations should have no political ramifications; any person should be able to hold any political office in the state and the legal status of all citizens must be equal.15 Secularists contend that the right to legislate rests with the people and its authorized representatives, while believing that contemporary utility is an overriding factor which can help determine the content of laws. Secular governments may draw on the Sharia for specific guidance where popular mores and consent demand, but ultimately for the secularists the Sharia is shaped by human beings, and both Sharia and human beings are subject to changing religious, social, political, and economic conditions.16

Alongside of and, at times, overlapping these groupings are the floating middlers. While they may believe in some core Islamic principles and even in secularism, at times they are open-minded regarding the accomplishments of the West, although harboring some resentment toward it, while, at other times, they may find themselves identifying very strongly with the objectives of individuals as different as Saddam Hussein and Usama bin Laden. Like many others in the majority-Muslim world, floating middlers take great pride in the religious, cultural, and literary achievements of Muslims throughout history and retain a deep sense of dignity about the relevance of Islam’s legacy to current affairs. While they would strongly object to living under the rule of an Islamist government, the floating middlers often find themselves identifying with the grievances of Islamists. Cynicism frequently characterizes the attitudes of the floating middlers. They are skeptical of existing secular governments in the majority-Muslim world, of Islamism’s or Islamic liberalism’s potential to make positive changes, and, probably most of all, of the United States’ objectives and influence in the Muslim world.

No matter which of these clusters forms the primary basis of a person’s ideas, those living in the majority-Muslim world share a common understanding of the West’s historical assaults against their region; this shared perspective may be foreign to those Westerners who may be unable to fathom the West’s historic aggression against the Muslim world.

The September 11 Attacks: Acts of Self-Defense?

From the perspective of contemporary Muslims, a genealogy of Western assaults against Islam can begin with the Crusades which started in 1096 and, from this vantage point, had a shattering effect on relationships between
Islam and the West.\textsuperscript{17} For many modern-day Muslims, the Crusades embody the worst aspects of Christianity’s belligerence and they stand as ominous portents of the West’s arrogance and rampant militarism during the colonial and post-colonial eras.\textsuperscript{18} Modern Muslims’ interpretations of the Crusades as being part of the West’s evil onslaught against majority-Muslim lands seem to have come into existence near the end of the nineteenth century. For various reasons, it seems before that time the vast majority of Muslims possessed limited knowledge of the Crusades, and before the twentieth century the Crusades played a relatively minor role in Muslims’ understandings of Islam’s relationship with the West. Modern Muslim conceptions of the Crusades as part of a grand narrative that depicted those wars as a crucial part of the West’s ongoing assault against Islam could have been influenced by such realities as Joseph-François Michaud’s \textit{Histoire des croisades} (which appeared between 1812 and 1822), Sir Walter Scott’s \textit{The Talisman} (which was published in 1825), and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany’s visit to Damascus in 1898. These entities seem to have had an influence on Western thinking about the Crusades, and the imagined conceptions of the Crusades that these works and events conveyed seem to have been spread among modern Muslims through various kinds of schools and media in the Middle East and other parts of the majority-Muslim world. During the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the idea that the Crusades were part of the West’s ongoing warfare against Muslims gained currency among the vast majority of modern Muslims, and various Islamist groups adopted this conception of history as part of their own anti-Western narratives. Thus, it has been argued that the Muslim, and oftentimes Western, belief that the Crusades are part of the West’s long-standing, constant warfare against Islam could be conceived, in some respects, as an imagined history, whose ideas could be attributable to nineteenth- and twentieth-century reconstructions of the Crusades which were transmuted to Westerners and Muslims.\textsuperscript{19}

The Crusades consisted of several European military offensives extending from the eleventh to the sixteenth century (and, for some historians, beyond that) when the Christian armies of the West battled Muslims of the Middle East.\textsuperscript{20} Fearing the marauding Turkomen bands in the wake of the Seljukid conquest of Baghdad in 1055, Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus called upon fellow Christian rulers and the Pope to counter this Islamic tide by engaging in a military assault to wrest Jerusalem and its environs from Muslim rule.\textsuperscript{21} In a similar spirit, Pope Urban II called for the beginning of the Crusades in 1095 when he commanded European Christians to liberate Constantinople, Jerusalem, the Holy Land, and other areas in the Middle East (including locations where Christians were living under Islamic rule) from the Muslims.\textsuperscript{22}

Unprepared for Christendom’s invasion, the Muslims’ initial acts of self-defense were ineffectual. The first Crusaders captured Jerusalem in
1099 and occupied it until Saladin’s (Salah al-Din’s) military reconquered it in 1187. During this period, the battles were virulent and devastating. After that, the momentum remained with the Muslims. By the thirteenth century, the Crusades had degenerated into Christian in-fighting. By 1453, Muslim armies had taken over Constantinople (which would be renamed Istanbul in the 1920s) and made it the seat of the Muslim caliph, marking the expansion of Islam over almost all of Asia Minor. The Ottoman Empire from this time to the onset of British and French colonialism constituted one of Islam’s high points culturally, architecturally, and literarily.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Islam’s fortunes had reversed and Muslims faced the threats of European colonialist expansion. While during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the threats to Islam’s identity and unity were mostly internal, in the subsequent periods Muslims confronted the West’s incursions. France, Britain, and Russia in particular influenced the Middle East and Central Asia politically, economically, culturally, and morally during and after their colonialist period which began to end at the conclusion of World War II. Muslims believe that the Western countries exploited the majority-Muslim world for their own material and financial benefit in ways that allowed the West to progress to the detriment of most Muslims. British and French citizens who lived in the Muslim world established separate neighborhoods and distinct laws, and enjoyed much higher incomes and standards of living than most of their Muslim counterparts. The colonialists’ ostentatious displays of privilege compounded Muslims’ frustrations. As Western powers expanded their influence during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Muslims reinterpreted their sacred texts and histories, while revitalizing their religious institutions, in response to the rapidly changing circumstances. Islamism is one of the most striking manifestations of this response.

Near the end of World War II as British and French colonialist influence in the Middle East and North Africa (among other regions) began to wane, the United States became a major power in those and some other majority-Muslim areas. According to many Muslims, the most visible and violent example of the United States’ intervention in that part of the world has been its military, economic, and political support of Israel in such a way that it has empowered Israel to occupy Palestinian lands, stripping Palestinians of their livelihood, education, autonomy, and dignity. The British played a significant role in bringing the modern state of Israel to life through the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the same year their occupation of Palestine began. They were continuously involved in that area until Israel’s creation in 1948. Muslims view the United States as the most powerful supporter of Israel after that time.

In their opposition to many Israeli and American policies in the Middle East, many Muslims would state that the United States provides Israel with
$3.65 billion in foreign aid annually, making it the largest foreign recipient of American aid.\textsuperscript{28} They say that the United States has played a leading role in making Israel (which has a population of 6.5 million and covers 8,020 square miles) the fourth largest military in the world, while consistently blocking United Nations resolutions and other diplomatic overtures harmful to Israel’s interest.\textsuperscript{29} Over the course of half a century, Muslims throughout the world have watched in horror as Israel – with the expressed support of the United States – has killed thousands of Palestinians and occupied the West Bank and Gaza. Muslims often say that since the first Jewish settlers arrived in Palestine in the early twentieth century, Palestinians have seen their properties expropriated, their equal opportunities for education, careers, and medical care hindered, while their friends and family members have been killed, unjustly imprisoned, and tortured by the Israeli military and government.\textsuperscript{30} Muslims who oppose Israel’s policies also state that since the Israelis’ occupation of the West Bank and Gaza began in 1967, the Israeli Defense Force has blocked Palestinian ambulances in emergency situations, has bulldozed Palestinian homes, and has made the killing of Palestinians a daily occurrence.\textsuperscript{31} Critics of these Israeli policies say that since the second uprising (or intifada) against Israeli occupation began in September 2000, more than three times as many Palestinians have been killed as Israelis.\textsuperscript{32}

Among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, 30 percent live under the poverty line, in contrast to 16 percent of Israelis, and average life expectancy for Palestinians is approximately seven years less than that of Israelis.\textsuperscript{33} In addition, Muslims would state that the Palestinians have been forced to watch as the Israelis have diverted their dwindling West Bank water supplies toward swimming pools, flower gardens, and broad expanses of green lawn in Israeli settlements on the West Bank, while, in the meantime, a large number of Palestinian communities have had little or no running water.\textsuperscript{34} Muslims who oppose Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians would point to United Nations General Secretary Kofi Annan’s statement that Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is illegal, and South African anti-apartheid activist the Revd Desmond Tutu’s observation that Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians are tantamount to apartheid.\textsuperscript{35}

Many Israelis and supporters of Israel view the situation differently. They state that British and American backing of Israel has never been automatic. They refer to repeated instances where Jews and Israelis have had to work very hard to garner support for their cause. Those who support this argument would, for example, point to the harsh military and political restrictions which the British placed on Jewish immigration to Palestine during the time leading to Israel’s independence in 1948.\textsuperscript{36} One of many examples of British recalcitrance was the British navy’s violent military seizure in 1947 of the Palestine-bound ship \textit{Exodus-1947}, which contained 4,500 Jewish holocaust survivors who wanted to immigrate to Palestine, forcing it to turn back to
Europe where the Jews on board were placed in displaced persons camps.\textsuperscript{37} This attack, which was part of a larger British naval blockade in the Mediterranean that sought to disrupt the immigration of Jews to Palestine, resulted in the deaths of three \textit{Exodus-1947} passengers and the wounding of approximately 100 Jews.\textsuperscript{38}

Many supporters of Israel would also say that the financial, political, and military aid which it has received from the United States and other countries is well deserved since Israel is surrounded by hostile or potentially hostile neighbors and requires a strong military to defend itself.\textsuperscript{39} In making this observation, at least some Israelis would refer to the $2 billion per year the United States grants to Egypt, the continued strength of that Arab nation’s military, and the possibility that if a government hostile to Israel comes to power there, it may launch an attack against Israel.\textsuperscript{40} Israel’s backers also state that it is surrounded by other untrustworthy countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Substantial evidence indicates that Syria’s government – which also has enormous influence in Lebanon – has trained and backed groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and other violent organizations that have perpetrated constant attacks, killing and wounding hundreds of Israelis.\textsuperscript{41} Many of these anti-Israeli assailants receive backing from other majority-Muslim countries where they receive enormous popular and governmental support.\textsuperscript{42} Israel and its allies state that American backing of Israel is one very helpful countervailing force to the tremendous aggression Israel confronts on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{43}

Advocates of this argument also believe that Israel must protect itself against other hostile countries such as Iran, which has weapons of mass destruction and supports Palestinian militant groups.\textsuperscript{44} Those who back Israeli policy toward the Palestinians state that when it has come to making peace with the Israelis, Palestinians and other Arabs have “never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity.”\textsuperscript{45} According to this position, Israeli leaders throughout history have been ready to make peace with Middle Eastern countries and organizations, yet repeatedly those bodies have reacted to Israel’s peaceful desires by responding negatively or by making war with Israel. Many Israelis and their supporters would point to the wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973 as obvious cases where Israel had to respond militarily to either hostile threats or actions from its neighbors.\textsuperscript{46} They would also state that when Yasir Arafat, the President of the Palestinian Authority, had the chance to enter into peace agreements with the Israelis during the first and second Camp David meetings (in 1978 and 1999 respectively), he refused.\textsuperscript{47} In addition, Israel has implemented aggressive measures vis-à-vis the Palestinians so it can defend itself against repeated belligerent actions including suicide bombings against hundreds of innocent Israeli civilians and soldiers.\textsuperscript{48} Most Israelis are particularly alarmed by the Palestinian suicide assaults against Israelis in the heart of Israel and in West
Bank settlements that began in September 2000 (after Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem) and have brought overwhelming death, injury, and fear to Israelis.\textsuperscript{49} In response to foreign criticism against Israel’s policies, such as those of Kofi Annan and Desmond Tutu, many Israelis and their supporters state that defense of Israel is a matter of Jewish and Israeli survival and that Israelis and other Jews will never again allow themselves to be victims of pogroms or another holocaust.\textsuperscript{50}

There are wide varieties of viewpoints among Israelis, Palestinians, and their advocates; these are general contours of some arguments on the “pro-Palestinian” and “pro-Israeli” sides. Islamists and many other Palestinian sympathizers, which include most Muslims, often disregard many of the Israeli concerns, their historical experiences, and their justifications for their actions. Thus, Islamists and most other Muslims emphasize the injustices which they believe the Palestinians have suffered while ignoring those of Jews and Israelis. These Muslims state that the West’s hostility toward Islam during the Crusades and modern Israel’s history are just part of the wider Western assault upon Islam.

There are additional dimensions to Muslims’ grievances against the West. According to many Muslims, American involvement in Iran from the end of World War II until its Islamic revolution in 1979 is another instance of American interference in the majority-Muslim world. In 1953, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) organized and helped launch a coup against the elected government of Muhammad Mossadegh (1880–1967) and, after his overthrow, restored Muhammad Reza Shah (1919–80), who ruled Iran from 1941 to 1951 and again from 1953 to 1979, to Iran’s throne. Additionally, the CIA trained and financed Muhammad Reza Shah’s secret police SAVAK, created in 1957, which imprisoned, tortured, and spied on thousands of Iranians who were or were perceived to be opposed to the Shah’s regime. According to many Muslims, in addition to many other crimes the CIA committed in Iran, they supported a corrupt monarchical government which: (1) siphoned hundreds of millions of dollars into the Shah’s personal bank accounts; (2) contributed to an ever-widening gap between the rich and poor; and (3) did very little to provide economic and educational opportunities to the vast majority of Iranians. At the same time – according to this perspective – the United States provided consistent broad-ranging support to an autocratic monarch who ruled by fiat alone, disregarding parliamentary procedures and the will of Iran’s majority.\textsuperscript{51}

Evidence of what Muslims perceive to be the United States’ ongoing twentieth- and twenty-first-century “war against Islam” includes that nation’s brutal military and political policies with respect to Iraq during and after the first Gulf War. Although some moderate Muslims believed that the Allies were justified in ejecting the Iraqi military from Kuwait in 1991, large numbers of Muslims vehemently opposed the subsequent American
policy toward Iraq which imposed “no-fly zones” in the northern and southern thirds of Iraqi air space. These American and British over-flights involved frequent bombins of Iraqi military and communications facilities and – together with the first and second Gulf Wars and the intermittently reduced food and medical supplies resulting from economic sanctions – caused the deaths of possibly more than 500,000 children and thousands of other Iraqi citizens, according to estimates from the United Nations and other international organizations.52

Soon after the end of the first Gulf War, the United States stationed, on what seemed to be a permanent basis, 5,000 soldiers in Saudi Arabia,53 which for Muslims is the most sacred land in Islam and the country they believe must protect two of Islam’s holiest cities. The holiest city for Muslims is Mecca, Muhammad’s hometown, the site of many Quranic revelations, and the location of the Kaba – the immense three-story tall black cubic structure toward which Muslims pray five times per day and to which they journey in the hajj. The second most sacred city is Medina, 200 miles north of Mecca, to which Muhammad and the early Muslim community emigrated in 622, where Muhammad built Islam’s first mosque, fought several of Islam’s major battles, and where he and several others of Islam’s most important early figures are buried.54

Muslims believe the second successor to Muhammad, the caliph Umar (d. 644), prohibited all non-Muslims from entering the Arabian peninsula in order to keep it pure and unpolluted from their presence; many contemporary Muslims believe that this regulation should be tightly enforced into perpetuity. Since the emergence of Islam, Muslims have taken great pride in their own ability to defend their lands – sacred or otherwise – from invaders and in their capacity for either preventing non-Muslims from entering those areas or imposing severe restrictions on those non-Muslims who do.55 Today, many Muslims believe that the United States, through its antagonistic actions and as the current imperial power, is endangering the liberty, freedom, and family values of Muslims throughout the majority-Muslim world.

Before the second Gulf War, the stationing of more than 5,000 American soldiers in Saudi Arabia was deeply offensive to Muslims – particularly to the members of al-Qaida, other Islamists, and some other Muslims – in at least three ways. First, they considered the American soldiers to be non-Muslim infidels who were in Saudi Arabia to protect American imperialist aims in the region. Second, Muslims who opposed the United States’ military presence there believed that these soldiers were, through their very presence, polluting Islamic sacred lands. Third, by permitting the American troops to be stationed in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government was allying itself with the most powerful superpower which had already exhibited its desire to destroy Islam. According to Muslims who have maintained this position, the Saudi government, which has historically taken the responsibility of
guarding the Islamic sacred lands, has betrayed Muslims by siding with their greatest enemy, the United States.\textsuperscript{56}

Yet, the grievances of Islamists and many other Muslims are not limited to the United States’ military and political involvement in the region. Their objections also relate to American and Western influence in various cultural spheres within majority-Muslim countries. These Muslims believe that Western influence in majority-Muslim societies’ educational and economic systems, in gender relations, and in moral domains has severely damaged Islamic values and structures. There are a number of specific ways in which the West’s destructive influence has made itself evident. The most obvious forms of this influence are manifested in Western movies, television shows, magazines, books, and music which portray sex and sexuality in ways that dishonor the Islamists’ views of Islam, while promoting greed and consumerism.\textsuperscript{57}

For Islamists, certain educational systems – particularly those supported by secular governments in majority-Muslim countries and by Western organizations there – have continually undercut Islamic teachings in every area of life, while helping to spearhead the West’s assault against Islam. These secular and/or Christian educational institutions either teach Christianity (a religion which falls short of Islam’s perfection) and/or they educate their students in Western history, literature, and science from perspectives which deny the Quran’s dominance over all realms of knowledge. For Islamists, Islamic educational institutions must wholeheartedly reject Western-based content within all academic disciplines in favor of subject matter that is grounded in Islam and can be devoted to its propagation.\textsuperscript{58} All these issues and their related grievances – which resonate with large segments of the Muslim populace – form the context for many Islamists’, including al-Qaida’s, understanding of jihad.

**Many Jihads**

The Arabic root of the term jihad means to strive or struggle and for Muslims this meaning is translated as a dutiful commitment to God and the Muslim community. Although, during Islam’s history, modern Muslims have defined jihad in a multiplicity of ways, they have tended to conceptualize jihad mainly in two modes: the greater (or internal) jihad and the lesser (or external) jihad. Yet, as David Cook and others have argued, this dichotomy does not seem to be a consistent theme during the pre-modern periods.\textsuperscript{59} Yet, for some modern Muslims, internal jihad means trying to do one’s duty to God in every detail of one’s life, while maintaining a continual consciousness of God’s oneness and Muhammad’s role as the final Prophet. This jihad also involves remaining steadfast in one’s adherence to the Five Pillars of
Islam and Belief and God’s other commands. During the course of Islamic history, different Muslims have viewed these and other kinds of jihad differently. It has been argued, for example, that during various periods in Islamic history, Muslims have viewed the internal jihad as a way of purifying Muslims for the external or military form of jihad, which has predominated. Also, on the whole, Islamists focus on the external or military form of jihad and have a tendency to downplay the distinction between internal and external jihad, although virtually all forms of Islamic piety are very important to them.

Yet, this internal striving goes much deeper than matters of ritual and belief. For observant Muslims, every minute of one’s life must be devoted to this greater jihad. One’s choice of clothing should be modest so as not to elicit heterosexual marriage. Strict adherents to Islam’s codes avoid contact with persons of the opposite sex who are not their spouses or relatives. A Muslim must be certain that the food she or he eats, the cookware within which it is prepared, and the utensils with which it is eaten are in full compliance with Islamic halal dietary regulations (which are similar to Jewish kosher rules and involve specific rules governing the manner in which food is slaughtered, cooked, and consumed). Muslims must also treat family members and everyone else with whom they have contact in a spirit of peace, goodwill, respect, generosity, and seriousness in full accord with the teachings of the Quran and the supreme example of Muhammad and early Muslims as found in the Hadith.

Jihad’s secondary meaning, the lesser jihad, refers to the duty which Muslims have to defend themselves physically under at least two conditions: (1) when the Islamic community is either experiencing attack or under the potential threat of outside invasion and/or (2) when Muslims are experiencing injustice. Typically, this form of jihad involves physical self-defense of the Muslim community (umma) and not an obligation for Muslims to take unprovoked aggressive actions against anyone whom they generally perceive to be an enemy. Paradigms which Muslims have used historically to justify this lesser jihad, or Islamic self-defense, are the battles in which Muhammad engaged during the early Islamic community’s Medinan period (622–32). During that time, Muhammad and the early Muslims successfully defended themselves from internal betrayals and/or non-Muslim attackers on three occasions: during the Battle of Badr in 623, the Battle of Uhud in 625, and the Battle of Khandaq (the Trench) in 627. In each case, Muslims believe the entire Muslim community was under the threat of complete destruction and as a result of God’s favor and Muhammad’s military prowess his armies protected themselves and their religion from annihilation. Muslims also point to Islamic self-defense against the Crusaders beginning in the twelfth century and against the invading Mongols in the thirteenth century as other paradigms for the lesser jihad.
According to this interpretation, there are Quranic injunctions – in addition to the actions of the Prophet Muhammad – which clearly justify militarily defending the umma when it is under attack. Proponents of this interpretation cite passages such as Quran 2:227, “Except those who believe, work righteousness, engage much in the remembrance of Allah, and defend themselves only after they are unjustly attacked. And soon will the unjust assailants know what vicissitudes their affairs will take.” Quran 42:39 is also frequently cited, “And those who, when an oppressive wrong is inflicted on them, (are not cowed but) help and defend themselves.” Although Muslims debate whether American military and political involvement in the Middle East justifies the invocation of historic paradigms and Quranic passages such as these, members of al-Qaida and their sympathizers used that reasoning to validate the September 11 attacks and other strikes against Western interests and Israel.

More specifically, members of al-Qaida in particular declare that much like Muhammad and the early Muslims who were under attack in Medina by invaders seeking to destroy Islam, modern Muslims have been subjected to military, political, economic, and cultural attacks by the West and must resort to lesser jihad to defend their religion, their nations, their families, and themselves. Members of al-Qaida and their sympathizers assert that the September 11 attacks constituted this form of lesser jihad – warfare for the purpose of self-defense. For them, the examples of the Crusades are just as timely. Muslims are justified in defending themselves because the Western threats against Islam are as destructive today as they were 900 years ago. Then and now, an external attack against one part of the umma constitutes an attack against the whole, and Muslims must unite to preserve Islam lest it be utterly destroyed. While Muslims have been involved in heated debates over the legitimacy of the September 11 attacks, it would be difficult to deny that Bin Laden, his interpretation of Islam, his actions against the United States’ Middle East policy, and his declaration of a war of Islamic self-defense against the United States, won millions of sympathizers across the world.

Another justification for the lesser jihad, under certain circumstances, is to spread Islam. In other words, according to this argument in favor of lesser jihad, if non-Muslims do not become Muslims as a result of peaceful persuasion, Muslims are permitted – and in some of these cases they see themselves as being obliged – to use violent means to spread Islam: “When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the arms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful” (Quran 9:5). Quran 2:191 is also interpreted
as legitimizing the use of force either against all non-Muslims or as a means of spreading Islam:

Slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is more grievous than bloodshed. But do not fight them within the precincts of the Holy Mosque unless they attack you there; if they attack you put them to the sword. Thus shall the unbelievers be rewarded: but if they mend their ways, know that God is forgiving and merciful.

In any case, one persistent belief is that war can be mounted against unbelievers only after they have been called upon to become Muslims:

Whenever the Prophet appointed a commander to an army or expedition, he would say: “When you meet your heathen enemies, summon them to three things. Accept whatsoever they agree to and refrain then from fighting them. Summon them to become Muslims. If they agree, accept their conversion. In that case summon them to move from their territory to the Abode of the Emigrants [i.e., Medina]. If they refuse that, let them know that then they are like the Muslim Bedouins and that they share only in the booty, when they fight together with the [other] Muslims. If they refuse conversion, then ask them to pay the poll-tax (jizya) .... If they agree, accept their submission. But if they refuse, then ask God for assistance and fight them.”

Many Muslims view these passages as having justified the spread of Islam by violent means beginning as early as the seventh century. While jihad as Islamic self-defense was the primary justification for the September 11 attacks, Bin Laden also hoped that the attacks would inspire non-Muslims to take an increased interest in the religion and convert to it. He also believed that he provided Westerners ample warning regarding al-Qaida’s impending attacks.

Usama bin Laden and Religious Poetics

Such religiously-based narratives of political resistance are not exclusive to Islam. Throughout the twentieth century, revolutionary groups have legitimized, strengthened, consolidated, and catalyzed their movements through religious poetics. Religious poetics involve an oppressed group’s reinterpreting and redeploying of classic myths, rituals, and symbols in ways that sanctify the group’s strategies and goals so that its members may pursue their objectives with a deeper sense of ultimate religious meaning. Religious poetics sacralize, reinforce, and reenergize the multi-leveled meanings of religious and political resistance.

Modern religious and political life is full of instances where groups have utilized religious poetics. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X harnessed
ideas and rituals from Christianity and Islam during the civil rights movement, while the Dalai Lama has reworked the language of Tibetan Buddhism to focus its resistance to China’s domination of Tibet. Some Chicanas and Chicanos have used the narratives and rituals of Roman Catholicism and the indigenous traditions of Mexico to reauthenticate their identities, reinforce their sense of community, and solidify their religio-political bonds. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Zionists reconfigured and recontextualized ancient Israelite and Jewish symbols in order to mobilize many Jews to create and sustain the modern state of Israel. Desmond Tutu as well as other black and white South African Christians reinflected Christianity to serve as a potent mode of resistance against apartheid.

Thus, as Bin Laden attempted to justify and institutionalize his religiously-based political critiques of the West, he engaged in a similar religious poetical endeavor to that of numerous other twentieth-century revolutionaries. His use of religious poetics infused his declarations with force and persuasiveness in the eyes of millions of Muslims throughout the world. Even Muslims who usually disagree with Islamists and dread the remotest possibility of living under such regimes sometimes found themselves resonating emotionally with Bin Laden’s viewpoints and anti-Western grievances. His use of religious poetics explains one aspect of his appeal, but that is just part of the story.

Primordial Sentiments and Islamic Totems: Islamism, al-Qaida, and Contemporary Muslims

How can one explain Usama bin Laden’s popularity among some Muslims, at least some of whom do not formally identify with Islamism and are often at odds with its objectives? Primordial sentiments provide one answer. These thoughts and feelings are the givens of social existence involving immediate contiguity and sometimes even the feelings of familial connection. They stem from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a common language, or even a dialect of a language, and/or following shared social practices. These similarities in speech, custom, religion, and/or related matters carry tremendous persuasiveness in and of themselves. Individuals are bound to their family members and neighbors, for example, “ipso facto – as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself.”

Primordial sentiments are relevant to contemporary Islam (and other forms of religion and even nationalism), generally, and some Muslims’ positive responses to Bin Laden more specifically. Muslims’ understandings of Bin Laden’s courageous opposition to the United States and their perceptions of his heroic stances in defense of Islam appeal to some of the
deepest Muslim beliefs pertaining to their dignity, pride, honor, and overall worth as individuals and as a transnational community. To the extent that Muslims believe the United States virulently assaulted Islam during the latter half of the twentieth century, Bin Laden represented a towering figure who bravely stood up for Islam as a religion, a civilization, and a culture.80

He also commanded a totemic appeal. A totem is a person or object that embodies the most sacred ideals of a clan, society, or religion. While for some classic social theorists totems were animals or objects to which “primitive” peoples attached their most potent yearnings, today some political, religious, and even artistic and athletic figures possess totemic qualities.81 Admirers have revered such individuals as Mao Tse-tung, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Elvis Presley, and Michael Jordan. Marketers and supporters have either commodified their images in ways that reflected their ideals or have found other ways to sacralize their lives. The likenesses of some of these leaders have appeared on posters, coffee mugs, t-shirts, and bumper stickers. The lives and ideals of others have been sanctified through routinized festivals, holidays, pilgrimages, and public speeches.

Bin Laden’s totemic appeal was similar. Contemporary Muslim children have said they want to be like Bin Laden when they become adults, while his image appeared on souvenirs and various household items.82 As the very figure of Bin Laden constituted a contemporary Islamic totem, he drew on pre-existing totems within Muslims’ collective unconscious to both convey his message and legitimate his status as their spokesperson. For instance, many media images of Bin Laden portrayed him with a long beard, turban, and flowing Islamic garb – all of which resound keenly for Muslims. For the more than 20 years Bin Laden lived in and shuttled into and out of Afghanistan, he consistently projected himself as living in full accord with the Prophet Muhammad’s example. Before Bin Laden was killed, photographs and television images often showed him residing in simple dwellings, surrounded by calligraphic quotations from the Quran, while sitting on the floor (true to traditional Islamic and Middle Eastern custom), eating modest amounts of apparently halal food. After Bin Laden’s death, however, it became apparent that the surroundings in which he lived, for at least the last seven years of his life, were more comfortable than the image he had attempted to convey.83 Bin Laden’s frequent references to Islamic sacred texts, to the profaning of Islamic sacred spaces by the United States’ military, and to the denigration of Muslims’ pride resulting from the West’s aggression also carried a totemic appeal.84 At the same time, since approximately 2003, Muslims’ attitudes toward Bin Laden became increasingly mixed, with apparent decreases in his popularity since that year, while, in contrast, there were vocal demonstrations supporting him after he was killed.85
Members of al-Qaida make use of other totems too. They embed their own contemporary life histories within Islam’s sacred myths. Weaving Bin Laden’s and al-Qaida’s narratives into the patterns of Islam’s sacred history has enabled al-Qaida and its sympathizers to see the movement as having greater legitimacy and meaning. For instance, the Meccans forced Muhammad and his early community to emigrate from Mecca in 622 (i.e., engage in the hijra) and to live in Medina for eight years, leading raids against those who attacked his burgeoning Islamic community there. Muhammad returned triumphantly to Mecca in 630. According to members of al-Qaida and their sympathizers, like the seventh-century prophet, Bin Laden left a “hypocritical and idolatrous” location – in his case it was Saudi Arabia – as he engaged in a modern-day hijra to Afghanistan, where he engaged in acts of Islamic self-defense against the invading Soviet infidels there.86

The members of al-Qaida elaborated this sacred narrative. Much as the small armies of the seventh- and eighth-century Muslim Arabians defeated the mammoth military of the Persian Empire (whose state religion was Zoroastrianism) to the northeast of the Arabian peninsula, so the members of al-Qaida, as they viewed it, defeated the “atheistic” Soviet military in Afghanistan, liberating that nation and placing it (or restoring it) under Islam’s banner. Much as Islam’s early caliphs (Muhammad’s successors) conquered much of the Byzantine Empire (whose state religion was Christianity) in Islam’s early years, acquiring that Empire’s provinces from Syria through all of North Africa, so too the members of al-Qaida hope that their efforts will overturn what they perceive to be the American Crusader empire.87 Bin Laden drew upon a panoply of totemic and sacred imagery in composing his religious poetics. This highly textured discourse legitimated his ideas in the eyes of many Muslims and appealed to their most profound emotions and frustrations. At the same time, his perspectives were grounded within and constituted one logical extension of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century Islamic thought.

Theorizing Religious Violence

Mark Juergensmeyer and René Girard are two of many scholars whose works examine the relationship between myths, rituals, symbols and legitimizations of religious violence. Juergensmeyer examines religious violence among contemporary Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and Buddhists. As militants from these religions, the members of al-Qaida included, justify and perpetrate their acts of religious violence, the sacred narratives they construct and the targets they choose are imbued with multivalent religious meanings. These activists seek precedents from violent aspects of their religions’
histories. They consistently believe that “their communities are already under attack – are being violated – and that their acts are therefore simply responses to the violence they have experienced.” These militant groups’ violent attacks are “performance events,” in that they attempt to make symbolic statements, and “performative acts” in that they attempt to change policy, as they choose targets with symbolic potency which can reach intended audiences with the messages the attackers hope to convey. By martyrizing themselves and demonizing their opponents, members of such organizations perceive themselves as engaged in cosmic wars where the fate of their religion and the whole of humanity hang in the balance. As the members of al-Qaida reinterpret the narratives which legitimate their movement and its violent strikes against the West, they are involved in this same Juergensmeyerian cross-cultural phenomenon. They choose targets with enormous symbolic value for Americans – United States embassies, an American naval vessel and military installations, the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center – and then extol the greatness of the Islamic “martyrs” who engaged in these acts, declaring “Islamic victory” against the “infidels” after the assaults. Yet, the scale of al-Qaida’s use of violence is global in nature and it has been argued that the scope of their goals and violent acts may be greater than those of certain other religio-political groups that use violence in attempts to achieve their goals.

René Girard discusses the ways in which the use of myth, ritual, and symbol decriminalizes religious persons’ acts of killing while raising those apparently murderous behaviors to the highest levels of obligation. For him, religiously-sanctioned acts of violence are not only permitted, some religious persons believe they are utterly obligatory. In this vein, the members of al-Qaida are not only sacralizing violence, they are making it a requirement when they declare the frequently repeated sentence, “It is better to die in honor than live in humiliation.” They are also declaring the obligatory nature of sacrificing themselves for their cause when they make parallels between the situation they confront as Muslims today and the circumstances which previous Muslims faced when they battled Muhammad’s enemies in Medina in the seventh century, the Crusaders beginning in the twelfth century, and the invading Mongols in the thirteenth century. According to this reasoning, Muslims were and are obliged, under certain conditions, to sacrifice their lives to protect Islamic lands. Muslim soldiers and contemporary activists receive rewards as a result of their sanctified sacrifices: they gain the satisfaction of working to kill the infidels and playing a role in establishing their vision of justice in the world, while eventually spending eternity in heaven. Thus, what non-Muslim targets of Islamist and al-Qaida aggression consider murderous, savage, and barbaric crimes of “terrorism,” the members of al-Qaida interpret as obligatory acts of sacred sacrifice.
Modern Oasis: Islamists’ Visions of the Ideal State

Bin Laden did not formulate his interpretations in a vacuum. He is the heir of an intellectual legacy which has its roots in the ideas of Muslim thinkers dating to the eighteenth century and stretching over majority-Muslim countries from Egypt to Pakistan. Influential progenitors of the modern Islamic intellectual tradition include Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703–87), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97), Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Hasan al-Banna (1906–49), Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), Sayyid Abu’l-A’la Mawdudi (1903–79), and Ayman al-Zawahiri (b. 1951). While some of these figures predate the beginnings of contemporary Islamism, they defined several key themes and, in some cases, the organizational structures of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Islamism. They also articulated the grievances which Islamists level against the West: its historic colonialist, political, military, and cultural assaults against Muslims.99 Concomitantly, Islamist groups (such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas) while making small variations to their messages, depending on the specific contexts where they operate, espouse visions of an ideal Islamic state that are similar to each other.

The Islamists’ beliefs regarding their religion’s all-encompassing nature are based on their interpretations of the Quran, Hadith, and Islam’s early history. For Islamists, God’s wisdom, power, beneficence, and sacred injunctions should not be relegated to only some aspects of human affairs. In this regard, they quote passages such as Quran 2:2, “This is the book, in it is guidance sure, without doubt to those who fear God,” and Quran 2:85:

Then it is only a part of the book that you believe in, and do you reject the rest? But what is the reward for those among you who behave like this but disgrace in this life? And on the Day of Judgment they shall be consigned to the most grievous penalty. For God is not unmindful of what you do.101

In addition to these Quranic proclamations, Islamists look upon Muhammad’s life as a supreme model for every aspect of daily existence. For example, according to the Hadith, “Verily, there was a good example for you in the ways of the Prophet.”102 According to the Islamists’ understandings of
Muhammad’s life, during the time he led the early Islamic community, he made no distinctions between the secular, religious, and political realms; hence, for these activists there should be no distinction between these realms today. In their view, the Quran, Hadith, and Sunna (the Prophet Muhammad’s example) establish the foundations of Sharia which, according to God’s decree, must be the basis for every law governing majority-Muslim countries.103

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Islamists have actively worked to change their societies, espousing the following principles:

1 Sharia must govern every aspect of life in Muslim countries.
2 Governments should consist of true Muslims who obey all the Pillars of Islam and have faith in God in a manner that embodies all of Islam’s teachings.
3 These governments may be either democratic (according to some Islamists) or ruled by a single emir (according to others) who has the function of God’s vice-regent on earth.
4 Islamically-based governments must give their financial and political support exclusively to Islamic schools and universities and ban all other forms of education.
5 These governments must require schools to teach the most important subjects in Islam including the Quran, Hadith, Sunna, Sharia, Arabic, and Islamic history, as well as courses in math, the sciences, and social sciences, from a perspective which reflects the conviction that God is the creator of the universe and the Quran has foretold everything which humans have learned and will discover.
6 Islam must form the moral basis for all aspects of society. For Islamists, an Islamically-based ethical system encompasses the following ideals:
   a Men and women must dress modestly. Men’s bodies must be covered with loose-fitting clothing which does not arouse sexual interest, while women, when in public and in the presence of men to whom they are not related, must cover their bodies and wear headscarves or cover their faces completely. Interpretations among Muslims in general and Islamists in particular differ regarding the specific articles of clothing women should wear and whether or not their faces should be covered. There are also differing understandings regarding the articles of men’s clothing and ways of wearing them that may or may not conform to various interpretations of Sharia.
   b Men and women must remain separate from each other so as not to excite one other sexually. These limited interactions between the genders should prevent them from engaging in premarital and extramarital sex, which are strictly forbidden.
c In accordance with Islamic law, alcohol, prostitution, and gambling must be prohibited.

d Virtually all Western movies, television shows, music, magazines, books, and images must be banned since they carry anti-Islamic messages which condone sex outside of marriage, alcohol consumption, materialism, selfishness, narcissism, and greed.

e Islamic governments must establish economic systems which are wholly independent and free of reliance on the West.

f Islamic governments must create societies where wealth is distributed equitably among all groups and where the large gaps which exist among the rich and poor are reduced. Islamic governments must also enable the availability of health care and a wide array of social services, including orphanages and welfare, which are supposed to assist the entire populace.¹⁰⁴

These ideals comprise one vision of an ideal Islamic state and of an eventual global Islamic state for many Islamists, including al-Qaida, and catalyze their religio-political movements.

Fundamentalisms and Interpretations of History

Typically, fundamentalists, such as the Islamists, attempt to formulate their ideals and then apply them to themselves and to others within their religion and society at large. As fundamentalists interpret texts, they do so with a desire to avoid compromise or thoroughgoing critical scrutiny of those texts and the other foundations of their ideas. In a number of cases, one salient component of religious fundamentalism involves fundamentalists taking active political roles in their efforts to shape society in accordance with their visions. Fundamentalism usually entails a number of features, including great religious passion, a defiance against secular and/or colonialist cultures, and a return to traditional sources of religious authority. Forms of fundamentalism are present in a number of religions, including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism to name a few.¹⁰⁵

By way of caveat, these and other ideas are meant to create an impressionistic picture of some similarities within and between what could be termed fundamentalists within various religions; the characteristics articulated here are to function as ideal types and may vary to the extent they characterize fundamentalists within or between various religions. The intention is to provide a general outline of what may be termed fundamentalism, while recognizing the enormous diversity in such movements within a given religion and between religions.
In any case, fundamentalists typically interpret their sacred histories in ways that mobilize their movements. For fundamentalists (and other religious people), the past is both exemplary and monitory; it is there to teach what must and must not be done. The Islamist groups, which this book examines, share at least some of those characteristics with Christian and Jewish fundamentalists, for example. The Islamists are responding to a variety of what they perceive to be political, religious, social, and economic problems for which they believe their understanding of Islam holds the solution. Like other Muslims, Islamists interpret Islamic sacred texts and history in such a way that mobilizes their actions in modern and contemporary times. For all Muslims, including Islamists, some of the most important entities that form the basis of their contemporary worldviews are the Quran, Hadith, the Sunna, and, in some cases, early Islamic history. Muslims use these and other elements to construct their meanings of the past, present, and future and to guide their actions.

In describing the ways that religious and other types of communities appropriate and understand their histories, among both fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists, the sociologist Anthony Giddens utilizes the term “reflexivity” and states that it is the characteristic of “all human action.” Reflexivity takes place when individuals and/or communities utilize their perceptions of their histories as a way of guiding their present and future actions. For Giddens, tradition is a means of “handling time and space, which asserts any particular activity or experience with the community of past, present, and future, these in turn being structured by recurrent social practices.” In light of this, tradition is a set of entities which religious communities and cultures continually reconstruct within certain parameters. Religions are not completely static in that almost every new generation reinvents the religious and cultural inheritance from the generations that preceded it.

While members of virtually all religious communities engage in the process of reflexivity, there are multiple examples of Islamists reflexively drawing on the sacred texts and history of Islam as they construct meanings related to their historic contexts. For example, when Islamists state their visions for an ideal Islamic state, they are reflexively drawing on the Quran, Hadith, Sunna, and aspects of Islamic history as they reconstruct their vision of that imagined past and then apply it to the present, while believing all along that the visions that they proclaim closely or exactly match aspects of the Islamic past. When Islamists identify their current enemies with the past enemies of Muhammad and with other groups whom they believe were the enemies of true Islam, and justify their violent acts against their current enemies based on those reconstructions, the Islamists are reflexively reconstructing Islamic history as a way of justifying their current actions. These and other reflexive reconstructions of history are not necessarily conscious or willful; this process can naturally flow from being religious and attempting to relate one’s
religious beliefs and actions to the specific historic context within which one finds oneself. Indeed, all Muslims, including Islamists, feel a deep connection with their religion’s history, while, at the same time, interpreting Islam’s history and sacred texts in different ways. As a part of this process that seems endemic to Islam, the Islamists are also reflexively reconstructing their interpretations of Islam’s sacred texts and history in such way that mobilizes their religio-political movements as they attempt to achieve their goals. Like all Muslims, the Islamists feel their connectedness to Islam’s sacred texts and history, in ways that the Islamists believe are genuinely Islamic.

Intentions

Among other things, this book argues that the worldviews of the members of al-Qaida follow specific patterns which are rooted in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Islamist ideas and institutions as well as some intellectual currents that date to the early modern period. It explores the connections between Islamist ideologies and movements in Egypt, the West Bank and Gaza, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, on the one hand, and those of al-Qaida, on the other. It also analyzes the United States’ Middle East policies from the beginning of the post-World War II period, and the ways in which Islamist groups have structured their ideologies and organizations to address Western political, cultural, and military influence in the region.

This study:

- introduces the main ideological points within modern Islamist groups and ideologies in Egypt, the West Bank and Gaza, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, while describing these movements’ histories and organizational structures in their socio-historical contexts;
- examines how Islamist groups in those five countries and regions have created educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages, and other social service venues which: (a) reinforce the Islamists’ popularity among some segments of society; (b) perpetuate these organizations’ visions of Islam; and (c) address the inadequate responses of governments to the educational, health, and other needs of many people within their societies;
- explores the changes in the structures and ideologies of Islamist groups and their differing strategies toward the governments which they oppose; and
- compares and contrasts some Islamists’ arguments in favor of Islamically-based autocratic regimes with those of other Islamists who advocate Islamically-based democratic regimes.

This book intends to examine some of the most significant Sunni Islamist groups and movements in the modern era, particularly in the time period
leading to the attacks on September 11, 2001. At the same time, there are certain Islamist groups which are excluded from consideration. This study intends to focus on some of the ones which have been and continue to be particularly influential. While there are a variety of Shiite Islamist groups that are important and influential, this book does not focus on such groups.

Within this framework, this book treats the historic contexts related to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia, on the other, somewhat differently than it treats Egypt, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, partly because of the unique circumstances related to those two regions (although the circumstances in each country and region in this study can be considered distinctive in their own way). One of several factors that makes Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza different from the other countries and regions in this study is that it is a region where most Muslims believe the removal of land from the possession of an indigenous Middle Eastern population was most severe and unjust. As part and parcel of that, Israel is the only majority-Jewish state in the Middle East and the world; in addition, within that context, Arabs and Jews live in dramatically close proximity to each other, and the conflicts between Arabs and Jews are particularly magnified. These and other factors related to Israelis, Palestinians, and their relationships necessitate providing additional historic context about the formation of Israel and various Palestinian groups, including the Islamist group Hamas, in a way that is different from the other chapters.

While Islam plays a role in one way or another in all the countries and regions in this study, certain forms of Wahhabi Islam played a distinctively crucial role in the formation, establishment, and perpetuation of the modern Saudi state. At the same time, the Saudi government possesses a responsibility that no other nation in the world does; it must protect Mecca and Medina, the two holiest cities in Islam, while ensuring safe passage for Muslims to and from these sacred cities. The almost all-encompassing role of Wahhabi Islam in Saudi Arabia’s history, development, and current status, its role as protector of Islam’s holiest sites, and the role that those and other factors played in shaping Usama Bin Laden’s worldview are some of the reasons that the chapter on Saudi Arabia provides additional historic context related to Wahhabi movements and their role in the formation of Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda.

Egypt, the West Bank and Gaza, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan

These countries and regions are the book’s focus because Islamists from these areas have had a substantial impact on the formation of Islamism in general and al-Qaida in particular. Specifically, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Muhammad Atef (1944?–2001), two of al-Qaida’s most powerful leaders,
Modern Islamist Movements

were born in Egypt and in 1998 (the year that their Islamic Jihad organization joined forces with Bin Laden’s al-Qaida) these intellectuals began to have an increasing impact on the policies and strategies of al-Qaida, while Islamist ideas from Egypt had a significant influence on al-Qaida and the Taliban before that time as well.112

Palestinians, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and issues related to the prospects of a Palestinian state also figure prominently within Islamism. For the vast majority of Muslims, the oppression and injustice to which they believe Israel (with American and European support) has subjected the Palestinians constitute some of the most cataclysmic events in the majority-Muslim world during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The calamities which Muslims believe have repeatedly struck the Palestinians have been reported on television, radio, in newspapers, and magazines almost daily since the 1940s. One of the few ideals which some governments in the majority-Muslim world share with the Islamist groups that oppose them is the hope for the establishment of a Palestinian state and an end to what most Muslims perceive to be Israeli oppression of Palestinians. Indeed, one of the most urgent demands that various Islamist groups, including al-Qaida and the Taliban, have been making is for the creation of a fully autonomous Palestinian state. Islamist groups, such as Hamas, play a significant role in Palestinian politics. Hamas is, in some respects, emblematic of Islamism more generally, and a pro-Palestinian position in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict forms a central problematic within the ideologies of Islamic groups throughout the world.113

Saudi Arabia and Iran, which are majority Sunni and Shiite respectively, have based their laws, their governments, and, to the extent that political structures can influence such matters, their societal mores on Sharia. The role of Islam in Saudi Arabia and its support of Islamist groups – particularly its on-again/off-again and at-times-direct/at-times-indirect support of al-Qaida – make an analysis of that country and its relationship to Islamism a key component of this study. A scholarly treatment of the religious, political, cultural, and economic ethos of Saudi Arabia is also helpful insofar as Usama bin Laden, 15 of the 19 September 11 hijackers, and large numbers of al-Qaida members inside and outside of Afghanistan are or were from Saudi Arabia.114 Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, born in ‘Uyaynah, a town in modern-day Saudi Arabia, wrote numerous publications that helped set the foundations for Islamism and the modern Saudi state.115 Also, three of the Muslim scholars with whom Bin Laden trained and whose advice he subsequently sought are Saudis.116

Pakistani Islamism and, to a limited extent, the Pakistani government itself have contributed to the rise and strength of Islamism in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other parts of the majority-Muslim world.117 Historically, India and Pakistan have had a long-standing interest in maintaining influence
in Afghanistan as they have attempted to limit the political, economic, and related activities of the Iranians, Soviets, Chinese, Central Asians, and others within the Afghan region.\textsuperscript{118} More recently, from the 1990s until a few weeks after September 11, the Pakistani government, through its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) network, supported al-Qaida and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{119} The role of Pakistan in Islamism and modern Islamic intellectual life is significant in terms of its connections to the ideologies, actions, and organizational structures of the Taliban and al-Qaida.

Since Afghanistan was Bin Laden’s adopted home for close to 20 years, it was a key base of operations for members of al-Qaida such as Bin Laden, Zawahiri, Atef, top-level al-Qaida advisers, significant numbers of rank-and-file al-Qaida militants, as well as sympathetic Taliban members, which constitute another focus of this study. From there, they formed their policies for al-Qaida, while attempting to strengthen that group’s ties to the Taliban and other Islamist organizations.\textsuperscript{120} Because al-Qaida’s headquarters and educational and training centers were in Afghanistan, it was the first target of American attacks and military occupation after September 11. While Afghan intellectuals did not provide the necessary intellectual underpinnings for al-Qaida’s formation, the country provided the physical location where members of al-Qaida exchanged ideas, crystallized their worldviews, planned strategy, created group cohesion, and trained themselves for future operations. Most of al-Qaida’s founding principles emerged in a nation 2,200 miles away, Egypt.

Indeed, the next chapter of this book (Chapter 2) focuses on the history of Islamism in Egypt. It analyzes the ideas of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97), Muhammad \textsuperscript{1}Abduh (1849–1905), and Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), who resided in Egypt for various periods of time. The chapter then discusses the life and ideas of Hasan al-Banna (1906–49), who drew upon the ideas of Afghani, \textsuperscript{1}Abduh, and Rida, founded Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, and was one of Islamism’s most influential activists. The chapter also explores the lives and ideas of other significant Islamists, such as Sayyid Qutb (a profound figure in the Muslim Brotherhood’s history) and Ayman al-Zawahiri, who has played a crucial role in al-Qaida.

Chapter 3 examines the Palestinian resistance against Israel among Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, and Israel proper, and the ways in which various groups such as al-Fatah, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Hamas have mobilized themselves in their efforts to create a Palestinian state. The chapter will analyze key figures in the Palestinian resistance, the structures of Palestinian resistance groups, and the various ways in which those groups have adapted and/or rejected Islamic and secular ideas in their ideologies. In addition, the chapter provides historic background regarding the establishment, formation, and development of the modern state of Israel.
Chapter 4 examines the role of the Wahhabi movement and Islam in the formation of the modern Saudi state and the ways in which various leaders in the Arabian peninsula appropriated Islam in the periods before, during and after the founding of the modern state of Saudi Arabia. The chapter analyzes the life and ideas of the influential Muslim intellectual Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92) and the ways in which various political and religious leaders in the Arabian peninsula adapted his ideas as they formulated their conceptions of – or opposition to – the modern Saudi state. While the chapter examines the role of Wahhabism in Saudi statecraft, it also analyzes the role of Wahhabi ideas in the formation of Usama bin Laden’s ideology and his and al-Qaida’s resistance to the Saudi government.

Chapter 5 explores various aspects of some Islamist groups in Pakistan. In some ways like Egypt, the Indo-Pakistani region has been a major center of Islamic intellectual life and religious reform. A number of Sunni Islam’s most prolific modern intellectuals, such as Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, Sayyid Abu’l A‘la Mawdudi, and Fazlur Rahman, have lived and worked in India and/or Pakistan. One of the largest Islamist organizations in the Sunni Muslim world, the Jama’at-i Islami was founded in Pakistan and continues to support and operate mosques, Islamic schools, hospitals, and other social service agencies there and outside the country. One of the largest Islamist organizations in the Sunni Muslim world, the Jama’at-i Islami was founded in Pakistan and continues to support and operate mosques, Islamic schools, hospitals, and other social service agencies there and outside the country. One of the largest Islamist organizations in the Sunni Muslim world, the Jama’at-i Islami was founded in Pakistan and continues to support and operate mosques, Islamic schools, hospitals, and other social service agencies there and outside the country. One of the largest Islamist organizations in the Sunni Muslim world, the Jama’at-i Islami was founded in Pakistan and continues to support and operate mosques, Islamic schools, hospitals, and other social service agencies there and outside the country. One of the largest Islamist organizations in the Sunni Muslim world, the Jama’at-i Islami was founded in Pakistan and continues to support and operate mosques, Islamic schools, hospitals, and other social service agencies there and outside the country.

Over time, the regimes ruling India and Pakistan have had an interest in influencing political, cultural, and religious affairs in Afghanistan for a number of reasons. One significant impetus behind these nations’ historic involvement in Afghanistan’s internal politics has been India’s and Pakistan’s desire for security. Indian and Pakistani governments have long tried to use the Afghan region as a buffer against Iranian, Russo-Soviet, Central Asian, British, and even Chinese influence in the area. The involvement of the Pakistani government and Pakistani Islamist groups in Afghanistan’s internal affairs during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been an extension of Pakistan’s long-standing concern with that country’s future. The chapter on Pakistan will also analyze the complex accommodationalist/oppositionalist strategies that Pakistan’s government has taken toward Islamist groups operating within its borders and in Afghanistan and India.
Chapter 6 will examine the role of Islamist groups in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s protracted war against the Soviet invasion and occupation from 1979 to 1989 and the subsequent Afghan civil war in the 1990s not only decimated the country, it made Afghanistan a crucial center for the formation and growth of al-Qaida and the Taliban. This chapter will examine the role which American military, financial, and political support of the mujahideen and of Usama bin Laden played in the origins and development of Islamism in Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s. It analyzes various Afghan and Muslim responses to the substantial decrease in American economic aid to Afghanistan after the Soviet pull-out from that country in 1989. There was, for instance, an expectation among many Afghans that after the war against the Soviets, the United States would support an extended redevelopment program. Millions of Afghans felt betrayed when the United States showed little commitment to rebuilding the country after it had played a key role in helping the Afghans oust the Soviets in the 1980s.

The chapter on Afghanistan will also discuss the monetary and religious contributions which Usama bin Laden made – and which many Afghans believed he had made – to a poverty-stricken Afghanistan in the aftermath of American disengagement, and how Bin Laden’s involvement and perceived involvement in Afghanistan’s internal affairs lent strength to his stature among Muslims inside and outside of the country. The chapter will also examine the relationship between al-Qaida and the Taliban, as well as the successful recruitment of large numbers of Muslims to their training camps, while providing an explanation of the goals which the multi-ethnic and transnational al-Qaida attempted to achieve by directing its message to large numbers of Muslims throughout the world with the hope of eventually establishing a global Islamic state. Central to this analysis is an examination of Islamism’s growth in Afghanistan through an exploration of the Taliban’s history, organization, and ideology. The chapter also examines the role of madrasahs in the Taliban’s rise and development. Chapter 7, the book’s conclusion, will summarize some of the book’s findings and suggest some ideas regarding the future of Islamist movements.

The chapters in a book such as this one could be ordered in a variety of ways. The chapters in this volume move geographically in an approximate manner from west to east, Egypt being the westernmost country, which receives extensive treatment, Pakistan and Afghanistan lying further to the east, with Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and Saudi Arabia lying roughly in between. While this study could have begun in any of the countries that are analyzed, Egypt is a viable place to begin because of the vitality of Islamic thought which has been present in that country for substantial periods of its history and because of the influence that Islamic ideas which have emanated from Egypt have had on the majority-Muslim world.
Notes

1 This is a quotation from a senior American government official that appears in David Johnston, Judith Miller, and Don Van Natta, “Qaeda’s New Links Increase Threats from Far-Flung Sites,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2002.

2 There has been a substantial amount of debate in academic circles regarding the merits and demerits of using the terms “Islamism,” “Islamic revivalism,” “Islamic fundamentalism,” and/or other terms in referring to this current within Islam. “Islamism” is being used in this book for a variety of reasons, including the possibility that it may be least confusing to a general readership.


7 Ibid.


10 Humphreys, “Islam and Political Values,” 3.

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 10.
16 Ibid., 10–11.


37 Ibid., 282–3.

38 Ibid.


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47 Ibid., 357–63.


55 Ibid., 241–71.


61 See, for example, Lindsay, Daily Life in the Medieval Islamic World, 58–60.

62 Firestone, Jihad, 16–18.

63 Ibid.

64 Sivan, Radical Islam, 96–128.


67 Ibid.

68 Gerges, “What’s Behind the New Arab Momentum.”


70 For detailed explanations of al-Qaida’s Islamic justifications for attacks against Western interests as defensive forms of jihad, see Quintan Wiktorowicz,

Bin Laden, “Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places.”


León, “Metaphor and Place,” 541–72.


Ibid.


Columbia International Affairs Online at www.ciaonet.org carries excerpts from Bin Laden’s videos and his use of Islamic sacred ideas and images is evident there.


89 Ibid., 12.
90 Ibid., 124.
91 Ibid., 145–86.
96 Bin Laden, “A Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places.”
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid. See also Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1–3.
100 Ibid.
101 See for example Sayyid Abu'l A'la Mawdudi’s *Towards Understanding the Quran*, vol. 1 (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1988), 5–32.
102 Mawdudi, for example, refers to this Hadith passage in his *Towards Understanding the Quran*, vols. 1 and 2.
110 Ibid., 37.
111 Ibid.


Rashid, *Taliban*, 17ff.

Torbakov, “Russian Planners Re-Examining ‘Great Game’ Concepts.”


Ibid.