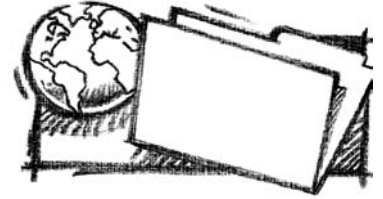


# STUDIES IN DEFENCE & FOREIGN POLICY



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## **UNHOLY TERROR: The Origin and Significance of Contemporary, Religion-based Terrorism**

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## *Terrorism shows the dark side of globalization.*

—Colin L. Powell, April 30, 2001

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### ❧ Introduction ❧

In a report issued some 16 weeks prior to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Colin Powell, the American Secretary of State, noted that there had been an 8-percent increase in international terrorist attacks during the previous year (Lacey, 2001). Two hundred of the 423 attacks recorded in the State Department inventory were directed against the United States or American citizens. Other accounts of international terrorism show similar trends. Prior to September 11, 2001, about a thousand Americans had been killed by terrorists (Hoffman, 2001). The sheer magnitude of the killing on that day indicates why the US has begun to reconfigure the architecture of its national security, as on a more modest scale has Canada.

In this *Study in Defence and Foreign Policy* I would like to make three points. First, to understand contemporary terrorism, one must consider both the material and the spiritual context within which it has developed. Second, an analysis of recent trends in terrorism might answer the question: what, if anything, is new about early twenty-first century terrorism? Third, I will consider briefly what might be done.

The substance of this analysis of contemporary terrorism is adapted from a book, “The Political Religions,” published in Vienna by Eric Voegelin in April 1938, a month after the Nazi Reich had swallowed Austria. Voegelin sought to understand the

self-interpretation of the Nazi movement, which is to say, its claim to be the “truth” of the German *Volk* and of its place in history, but also to analyze the obvious conflict with common sense reality posed by Nazi race doctrines, associated ideological symbols, and oppressive and murderous practices. In 1938, Voegelin was concerned not to denounce the Nazis as “merely a morally inferior, dumb, barbaric, contemptible matter” but to understand them as “a force, and a very attractive force at that” (Voegelin, 2000, p. 24). To put it bluntly, it was a question of comprehending the attractiveness of evil.

Many conventional analyses of contemporary terrorist acts, including the September 2001 attacks, have noted a “religious” dimension among the motivations of terrorist violence. Whatever the limitations of such conceptual language, it does contain an obvious insight: religion is more than the practices carried on by institutional churches, temples, mosques, and so on, just as politics is more than the practices carried on by states. All political orders, including those of the west, are integrated and justified by symbolic narratives that connect political practices in the pragmatic and even secular sense to a larger order of meaning. It is for this reason that it is impossible to understand contemporary terrorism without paying close attention to the religiosity or spirituality that contemporary terrorists experience as central to their own activities.

About a year before Voegelin's book appeared, the Japanese Ministry of Education issued a document advancing the claim that Japan was a divine nation. The Japanese, it said, were "intrinsically quite different from so-called citizens of western nations" because the unbroken bloodlines of its people preserved the "pure" and "unclouded" Japanese spirit. A couple of years later, in the spring of 1942, several Japanese philosophers assembled in Kyoto to discuss how Japan might "overcome modern civilization," the great embodiment of which had been attacked a few months earlier at Pearl Harbour (Doltom, 1943, p. 10).

The same year as Voegelin's book was published a Hungarian refugee, Aurel Kolnai, wrote *The War Against the West*, an analysis not just of the Nazis but of the Japanese as well. This "war," he said, was against the western notion of citizenship, the state, and the political community. Underlying what Buruma and Margalit (2002) call "occidentalism" are aspects of western culture that its opponents hate: it is urban, bourgeois, prosperous, and egalitarian. Typically these attributes of western civilization are denounced as decadent, arrogant, weak, and depraved.

For example, hatred of the city, symbolized as Babylon, is considered necessary to ensure the purity and virtue of rural peasant piety. In both the Bible (Gen.11: 4-6) and the Koran (16:23) God takes deep offence at the famous urban monument, the tower. The contemporary icon of the mythic tower of Babylon is the skyline of Manhattan. The anonymity offered by cities and the liberty that anonymity fosters is seen by the pure as a source of licentiousness and hypocrisy. The separation of public and private,

of the word and the heart, are to the occidentalists the mark of corruption.

Cities are also the venues of markets, and so, to the pure, of greed, selfishness, and the cultural corruption that comes when human beings, both natives and foreign, or immigrant minorities, meet as equals to exchange goods and services. The Japanese, for example, went to war not to take market share away from the Americans and Europeans, but to destroy the competitive markets the foreigners created (Iriye, 1981). Worse yet, the settled bourgeois, the petty clerk, or the plump banker, just the sort of person who might hold down a job at the World Trade Center, are utterly unheroic, the very antithesis of greatness, risk, peril, and sacrifice that so inspires the pure.

Likewise, cities in the west have been the places where laws are drawn up. Courts and jurists, not gods or God, are the sources of western laws. The notion of "man-made law" is not a term of abuse in the west, because westerners consider that laws made by the spiritually elect in the name of God invariably turn into the rule of human beings, not of laws, which westerners understand to be tyranny. Moreover, the human beings who rule in the name of God invariably turn out to be males, holy men, with an agenda of oppression.

These anti-western themes are not confined to the Islamist terrorists of the contemporary world. The Japanese or indeed the Nazi examples indicate that "occidentalism" is a kind of free-floating temptation that can arise in many different contexts. The present context, however, has its own unique attributes and configuration, as we shall see.

## Context

The great political confrontations of the twentieth century pitted democratic regimes against totalitarian ones. One need simply recall the obvious: the World War of 1939 to 1945 was followed by a generation-long cold war. In contrast, many observers have argued that the defining issue of the early twenty-first century seems to be whether generally prosperous democracies can control, or even manage, the generally poor, dangerously chaotic, and unquestionably troubled regions beyond their borders. Moreover, as Lindblom (1977, p. 116) observed a generation ago, and as numerous empirical studies have since confirmed (Gwartney and Lawson, 2001), “not all market-oriented systems are democratic, but every democratic system is also a market-oriented system.” As a result, those parts of the world that are neither democratic nor market-oriented are not, in the short or medium term, being made peaceful by globalization. The bimodal structure of twentieth-century international affairs seems, therefore, to have been perpetuated into the twenty-first. It is noteworthy, however, that some significant social and political changes have taken place in the last generation or so. We begin with a synopsis of changes to the material context.

In 1991, Thomas Homer-Dixon argued that war and civil violence are likely in the future to result from conflict over environmental resource scarcities such as water, arable land, forests, and fish, not commodity scarcities (Homer-Dixon, 1991). The social indices for his prognostication are also well known. Global population over the next half-century has been projected to grow from about five-and-a-half billion to around nine billion, and most of that growth will be in non-democratic countries that have a low probability of future pros-

perity. Most do not have “information-age” economies; many are agrarian and are characterized by dysfunctional governments and poorly-educated workforces. These places may not be able to provide minimal government services—defence of the realm and the administration of justice, to use western medieval categories; they are almost certain not to be friendly to democracy or to the west. Internally, these stressed regimes can range from the frankly totalitarian, as in Iraq, to the loose kind of warlord balances of Somalia. Many are referred to as “failed states.” Others have avoided or postponed state failure by pursuing a deliberate policy of exporting troublemakers, including terrorists, by turning them into a new kind of remittance man—recipients of financial support only so long as they remain abroad.

Speaking of an especially unsettled region, Zaharia (2001, p. 311) noted that “almost all of the Arab world is governed by political elites that dare not liberalize because to do so would unsettle their own power. To them, globalization is not an opportunity but a threat.” The leaders and governments of such countries are not eagerly awaiting the beneficial effects of a globalizing world. Indeed, with or without globalization the existing situation seems pregnant with a future of chaotic turbulence and trouble in many places, not ecumenic tranquility.

Often novelists are better at capturing the kinds of lives that people lead in such countries than are prosaic economic statistics and the narratives of political observers. For example, even though V.S. Naipaul (1977) was writing of India, usually seen as a triumph of political development, he subtitled his famous book, *A Wounded Civilization*. This is what he said of “modernizing” Indians:

They saw themselves at the beginning of things: unaccommodated men making a claim on their land for the first time, and out of chaos evolving their own philosophy of community and self-help. For them the past was dead; they had left it behind in the villages.

The past was dead. For recently urbanized peasants, the entire world had become new, but unaccommodating. Possibly the least pleasant aspect of this newness is the unstable poverty of urban life, a poverty spiked with resentment, and much different than the poverty of the villages. In the villages poverty was a traditional dispensation, but tradition has died as well.

Imagine life in a pseudo-modern city for one of these new men or women. You are at the beginning of things; you have no past tradition to guide you into the future. Basic services such as electricity and running water are scarce, are interrupted, or are simply not available. There is clear evidence of what Homer-Dixon called human-induced environmental pressure. In plain language, the air stinks, and the water is dangerous to drink. The order, to say nothing of the comfort, of western urban life is unknown to immediate experience, but may be available as a kind of utopian TV-mediated image. Under such circumstances, material discomfort can easily be given a historical, even a spiritual significance. As Ranstorp observed, “economic change and disruption” combined with “political repression, economic inequality, and social upheaval common among desperate religious extremist movements, have all led to an increased sense of fragility, instability, and unpredictability for the present and the future” (Ranstorp, 1996, p. 50). A semi-western or semi-modern new culture looks like an assault upon a tattered tradition. “In these depressing circumstances,” said Lieven (2001, pp. 303-4),

adherence to a radical Islamist [or other religious] network provides a sense of cultural security, a new community, and some degree of social support—modest, but still

better than anything the state can provide. Poverty is recast as religious simplicity and austerity. Perhaps, even more important, belief provides a measure of pride: a reason to keep a stiff back amid continual humiliations and temptations. In the blaring, stinking, violent world of the modern “Third World” Muslim city, the architecture and aesthetic mood of the mosque is the only oasis, not only of beauty but of an ordered and coherent culture and guide to living. Of course this is true ten times over for a young male inhabitant of an Afghan, Chechen, or Palestinian refugee camp.

In the same vein, Zaharia noted that “radical Islam has risen on the backs of failed states that have not improved the lots of their people. It festers in societies where contact with the west has produced more chaos than growth and more uncertainty than wealth. It is, in a sense, the result of failed and incomplete modernization” (Zaharia, 2001, p. 316).

More specifically, the “Afghan Arabs” who make up a disproportionate number of the al-Qaeda network have been cut loose or expelled from their traditional world. Fouad Ajami (2001, p. 17) described them as “insurrectionists, caught in no-man’s-land, on the run from their homelands but never at home in the west.” Yet only in the west could they hide and nurse resentments against the west for the misery of transitional life at home (Wright, 2001).

Accounts of such “depressing circumstances” may remind readers of Chapter 13 of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, which is devoted to “the natural condition of mankind.” There one finds his account of a potential for disorder into which common human life may at any time relapse. Hobbes attributed the cause to pride and vanity, but saw as well that the absence of “a common power to fear” was needed. In any event, in such a condition, Hobbes said in his most oft-quoted phrase, there is “continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” It is a state of war



without law and without justice, filled only with force and fraud, the “two cardinal virtues” of war.

There is one other feature of Hobbes’ account that we should also recall. His analysis of competitions and the race to “out-do” is far more than a vulgar desire for consumer goods. According to him, true joy for a man, which is open to all human beings, “consisteth in comparing himself with other men” and is limited only by a kind of madness where people, believing themselves to have a special grace, begin to compare themselves to God. When groups of such people come together, their collective madness constitutes, in Hobbes’ words, “the seditious roaring of a troubled nation.”

The “madness” Hobbes had in mind was not so much the clinical disorders listed in the handbooks of psychiatry, but a *nosos*, a spiritual disorder, as Plato called it. Or, to use a more recent distinction apparently first made by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Schelling, but more extensively used by Eric Voegelin, it is a disease of the spirit, a pneumatopathology or a pneumopathology, not a mental disease, a psychopathology, that afflicted human beings who saw themselves as specially chosen by God—or even as gods themselves. As we discuss below, current pneumopathologies among terrorists are similar to those considered by Hobbes, and have led otherwise sane people to claim divine inspiration or inspiration from other sources, some of them occult, and all of them hidden to the world of common sense. The plainly disturbed see themselves as political saviours; the mildly disordered may be content to profess the one and only truth. All of them, however, can flourish in the context of a past and a tradition that is dead. All can see themselves at the beginning of new and unaccommodating things, where the temptation of violence has perhaps its greatest appeal.

In this context, violence is to be understood not as Hannah Arendt has argued (1969), as a pragmatic

mode of human activity, so much as a magic instrument able to transfigure reality. Normal people living in a shared, commonsensical world do not believe in magic, whether violent or not; typically, therefore, an aspect of pneumopathological consciousness involves the construction of an imaginative “second reality” where terrorism can have its intended and magical effects (Cooper, 2001). When individuals who of necessity exist within commonsensical or “first” reality nevertheless attempt to live within the imaginative or fantasy-based second reality, characteristic frictions between the two typically arise. As we shall see with respect to modern terrorism, the most significant conflicts are concerned with the structure of spiritual realities and their symbolization. We find, for example, the terrorists in Aum Shinrikyo poisoning their fellow citizens and understanding their activity as a means of initiating a worldly apocalypse of history. Because, in fact or in reality, human beings do not have the ability to initiate a worldly apocalypse of history, and because, in reality, the language of historical apocalypse is properly part of a speculation on divine rather than human activity, eventually friction between the pragmatic activities of Aum Shinrikyo, namely murder, and the Japanese police would arise, notwithstanding the fact that the members of Aum Shinrikyo also claimed to be undertaking a salvific activity that, at the same time, they knew to be impossible. The curious twilight form of existence, where a terrorist group both knows and refuses to acknowledge what it knows perfectly well, is enacted by both leaders and followers. In the example of Aum, it is evident both in the public proclamations of the leader, Shoko Asahara, and in his strenuous efforts to evade capture by the police.

The attractiveness of violence to increasingly large but pneumopathologically afflicted populations, both in the west and in the rest of the globe, also conditions a novel political context for the conduct of war. To repeat: a commonsense understanding leads one to conclude that war and violence are

pragmatic elements of human culture, not inexplicable aberrations or breakdowns. Indeed, the fascinating studies of chimpanzees by Jane Goodall or Michael Ghiglieri have shown that war is part of primate life (Goodall, 1990, ch. 10 and Ghiglieri, 1999, ch. 6). As some military historians have argued, what has changed over the past few decades is not war, the attractions of war, or the human proclivity for war, but the forms or formalities of war. What might be termed the orthodox account of modern war was given theoretical precision in the early nineteenth century by Carl von Clausewitz (von Clausewitz, 1984). According to him, war could be waged only by the state, for the state, and against another state; the instrument used in the conduct of war was the army, which was distinguished from the civilian population by customs such as the salute, separate laws, and distinct costumes. The third element postulated by von Clausewitz involved the people, the civilians; their sole war-related task was to remain quiet and pay their taxes. All of this practice was codified in the second half of the nineteenth century, say from the battle of Solferino in 1859 to the Second Hague Conference in 1907. Some of von Clausewitz' contemporary critics (van Creveld, 1991, pp. 35-42; Keegan, 1994, pp. 18-24; pp. 386-92) have called this account of a *state* using an *army* to fight on behalf of a *people* "trinitarian war."

Two things were implied by Clausewitzian orthodoxy. First, only states waged war. Second, the practice of violence by peoples who knew nothing of the state nor of the legal divisions between the state, the army, and the people were by definition outside the scope of state law. On the one hand, this meant that Europeans operating in uniform outside of Europe were licensed to kill; on the other, it meant that the lesson was not lost upon non-Europeans. When war in the form of headhunting or "counting coup" was made impossible by European armies and by civil and religious administrators, but when such practices of war were central to non-European cultures,

an end to war was understood by the non-Europeans as an end to their culture or as what later was called "cultural genocide."

To put it another way, societies not organized as states do not *have* armies; rather, they *are* armies. In principle, therefore, where armed force is directed by organizations that are not states, against organizations that are not armies, by people who are not soldiers, modern Clausewitzian categories are gone—as are distinctions between officers and ordinary enlisted soldiers, military and civilians, combatants and non-combatants—even the "wounded" as a category of combatant depends on the modern law of the state. This is one reason for the controversy over the status of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters captured in Afghanistan and transported to the US Navy base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for interrogation.

The absence of distinctions between armies and peoples, or between armies and cultures (or religions), is what makes the circle of trust among such non-modern European military organizations so restricted, on the one hand, and on the other makes the circle of their targets so wide. Indeed, it is hard to think of a wider circle of targets than is provided by culture. For example, we were given a preview of the Taliban destruction of the 1500-year-old monumental statues of the Buddha in Afghanistan when the Serbs obliterated medieval monuments in Croatia Dubrovnik (Campbell, 2001). Tightly-based military organizations engaged in cultural conflicts have no use for another aspect of Clausewitzian war: respect for state borders. In addition, at least with respect to modern terrorism, the distinction between war and crime has also grown ambiguous, because it depends on the integrity of the state and its legal monopoly of armed force. Modern terrorists are prepared to contest both armies and the police, and armies and police forces have begun to redefine their mission in terms of "security," which can be both pre-emptive action and the post-facto investigation of crimes.



## ❧ “Traditional” Terrorism ❧

According to what has become a widely accepted definition, the US State Department described terrorism as the “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetuated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (Kauppi, 1998; Stern, 1999). Christopher Harmon has provided what is perhaps a more precise definition. “Terrorism,” he said, “has always one nature. Capable of different expressions, such as hot rage, cold contempt, and even ‘humane’ indulgences of certain victims, terrorism never loses its essential nature, which is the abuse of the innocent in the service of political power.” It is, he continued, “the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming, and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends” (Harmon, 2000, p. 1). Taken together, these remarks constitute a reasonable and accurate enough summary description with which to begin.

Terrorism has been the subject of a large number of presidential and prime ministerial statements over the years and is almost invariably included on the agenda of G-7/8 meetings. The purpose identified by the State Department, namely, “to influence an audience,” led Brian Jenkins to remark as long ago as 1975 that “terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening and not a lot of people dead” (Jenkins, 1975a, p. 15; 1985a, p. 511; 1985b, p. 6). Moreover, because conventional terrorists were more or less rational calculators, there were few reasonable demands that terrorists could make by threatening to inflict large-scale casualties (Hoffman, 1999, p. 12). As a result, the weapons and the killing tended to be relatively limited. For many domestic terrorists, or “nuisance” terrorists, as Laqueur called them (Laqueur, 1999, p. 4), the amount of damage they could inflict has also been

limited. The several lethal nuisances include eco-terrorism (Egan, 1996), agroterrorism (Foxell, 2001), bizarre new-age apocalypticism (Whitsel, 2000), and other acts by “single-issue” political obsessives (Monaghan, 2000).

An examination of the history of terrorism, however, as well as the logic of its use, indicate that any observed limitations to terrorist violence have been almost entirely accidental and contingent. Thus, prior to the nineteenth century, the only acceptable justification for terrorism was religious. It is significant that the English words “thug,” “assassin,” and “zealot” are all connected to systematic religiously-inspired killing (Rapoport, 1984). Like liberalism and conservatism, the word “terrorism” came into use during the French revolution. The *régime de la terreur* of 1793-94 was established to bring stability by consolidating the power of the new revolutionary government. Shortly after, Burke denounced the “thousands of those Hell hounds called Terrorists... let loose on the people” (Burke, 1854, p. 262). By the mid-nineteenth century, however, terrorism and terrorists had gained the familiar attributes of an anti-state conspiracy, though this is not to imply that terror as a mode of governance—as it had been during the French Revolution—ceased to be an option. On the contrary, terror is essential to the operation of twentieth-century totalitarian governments (Arendt, 1953; 1966, ch.13). By the mid-nineteenth century, as well, terrorists conventionally pursued the purposes of publicity indicated by Jenkins and summarized by the Italian terrorist, Carlo Pisacane, about 1857, as “propaganda by deed” (see Stafford, 1971). Modern secular terrorists such as Pisacane and his successors tend to be intellectuals who offer reasons for using violence. Indeed, it is precisely in such texts that evidence for

the pneumopathological character of the consciousness of terrorists is to be found.

If, as we have argued, there is nothing specifically terrorist in the use of violence, including such measures as bomb-throwing or murder, one must look to the consciousness of the terrorist to discover the typical features that distinguish terrorist violence from other violence. Here one finds something like the following profile: an individual, usually an intellectual, with an active, practical personality, experiences great guilt at the misery and evil in a society or perhaps in the world at large. Such a consciousness desires reform, but finds that legitimate channels of constructive activity for one reason or another appear to be closed; the way beyond this evident impasse seems to him (and terrorists are overwhelmingly male) to lie in action that the actor anticipates will entail sacrifice on his part, particularly if the individual is gifted with great moral sensitivity. This is why, as Hoffman observed, “the terrorist is fundamentally an *altruist*: he believes that he is serving a ‘good’ cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency—whether real or imagined—which the terrorist and his organization purport to represent” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 43). Or in the words of Walter Laqueur, “traditional terrorism rests on the heroic gesture, on the willingness to sacrifice one’s own life as proof of one’s idealism” (Laqueur, 1996, p. 31). It is important to distinguish, however, the *refusal* to separate what is real from what is imagined, which is the distinguishing attribute of a pneumopath, from an *inability* to do so, which is the mark of an ordinary psychopath. This is why, for example, the Victorians spoke of “moral insanity” (Laqueur, 1999, pp. 231ff) as a phenomenon to be distinguished from ordinary insanity, madness, or lunacy.

More to the point, most commonsensical individuals would reject out of hand the notion that terrorists’ murder could ever be connected to altruism, self-sacrifice, and heroic gestures. “The essence of

terrorism,” Harmon said, “includes immoral kinds of calculations: singling out victims who are innocent; and bloodying that innocence to shock a wider audience” (Harmon, 2000, p. 190). The reality that terrorists carefully avoid facing is that killing the innocent is inherently illegitimate. Moreover, terrorists are sufficiently aware of this truth or this reality that they go to great effort to deny it. There is, therefore, an inherent friction between the common or first reality within which the terrorist lives along with his victims, and the second reality that is expressed in the pneumopathological consciousness of the terrorist and the deliberate but perverse logic that interprets murder as self-sacrifice. This is a subtle, though not complex issue, and needs to be examined in more detail.

The crucial element within the pneumopathological consciousness of the terrorist is not that he might get caught and be punished, say, by execution for murder. Rather, by killing, the terrorist deliberately sacrifices his moral personality and this self-inflicted act of moral annihilation is understood both as a supreme sacrifice and an ultimate justification. It is also the clearest possible indication of pneumopathological consciousness:

for a sacrifice of moral personality can neither be brought into a spirit of love nor is acceptable to other men. It is not an act of love but rather an act of self-assertion by which the man who makes the sacrifice claims for himself an exceptional status in comparison with other men; the men to whom he brings the sacrifice are misused as the audience for his own justification. Moreover, the sacrifice is spiritually vain because the sacrificial act, if understood as a model of conduct, would implicitly deny moral personality to the men for whom it is committed. The act would insinuate to them eventually to follow the example as well as to accept the sacrifice. Neither, however, is possible in a healthy spiritual relationship. For neither has man a right to

place them in a position where his own sacrifice of moral personality would appear as requested by them for their benefit. The terroristic act as moralistic model is a symptom of the disease in which evil assumes the form of spirituality (Voegelin, 1999, 277-8).

As we will see in the following section, the language changes when religious experiences and sentiments are invoked, but this means only that a pneumopathology identical or at least equivalent to that just described is being expressed through religious language.

Terrorists occasionally compare themselves to soldiers even though their victims usually consider them criminals. Leaving aside the issue of criminality, it seems obvious enough that terrorists are not soldiers. Not only is the formal relationship to a state (discussed above) typically absent, but terrorists do not observe the limitations or rules for the conduct of war that armies usually do. A series of international agreements beginning in the 1860s established a number of conventions and restrictions on the conduct of war. Chief among them are the distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, a prohibition against hostage-taking, regulations governing the treatment of prisoners, recognition of the neutrality of certain states, the immunity of diplomats, and so on. On the other hand, “one of the fundamental *raison d’être* of international terrorism is a refusal to be bound by such rules of warfare and codes of conduct. International terrorism disdains any concept of delimited areas of combat or demarcated battlefields, much less respect of neutral territory” (Hoffman, 1998, pp. 35-6).

Add to these well-known formalities regarding the conduct of war a more basic feature: war entails risk. War is not, therefore, just large- or small-scale killing. War begins not when A kills B, but when A risks his life to kill B. Accordingly, “killing people who do not or cannot resist does not count as war” (van Creveld, 1991, p. 159). Moreover, war is not simply concerned with advancing interests—in fact,

for soldiers, the notion of dying for the interests of somebody else (or indeed for oneself) is absurd since the dead are characterized precisely by the absence of interest. War in the broadest sense is not, therefore, the continuation of policy but of sport. Terrorists, to use a distinction of Jan Huizinga, are thus “spoil sports” rather than cheats (Huizinga, 1955, p. 11 and ch. 5). That is, they refuse to accept the rules rather than break them to their own advantage, and thereby reinforce the difference between fair play and cheating.

Traditional terrorism is associated with nineteenth-century bomb-throwing revolutionaries and ethno-nationalists operating within the moribund Russian, Ottoman, and Hapsburg empires. Terrorism intensified and became a global phenomenon, however, in the years following 1945. The Irgun in Palestine, the EOKA movement in Cyprus, and the FLN in Algeria can all be classified as the first wave of post-war anti-colonial terrorism. They were important for the most obvious reason one can imagine: they were understood as having led to the successful foundation of new states. Thus, by the 1960s, terrorism was seen as an instrument to be used by other aggrieved individuals as if by imitation. It is true enough, as many analysts have observed, that terrorists often choose the instruments of violence that they do because of what some strategists have called “displacement” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997c, p. 276; Bodansky, 1999, p. 321). That is, states and state-supported NGOs such as al-Qaeda realize that they are incapable of winning or even waging a “regular” or a “conventional” war. For a vast array of adversaries and critics of the west and especially of the United States, this was a lesson that was hard to miss after the Gulf War—which may turn out to have been the last war of mass and manoeuvre seen for some time.

However that may be, the alleged threat posed to traditional regimes by western culture, globalization, or secularization, which is a very large and practical

issue, is not our immediate concern. Our concern is with the purposes of terrorism. In this context, as Berger and Sutphen said, it is important “to distinguish sharply between the purpose [the terrorist] seeks to achieve and the grievances he seeks to exploit” (2001,

p. 123). The purposes are almost invariably riddled with pneumopathological elements; the grievances are almost always at hand in the common sense world. This is why the two constituents of contemporary terrorism must be sharply distinguished.

## ❧ *Modern Terrorism* ❧

### *The issues*

**T**he massive terrorist attacks of the 1990s and early years of the new millennium were preceded by a transition from traditional terrorism. The beginning of the new era is often identified precisely: July 22, 1968. On that date, an El Al commercial airliner was hijacked with the purpose not of diverting the plane to an unscheduled destination, but in order to barter the passengers for imprisoned colleagues of the hijackers—in this instance, Palestinian terrorists held by Israel. During the 1970s, most terrorist acts were “events of duration,” that is, hijackings or hostage-taking completed by nationalist separatists and social revolutionaries, usually Marxists of some sort, using the traditional weapons of bombs and guns. By the 1980s, new methods led to “conclusive events,” that is, acts that took place too quickly to permit any counter-terrorist response—semtex plastic bombs, suicide bombing of buses, and so on. Marxist revolutionaries undertook some of these acts, but religious and narco-terrorists introduced new motivations as well (Medd and Goldstein, 1997, pp. 282-3).

During the 1980s the first chemical attacks took place, motivated chiefly by economic blackmail: Chilean grapes and Israeli oranges were contaminated by opponents of the governments of those two countries; Mars Bars were contaminated by members of the Animal Liberation Front. The 1990s saw the formation of new alliances and networks between and among traditional political terrorists and organized crime: the Cali cartel joined forces with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC; other groups established working relationships with Chinese triads, Russian and Ital-

ian mafias, former KGB agents and so on (Rapoport, 1999, p. 55; Stern, 1993, pp. 208ff). Two changes during the last quarter century are of particular importance for the present analysis. First, there is a natural upper limit to the number of people that can be killed by conventional terrorist bombs—somewhere in the hundreds as opposed to the thousands. To move beyond explosives (at least prior to the use of fuel-laden civilian aircraft as bombs) entailed a search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Second, the number and prominence of apocalyptically-inspired pneumopathological religious groups for whom terrorist violence is a magic act intended to bring about a transfiguration of reality has increased.

We will consider first the technical aspects of contemporary terrorism and then the typical motivations for it. We return to the question of innovations in organization form after examining the specific features of Islamist terrorism and al-Qaeda.

In its annual public report for 2000, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) made the following observation: “Advanced communications techniques, combined with the ease of international travel, have broadened terrorism’s scope of operations, while greatly compressing the time frames available to security forces to detect and neutralize terrorist threats.” Moreover, matters are likely to get worse in the years ahead. “The use of advanced explosive materials, in combination with highly sophisticated timers and detonators, will produce increasingly higher numbers of casualties. There will likely be terrorist attacks whose sole aim would be to incite terror itself.... Computers, modems,



and the internet are enhancing the operational capabilities of terrorist organizations.... Terrorists also have augmented their security through the use of sophisticated encryption software to protect sensitive communications” (CSIS, 2000). According to Reuters (2000), Internet bulletin boards carrying pornographic and sports information are the most popular sites for hiding encrypted terrorist messages. By “operational capabilities” CSIS was referring to such things as commercially-available instruction manuals and guides to assassination, poison, bomb-making, and so on that can be downloaded from the Internet. In addition, of course, the Internet is by itself a splendid means of communication. The CSIS appraisal was essentially the same as that available from American intelligence sources. Likewise, the consensus among academic observers of terrorism has been that advanced technology has increased the potential for damage and so has enhanced *vulnerability*, but the probability of actual damage, or *threat*, remained considerably lower (Hoffman, 1998, pp. 203-4).

In part, the long-standing divergence between “alarmists” and “minimalists” reflected the difference between those in the physical and social sciences. Worst-case options seemed possible to the former because they were more aware than the latter of the potential of chemical and biological agents, and the technical requirements to increase the toxicity and lethality of those agents; their concern was with what *could* happen. Historians and political scientists, however, were more likely to be sceptical “for the simple reason that we know there have always been enormous gaps between the potentiality of a weapon and the abilities and/or will to employ it” (Rapoport, 1999, p. 51). Their concern was not with what could happen but with what *has happened* (Dishman, 2001; Roberts, 2000). Even so, during the late 1990s social scientists drew attention to the convergence of vulnerability and threat as a result partly of technical changes but chiefly as a result of novel “religious” motivations (Hoffman, 1998, pp.

203-4). Following the September 2001 attacks, the gap between vulnerability and threat has narrowed considerably.

Historically, there have been good reasons to be sceptical. Terrorists traditionally had no use for WMD because such weapons were sufficiently destructive to make sense only within the logic of deterrence. Accordingly, states that had access to WMD were unlikely to supply weapons to those who might want to use them precisely because states possessing them knew their “use” was to deter their actual use. And if a group of unconventional terrorists ever were supplied with such weapons, the state that supplied them would also be at risk, either directly from the probably unreliable terrorists, or indirectly through retaliation by other states. Moreover, as was indicated above, traditional terrorists did not see mass casualties as advancing their political, and so limited, objectives. Because of the limited nature of politics, even when connected to terrorism, there are moral constraints involved as well. Ordinary terrorists kill the innocent, but WMD kill an excessive number of the innocent, even for ordinary terrorists to stomach. In addition, acquiring WMD is both risky and expensive, as is using them, and most terrorists prefer simple, cheap, and reliable weapons—guns and explosives. Accordingly, the extent to which reports that al-Qaeda has been seeking WMD from the former Soviet Union and from Pakistan are accurate (Bodansky, 2001, pp. 328-31; Berger and Sutphen, 2001, p. 124), is a measure of the novelty of the operational practices of this group.

At the same time as political analysts had good reason to be sceptical about terrorists ever successfully employing WMD, a large piece of statistical evidence suggested the opposite. Both State Department data and data compiled by St. Andrews University and the RAND Corporation indicated an ominous trend: from the 1970s to the 1990s, terrorist attacks declined in number but became more



lethal (Stern, 2000, pp. 6-9; Hoffman, 1997, p. 21; 1999, pp. 19-21). As CSIS reported: “of particular concern is the emergence of groups... whose aim is not to bargain with governments nor to win over public opinion to their point of view, but rather to cause the maximum possible amount of damage and disruption to a people or a system that they consider especially abhorrent” (CSIS, 2000, p. 2). Several terrorist groups who began operations during the 1990s “did not necessarily espouse political causes or aim to take power.” Instead, many of them “were intent on harming a maximum number of people” (Smithson and Levy, 2000, p. 15). These groups have grown increasingly indifferent to the risk of high casualties because their mission is to attack or “punish” an entire culture, to attempt a large-scale transformation of political reality by means of large-scale violence, or to commence some other transfigurative act that we have argued is typical of modern pneumopaths living imaginatively in a second reality of their own construction.

### *Aum Shinrikyo*

For such grandiose objectives, and for such a consciousness, WMD are an attractive option. There have, in fact, been a couple of dozen terrorist attacks to date that used chemical and biological weapons, but none so far that have used radiological or nuclear weapons. Most of these efforts have attempted to contaminate food and water, and few have been successful. The chief exception was the previously mentioned March 20, 1995 poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway system by Aum Shinrikyo, choreographed by Shoko Asahara.

In 1984, Asahara founded a religious group called *Aum Shinsen no Kai*. Aum (which equals “Om” in English) is Sanskrit for the fundamental powers of cosmic stability and change, and often is chanted as part of a personal or community mantra. *Shinsen no Kai* means circle of divine wizards. The implication of the name of Asahara’s first group, therefore, was

that they might magically command the basic cosmic forces. A year later Asahara had a vision, which he later identified as being of the Hindu god, Shiva (who is associated with salvation through destruction of the world), and two years later renamed his group *Aum Shinrikyo*: Shinrikyo means teaching of supreme truth. Taken together, Asahara was claiming to be a wizard with knowledge of the supreme truth, namely, that salvation demands the destruction of the world. Between 1988 and the early 1990s, the implications were gradually worked out in practice.

Following the subway attack, US Senator Sam Nunn declared that “the world has entered a new era” (Falkenrath, 1988, p. 167). The reasons for this assessment were clear: “Terrorists packing guns and bombs are frightening enough, but chills go down the spine at the thought of indiscriminate killers employing weapons that at times cannot be seen, heard, smelled, or tasted: arbitrary death from an imperceptible cause is a nightmare if ever there was one” (Smithson and Levy, 2000, p. 1). Aum had succeeded in deploying just such a weapon, the nerve gas sarin, which had first been created by the Nazis, though the recipe used by Aum had been copied from the Soviets. In using sarin, Aum crossed a moral threshold similar to those crossed in the 1960s when terrorists began launching random attacks (as in Northern Ireland), the 1970s when hostage-taking increased, or the early 1980s when embassies came under attack. In fact, Aum was not the first to use poison gas; in 1990 the Tamil Tigers deployed poison gas against a Sri Lankan army post. It received much less publicity than the Tokyo attack: fewer people were watching. The norm of sparing women and children began to decline about the same time, and in 1985 Sikh terrorists blew up an Air India passenger plane killing 363 people (Stern, 2000, pp. 203-5). In this analysis of the Aum attack, we consider first what took place; second, how Aum was able to undertake the operation; and third, the motives for the attack.

Several accounts of the attack have been published, including extensive hearings by the US Senate.<sup>1</sup> At approximately 8:15 a.m. on Monday, March 20, 1995, five trains in the Tokyo subway system were scheduled to arrive at Kasumigaseki station in downtown Tokyo, the most convenient stop for workers in the major bureaucracies that govern Japan. Five individuals, having swallowed an antidote to sarin, pierced vinyl bags containing the nerve gas and exited the trains about 8:00 a.m. A dozen people died and between 5,000 and 6,000 were injured. Had Aum been able to keep to its original schedule and manufacture gas of greater purity, the casualties would have been enormously higher. Indeed, the March 20 attack had been preceded by at least nine less successful efforts using botulinum toxin and anthrax as well as sarin (Cameron, 1999). Aum was simply unable to manufacture an effective botulinum toxin and their technicians were unable to turn the anthrax slurry into an aerosol; in a kind of dress rehearsal for the Tokyo attack the group succeeded in releasing sarin in June, 1994 in the resort town of Matsumoto, which killed seven people, a large number of dogs and fish, and sent over 15 others to the hospital. The deaths and injuries were blamed on an accidental release of a home-made pesticide.

There has also been considerable analysis of how Aum was able to muster the resources to conduct these attacks and to do so without attracting attention from either the Japanese police or from any intelligence service. Probably the most significant element in the organizational success of Aum is that it was considered a religious organization under Japanese law.

Article 20 of the post-War Japanese constitution was designed to separate the Japanese government from the Shinto religion and make it more difficult to forge the political and religious alliance that proved so effective in motivating Japanese military activities during the 1930s and 1940s. This article guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits any state involve-

ment in “religious activity.” The Japanese courts and police have interpreted Article 20 to mean they cannot examine the religious practices of any organization covered by the Religious Corporation Law nor enter any religious building without solid evidence of significant illegalities. This meant that police surveillance of a “religious corporation” was unlikely. Moreover, in Japan there is no national police force such as Canada’s RCMP or the American FBI to coordinate information from local police—who in turn are often ill-equipped to deal with major and sophisticated criminal activity outside the traditional underworld, the *yakuza*. Finally, because American intelligence organizations were focused primarily on left-wing Japanese political groups, and because Japanese authorities ignored them because of their protected status, Aum attracted next to no interest in what they did or what they believed.

In 1982, Asahara was fined 200,000 yen, sent to jail for 20 days, and had his herbalist licence revoked for selling a worthless infusion of orange peel as a herbal cure. He had joined one of Japan’s “new religions” the year before and began his study and interpretation of esoteric Buddhism, the prophecies of Nostrodamus, and a mixture of North American new age materials. He apparently confided to one of his assistants that “religion” was the way of the future and in 1984 founded his own group. The associated company began to operate a chain of yoga schools and Asahara himself claimed to have received several visions that indicated to him that he was a prophet and that apocalyptic events lay just over the horizon. It was at this point that he changed his name from Chizuo Matsumoto to the more spiritually heroic Shoko Asahara.

Using the yoga centres as recruiting bases, Asahara’s own “new religion” grew rapidly. He was able to take advantage of a general spiritual void in Japanese society that by the early 1990s had been filled by over 200,000 registered cults with a membership of some 200 million, which was 70 million more than

the population of the country, indicating that considerable numbers of Japanese held memberships in more than one cult. At the same time, the requirement that members turn over large sums to the organization enabled Aum to grow and to grow wealthy. Many converts were *otaku*, individuals with a deep involvement in science and technology, limited interpersonal skills, and a strong taste for the peculiar genre of book-length, ultra-violent, graphic and dramatic Japanese comics called *gekiga*. Internal discipline was maintained by a strenuous regime involving sleep deprivation, drugs, and rigorous indoctrination, along with violence (including murder) directed against anyone wishing to leave or criticize Aum or Asahara. Many of the converts were technically skilled, notwithstanding their *gekiga* view of the world, and a significant number were members of the police and self-defence forces.

By the time of the subway attack, Aum had over 10,000 members in Japan and 50,000 across the world in half a dozen countries, including the former Soviet Union where 30,000 Aum supporters lived, many of them, as in Japan, technically adept. There is evidence as well that the former Soviet Union was the scene of several attempts by Aum to acquire nuclear weapons or uranium useful for radiological warfare, that is, large-scale radioactive contamination, and what Asahara called a “radioactive sunrise.” In short, as a result of these organizational successes, Aum had become a multinational NGO with assets of one-and-a-half billion US dollars and control over a number of front companies engaged in purchasing raw materials, state-of-the-art equipment, and modern facilities. They were organized in a strict hierarchy and staffed by dedicated scientists and technicians. By most ordinary measures of normality, Aum was a successful start-up company in the “religious market,” as Asahara called it.

The product Aum delivered to that market, we noted above, was derived from a wide selection of

esoteric sources. The actual contents consisted of a bizarre apocalyptic cocktail: Asahara was the prophet of a coming cataclysm. He singled out 1995 as the year because Pluto entered the sign of Sagittarius on January 18th. The next day a major earthquake struck Kobe, and Asahara used the occasion to explain the higher significance of the event to all who would listen: “The mysterious Great Power had set off the earthquake either with a small, distant nuclear explosion or by ‘radiating high voltage microwaves’ into the ground near the fault line” (Sale, 1996, p. 69). As a consequence of this “prediction,” the profile of Aum, at least in the Japanese media, increased enormously. Perhaps more ominously, Asahara’s sermons mentioned more frequently the danger of gas attacks from the United States Air Force, which in fact telegraphed his next move.

On the one hand, therefore, Asahara was a successful entrepreneur. The face he presented to the public, however, was of a prophet who might use his power to prevent cataclysm or use it to transform the world; he gradually drifted more and more into the realm of second reality and came to believe that mass destruction had become a necessary prelude to the survival of a saving remnant, Aum Shinrikyo itself. Moreover, Asahara determined that his new task was to initiate the final apocalyptic struggle for the good of a corrupt world and in order that Aum might then save it. It became the task of his followers to ensure the prophecies of Asahara came true. That is, Aum would initiate the final events and in this way prove the truth of his apocalyptic vision. To ask if Asahara “really” believed what he was saying is meaningless because within his consciousness the blending of first and second reality put the meaning of reality itself into play.

The logic of Aum was, in this respect, akin to that of the National Socialists or Bolsheviks. For example, the former declared that Poles were without well-developed intellects because they had no intellectuals; they had no intellectuals because the Nazis

had murdered them. Similarly, the Bolshevik doctrine that the kulaks were a “dying class” was proved by the extermination of kulaks. And likewise Asahara sought to bring about what he predicted. He “believed” what he said to the extent that he acted in order to achieve it.

A crucial event that led Asahara down the road to terrorism was the result of the February 1990 election for the Japanese parliament. Aum ran 25 candidates under the banner of the Truth Party; they received 1,783 votes and the self-described prophet was humiliated. He predicted a disaster for Japan, which meant in common sense language that he was about to cause one. He then enlisted Shiva, Nostrodamus, and esoteric tantric texts and practices in his cause and started the search for sarin, ebola, and other WMD, including “surplus” nuclear weapons from the former Soviet Union. In terms of the second reality of Asahara’s prophetic vision, the 1990 election was the last chance for the world. The world would not listen; too bad for the world: “all who remained outside the movement were unworthy, while those inside were transformed into sacred warriors who believed that they could kill with impunity and that in so doing, they could save in the spiritual sense those they killed” (Reader, 2000, pp. 248-9). On another occasion, when reflecting upon the inevitability of World War III, which he identified with the Biblical Armageddon and which he (and not God, as in the Bible) was charged with bringing about, Asahara remarked: “I stake my religious future on this prediction.” Lifton commented on this passage: “We may assume that he was unaware of the irony of that statement. (Who, after all, would be around to affirm his ‘religious future’?) But in his own theological terms the statement had a certain logic” (Lifton, 1999, p. 44).

The pneumopathological substance of Asahara’s remarks are self-evident when summarized in the common sense language of a Reader or a Lifton. Only within the context of Asahara’s second reality

did the “logic” of his “theological terms” make sense. The doctrine that explained how killing a person would save the person being killed was derived from a disciplined, deathbed meditative practice called *poa*. Poa is practiced chiefly by members of a sect of Tibetan Buddhism called Vajrayana, or “Diamond Vehicle.” According to the Vajrayana tradition, poa meditation transfers consciousness from the mundane world of existence to a transfigured world of post-existence. This meditation is undertaken with the intention of attaining a higher state of consciousness in the next rebirth. Asahara’s version changed the meaning completely. Instead of an individual intentionally undertaking a poa-meditation as a step towards Nirvana, Aum would impose the benefit whether the individual sought it or not. Poa was for Aum not a meditative exercise but, within the imaginative second reality articulated by Asahara, became an active, transitive verb. Thus, when Asahara ordered someone to be “poa-ed,” their time on earth was already up; by carrying out a death sentence, in the second reality of Aum, the victim would benefit in his next birth. The world would benefit now because the death of the one poa-ed, that is, the victim, would remove “bad karma” from the world (Watanabe, 1988).

The first murders began during the winter of 1988-89 and were suffered initially by members of Aum who perished during “training” or felt remorse for those who did. In November 1989, a lawyer, Tsutsumi Sakamoto, and his family were poa-ed for criticizing Aum in the media. Within their second reality, opposition was *prima facie* evidence of bad karma. Killing altruistically meant that the murdered person would be prevented from accumulating more bad karma and even worse retribution in the next life. Asahara said that to poa meant “to transform a person doing bad things.” In common sense language, to poa meant to end the possibility of transformation; to poa meant to murder. But for Aum, poa-ing enhanced the immortality of both the killer and his victim. As Lifton observed, Aum took

a step beyond even the Nazi killers: the Nazis “claimed no spiritual benefits for the Jews from being murdered. In Aum, the ‘healing’ embraced both the perpetrators and their victims: they merged into an all-encompassing immortalization” (Lifton, 1999, p. 67). The fact is, however, that in common sense reality only the murderer was transformed: his victim was, in reality, dead, and nothing could be known or said about the consequences for the soul of the victim.

Poa, therefore, was more than a convenient rationalization of murder as a defensive tactic or a means of socializing individuals to the ordinariness of large-scale killing. Within the second reality created by the pneumopathological consciousness of Asahara and of Aum members, it was also a means to purify the world so that it might be filled with the “supreme truth,” the “sacred carefree mind” that Asahara instilled in his followers through “training.” This “sacred carefree mind” enabled the members of Aum to poa anyone Asahara marked for death. In common sense language, killing “others,” namely everyone outside Aum who necessarily had not attained a “sacred carefree mind,” would enhance the sentiment of immortality within Aum, would enhance their purity, and most of all would enhance their power as the only arbiters of life and death, truth and lie. Asahara’s doctrine of poa became a recipe for altruistic genocide, and indeed a prelude to the altruistic death of everything.

In the description of pneumopathological consciousness provided by Voegelin, emphasis was drawn to the self-assertive and aggressive aspects of an individual who claims an exceptional status, an exemption from the ethical or political constraints of ordinary people. The claims of Asahara and Aum are almost a caricature of the ordinary terrorist. Aum was the first group in history to combine an ultimate exceptionalism with a quest for ultimate weapons that might destroy the world but that somehow would not destroy them.

In one respect Aum followed a trajectory common to other terrorist groups that combined extreme exceptionalism with a search for extreme weapons. As Gurr and Cole (2000, p. 251) said, the appeal of WMD increases with the transition toward “unlimited goals” or, as Cameron (1999, p. 297) put it, “on the assumption that terrorist demands and tactics have to be proportionate to one another, just as the scale of the group’s objectives has increased, so too must the strategies employed to achieve them.” Moreover, within the logic of traditional terrorism, given the limited number of people that can be killed by explosions, if the shock of killing is thought by terrorists to be wearing off, because not enough people are watching, then graduation to weapons of mass destruction is a logical next step (Jenkins, 2001, pp. 5-6).

On the other hand, however, it is difficult for common sense to understand how “proportionality” is maintained between WMD and grandiose transformative goals. Indeed, no goal can be “unlimited” and still remain a goal in any pragmatic sense. “Unlimited goals” can make sense only within the pneumopathological second reality of the imagination. Accordingly, when someone acts in the common world as if it were possible to achieve an “unlimited goal,” the aforementioned friction between first and second reality arises. For example, many commentators have noted the inability of Aum to mount a serious lethal attack. Notwithstanding its many technical and material assets, the Aum scientists and technicians failed to produce sarin sufficiently pure to accomplish what Asahara intended.

It has been suggested that one of the reasons for the failure of the biological weapons program was not that the scientists and technicians within Aum were incompetent but that they “seemed hampered by the cult’s fickle and irrational leadership and by poor scientific judgement and a lack of experience in working with agents such as *B. anthracis* and botuli-



num toxin” (Rosenau, 2001, p. 296). That Asahara was “fickle” and that his scientists had limited experience is undoubtedly true. It is also true that the sarin program “was rife with life-threatening production and dissemination accidents” (Smithson and Levy, 2000, p. 280). It does not follow, however, that if only the leadership of Aum had been more reasonable, or more careful, or less paranoid, they then would have been able to carry out a more successfully lethal attack on the Tokyo subways. The argument that Aum *could not* have been more prudent and so *could not* have been anything other than a “fickle” not to say paranoid organization is as old as political science and rests upon an equally antique philosophical insight: the realm of action, power, and pragmatic rationality—what used to be called the *vita activa*—is not autonomous. It is an integral part of human existence that, in its entirety, includes the rationality of the moral and spiritual order.

Precisely because of their pneumopathology, their commitment to the second reality of Asahara’s vision, were the members of Aum incapable of undertaking pragmatically rational pursuits. In reality, human beings are not capable of bringing about a spiritual Armageddon; they cannot “force the end,” as Asahara sought to do. When spiritual rationality is replaced by a pathology such as afflicted Asahara, then the pursuit of pragmatic goals will be controlled by irrational or pathological spiritual aspirations. To put it bluntly: the coordination of end and means was possible in the sense that Aum could murder people, but the action of murdering them was senseless because the goal for which the killing was undertaken had no connection to the reality of spiritual or any other kind of order. The spiritual irrationality of Aum, and hence the friction between Aum and Japanese society, was expressed with great clarity in the perverse doctrine of poa invented by Asahara.

In one sense, Aum Shinrikyo kept one foot on the ground of common sense. They remained con-

cerned with the safety of the terrorists who carried out the attacks. Aum members were provided with anti-sarin pills as well as quick-reacting antidotes. That is, they were not so completely absorbed in the second reality that they were taken in by their own apocalyptic fantasies: the Tokyo killers wished to survive and kill again. The last step in the logic of pneumopathology was taken not by Aum and the esoteric and syncretistic theology of omnicidal poa, but by spiritually disordered individuals acting within the entirely different religious world of Islam.

### *Other “religious” terrorists*

In terms of the argument developed in this *Study in Defence and Foreign Policy*, the traditional sociological distinction between sect, cult, and larger religious organization is secondary. Moreover, in the literature on “religious” terrorism, such distinctions are seldom emphasized (Laqueur, 1999, p. 80). For Smithson and Levy (2000, p. 17), “a common thread through much of the late twentieth century terrorist activity was religion”; for Hoffman, religion was the “connecting thread” in the new terrorism (Hoffman, 1997, p. 47). The metaphor of a “thread” applies to a wide range of religious groups with their own idiosyncratic traditions and motivations. In all of them are found elements of purity and catharsis not unlike the imaginary goals of Aum.

During the 1990s, for example, Sikh terrorists killed upwards of 20,000 people in their quest for Khalistan, the Land of the Pure (Hoffman, 1995, p. 279). White supremacists in the US and associated “militias” have their own sacred texts such as the *Turner Diaries* that advocate a “racially pure” America in the context of a mythic renewal of the cosmos—a doctrine that apparently motivated Timothy McVeigh to blow up the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City (Barkun, 1997a; 1997b; Campbell, 1972; Whitsel, 2001). In 1994, Baruch Goldstein, a member of the Kach movement, emp-



tied three 30-shot magazines into a crowd gathered at the Ibrahim mosque in Hebron, killing 29, wounding 150. He was then beaten to death, but claimed he was enacting the role of Mordecai the Revenger in the Purim story (Ranstorp, 1996, p. 41). Other Jewish terrorists had even more grandiose notions: enacting the magical dictum of Rabbi Meir Kahane, that “miracles are made,” by blowing up the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest shrine in Islam, some of his followers expected to ignite a holy war between Jews and Moslems and compel the intervention of the Jewish Messiah (Hoffman, 1995, p. 175 and Juergensmeyer, 1996, p. 10). There are religious overtones to purifying terrorism in Ireland and in the Balkans, which after all, gave the world the euphemism “ethnic cleansing.” Among Islamic terrorists the names Hezbollah (Party of God), or Jund al-Haqq (Soldiers of Truth), indicate clearly enough their own religiously purifying purposes.

During the 1970s and 1980s, terrorists such as those operating in Northern Ireland used “religion” as a screen behind which they pursued their own political agendas. “Today, however,” as Dishman observed, “more terrorist groups are using religion itself as the primary motivation behind their attacks” (Dishman, 1999, p. 357). In light of the pneumopathologies brought to light by an analysis of Asahara’s doctrine of poa, it is only prudent to attempt to give the term “religion” a precise meaning in any analysis of terrorism.

This is easier said than done. To begin with, the notion of “religion” used in political analysis (Arendt, 1968, pp. 126ff) opens up a very wide spatial and temporal field for terrorist activity. Thus, “ethno-religious” terrorism is often directed at “ethno-secular” leaders of the same “religious” group. President Sadat, for example, was murdered by an Egyptian Islamist; Prime Minister Rabin was murdered by an equivalent type of Israeli. The terrorist group Hamas is as opposed to PLO leader Yasser Arafat as it is to Israel. On occasion this divi-

sion between terrorists has led to some grotesque contrasts, as when Arafat responded to the attempt of Abu Nadal to assassinate him with the words “he’s a real terrorist!” An appropriate comment on this farce was made by Harmon (2000): “The new terrorists use the old terrorists’ arguments. There may be an international interest in preserving Arafat’s life, but others must make the moral argument for him; Arafat has no credibility to make it himself.” This kind of ambiguity is not confined to the Middle East, but applies equally to the Balkans or to the Tamils of South Asia (Juergensmeyer, 1996, pp. 4-7).

It is also sometimes argued that “religious” terrorists are inherently more unpredictable than secular ones because, unlike the latter, the objectives of “religious” terrorists are often unintelligible to those who do not share their religious outlook (Hoffman, 1998, p. 129). In fact, however, the goals of “traditional” and even of modern “secular” terrorists can be analyzed in terms of pneumopathology just as easily as those of “religious” terrorists.

As we noted at the beginning of this *Study in Defence and Foreign Policy*, there has been considerable disruption associated with modernization and globalization. Economic inequalities may have been reduced, but political repression is as strong as ever. More important, when cultures are changed, challenged, transformed, mocked, and perhaps suppressed, especially if this happens at the hands of outsiders, secularization that has unavoidably accompanied global modernity is experienced by religious communities as an assault and may appear to be the most important source of both religious damage and more general political disorders. In this way, political difficulties can be taken to have a religious solution and the goals of a religious community can be understood to be capable of being gained by political action.

Terrorism, in short, can begin as a defensive activity, though it seldom remains that way. “Not only do

the terrorists feel the need to preserve their religious identity,” said Ranstorp, “they also see this time as an opportunity to fundamentally shape their future” (Ranstorp, 1996, p. 46). Like the Bolsheviks or Nazis who thought “history” would justify them, so too do terrorists typically evoke a future where the oppressed of today emerge radiant and triumphant, the initiators of a new regime, usually identified with peace and justice. For example, Leila Khaled, a Palestinian terrorist who masterminded a couple of successful hijackings during the late 1960s wrote, “We shall win because we represent the wave of the future... because mankind is on our side, and above all because we are determined to achieve victory” (Khaled, 1973, p. 209). It may be a short step, therefore, from political opposition to resistance to secularization, from a call to “shape” the future to the evocation of an inevitable historical course that leads to victory. When things do not go according to the way a particular individual knows they must, when the political struggle to ensure the existence of the religious community runs into resistance, as political struggles tend to do, then it is easy enough to see another religious force as being responsible. Thus does a political struggle become a battle between good and evil or, to use the symbolism often favoured by Islamists as well as Christian and Jewish fundamentalists, resistance to secularization is a struggle against “Satanic forces” (Laqueur, 1999, p. 81; cf. Armstrong, 2000).

A number of implications follow from recasting a political problem into religious language. To begin with, “For the religious terrorist, violence is first and foremost a sacramental act or divine duty executed in response to some theological demand or imperative.” Terrorism thus assumes “a transcendental dimension, and its perpetrators are consequently unconstrained by the political, moral, or practical constraints that may affect other terrorists” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 94; Hoffman, 1997, p. 48). To be more precise, religious terrorism assumes this transcendental dimension and becomes this sacra-

mental duty within the context of a second reality created by the terrorist. Without question, however, such motivations reduce the effects of pragmatic constraints. Accordingly, Jenkins’ dictum, that terrorists want a lot of people watching not a lot of people dead, is simply invalidated. As with Aum, the objective has been expanded to include harming the maximum number of people. Moreover, religiously-inspired terrorists can afford to keep a low profile not simply to evade capture or detection but because, in their imaginations, they are doing the work of God. As Jenkins himself (1996) said, “If God tells you to do it, God knows you did it. So you don’t have to issue a communiqué to let God know.”

No matter how destructive these acts of political violence may be in common sense terms, for the terrorist pneumopath, they “are sanitized by virtue of the fact that they are religiously symbolic. They are stripped of their horror by being invested with religious meaning” (Juergensmeyer, 1996, p. 16). At the same time, however, it is important never to lose sight of the fact that individuals, with a great variation of talents and idiosyncrasies, seek and find a political solution to a religious experience. When the heart is sensitive to the things of the world and the mind is perceptive regarding their structure, one look is enough to indicate the misery and injustice as well as the grandeur and joy of human existence: when heart and mind are insensitive and dull, massive events will be required to engender even weak feelings and modest insights. One person may see in suffering and injustice the essential attributes of humanity, and search for meaning and deliverance beyond the world; another may experience the same realities as a flaw, a mistake, a grievance that must be remedied, here and now. Notwithstanding the fact that these various attitudes and attributes can be discovered among all varieties of religious terrorists, for obvious practical and historical reasons, most of the detailed analysis has been directed at Islamist groups, so it is to this question that we now turn.

## ❧ *Islamist Terrorism* ❧

If Aum is noteworthy in the development of modern terrorism for being the first to introduce non-conventional weapons, Islamists were the first extensively to deploy suicide attacks, beginning with the truck bombing of the American embassy in Beirut in April 1983. This was shortly followed by the attack also in Beirut on the US Marine barracks and other attacks against French, American and Israeli targets. The early suicide attacks were carried out by Shiites inspired by the Islamist revolution of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. It was not until somewhat later that Sunni terrorists emulated their Shiite brothers. From the beginning, however, both collections of terrorists were characterized by similar apocalyptic expectations, so that internal differences between Sunnis and Shiites are, for our purposes, secondary.

Article Seven of the (Sunni) Hamas Covenant, for example, states: “The time [of Redemption] will not come until Muslims fight the Jews and kill them, and until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, whence the call is raised: ‘Oh Muslim, here is a Jew hiding! Come and kill him!’” (Hoffman, 1998, pp. 98-9). During the time of Redemption, therefore, the common world is transfigured, and even the rocks and trees cry out to assist in the process of extermination. Likewise, Hussein Mussawi, founder of the Shiite Hezbollah stated: “we are not fighting so that the enemy recognizes us and offers us something. We are fighting to wipe out the enemy” (Taheri, 1987, pp. 7-8). The purpose of this large-scale killing is akin to Aum’s purpose of large-scale poisoning: to bring about a peaceful world of triumphant justice (Rapoport, 1987-88, p. 197ff). As with the example of Aum, common sense has difficulty grasping how an apocalyptic war of extermination can achieve an endless peace of righteous-

ness. Thus, as Juergensmeyer said, with some perplexity, there are no “simple answers” that terrorists alive to apocalyptic expectations can give when they are asked “simple questions,” such as: “what kind of a state do you want? How do you plan to get it? How do you think you will get along with the rest of the world?” (Juergensmeyer, 1996, p. 17). Juergensmeyer’s common sense questions are easily dismissed by terrorist pneumopaths because such people have no concern with getting along with the rest of the world, but with changing the world. In common sense language, the objective is to alter the structure of reality, not to effect reform. Such individuals, in a new context, are enacting Marx’s pneumopathological advice in the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: “philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it” (cf. Voegelin: 1999, pp. 343ff).

No doubt the symbols used by any number of so-called “religious nationalists” have a Biblical aura about them. With Islamist terrorism, however, the connection to the Bible is much more direct insofar as it originates in the Mosaic foundation of the Israelites as a theopolity, that is, as the Kingdom of God institutionalized in a specific people. The process by which the experience of the revelation of a world-transcendent God is yanked into history to do the bidding of a self-proclaimed prophet has been given the name *metastasis* by Eric Voegelin (1956, pp. 452ff; 1990, pp. 76-8; 2000, pp. 152-3). In the example of Hezbollah and Hamas, apocalyptic war will issue in metastatic peace because reality, as envisaged by the likes of Mussawi, will be transfigured by means, precisely, of terrorist violence.

As with other kinds of second realities made up by one or another variety of deformed consciousnesses,

the great problem with metastatic faith is the nonapocalyptic structure of history. As we saw in the example of Aum Shinrikyo, the magic operations designed to introduce the apocalypse were interpreted by the Japanese police as murder, leading to the aforementioned friction and the eventual arrest of Asahara and several of his followers. To analyze in detail the analogous problem in the Islamist context, which has resulted in the “friction” between the Taliban and al-Qaeda and western military forces led by the United States, we might begin with a consideration of the Islamist transformation of the notion of martyr.

Within what might be called “orthodox” or mainstream Islam (both Shiite and Sunni) a martyr, *shahid* in Arabic, is one who bears witness to truth, which is a common enough sentiment that is hardly confined to Islam. Article 8 of the (Sunni) Hamas Covenant, for example, states that “death for the sake of Allah is its most sublime belief” (Ranstorp, 1996, p. 52). Such theological sentiments are common to Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam, and although they may be unusual or even disagreeable, there does not seem to be anything particularly unorthodox, metastatic, magical, or pneumopathological in them. It is also true, however, that by tradition, the community (*umma*) assigns the status of martyr not simply to those who die on its behalf, but to those whose death provides proportionate benefits to the community. Only rarely have Islamic jurists, scholars, and other religious authorities endorsed actions in defence of the community that have a high probability of death for the believer.

It is an innovation, therefore, to think of martyrdom in terms of an individual act undertaken without reference to the community and without reference to the practical issue of the defence of the community. It is also an innovation to identify as martyrs those who kill civilians rather than more worthy and more equal opponents. By 1990, however, it was

clear from a study of Shiite terrorists that none of the sample interviewed had the slightest interest in including any communal constituency or changing anyone’s mind. They were acting without reference to the practical commonsensical realities of politics and were concerned only to serve God individually by killing and dying (Schbley, 1990, p. 240).

All Muslims, whether modern innovators or not, would subscribe to the traditional teaching that a martyr is particularly fortunate if he dies in battle against the infidel and on behalf of the community.

The Messenger of God said, “A martyr has six privileges with God. He is forgiven his sins on the shedding of the first drop of his blood; he is shown his place in paradise; he is redeemed from the torments of the grave; he is made secure from the fear of hell and a crown of glory is placed on his head of which one ruby is worth more than the world and all that is in it; he will marry seventy-two of the houris with black eyes; and his intercession will be accepted for seventy of his kinsmen” (Rapoport, 1990, pp. 117-18).

For some, the specifics of posthumous repose are no doubt appealing on their own; for others, the angelic promise may be a source of strength. The contemporary interpretation, however, is heavily weighted in favour of redeeming a promise. In the words of one of the commanders of the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks: “none of us is afraid. God is with us and gives us strength. We are making a race like horses to see who goes to God first. I want to die before my friends. They want to die before me. We want to see our God. We welcome the bombs of Reagan” (Wright, 1986, p. 54).

It is a short step to transform the consolations of martyrdom into the appeals of martyrdom. That is, if you are importuned by 70 kinsmen and find the prospect of marriage to 72 black-eyed houris appealing, then an angelic message can become a piece of

sympathetic magic: in order to gain access to the black-eyed houris, get yourself killed in action.

Considerable controversy surrounds the meaning of the word, “houri.” On August 19, 2000, the CBS program *60 Minutes* aired a story dealing with Hamas, and the rewards of martyrdom that, CBS said, included “70 virgins.” This translation of the Arabic text led the Muslim Public Affairs Council to demand a retraction from CBS, and CBS then sought clarification of the proper way to translate *hur’ayn*. There is considerable learned debate, not so much about the translation, which can mean both “virgin” or “pure,” or “heavenly being,” but whether or not information concerning “the black-eyed” is understood as theology or as folklore, and, more importantly, whether in the context of suicide-bombers, the promise of 72 (not 70) “black-eyed virgins” is understood symbolically or literally. The notes left by the September 11<sup>th</sup> hijackers, to say nothing of recruitment inducements for Middle Eastern suicide bombers are clear: suicide bombers are seen as martyrs, and martyrs are to be rewarded with 72 black-eyed virgins (Feldner, 2001).

Whether an appeal or a consolation, martyrdom introduces additional variables into the understanding of terrorist motives and adds new complexities to counterterrorism. There are two distinct aspects of the new attitude. One of the practical consequences of undertaking terrorist acts with a high probability of getting killed is that anti-terrorist measures would have to change in response. In the words of Lord Chalfont:

The whole time that I have been involved in terrorist operations, which now goes back 30 years, my enemy has always been a man who is very worried about his own skin. You can no longer count on that, because the terrorist [today] is not just “prepared” to get killed, he “wants” to get killed. Therefore, the whole planning, tactical doctrine, [and] thinking [behind anti-terrorism mea-

asures] is fundamentally undermined. (Kidder, 1986)

Changes in the practical business of delivering terrorist violence as well as counterterrorist measures are, of course, significant. In addition, however, there is the theoretical or theological step that expands the notion of martyrdom to include suicide.

One of the leaders of Hezbollah, Sheik Muhammed Hussein Fadlallah, denied that his organization was terrorist at all. “We don’t believe in terrorism,” he said. “We don’t see resisting the occupier as a terrorist action. We see ourselves as *mujihadeen* (holy warriors) who fight a *jihad* (holy war) for the people” (Jamieson, 1991, p. 33). Now it is certainly true that all Islamic authorities would agree that those who take part in a *jihad* can be called *mujihadeen*. The question of what constitutes a *jihad*, however, is rather more complex than the remark of Sheik Fadlallah indicates.

To begin with, *jihad* first of all means “striving” and refers initially to struggling against those who would impede the call to Islam. Of course, this struggle may include armed conflict against those who hold contested lands, particularly Muslim lands occupied by non-Muslims. The modern attribution of primacy to armed conflict over spiritual struggle can probably be traced to the Middle East theatre of operations during World War I. During that war, the British and the Central Powers each encouraged their Muslim allies to declare a *jihad*, in the sense of armed warfare, against their enemies, namely the Central Powers and the British respectively (Mottadeh, 2001). At the same time, in contemporary Persian and Arabic, the word can be used to refer to any major undertaking—a construction *jihad*, for example, much as in English one can speak of a “crusade” against poverty or AIDS (Bodansky, 2001, p. 408).

Fadlallah, however, was not concerned simply with reinforcing the legitimacy of armed confrontation



by endowing it with religious significance. He went on to claim that the commonsensical difference between suicide and martyrdom is spurious: "There is no difference between dying with a gun in your hand or exploding yourself. In a situation of struggle or holy war, you have to find the best means to achieve your goals" (Ranstorp, 1996, p. 55). The implication seems to be that the choice of weapons is merely tactical: whatever works best should be chosen.

Even within the context of *jihad* as armed struggle, there is an important difference between risking one's life in the service of religious truth in such a way that one may or may not become a martyr, and blowing oneself up. There is, to be blunt, no risk in blowing oneself up, only the certainty of death. By any commonsensical understanding, such an act is suicidal, and suicide (*intihar*) is usually identified as a grievous sin.

Following a thorough analysis of the relevant passages in the Koran, Rosenthal concluded in an authoritative study undertaken many years before the advent of suicidal terrorist attacks:

it may be said that there is no absolutely certain evidence to indicate that Muhammad ever discussed the problem of suicide by means of a divine revelation, although the possibility remains that the *Qur'ân* 4.29(33) contains a prohibition of suicide. It is, however, certain that from the early days of Islam, this and some other passages of the *Qur'ân* were considered by many Muslims as relevant to the subject. (Rosenthal, 1946, p. 243)

When, moreover, one examines the Hadith rather than the Koran, the Prophet many times is recorded as having said that a person who commits suicide will never enter Paradise but, on the contrary, will repeat his suicidal agony in the flames of Hell. Moreover, the canonical literature containing the *fatwas* of judges also indicates that suicide is unlawful. Thus, according to Rapoport, the Shiite teach-

ing that suicide bombers go to paradise with the six privileges of a martyr is simply "a perversion" (Rapoport, 1997-98, p. 195), an opinion that has been confirmed by several other Islamic scholars in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks (Hashimi, 2001; Makiya and Mneimneh, 2002). In this context it is perhaps worth noting that press reports indicate that an unknown cleric has given bin Laden permission to commit suicide (Bell, 2001). There was no explanation of the theological reasoning behind this absolution if, in fact, it occurred.

It is reasonable to conclude, at the very least, that there is an unresolved and ambiguous issue here. In a later study Rapoport provided an analysis of one attempt to explain why suicide is acceptable when combined with murder (Rapoport, 1990, pp. 103-30). The specific occasion was the 1983-85 suicide bombing campaign carried out in Beirut by Islamic Jihad. Fadlallah, whom we quoted above, was the Shiite cleric who provided the most extensive analysis of the problem. Initially, as we noted, he was concerned only with the effectiveness of the attacks, fearing they would not work and so should be abandoned on prudential and pragmatic grounds. But the attacks, in fact, proved highly effective, so he had to confront and deal with the basic theological question. For a time, he resisted efforts to get him to provide a decisive ruling or explicit judgment, a *fatwa*, and instead reflected on the plight of Muslims and the need to fight, even using "unconventional" methods. This was, of course, fair enough as a political complaint, but it did not address the theoretical or theological issue of suicide. As Martin Kramer said, "one could not simply argue extenuating circumstances to a constituency devoted to the implementation of Islamic law" (Kramer, 1990, p. 145).

In this context Fadlallah made the remark quoted above likening death in battle to death by suicide. On another occasion he asked, rhetorically: "what is the difference between setting out for battle know-



ing you will die *after* killing ten [of the enemy], and setting out to the field to kill ten and knowing you will die *while* killing them?” (Kramer, 1990, pp. 145-6). The question deserves an answer, and it is not difficult to find one: a military commander does not know *who* will be killed in battle, though he knows some will die; the commander of a suicide bomber knows both that his “soldier” will die and precisely who it will be. The commander and the “soldier” cannot absolve themselves of personal responsibility for the bomber’s death by appealing to the will of God, or fate, or statistics, or luck. The reason, to repeat an observation made earlier, is because there is no risk in suicide bombing; there is certainty.

In any event, clerics less subtle or evasive than Fadlallah simply declared that “self-martyrdom” (*istishad*) was not suicide (*intihar*) and so was acceptable to their version of Islam. Perhaps more to the point, such tortuous theology ceased to be necessary once suicide bombing (whether described as self-martyrdom or not) became a more or less normal practice. In 1988, the suicide-bombing campaign in Lebanon was abandoned for tactical, not theological reasons—the opportunity for success ended with the withdrawal of the troops of the Multi-Lateral Force. It has never fallen from favour among Hamas and Islamic Jihad, terrorists operating against Israel, and was revived in a spectacular fashion with the attacks on New York and Washington.

The September 2001 attacks were unusual in another respect as well: traditionally, suicide attacks have been launched close to their targets and without much planning so as to prevent time and distance from undermining the resolve of the suicide bomber. The September 2001 attacks involved long-term planning, terrorist “sleepers,” and for some, and possibly all members of the terrorist teams, full awareness of a group suicide, which is rare. Moreover, the profile of the September 2001 terrorists was much different than the typical Hamas

recruit: they were not young, poor, ill-educated or psychologically damaged, as so many of their predecessors seemed to be (Jenkins, 2001, p. 7).

Suicide bombings, it should also be pointed out, are not an Islamist monopoly. In July 1987, a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) drove a truck filled with explosives into an army compound in Jaffna, killing 128 Sri Lankan soldiers. The Tamil Tigers are also credited with inventing the “suicide jacket,” a bomb vest worn next to the skin with detonators in the outside pockets. Indeed, according to one authority, Tamils have conducted suicide attacks at a higher per capita rate than Islamists (Laqueur, 2001, p. 79). Nevertheless, it seems accurate to say that, on the wider terrorist scene, the decisive contribution Islamists have made to the repertoire of terrorist techniques has been to combine murder and suicide.

The extent to which martyrdom has been perverted by the notion of self-martyrdom is clearly indicated by the routine, though exacting documents left behind by hijackers of three of the four planes used in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack. Much of the language is crude and dogmatic. It combines practical precautions for killing (sharpen your knife; make sure no one follows you; put your socks on, and make sure to tie your shoe-laces tight) with a last-minute pep talk (your heart should be happy; give a priority to interests of the group; the enemies of Islam were in the thousands but the faithful were victorious) and a promise of Paradise in death (“open your chest, welcoming death... then you will be in heaven; the houris are calling out to you, ‘come over here,’ companion of Allah”). The text also contains some specific rituals to be followed in order to ensure success against “the followers of Satan,” which itself is interpreted in ritualistic language of “slaughter” *dhabaha* rather than the prosaic “killing” *qatala*.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as Makiya and Mneimneh (2002, p. 20) point out, “there is not a word or an implication” in the entire text, “about any wrongs that are being redressed” in

Palestine, Iraq, or Saudi Arabia. The September attack was, in bin Laden's words "a martyrdom operation" where the hijackers achieved that status on their own, as if it were a private act of worship, not a communal decision bestowed on the grounds of

benefits conferred to the community by extraordinary acts. In many respects, therefore, the al-Qaeda terrorists simply gave their own expression to a conventional complex of pneumopathological motives.

## Bin Laden and al-Qaeda

We noted above that what conditioned the recruitment of terrorists was not so much the existence of poverty or a repressive government as the expectation that violence can transfigure the world into something where poverty, repression, injustice, evil, or what-have-you is no longer possible. With respect to bin Laden and the al-Qaeda terrorists who carried out the September 2001 attacks, poverty was the least of their concerns. It is well known, for example, that Osama bin Laden comes from a very wealthy family. Moreover, 15 of the 19 terrorists identified in the September attacks were Saudi citizens, as is bin Laden, many of whom were well educated and from reasonably prosperous families. It is also evident from bin Laden's statements over the years that his alleged concern about Israeli insults to the ethnic pride of the Palestinians is entirely contingent upon his more grandiose schemes for the "Islamic nation," the *umma*. To the extent that bin Laden is pursuing what might be called the ordinary goals of international politics, he seeks to control the oil wealth of Saudi Arabia and the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan (Berger and Sutphen, 2001, p. 124). He has indicated in interviews with *Time* (December 23, 1998) and *Newsweek* (January 6, 1999) that he was trying to obtain weapons of mass destruction; other information indicates that bin Laden tried to obtain atomic demolition munitions or "suitcase bombs" from Kazakhstan (Cameron, 1999, p. 288). Even so, the point of obtaining such assets is subordinate to his pneumopathological vision of an ecumenic transfiguration of human life.

Some Islamic scholars have traced the origin of al-Qaeda to a religious movement called *Salafiyya*, which is in some respects analogous to the rejection of secularism by Christian and Jewish fundamental-

ists (Armstrong, 2000). In what might be termed mainstream Islam, theological opposition to secularism is balanced by a practical division and pragmatic compromise between the claims of politics and religion. The tension between what westerners would call church and state appeared during the Abbasid caliphate (750 to 1258 AD). The court culture was quite distinct from the religious teachings of the Koran, or so it seemed to many Muslim clerics and scholars, *ulama*. Partly in response to the rulers' way of living, they developed the legal and ethical code, the *shari'a*. Periodically, as the caliphate came under political pressure, much as western European calls for spiritual reform during the Middle Ages, or, indeed, Israelite recollections of the covenant between Yaweh and his people, so too were there calls to renew and reform Islam by recalling the original teaching of the Prophet.

According to Karen Armstrong, "the archetypal reformer was Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263 to 1328) a scholar of Damascus, which had suffered terribly during the Mongol invasions" (Armstrong, 2001a, p. 65; cf. Armstrong, 2000). Ibn Taymiyya was of the view that the Mongols, though nominally Muslim, were in fact apostates because they did not follow the law of Allah, the *shari'a*, but instead preferred their own traditional and, to ibn Taymiyya, man-made law code, the *yasa*. He also argued that true Muslims must bring the *shari'a* up to date in order to deal with the Mongols but also to recall "the venerable forefathers," the *al-Salaf al-Salih*. Hence his reforming movement became known as the *Salafiyya*.

During the eighteenth century, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703 to 1792) established in central Arabia a reformed state, independent of the Otto-

man sultans in Istanbul. As had ibn Taymiyya, he advocated a strict form of Islam based on his “original” reading of the Koran and his view of what the seventh century *umma* was like. Today Wahhabism is the form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia and was an element in the religious training of Osama bin Laden. The argument that al-Qaeda grew out of the *Salafiyya* movement is based upon the similarity of the views of the two movements regarding the Islam that most Muslims practice today. Both consider it to be polluted by idolatry; both call for purification through a return to the practices of the venerable forefathers; and both identify the United States with the Mongols, against whom all Muslims are called upon to struggle, as they did in the time of the venerable forefathers.

Since the attacks of September, 2001, a number of hastily composed biographical accounts and analyses of bin Laden’s writings have appeared. The most significant, however, began in the mid-1990s, shortly after bin Laden started stylizing himself “sheikh,” a religious honourific, notwithstanding his lack of religious training or learning. Following his expulsion from the Sudan in August 1996, for example, bin Laden issued his *Declaration of War Against the Americans Who Occupy the Land of The Two Holy Mosques*.<sup>3</sup> On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1998, in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, an Arabic newspaper published in London, bin Laden promulgated his famous edict and *fatwa*, the *Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders*.<sup>4</sup> This text has remained close to the centre of al-Qaeda doctrine and deserves some scrutiny. It begins with a formulaic invocation of God’s name, a quotation from the Koran exhorting the faithful to slay pagans, and a passage from the Hadith where Mohammed says he has been sent with a sword to ensure that no one but God is worshipped. It goes on:

The Arabian Peninsula has never—since God made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas—been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in

it like locusts, eating its riches and wiping out its plantations. As a result of this desecration of Arabia, “we should all agree on how to settle the matter.”

Before indicating how things are to be settled, however, the edict makes three points. First, the United States “has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula” and using Arabian wealth, second, to fight Muslims, especially Iraqis. Third, this “crusader-Zionist alliance” aims “to serve the Jews’ petty state” by destroying Islamic states in order “to guarantee Israel’s survival and the continuation of the brutal crusade occupation of the peninsula.” All these crimes, the edict says “are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and his Muslims,” for which an armed *jihad* is the only acceptable response. The text of the *fatwa* then states:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem] and the holy mosque [in Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.

The edict then quotes again from the Koran and returns to the theme of war:

We—with God’s help—call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan’s US troops and the devil’s supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.

In May, 1998, a couple of months prior to the bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, bin Laden was interviewed by ABC

reporter John Miller.<sup>5</sup> The terrorism practiced by his group, bin Laden said, is “commendable” because “it is directed at the tyrants and the aggressors and the enemies of Allah,” including Muslim apostates and traitors. “We do not have to differentiate between military and civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets and this is what the *fatwa* says. The *fatwa* is comprehensive.” On the positive side, bin Laden said, he was simply reiterating the call to all mankind that was revealed to Mohammed, the call of Islam, the invitation to all nations “to embrace Islam, the religion that calls for justice, mercy, and fraternity among all nations.” So far as the Jews are concerned, “the enmity between us... goes far back in time and is deep rooted. There is no question that war between the two of us is inevitable.” And, as for the Americans, or the “American Crusaders,” as he calls them, it matters not what they say: God determines how long bin Laden will live and the Americans can do nothing about that. His first task, he said, is to liberate Mecca from the Crusaders and Jerusalem from the Jews.

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, bin Laden issued a press release reiterating the same litany of complaints. Since World War I and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims have been humiliated, their homelands debauched by hypocritical leaders, and so on. It was also clear that the attack was both “propaganda by deed” in the old style, and reaffirmation of the symbolic opposition of a *salafi* to the modern world. Regarding the first element of the attack bin Laden said: “Those young men... said in deeds, in New York and Washington, speeches that overshadowed all other speeches made everywhere else in the world. The speeches are understood by both Arabs and non-Arabs, even by Chinese.” (*The National Post*, December 14, 2001, p. A4). Moreover, he drew attention to the symbolic nature of the World Trade Center. “The Twin Towers were legitimate targets; they were supporting US economic power. These events were great by all measurement. What was destroyed were not

only the Towers, but the towers of morale in that country.” He went on to justify, in his own mind, the mass murder of civilians: “Yes, we kill their innocents and this is legal religiously and logically. There are two types of terror, good and bad. What we are practicing is good terror. We will not stop killing them and whomever supports them” (*The National Post*, November 12, 2001, p. A9). It is fair to say that bin Laden’s narrative has moved a considerable distance from both the western understanding of common sense reality and that of most conventional Muslims. For bin Laden, of course, the separation from his pneumopathological vision confirms that westerners are infidels and ordinary Muslims are apostates. Both, therefore, deserve to die.

One of the post-September formulas in his statements is particularly rich in symbolism and deserves more detailed analysis. “Hypocrisy stood behind the leader of global idolatry, behind the Hubal of the age—namely America and its supporters” (AP press release; reprinted in the *Calgary Herald*, October 8, 2001, p. A1). As already noted, the symbolization of the Mongols as idolators and the identification of the United States with the Mongols has become something of a trope. The invocation of Hubal, however, was new. Hubal was a stone idol that stood in the Kaaba, which had by Islamic tradition been built by Abraham on orders from God as a sanctuary. Between Abraham’s day and the time of the Prophet, according to tradition, the Arabs abandoned true religion and worshipped idols, much as the Israelites had done (Exod. 32). Hubal was the most important of these. By identifying the US as the Hubal of the age, bin Laden indicates that, like Hubal in the time of the Prophet, the US is polluting the Kaaba and the holy land of Arabia, which, according to bin Laden’s account, is off limits to infidels. So far the interpretation is no more than a reiteration of familiar themes.

The Hubal story has other implications as well, however. Originally, Mohammad called for the



destruction of the idol, but the rulers of Mecca, who benefited from the commerce that accrued to the city because it housed the idol, objected and drove Mohammad away to Medina. There he and the Muslims founded the *umma*, the politico-religious community that bin Laden calls the Muslim nation. In Medina as well, Mohammad encountered the “hypocrites,” who accepted only the outward forms of true Islam and, in battle against the pagan Meccans, deserted the Prophet. Notwithstanding their treachery, the Prophet returned to Mecca, defeated the pagans, destroyed Hubal, and true Islam became a major religion of the world.

By identifying America as the Hubal of the age, therefore, bin Laden was evoking a rich and complex story. Not only was American culture the source of idolatry, and were American soldiers polluting the holy land of Arabia, the Arab and Muslim governments, allied with the United States, were the Medinese hypocrites of the age and destined to perish as they did in the time of the venerable forefathers (Doran, 2001, pp. 33-7).

Just as the religious vision of the *salafis* led to political action, some analysts have reversed the sequence: political experience, particularly the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan, found in religious language a vocabulary to express the meaning of events. As noted above, bin Laden had no advanced religious education and is largely self-taught in religious matters. According to Gause (2001, p. 112), not Wahhabi fundamentalism but the expulsion of the USSR from Afghanistan was the formative “religious” experience in bin Laden’s life inasmuch as he understood this event as a *jiḥād*-inspired miracle.

The aftermath of the miracle, however, was a different story. In 1989, the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, began to deploy the Interservice Intelligence agency (ISI) into Afghanistan as an agent of Pakistani foreign policy. In March 1989, the ISI directed the *mujihadeen* to undertake a frontal

attack on the well-defended positions of Afghan government troops around Jalalabad. The *mujihadeen* were decimated, which put the ISI in a position to create a replacement group, the Taliban, who eventually helped secure a Pakistan-controlled route to central Asia. At the time, however, bin Laden understood the slaughter of the *mujihadeen* to be a consequence of American treachery.

A second blow came later that year, this time actually at the hands of the Americans. Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia and argued before the government that if the *umma* could defeat the Soviets, they surely could handle the growing but essentially intramural threat of Iraq. Instead, however, the Saudis sought protection from the infidel United States, which prompted bin Laden to warn “that Riyadh would have to choose between short-term ‘security’ and long-term Islamic legitimacy” (Bodansky, 1999, p. 31). To bin Laden, the chief result of the Gulf War was to turn the Americans into the new Soviets.

Bin Laden’s response to the new political configuration and his drift toward Islamist terrorist organizations has been documented in detail by his biographers. Following his expulsion from Saudi Arabia in 1992, he began his association with Hassan Abdalla al-Turabi and the International Muslim Brotherhood, an Iran-sponsored, but Sudan-centred Islamist group. Turabi advised General Bashir in Sudan and entertained a grandiose notion that an Islamist Sudan was the first step in the creation of a great empire with himself as supreme imam. Bin Laden was given responsibility to organize finances through the “Brotherhood Group,” an association of 130 or so very wealthy Arabs in the Gulf states.

Iran also helped sponsor and integrate the “Arab Afghans,” many of whom were in fact Egyptian, into the operations of Hezbollah. The new theatre of operations would be east Africa, not least of all because the states of the Arabian peninsula were so tightly controlled. Turabi, with the continuing help



of the Iranians, remained at the centre of Islamist terrorism during the mid-1990s. Bin Laden was his right-hand man.

In April 1993, a *fatwa* issued from the Islamic Religious Conference in Sudan made no distinction between infidels and apostates; in August 1995, Turabi revived the views of Sayyid Muhammad Qutb, who had been executed by Egyptian President Nasser in 1966, and called upon all Muslims to resist the modern state as the embodiment of *jahiliyyah*, a pre-Islamic condition of ignorance (Armstrong, 2000, pp. 239-40). In November 1995, bin Laden organized the first attacks on Saudi soil. By June 1996, again with Iranian sponsorship, a loose coalition of Islamist groups had agreed to standardized training routines and a unified financial network, thus creating a capacity for interoperability among groups from some 30 different countries. That same month, the bombings in Dhahran used a typically Iranian-style bomb designed not just to destroy buildings, but to inflict large casualties.

During the summer of 1996, bin Laden, as befits a self-styled “sheikh,” began issuing his own *fatwas*, now from Afghanistan. His initial views were typical of fundamentalists everywhere: vulgar, straightforward, and simplistic. The west, he said, the “Crusaders and Zionists,” were undertaking an apocalyptic attack on Islam and the holy land of Arabia for which only an apocalyptic response would be sufficient. Such a momentous conflict required the most meticulous preparation, from recruiting “clean” Islamist terrorists unknown to western intelligence to organizing a “terrorist summit” in Tehran. By early 1998, therefore, it was evident to bin Laden that the final conflict between a single, ecumenic world of apostasy, the world of *kufir*, and the single ecumenic world of truth, the world of the *umma*, was about to begin. No wonder that the entire globe was filled with actual targets of opportunity: in his imagination, nothing less than the fate of Islam as a whole lay in the balance.

The way to such an imaginary Armageddon was prepared and charted with the famous *fatwa* of the World Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders quoted above: Americans and their allies were to be killed wherever they could be found, and Muslims would be rewarded by God for killing the troops of Satan.

Once such high-octane documents have been issued and the urgency and irrevocability of the coming conflict has been so strongly emphasized, they take on a life of their own. Something had to be done, the more spectacular the better, if only to preserve the voice of the World Front and of “sheikh” bin Laden in the Muslim world. The bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam on August 7, 1998, were both low risk and spectacular. Both showed Iranian “signatures” on the explosives, and provided clear evidence of the organizational skill of bin Laden and the World Front.

By 1998, at the latest, it was clear that bin Laden had created a theological argument to authorize an extensive and ruthless terrorist attack on the west, not in response to the on-going political problems between Israel and the Palestinians, nor even as a reaction to the crisis in Iraq after the Gulf War. He had done so initially with the help of Iran, and his World Front served the interests of that country by providing a screen to ensure “plausible deniability,” particularly after Western security agencies uncovered in the spring of 1987 an Iran-backed plan to attack the World Cup soccer matches scheduled to take place in France that summer.

Following the August 7, 1998 attacks, *al-Quds al-Arabi* published a *salafi*-inspired analysis, and bin Laden’s Islamic Front issued its own communiqué (Bodansky, 2000, pp. 270ff). The issues had widened once again: the departure of the American troops and the return of a regime of Islamist truth to the holy land of Arabia was not enough. Western influence must be banished from the Muslim world

as a prelude to the expansion of an ecumenic Islamist empire. The communiqué concluded:

The Muslim Ummah is in a constant state of Jihad, physical, financial and verbal against the terrorist state of America, Israel, Serbia, etc. We can envisage that this is the beginning of much more bloodshed and deaths should the US continue to occupy Muslim land and to oppress Muslims in the Gulf and elsewhere. The Muslims will never rest until their land is liberated from the occupiers and the authority to rule restored to the Muslims from the tyrant, self-appointed, puppet leaders in Muslim countries such as Mubarak of Egypt, Fahd of Arabia, Zirwal of Algeria, Qaddafi of Libya, etc. The struggle will continue against regimes in Muslim countries until al-Khilafah (the Islamic State) is re-established and the law of God dominates the world. (Bodansky, 2000, p. 271)

By the fall of 1998, bin Laden had become a “guest” of the Taliban, the US had launched an ineffective cruise missile attack against targets in Khartoum and Afghanistan, and the latter country had replaced Iran as the sponsoring state of his efforts. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia continued to supply the Taliban and al-Qaeda with generous financial aid, and the ISI and Pakistan assisted in their training.

Whether one begins from the side of “religion” or from the side of “politics,” the objective is the same: the establishment of a *Khilafah*, an ecumenic caliphate, from Andalusia to Indonesia (Bergen, 2001, p. 21). As with so many other pneumopathic designs for ecumenic tranquility, the road to peace is constantly interrupted by massive, indeed apocalyptic, conflict. As noted above, the purpose of the September 2001 attacks was to signal that the way of terrorist killing leads to final tranquillity. Moreover, it is evident enough that much of the “secular” commentary in the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East, follows the *salafi* interpretation of international politics: the plight of the Palestinians and the Iraqis, as perpetual victims, explains the entire monstrous Zionist-Crusader conspiracy. One conclusion seems obvious: bin Laden and al-Qaeda are conventional in their motivations, their grievances, and their preference for highly destructive but comparatively low-tech weapons. In one important respect they have, however, achieved a significant innovation. Aum was strictly hierarchical, as are older terrorist organizations such as the PLO. Like Hamas, however, al-Qaeda is a network, which makes a conventional decapitation strategy far less effective than it would if all that were needed to destroy al-Qaeda were the death of its leader. It is to the last aspect of this terrorist organization that we now turn.

## ∞ *Networks and Netwar* ∞

**A**l-Qaeda is invariably referred to in the media as a network. A network is a form of organization with its own advantages and vulnerabilities. In order to assess the reasons for success of al-Qaeda as well as to indicate the likely method of its destruction, it is necessary to describe the formal aspects and attributes of a network.

For students of organizational theory, networks can be distinguished from clans and tribes, on the one hand, and from markets and hierarchies on the other (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1996, p. 275). The latter distinctions are more important than the former. A hierarchy typically addresses the problems of organizing power, authority, administration, and governance by establishing a centralized and coordinated decision-making headquarters. Typically hierarchies are built around chains of command and animated by rituals and honours, duties and privileges. To use Max Weber's classic formula, the "charisma" of a clan chief becomes routinized as a bureaucratically rational command-and-control cadre, at the top of which is a sovereign uttering the words, "I will it." The great early examples of hierarchy in the west are the Church and the army; by the time of the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) they were superseded, broadly speaking, by the state.

The great weakness of hierarchies, as any bureaucrat knows all too well, is that they are unable to process large volumes of complex and ambiguous information. Historically, this weakness appeared initially in failures to control economic transactions, particularly long-distance trade. As a result, state hierarchies were faced with a major problem: they could either attempt to control the new organizational form, the market, or they could limit themselves.

From the perspective of organizational theory, the transition from mercantilism to capitalism amounted to the self-limitation by state hierarchies of the reach of their own authority. Those states that managed the transition well were strengthened; those that did not were weakened. The end of the transition was a separation of public and private, of state and market.

The attribute of the market that is of interest in the present context is not its enormous productivity, but the fact that it is competitive and that market actors or players are independent one from another. Not the will of the sovereign but personal interests, exchange rates, the search for profits, and the rights of individuals characterize the principles of market organization. There is no single animating intelligence or sovereign will but rather, in Hayek's felicitous phrase, "spontaneous order." Where a hierarchy tends toward monopoly institutions—one state-run bank, one state-run airline or trading company—markets tend toward pluralities of institutions: many banks, many airlines, and so on. There are, of course, extended debates regarding the limits of the state, but generally speaking, "the growth of the market system strengthens the power of the states that adopt that system, even as it ensures that the state alone cannot dictate the course of economic development" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1996, p. 32). The limitation of the market is not that it produces winners and losers, but that it is not adept at reducing the differences between them, which is a common political demand that losers are apt to make. One result may be that they look to the state, a hierarchy, to introduce greater equality, which in turn introduces additional dilemmas and contradictions.

Generally speaking, markets view networks as threats because they disrupt commercial spontaneity; hierarchies view networks as threats because they cannot be controlled by issuing orders.

The conflict and cooperation of hierarchy and market has been augmented in recent years, according to some organizational theorists, by what is usually called the information-age network. Anthropologists and sociologists have long studied social structures as networks of one kind or another. During the 1990s economists and management theorists discovered the importance of networks within corporate organizations (Powell, 1990). As the implications of modern communications technologies grew clearer, the possibility of non-hierarchic coordination and collaboration among what are usually termed “civil society” organizations became more obvious as well. Such organizations include such “uncivil” actors as drug smugglers and terrorists. For organizational theory, networks are both more than a high-tech communication grid, though they make use of such devices, and more than the complex interpersonal activity that can be mapped on an equally complex sociogram.

Following Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001c), all networks can be analyzed in terms of the following attributes: technology, organizational design, social capital, animating narrative, and doctrine.

Historically, networks have been harder to operate, and thus less efficient, than hierarchies because, on the one hand, they require constant and dense communications in order to exist, but, on the other, this requirement makes it very difficult to come quickly to a decision. New communications technologies, however, can supply the level of bandwidth and connectivity needed to overcome these problems and constitute, in Castells’ term, the “material basis” for sufficient interconnectedness to permeate the whole of civil society (Castells, 1996, p. 469).

Most analysts (see Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001a) distinguish among three distinct types of network:

- The chain or line network, as in a smuggling chain where people, goods, or information move along a line of separated contacts, and where end-to-end communication must travel through the intermediate nodes.
- The hub, star or wheel network, as in a franchise or a cartel where a set of actors is tied to a central (but not hierarchical) node or actor and must go through that node to communicate and coordinate with each other.
- The all-channel or full-matrix network, as in a collaborative network of militant peace groups where everybody is connected to everybody else.

The organizational design that most closely conforms to the principles of the Internet, the all-channel network, is best adapted to coordinating open, multiorganizational, and transnational networks quickly. The chain and hub, or variations such as the spiderweb, are more secure than all-channel networks but are also slower. Other organizational designs and hybrid forms attempt to create the optimal compromises between speed or efficiency in communications, and security. It is self-evident that security will be a major consideration for networks where stealth and secrecy are important. One of the first tasks to be undertaken with respect to al-Qaeda, therefore, has been to determine the type of network it is so that an appropriate “counternetwork” strategy can be developed.

The remaining elements that condition the effectiveness of any network, namely social capital, narrative, and doctrine, constitute what might be called “network self-consciousness.” The strongest networks will be those where the organizational design is reinforced by a story that gives meaning to experiences, interests, and purposes, that sustains a sense of identity, team membership, and belonging, as

well as a mission statement that explains how and why “we” will prevail over “them.”

There are two aphorisms that are often applied to the activity of networks, particularly those such as al-Qaeda. The first: networks conduct networks. The second: it takes a network to fight a network.

The term “netwar” refers to a conflict, including non-Clauswitzian armed conflict and crime, where the antagonists are organized chiefly as networks rather than hierarchies and rely extensively on strategies and technologies that are part of the information age. They are usually dispersed and often operate without a central command. A recent comparatively benign example of a netwar within civil society was the anti-WTO protest in Seattle in November 1999 (deArmond, 2001). The “Battle of Seattle” was fought as much in the infosphere as in the streets, and illustrated a number of the difficulties that hierarchies, in this case the several police and law enforcement agencies involved, have dealing with networks of “affiliated groups” (Sullivan, 2001). In their dealings with drug networks, the Colombian police experienced a less benign example of the same difficulty encountered by the Seattle police forces (Sullivan, 2001, p. 109). As Arquilla and Ronfeldt observed:

netwar differs from traditional modes of conflict and crime in which the protagonists prefer to use hierarchical organizations, doctrines, and strategies, as in past efforts to foster large, centralized mass movements along Leninist lines. In short, netwar is about Hamas more than the PLO, Mexico’s Zapatistas more than Cuba’s Fidelistas, the Christian Identity Movement more than the Ku Klux Klan, the Asian Triads more than the Sicilian Mafia, and Chicago’s Gangsta Disciples more than the Al Capone Gang. (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997, p. 277)

Before indicating in more detail the strengths and weaknesses of networks, including terrorist net-

works, it is necessary to analyze the collaborative strategies or doctrine that networks typically employ. Given the flexibility of networks, particularly open, all-channel networks, it may seem questionable to speak of a “doctrine” to which network operations adhere. In this context, however, a doctrine is not a rigid set of procedures to be followed under all circumstances, but a set of guiding principles and practices that enable members of a network to operate strategically and tactically without a commander issuing orders. Indeed, “leaderlessness,” or the principle that any particular leader (or so-called leader) can be replaced easily and quickly by anyone else is a major constituent of netwar doctrine.

A second is the phenomenon of “swarming” (Edwards, 2000; Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2000). At present, the ability to “swarm” an adversary may be little more than an empirical tactic. However, the ability to mount coordinated and simultaneous attacks (Jenkins, 2001, p. 6) using small, dispersed groups, converging from several directions, unlike a “wave” where the assault is along a front, may nevertheless be refined and clarified into something like a doctrine.

Historical examples, which illustrate the concept of netwar and the doctrine of swarming, antedate these formulations. The Mongols, the Zulus, the Métis, and the plains Indians of North America were all capable of refining their hunting strategies to swarm their adversaries, appearing suddenly from several directions. The RAF was able to swarm the attacking Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain from several dispersed airfields, much as the U-boat “wolfpacks” could swarm convoys in the Battle of the Atlantic. Moreover, both examples from World War II depended upon controlled information (from radar and Enigma respectively), both blurred the distinction between offence and defence, both were capable of independent action and initiative (fighter pilots and U-boat captains were notoriously un- or even anti-hierarchical), and both depended



on rapid dispersal, rather than retreat, combined with readiness for another attacking “pulse” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2000, p. 21).

Elements of swarming can be detected in the battle when the Athenians destroyed the Persian fleet in the narrow waters off Salamis (Herodotus, VIII, 84ff); in the destruction of the Spanish Armada in 1558; in the 1968 Tet Offensive in Viet Nam; in the operations of the Chechens against the Russians in 1994-96 (Arquilla and Karasik, 1999); or of the Russians against the Nazi Blitzkrieg at the battle of Kursk (Carell, 1966). Swarming is, moreover, the doctrine developed by US Navy strategists governing the optimal use of a new generation of small, Kevlar and carbon-fibred catamarans called “Streetfighters,” capable of delivering considerable lethality against much larger opponents, especially submarines (Jaffe, 2001).

In his analysis of “gangs, hooligans, and anarchists,” who constitute “the vanguard of netwar in the streets,” Sullivan concluded boldly that “networks can prevail over hierarchies in this postmodern battlespace” (Sullivan, 2001, p. 100). The imagery of battlespace and of prevailing, however, is somewhat misleading inasmuch as the purpose of netwar is not to deliver the knock-out blow, the decisive defeat that seems to be inherent in the western and, indeed, Clausewitzian understanding of battle. It is true that networks have an advantage over hierarchies in the conduct of netwar. But the question still must be raised as to what the outcome of a successful netwar might be. What is the purpose of netwar, especially when it is a success?

One thing at least seems clear: the Zapatistas had no chance of replacing the Mexican government without, at the same time, abandoning their organization as participants in an international “social network” (Ronfeldt and Arquilla, 2001, pp. 171ff). Likewise, the swarming protestors against the WTO in the “Battle of Seattle” could not have replaced the WTO

or any of the governments that comprised it, and did not attempt to do so. Jeffrey R. Cooper understates the limitations of netwar protests when he writes: “rather than attacking a neighbour for territorial aggrandizement, nonstate opponents might be tempted to inflict pain, and thereby destabilization, on opposing societies” (Cooper, 1997, p. 110). It is more accurate to say that netwarriors, including terrorists, can *only* inflict pain or destabilize societies. The great strength of networks, at least historically, has been their defensive ability to survive the repressive measures taken by hierarchies. Today, networks can go on the offensive and challenge state hierarchies but they cannot realistically expect ever to replace them.

This is not to deny that terrorists and other swarming netwarriors may say that they are out to change the government, the system, or indeed the world. It is also true that terrorists waging netwar tend to use violence less for specific state-related purposes than for more generalized ones—not hostage-taking with specific demands, so much as mass killing to ensure vague but fundamental changes. As Arquilla and Ronfeldt say, “this reflects a rationality that disdains pursuing a ‘proportionate’ relationship between ends and means, seeking instead to unhinge a society’s perceptions” (1997, p. 284). The practice of a persistent disdain for pursuing a proportionate relationship between ends and means is precisely the attribute of the pneumopathological consciousness discussed above. It is important, therefore, to bear in mind the common sense observation that networks require hierarchies, and especially states, in order to have something to oppose. All that terrorists and other “uncivil society” networks ever can achieve is to damage, harm, interrupt, and disrupt alternative forms of organizations, which for our purposes are confined to markets and hierarchies—though the example of the Zapatistas indicates that networks can also harm tribes and clans (see Cleaver, 1998; Fox, 1994; Ronfeldt and Arquilla, 2001b).

Within that inherently limited “battlespace,” networks do indeed have a number of advantages over markets and hierarchies. First of all, the technology that provides the material basis for a network—cell phones and wireless internet access, for example—is not complicated (Zanini and Edwards, 2001, p. 50). Second, “if the object is pain, not publicity, we may find it difficult to identify the proper target for our response” (Cooper, 1997, p. 110). This is especially true with networked terrorist organizations that are state-supported. Third, because networks tend to “pulse” in their attacks, the temporal rhythm of netwar conflict is often erratic so that it is unclear when it begins and ends. “A netwar actor may engage in long cycles of quietly watching and waiting, and then swell and swarm rapidly into action” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997, p. 283), which makes it often difficult to know who the adversary is. Only in retrospect, for example, can al-Qaeda be connected to the US embassy bombings in east Africa, the battle in Mogadishu, the explosion of TWA flight 800, or the attack on the USS *Cole*. Likewise, damage assessment of networks is difficult to undertake with accuracy and in a timely fashion.

Notwithstanding the organizational advantages that networks have over hierarchies, even within the limitations of a battlespace designed to disrupt rather than defeat, networks are far from invulnerable. One of the images introduced by Arquilla and Ronfeldt, who together have undertaken the most extensive reflections on the strategic implications of networks and netwars, is between Ares and Athena. Ares, even more so than his more refined Roman equivalent Mars, was the Greek deification of a wild, warlike spirit, the tempestuous instigator of violence.

In contrast, Athena was first of all a god of citadels, and so of cities, civility, and civilization. Unlike Ares, she was leader in battle, and on one occasion guides the spear of Diomedes into the belly of Ares (*Iliad*, 5.856). Moreover, she is the protector of Athens who brought technological and communications

improvements, such as the war-chariot and the trumpet, to the battlefield. She was the patron of arts and crafts and other highly skilled activities, including medicine and weaving—itself an image of networking. Perhaps most importantly, she was the god of wisdom who sprang fully formed and fully armed from the brow of Zeus, uttering her war cry. On the Athenian Acropolis, the god subordinate to her was Nike, the female god of victory. She is, say Arquilla and Ronfeldt, “The Greek god of war best attuned to the information age. Where warfare is about information, she is the superior deity” (1997, p. 9). Because netwar and counternetwar rely so heavily on information it is important to be “in Athena’s camp,” to use the title of their study of “conflict in the information age.”

This is not to say that “Ares’ camp” cannot achieve a brutal, short-term effectiveness. Hama was a village in Syria that was obliterated by artillery on the orders of President Hafez-al-Assad in 1982 because its Islamist inhabitants conspired to overthrow Assad’s regime (Friedman, 2001). The appeal of “Hama rules,” which is the appeal of Ares, is obvious enough, as is the cost. Ignoring for a moment the ethical costs, it is not obvious that such large-scale killing could compel surrender. Van Creveld (1991, p. 143) noted that, a “bookkeeping rationality” is required to compel an adversary to surrender; one thing seems clear, from the Algerian war of the 1950s to the Vietnam war of the 1970s, bookkeeping rationality is in short supply among non-industrial armies. It is entirely absent from terrorist groups such as Aum or al-Qaeda. As Ajami (2001, pp. 22-3) observed: “power can never speak to wrath.” More precisely, pneumopathologically disordered individuals are incapable of a political conversation involving even their own interests. Besides, avoiding the ethical irrationality of killing on such a large scale is central to the western conduct of war.

Athena’s style of war, then, is a “comprehensive information-oriented approach to battle that may be

to the information age what Blitzkrieg was to the industrial age” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997, p. 6). In traditional language, technological or hardware superiority alone cannot achieve strategic superiority. At best, only local or tactical victories can be gained by the application of the “Hama rules” (Blank, 1996, p. 22). Thus, the “Athenian view” of netwar means targetting the information-rich components of an adversary’s order of battle.

Each of the elements of a network—technology, organizational design, social capital, animating narrative, and doctrine—can be disrupted and destroyed by a corresponding counternetwar strategy. In counternarcotics operations, for example, it has become a standard procedure to attack the financial transactions, especially electronic transfers of funds, of traffickers rather than use pesticides on drug crops. The application of this strategy to disrupt the cash flow of al-Qaeda by targetting its many charitable fronts, the underground banking system or *hawala*, and regular banks that move and launder funds seems obvious enough (Wechsler, 2001).

A second counternet approach takes advantage of the fact that all electronically mediated information exchanges leave a digital “trace.” This feature of information transfer has enabled the FBI, for example, to develop an Internet wiretap program called “carnivore” to track terrorist email correspondence (*Newsweek*, August 21, 2000). Telephone companies routinely log phone calls, and captured computers have provided enormous amounts of information (Reeve, 1999, pp. 33, 97; Soo Hoo *et al.*, 1997, p. 139). In addition to using information technologies passively to monitor the communications of networks, they can be used actively in counternetwar operations as well. That is, just as adversarial hackers can use the Internet to mount a “cyber-jihad” against Israel, for example (Lemos, 2000), so too can counterterrorist organizations disrupt their adversaries (Kitfield, 2000). So far as the animating narrative is concerned, we have already mentioned the

necessity of correcting the use of terms such as *jihad* with alternatives such as *hiraba*, “unholy war” (see Makiya and Mneimneh, 2002).

Turning to military operations against terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda, analogous arguments apply. The theory of counternetwar is straightforward: identify the critical nodes in the network and attack them simultaneously along with the nearest boundaries between the network and the rest of the world (Williams, 2001, pp. 93-4; State Department, 2000, “Introduction;” Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001d, p. 364). Add to the optimal execution of the theory a rich information source based on “human intelligence” and counternetwar operations are bound to succeed.

Of course, there is always a gap between theory and practice. The post-Clauswitzian “fog of war,” in this context, could be anything from imperfect information (and information is always imperfect), disinformation, or even sufficient information that is misunderstood because the context and strategy of a networked adversary is not understood (de Armond, 2001, p. 212). There are, however, some examples of counternetwar operations that have been highly successful and other strategic responses that show great promise.

Because the Israeli government has experienced the effects of terrorist networks longer than others, it is perhaps not surprising that they have developed the most successful responses. Following the 1972 massacre of Olympic athletes in Munich, the Israeli government announced they would kill any member of the Black September terrorist network who was directly or indirectly involved in the Munich event. This was the first time that any government created dedicated *counter*-terrorist teams and not merely *anti*-terrorist police or military units. Each of the several assassination teams operated independently of the others and, indeed, in ignorance of the existence of the others. One used the conventional

operational methods of the Israeli intelligence service, the Mossad, but the others operated with complete anonymity outside all government structures and with but a single contact person in Mossad (Jonas, 1984).

Because terrorist organizations depend on sources of supplies from outside much more than do armies, the first objective was to cut these sources off and then kill the leaders. In this way, the organization would be compromised and rebuilding would be slowed. The most successful teams were entirely outside the chain-of-command, including the government. This meant their operations were insulated from political pressures, especially the need to produce results according to a politically prescribed timetable. “The concept,” wrote Calahan, “was for the team to combine their specialties into a totally flexible lethal unit,” an organization with a soft rank structure (if any) and no rigid operational doctrine. In this respect, the Israeli teams resembled British, American, and Canadian special forces (Calahan, 1995, p. 10). The successor program to the post-1972 operation has been called “early retirement,” and consists of state-sanctioned assassination carried out by Israeli special forces (Graham, 2001).

Within the context of a hierarchic organization, apart from the several special forces, only the US Marines seem to have advanced very far down the counternetwar road. Marine “infestation teams” are a prelude to small-unit swarming operations, with platoon-sized fully internetted units. “They are all able to communicate and coordinate with each other, independent of the higher command, although the CINC has awareness (topsite) of their communications and actions. Though headed by junior officers, the units can control and call fire from assets ‘owned’ by any service” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997, p. 463). The objective is to combine tactical decentralization with coordination of dispersed units, each of which has access to command, control, and communications systems, but also to intelligence, surveillance, and systems that distribute synoptic “topsite” as well (Gelernter, 1991).

Early reports of the conduct of hostilities in Afghanistan during the winter of 2001-02 indicate that special forces teams have been given very loose rein to conduct a campaign with a semblance to netwar (Bell, 2001). That is, unconventional deployment of small unit teams combined with dense communication and the advantages of large weapons platforms with precision-guided munitions has resulted in tremendous force multiplication (cf. Libicki, 1997, p. 191).

## ∞ Conclusions ∞

The conclusions to be drawn from the previous analysis may be stated briefly. First, the magnitude of the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the first hostile enemy action on the US mainland since the war of 1812, was shocking: prior to that date, about 1,000 Americans had been killed by terrorists. Accordingly, the sheer immensity of the events of that day can easily overwhelm any theoretical or analytical considerations. As Voegelin observed with respect to the political religion of the Nazis, it is not enough simply to denounce a particularly foul deed. Three distinct and intelligible elements came together on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

First, a long-tested terrorist procedure, airplane hijacking, was combined with a long-standing search for a weapon of mass destruction. It was not what analysts of terrorism had suspected or feared would be the weapon of choice, and there is no evidence that traditional WMD, chemical, bacteriological and radiological weapons, are not still sought by terrorists.

Second, the al-Qaeda organization has developed a complex religious interpretation of its actions that is not only a pneumopathological fantasy, but one that has great resonance among many Muslims. In this respect, it is akin to the various race doctrines or class doctrines that have undergirded the political religions that have deformed twentieth century Europe.

Third, al-Qaeda, unlike most other terrorist organizations, is an extended network. As a result, it can successfully be opposed only by adopting an equally extended scale of operations. This also means that counternetwar strategies have to be used as well as the more familiar operations that state hierarchies

conventionally deploy. Very simply, opposition to terrorist networks will require the extended use of networked special forces, for whom the legendary nineteenth-century adventurer, Sir Richard Burton, may prove to be the model.

Fourth, the obvious ability of the al-Qaeda network requires a significant reconfiguration of both Canadian national security architecture and closer cooperation with the Americans. Three aspects ought to be included in any reconfiguration. The first step in coalition networking must be intelligence sharing. Given the secrecy of most intelligence hierarchies even within the same government structure, let alone with foreign nationals and former enemies or rivals, this is a significant challenge. It also seems clear that intelligence collection efforts will have to be diverted from traditional military threats to a whole host of organizations that, because of the pneumopathological fantasies of their members, are likely to appear enigmatic and bizarre to traditional intelligence hierarchies. In any event, bizarre or not, they are bound to be non-traditional, non-military, and non-state adversaries.

A second step involves narrative and doctrine. Obviously, there is a wide and deep gulf between the story of Islam and the world as told by the *sulafis*, and the story of western liberal democracy. Absent an *Islamic* story that criticizes the perverse spirituality of terrorism (that indicates as clearly as possible that, for example, far from being martyrs, suicidal terrorists are simply murderers and so condemned, not exalted by Islam), something like the crude and parochial account provided by Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) or Keegan's (2001) contrast between western "resolve" and Oriental "surprise" is likely to become the new orthodoxy.



A third step in the adjustment of North American defence policy concerns the question of social capital. Given the openness of western societies and the absence of social trust among many of the coalition partners, the advantage to the al-Qaeda network as a recruiting ground for additional hate-filled and death-bound terrorists seems clear. On the other hand, the morally compelling narratives against terrorism and the threat it poses not only to western but more directly to non-western governments provides plenty of motives to cooperate.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that terrorism is not a matter of law enforcement, but of national security. To imagine that counter-terrorist operations could be otherwise lands us soon enough

in a fool's paradise. It is important, therefore, to be clear about this distinction as well. Law enforcement operations come into play after the fact of a crime. Such operations gather evidence to present before a court, all of which activity takes place within strict and formal legal constraints. In contrast, national security tries to foresee threatening events before they happen and appeals not to law but to reasons of state. Its means are not restricted to gathering evidence and laying it before a court of competent jurisdiction. The methods are sometimes violent and sometimes it is necessary for security forces to act as police, judge, jury, and executioner. Both Canadians and Americans are likely to have to become accustomed to this more robust and aggressive way of ensuring their own safety.

## ❧ Notes ❧

<sup>1</sup>See US Congress (1996); Lifton (1999); Kaplan and Marshall (1996); Kaplan (2000); Sale (1996); Brackett (1996); Reader (1996); Reader, (2000).

<sup>2</sup>These documents have been translated in several versions. See *The Washington Post*, September 28, 2001; *The National Post*, September 29, 2001; *The Calgary Herald*, September 29, 2001.

<sup>3</sup>The texts are widely available. See, for example: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/edicts.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/edicts.html).

<sup>4</sup>See: [www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm](http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm).

<sup>5</sup>See: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html).

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