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Muslim Engagement with Injustice and Violence

Bruce B. Lawrence

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores the role of violence in Islam, specifically contrasting Islam in 611 with the Islam associated with terrorism on 9/11. When several tribes attempted to draw from the treaty that bound them to Muhammad, Abu Bakr opposed them in what became known as the Ridda wars. The Ottomans succeeded in invoking Islam, and also the doctrine of jihad. Islam became an explicit ideology and building block of public prestige for the newest Turkish Muslim Empire, and also became an idiom of protest against the gradual contraction of internal and external trade. The association of Osama bin Laden with al-Jazeera proves to be almost as significant as his decision to wage jihad. There are many ways to connect Bin Laden to the early generation of Islam. Bin Laden's legacy is one of deviance and damage rather than persistence and profit in the cause of Islam.

Keywords: violence, Islam, 611, 9/11, terrorism, Abu Bakr, Ridda wars, Ottomans, jihad, Osama bin Laden

In thinking about Islam and violence, when do we begin to track the connection of the two? Do we begin with 9/11 or 611? 9/11 is all too familiar: It conjures the stealth attack of Arab/Muslim suicide bombers, co-opting two planes, on the twin towers of the World Trade Center, a third plane attack on the US Pentagon, and a fourth crashed plane in Pennsylvania. After 9/11 and as a result of the traumatic death of more than 3,000 people, the US government declared war on two majority Muslim nations, global airport security forever changed, and American Muslims, as well as Muslims coming to the United States, became potential terrorist suspects.

But if 9/11 redefines Islam and violence, does it not also distort the long historical view of Muslims and their multiple responses to violence? If one begins not with 9/11 but almost 1,400 years earlier with 611, the story of Islam and violence changes dramatically. There was no Islam in 611, just an Arab merchant who felt called to be a prophet. The previous year, 610, when Muhammad ibn Abdullah experienced revelation for the first time, only his wife and a few others accepted his claim. His claim to prophecy depended on

intermittent revelations, delivered in the face of hostility from local tribesmen, merchants, and idolaters in his hometown of Mecca. When Muhammad began preaching publicly, as he did in 612, the public reaction was not only negative but violent. From 612 till 622, there was continual, punitive violence directed against Muhammad and his tiny band. It was expressed at many levels: disregard of his lineage, since he had been orphaned, then raised by an uncle; disdain for his relative poverty, since he was not among the wealthy elite of Mecca; and outright (p. 127) rejection of his claim to represent a superior divine channel, a single all-encompassing God called Allah, rather than a pantheon of competing deities with several names.

Violence in the Earliest Phase of Islamic History

The Time of the Prophet: Societal versus Military Violence

If we begin in 611 rather than 9/11, the first expression of violence and Islam is not violence directed by or sanctified through Islam but rather violence against Muslims. Often that violence was a response to efforts by early Muslims to curtail pre-Islamic forms of violence. Throughout human history, societal violence has been as prevalent as military violence, and in early seventh-century Arabia one finds numerous forms of societal violence. These included, for instance, female infanticide, along with the abuse of orphans, the poor, and marginal. Against such forms of societal violence, the revelations mediated through Muhammad were clear, incontrovertible challenges to the social order of tribal Mecca. For instance, they prohibit the pre-Islamic Arabian practice of female infanticide as well as other bodily and social abuses through directives set down, transmitted, and encoded in the Qur'an. Consider the following:

And when the infant girl who was buried is asked

For what offense she was killed

[the person who killed her will have to answer

for his sin on Judgment Day].

(Surah al-Takvir, Qur'an [Q] 81: 8-9)¹

Do not kill your children out of fear of poverty;

We will provide for them, and for you.

Indeed, killing them is a great sin. (Surat al-Isra, Q 17:31)

What these two passages reflect is that in pre-Islamic Arabia killing of female infants was very common; often the moment a female was born she was buried alive. Islam not only prohibits female infanticide, but it forbids all types of infanticide, irrespective of whether the infant is a male or female. Consider the following:

You should not kill not your children on account of poverty—

We provide for you and for them.

And do not approach the property of the orphan,

except with what is better till he comes of age.

Take not life which God has made sacred. (Surat al-Anam, Q 6:151-152)

In 2011 it is difficult to imagine how precarious life was in 611 and not just for children and women but also, and especially, for orphans. Consider the (p. 128) following directive, set forth in the chapter dedicated to women: Give orphans their property,

Without exchanging bad for good;

—And if you fear you cannot

Do justice by the orphans,

Then marry women who please you,

Two, three, or four;

But if you fear you won't be equitable,

Then one, or a legitimate bondmaid of yours,

That way it is easier for you not to go wrong. (Surat an-Nisa, Q 4:2-3)

The irony of the preceding passage is its misapplication during subsequent Muslim history. In the course of centuries, Islamic law overlooked both the context for this revelation—to care equitably for the orphan—and its qualification—if you cannot be equitable to two, three, or four women (who have been previously married and have children now orphaned without a father), then marry but one woman or cohabit with a

legitimate bondmaid, as Abraham did with Hagar producing Ishmael. Caring for orphans is the crucial rationale for plural marriage during the earliest period of Islamic history. It could even be argued that it is the sole rationale for plural marriage, and so the first signpost of violence in Islam is not the violence inherent in Qur'anic dicta but rather the greater violence of the preceding, non-Islamic period known as *jahliyya*, or period of ignorance. And the revelation of the Qur'an, along with the formation of a Muslim community (*ummah*), was intended to curtail rather than to expand or export violence.

The Qur'an as Guidepost for Early Muslims

It was difficult, however, to sustain the purity of thought and the dedication of purpose indicated in those early surahs. They were revealed to the Prophet intermittently over twelve years, from 610 to 622, and during that time Muslims were the nonviolent members of Arabian society, in general, urban Mecca, in particular. At one moment, it seemed that Muhammad's nonviolent responses to the provocations of his hostile countrymen would jeopardize the entire Muslim experiment. In 617 the Prophet sent some of his closest followers and relatives next door, across the Red Sea, to Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Their enemies followed them and demanded that the traitorous Muslims be handed over to them and returned to face justice, that is, certain death, in Mecca. When the Christian king asked the fearful Muslims to explain their faith, one of their band recited to him a revelation that had just come to the Prophet. It included the first forty verses of Surat Maryam, and so closely did it parallel Christian scripture, belief, and hope that the king granted them asylum. That first *hijrah*, or exodus, was yet another instance when violence was prevented, rather than abetted, by the earliest Muslims, and the medium of their pursuit for justice, peace, and equality were those revelations that later became the Noble Book, the Holy Qur'an.

Later the bar of restraint moved higher and higher for Muhammad and his followers. By 622, life had become intolerable for the hardy cohort of Muslims. (p. 129) Consider the power of their enemies. All of them were connected to Mecca, either to Muhammad's close relatives or to tribesmen who had resolved to defeat him and, if possible, to kill him. The early followers faced curses and death threats from prominent Meccans, some of whom were relatives of the prophet. Public spectacles were made of converted slaves, for instance, who were targeted for verbal shame and physical harassment. In instance after instance, violence was directed at Muslims, not perpetrated by Muslims.

The First Instances of Muslim-Initiated War

Once Muhammad established a community of followers in Medina, he had no choice but to fight his Meccan enemies who continued to pursue him. As the Qur'an represents it, God had declared:

Permission to fight is given

to those on whom war is made. (Surat al-Hajj, Q 22:39)

But war was always and everywhere to be defensive. The war Muhammad waged against Mecca was not a struggle for prestige or wealth; it was, in his view, a war for survival, of both the community and the faith. His helpers from Medina joined the migrants from Mecca. They provided the migrants with food and with shelter from their own resources, but they were all stretched to the limit. They had to raid caravans. They raided only small caravans at first and never attacked during those times when fighting, especially blood feuds, was prohibited by Meccan custom. As someone who had guided many a successful caravan to its destiny, Muhammad knew the routes. He knew the seasons. He also knew the wells where Meccan traders would pass with their camels and their goods.

In December 623, more than a year after the beleaguered Muslims had fled to Medina, Muhammad ordered a small detachment to spy on a caravan to the south. It was proceeding along the route to Yemen, at the oasis of Nakhlah that links Mecca to Taif. Since it was a holy month, he had ordered his followers not to attack but they disobeyed. Killing some, they took others captive and brought the caravan back to Medina. Muhammad was appalled. Not only had his followers disobeyed him; they had disobeyed the divine command to fight only in defense of one's own life and property. Their actions mirrored his leadership. He was responsible. The prophet who had pledged to be a divine mediator had betrayed his own prophecy. Riven with distress, he prayed to God. He needed guidance from above. And when it came, it was at once clear and compelling:

They ask you about war in the holy month.

Tell them: "To fight in that month is a great sin.

But a greater sin in the eyes of God is

to hinder people from the way of God,

and not to believe in Him,

and to bar access to the Holy Mosque

and to turn people out of its precincts.

(p. 130) And oppression is worse than killing."

They will always seek war against you till

They turn you away from your faith, if they can.

But those of you who turn back on their faith

and die disbelieving will have wasted their deeds

in this world and the next.

They are inmates of Hell,

and abide there forever. (Surat al-Baqarah, Q 2:217)

This revelation had replaced a rule of principle with one of practical moral value. Yes, killing is forbidden in the sacred month (Q 2:191), but worse than killing is oppression, hindering people from the way of God. Empowered by this divine dictum, Muhammad accepted and divided the spoils of war from his followers at Nakhlah.

More war would follow. Muhammad and his followers entered into an unending conflict with their Meccan kinsmen and opponents. From 623 to 632, Muhammad planned thirty-eight battles that were fought by his fellow believers. He led twenty-seven military campaigns. The nonviolent protestor had become a general, waging war again and again. The first full-scale military campaign came at the wells of Badr, in 624, less than four months after the skirmish at Nakhlah. Muslims chose to attack a caravan coming south from Palestine to Mecca. The Meccans learned of their attack, opposing them with a force that far outnumbered the Muslim band. Muhammad and his followers should have lost; they would have lost, except for the intervention of angels (Q 3:122-127).

While the Battle of Badr projected the small Muslim community onto a stage marked as cosmic, with divine intervention as the basis for military victory, its outcome provoked fear in the Meccans. It also made them resolve even more firmly to defeat the upstart Muslims. By 625 the mighty Meccan general Abu Sufyan had assembled a huge army of both foot soldiers and cavalry. He marched toward Medina. The Muslims countered by moving out of the city proper. They engaged their rivals on the slopes of a nearby mountain, Uhud. Despite the superior numbers of the Meccans, it went well for the Muslims till some of Muhammad's followers broke ranks too early, in anticipation of another victory such as Badr. The Meccans then counterattacked, and Khalid ibn al-Walid, one of the brilliant Meccan nobles, led his squadron to the unprotected rear of the Muslim formation and, catching them unawares, began a great slaughter. The Muslims were soundly defeated, Muhammad wounded in the mayhem that day.

Yet the Prophet resolved to learn the deeper lesson behind this bitter defeat. He regarded the defeat of Uhud to be as important for Islam as the victory of Badr, for in defeat as in victory the Muslims had to acknowledge that their fate was not theirs but God's to decide.

He knows what lies before them and what lies after them (i.e., what is in their future and in their past), and they understand nothing of His Knowledge except what He wills (to disclose to them). (Surat al-Baqara, 2:255)

The aftermath of the Battle of Uhud also reinforced Muhammad's resolve to secure the loyalty of all his followers—both those who were Muslims and those who were non-Muslims yet bound to him by treaty. There followed some difficult, often bloody purges of tribes near Medina, and then the major Battle of the Trench in 627. A mighty Meccan army was led again by Abu Sufyan, the architect of Uhud. Abu Sufyan had tried to invade Medina, to defeat and destroy Muslims once and for all. Yet as understood by Muslims, God—and God alone—granted Muslims victory there. In the aftermath of this victory, fierce foes such as Abu Sufyan and the fiery Khalid ibn al-Walid ceased to oppose the Muslims and instead joined their ranks. (p. 131)

Beyond the battlefield, Muhammad never ceased trying to convert his Meccan opponents to the religion of Islam. Though he had forsaken nonviolence, he had not embraced violence as a way of life, only as an expedient to a higher end. He contacted the Meccans to propose a peaceful pilgrimage. He assured their leaders of his intention, but they doubted him. It took until 629, seven years after he had left Mecca, before he and his followers were allowed to reenter their native city. At last all Muslims—those Meccans who initially had emigrated to Medina, those Medinans who had joined them, and other tribes who had become their allies—then also submitted to God, and all were able to return to Mecca in a peaceful pilgrimage.

When they returned in January 630, Muhammad made a singular decision. Instead of vengeance, Muhammad forgave all but his bitterest enemies. Yet another military encounter quickly followed on the heels of the peaceful pilgrimage. It happened one month later, in February 630. It was a bigger battle than any Muslims had seen since Uhud, and it came not from Mecca but from beyond. Many Bedouin tribes who were opposed to Islam saw the reentry to Mecca as provocation for their own ferocious, full-scale assault on the Muslims. Hunain was a fierce battle. Many of Muhammad's followers panicked. Once again, from the Muslim point of view, it was the Almighty and the angelic host—not Muslim numbers or their military prowess—that brought them victory. The Qur'an once again marked the event:

Indeed God has helped you on many occasions,

Even during the battle of Hunain,

When you were elated with joy at your numbers

Which did not prove of the least avail,

So that the earth and its expanse became too narrow for

you,

And you turned back and retreated.

Then God sent down a sense of tranquility

On His Apostle and the faithful;

And sent down troops invisible

To punish the infidels.

This is the recompense of those who do not believe. (Surat al-Tawbah, Q 9:24b)

Muslims had scarcely moved beyond the victory of Hunain when other challenges beyond their borders arose. They had to engage the Byzantines, they had to levy taxes among recalcitrant Bedouin tribes, and above all, they had to purify their central rite, the pilgrimage or hajj, removing every vestige of pagan practice.

(p. 132) Muslim Wars after Muhammad: The Special Case of Ridda and the Problem of Retaliation

After the death of Muhammad in 632, his experiment, based so squarely on his personal authority, almost came unhinged. It was a delicate moment when a new leader, one of his trusted followers, Abu Bakr, was elected his successor, or *khalifa*. When several tribes tried to withdraw from the treaty that bound them to Muhammad, Abu Bakr fought them in what became known as the Ridda wars, the wars of apostasy or repudiation of Islam. For many scholars, this period initiates the practice of open warfare in the name of Islam. It is said to be the time when jihad, or war in defense of the faith, came to be associated with Islamic expansion. Yet according to Fred Donner, the Ridda wars, while testing the new Muslim state's capacity to integrate and organize Arabia's tribesmen, did not meet the standard of jihad, and neither the Ridda wars nor the expansionary wars that continued through the next period of nascent Islamic history should be defined as jihad.

According to Donner, three interlocking concepts defined the nascent Muslim experiment. They were: a single, indivisible community united by faith, that is, "the universal community of believers, reflecting its character as the body of worshipers of the one and universal God"; an absolute authority mediated through a binding, divine law; and the notion of a central human authority transferable from Muhammad to his successors (Donner: 54-61). The second concept—absolute authority mediated through

divine law—was crucial since it curtailed without quite eliminating the protocol of retaliation, requital, or *lex talionis*. Qur’anic passages support this shift:

Believers, requital is prescribed
For you in cases of murder;
The free for the free, the slave for the slave,
And the female for the female.
But if anyone is forgiven
Anything by his brother,
Let fairness be observed,
And goodly compensation. (Surat al-Baqarah, Q 2:178)
And do not take a life
That God has made sacred,
Except for just cause
And if anyone is killed unjustly,
We have given his next of kin
A certain authority;
But he should not be excessive in killing;
For he has been given divine support
(to be restrained). (Surat al-Isra, Q 17:33)

Especially crucial is the protocol for requital among believers, announced in Surat an-Nisa. It is long but pivotal and consequential for Muslim attitudes toward interpersonal violence:

It is never right
For a believer to kill a believer,

(p. 133) Except by mistake;

And one who kills a believer by mistake
Is to free a believing slave,
And compensation is to be handed over
To the family of the deceased,
Unless they forego it to charity.
If the deceased was from a people
Warring against yours,
Yet was a believer,
Then free a believing slave.
But if the deceased was from a people
With whom you have a treaty,
Then compensation is to be paid
To the family of the deceased,
And a believing slave is to be freed.
And if one has not the means,
Then one is to fast
For two consecutive months,
As an act of contrition granted
As a concession from God.
And God is all-knowing, most judicious. (Surat an-Nisa, Q 4:92)

All of these conditions—God as authority, the community as resource, the successor as leader—are crucial for defining both the Islamic state and its impetus for expansion through war. Jihad, when it does occur, appears only as an ancillary, incidental concept. Of course, early Muslim warriors were motivated by the prospect of either booty (if they survived) or paradise (if they were slain), but jihad entered as “a product of the rise of Islam, not a cause of it—a product, to be exact, of the impact of the new concept of the

umma on the old (tribal) idea that one fought, even to the death, for one's own community (Donner: 295–296).” While there is a lot of fighting depicted in Islamic histories, such military encounters are known mostly as *maghazi* (“raids”) or *futuh* (“conquests”). Whenever jihad is invoked, it is a sidebar, not a central feature of the narrative of early Muslim warfare.

Jihad Invoked, Redefined, and Reawakened

Over time what had been an incidental, qualified part of the Qur’anic message, and the earliest Islamic worldview became an independent force on its own, so much so that some have declared jihad to be a sixth pillar (beyond the standard five) that defines Islamic belief and practice. The seminal text cited by all proponents of jihad as a collective duty incumbent on all Muslims is Surat at-Tawbah (Q 9). Here, Muslims are told that idolaters must be fought, polytheists leveled, and that the reward for those who struggle will be paradise:

(But) the messenger

And those who believe with him

Struggle with their possessions and their persons.

So the good things are for them,

(p. 134) And they are the successful ones.

God has prepared gardens

Under which rivers flow,

Where they will abide.

That is the great attainment. (Surat at-Tawbah, Q 9:88–89)

Yet neither this verse nor other Qur’anic verses motivated Muslims to engage in perpetual warfare against Byzantines, Sassanians, and other “people of the Book” after the death of Muhammad. In an analysis marked by consummate concern with detail and context, Carole Hillenbrand has shown how by the early eighth century, Muslim navies had given up their century-long quest to conquer Constantinople. “It became the practice for both empires to engage in annual campaigns, described in the Islamic sources as jihad but these gradually became a ritual, important for the image of the caliph and the emperor, rather than being motivated by a vigorous desire to conquer new territories for their respective faiths” (Hillenbrand: 93).

It was not until the eleventh century, with Saladin and the crusader conquest of Jerusalem, that jihad was revitalized. The crucial events were the fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders in 1099; the recapture of Edessa from the crusaders by Saladin's father, Zengi, in 1144; and then, in 1187, Saladin's recapture of Jerusalem. It was during the fateful twelfth century that the doctrine of jihad was revived and heralded as a paramount duty to preserve Muslim territorial, political, and symbolic integrity. "The process of the reawakening of jihad," notes Hillenbrand, "must have been slow and gradual, and in some part at least it must have come as a direct response to Crusader fanaticism, witnessed first-hand (Hillenbrand: 108)."

One scholar has even gone so far as to argue that "the Crusades triggered the jihad mentality as we know it now." It was in response to the Crusades that Zengi and Saladin produced, for the first time in Islamic history, "a broad scale propaganda effort to praise jihad and jihad-warriors. Jerusalem became the center of jihad propaganda, and Saladin extended its sanctity to Syria, reminding everyone that Syria (too) is the Holy Land and that Muslims are responsible for defending and protecting it (against foreign assaults) (Mourad)."²

Later, the doctrine of jihad was amplified and applied anew in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries after the Mongols plundered Baghdad, ravaged the Muslim world, and then themselves became Muslims. It was Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), one of the most influential jurists in Islamic history, who inveighed against the Mongols, and his favorite tool for anathematizing them was jihad. "With Ibn Taymiyya," observes Hillenbrand, "jihad to (save) Jerusalem is replaced by an internal movement within the Dar al-Islam itself, both spiritual and physical.... Ibn Taymiyya sees the Muslim world assailed by external enemies of all kinds, and in his strong desire to purify Islam and Islamic territory from all intrusion and corruption, he advocates as "the only solution to fight [is] jihad so that 'the whole of religion may belong to God.'" (Hillenbrand: 243).

(p. 135) Violence in the Gunpowder Empires

The Ottoman Case

Is violence waged by an Islamic empire or nation always an expression of jihad, or religious violence? One could argue that it is less jihad than other features of structural violence that came to characterize the major Muslim empires of the premodern era. Beginning in the fifteenth century and, in part, due to the violence unleashed by the Mongols, a simpler political map of the Nile-to-Indus region, or the core Islamic world,

emerged. It was characterized by three regionally based empires: the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal. They represented the core population of the Muslim world by 1800, perhaps 70 percent of all Muslims, and much of what today is regarded as Muslim expressions of violence can be traced to the structural elements that characterized each of these empires.³ For clarity of insight into violence—its causes, expressions, and outcomes—the focus will be on the Ottoman Empire. The Sunni Ottomans, based in Anatolia and southeastern Europe, absorbed nearly all of the Arabic-speaking lands with the exception of Morocco and parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Theirs became the dominant regional power, although Shia Iran emerged as a formidable foe and bloody conflicts between the two countries erupted periodically. Mughal India, officially a foe of neither the Ottomans nor the Safavids, benefited from their mutual antagonism. Especially the persecution and expulsion of non-Shia Muslims from Safavid Iran provided some of the human resources—artistic, intellectual, and religious—that made possible the splendor of the Great Mughals. Islam remained a central focus of identity as well as the ideological underpinning for a variety of social and political movements. The period saw the establishment of Shiism as the state religion of Iran, with the forced conversion of its largely Sunni population under Safavid pressure. New Sufi orders emerged throughout the region, one of them actually serving as the precursor to the state sponsored Shiism of Safavid Iran. Often Sufi orders became vehicles of protest against the establishment, nowhere more evidently than the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi movement of north India. Toward the end of this period in Arabia, the Muslim puritanical movement of the Wahhabis rose to challenge Sufi practices and Ottoman authority.

Violence must also be traced through its implication in the political order, not least in the way that it was managed for the preservation of the empire so that the rulers of various Muslim empires, like their non-Muslim counterparts elsewhere, became the sole legitimate purveyors of violence. There was never a question of eliminating violence but rather justifying its use for higher ends.

One must instead ask again the question Is warfare, when declared by a Muslim ruler, always and everywhere a reflex of Islamic norms and values? That was the question that occupied Ibn Taymiyya, but its practical consequence was nil, as much of the violence that characterized premodern Islamic polities was (p. 136) intra-Islamic, that is, Muslims were fighting Muslims for imperial gain, better taxation, and public prestige. Consider the case of the Ottomans.

In its origins, the Ottoman Empire goes back to the thirteenth century and the Seljukids. The first of the newly converted Turkish nomads to expand beyond their central Asian homeland, the Seljuks had overrun Buyid Iran in the eleventh century and conquered Baghdad by 1055. The Seljuks created a new empire in the name of Islam, but they also drew on Sasanian traditions still in place with their conquered subjects. They had a

graduated taxation system that depended for its efficiency on *iqtas* or land grants. Warriors were supported through *iqtas* in return for their service on behalf of the Seljukid rulers.

The Seljuks were also assisted and tested by Turcomans, nomadic frontiersmen with less interest in settled or city life than the Seljuks. The Turcomans helped the Seljuks by operating as *ghazis*, or warriors for the faith, on the frontiers with the Byzantine Empire. They readily invoked jihad in their cause. After the Battle of Manzikert, where the Seljuks defeated the Byzantines in 1071, the Turcomans helped to Islamize and Turkify the region of Anatolia, still culturally linked to Byzantium.

The Seljuks might have become the masters of Anatolia and survived much longer had they not become victims of the Mongols. The same Mongol invasion that led to the sack of Baghdad in 1258 had earlier led to a Seljuk defeat in 1243. The Seljuks survived as a reduced polity in Asia Minor but as a vassal Mongol state; their last Sultan died in 1306. In the meantime, between 1260 and 1320, the Turcomans, mobilized by their *ghazi* tribal chiefs, and in tandem with the Seljuks, waged jihad against Byzantine forces that still held parts of Anatolia. Their leader was Osman Ghazi, who held the frontier land in western Asia Minor that was farthest north and closest to the Byzantines. He gained immense prestige when he defeated an imperial Byzantine army in 1301 at the Battle of Baphtion. Many other nomadic Turkish soldiers came to Konya, Osman's capital. They became known as *beys*, commanders of complements of fighters who were loyal to them, just as they, in turn, were loyal to Osman. At Osman's death, his son, Orhan expanded the empire still further, capturing major strategic and commercial cities in Anatolia. Bursa became the new Ottoman capital after 1326 and remained so until 1402.

At the same time as they were expanding in the east, the Ottomans were also making inroads into the Balkans, and a measure of their success is that one of Orhan's successors, Murad, made Adrianople (also referred to as Edirne) his capital in order to consolidate Ottoman conquests in Rumeli.

The success of the Ottomans invoked Islam and the doctrine of jihad, but it was banked on the logic and limits of conquest. They formed a pyramidal military state, with roots that went deep into local society, and allowed the Ottoman Sultan at the apex to control the beys, who also represented geographical and economic interests crucial to the burgeoning state.

As ideal as the system sounds, it had limits inherent to the very strengths that made the system possible. Ottomans were heirs to the Byzantine as well as the Sasanian empires. Like their Umayyad predecessors, it was the Byzantine model, (p. 137) especially as reflected in Istanbul, which both fueled and restricted their imagination. They expanded

by conquest, making the army responsible for two fronts, one in Asia and one in Europe. Yet the army could only fight when the Sultan was on the battlefield to lead his troops in person. The competitive pull of two war zones produced a major donnybrook for the fledgling Ottoman state in 1387. Murad I had to confront an Anatolian resistance movement, the Karmanids, at the same time as the Serbs, joined by dissatisfied Bosnians and Bulgarians, were posing a challenge in the Balkans. Though the Ottomans won the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, Murad was killed in the fray, and in its aftermath his son and successor, Bayazid, executed the Serbian king, Lazar.

More threatening to the state than Anatolian or Balkan rivals, however, was the emergence in the East, in Rum, of a threat from central Asia. It came from the Chagatai Turkish successor to the Mongols: Timur Leng, or Tamerlane. When Ottoman and Timurid forces clashed in Ankara in 1402, the Timurids were victorious. Bayazid, humiliated as well as defeated, died at his own hand a year later in 1403. The Ottoman experiment, like many of its *ghazi* emirate neighbors, might have vanished with Bayazid, but it survived for several reasons. First, it had attained legitimacy as a Muslim polity when Bayazid, anticipating the threat of Timur, had invested himself with recognition as an official Muslim ruler: The Mamluk ruler of Cairo had become the caliph or nominal leader of all Muslims after the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1256, and in 1394 he made Bayazid the sultan of Rum. Second, he had introduced a system of recruitment and administration that conjoined the *timar* system with the expansion of territory. Like his Seljukid predecessors, he recruited non-Muslim youth, then, after converting them to Islam, had them trained as slaves, or *ghulams*, for military and palace duty. In effect, Murad began what became known as the janissary system, a backbone of later Ottoman state policy.

The religious establishment was important as a third element of regime enhancement. Bayazid fostered it as he did the janissary or slave system, extending patronage to its recipients but at a price: preferential deferral or even outright acquiescence in the authority of the state. Muslim scholars and teachers, Sufi masters, and juridical experts came from neighboring Islamic polities to Anatolia and to the Ottoman court. They came because of patronage from the emperor, and they were expected to assist him in his effort to be not just a conquering ghazi but also a Muslim Sultan. In other words, Islam became an explicit ideology, and building block of public prestige, for the newest Turkish Muslim empire.

The defining moment for the new Ottoman polity came in 1453 when Muhammad II, also known as Mehmed the Conqueror, achieved an ambition that had eluded all his Muslim predecessors: the conquest of Constantinople (Istanbul). It was a singular moment that saw not just the collapse of the truncated Byzantine Empire but also the rededication of Constantinople as a Muslim capital city.

Following the conquest of Istanbul, Syria, Egypt, and the Hijaz region of Arabia were conquered in the early sixteenth century. The conquest of Egypt conferred further Islamic legitimacy, as the caliphate devolved from the defeated Mamluks (p. 138) to the victorious Ottomans. With the possession of Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina, they controlled the three holiest cities in Islam. Rumeli remained no less important to the imperial ambitions of the Sultans: By the sixteenth century, Belgrade and Hungary, Moldavia, and Wallachia and Transylvania had all become tributary principalities under nominal Christian rulers. But the Ottomans were limited by the need to maintain supply lines to their sources. On the European front, they could not go beyond Vienna, where the time frame for sieges was limited and so never succeeded. On the southern rim of the Mediterranean, they continued to expand beyond Egypt, annexing Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis and establishing beys and *deys* as rulers or surrogates on behalf of the Ottoman sultan, who was now also the commander of the faithful. Thus, at its apogee under Suleiman I in the mid-sixteenth century, the Osmanli realm was the most powerful empire in the world. Overshadowing his nearest European rival, Suleiman I enjoyed revenue twice that of Charles V.

But the state had limits both theoretical and empirical. In theory, it sustained an Islamic empire, with the sultan the uncontested source of religious as well as secular authority. He combined in himself the apogee of *shari'a* (religious) and *qanun* (civil) law. Suleiman was known as Suleiman *qanuni*. The notion of the state as a harmonious structure permeated the state military and civilian bureaucracies. It derived from the classic Perso-Turkish source, Nasir ad-din Tusi (d. 1273). No theory or account of Islam and violence can be complete without reference to Tusi's circle of justice. The circle of justice became the basis for Ottoman consciousness. Since the Sasanian social ethic emphasized order, stability, legality, and harmony among the theoretical four estates of priests, soldiers, officials, and workers, Tusi recycled Sasanian principles within an Islamic program. Tusi projected a dual function: hierarchical duties mirroring a consensual reciprocity between different groups, each aware of its specific role in the hierarchy. While the loyalty structure is a pyramid, its function is projected as a circle, the circle of justice. There can be no royal authority without the military (*askeri*):

There can be no military without wealth

The reaya or agriculturalists produce the wealth

The sultan keeps the loyalty of the *reaya* by ensuring justice

Justice requires harmony in the world

The world is a garden, its walls are the state

The state's axis is the religious law

There is no support for religious law without royal authority.⁴

The elegance of this formulation belies its inner tension. The accent is on justice rather than right religion as the basis for effective rule, not eliminating conflict or violence but redirecting its force to the benefit of the state. While the ruler and the ruled depend on each other, theirs remains an asymmetric relationship, for the circle begins and ends with the state and its supreme subject, the ruler. Only the middle line suggests that harmony and justice are coterminous one with the other, yet justice is not justice between equals but rather justice as "just" rewards or allotted payments for participation in the system. It never approaches parity much less (p. 139) equality. The religious classes, custodians of religious law, require state support, just as the state, in turn, requires the askeri or military classes who are its foundation. One could either label this system as controlled violence or the harmonious balance of competing self-interests, but it projects a consistent stress on justice.

Enlightenment notions of nonreligious loyalty to a state marked by both equality and justice for all are confounded in the Sasanian, then Ottoman notion of justice as a circle with the ruler at its center and also its apex. The pyramidal nature of authority becomes clear when one traces the circle via the four classes or differentiated orders, also derived from Tusi. The men of the sword dominate, with the men of the pen as their closest allies, while all other groups, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, urban or rural, have a lesser stake in the system but cannot escape its influence.

A review of its empirical limits demonstrates the faultlines within the Ottoman Empire. The system could only work as long as the conquests continued. Suleiman's reign may have been the apogee of power, but it also cast a shadow on the subsequent period of Ottoman history. The last significant conquest in the Mediterranean theater was Cyprus in 1570 (soon after his reign), and no other conquest came till Crete in 1664 almost a century later. The battles to the east of Rum, specifically with the Iranian Safavids, did not produce any major territorial gains. Without conquests, the Ottoman state could not claim to be the major Muslim empire of its day. Lack of conquest undermined its own logic, signaling its reduction in status and eventual demise. The empire's ideology was two pronged. It was dominated by and oriented toward the bureaucracy and governing institutions, yet at the same time it was reinforced by the religious schools and courts. The focal point of the ideology was the emperor. The success of the system depended on his personal stature. The emperor was at the same time the supreme religious leader, the owner of all land, and the commander in chief of the armed forces.

So there were indices of autocratic violence—structural, societal, and political—that characterized not only the Ottoman Empire and also its rivals, the Safavids and Mughals, but also its regional subsets, later to become independent polities, from Morocco on the edge of the Atlantic to Egypt at the base of the Mediterranean.

Overshadowing these rivalries, however, was engagement with Europe, above all, a response, sometimes cooperative but more often oppositional to European initiatives to control parts of Africa and Asia. Commercial trade became the Achilles heel for Ottomans as for other Muslim polities. Closely controlled by the state, trade was primarily in luxury items (Ottoman silk and Asian spices). It did not propel the economy out of its sense of self-sufficiency nor did it enable the state to control the number of competing centripetal forces within the empire that put Ottoman officialdom at risk in dealing with external polities, whether European or Muslim. Diplomatic relations with France revealed the strength as well as the weakness of the Ottoman system. A French-Ottoman alliance, forged in order to combat Charles V and the Holy Roman Empire, effectively delayed the Ottoman need to enter into permanent relations with other European powers until 1793, with (p. 140) the result that the Ottomans actually knew little about their future rivals, including the Russians. There were efforts to recuperate lost opportunities in the nineteenth century, but the great chase deprived not just the Ottomans but other Muslim polities from any sense of parity vis-à-vis their European rivals, then rulers.

Comparative Perspectives on Regional Empires

Comparable political economic processes informed the Ottomans along with their neighbors and rivals, the Safavids and Mughals. The rise of each empire involved the imposition of a strong state with tribal origins on a predominantly agrarian economy and society. In all three cases, after a prosperous period of stable reproduction of social relations and expansion of wealth in the sixteenth century, a retreat or decline seems to have been registered in the seventeenth century in the form of agrarian crises with political economic causes and political outcomes.

Several major developments altered the political scene in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the Ottoman Empire became decentralized as Istanbul's hold on the provinces weakened and autonomous authorities sprang up almost everywhere; the Safavid regime collapsed, giving way to several decades of internal fragmentation and turmoil; and Mughal India reached its apogee, only to be sacked by Nadir Shah, an Afghani adventurer, in the early eighteenth century.

Alongside the shifts in the internal power relations came changes in the region's position in regard to Europe. While Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals remained virtually untouched by European culture, they now fought and traded with Europeans on a more extensive basis than before and on increasingly unfavorable terms. Military conflict with

European countries raged along a wide front extending from the Black Sea area and the Balkans to the western Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The region's armies were able to hold their own until the second half of the eighteenth century, when disastrous defeats by Russia and the easy fall of Egypt to Napoleon brought home to the Ottoman leaders the recognition that global power had shifted definitely in favor of Europe.

European Colonial Presence and Violent Muslim Responses

There is no generic category of religious protest that applies to the modern period of world history, from 1600 to the present.⁵ Instead, there are three distinct phases of Islamically valorized protest. In each phase, certain Muslim groups revolted against the ascendant, which has become the dominant, world order linked to western Europe. Only the first phase is properly speaking revivalist. It is succeeded by a second that can and should be termed reformist, and it is only after the revivalist and reformist phases and, in large part, due to their failures that there what is now termed Islamic fundamentalism or Islamism emerged.⁶

(p. 141) All three—revivalism, reformism, and fundamentalism—are historically specific socioreligious movements propelling marginalized male leaders into public view as they attempt to reclaim the space challenged and reduced, impoverished and redefined, by the expanding sea powers of western Europe. From the eighteenth century to the present, all the major Muslim polities experienced financial crises, demographic disruption, and agricultural stagnation. If there is a case to be made for structural violence as the backdrop and often the catalyst for physical violence, then the European interlude must be considered when addressing the topic of Islam and violence. Some of the malaise in early modern Muslim polities resulted from indigenous challenges. Provincial Arabs chafed under Ottoman Turkish rule, Afghans protested Qajar control within Iran, and Marattas rebelled against Mughal hegemony in South Asia. In each instance, however, the situation of ruling elites was complicated and worsened by: the external diversion of commodity trade from the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean routes to the Atlantic Ocean following the discovery and exploitation of the New World and the internal infiltration of European trade through a nexus of foreign merchants and local middlemen or *compradores* cooperating to establish new products, new markets, and new communication networks also as new sources of profit and reinvestment. Islam, in effect, became an idiom of protest against the gradual contraction of internal and external trade, brought about by the mercantile activities of European maritime nations, specifically, the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, and the French. What was contested in the name of Islam by Islamic revivalists was control over vital commodities—slaves, textiles, coffee,

tea, and spices—as well as gold, all trafficked along the major trade routes from the Atlantic coast of West Africa to the Indonesian archipelago.

The major Muslim revivalist movements were without exception preindustrial. Their leaders mobilized followers in response to the European redirection of global trade, even when they did not acknowledge the extent to which European advances were reshaping their lives.

One of the earliest instances of European influence concerns the upstart Wahhabis. In western Arabia, the Wahhabis aligned with a Najdi chief named Ibn Sa'ud. That combination in time produced what is now regarded as a legitimate government, though it remains the only Muslim polity named after a tribal group: the present-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Both Ibn Sa'ud and his appointed ideologue, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, benefited from the loss of revenues suffered by their chief rival, the sharif of Mecca, who in the eighteenth century reigned as the legitimate ruler of the Hijaz. Dependent as he was on the lucrative Indian trade, primarily in textiles, indigo, and spices, the sharif could not sustain its diversion away from the Arabian Peninsula by the British. Weakened economically, he also became vulnerable militarily. His Najdi rivals rallied to their side other groups who had been deprived by the British ascendancy in trade, and toward the end of the eighteenth century they were able to dislodge and replace the sharif of Mecca. Although the Wahhabis had other battles to wage, with the Turks and also with Muslim loyalists from rival tribes who did not accept their leadership, their initial success was a by-product of incipient European colonialism. (p. 142)

Unfortunately, the influence of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab on both Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship of Islamic revivalism has led his movement to be overvalued beyond its actual historical achievement. It is often presumed that a literal, text-restricted reading of the Qur'an prevailed from the origins of Islam. It did not, nor has it ever been the practice for most observant Muslims. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab had a narrow reform agenda not shared with other eighteenth-century and later Muslim reforms. Even his notion of the boundaries of faith were limited to exploring and explaining the concepts of *tawhid* and *takfir*, *iman* and *kufr*, that is to say, how you make God exclusively one and declaim all other Muslims who fail to express the same level of creedal commitment. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab never claimed to be a reinterpreter of the scholarly legacy of the past. He never concerned himself with the wider Muslim community and its integrity. He never addressed issues of tyranny and social justice.

Yet the Wahhabi paradigm created numerous analogues elsewhere on the seams of commercial activity that became increasingly under British rule. In northwestern India, the Brelvis tried to wage war against indigenous groups the Sikhs and Hindus, but the latter were better positioned than the Brelvis in regard to British commercial interests.

The Brelvis were strategically isolated before being defeated on the battlefield by Sikhs. Elsewhere, in northeastern India, the Faraidis perceived the shift to a moneyed, international economy as advantageous to Hindu landlords while impoverishing Muslim peasant laborers. They mobilized resistance, at first in local protests, later in region-wide acts of defiance; neither succeeded in reversing the tides of change.

It was the same story, with different actors but a similar outcome in Africa. The best documented of the revivalist movements, the Fulani-Qadiris in Nigeria, pitted Muslim herdsmen and traders against British markets and middlemen who were often being recruited from rival Muslim tribes. Though the revivalists enjoyed superb Islamic credentials, they were eventually defeated on the battlefield. There were temporary successes: the Sanusis prevailed in the Cyrenaica region near the Ottoman province of Libya, strengthening Islamic identity for more than fifty years until the Italian invasion of 1911. A Somali chieftain, too, was able to mobilize interior tribes against British, Italian, and French forces in the coastal areas near Mogadishu. He won several battles and continued to rule for more than twenty years, only to have the British bomb and machine gun their way to victory in 1920. Finally, on the other side of the Muslim world in Southeast Asia, a puritanical movement known as the Padris galvanized Sumatran Muslims dispossessed by the shift from gold and pepper trade to a new cash crop, coffee. During the course of the nineteenth century, the Padris were harassed and coerced, enduring defeat after defeat in bloody encounters before finally succumbing to the Dutch authorities.

All these revivalist movements were violent, but they followed a pattern of responsive violence. It is not accidental that they all occurred at crucial seams in the expanding imperium of maritime Europe. All were Sunni Muslim movements. (p. 143) The single parallel within Shia Islam were the Bahais, a group still despised by Twelver Shia clergy. The vilification masks a deeper fear: The first Bahais embodied and projected the latent messianic impulse of Twelver Shiism. Yet the Bahais became harbingers of ecumenical pluralism and so represent a graphic example of how Islam and violence cannot be neatly matched.

Apart from the Bahais, Islamic revivalist groups were succeeded by Islamic reformers. Interposed between Islamic revivalism and Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic reformers are closely linked to nationalist movements, and in retrospect it can be seen that, despite their universalist rhetoric, almost all the Islamic reformers were shaped by the influences of the colonial period. Especially keen is the emphasis on science and technology in education, constitution and parliamentary democracy in politics, and the revised role of women in social life. If Muslim nationalism became mimetic, it is due to the fact that movements that claimed a loyalty to Islam were also mimetic, picking up elements of the West that they hoped could be transformed into an Islamic system. Far from reacting

with violence to European presence and control, they attempted to accommodate to an emergent, if asymmetric, world system. There is no independent Muslim movement after the colonial period; all are reacting to some force or series of forces that emanate from the Western world, which is to say northern Europe and the United States.

Muslim reformers recognized the power of the institutions that were propelling European maritime nations to a unique position of global prestige. The reformers came from those countries whose Muslim elites were most engaged by the specter of European commercial and military penetration—Egypt and India, Iran and Turkey before World War I, but then, following the war, also Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. The North African reformers coalesced into a movement known as Salafiya, or Islamic traditionalism. Criticized for their unwitting promotion of historical retardation, its leaders seemed to hark back to a golden age that never existed or at least could never be reconstructed, and so their passionate pleas merely drained energies away from the task at hand, to accommodate to the new reality of a European world order. Yet most of the reformers acted in good faith, as committed Muslims conflicted by the gap between Europe's pragmatic success and what seemed to be its spiritual vapidness. It was as though they were witnesses to a novel and "unholy" revelation. For them, "the arbiter of truth and knowledge suddenly ceased to be enclosed in the revealed word of God. Another text, with no specific author or format, had made a permanent intrusion. It was the West in its political systems, military presence and economic domination which now appeared in the background as an authoritative code of practice."⁷

But the authoritative code was not uniform. The intervening European powers quarreled with one another. Some Muslim polities, such as the Sharifian kingdom of Morocco, benefited from these quarrels, able to resist direct rule because no Mediterranean power wanted its rivals to control the seat of the Arab/Muslim West. But all polities were affected by the great wars, sometimes known as the Christian wars, which were waged by these self-same powers twice in the twentieth century. It was only due to the enormous expenditures and consequent destruction of these (p. 144) wars that protest movements among Muslims and others were able to mobilize into national liberation movements. Gradually, as the smoke cleared from the second of these horrific Christian wars, most Muslim ruling elites were able to grasp the laurel of independence. Even so, not all were marked by the same political order.

Even countries that were not colonized directly, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, still experienced the effects of colonial economic penetration into the eastern Mediterranean and Indian Ocean, and the structures that arose after independence reflect this influence, above all in the sphere of politics and law. It was because the nature of self-rule was shaped as much by European as by indigenous models that one must speak of "mimetic nationalism." Though Arab, as also non-Arab, Muslim leaders embraced nationalism to

chart the path to independence, the models of governance were derived from the departing colonials. Whether one looks to constitutional charters or to the adoption of separate executive and legislative bodies, the impress of European precedents is evident. At the same time, the boundaries of new nations reflected a patchwork of compromise that was worked out by the European powers not by their Muslim subjects. Saddam Hussein's outburst in fall 1990 over the manipulation of Iraq's borders with Kuwait was at once justified and spurious. It was justified because the borders of all African and Asian countries were set in the colonial period or its immediate aftermath. It was spurious because many countries benefited as well as lost from such manipulation: Without the addition of parts of Kurdistan, especially the oil-rich region around Mosul, Iraq, for instance, would not have had the geopolitical resources that make it potentially the economic giant among all Arab states.

The truth about the process by which postcolonial borders were decided may be simpler, though no prettier, than conspiracy theories allow: Disparate communities of Asia and Africa had been welded together as parts of the British, French, or Dutch empires. They could not be dissolved and reconstituted in their precolonial form with independence. Often the conditions of self-rule had to be set by colonial authorities and imperial administration, because consent could not have been secured on any other basis. Yet the end result was to make the entire process of Arab/Muslim nationalism seem imitative or mimetic. It appealed only to a limited stratum of elites. The mechanisms to curb military control and to spur the emergence of a middle class were never set in place. Structural violence took on a new face, but it was still violent and its tensions, contradictions, and excesses continue to the present day.

While most Europeans and Americans have lived within "secure" national borders for several generations and see themselves as beneficiaries from the tradition of nation-state loyalty, many third world citizens, and Afro-Asian Muslims, in particular, do not share either their experience or their trust. For most Muslims, it is hard to applaud the random, top-down process by which almost all their polities came to assume their present form.

Not only the external boundaries of territory but also the internal boundaries of identity are open to challenge and reformulation. In thinking about Islamic protest, it is especially important to note how the clash at the core of all other clashes (p. 145) between nationalists and fundamentalists is the totalizing impulse guiding each. In the Muslim world, the state functions as an obedience context, and the rulers of the Muslim state demand total compliance with the state's vision of Islam. Tacitly it recognizes that the norms it imposes are not universally shared by all Muslims, yet publicly it arrogates to itself and to its custodians the right to decide which elements of Islamic belief and practice are to be supported. The memory of other Islams is too strong, however, to be erased. In each instance, Muslims have to decide how to preserve their symbolic identity

within a public order that is antireligious at worst, as in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, China, Indonesia, and Turkey or pseudoreligious at best, as in most Arab states, Iran, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Twentieth- and now twenty-first-century nationalism produced for the entire Muslim world a cleavage of enormous magnitude. The most evident rift was between Muslims and the dominant culture of western Europe. But an equally great divide developed among Muslim themselves, between those who were attracted to European achievements, seeking to appropriate their benefits, and those others who sought to oppose them.

While the legacy of colonialism reshaped the Muslim world into truncated territories and contested borders, capitalism left it with economies that could only function on the margins, benefiting the major powers of the high-tech era. These powers were the technologically advanced, professionally differentiated, and economically privileged societies of western Europe, North America, and, now, East Asia. Even before the rubric of first, second, and third worlds was invented in the 1950s, a third world existed. It embraced all Muslim societies, even those benefiting from the petrodollar infusion that began in the 1950s and 1960s but did not accelerate until the 1970s and 1980s.

Jihad in Modern Times

Among the ongoing effects of the postcolonial legacy in Muslim polities has been the overwhelming attention to Islam and violence. From medieval to modern to contemporary history, the trope of Islam as violence has focused on jihad, and so it is important to note how those who came to be labeled fundamentalists invoked the early experience of the Prophet Muhammad and the Medinan state on behalf of their own authority to proclaim jihad. None did so more stridently or effectively than Sayyid Qutb, the Muslim brother who opposed Nasser, the Egyptian president from 1954 to 1970. Executed on charges of sedition in 1966, Sayyid Qutb produced a series of writings, some from prison, that exposed modern-day nationalism as itself a form of *jahliyya*. In effect, it was equated with the kind of tribal order that Muhammad had opposed and that he, together with his early followers, had to overcome in order to establish the ummah, or single supratribal Muslim (p. 146) community. In one of his most memorable string of homologies, Qutb reappropriated nationalism for “true” Islam: “[N]ationalism is belief, homeland is Dar al-Islam, the ruler is God, and the constitution is the Qur’an” (quoted in Lawrence 1998: 68).

Qutb’s message and his resort to jihad as the just cause for Muslims under threat resonated through Egypt and the Arab world and with the Taliban and the attackers of

9/11. It is impossible to make this temporal transition from the seventh to the twenty-first century without noting how eschatological religion is instrumentalized through modern means, not least martyr operations. The connection has been nimbly charted by Hans Kippenburg:

When they attacked the United States in September 2001, jihadists were interpreting the Middle East conflict in Islamic concepts, but they did so in a radically different manner from the mainstream of the Muslim Brethren (following the lead of Sayyid Qutb rather than his predecessors). The power of the United States and Israel has made Islam so rotten and corrupt that no external institution is now able to represent it credibly; it is only the pure intentions of the last surviving upright believers that can form the core of a new community of the elect. And this is what they demonstrate by means of martyr operations (carried out by Al-Qaeda and in the name of Osama bin Laden). (Kippenburg: 201)

The Legacy of Osama Bin Laden: The Cosmic Warrior Mediated

We now come full circle from 611, the beginning of a nonviolent protest movement led by an Arab merchant turned prophet, to 9/11, the day of infamy for twenty-first century Americans. The source of that violence that brackets Islam with the worst forms of violence was Osama bin Laden; but it was Bin Laden, the Islamic apocalypticist as mediated through modern visual and satellite technologies. Now that Osama bin Laden has been killed by a US Navy seal team in Abbotabad, Pakistan, in early May 2011, it is possible to reflect on his impact on Islamic notions of war and violence.⁸

There is probably no aspect of Bin Laden's profile that is more critical nor less understood than his use of the media, especially *al-Quds al-'Arabi* and al-Jazeera. One episode from late 2003 illustrates how intertwined the interests of the Saudi dissident and the major Arabic language media were. On December 10, 2003, the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* reported that Al-Qa'ida, headed by Osama bin Laden, "is gearing up for a big operation to coincide with Eid Al-Adha [February 2, 2004]...a new videotape of bin Laden will be circulated shortly before the holiday...it will surface in conjunction with 'a great event that will shake the region,' and it will be broadcast by Al-Jazeera television." The source explained that Al-Qa'ida had an agreement with Al-Jazeera by which it was committed to broadcast any videotape that the Sahab Institute provides about Al-Qa'ida. (p. 147) He pointed out that the institute would sever its relations with the station if it refused to broadcast a videotape, and reiterated that the station is obligated to broadcast any videotape we send to it.⁹

In the several messages included in my collection of Bin Laden's writings, his relationship to Al-Jazeera proves to be almost as important as his decision to wage jihad. Prior to December 1998, when the United States and Britain launched an attack on Iraq, called Operation Desert Fox, Al-Jazeera had been a local satellite news service. Founded in February 1996 by the emir of Qatar, its goal was to promote freedom of information among Arabic-speaking citizens of the Gulf and its neighbors. In 1998, the Baghdad office got the big break when they filmed the missiles launched against Iraq from British and American airplanes. Bin Laden gave an interview that was broadcast on Al-Jazeera in December,¹⁰ and he became an instant international attraction. So significant was the impact of this interview that, nine days after September 11, 2001, it was rerun by Al-Jazeera. Accompanying the ninety-minute video were pictures of Bin Laden firing a gun. The message, in images as well as in words, was that the war is religious, the war is between aggressive crusaders and defensive believers, and Muslims have a stark choice, either to side with the infidel oppressors or to support the beleaguered but pure and resolute Muslim defenders.

The same message was articulated in all of Bin Laden's subsequent epistles that were broadcast via Al-Jazeera. Each was tailored to the audience he addressed. Jason Burke observed that "bin Laden seemed to show an incredible instinctive grasp of modern marketing techniques" (Burke: 175). Flagg Miller goes further, explaining why the genre of epistles may be one of the best marketing techniques for his's message:

Epistles became a defining medium of eloquence in the 9th-century Abbasid court of Baghdad. In epistles colorful pleasantries, competitive verbal jousts, and political wrangling are all of a piece. Bin Laden deploys the genre with his own rhetorical flourishes. As pious public lecturer, militant *jihadist*, and now enfranchised literate scribe, Bin Laden excoriates ruling Saudi leaders for corruption, fiscal mismanagement, human rights abuses, and especially for their alliance with 'American Crusader forces' since the Gulf War of 1990. Such accusations gain religious significance for Bin Laden as apostasy (*shirk*) insofar as Saudi leaders are represented as recurring to man-made state law instead of to true Islamic law (*shari'a*), the latter of which remains confidently underspecified. Overall, the pious tenor of Bin Laden's epistle is consistently maintained as an act of remembrance (*dhikr*), so central to Islam's message that mankind is essentially forgetful, and is thus in need of constant reminding. (Miller)¹¹

The epistles functioned as sermons, delivered from on high and projected globally in ways that enhanced Bin Laden's charismatic stature.

His epistles to the Iraqis were elaborated with scriptural and historical citations and also with poetic verses, some from his own pen. His epistle to the Afghans flowed with

cascades of Qur'anic citations as he reminded them of his struggle on their behalf against the Soviets. His letter to the Americans and Europeans, (p. 148) by contrast, contained an unadorned accusation: They were blindly following leaders who were dooming them to an endless war of attrition. In every instance, he was an antiimperial polemicist on behalf of global jihad, shaping the message to reach the audience.

In the sermon he delivered in 2003 on the holiest day in the Islamic calendar, Id al-Adha, he combines elements from all his letters and declarations to address Muslims around the world. He talks to individuals directly, commending each one's worthiness to participate in global jihad and accusing their leaders of criminal corruption. Like the first encounters that the seventh-century Arabs had with unbelieving Persians, the current jihad pits absolute good against absolute evil. Psychologically speaking, it is as though Bin Laden is charged with a paranoid certainty about the end time, the apocalyptic moment in which all are living but only he and the guided warriors from Al-Qa'ida understood fully. Numerous Qur'anic citations and prophetic traditions are woven into his fervent appeal to believers to take up arms against the United States, Britain, Israel, and their collaborators in the Arab world. Like the Prophet Muhammad's followers, Bin Laden's Muslim armies will prevail. They have a recent history of victories over the superpowers. Who was it that defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the Russians in Chechnya if not the Afghan-Arab mujahidin? Was it not they who conquered the Americans in Lebanon, Somalia, Aden, Riyadh, Khobar, East Africa, at home, and, most recently, in Afghanistan? The myth of American democracy and freedom has been shattered, thanks be to God! And then, remarkably, he concludes with his own poem in which he vows to fight until he becomes:

a martyr,
dwelling in a high mountain pass
among a band of knights who,
united in devotion to God,
descend to face armies.

Unfortunately, Due to the dizzying shifts of technology in the Information Age, one loses all sense of just how dramatic Bin Laden's moves as a risk taker were. As one analyst explains:

Bin Laden's bald comparisons between hallowed personages of early Islamic history and contemporary actors and events subject him to decided risks. Not only does he hazard alienating Muslim listeners by compromising the unique role that

the Prophet played in Islam; he also risks becoming a poor historian, one whose antiquarian zeal fails to re-connect narrated events with present concerns. It is precisely here that Bin Laden adopts an entirely new tactic, one that moves him from his role as pious public lecturer to the roles of tribesman, poet, and ultimately cosmic warrior. In the midst of this set of transformations, the temporal distinctions of 'then' and 'now' become entirely blurred, and listeners are invited, through the most sonorous and impassioned portions of the cassette, to mobilize as eternal holy combatants." (Miller)

The oracle who speaks has recast himself as a cosmic warrior, auguring both the end time and its "certain" outcome.

(p. 149) While Bin Laden not only mastered modern media and was also its primary beneficiary, no one should assume that Bin Laden benefited from his use of the media, in general, and Al-Jazeera, in particular, without some cost to his project. The channel of influence and of risk taking runs two ways. Bin Laden advocated the maximal response to imperialism. He constantly called on sacrifice, especially of youths through martyrdom for a greater cause, yet he gave no hint of a future frame beyond the shibboleth "Islamic state" or "rule of God on earth." The emptiness of his political vision was made clear in the Taysir Alluni interview in October 2001 (MW # 11), when he declared that jihad will continue until "we meet God and get His blessing!" Yet earlier, in the Ladenese epistle of August 1996 (MW # 3), he had seemed to call for a deferral of apocalyptic rewards, insisting on the value of oil revenues for a near term Islamic state: "I would like here to alert my brothers, the Mujahidin, the sons of the nation, to protect this (oil) wealth and not to include it in the battle as it is a great Islamic wealth and a large economical power essential for the soon to be established Islamic state, by the grace and permission of God."

Still later, in his second letter to the Iraqi people (February 11, 2003; MW #18), he called again for establishing the rule of God on Earth but only through incessant warfare against multiple enemies, with no agenda for structure or network that succeeds the current world system.

While there are many ways to connect Bin Laden to the early generation of Islam, perhaps the crucial move is to see how he contrasted the perfection of early Islam with the desecration of the twenty-first century. In the same way that former President George W. Bush saw freedom and democracy as standards of global virtue, projecting both holistic soundness and indivisible oneness for "the axis of good," so Bin Laden saw sacrifice and war as the dual emblems of early Islam that persist until today as the axis of hope for all committed Muslims who recognize the seriousness of the moment. Yet his was a hope that could never be realized under the current world order because all its

denizens were living in an end time of total crisis. There was no rush to restore the caliphate nor to remake the Ottoman Empire in the pre–World War I image of a pan-Islamic Muslim polity. Instead, the ultimate criterion was “meeting God and getting his blessing.” That was a deferred hope, one that could not be achieved in this world during the lifetime of Muslim martyrs but was deferred for all humankind to experience in the terrible reckoning that God Almighty has prepared.¹²

The Muslim Legacy Post-Osama Bin Laden

The great unaccounted for in the scenario of Osama Bin Laden are those Muslims who still consider themselves custodians of the faith and followers of the Prophet yet do not see perpetual warfare in the name of jihad as the only measure of Islamic loyalty. Instead of opposing perfections, they try to see the will of God in this age through different instruments, affirming the current world order, at once trying to maximize its benefits while curbing its excesses. They need more than scriptural (p. 150) dictates, poetic balm, or binary shibboleths to chart their everyday life, whether as individuals or as collective members of local communities, nation-states, and the world at large. For them, Bin Laden’s legacy, especially in the aftermath of his death and with seeds of hope sprouting from the Arab Spring (January–June 2011), is one of deviance and damage rather than persistence and profit in the cause of Islam. The world is not coming to an end, and other means have to be found to advance Islamic principles and the well-being of the Muslim community (ummah).

For pragmatists, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, the real work is to prepare for an eventuality beyond the diatribes of apocalyptic doomsayers. It is not easy but it is the only way forward, and if God wills, it may yet augur the next chapter in Islam beyond violence, mirroring the first phase of the life of the Prophet Muhammad as also the consistent intent of the full panoply of divine directives mandated in the Holy Qur’an and pursued through the major epochs of Muslim history.

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Notes:

(1.) Unless otherwise noted, all the Qur'anic verses quoted here and subsequently derive from or are adapted from Thomas Cleary, *The Qur'an—A New Translation* (Starlatch, 2004).

(2.) Suleiman Mourad in an e-mail dated September 23, 2003. Elsewhere in an April 15, 2011, interview (<http://www.smith.edu/insight/stories/jihad.php>, Professor Mourad, who is co-authoring a book titled *The Radicalization of Sunni Jihad Ideology in the Crusader Period* (to be published by Ashgate Press), observed that: "Jihad is not what the Prophet initiated but what a scholar in 12th-century Damascus (Ibn Asakir) was paid by his political patron to promote and disseminate."

(3.) In the analysis that follows, I have benefited from the seminal work of Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), volume 3: *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times*, as also the more recent, by Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), but neither Dale nor Hodgson is responsible for my inferences about the interconnection between Islam and violence during the long span of these premodern Muslim empires.

(4.) For the elaboration of this concept among Ottoman ruling elites, see Cornell Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and 'Ibn Khaldunism'" in Bruce B. Lawrence, ed. *Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Ideology* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1984): 48-51

(5.) The issue of Muslim responses to European colonial presence in Afro-Eurasia has been explored in Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam beyond Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), and in what follows, I have relied on the analysis provided in chapter 2 "Islamic Revivalism: Anti-Colonial Revolt," especially pp. 41-52.

(6.) On the debate between Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism as analytical categories, see Richard C. Martin and Abbas Barzegar, eds., *Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam* (Palo Alto CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). My essay, "Islam at Risk: The Discourse on Islam and Violence" (93-98), challenges assumptions behind the more recent terms, *post-Islamism* and *neofundamentalism*, especially as deployed by Olivier Roy (98).

(7.) Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Boston: Twayne, 1990): 35. I am indebted to Choueiri for his clear exposition of Islamic fundamentalism, but I demur from his use of “radicalism” to refer to the last or most recent phase of Islamic protest. The term *radical*, unlike *revivalism* and *reformism*, has no positive referent. It presupposes some other norm, and in my view, that norm is a strict religious code or sense of inalterable, all-encompassing fundamentals, thus my use of *fundamentalism* in preference to *radicalism* to denote the last and most significant phase of Islamic protest.

(8.) Much of the material that follows comes from the final section of my article “Osama bin Laden—The Man and the Myth,” forthcoming in Charles B. Strozier, ed. *The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays*, 2nd edition (New York: Springer, forthcoming).

(9.) See the (too) brief reference to Al-Sahab in Hugh Miles, *Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World* (London: Abacus, 2005): 180. Other sources are equally dismissive or neglectful of this crucial conduit to the Osama bin Laden media strategy.

(10.) Osama Bin Laden, “A Muslim Bomb” in Bruce Lawrence ed. *Messages to the World—The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London and New York: Verso 2005): 65–94.

(11.) W. Flagg Miller, “On ‘The Summit of the Hindu Kush’: Osama Bin Laden’s 1996 Declaration of War Reconsidered,” unpublished talk delivered at the University of Michigan in March 2005, cited here by permission of the author.

(12.) The notion that apocalypse as end of the world appeals to other contemporary Muslim audiences is also reflected and documented in Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). His monograph also provides apt and striking parallels to Christian apocalyptic thoughts, movements and leaders.

Bruce B. Lawrence

Bruce B. Lawrence is Marcus Family Professor of the Humanities Emeritus, Professor of Islamic Studies, and Inaugural Director of the Duke Islamic Studies Center. He has authored or co-authored, edited or co-edited, translated or co-translated eighteen books, including *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (2005) and *The Qur’an: A Biography* (2007).