

# Bombers for Allah's Sake

*It seems that Jihad will be with us  
for a long time to come*

by Alfred Sherman

Though suicide bombing was not the invention of militant Muslim fundamentalists, it has become their hallmark; so the wider world has to work out causes and responses. It is not simply a matter of security and counter-terrorism, however vital they may be, but a function of the total interaction between Islam and the rest of the world, which inevitably conflates with conflicts inside the Muslim world, between states, dynasties, sects and movements. Our overall aim in the West has long been peaceful coexistence with Islam and genuine mutual understanding, and must continue to be so. Powerful forces in Islam do not share this aim at the present time. But since *jihad* is increasingly directed at least as much against fellow-Muslims as against us, there is room for alliances and

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understandings. We must begin by clearing our minds of sets of fables: first, of Marxist dogma which ascribes Muslim terrorism to economic discontents and injustices; secondly of wishful-thinking mantras, e.g., that Islam is a religion of peace. For those who believe in God and an afterlife, as Muslims do, economics, however important, always take second place at best. Those who would convince themselves that Islam is a religion of peace are invited to read the Koran, available in English in paperback, study the last twelve centuries of history, and even consider that Muslim political theology divides the world into *darulislam* and *darulharb*: the realm of Islam and the realm of war.

For years, *jihad* has been financed and directed principally by the fabulously wealthy Saudi ruling classes as part of a holy war against Christians, Hindus, Jews and moderate Muslims. Oil revenues, which should have been directed to economic development to safeguard the States' economic future, have been poured into *jihad*, arms and luxuries. Now that the *jihad* is being turned against its supporters, notably its financiers and well-wishers among the Saudi

rulers, new fronts are being opened.

The current *jihad* is a religious war. For parallels in European history, we must go back several centuries, when religious differences were the main focus of policy, and savage wars were fought over them. For centuries the Christian world was in a state of permanent warfare with Muslim kingdoms, but conflict inside Christendom was often much bloodier. Think of the "Great Schism" between Rome and Constantinople, which led the Western churches to view with equanimity or even satisfaction the fall of the Eastern Empire to the Ottoman Caliphate; think of the crusades and the inquisition! The Reformation and Counter-Reformation were decided in blood, not theology; during the Thirty Years War between Catholic and Protestant magnates in the Holy Roman Empire and their neighbors; over a third of the inhabitants perished. The Peace of Westphalia which brought the war to an end decreed that all subjects must adopt their ruler's religion, *cujus regio eius religio*. In France, Protestants,

the most enterprising citizens, who were lucky to escape with their lives, emigrated *en masse*. The Spanish civil war, the holocaust and the mass murder of Orthodox Serbs by the clerico-fascist Croat regime installed by Hitler are reminders of the lethal quality of religious warfare inside Christendom.

History is replicating itself in the Muslim world. The dominant outlook there among all classes is one of unbridled religiosity reminiscent of the European Middle Ages: all things are seen through the prism of religion, as they once were here. For how long this will persist is a matter for speculation, but in the meantime your Muslim is *homo religious*. Until a few decades ago, the Muslim world was on the defensive, most of it under occupation by Christian powers, as the Muslims saw them, though few thought of themselves as such. Only after the Second World War did dozens of independent Muslim states spring up. Some see it as a sign that Islam's forward march of previous centuries, which signified Allah's approval, must be recommenced. Muslim theology holds that all men are born Muslims and that if they are brought up under a different faith this is in defiance of Allah's will. The Koran makes it clear that force may be used against infidels – they may be killed or enslaved, and never accepted as full citizens.

In its early centuries Islam outdid the Christian world in war and peace, scholarship, architecture and economic activity. Muslim

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armies fueled by the certainty that *jihad* would guarantee them pleasures for eternity spread Islam by the sword at the expense of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Taoism; Islam was also spread by missionaries in Africa and Asia. They saw Islam's expansion as confirmation of Allah's will. When the tide turned, and fanatical rejection of science had undermined their military competence, reasons were sought. The dominant reaction has been that Allah had been punishing them for insufficient piety. Vast subsoil reserves of oil, which gave huge incomes to governments without any labor on their part, were taken as a sign of Allah's bounty to the faithful and as provision for *jihad*. The Saudi royal regime, in pawn to Wahabism, one of the most obscurantist and aggressive versions of Islam, owed much of its wealth and power to early support by the British and Americans. It thereby enjoyed immunity from counterattack.

But political independence has fueled resentments. Oil wealth has

not made Muslim societies prosperous. Their technological and military dependence on the West has grown; the West is thereby a handy scapegoat, as the Jews were in Europe. *Jihad* is one such reaction, fortified by tradition. Suicide bombing, which merges modern technology with the cult of martyrdom, has found fertile ground. By its use, relatively modest means could wreak massive havoc on the mighty. It gives great

psychological and religious satisfaction, even though it has so far been incapable of creating or transforming polities, and is unlikely to do so. Bombing for Allah's sake could not have spread without widespread approval or at least tolerance by public opinion, primarily by the mosque. Muslim feeling identified with the “witnesses,” i.e., martyrs. From Morocco to the Philippines, central Asia to Karachi, New York to Moscow, the suicide bombing formula has been replicated. In the short term, there seems no way to appease the *jihadists*.

At present there is no shortage of Muslim “witnesses” to blow themselves up. The mood in many Muslim countries of combined desperation, enthusiasm, hatred of infidels and attractiveness of the supreme sacrifice in the full glare of public approval are strong enough to ensure a supply of would-be martyrs. The causes of resentment will not go away. Even if you believe that the invasion of Iraq was counterproductive, as I do, and that some of Sharon's American-

backed policies are a dead end – though what he can and should do is unclear – they are not the root of the plague of bombing. Al-Qaida was set up while Israel-Arab peace appeared to be within reach. Iraqi sanctions were on the back burner, and the war against Russia in Afghanistan had been won. It was precisely the *jihad's* early victories in Afghanistan – a major historic turning point sparked by miscalculations of the moribund Soviet regime – which sparked off its extension to the Arabian Peninsula, including the despised Saudi kingdom, and thence to the wider world. Their main and unappeasable complaint against the USA is not anything it does, but that it exists at all in its present mode; the same holds good for Israel and other *jihad* targets.

While the early Saudi role in worldwide *jihadism* was crucial, it is not unique. North Africa has vast reservoirs of fanaticism which have existed for generations. The certainty that the bloody revolt against the French in North Africa, which by no means enjoyed undivided support among the Muslim population – as I myself had occasion to ascertain – would usher in an age of piety and justice similar to that which they believed prevailed in the first decades of Islam was rudely disappointed. Civil unrest leading to civil war, mass murder by the rebels to terrorize the public and reprisals by the regime, and mass emigration to Western Europe, which provides cover for terrorists, has become the norm.

The “International Brigades” of *mujahidin* who came to defend Afghanistan against Soviet

aggression, when their task was completed sought fresh fields to conquer. With American encouragement, they flooded into Bosnia to support the installation of a fundamentalist Muslim regime which rejects all links with fellow Slavs, where they made up for the lack of enthusiasm among most Bosnian Muslims, who would have preferred continued coexistence with Serbs. Among those who visited Bosnia to organize the *mujahidin* was Osama Bin Laden. The “Afghanis” established links with Egypt, which has a tradition of violent radical fundamentalism going back to the 1920s. A couple of years ago, *Jihadis* organized the murder of a couple of thousand Christian villagers there. *Jihadis* found their way to Iraq after the American conquest, where they have become *francs tireurs*, to Yemen, Indonesia and the southern Philippines. Though the present government of Pakistan is lukewarm toward Islamic terrorism, the terrorists enjoy considerable support in the tribal areas of the Northwest frontier and on the part of the Pakistani military intelligence which created the Taliban in the first place, facilitated terrorism in Kashmir, and helped train and finance local and foreign *jihadists*.

Nevertheless, *jihad* appears to be generating its own antibodies. Like all revolutionary movements, it has its own momentum, generates further extremism and, per Danton, may devour its own children. Extremism past a certain point wins few new friends but widens the circle of its enemies. While the Saudi rulers financed world *jihad*, their dependence on Western arms

and training and strategic support for self-defense against Iraq and other threats from inside Islam offended the sensitivities of the more extreme radicals. Hence it created “holier than thou” enemies within its own camp.

The Saudi kingdom also suffers serious economic and social problems generated by the parasitic nature of the regime and its economy which lives off unearned oil revenues, depends on foreign experts and workers, and does not create employment opportunities for its growing population consonant with its wealth, which in any case is being squeezed as more Russian, Caspian and Caucasian oil comes on stream. Under Saudi conditions, where all political criticism is treated as tantamount to treason, some discontents have expressed themselves in the form of bombing and killing, which offers immediate emotional satisfaction. It is a staple of all societies that the primary concern of any regime must be its own survival. The Saudi regime now sees no alternative to draconian measures, which are in any case second nature, against internal *jihad*. So the war against the infidel turns to war among Muslims. Fundamentalist clerics are read the Riot Act. Changed strategies by the Saudi rulers towards *jihadism* need not necessarily show quick results; *jihadism* has resources and devotees in the pipeline at home and abroad. But in the course of time the switch from exporting *Jihad* with petrodollars to restraining it will show its effects. There are already signs of the tide turning in similar ways and for the

same basic reason, government quest for survival in Indonesia, the Yemen, Libya, and former Soviet Central Asia.

Since, as I argue earlier, there is little if any room for appeasing the bombers and their sheikhs, and it will take decades before causes of internal discontent in the Muslim world are eradicated, even partially, there are limits to scope for counteraction by the West, apart from security measures which call for international networking, and selective collaboration with Muslim governments which are turning against *jihadism* for their own survival. Common enemies always make for the best alliances. The West now has large Muslim minorities, which I have always argued was a mistake to acquire, but it would be equally mistaken to treat them heavy-handedly across the board out of panic, as the Americans treated their Japanese citizens in 1941. Security is most soundly based on justice and proportionality. We are destined to share the planet with Muslims, and must sit out this phase of the relationship.

This article is devoted to Islamic terrorism. It does not cover related aspects of the encounter between Islam and the Christian world: other forms of violence and persecution against Christians and Hindus among others, ethnic cleansing which Western governments have generally been shamefully slow to react to, and the imposition of *sharia* law on Christians and Hindus. Nor does it cover mass Muslim immigration into the Western world, which creates indigestible alien minorities, political

#### Websites Referring to Islam

Daily news and commentary – [www.JihadWatch.org](http://www.JihadWatch.org)  
 Articles, opinion and reference library  
[www.faithfreedom.org](http://www.faithfreedom.org)  
 General topics – [www.knowislam.info/](http://www.knowislam.info/)  
 ExMuslims explain their decision – [www.apostatesofislam.com/](http://www.apostatesofislam.com/)  
 Former Palestinian terrorist Walid Shoebat – [www.shoebat.com/](http://www.shoebat.com/)  
 164 Koran verses about jihad  
[www.angelfire.com/moon/yoelnatan/koranwarpassages.htm](http://www.angelfire.com/moon/yoelnatan/koranwarpassages.htm)  
 Committee to Defend Women's Rights in the Middle East  
[www.middleeastwomen.org/](http://www.middleeastwomen.org/)  
 Daniel Pipes, long-time scholar of militant Islam  
[www.danielpipes.org/](http://www.danielpipes.org/)  
 Prophet of Doom - online book includes topical quotations of the Prophet  
[www.prophetofdoom.net/](http://www.prophetofdoom.net/)  
 Status of non-Muslim minorities under Islamic rule  
[www.dhimmitude.org/](http://www.dhimmitude.org/)  
 Writings of Bat Ye'or on oppression by Islam  
[www.dhimmi.org/](http://www.dhimmi.org/)  
 Translations from Middle East media  
[www.memri.org/](http://www.memri.org/)  
 Council for American Islamic Relations (CAIR)  
[www.cair-net.org/](http://www.cair-net.org/)  
 Anti-CAIR works to "Expose CAIR's activities on behalf of Islamist terror in the U.S."  
[www.anti-cair-net.org/](http://www.anti-cair-net.org/)  
 Arab News - daily from Saudi Arabia  
[www.arabnews.com/](http://www.arabnews.com/)  
 Pro-Jihad; includes Fatwa Editing Desk  
<http://islamonline.net/english/index.shtml>

pressures, and cover for *jihadists*. These issues need frank and rational discussion on their merits. Among other things, we must go beyond counter-terrorism and explore the meaning of the Judeo-Christian heritage for the twenty-first century. In the beginning was the word. •