



## The "Afghan Alumni" and the Clash between Civilizations

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In recent years, some scholars have spoken of a clash of civilizations between Islam and modern secular (or Judeo-Christian) democratic values and culture, or between Islamic civilization and the West.<sup>1</sup> This trend gains surprising support from Osama bin-Laden, one of the most radical leaders of fundamentalistic Islam.

Osama bin-Laden set himself up as the leader of the "historical, cultural, religious struggle between Islam and Jewish-Crusader pact" which, he claimed, aimed at subjugating Islam and conquering the Muslim holy places.<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 1993, Professor Samuel P. Huntington, a lecturer in international relations at Harvard University, published an article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations,"<sup>3</sup> which caused a stir within the international academic community. Three years later, Professor Huntington published a book of the same name,<sup>4</sup> in which he argues that the root of global conflict at the turn of the century is neither ideological nor economic, but primarily cultural.

Huntington divides the development of conflict in the modern world into four periods:<sup>5</sup>

1. **Conflicts between monarchs:** These conflicts were based on rival economic and territorial interests.
2. **Conflicts between nations:** Since the French revolution and the rise of nationalism, the principal actors in conflicts are no longer monarchs, but nations. As Huntington puts it: “The wars of kings are over, the wars of people had begun.”<sup>6</sup> This stage lasted until the end of the First World War.
3. **Conflicts between ideologies:** Since the rise of communism in Russia, conflicts between nations have been replaced by conflicts between competing ideologies — first between communism, fascism, and democratic liberalism, and later between communism and democratic liberalism (the “Cold War” or “East against West”).
4. **Conflicts between civilizations:** Since the end of the “Cold War,” the clash between civilizations has become the primary cause of conflict.

Huntington argues that until the end of the “Cold War,” Western culture dominated the modern world and shaped most of its significant conflicts, which he calls “Western civil wars.”<sup>7</sup> At the end of the “Cold War” era, Huntington continues, Western culture lost its primacy, and the center of gravity in international politics shifted toward non-Western cultures. Conflicts between Western and non-Western cultures, and conflicts within the non-Western cultures themselves began to replace the “Western civil wars.” From this point on, nations and states affiliated with non-Western civilizations ceased being the victims of Western colonialism, but became active, or even dominant, partners in the shaping of history.

During the “Cold War” period, nations were classified according to their political, economic, and technological advancement (developed and developing nations, First, Second, Third-World Nations, etc.). Huntington claims that this nomenclature is outdated and that today nations should be classified in terms of culture or civilization.

Civilization is defined by objective factors such as language, history, religion, customs, and institutions, and subjective factors such as the way people define themselves or their reference group. Therefore, civilizations may be defined as the broadest cultural entities with which people identify, or: “The highest cultural grouping of people and broadest level of cultural identity people have, short of that which distinguishes humans from others.”<sup>8</sup>

Huntington goes on to list eight major civilizations in the modern world: Western, Slavic, Sino-Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Latin American, Islamic, and African.<sup>9</sup> Of these, Huntington singles out Islamic civilization as the most militant, and emphasizes the inherent conflict between it and Western and other civilizations. He outlines the historical evolution of this conflict, starting with the Crusades, and continuing through the Ottoman Empire, Western colonialism, and the liberation wars of the Muslim states.

A glance at the map of international conflicts corroborates Huntington’s premise: From West Africa to the Pacific Islands, Islam is engaged in violent conflicts with neighboring civilizations (known as “fault-line wars”). Huntington adduces the following conflicts in support of his theory.

- The Afghan War
- The Gulf War
- The conflict between Serbs and Albanians<sup>10</sup>
- The confrontation between Turkey and Greece
- Ethnic and religious confrontation in the former USSR<sup>11</sup>
- The war between Azerbaijan and Armenia

A more up-to-date list (up to 2000) lends further support to Huntington’s contention.

- The civil war between Christians and Muslims in the Sudan
- The war between Christian Ethiopia and Muslim Eritrea
- The war in Kosovo between the Christian Serbs and Muslim Albanians

- The war in Chechnya and Daghestan, and insurrection against the pro-Russian regimes in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan
- The ongoing conflict with Iraq
- The war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir
- Subversion by Uighur Muslim nationalists in Western China
- The struggle between the Muslims and the Christian regime in the Philippines for control of Mindanao (Moro)
- The war between Indonesian Muslims and Christians in East Timor
- The Israeli-Arab conflict — a significant element in the conflict between Islamic and Western cultures, which has over the past decade adopted the guise of a Jewish-Muslim conflict

Although the political reality, as described above, reinforces Huntington's basic contention, a critique of some of his claims is in order. Our main criticism is that Huntington depicts all Muslim states as a single cultural bloc in conflict with Western and other civilizations. A more careful study of the regimes in Muslim states shows that the majority are secular regimes, or moderate and pragmatic Muslim regimes which, far from being in conflict with Western culture, have jumped onto the "modernization bandwagon" and adopted Western technologies, values, and ways of life. As well as modeling themselves on a Western lifestyle, many even rely on military, political, and economic aid from the West for their survival. Huntington has failed to differentiate between this dominant stream, and the fundamentalist Islamic stream, which, despite its militant anti-Western stance, still represents only a minority within the Muslim world.

John L. Esposito, criticized Huntington's concept: "Huntington's position emphasizes religious and cultural differences with confrontation. Areas of cooperation and the fact that most countries are primarily, although not solely, driven by national and regional interests are overlooked in his analysis."<sup>12</sup>

The two words "Islam" and "fundamentalism," which have become intimately linked in English usage in recent years, are "Western" terms and definitions dealing with a phenomenon taken from a different culture and environment.

Therefore, the nature of fundamentalist Islam and even the use of the term are hotly debated.<sup>13</sup>

The Muslim world today is torn by a deep internal conflict over the essence and purpose of Islamic society. The outcome of this internal conflict has dictated, and continues to dictate, the nature of the ties between Muslim civilization and Western and other civilizations.

The radical Islamic elements operate in all Muslim states at different levels of intensity. Their objective is threefold: to bring about the rule of Islamic law in Muslim countries, to establish new Islamic states, and to obtain independence for Muslim minorities in countries such as China, the Philippines, Serbia, and India, among others.

In other words, the radical Islamic struggle against foreign cultures may embrace one or several of the following four goals:

1. The overthrow of secular regimes in Muslim states and their replacement by Islamic theocratic regimes
2. Independence for Muslim minorities, and the establishment of independent Islamic states
3. The suppression of ethnic/cultural minorities seeking autonomy or independence in Muslim states
4. The neutralization of the influence of foreign — particularly Western — civilizations situated on the fault lines with Islamic culture.

The following three events have had a significant impact on the development of Islamic fundamentalism:

1. The Islamic revolution in Iran — This event turned Iran into a focus of radical *Shi'ite* Islam, exported the revolution to the Muslim world, and led to radical Islam's condemnation of the hegemony of the superpowers under the slogan: "Neither East nor West."

2. The victory of the Islamic *mujahideen* in Afghanistan — The defeat of the Soviet Union in battle was perceived by Islamic circles not only as a military victory, but also as a cultural one.<sup>14</sup> It created a broad cadre of seasoned, militant volunteers eager to disseminate fundamentalist Islamic ideas throughout the Muslim world.
3. The disintegration of the USSR — The collapse of communism left a political and ideological vacuum into which Islamic circles were only too eager to step.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire led to the creation of new states with Muslim populations, thereby furnishing a new arena of conflict for fundamentalist Islamic groups. Radical Islamic circles perceived the new geopolitical reality of the post-Cold War era, in which Islam spearheaded the ideological conflict with the West, as a mark of their success.

In Europe, meanwhile, for the first time in decades, the issue of Muslim identity arose among the populations of the Balkans (Bosnia, Kosovo, and Albania). For the first time, too, the religious and ethnic conflicts in this region presented radical Islam with an opportunity for gaining an ideological foothold in these areas.

In this chapter we shall be focusing on a recent phenomenon which clearly exemplifies Huntington's theory of the "clash of civilizations" — that of the "Afghan *mujahideen* — the spearhead of radical Islam's struggle against heretical cultures. Despite their name, the "Afghan terrorists" are not affiliated with a specific movement or state, but see themselves as the representatives of Islam's relentless struggle against secular Muslim regimes and heretical cultures.

#### THE "AFGHAN ALUMNI"

Throughout the 1980s, Muslim volunteers from Muslim and Arab countries streamed into Afghanistan to help the Afghan *mujahideen* in their struggle against the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul and the Soviet occupying forces. Although no exact figures are available, it would seem that several thousand answered the call of the Afghan *jihad*, for religious, personal, or mercenary reasons.<sup>15</sup> During their stay in Afghanistan, the volunteers underwent military training and acquired extensive combat experience in guerrilla warfare.

The *mujahideen* and the Afghan volunteers were usually trained in camps in Pakistan, particularly in the city of Peshawar (near the Afghan border), which soon became the hub of *mujahideen* activity.<sup>16</sup> Instruction was given by Pakistanis, experts from Arab countries, and for a while also by Western — particularly official American — specialists.<sup>17</sup> The volunteers from Arab countries also trained in camps in the Sudan, Yemen, and Iran.

Although there are no records of the breakdown of volunteers by their affiliation to any of the Afghan rebel groups, many of the volunteers (some say as many as 3,500) would seem to have joined "Hizb Islam," Hekmatyar's extremist organization (where some of the volunteers continue to serve to this day, participating in its struggle against the current Islamic regime in Kabul).<sup>18</sup> After the collapse of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul in May 1992, most of the volunteers — or "Afghan Alumni" — began returning home.

Despite the Pakistani government's declaration of January 1993<sup>19</sup> pledging to shut down the offices of the Afghan movements and expel illegal residents, in practice it has failed to keep its promise. To this day, many *mujahideen* continue to live in the camps of Peshawar and other places in Pakistan.

The ranks of the Afghan Alumni were swollen by the hundreds of Islamic terrorists who came to Afghanistan after the war to train in guerrilla and terrorist warfare, under the sponsorship of the various *mujahideen* factions. One of the outstanding leaders of these Afghan Alumni is Ahmad Shauqi al-Islambuli, the brother of President Sadat's assassin. Al-Islambuli and other radical leaders do not see themselves as terrorists, but rather as the proponents of a *jihad* designed to overthrow the "corrupt" regimes of Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and other Arab or Muslim countries.<sup>20</sup>

The Afghan Alumni's heroic participation in the *jihad*, their extensive combat experience, and their victory over the Soviet superpower, have today turned them into the vanguard of the Islamic fundamentalist and radical terrorist organizations.

Today, the Afghan Alumni operate in four capacities:

1. As leaders of the radical Islamic organizations in their countries of origin (Egypt, the Maghreb countries, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.)

2. As founders of new terrorist organizations, such as Osama bin-Laden's *al-Qa'idah* ("The Vanguard")
3. As the architects of "independent" terrorist cells which, while lacking a specific organizational affiliation, cooperate with other institutionalized terrorist organizations
4. As participants in the struggles of Islamic populations in places such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Tajikistan, and Kashmir<sup>21</sup>

Many of the countries which welcomed the volunteers' departure for Afghanistan, violently opposed their return, fearing that these battle-hardened, Muslim firebrands would join the ranks of the radical Islamic opposition in their countries of origin. Accordingly, the authorities of Egypt, Jordan, and most countries of the Maghreb tried to prevent the volunteers from returning, with varying degrees of success.

Sudan, and even Yemen, are today the Afghans' main sponsors, sheltering them before they infiltrate back into their countries of origin to join the ranks of the fundamentalist terrorist organizations there.<sup>22</sup> Iran, despite religious and ideological differences with the *Taliban* regime, shelters leaders of organizations affiliated with the Afghan Alumni. It supports several groups associated with the Afghan Alumni in Lebanon, Egypt, and Algiers and even sanctions the passage of activists and weapons through Iran to the *mujahideen* fighting in Chechnya.

Below is a breakdown of Afghan Alumni by country of origin.

### ALGERIA

During the 1980s, many volunteers — an estimated several hundred to three thousand — left Algeria to fight alongside the Afghan *mujahideen*.<sup>23</sup> The Algerian *mujahideen* in Afghanistan (and Pakistan) were, and still are, divided between the supporters of the radical Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the supporters of Mahfoud Nahnah's more moderate Algerian "*Hamas*" movement. In the late 1980s, particularly after the *mujahideen's* victory in Afghanistan, the battle-hardened volunteers, imbued with an Islamic revolutionary fervor, began returning home, where they joined radical Islamic

organizations such as the "Armed Islamic Movement" (GIA) and the "*Al-Takfir-wal-Hijrah*" organization.<sup>24</sup>

Ali Belhaj, a leader of the Islamic Front, served as the spiritual father of most of the radical opposition organizations in Algeria. Some believe it was he who paved the way for the Afghan groups' absorption into the Islamic Front, with the aim of institutionalizing a focus of militant radical power as a counterweight to the political compromise advocated by some of the movement's leaders.<sup>25</sup>

The Afghans' first attack took place in November 1991 in the town of Gumhar on the Algerian-Tunisian border, when a group of fighters attacked a police station, causing many deaths and injuries.<sup>26</sup> From this point on, the struggle between the Algerian regime and the Islamic opposition intensified, with growing reports of involvement by the "Afghans" in terrorist operations throughout the country.

The terrorist activities of the Islamic organizations in Algeria, which began in 1991 with sporadic attacks against military and governmental personalities and institutions, have gradually escalated into a relentless civil war that has, so far, claimed at least 70,000 lives. In under a decade, the Islamic terrorists have succeeded in gaining control of many rural areas, and even some urban neighborhoods.

In 1994, the Islamic terrorists expanded their struggle by targeting foreign civilians and institutions in Algeria. Algeria currently has about 60,000 foreign workers, many of them working for the oil industry, which is the country's main source of revenue.<sup>27</sup>

From 1994 onwards, particularly in 1995–1996, the GIA began carrying out terrorist attacks abroad. All the attacks took place in France, or targeted French citizens abroad, to protest the French government's support of the Algerian regime. According to GIA spokesmen, the GIA's hostility toward France is a relic of the historical conflict between Algeria and France during the Algerian War of Independence in the early 1960s. Terrorist attacks by the GIA abroad included the hijacking of an Air France plane in December 1994, and two waves of attacks in France (July–Oct. 1995 and December 1996) in which some 20 people were killed, and dozens were injured.

The GIA, like other fundamentalist organizations in Arab countries, advocates the establishment of an Islamic regime ruled by Islamic law. Interestingly, although it sees the United States,

Israel, and Judaism as the enemies of Islam, none of its terrorist attacks have been specifically directed against American or Israeli targets. However, as part of its overall anti-French strategy, three of its attacks were directed against Jewish targets in France. The first (December 24, 1994) was an abortive car bomb attack against a Lyon synagogue, the second was a car bomb attack against a Jewish school in Villeurbanne near Lyon (September 1995), and the third was a letter bomb sent to the editor of a Jewish newspaper (December 1996).

The GIA terrorist attacks in France led to the exposure of an extensive GIA infrastructure in various European countries, particularly in France, Belgium, the UK, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Spain. Logistic, financial, and operational ties were found to exist between the members of the small terrorist cells operating in these countries. The main objective of this European network was to smuggle funds and weapons to their comrades in Algeria.<sup>28</sup>

The European-wide crackdown against terrorists, sponsored by France, dealt a heavy blow to the infrastructure of the Algerian terrorist network, and effectively led to the cessation of terrorist attacks by GIA operatives abroad.

Unlike Palestinian and *Shi'ite* terrorist organizations, the GIA has so far refrained from carrying out "extortionist" terrorist operations in attempts to free dozens of its members languishing in various European jails. This may be due to the GIA's wish to focus on the struggle at home, and to avoid alienating European public opinion, which could harm its potential for exploiting Europe as a vital logistic base for its activities in Algeria.

Note that in 1998, as well, more GIA-affiliated terrorist cells were uncovered in Europe. The involvement of first- and second-generation immigrants from the Maghreb countries in attacks in France, and in Algerian terrorist cells in various countries in Europe, shows that the organization drew upon a large pool of potential volunteers from the poorer strata of the immigrant population who felt discriminated against and alienated in their countries of adoption. These populations served as a source of recruitment for new volunteers, some of whom were sent to Afghanistan for terrorist training in the early 1990s and others of whom volunteered to fight in Bosnia.

## TUNISIA

Tunisian intelligence agents claim that in May 1992, Islamic extremists who had trained in Afghanistan tried to assassinate the president of Tunisia, Ben Ali, by attempting to down his plane with a portable missile. The attempt failed and the assassins were arrested. Today, the Tunisian security services are successful in containing extremist Islamic activity in Tunisia. Extremist Islamic organizations have been banned and most of their leaders have been arrested or have fled abroad, including Rashid Ghannushi, head of the "*Al-Nahdha*" ["Revival"] movement, who has been granted political asylum in London.

Nevertheless, the violent struggle between the Algerian regime and the Islamic opposition in neighboring Algeria, and the possible rise to power of an extremist Islamic movement there, will undoubtedly have far-reaching repercussions on developments in Tunisia.<sup>29</sup>

## YEMEN

Yemen, today, is an important center of "Afghan" terrorist activity, due to the regime's "tolerant" attitude toward such activity. Yemen also serves as a meeting and transit point for Afghan Alumni throughout the world.

In December 1998, the Yemenite authorities arrested members of an extremist Islamic group who were planning to carry out attacks against British and American targets in Aden.<sup>30</sup> The group, headed by the London-based Muslim cleric Abu Hamza, who is identified with the radical "Supporters of *Shari'ah*" movement, included eight Britons and two Algerians. Members of the group reached Yemen using forged French passports, and were trained and equipped by a local fundamentalist Islamic organization called the "Islamic Army of Aden," led by Al-Mihdar, who was executed after his implication in the kidnapping of 16 European tourists.<sup>31</sup>

During Al-Mihdar's trial, it transpired that members of the "Islamic Army" kidnapped the European tourists in order to obtain the release of members who were arrested in December 1998.<sup>32</sup> The kidnapping saga was brought to an end by a rescue operation mounted by the Yemenite security forces, resulting in the death of the kidnapers and four hostages. A study of those involved in the

two terrorist attacks in the Yemen shows that some of them were trained in Afghanistan, and had ties with the Egyptian *jihad* organization supported by bin-Laden.

### EGYPT

In the 1980s, Egypt aligned itself with the Muslim and Western world by condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and by providing aid to the *mujahideen* leading the struggle against the Kabul government and Soviet forces. In a show of solidarity, Egypt allowed volunteers to leave for Afghanistan to participate in the *mujahideen*'s struggle. Most of the Egyptian volunteers who left for Afghanistan were members of the Muslim Brotherhood or of more radical organizations, such as the Egyptian "Muslim *jihad*."<sup>33</sup> At the time, the Egyptian authorities were relieved that the "revolutionary fervor" of the radical Islamic elements was being directed outside Egypt. This not only led to a decline in radical activity in Egypt but also strengthened Egypt's status within the Muslim community.

However, as we shall see, the issue of the "Afghan volunteers" became, in time, a "double-edged sword" for the Egyptian government. With the defeat of the Soviet forces and the collapse of the pro-Soviet administration in Kabul, the Egyptian volunteers began returning home, much to the dismay of the Egyptian authorities who, fearing an upsurge in radical terrorist activity in Egypt, did their best to prevent them.

Despite their efforts, some Afghan Alumni evidently found their way back into Egypt where they joined Islamic terrorist organizations. In 1992–1994, the "Afghans" were involved in a series of terrorist attacks in Egypt. Their trials, which came to be known as the "Trials of the Afghanistan Returnees," shed light on some of their activities as members of terrorist organizations working against the Egyptian regime. Below are some of the "achievements" of the Egyptian *mujahideen* in Afghanistan:

- The establishment of training camps in Afghanistan and in Peshawar in Pakistan<sup>34</sup>
- The dispatch of trained fighters back to Egypt, particularly via the Sudan<sup>35</sup>

- The preparation of false documents for these fighters<sup>36</sup>
- The cultivation of drugs and drug trafficking in order to finance the organizations' activities<sup>37</sup>
- Propaganda activity for terrorist organizations such as "*Tala' I' al-Fath*" ("Vanguards of the Conquest") and the Egyptian "*jihad*"<sup>38</sup>
- The planning and implementation of attacks in Egypt and other places (Afghan Alumni were among the perpetrators of the World Trade Center bombing in New York City)<sup>39</sup>

The Egyptian volunteers were involved in numerous terrorist activities in Egypt, among them violent activities in upper Egypt. In 1992–1993, extremist Islamic activists incriminated in these activities were arrested and tried in Egypt. During their interrogation, they admitted that they had trained in Afghanistan, and that they had planned terrorist attacks against the Egyptian security forces and Egyptian public figures,<sup>40</sup> such as the attempted assassination, in 1992–1993, of the Egyptian Information Minister, Sawfat al-Sharif, the Interior Minister,<sup>41</sup> and the Prime Minister, Atef Sidky. The assailants, who were caught, were found to be members of *Tala' I' al-Fath* — an organization that had been set up in Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup>

The Egyptian terrorist organizations chose tourism as their target, as the best way of harming the state's economy (tourism is the country's second most important source of revenue after the Suez Canal), and its image both at home and abroad. The spectacular terrorist attacks they mounted against tourists were designed to destabilize the regime on the one hand, and to attract new recruits, on the other.

Attacking tourists also served the ideological goal of destroying the representatives of the "heretical" Western culture that "contaminated" the Muslim world.

As a result of these attacks, the 1992–1993 tourist seasons in Egypt suffered serious losses amounting to several billion dollars. The most serious attack was that perpetrated by *Al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah* ["The Islamic Group"] against tourists in the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut in Luxor (November 1997), in which 58 tourists and 4 Egyptians were killed. The attack caused enormous

damage to Egypt's recovering economy, in losses estimated at half a billion dollars.

The Coptic Christian minority, perceived by the fundamentalist organizations in Egypt as a cultural, ethnic, and religious foreign implant, and envied for its economic success, has also served as a target for terrorist attacks.

In November 1993, President Rabbani of Afghanistan visited Egypt and signed an extradition agreement and a security cooperation pact, whereby Egypt offered Afghanistan economic and security aid in return for Afghanistan's commitment to banning extremist Egyptian Islamic elements in Afghanistan and extraditing prominent activists such as Muhammad Shauqi al-Islambuli.<sup>43</sup> At the end of his visit, President Rabbani expressed his appreciation of Egypt's contribution to the victory of the Afghan *mujahideen*, condemned terrorism in all its forms, and declared that he would not allow Afghanistan to be used as a springboard for attacks against the regime in Egypt.<sup>44</sup>

Rabbani's wish to improve his country's standing with Egypt was not shared by his rival, Hekmatyar, who extended his patronage to the Egyptian fundamentalists in Afghanistan, and even offered Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman political asylum (after Egypt requested his extradition from the United States for his involvement in the World Trade Center bombing). Since Rabbani's regime had no control over Hekmatyar's opposition movement,<sup>45</sup> Afghanistan failed to keep its promise to banish or extradite Egyptian fundamentalist terrorists residing in the country.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, Egypt announced that it could not honor the agreement.

The "heavy-handed" policy adopted by the security forces against the terrorist organizations in Egypt, and the expulsion of terrorists, limited their freedom of action, compelling them to resort to terrorist attacks abroad. Most of these attacks were in retaliation for the arrest, extradition, and assassination of their members abroad by Egyptian security forces, sometimes in cooperation with local security forces. These attacks included the attempted assassination of an Egyptian diplomat in Switzerland by the Egyptian *jihad* (November 1995), a suicide bomb attack against the police station in Rijeka, Croatia, by *Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah*, (October 1995), and the bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan (November 1995). The most daring

attack orchestrated by *Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah* was the attempted assassination of Hosni Mubarak during his visit to Ethiopia (June 1995). (The terrorists chose this occasion on the assumption that security precaution there would be more lax than in Egypt.)

The Egyptian organizations, predominantly *Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah*, were indirectly involved in international terror, through "Arab-Afghans" (Egyptian citizens who trained in the *Mujahideen* camps after the end of the war) who operated as individuals within autonomous Islamic terrorist cells abroad.

Note that the blind Egyptian cleric, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the supreme spiritual authority of *Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah* and the Egyptian *jihad*, issued a *fatwa* (religious decree) sanctioning the activities of these terrorist cells.

In recent years, especially since 1998, the activities of the Egyptian organizations have been influenced by their ties with Osama bin-Laden and his *al-Qa`idah* organization. *Al-Qa`idah* has recruited a substantial number of Egyptians. At least one of the drivers in the suicide bomb attacks in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam in August 1998, masterminded by *al-Qa`idah*, was an Egyptian citizen. The alliance between bin-Laden and the Egyptian organizations is reflected in his close ties with leaders of these organizations, such as Ahmad Rifa`i Taha and Mustafa Hamza, heads of the political and military arms of *Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah*, respectively, and especially Oman Ayman Zawahiri, head of one of the factions of the Egyptian *jihad*. Zawahiri has adopted bin-Laden's new terrorist strategy of targeting American, rather than Egyptian objectives, on the grounds that the head-on confrontation with the Egyptian regime has caused the deaths of innocent people and has alienated Muslim public opinion in Egypt, while attacks against the American infidels were sure to elicit sympathy among the Muslims. That the Egyptian *jihad* adopted this strategy is evident in its planned attack on the U.S. consulate in Albania, (foiled in June 1998), and its involvement in the embassy attacks in East Africa in August 1998.

*Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah*, the mainspring of the religious-military coalition envisaged by bin-Laden, has for the past two years been divided in its policy regarding domestic and anti-U.S. terrorism. The unilateral declaration of a truce toward the Egyptian government by its imprisoned leaders (July 1997) caused a rift

between the leadership in Egypt and the leadership abroad concerning the movement's policy and goals. The massacre of the tourists in Luxor (October 1997) intensified the polemic, in particular as a result of growing pressure by the Egyptian regime on members of the organization in Egypt and abroad. Omar Abdel Rahman's declaration from his prison in the United States, advocating peaceful means in pursuing the organization's objectives (October 1998), tilted the balance in favor of the "moderates."

*Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah* has already officially declared a "cease-fire," and some members of the Egyptian *jihad*, after Ayman Zawahiri's resignation, have followed suit. This declaration has intensified the polemic within the Egyptian organization, and the question of whether the cease-fire will be observed remains to be seen.

### THE JORDANIAN AFGHANS

In early 1994, a series of bombs exploded in several cinemas in Jordan.<sup>47</sup> Following arrests by the Jordanian security forces in 1995, a group belonging to the "*Bai`at al-Imam*" ["Homage to the Imam"] movement was discovered, headed by "Issam Muhammad al-Burqawi" (Abu Muhammad al-Muqadassi), a Palestinian originally from Jaffa, and a number of Afghan Alumni.<sup>48</sup> The organization, which disposed of weapons and explosives, aimed at overthrowing the regime in Jordan through a *jihad*, as part of an overall struggle to reform Islamic society. In the course of the investigation, it transpired that the terrorists had intended carrying out a range of terrorist attacks against people (public figures) or institutions (cinemas, hotels) they identified with corruption.

In December 1999, an Islamic terrorist organization, comprising Jordanian, Iraqi, Algerian, and Palestinian citizens bearing American documents, was uncovered in Jordan. The group was headed by Abu Hoshar who had already been arrested in Jordan (1993) for carrying out attacks there, but who had been granted a royal pardon. Abu Hoshar, who had trained in Afghanistan, returned to Jordan to set up the "Army of Muhammad," which was also partly composed of Afghan Alumni.<sup>49</sup>

On December 17, 1999, Halil Dik (an American of Palestinian origin), considered the architect of the abortive attacks in Jordan, was extradited to Jordan by Pakistan. The investigation of members

of the organization showed that they intended carrying out attacks against Jewish and Israeli tourists in Amman's Radisson Hotel, against visitors to Moses' tomb on Mt. Nebo, against tourists passing through the Jordanian-Israeli border check post, and against pilgrims visiting the site of Jesus' baptism.<sup>50</sup>

### ATTACKS BY AFGHAN ALUMNI AGAINST ISRAELI AND JEWISH TARGETS

The virulent rhetoric of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, used by the Sunni Muslims against Judaism and Israel has not, so far, been translated into a consistent terror campaign against international Jewish and Israeli targets. Since the mid-1990s, however, Sunni Muslim organizations have been responsible for isolated attacks/attempted attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad. For example, on April 19, 1996, during the "Grapes of Wrath" operation in Lebanon, the Egyptian *Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah* mounted an attack against tourists in the Europa hotel in Cairo, killing 17 Greek pilgrims. In its communiqué claiming responsibility for the attack, the organization stated that it had meant to target Israeli tourists who were known to frequent the Europa hotel.

As stated above (see section on Algeria), the Algerian GIA carried out three attacks against Jewish targets in France as part of its terror campaign in France. These attacks included two car bomb attacks, one near a synagogue in Lyon in 1994 (foiled) and one near a Jewish school in Villeurbanne. It was only because the school bell was late that a massacre of Jewish schoolchildren was averted. The third attack was a letter bomb sent to the editor of a Jewish newspaper in France (1996).

In 1995 and 1999, two organizations of Afghan Alumni which were planning attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets were discovered in Jordan (see section on Jordan above).

Particularly noteworthy is the growing involvement of Palestinian Afghan Alumni abroad in planning terrorist activities against Israeli targets. This has been particularly evident in recent terrorist activity in Jordan.

In February 2000, Sa`ad Hindawi, a Palestinian "Afghan veteran" hailing from Halhul, who lived in Lebanon for many years, was arrested in Israel, where he and his family had returned after

the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Hindawi, whose brother is the chief of police in Hebron, admitted that in 1998 he was trained in Durante — one of Osama bin-Laden's camps in Afghanistan — in terrorist warfare and sabotage. Diagrams for assembling explosives were found in his possession.

Despite his denials, he was suspected of planning to carry out attacks against Israel, possibly in coordination with local Palestinians.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, a Jordanian of Palestinian origin, was the main ideologue of the Afghan Alumni and bin-Laden's partner in setting up the "Services Office" (*Maktab al-Khidamat*) — the recruiting office for the thousands of Islamic volunteers who streamed into Afghanistan to take part in the battle against the Soviets. Although Abdullah Azzam was killed in a car bomb explosion in Afghanistan in 1989, his writings and philosophy continue to provide ideological fodder for the struggle against the "enemies of Islam."

A number of factors may explain the relatively small number of terrorist attacks by Sunni terrorist organizations against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad.

- These organizations see their main goal as the overthrow of the secular regimes in their own countries, and their replacement by Islamic regimes governed by the rule of Islamic law (*Shari'ah*).
- These organizations do not see attacks against Israeli or Jewish targets as means in themselves, but rather as part of an overall terrorist strategy against their non-Muslim rivals.
- These organizations tend to focus their terrorist activity against American objectives, in line with their view of the United States as Islam's main enemy.

Osama bin-Laden, a proponent of this policy, has been sharply criticized for ignoring other "Islamic" problems, including the Palestinian problem. This criticism may have been one of the reasons behind the choice of Israeli and Jewish targets in the attacks perpetrated by the Egyptian *jihād*, *al-Qa'idah*, and the Islamic cells in Jordan, in 1995 and 1999.

## AZERBAIJAN

Following the defeats suffered by the Azeri (Muslim) forces in their war with the Armenians (Christians) over control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan turned to Afghanistan in August 1993 for military aid. Afghanistan responded by sending 1,000 *mujahideen* warriors to help the Azeris. In October 1993, the Afghan *mujahideen* launched a surprise attack against the Armenian forces in the region of Zanglan (near the Iranian border), and even gained ground, before being repulsed by the Armenian forces. As far as we know, these *mujahideen* forces remained in Azerbaijan where they continue to help the Azeris in their struggle against the Armenians.<sup>52</sup>

## CHECHNYA

The disintegration of the Soviet Union triggered a religious-national awakening in Chechnya, following which (September 6, 1991) the leaders of the separatist stream declared their secession from the USSR and the establishment of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

President Yeltsin, refusing to condone this move, tried to bring about the downfall of the separatists by funneling aid to the opposition groups in Chechnya, and by direct military intervention. His failure created a situation of de facto independence for Chechnya, and led to growing tension between the countries. This tension reached a peak on December 11, 1994, when Russia invaded Chechnya. Since then, Russia and the Chechen separatists have been engaged in an armed confrontation which began as a regular war, but which has since evolved into guerrilla warfare and the use of terror by the Chechen forces.

Following the victory of the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan over Najibullah's pro-Soviet regime in 1992, the Afghan Alumni were free to help the Islamic struggle in various countries throughout the world, including Chechnya. Afghan *mujahideen* organizations, and since 1996 the *Taliban* regime, have been sending equipment, weapons, and warriors to help the Muslim separatists in Chechnya in their struggle against the Russians. Other Muslim organizations helping the Chechens are affiliated with the Saudi *Wahabi* movement, and even bin-Laden's organization.

Moreover, the ranks of the Chechen fighters have been swollen by Afghan Alumni headed by Ibn-ul-Khattab, whose extensive combat and leadership skill, acquired in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, have proved of great service to the Chechens.

The “Afghan” volunteers’ extensive experience in guerrilla warfare and terror and their familiarity with Russian tactics and vulnerabilities acquired in the wars against the Russians in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, have been of invaluable assistance to the Chechen warriors.<sup>53</sup>

### BOSNIA

In 1993, about 200 Arab-Afghan *mujahideen* from Algeria, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia were found to be operating in central and northern Bosnia.

These *mujahideen*, as well as taking an active part in the war against the Serbian forces, ran educational activities designed to inculcate their fundamentalist world view on the Bosnian population. In an interview with a member of the *mujahideen*, he stated that his movement had two goals in Bosnia: to launch a *jihad* against the Serbs, and to educate Bosnian Muslims in the true way of Islam (“missionary” activity or *da`wah*).<sup>54</sup>

### INDEPENDENT TERRORIST CELLS

One of the salient features of international terrorism in recent years has been the activity of autonomous, Islamic terrorist cells without any defined structural hierarchy, which operate through institutionalized terrorist organizations. The Afghan Alumni played a major role in the activity of these cells, through their training in Afghanistan and their ties with Islamic relief organizations, which supplied them with logistic and financial aid. These terrorist cells were responsible, among other things, for the World Trade Center bombing in New York City (February 1993) which left six dead and about a thousand wounded, plots to attack the UN building and the New York-New Jersey interstate tunnels (June 1993), the attack against the Philippine PAL jetliner (December 1994), and a planned offensive against American planes in Asia, scheduled for early 1995.

An investigation of these terrorist cells brought to light their ties with Islamic Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) such as the

“Muslim World League” (MWL), the “International Islamic Relief Organization” (IIRO), and Islamic cultural centers in Europe, such as the center in Milan. Members of these cells were also found to have close ties with Osama bin-Laden.

### AL-QA`IDAH [THE VANGUARD]

Another key organization in the activity of the Afghan Alumni, whose influence has been increasing in the international arena, is *al-Qa`idah*, an organization set up in 1988 by the Saudi millionaire Osama bin-Laden.

*Al-Qa`idah* was set up by the “Services Office” (*Maktabal-Khidamat*), a Non-Governmental Islamic Relief Organization, to handle the recruitment, absorption, and placement of thousands of Islamic volunteers from 50 countries around the world in *mujahideen* camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

After the war, most of its activities were conducted from the Sudan and Afghanistan through a network of worldwide offices, including the United States (especially the “*Al-Kifah*” center in Brooklyn) and the Philippines.

*Al-Qa`idah* provided aid to other terrorist organizations, and worked for the radicalization of the Islamic movements operating in Chechnya, Bosnia, Tajikistan, Somalia, Kashmir, Yemen, and Kosovo. Its members were also involved in terrorist operations, such as the attacks against UN forces in Somalia in October 1993, in which 18 American servicemen were killed, and the attacks in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998. There is also evidence pointing to a clear connection between *al-Qa`idah* and terrorist attacks that were planned and carried out by terrorist cells led by Ramzi Yousef in New York (1993) and in the Philippines (1994). *Al-Qa`idah* was likewise involved in the attack in Riyadh, in which six people, including five American servicemen, were killed (November 1995). The Saudis argued that bin-Laden was not directly involved in the last two attacks, but that his militant anti-American rhetoric may have provided the inspiration for them.

### THE ESCALATION OF THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN BIN-LADEN AND THE UNITED STATES

In 1998, the issue of the Afghan Alumni became something of a cause *célèbre* after the spectacular attacks carried out by *al-Qa`idah*

in East Africa. Bin-Laden, accused by the United States of masterminding these attacks, was portrayed by the Western and Arab media as epitomizing the threat of international fundamentalist terror. Bin-Laden lent credence to this claim by setting himself up as the leader of the “historical cultural-religious struggle between Islam and the Jewish-Crusader pact” which, he claimed, aimed at subjugating Islam and conquering the Muslim holy places.<sup>55</sup>

In interviews and statements, such as the June 1996 “Declaration of War”<sup>56</sup> and the February 1998 “*fatwah*,” bin-Laden paints a world view in which the entire world, especially the Middle East, is seen as the stage on which the deterministic battle for survival of the three major religions is being waged. In this struggle, a Jewish-Christian (or “Jewish-Crusader”) alliance has evolved, personified by the United States and Israel (and World Jewry), which has conquered the holy Islamic places (Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem), and aims to subdue Islam. According to bin-Laden, this alliance is responsible for the systematic and deliberate slaughter of Muslims.

In order to win over the Muslim public, bin-Laden sprinkles his rhetoric with historically loaded terms imbued with Islamic undertones, such as “crusaders” and *jihad*. He justifies the violence he preaches on the grounds that its purpose is to protect the Islamic holy places. By portraying the Muslim as victim, he minimizes his role as aggressor.

Bin-Laden believes that the use of violence and terror will show the community of believers that the enemies of Islam, even if seemingly invincible (like the United States and the Soviet Union), are in fact rendered vulnerable by their lack of faith. In this context, bin-Laden relies heavily on the ethos of the victory of the Afghan *mujahideen* which, he holds, brought about the collapse of the Soviet Empire. He cites other examples of the weakness of the enemy (particularly the United States), such as the withdrawal of American troops from Somalia which, he claimed, was the result of the guerrilla activities he supported.

The attacks by the Saudi opposition forces in Riyadh (November 1995) and Dhahran (June 1996), which left 24 dead and dozens injured, were part of a two-pronged struggle: to “purge” the holy places (Mecca and Medina) of American control, and to bring about a moral-psychological victory for the Islamic warriors.

Bin-Laden had similar designs on the Israeli occupiers of the holy site of Al-Aqsa.<sup>57</sup>

During 1998, bin-Laden had spun around him a web of Islamist organizations to counteract the Jewish-Crusader pact. On February 23, 1998, he convened the heads of a number of Islamic organizations in Afghanistan, and declared the establishment of the “Islamic Front for the Struggle against the Jews and the Crusaders” (hereafter the “Front”). The Front issued a *fatwah* signed by the leaders of five major Islamic organizations — Osama bin-Laden, head of *al-Qa`idah*; Ayman al-Zawahiri, head of the Egyptian *jihad*; Ahmad Rifa`i Taha, leader of the Egyptian *Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah*; Sheikh Miyar Hamza, secretary of the Pakistan Scholars Society (*Jama`at al-Ulema*); and Fazlul Rahman, the emir of the Bangladesh *jihad* movement. Since bin-Laden has no religious authority or military power to speak of, he needs the backing and support of these organizations. The clerics, particularly Sheikh Miyar Hamza, a high-ranking Islamic spiritual authority, lend a religious character to the decisions of the Islamic Front, while the heads of *Al-Gama`ah al-Islamiyyah* and the Egyptian *jihad* provide the military-terrorist infrastructure.

A *fatwah* issued by the Front called on Muslims throughout the world to consider it their personal duty to kill Americans and their allies, including civilians, in order to liberate the Holy Mosque in Mecca (read: Saudi Arabia) and the Al-Aqsa Mosque (read: Jerusalem and Palestine).<sup>58</sup>

In May 1998, in an interview with the ABC network, bin-Laden declared before the American public the Front’s intention to carry out global attacks against American citizens in retaliation for the American administration’s “corrupt policy.” Trilateral security cooperation between the United States, Egypt, and Albania foiled the attack planned by members of the Egyptian “*jihad*/Zawahiri faction” against the U.S. embassy in Tirana, and led to the extradition of its members to Egypt (July 1998). Following these events, the Front and the Egyptian *jihad* sent letters to the *Al-Hayat* newspaper<sup>59</sup> threatening to attack American targets. The next day (August 7), members of *al-Qa`idah* launched two sensational attacks against the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, resulting in 291 dead and about 5,000 injured. Most of the victims were local people. Of

the U.S. citizens who were the main target of the attack, “only” 12 were killed (Nairobi embassy employees).

The attacks in East Africa presented the United States with an opportunity for carrying out a limited military operation against the Afghan Alumni under the leadership of bin-Laden and the Egyptian organizations. The evidence taken from those involved in the embassy attacks served to vindicate the U.S. bombing of *al-Qa'idah* bases in Afghanistan and the Sudan, and the violation of the sovereignty of the sponsor states involved. The American bombing (August 20, 1998) was directed against five *al-Qa'idah* camps in Afghanistan, and against a pharmaceuticals concern in Khartoum which, according to the United States, was financed by bin-Laden, and manufactured chemical warfare components for him.

Alongside military and intelligence operations, the United States and Britain also explored the diplomatic avenue. The United States, for example, sent Ambassador Richardson to Afghanistan in an attempt to persuade the *Taliban* to hand over bin-Laden or at the very least, to contain his anti-American activity and rhetoric. Britain for its part, was prepared to strike a deal with the *Taliban*, by authorizing the opening of a *Taliban* office in London, and clamping down on the Afghan opposition in London, in return for a restriction on bin-Laden's activities.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile, the United States continued to cooperate with its Arab and European partners in rounding up members of *al-Qa'idah* and the Egyptian organizations, with some success. September 1998 saw the arrest of a number of key operatives in bin-Laden's terrorist network, such as Wahdi al-Haj, a Lebanese Christian who converted to Islam. Al-Haj, who until 1994 had served as bin-Laden's personal secretary in the Sudan, was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the August 1998 bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. He was arrested in Texas, where he had moved in 1997, probably with the intention of setting up a terrorist infrastructure in the United States.

On September 16, Mamduh Muhammad Mahmud Salim, one of bin-Laden's senior aides, was arrested in Munich. Salim, who served as bin-Laden's financial and logistics advisor, was responsible for procuring weapons (possibly even non-conventional weapons). Salim was extradited to the United States on December 24, 1998,

where he is awaiting trial for participation in bin-Laden's terrorist network.

Members of bin-Laden's network have been arrested in London. Foremost of these is Khaled Fuaz, bin-Laden's representative in London, a member of the Saudi opposition, and head of the “Advice and Reform” commission.

Egypt, too, during the second half of 1998, stepped up its counter-terrorist operations against Egyptian operatives abroad. In a joint American-brokered security operation, Egypt arranged for countries such as Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, South Africa, Ecuador, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE, to extradite members of the Egyptian *jihad* and bin-Laden's terrorist network. This operation, later known as the “Albanian Returnees Affair,” almost destroyed the Islamic umbrella organization.

Bin-Laden used the American bombing of Iraq (December 17–20, 1998) as a pretext once again to threaten American citizens for supporting the United States “massacre” of the Iraqi Muslim population. In a series of aggressive interviews with *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the BBC, he called on his Muslim brothers to renew their attacks against the enemies of Islam.<sup>61</sup>

Bin-Laden has proclaimed his intention to intensify efforts to obtain non-conventional weapons. He sees this as a religious duty, and accuses Muslims who obstruct such activity as sinning against Islam. Bin-Laden is deliberately vague about whether he possesses such weapons, and under what circumstances he would use them.<sup>62</sup>

Bin-Laden's attempts to acquire and manufacture non-conventional weapons had been closely monitored by the United States, even before he openly declared his intentions.

Indeed, the United States justified its attack on the pharmaceuticals plant in Khartoum on the grounds that the factory was manufacturing chemical weapon components for bin-Laden. The extradition of Mamduh Salim (December 24, 1998), bin-Laden's weapons procurer, from Germany to the United States, was also in connection with the acquisition of non-conventional weapons.

## CONCLUSIONS

Islam has reemerged as an alternative to the perceived failure of secular ideologies. Islamic movements and organizations have

become sources of legitimacy and mobilization, and Islamic movements span the religious and political spectrum from moderate to extremist. Islamic movements, both moderate and extremist, have proliferated and become agents of change. They establish modern political and social organizations and embrace advanced means to disseminate their message. Most of the movements function within civil society as social and political activists.

At the same time the extremists use violence to threaten the stability of many regimes.

The phenomenon of the Afghan Alumni has in recent years become an increasingly significant factor in the world of international terror and poses a real threat to the stability of Muslim regimes. It far transcends the narrow context of a terrorist organization or state-sponsored terrorism. Rather, it represents a militant religious-ideological current, which aims at bringing about a cultural revolution in an attempt to reinstate Islam's bygone glory. As such, the phenomenon of the "Afghans" clearly embodies the clash of civilizations that lies at the root of Huntington's premise.

The Afghan war gave rise to a number of exceptional processes in modern history, as described below:

- The creation of a kind of Islamic "*internationale*" through the recruitment of volunteers throughout the Muslim world to help the struggle of the Afghan *mujahideen*
- The creation of a global network of radical Muslim terrorists through ties between these volunteers and radical Islamic movements throughout the Muslim world
- The creation of a mystique of invincibility. The Islamic fighters' victory over the Soviet forces has won them international acclaim and has served as a source of inspiration to Islamists throughout the Muslim world.
- The creation of a broad-based cadre of highly motivated and experienced warriors, bent on exporting the Islamic revolution to the world at large

Osama bin-Laden is one of the outstanding "products" of the Afghan war, and his organization *al-Qa'idah* is one of the main

expressions of the "Afghan" phenomenon. Bin-Laden views his struggle as part of the conflict between Islamic and other civilizations, particularly "the Jewish-Crusader Civilization," as he calls it.

As a cultural struggle, the worldwide Afghan struggle is being waged on three fronts: within Muslim countries (to reinstate the rule of *Shari'ah* law); in countries with Muslim minorities, situated on "fault lines" with other cultures (the Balkans, the Caucasus, Kashmir, etc.); and, internationally, in the struggle against Western, particularly U.S., civilization, which is perceived by the fundamentalists as the source of all evil, and the primary threat to Islam.

It looks as if the clash of civilizations as perceived by Huntington, at one extreme, and Osama bin-Laden, at the other, is with us to stay, at least for the foreseeable future.

#### Endnotes

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