



What Is to Be Done?

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The amazing phenomenon is that fundamentalist Islamic terrorism has been with us for many years, and it is only the irresponsible complacency of leaders, who repeatedly deny the reality and rationalize their inactivity,¹ that causes them to act only when catastrophe is at their doorstep.

The Afghan example is instructive. The United States acted to aid the Afghan rebel forces with funding and military equipment on an enormous scale. It viewed bin-Laden as a man of vision, and the *mujahidin al-Afghan* as freedom fighters. After the loss of Iran in February 1979, the United States feared that the conquest of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union constituted a substantial threat to its influence in the oil states, as well as possible Soviet control over strategically sensitive central Asia.

The size of American aid to the Afghans began at \$100 million in 1980, and by 1986 reached a half a billion dollars. Altogether, the United States poured three billion dollars into Afghanistan and bin-Laden's organization. Although the United States acted in coordination with Saudi Arabia as a means of protecting its interests,

Saudi Arabia's agenda was to disseminate its religious influence. It played a central role in the activity of the "Arab Afghans," and in the aggressive spread of fundamentalist Islam. It funded and supported the Taliban's activity, and bin-Laden retained close ties with the Saudi royal house. Its aim was to disseminate the Wahabi school of Islamic thought and practice, while encouraging radical religious movements such as *al-Ittihad al-Islami* and funding *jam'iat al-mujahidin al-Islamiyah* or "graduates of Afghanistan," which fought alongside the Muslims in Bosnia, or funding the Islamic Palestinian organizations, including the *shuhada* families. The United States knows well that the Saudi regime is not much different from the regime the *Taliban* set up in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia occupies a high place in the list of fundamentalist Islamic terrorist nations.

It is important to refute two notions that have gained currency in the West, which are interrelated and fundamentally erroneous. One concerns economic welfare, the other education. The cultural assumption in the West is that economic welfare means pliancy, and education means moderation, and both of these lead to "sane" and rational politics. This view is a "mirror image" of the West and bears no relation to reality. Poverty leads to crime but not to terrorism. The major leaders and activists of the terrorist organizations are from the middle class or sometimes from the upper class, and the preponderant majority of them have higher education. Rarely does a formal leadership develop among the poor and socio-economically oppressed. Terrorism does not grow from hunger, rather from radical ideologies and especially fanatic religion. Bin-Laden and Muslim terrorist leaders never declared that the reasons for their activity are poverty, ignorance, and hunger. They have mentioned the Western Crusades, the belligerency of the Jewish state, and the authoritarian Arab regimes.

In the mid-1990s, fundamentalist Islam became one of the hottest topics in academic, media, and government circles in the United States. In the era of "politically correct," Perlmutter rightly and notably compared Islamic radicalism with nazism and fascism, stating that its goal was to create a totalitarian Islamic state. He recommended that the West kill the phenomenon in the cradle,² and asserted that any conciliatory policy would be a terrible mistake. The

only way to deal with fundamentalist Islam, Charles Krauthammer argued, is the "pure stick approach."³

The attack on the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993, brought home to the policymakers and citizens of the United States the essential threat embodied in fundamentalist Islam. Not since the international activity of the PLO led by the arch-terrorist and serial liar Arafat, has there been such a menacing and imminent threat to the basic interests of the United States. Meanwhile, several large terrorist attacks had to occur to induce a zero-hour realization that what is at hand is an all-out civilizational assault.

Strategic experts and political advisers disagree about the operative means and methods of struggle. One model, for instance, is that of Egypt and Jordan's fight against the Islamic terrorist organizations, as Indyk proposes.⁴ This entails a determined military struggle and uncompromising enforcement, with the aim of restricting the groups to the socioeconomic domain only. A second model of action is that proposed by Murphy and Gause — namely, to adopt the approach the Turks used against Erbakan, the leader of Islamic party, and fit Islamic activity into an agreed framework so as to avoid political polarization.⁵ Still another model is the assessment that if radical Islam gains power, it need not necessarily harm Western interests, because it is an authentic representative of the Islamic public.⁶

As for academic research, two main approaches crystallized regarding the Islamic fundamentalist danger to Western civilization: the first, the *clash of civilizations* approach, maintains that fundamentalist Islam is on a direct collision course with the West.

Huntington was the first to characterize the problem in terms of a clash of civilizations and a reformulation of the world order. He counted the conflicts that occurred during the 1990s, and found that most of them were located on the fault line between Islamic civilization and other civilizations.⁷ The West refuses to acknowledge what it itself clearly sees: the struggle is between democracy, pluralism, modernity, tolerance, openness, civic freedoms, individualism, and a critical attitude on the one hand, and mental absolutism and cultural closure, tribal traditionalism and social anarchy, religious fanaticism, intolerance, and an unbridled violence directed against all infidels on the other.⁸

This is also the position of Lewis, who was the first to point out the Islamic threat to the West.⁹¹ Islam is an aggressive and expansionist religious ideology, a reaction to the Judeo-Christian cultural heritage.¹⁰ Pipes regards Islamic fundamentalism as a threat similar to communism. This ideology, the “green threat,” jeopardizes human society,¹¹ which is Kramer’s view as well.¹²

Second is the *integrated approach*, which views fundamentalist Islam as a phenomenon that is natural to Arab-Islamic society, and sees no essential contrast and antagonism with the West. Islamic fundamentalism is not a threat, but rather a deeply rooted response to the Arab governments’ failure to address socioeconomic problems. The main scholars espousing the integrated approach are Voll and Esposito. In their view, most of the Islamic movements constitute a positive, dynamic force rather than militant extremism. Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance, and fraternity, and does not threaten the West.¹³

Even though the debate has been clearly decided, and even the greatest skeptics no longer have any pretext after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, unfortunately the issue has not yet been internalized in Israel. Once a nation that served as a model for all the world of effectively fighting terror, Israel became defeatist and flawed in its approach.

The greatest threat posed by fundamentalist Islam remains the non-conventional threat. As former CIA director James Woolsey pointed out, the United States does not have to wait for another Pearl Harbor to understand that there is no greater threat to its security than terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction.¹⁴ Fundamentalist Islam in the form of *al-Qa`idah* and the World Islamic Front for Holy War against Jews and Christians is a clear and immediate danger, and these forces have enough motivation to go all the way and thereby hasten apocalyptic processes of redemption.

Yet the most deadly and dangerous terrorism, in our view, is computer terror, or cyber-terrorism. The destruction it could wreak on human society stands in inverse proportion to the threat it is perceived as embodying. Because it is very effective and low cost, it is impossible not to regard it as the preferred battlefield. A planned computer terrorist attack would likely cause a total disruption of modern society: information, electricity, banking, and industrial

systems, as well as a total disruption of the political and military systems. Deutsch, another former CIA director, rightly remarked that the electron is the ultimate precision-guided weapon. When Islamic fundamentalist terrorism gets over its yen for open, demonstrative terrorism, it is likely to turn to computer terrorism, even if this does not involve manipulative use of the media.

There are two approaches to the war on terrorism. 1. Different means of defense such as protection of important individuals and technical-physical security of different kinds (checkpoints, means of exposure and detection, wiretapping and electronic surveillance, and preventive intelligence). Yet if the war on terrorism is restricted to the preventive dimension alone, there is no doubt that terrorism will triumph. 2. Proactive measures such as preemptive as well as retaliatory and punitive actions. The principle is to hit terrorism first, before it organizes and takes action. Harming or weakening the intelligence on terrorism is like making a country blind. Instead, intelligence must provide all the necessary means for functioning.

Proactive measures include clear strategic policymaking, and well-defined objectives in a determined war on terrorism. If only short-term steps are taken, failure is certain. Simply to rest on one’s laurels is not permissible. Action against the foci of terrorism must be aggressive and consistent. Terrorism succeeds when for military and/or political reasons its adversary refrains from applying its full resources to the war. The key precept is that terrorism, like guerrilla warfare, must be fought by its own tactics. That, in a nutshell, is the strategy and formula for success.

There should be extensive activity in the realm of disseminating, including the establishment of a national information authority whose task is to gather information for use on that key battlefield of the modern era, the field of the media and world public opinion where terrorism also concentrates most of its efforts.

In Israel, there is some question whether terrorism can be defeated and its dangers overcome. World experience shows that terrorism cannot be terminated. It remains part of the society for generations despite its profound threat to the survival of given societies. Nevertheless, terrorist groups can and must be defeated. Examples include the Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, the Japanese Red Army, the *aum shinriki* (Pure

Truth) in Japan, the Tupamaros and the Monteneros in South America. As for nationalist organizations, it is worth learning from Turkey's experience with Ocalan and the PKK; Spain's struggle with ETA, the Basque underground; the situation of the Islamic *jihād* for five years after the assassination of its leader Fathi Shkaki (until it recovered under the auspices of the arch-terrorist Arafat); or the situation of *Hamas* for more than a year after the 'Awdallah brothers were killed until, once again, it was resuscitated with Arafat's assistance.

The question on the international agenda is what to do for the future of humanity? Should the Islamic approach be adopted that calls for the restoration of the traditional-anarchic past, should the West continue with its policy of human progress and social welfare? The two are basically incompatible. Any attempt to avoid coping with this question will only exacerbate the problems, and intensify the dangers to the point that they threaten our sheer existence. On September 11, 2001, a world war broke out. The attack on the American targets was a challenge to Western society. Until it is understood that the struggle against fundamentalist Islam is a war of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, until the means are made available for an all-out war on the terrorists and the nations that support them, the world will continue to face an existential threat. Bin-Ladenism is the new Hunnism, bent on the destruction of modern civilization and on installing the reign of total anarchy. The new Huns threaten everything that goes against their fanatical values. Unless they are denied the chance to do so, they will succeed in turning the past into the future.

Endnotes

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- 2 A. Perlmutter, "Wishful Thinking about Islamic Fundamentalism," *Washington Post*, February 6, 1992.
- 3 C. Krauthammer, "America's Great Success Story," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 4 (December 1994): p. 71–79. See also A. Stav, "The Muslim Threat to the Western World," *Midstream*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1993): p. 2–6.
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- 5 R.W. Murphy and G.F. Gause, "Democracy in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 1977).

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- 11 D. Pipes, "There Are No Moderates: Dealing with Fundamentalist Islam," *The National Interest*, vol. 41 (Fall, 1995); D. Pipes, "The Western Mind of Radical Islam," in M. Kramer, editor, *The Islamism Debate* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1997).
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- 13 J. Esposito, "Clash of Civilization? Contemporary Images of Islam in the West," in G.M. Munoz, editor, *Islam, Modernism and the West* (London: Tauris, 1999); J. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); J.O. Voll and J.L. Esposito, "Islam's Democratic Essence," *Middle-East Quarterly* (September 1994; December 1994).
- 14 J. Woolsey, *Time*, June 1, 1997, p. 4.