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## Al Qaeda's Resilience

By striking forcefully at the Islamists' most distant and powerful enemy, Al Qaeda put its theories of global jihad to the ultimate test. The horrid spectacle of this deadly and delicately coordinated operation propelled the radical organization into worldwide prominence, and its subtle manipulation of the media during the following months demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the global communication system. Al Qaeda began to speak with a voice out of all proportion to the small number of activists at its core.

Osama bin Laden's first declaration following the attacks was published without fanfare on September 28 in the Pakistani periodical *Umma*. There, he denied any responsibility for the hijackings, just as he had previously denied direct involvement in the bombing of U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya on August 7, 1998, which left 258 people dead and over 5,000 wounded, and the USS *Cole* in November 2000. Instead, he placed the blame on America, "which has no friends," and on Israel's intelligence service, Mossad.

But on October 7—the day that the Pentagon launched its military operation in Afghanistan—Al Jazeera's broadcast of the videotape recorded in front of an Afghan cave introduced Bin Laden

and Zawahiri to a worldwide television audience. In this highly influential recording, Bin Laden praised the daring and courage of "the blessed Muslim vanguard" who had given their lives for the sublime cause of jihad. Though again he took no direct responsibility for the operation, he depicted the victims as sacrificial lambs whose immolation would please Allah. Through the rhetoric of holy war and religious sacrifice, Bin Laden hoped to dehumanize them and forestall any compassion in the Muslim world for the thousands of victims who had died in the multiple attacks of September 11.

Al Qaeda's activists and their sympathizers viewed the successes of that day as an extraordinary symbolic victory for Islam. Evidence of this conviction came in the form of another videotape recorded privately by the movement and then discovered by U.S. soldiers in November 2001. The tape, which aired on December 21, was made near Kandahar, where Saudi Sheikh Khaled al-Harbi, a veteran who had lost both legs in Afghanistan, was received by Bin Laden. Asked about the reaction in Saudi Arabia to the September attacks, the sheikh replied: "Suddenly, we received the news, and everyone was overcome with joy . . . Each of us said 'Allah is Great,' 'Praise Allah,' and 'Thank Allah.' All day, we called to congratulate each other. My mother was receiving calls constantly . . . There is no doubt: it is a brilliant victory. Allah has given us this honor; He will bless us and grant us even greater victory during this holy month of Ramadan." Bin Laden commented that "in Holland, the number of people who converted to Islam during the days that followed the operations was greater, in total, than during the past eleven years."

Surprise and symbolism, along with games of media manipulation, could take the movement only so far, however. What was needed was a conventional military victory, of the sort that had driven the Soviet army from Afghanistan. But the only arms at Bin

Laden's disposal after 9/11 were subterfuge, evasion, and deception—the weapons of the weak. As soon as U.S. intelligence fingered Al Qaeda for responsibility, the United States brought its sophisticated military arsenal to the task of locating and destroying the organization's base of operations in Afghanistan. By mid-December ground forces of the indigenous Northern Alliance, assisted by hundreds of airstrikes called in by U.S. special forces, had gained control of Bin Laden's manmade caves in the Tora Bora mountain range. Many jihad fighters were killed or taken prisoner, but the main quarry—Osama bin Laden and Zawahiri—eluded capture.

The initial target of the war on terror was neither Afghanistan nor its population—whose hearts and minds the Americans were set on winning—but the terrorists who had taken refuge there. When these men proved hard to pin down, however, the Americans modified their goal accordingly. Instead of obliterating Al Qaeda, the new goal became the obliteration of the terrorists' Taliban hosts. The operation had fallen short of arresting or incapacitating the main suspects, but it had flung its net wide enough to catch thousands of accomplices and other small fry.

During the next two years, U.S. special forces, with their unmanned surveillance aircraft and GPS technology, seemed always to be just days behind Bin Laden and his band of nomads, who nevertheless managed to smuggle out several tapes that were broadcast by Arab television, together with messages that appeared on the Internet. In a litany of threats against the West and calls for the murder of unbelievers—including a tape aired on April 17, 2002, which finally admitted Al Qaeda's responsibility for the destruction of the twin towers—Bin Laden asserted Al Qaeda's role in post-9/11 bombings the world over, from Bali to Istanbul to Madrid.

Al Qaeda's resilience in the face of the Bush administration's

war on terror revealed a major intelligence deficiency in the U.S. government. The means adopted by the United States to annihilate terrorism appeared to be inappropriate, and indeed Washington's very interpretation of terrorism seemed to be erroneous. That interpretation was derived from Cold War thinking about strategic options, which the neoconservatives in the Bush administration—their hand strengthened by the distortion effect of the September 11 attacks—took to their logical extreme. Just as the left-wing terrorist groups of the 1970s and 1980s were presumed by previous administrations to have some sort of obscure link to the Soviet bloc's intelligence services, the Islamist terrorists of 9/11 were presumed by the Bush administration to have some connection to Iraq and Iran—rogue states on an “axis of evil” that no longer included Moscow. Bringing those states to heel became the Bush administration's new goal.

Neoconservatives in Washington would not be satisfied with tracking down a bunch of haggard bearded men, hiding out in caves or motel rooms, who conducted their business through satellite phone connections and bank accounts in offshore tax havens. The United States required a worthy adversary for its war on terror—a nation with real estate to be occupied, military hardware to be destroyed, and a regime to be overthrown—not a terrorist NGO without status or headquarters, however devastating that NGO might prove to be. Washington's strategic planners were culturally incapable of grasping an actor that was not, in the final analysis, a state.

Following this misguided reasoning, the Pentagon's special services had no sooner destroyed the embryonic government of the Taliban in Afghanistan than strategists began making plans for the invasion of Iraq. What they did not do was move rapidly to eliminate the international network controlled by Bin Laden and

Zawahiri, primarily because they did not understand its nature and functions adequately. They gave it a vivid, reductionist name—Al Qaeda—but this served only to reify the network's fluidity, thereby masking its true source of strength. Naming the adversary created the illusion of having identified it. But that verbal representation replaced further analysis and short-circuited the search for operational concepts that could assimilate a complex reality and, in the process, restructure existing cognitive categories.

True, Bin Laden and Zawahiri had been buyers at the bankrupt Soviet bazaar, where nuclear warheads and other dirty weapons were on offer at yard-sale prices; they also had suspicious friends in Baghdad and Tehran. But they were first and foremost the privileged children of an unlikely marriage between Wahhabism and Silicon Valley, which Zawahiri had visited in the early 1990s. They were heirs not only to jihad and the *umma* but also to the electronic revolution and American-style globalization. Despite their beards and the soap opera costumes they donned for Arab television audiences, they had ambitions and interests in common with hackers and cosmopolitan golden boys everywhere.

The confusion of U.S. intelligence was visible from the administration's first attempts to identify, circumscribe, and define the nature of the new threat. The use of the word "terrorism" to describe the operation on 9/11 was already vague enough, but the confusion only increased as President Bush started to speak of a "war on terror." The phrase was engineered to heighten fear while simultaneously tapping the righteous indignation of citizens in "civilized nations" against barbaric murderers who would perpetrate despicable atrocities on innocent victims. But stigmatizing the enemy by calling them "terrorists" was of little help in defining the nature of the new threat they presented and creating ways to eliminate it.

After September 11, various arms of the U.S. government succes-

sively published and updated separate lists which, using different criteria, endeavored to identify these "terrorists." President Bush was first, with a fresh classification, Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT), which allowed the United States to freeze assets belonging to twenty-seven organizations or individuals rumored to have links to the Al Qaeda network—a network that had not yet been defined in any way other than by this list.

Eleven days later, on October 5, the State Department's preexisting roster of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) was updated and its content changed. On October 10, the FBI published its own Most Wanted Terrorists (MWTs), which included the names of twenty-two activists, all accused of having assassinated American citizens and all originally from the Muslim Middle East. On October 12, the Treasury Department froze the assets of thirty-three new individuals (of whom eighteen were already on the MWT list) and six organizations, which were added to the SDGT list.

On October 31, Attorney General John Ashcroft demanded that forty-six groups be designated officially as terrorist organizations; of these, nine were already on the SDGT list. On November 7, the Treasury Department froze the assets of sixty-two groups and individuals associated with the Islamic financial networks of Al Taqwa and Al Baraka, suspected of having links to Al Qaeda; these were added to the SDGT list. On December 5, the State Department updated its Terrorist Exclusion List (TEL) to include the thirty-nine individuals and organizations whose assets had been frozen by the Treasury Department.

These diverse inventories—the result of hasty cut-and-paste jobs on various groups, individuals, and bank accounts—captured the understandable disarray of America's intelligence efforts in the days and weeks following the 9/11 attacks. But because of the government's inability to comprehend the nature of the network that

took Bin Laden as its iconic figure, the war on terror struck both below and above the heart of its enemy. The strategy of destroying the Afghan base and then annihilating Saddam Hussein's "rogue state" presented the advantage of being operational: it allowed the Pentagon to use its panoply of high-tech weapons, forged in the confrontation with the USSR and then adapted to vague new threats. But it missed the intended target. The very intangibility of the Al Qaeda network precluded a traditional military conquest.

During the first phase of the war on terror, U.S. strategists seemed to take the English translation of the network's name—"the base"—literally, imagining that the elimination of Al Qaeda's territorial base in Afghanistan would put the organization out of operation. By striking at the head, according to this reasoning, the tentacles would cease to be effective. But an interview that the Al Jazeera journalist Tayseer Allouni conducted with Bin Laden in October 2001 suggests why this interpretation was inadequate:

The name Al Qaeda is very old. It came about without anyone really choosing it. The late Abu al-Ubaida Banshiri [an Egyptian activist, drowned in Lake Victoria in the spring of 1996, while he was organizing cells for the network in East Africa] had created a military base to train young men in the fight against the . . . Soviet terrorism. This training camp was called "the base" [Al Qaeda]. And the name spread. We are the children of one nation [*umma*], which extends from the Middle East to the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, and as far away as Mauritania.

Bin Laden's explanation suggests that as the network evolved over time, its name came to have a double meaning. Originally, it designated a group of radical Islamists who were training together

at one specific military base. But as the organization changed and developed, by extension the name became a metaphor for the dispersal of those fighters around the globe and for the web of communication links that held them together—a “database” that served as a microcosm of the *umma*, whose “brothers in Islam” could be found from the Philippines to Mauritania.

By intensely focusing strikes and searches on the physical facilities in Afghanistan, the United States demonstrated a failure to grasp fully the entirely different, and much wider, reality expressed by the name’s double meaning. Perhaps the psychological mechanism of denial was at work in Washington’s metaphorical lapse—denial of the intimate relationship that the Pentagon and the American intelligence services had nourished with Islamist radicals during the United States’ proxy war against the Red Army on the same soil. By reducing Al Qaeda to a military-style base that could be pinpointed through special operations conducted by Green Berets and Gurkas and then destroyed by laser-guided airstrikes, perhaps Washington—and the neocons most prominently—hoped to avoid the difficult analysis of their own role in creating a monster.

With the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration moved from the still unfinished pursuit of Al Qaeda to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Part of the incentive was to strike and destroy a tangible enemy, and in the process send a message to rogue states everywhere that the United States was not in a tolerant mood. But the rich folds of the anti-terrorism banner could accommodate and conceal the Bush administration’s much larger mission—one that predated the attacks of September 11. That mission was to rebalance the power structure in the Middle East.

This prospect brought together two primary interests that had determined U.S. foreign policy in the region since the Second World War. The first was to reconcile, once and for all, the United

States' need for dependable oil supplies with its commitment to Israel's security. A regime installed in Baghdad that was dependent on the United States and friendly toward Israel could accomplish this goal. The second interest sought to encourage democracy and peace in this region of the world. The elimination of a dictator who had massacred Kurds and Shia in his own country, initiated devastating wars with his neighbors, Iran and Kuwait, and imposed a reign of terror on his people in the name of Arab nationalism, while monopolizing oil wealth for his clan, would go a long way toward bringing peace to the Middle East. Success at these two complementary goals—or so the wishful thinking went in Washington—would eliminate terrorism's root causes in the region, which grew out of political oppression, poverty, ignorance, and instability.

Depending on whether one wholeheartedly accepts or rejects these two dimensions of U.S. foreign policy as legitimate, the notion of eradicating terror through the invasion of a sovereign country can be seen as either a noble cause or a sordid pretext for imperial ambitions. But those who wish to transcend such impassioned value judgments must adopt a more critical attitude at every step along the road that stretches from September 11, 2001, to June 28, 2004—the date of the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi people. These two dimensions of U.S. foreign policy are in fact intrinsically related, and indeed incomprehensible when viewed independently. The complex meanings and signs encoded in U.S. operations in the Middle East during this period are not decrypted as easily as the administration's supporters and detractors have claimed.

AS SHOCK AND CHAOS prevailed in the days following the strikes on New York and Washington, the U.S. government was forced to

propose emergency reprisals, even though no one had yet claimed responsibility for the attacks. In impromptu remarks, President Bush described America's counteroffensive as a "crusade." In the United States, this term did not designate anything more than intense mobilization, and it carried no explicit connotation of the medieval Christian context in which it arose. Nevertheless, the choice of this word was a serious gaffe, and the American president retracted it immediately. He promptly visited Washington's principal mosque, contrite and barefoot, in order to erase the impression that the mobilization in question was directed at Muslims or at Islam in general.

The Bush administration sang the refrain of harmony with Islam again and again as the war on terror took shape. With equal conviction, many imams and a plethora of Islamist websites claimed that the real target of the war on terror was Islam, just as Islam had been the target of the medieval Crusades. By forcing President Bush's about-face, his adversaries scored the first point in a tense game of political rhetoric. His awkward reference to a "crusade" was at best a confirmation of the president's inexperience in dealing with international crises, even if it was not a Freudian slip that betrayed his subconscious desires. In the Muslim world, the significance was not dismissed so easily. Through acts of exegesis performed on the word by television preachers throughout the *umma*, the United States—itsself the victim of terrorism—was turned into a repeat offender against Islam. Bush's "crusade" echoed the "Crusaders" Bin Laden was denouncing in his declarations and confirmed the content of his propaganda. Al Qaeda's circle of sympathizers widened as a result of Bush's misstep.

From there, it was but another small step to the claim, made widely in the Muslim world, that September 11 had been set up by American and Israeli intelligence as a pretext for a "Crusader-

Zionist" offensive targeting the Middle East's oil wealth. In a further spin on the conspiracy theory, rumors spread from Cairo to Damascus and Karachi to Jakarta of an email message (never produced by anyone) that had supposedly advised Jewish employees at the World Trade Center to stay home from work on that fateful day.

Semantic problems aside, Washington's primary difficulty in the days after the attack was one of military strategy. Since the beginning of the Cold War, U.S. doctrine had been devoted principally to the concept of deterrence in various guises: the Soviets had to be dissuaded from ever launching a nuclear attack, the consequences of which would be devastating on their own territory. The result was a state of international tension that commentators termed a "balance of terror."

In his plans for 9/11, Bin Laden sought a balance of this type between America and Muslims (of whom he was the self-designated representative). "They understand only the language of attack and murder," he told the journalist Tayseer Allouni in October 2001. "Just as they kill us, we must kill them, to create a balance of terror. This is the first time in the modern era that terror has begun to reach a point of equilibrium between Americans and Muslims. Until now, American politicians did as they pleased with us. The victims could not even cry out . . . The battle is now inside America. We will work to carry it on, if Allah allows it, until victory or until we return to Allah, before the inevitable success."

The problem with September 11, from the standpoint of U.S. military strategy, was that the United States could not clearly define a stable territory against which its retaliatory missiles could be launched. Military modes of action and reaction, nuclear or conventional, were conceived to destroy territorial defenses, seize cities, control airspace, annihilate tanks, disrupt troop formations,

shoot down planes, and overthrow regimes that physically occupied palaces, offices, and barracks. Bin Laden and his allies had no homeland or territory: they were at best refugees in Afghanistan, under Taliban control. That Mullah Omar, the emir who ruled over Kandahar, had fallen under the spell of his Saudi guest did not circumscribe the network any more clearly within that country's borders.

Yet in the early phase of the war on terror, most of the means and resources employed to track down the terrorists focused on annihilating Al Qaeda's Taliban hosts through the occupation of their national soil. U.S. strategists were apparently convinced that Bin Laden, Zawahiri, and the rest, even if forced into their Tora Bora lairs in the high Pashtun mountain ranges, could be captured or exterminated during the course of the campaign to wipe out the Taliban regime.

Bin Laden's counteroffensive recognized that, under the right circumstances, rhetoric and satellite propaganda can be on equal footing with unmanned bombers and cruise missiles. He responded to the Afghan invasion on October 7 with a call to Muslims worldwide to take up arms in a universal jihad against America. In Afghanistan itself, however, this jihad was ineffective, and the attack against the Taliban represented a stunning victory for state-of-the-art U.S. weaponry. In an exemplary application of the military doctrine of Albert Wohlstetter, the U.S. military minimized human losses among troops and "collateral damage" among civilian populations through the use of special forces and "smart bombs."

The attack also represented a success for U.S. intelligence services, which had unified disparate ethnic groups—mainly Tajiks and Uzbeks—into a fighting force called the Northern Alliance. These tribal warriors, equipped with American technology, carried

out most of the ground offensives, including the final march on Kabul. The Muslim troops who fought and ultimately overthrew the Taliban silenced the preachers on Arab television channels who were inciting the world's Muslims to take up arms in defense of Islamic territory that was being invaded by unbelievers. Once Mazar, Herat, Kunduz, Kabul, Jalalabad, and finally Kandahar had fallen to forces composed of Afghan Muslim soldiers, the religious foundation for the call to jihad fell away. Confusion reigned when the first images were broadcast of Arab jihad fighters being bound with wire, taken prisoner, and even mistreated by members of the Northern Alliance—fellow Muslims whom the jihadists were supposedly delivering from the infidels.

From both a military and a psychological point of view, the Afghan operation appeared to be a triumph for the United States. American soldiers had gained a foothold in former Soviet republics in Central Asia—Muslim countries rich in oil and gas and anxious to shake off Moscow's postcolonial dominance. Furthermore, since NATO had played only a marginal role, this victory belonged to the superpower alone. And for the first time, perfect electronic integration of air, sea, and land forces had been tested on the battlefield, where they performed splendidly. The Pentagon's control of the commons—sea, sky, and space in the theater of conflict—was absolute, as it would be in the conventional phase of the Iraq War a year and a half later.

Given the stated goals of the war on terror, however, Operation Enduring Freedom was a Pyrrhic victory. Despite the severe blows the Al Qaeda network had suffered—its data seized, many of its activists captured or killed—the elimination of its physical base in Afghanistan did not eradicate Al Qaeda's effectiveness. Attacks started up once more, and as they increased, the double meaning of the metaphor became clearer: this organization did not consist of buildings and tanks and borders but of Internet websites, satel-

lite television links, clandestine financial transfers, international air travel, and a proliferation of activists ranging from the suburbs of Jersey City to the rice paddies of Indonesia. The U.S. military force had taken Tora Bora with bombs and missiles, and British commando squads had explored the depths of the caves where Bin Laden had been filmed; but the prey would not be found there.

In deciding to eradicate the Taliban, Washington revised the logic that had dominated U.S. policy in Afghanistan since the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. In the manner of police strategies that encircle and contain certain forms of delinquency by coordinating surveillance with neighborhood gang leaders and pimps, the U.S. strategy toward Afghanistan had tacitly encouraged the Taliban to harbor the lost soldiers of jihad, who had nowhere else to go once the armed struggles in Algeria, Egypt, Bosnia, and Kashmir had failed. On the surface, the United States adopted a practice of benign neglect, but in reality Pakistan's support for the rising Taliban movement and its occupation of Kabul in 1996 would have been ineffective, indeed inconceivable, without Washington's consent. In 1996 Bin Laden himself, along with his entourage, was transported to Kandahar from Sudan with the United States' blessing, when his presence began to hinder a regime seeking to escape international condemnation. Neither Washington nor Riyadh wished to put the Saudi multimillionaire on trial, although Kharthoum was willing to turn him in. Rid of Bin Laden, Sudan felt the pressure from Washington lift. Meanwhile, communication and transportation problems between Afghanistan and the rest of the world made it unlikely that jihad would be exported from this remote region—so common wisdom had it.

The inanity of this red-light-district strategy became apparent as early as August 23, 1996, when Bin Laden made his jihad declaration and began transforming Afghanistan into a base from which

to launch the attacks of 1998, 2000, and 2001. Yet American policy toward the Taliban did not shift. On September 11, however, the sheer magnitude of the destruction required a thoroughgoing revision.

The war on terror directed at the Taliban was analogous to the behavior of police when delinquency transcends the terms of the gentleman's agreement between gang leaders and the forces of order. At that point the police often besiege a stronghold, seizing caches of arms, handcuffing unsavory criminals, and even demolishing buildings. But these dramatic crackdowns, which often make the evening news, serve only to encourage the proliferation of criminal behavior outside the besieged zone when no social measures are taken to counter the factors giving rise to the delinquency. In the same way, the crackdown on the Taliban's Islamist halfway house served to disperse many Al Qaeda jihadists around the world. Alerted in plenty of time, they fled with the innkeeper. As Bin Laden, Zawahiri, and Mullah Omar vanished into the Pashtun valleys, they left behind only their accounts and some addresses—small consolation indeed.

A communiqué from a group speaking in the network's name and signed Qaedat al-Jihad (Jihad Base), which appeared on the Internet on April 26, 2002, announced: "Allah has allowed us to protect most of the Arab forces and lead them to safety. There were about 1,600 mujahedeen, from all over the Muslim world, spread along four main fronts: north of Kabul, Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. About 325 became martyrs, 150 were taken prisoner, and over a thousand fled. Through Allah's grace, over 300 families were evacuated. The total number of martyrs is nine women and ten children." Even if these numbers were skewed for propaganda purposes, the fact remained that many jihad fighters had been able to get away.

The fall of Kabul and the arrest or death of many Islamist activists obliterated the network's physical infrastructure but did not affect the network's ability to reconstitute itself elsewhere, albeit on a smaller scale, and to launch a series of attacks during the following years. Al Qaeda needed only to demonstrate to potential "martyrs" that it had escaped destruction and was continuing to serve the cause of jihad until the inevitable defeat of the Western imperialists and their Muslim clients. To that end, it had only to show itself through attacks that were preceded or followed by communiqués attributed to Bin Laden or Zawahiri.

The targets were chosen carefully, according to two criteria. The first was the impact of terror on the enemy; images of dismembered, bleeding bodies broadcast to the farthest reaches of the earth were intended to panic and demoralize the West and foster dissent in its ranks. The second criterion was the impact of terror on potential "martyrs"; as the alleged moral dimension of the attacks increased from the perspective of Muslims, the popularity of the movement would grow and more recruits would volunteer for martyrdom. On this scale of values, Jews, then Americans, followed by Westerners in general, and finally their "apostate" Middle Eastern agents were targets ranked in descending order of legitimacy.

In the framework of jihad, none of Al Qaeda's intended victims were "innocent." Jews were the preferred targets, not just in reference to the state of Israel or Ariel Sharon's policy toward Palestine but in an essential, ontological sense. Thus, in October 2001 when Tayseer Allouni asked Bin Laden if he agreed with the concept of a clash of civilizations, he received this reply:

Absolutely. The [holy] Book states it clearly. Jews and Americans invented the myth of peace on earth. That's a

fairy tale. All they do is chloroform Muslims while leading them to the slaughterhouse. And the massacre continues. If we defend ourselves, they call us terrorists. The Prophet said: "The Hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them." When a Jew hides behind a rock or a tree, it will say: "O Muslim, O servant of Allah! There is a Jew behind me, come and kill him!" Those who claim that there will be lasting peace between us and the Jews are unbelievers because they disagree with the [holy] Book and its contents.

Bin Laden was drawing on a literal interpretation of one of the Prophet's sayings, the kind of interpretation preferred by salafist preachers in order to convince their fellow Muslims—under threat of excommunication—that murdering Jews is their duty. This interpretation differed from that of preachers who emerged from the Muslim Brothers, such as Sheikh Qaradawi, who justified the killing of Israelis, but not of Jews in general, as part of the jihad to reconquer Palestine, a usurped Muslim land. Americans could not be presumed innocent either, according to Bin Laden; but here his arguments were less assured and underwent several changes over time.

In an interview with Hamid Mir, a Pakistani journalist, which was published in the Lahore daily *Dawn* on November 7, 2001, the leader of Al Qaeda, asked to justify the murder of innocents in light of the teachings of Islam, snapped:

This is a major point in jurisprudence. In my view, if an enemy occupies a Muslim territory and uses common people as human shields, then it is permitted to attack that enemy. For instance, if bandits barge into a home and hold a child hostage, then the child's father can at-

tack the bandits and in that attack even the child may get hurt. America and its allies are massacring us in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir and Iraq. The Muslims have the right to attack America in reprisal . . . The September 11 attacks were not targeted at women and children. The real targets were America's icons of military and economic power.

As if the weaknesses of his argument were visible even to himself, Bin Laden followed a different line of thinking in his next explanation: "The American people should remember that they pay taxes to their government, they elect their president, their government manufactures arms and gives them to Israel, and Israel uses them to massacre Palestinians. The American Congress endorses all government measures and this proves that [all] America is responsible for the atrocities perpetrated against Muslims. [All] America, because they elect the Congress."

As for the many non-Americans who died when the twin towers collapsed—and in particular Muslims in whose name the jihad was carried out—Bin Laden settled the question by noting: "The Islamic sharia says Muslims should not live in the land of the infidel for long." This argument was also used by the GIA in the 1990s to justify the massacre of Algerian civilians, through communiqués transmitted by London's Islamist media. Like Bin Laden, these activists had been indoctrinated in the Afghan jihad training camps by the same salafist-jihadist ideologues.

According to Bin Laden's point of view, the slaughter of innocents is not terrorism. It is merely a minor reparation for the countless crimes and murders committed against Islam and Muslims since the end of the 600-year-old Ottoman Empire in 1923. "What the United States is tasting today is nothing compared to what we

have tasted for decades. Our *umma* has known this humiliation and contempt for over eighty years. Its sons are killed, its blood is spilled, its holy sites are attacked, and it is not governed according to Allah's command. Despite this, no one cares."

DESPITE AMERICA'S EFFORTS to run Al Qaeda to ground, in the period between September 11 and the transfer of sovereignty to Iraq, a series of attacks demonstrated Al Qaeda's global presence and its resilience. These attacks were designed to satisfy Bin Laden's two criteria: maximum damage to the enemy, and maximum popularity among the masses. Only the proportions varied, depending on local conditions.

On December 2, 2002, during Ramadan, and then again on December 6, on the occasion of the feast marking the end of the month of fasting, two statements were posted on websites that the movement used frequently. Signed respectively by the "political bureau of Qaeday al-Jihad organization" and Al Qaeda's usual spokesman, Sulayman Abu Ghaith, a Kuwaiti, they explained the significance of the two largely unsuccessful attacks in the Kenyan beach resort of Mombassa just a few days earlier, on November 28. This failed operation—in which two missiles launched against an Israeli charter plane were turned off course by its radar, and nine Kenyan employees, as well as the three suicide bombers, were among the fifteen people killed in an explosion at the Paradise Hotel—made it necessary to explain the goals of the network, which had been blurred by this fiasco.

Despite the absence of conclusive, absolute proof, most expert observers believed these statements were authentic. The fact that they were posted on the Internet instead of being broadcast on one

of the Gulf's pan-Arab satellite channels (which fight for the privilege, hoping to increase their audience) suggests that the messages were intended primarily for potential sympathizers rather than for the masses, and that the goal of the postings was first and foremost to clarify and validate the political logic that underpinned the Mombassa attack.

The first statement was elaborate, exceptionally precise, and carefully argued. The second completed the first and claimed to authenticate it, thanks to Abu Ghaith's "signature" (although neither Bin Laden's nor Zawahiri's signature appeared). It is impossible, given the available evidence, to untangle the internal conflicts that may have motivated this curious double posting. But together, the statements offer a fairly accurate representation of Al Qaeda's strategy after its dismantled base spread across the real and the virtual world.

The statement issued by the "political bureau" ran as follows:

In the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Praise be to Allah, who has said:

"... slay

The Infidels wherever ye find them,

And seize them, beleaguer them."

Blessings and praise upon the most noble of prophets, Muhammad, and upon his people. In this holy month [Ramadan], and in these past ten blessed days, we would like to congratulate, first, our people in Palestine, and then all the Muslim *umma*. We delayed these congratulations deliberately, so that they would coincide with the two operations in Mombassa, Kenya, against Zionist interests, and so that our greeting would be more mean-

ingful in the circumstances under which the *umma* is suffering by the fault of its enemies, the Crusaders and the Jews.

Today, the mujahedeen have returned to this place, where the coalition of Jews and Crusaders was overcome four years ago, at the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, in order to strike this deceitful coalition once more; but this strike is against the Jews, and it bears the following message: whatever you inflict by way of war damages, occupation of our holy sites, criminal acts against our people in Palestine—by killing children, women, the elderly, by destroying houses, uprooting trees, and maintaining your siege—will not go unpunished. You will suffer the same, and more if Allah allows it. Your children for ours, your women for ours, your old people for ours, your buildings for our homes. In retaliation for the siege you have imposed on our lives and survival, we will besiege you with terror and fear, we will hunt you down, with Allah's permission, wherever you are, on land, at sea, or in the skies.

The mujahedeen have kept their promise to Allah to cause His religion to triumph. They have kept their promise to the *umma* to end its humiliation and degradation, by launching painful strikes and victorious operations, with Allah's assistance, against the treacherous coalition of Jews and Crusaders, wherever it is to be found. Praise be to Allah for what follows:

The destruction of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi;

The destruction of the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam;

The destruction of the World Trade Center in New York;

The destruction of the Pentagon;

The hijacking of the American airliner over Pennsylvania, intended to strike at the U.S. Congress.

America was maddened by all this. It was plunged into a state of shock and horror by all it saw and heard, without understanding the cause of its ill. It was shaken, its dignity was crushed into the ground, and it forced the entire world to rally behind its flag and fall into step with its iniquitous campaign—unprecedented in ancient or modern history—against this honest group of mujahedeen and against the Muslim *umma*. It thought it would be capable of winning the day and exterminating Allah's soldiers.

The entire world became a CIA office, following America around everywhere on earth and under the heavens, forgetting that Islam is devotion, that it grows stronger in hardship, suffering, and distress. This was demonstrated by the mujahedeen, who proved capable, with Allah's help, of targeting their strikes and launching attacks during a year when they were being hunted down. Since the Crusaders attacked Afghanistan in the middle of the month of Rajab 1422 [October 2001], they have accomplished the following:

The operation in Djerba, Tunisia, against the synagogue;

The shoe rigged with explosives on the American airliner;

The attack on French soldiers in Pakistan;

The attack on the [French] oil tanker in Yemen;  
The assassination of marines in Falayka, Kuwait;  
The destruction of the Bali discotheque, as well as  
other operations that took place on the same day in Indonesia;

The two operations in Mombassa against Jewish interests;

Dozens of operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere in various parts of the world;

Other operations, which we shall not mention for various reasons . . .

The statement that appeared four days later, signed by Sulayman Abu Ghaith, on *jihad.net*, in a bid to "confirm" the previous one, noted:

While the nature of our activities in the previous phase prevented us from claiming responsibility for our jihad operations against this iniquitous alliance, today we find ourselves in a better situation and a more assured position, and can therefore do so. The mujahedeen are part of this blessed, victorious *umma*. They are the vanguard, which has devoted itself to fomenting confrontation with our enemies. This vanguard is not fighting in the *umma's* place, but acts upon it like yeast, allowing it to rise and resist occupiers and invaders. It would be wrong to reduce jihad to one limited organization, because jihad is an essential part of faith, of the original doctrine that confronts Islam's enemies. It is part of the path shown by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him) and his companions.

These two statements, like many of the documents issued by the Islamist terrorist network, pose a problem of authenticity, since the Internet lends itself to infinite manipulation. Abu Ghaith's electronic signature proves nothing in itself. Only the fact that the statements were posted on a jihadist site well known at the time, and the fact that no one has disavowed them since, provides the documents with some external elements of credibility and veracity. Furthermore, they show a considerable degree of internal coherence; and the relation between the content and the actions to which the text refers, as well as the suggested interpretation, makes sense.

The interest of the two statements lies first in the list of acts to which they lay claim, an innovation justified by the "improved" circumstances in which the network found itself. This boasting affirmation should be read, however, as exactly the reverse: if the list was published as a show of strength, it was because the network was in fact going through a phase of weakness. In March 2002 Abu Zubayda, a 31-year-old Palestinian born in Saudi Arabia, had been arrested in Pakistan. An operations commander, he was close to Bin Laden, who had made him responsible for directing camps in Afghanistan and then for training terrorists even when he was very young. Some of these trainees—like the "shoe bomber" Richard Reid, a British convert who tried to blow up his shoe in December 2001 on a flight from Paris to the United States—had been arrested and had revealed vast amounts of information to their interrogators.

Above all, in September 2002 Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and his associate, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, the technical "brains" behind the September 11 operation, suffered the consequences of their carelessness after attempting to influence a documentary Al Jazeera was supposed to air in commemoration of the attacks on the United

States. While meeting an Egyptian journalist who worked for the station in Karachi, they allowed U.S. and Pakistani intelligence agencies that were trailing them to locate the group that had planned the attacks. In late September Bin al-Shibh, a Yemeni who had been slated to be a 9/11 hijacker but was unable to obtain a visa to enter the United States, was arrested. This opened the way to the capture of the planning and operations chief behind the attacks, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. He was caught on March 1, 2003, hiding in a house in Rawalpindi that belonged to a deputy of Pakistan's main Islamist party. Born in 1965 to a Baluchi family that had settled in Kuwait, he was Ramzi Youssef's uncle, albeit only three years his nephew's senior. Youssef had planned the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 and was serving time in the United States.

The circumstances of these arrests, amid recurring doubts that Bin Laden was alive and still fit to command, hardly made the case for the group's efficiency and capacity to pose a global threat. Rather, they testified to the fissures in its security, protection and alliance networks, and communications policy. Furthermore, the network now had a new name, *Qaedat al-Jihad*, which combined "Al Qaeda" with the name of the Egyptian group led by Zawahiri, "Tanzim al-Jihad" (Jihad Organization) to create an expression signifying "Jihad Base." It also claimed to have acquired a "political bureau," an expression more reminiscent of extreme left-wing parties than of Islamist movements and one intended to suggest efficiency and political savvy at a time when these qualities seemed to be in question.

The first admission of responsibility for the September 11 attacks had taken the form of a the macabre video clip of the "testament" recorded by one of the hijackers, a Saudi citizen, Ahmad al-Haznawi al-Ghamdi. He made his statement before a picture of the twin towers, above which floated the slogan: "Expel the *mushrikin* [that is, the Jews and Christians, who worship other dei-

ties alongside the one true God] from the Arabian peninsula." This videotape, which was televised on April 17, 2002, by Al Jazeera, marked a break with the deliberate evasiveness that Bin Laden had adopted with his interviewers up to that point.

The date of this change in communication strategy is significant: it coincides with an Israeli army operation in the Jenin refugee camp aimed at dismantling explosives workshops and suicide-bomber training networks in the Palestinian territories. Israeli troops killed many Palestinian civilians and caused extensive property damage. Across the Arab world, outrage mingled with frustration and a sense of powerlessness. Thanks to a U.S. veto, the "Jenin massacre" was not discussed at the U.N. Security Council. With this first explicit, irrefutable admission of responsibility for the 9/11 attacks, the planners asserted to the *umma* that they were the only force able to strike a comparably powerful blow at the enemy.

This vendetta logic was visible in the two subsequent statements released in December 2002. At that time, Sharon's government had begun to build a "security fence" that would encircle Israeli space and isolate the eroding Palestinian territories, to the great distress not only of Arab public opinion but also of international institutions, which protested in vain. In retaliation for the "siege" Israel had imposed upon the Palestinians, the December 2 statement announced that it would besiege the Israelis on land, at sea, and in the skies—thus providing the Mombassa operation with a justification that was all the more necessary because the attack had fallen so far short of its goals. For Al Qaeda supporters, it was therefore crucial to reiterate that its militants were not acting in the *umma's* stead but rather were the agents of its uprising against the "Jews and Crusaders"—that these militants would strike a blow for every blow received, while all the other representatives of the Muslim world faltered.

During the same month of December 2002, for three days running, the Arabic-language London daily *Al-Quds al-Arabi* published a pamphlet by Ayman al-Zawahiri entitled *Al-wala wal-bara* (*Loyalty and Separation*); it was also available on all the jihadist movement's websites. A little over a year after the hunt for Al Qaeda had begun, at a time when the invasion of Iraq seemed imminent, Zawahiri's statement did not discuss the operational or technical aspects of the attacks that had taken place during the previous months but echoed points made in his *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, which had appeared a year earlier. He reaffirmed the doctrinal foundations of global jihad and identified its contemporary targets and goals.

To Arabic-speaking readers who were knowledgeable about Islamic concepts, the reaffirmation was obvious even in the title. *Al-wala wal-bara* is a canonical definition of Muslim identity, referring to a state of siege, especially during the Prophet's era, which was rife with crucial conflicts, and to two subsequent historical traumas: the loss of Andalusia to the Christian Reconquista between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries and the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols, or "infidel" Tatars, in the thirteenth. The phrase advocates enclosing Islamic identity within an internal citadel, in accordance with austere, intransigent criteria, to ward off the threat of its imminent disintegration or corruption.

The term *wala* suggests friendship, loyalty, trust; *bara* evokes the severing of ties, the absence of any relation. The correlation of the two concepts enjoins Muslims to give their trust and friendship only to Muslims, and to withhold them from unbelievers; infidels, apostates, and hypocrites—non-Muslims—must be subjected to a merciless jihad until they accept Islam or face extermination. The Quranic verse most frequently cited in scholastic tradition stipulates:

O ye who believe!  
Take not the Jews  
And the Christians  
For your friends and protectors:  
They are but friends and protectors  
To each other. And he  
Amongst you that turns to them  
(For friendship) is of them.

This last verse has been used repeatedly since the 1990s by jihad fighters to justify the incidental killing of Muslims (often more numerous than the originally targeted enemy) during attacks against unbelievers, under the pretext that they should not have been nearby, since such proximity exposed them to suspicions that they were associating with the infidels. In the context of a war against unbelievers, the term *bara* or separation suggests that if Muslims do not break all ties of friendship or trust with unbelievers—if they associate with some of them, for instance, to preserve their immediate interests—then Islam is in peril.

Some ulema used this reasoning to explain Baghdad's fall to the Tatars or the Reconquista of Andalusia. By contrast, during colonial times, which gave rise to critical introspection among Muslim elites who sought the causes of colonial domination in the Islamic world's backwardness, the notion of *al-wala wal-bara*, with its imperative of separation from Europe, fell into disuse. It seemed more urgent at that time to learn the technologies and ways of thinking that had made European civilization dominant—even if that question was addressed, as it was by reformers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his disciples, through the rereading of sacred texts. Once purged of accumulated tradition, the reformers imag-

ined, these texts would allow them to bring the precepts of early Islam into line with European modernity. The result, however, was that men of religion lost their influence among Muslim intellectuals: the ulema had to give way, or at least accept the loss of their monopoly, to academics and thinkers who advocated nationalism, liberalism, secularism, or socialism.

The failure, a generation after the colonial era, of independent states that were founded on these principles reopened the way to those who rejected the ideals themselves. Believing that Western civilization had corrupted the Islamic world and was the root of all ills, they advocated its wholesale rejection. This philosophy, at its most extreme in Zawahiri's writings and Bin Laden's terrorist practices, unearthed the doctrine of *al-wala wal-bara* as a means to that end.

The premises of the doctrine can be found as early as the 1960s in the work of Sayyid Qutb, who advocated separation between the Muslim vanguard, which had to return to the Prophet's way of life in order to restore Islam's greatness, and what he termed *jahiliyya*, the modern world of ignorance and unbelief. Qutb, however, was not trained as a classical jurist, and he used a modern term more easily understood by readers who were superficially educated in Arabic: *mufasala*, which also means separation but is not a Quranic reference. On the other hand, *bara* emerged from a religious and scholarly tradition and, as used by Zawahiri, had a significance that only erudite Arabic speakers with a religious education could grasp instantly. Thus, Zawahiri's pamphlet constituted a sort of linguistic strong-arm tactic: it intimidated those who did not adhere to his views by attributing their disagreement to ignorance of the language used in the Quran.

The text was divided into two unequal parts. The first, twice as long as the second, set down the Islamic grounds for the doctrine

of "loyalty and separation"—implying that newspaper readers or Internet surfers had forgotten them. The second specified the doctrine's modern application, thus mobilizing the resources of religious tradition in the service of jihad. In the first part, Zawahiri offered his own potpourri of Quranic verses, prophetic sayings, and analyses and glosses by legal scholars to demonstrate that Muslims are forbidden from associating with "infidels." In his argument, there was no trace of the tolerance for "people of the Book"—especially Christians and Jews—upon which Islam's apologists insist. Zawahiri lumped them all together indiscriminately: they were all infidels, who must submit or be killed. The same applied to "bad Muslims," the apostates and hypocrites who do not heed the call to jihad and who for their own sordid reasons prefer to associate with infidels, thus precipitating their fall in this life and the hereafter.

Zawahiri drew heavily on the fatwas (legal opinions) that Ibn Taymiyya pronounced in the thirteenth century, as the Tatar invasion was under way. That invasion would culminate in the conquest of Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid caliphate. These references were hardly coincidental: the U.S.-led coalition was preparing to attack Baghdad and would launch its invasion three months after the publication of Zawahiri's tract. The point, therefore, was to read the forthcoming war not as a battle for democracy, as the neoconservatives in Washington saw it, but as a sort of remake of the devastation the warring Tatars had caused seven centuries earlier. This view would revive one of the two major disasters (Andalusia being the other) that have marked the history of Islam.

Thus, Zawahiri recycled the traditional ulema's most radical rulings, passed centuries earlier in a time of imminent peril, but imbued them with an unchanging and binding character that made

them applicable to the circumstances of today. Zawahiri's first target was the Muslim leadership—the kings, emirs, and presidents of states close to Iraq, from Egypt to Pakistan via the monarchies of the Arabian peninsula—that was preparing to participate in the American invasion by providing troops or allowing the use of military bases or air space. In so doing, Zawahiri was taking no great risk, since he was echoing an opinion that transcended jihadist circles: in Qatar, which would become the headquarters of the U.S. attack on Saddam, Sheikh Qaradawi had spoken out along the same lines. Conveniently for U.S. military operations, he disappeared from the screen of Al Jazeera (which broadcasts from Qatar) to undergo a surgical procedure—one which he had put off repeatedly in the past and which required a period of convalescence that coincided with the period of the U.S.-led invasion.

Saddam Hussein was a secularist whose Baath Party the Islamists despised. But they felt that his crimes, no matter how grievous, could not justify a Muslim alliance with a non-Muslim coalition, especially since those non-Muslims were acting with the perverse intention of corrupting belief and obedience to Allah. Thus, according to Zawahiri, who took the argument further than Qaradawi, any Muslim ally of America against Saddam Hussein was by definition an apostate whose blood it was permissible to spill. The ultimate goal of the Judeo-Crusaders, to use the term popularized by the World Islamic Front against Jews and Crusaders in 1998, was to occupy and thereby annihilate—symbolically if not in reality—Islam's holy sites, and therefore to strike a fatal blow against Islam itself. Israel's occupation of Jerusalem was merely the prelude to a U.S. occupation of Mecca and Medina.

By putting forth a theological argument to buttress a feeling of anxiety and humiliation that was widespread in the Muslim world

but was rarely made explicit, Zawahiri continued to compete for the hearts and minds of believers and to seek their acceptance of Al Qaeda as its belligerent vanguard. No alliance or friendship with the infidels was permitted, though dissimulation was an acceptable strategy when the enemy occupied a position of strength, as in India and China or on the outskirts of European and American cities. Through such dissimulation of allegiance, the community's ranks and strength could grow, until the time was right for jihad. Against the apostate regimes (lackeys of the Judeo-Crusaders), against the ulema, thinkers, journalists, and intellectuals who served those princes and spent their time inventing pretexts to delay the struggle, young people of the Muslim world were duty-bound to join the jihad caravan wherever it could be found: "Young Muslims must not await anyone's authorization. Jihad against Americans, Jews, and their allies among the hypocrites and apostates is mandatory on all Muslims." Thus did Zawahiri conclude his pamphlet. In 2003, a new group of activists heeded his call.

THE ATTACKS CARRIED OUT in 2003 opened a new phase of violence, bringing it back to the Middle East, where, in mid-March, the U.S. army had begun its invasion and occupation of Iraq. A stated goal of this operation was to eradicate terrorism by overthrowing a tyrant and establishing a democratic regime that would spread its influence throughout the region. For Al Qaeda and those who shared its hostility to the U.S. presence, attacks within the region would demonstrate to the world that Washington's hopes were absurd.

With the exception of strikes in Iraq, to which we will return

later, the series began in Saudi Arabia. On May 12, thirty-five people were killed in a residential complex in Riyadh as Secretary of State Colin Powell was visiting the capital; nine of the victims were Americans. On May 16, in Casablanca, the targets were "Jewish and European," but all forty-five of the victims were Muslims. On November 8, in Riyadh again, seventeen people were killed, all Arabs (including some Lebanese Christians). On November 14 and 20, in Istanbul, a synagogue, a Jewish center, and a British bank were targets of explosions. A local Islamist newspaper ran the headline: "Sixty-nine dead, but only six Jews."

The high proportion of Muslim victims in the 2003 attacks suggested less "professionalism" than Al Qaeda had demonstrated in the previous year. If Zawahiri and others sought to mobilize the *umma*, this shotgun approach was counterproductive. In Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Turkey, the population rejected terrorism virulently, cutting the radical Islamists off from many potential supporters—as had been the case in Egypt in 1997, when the Luxor massacre caused widespread revulsion. On the other hand, the suicide attacks demonstrated the growing localization and decentralization of the terrorist network, following the arrest in March of the network's chief operations planner, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. This new crop of suicide bombers consisted of natives: Saudis, Moroccans, and Turks, trained only superficially by some compatriot who had been in an Afghan or Pakistani camp. The amateurishness of the attacks translated into relatively weak coverage by the world media, in contrast with operations in 2001 and 2002, which had been remarkably effective in popularizing the cause of jihad.

Balancing out such decreased effectiveness, however, was the fact that terrorism had proliferated beyond the practiced activists in Bin Laden's circle, most of whom were now serving prison sen-

tences or were in U.S. custody. This troublesome evolution suggests that terrorism could become routine in these countries, in much the same way that it has become routine in Palestine, Israel, and, increasingly, in Iraq. Violence inspired directly or indirectly by the ideology of *al-wala wal-bara* and similar doctrines has spread to the slums, among networks of delinquents financed by dope-peddling and sundry petty trafficking. Their bombs are cheap and easy to make with ammonium nitrate and have devastating effects. Al Qaeda, in a sense, has become a franchise, with Bin Laden merely the logo for small-time operations managed by independent micro-entrepreneurs working under license to purvey terrorism.

Nowhere was the indigenous character of the new terrorism clearer than in the May 16 attacks on Casablanca and the March 2004 bombing of the Madrid trains. The suicide bombers in Morocco died as they detonated their charges in places with Jewish or European connotations: the alumni association of the Universal Israelite Alliance, a Jewish-owned restaurant, a hotel where Israeli tourists were staying, the Jewish cemetery, and the Casa de España club, where Spaniards socialized during colonial times but which is frequented only by Moroccans today. Just as the 9/11 hijackers had slit the throats of those who tried to resist, the attackers in Casablanca used long knives to slit the throats of porters, policemen, and guards on duty before blowing themselves up with a primitive fertilizer-based mixture.

All the victims were Moroccans, which confused the message received by a population that was supposed to rally to the jihad and its goals. The terrorists, too, were Moroccans: ten of the twelve were from one shantytown neighborhood on the outskirts of Casablanca. Most of the suicide bombers were barely educated, though a few had managed to escape for a time before falling back into poverty, and several had attempted to emigrate secretly to

Spain, in hope of finding work there. None had a direct link to Al Qaeda; none had trained in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Their indoctrination had been an entirely local affair, carried out through the sermons and speeches of imams from the salafist movement, some of whom had been educated in Saudi Arabia and sought to impose Islamic order in the slum, to "command good and forbid evil." They did this by sending out militias armed with sticks and whips to hunt down unmarried couples, petty dealers, people who drank alcohol, and "immoral women."

One of these imams was thought to be the Moroccan representative of the salafist-jihadist militant Abu Qatada, whom many considered to be the most radical figure of the London-based Islamist movement. Another had already ordered several executions by stoning or decapitation. Yet another, at the same time that Zawahiri was writing his pamphlet, had circulated a small treatise also titled *Al-Wala wal-Bara*, which incited readers to engage in immediate jihad against the Moroccan regime, which he saw as "falsely Muslim."

A few of the May 16 suicide bombers had discovered Islam recently; some had been petty criminals, drug addicts, or alcoholics; but all had been delighted by the September attacks. Won over by Osama bin Laden's charisma, they were desperate to imitate him. Encouraged by the imams to act but unable to cross the Straits of Gibraltar to enter Europe, they chose instead to leave the misery of the slums behind for good and head toward Paradise, where their status as jihad martyrs guaranteed them extraordinary rewards.

The Casablanca attacks resulted from a mix of Al Qaeda's ideology with the social frustrations of dispossessed young men who decided, under the influence of radical salafist imams, to translate their political impotence into terrorism. This primitive hybrid had a fatal flaw, however—the Islamists' failure to convince the *umma* that a struggle which killed so many innocent believers was just.

Their sympathizers may not have objected to the massacre of Jews, Americans, Europeans, and other infidels—indeed, may even have rejoiced—but they drew the line at killing fellow Muslims. In November 2003, when a bloodbath in Riyadh claimed only Arab victims, the same sentiment prevailed, and the jihadist imams had to issue an apology. The Madrid massacre, by contrast, killed mainly infidel Europeans. Though it was carried out by Moroccans linked to the Casablanca movement, this time a group of more experienced jihad fighters, trained directly by Bin Laden's network, was in charge.

Al Qaeda's "Moroccan émigré" connection had caught the attention of investigators following September 11. It had gained visibility mainly through the arraignment of Moroccans who had crossed the borders into France and Germany. Most famous among them was Zacarias Moussaoui, arrested in the United States, and Mohamed al-Mutasaddiq, arrested in Hamburg. Spain's role as a revolving door for terrorists had become clear: its large population of Moroccans included many illegal residents. In July 2001, the principal meeting to plan September 11 in Tarragon had been attended by Mohammed Atta, the chief of the U.S. commandoes, and Ramzi bin al-Shibh, the Yemeni who served as liaison officer with Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and Bin Laden. At the time, the Spanish police and judiciary had no experience in the surveillance and pursuit of radical Islamist groups, and control techniques at border checkpoints were inefficient. This lack of expertise allowed Bin Laden's followers to use Spain as a sanctuary and a base: activists and financial transfers alike passed through it. But a series of extremely thorough investigations and subsequent arrests after 9/11 disturbed this tranquil arrangement and provided data that linked the attacks in Madrid and Casablanca to Al Qaeda soon after they occurred.

The Madrid train bombs exploded early in the morning, as com-

muters on four trains were traveling toward Atocha station. Spain was nearing the end of its election campaign, and the Aznar government had sent troops to Iraq despite strong public disapproval. The prime minister therefore faced left-wing opposition that had made troop withdrawal part of its platform. If these early trains had been running on time on March 11, they would have converged at the station just as the bombs exploded. The railway station itself would have collapsed, killing thousands. Only delays in train departures limited what would have been the gravest massacre in European history. As things stood, 191 people were killed and thousands were crippled for life.

The parallel with September 11 was immediately striking: just as Atta and his accomplices had chosen to target air travel, which is emblematic of transport and communications in the United States, the Madrid terrorists targeted trains, since in Europe railway travel epitomizes efficient transportation. Other shared traits on 3/11 were the early hour and the choice of four trains, to echo the four planes of 9/11.

The Aznar government's immediate reaction was to blame the Basque terrorist group ETA. This tactic, adopted with a view toward the elections, backfired as soon as the first Islamists were arrested and the evidence of their involvement came to light. Voters punished the government severely, refusing to allow Aznar to derive political capital from the attacks, as George W. Bush had done successfully in 2001. Zapatero, the socialist leader who defeated Aznar, reiterated his promise to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq, and a statement from Al Qaeda "saluting" this decision announced that a truce would be called in Spain. This precedent, coming on the heels of Zapatero's inopportune declaration, aimed to show that Bin Laden and his associates could use murder and blackmail to influence domestic policy in European states. But its true

value—or the lack thereof—was revealed on April 3, when a bomb set to blow up under a high-speed train full of passengers traveling from Madrid to Seville was discovered and defused in time.

A statement in Arabic, communicated to the London daily *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, claimed responsibility for the Madrid attacks on the day they occurred. The text was signed by the Abu Hafs al-Misri Brigades (al-Qaeda), in reference to an Egyptian (*Misri* in Arabic), Mohamed Atef, a.k.a Abu Hafs, a former police officer who had become Bin Laden's military and security chief and who was probably killed in the American bombardment of Afghanistan on November 16, 2001. The text referred to an earlier communiqué, issued on March 2, which denied that Al Qaeda's Sunnis had been involved in any way in the bombing that had killed hundreds in Karbala, Iraq, that day. It thereby incriminated the United States in the attack on the world's greatest Shiite pilgrimage site, at a time when Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq were sealing an alliance that would result in an uprising against the U.S. occupation the following month.

After three Quranic citations intended to legitimate the operation from an Islamic point of view, the text began as follows:

Operation trains of death.

The Abu Hafs al-Misri Brigades affirmed in a previous statement [Al Qaeda's statement about the attacks on Karbala and Baghdad], dated Muharram 11, 1425, which corresponds to March 2, 2004, that operations would follow . . . and the brigades have kept their word . . . The death squadron has successfully made its way deep into Crusader Europe, and has dealt one of the pillars of the Crusader alliance [Spain] a painful blow . . . This is only part of the settlement of old scores with Crusader Spain,

America's ally in its war against Islam . . . We in the Abu Hafs al-Misri Brigades do not worry about the deaths of so-called civilians . . . Is it permissible for them to kill our children, our wives, our old people, and our youth in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Kashmir? Is it then illicit for us to kill them?

After recalling and justifying other attacks, giving coded instructions to other brigades that stood "ready to act," announcing America's imminent destruction by a "winds of black death" operation, said to be ninety percent organized, the statement closed, before the customary praise of Allah, with a "warning to the *umma*: do not approach civilian and military installations belonging to Crusader America and its allies."

It is significant that the statement made reference to "old scores" to be settled with Spain. Whether by coincidence or intentionally, the towns from which the booby-trapped trains departed bear Arab names, as do many cities in the Iberian peninsula, recalling Muslim Andalusia: Alcala de Henares (from the *al-qala*, the fortress), and Guadalajara (from *wadi al-hajara*, rocky river). The Islamic reconquest of the peninsula was explicitly on the salafist-jihadist agenda, starting in the 1980s with the pamphlets and sermons of Abdallah Azzam, spokesman for the Afghan jihad, when he was still the U.S. government's favorite anti-Soviet freedom fighter. Jihad in the Iberian peninsula is a binding duty for Muslims because Spain and Portugal constitute Islamic lands usurped by infidels (even if they were usurped six centuries ago), like Israel and Bosnia, for example. It is therefore perfectly legitimate to conduct a "defensive jihad" there, one which targets the non-Muslim population, including civilians, until that population submits anew to an Islamic government. Today, most Muslims consider these

ideas bizarre, but the minority who believe them have the means and the will to transform this doctrine into a terror machine and to galvanize the fringe of sympathizers who were repelled by the massacre of Muslims in Casablanca or Riyadh but who do not object to the killing of infidels, which a jihadist interpretation of the sacred texts prescribes.

Beyond these doctrinal considerations, the Madrid attacks had significance in two other respects. First, they demonstrated that Al Qaeda "professionals" had taken operations in hand once more and were capable of issuing statements that would place their operations in a global context and provide the key to their interpretation. After the text just cited, a tape claiming responsibility for the attacks reminded listeners that they had taken place "exactly two and a half years after September 11." Bin Laden and his associates have demonstrated again and again an obsession with symbolic effects that multiply the material impact of terrorist attacks.

Second, once the amateurishness evident in the Casablanca massacre of Muslims had been corrected, the Madrid bombings confirmed that "natives" were being charged with carrying out large-scale actions on the ground. The links of the main suspects to the inner circles of Al Qaeda were strong, but most of the other Moroccans involved in the attacks were only remotely related to the network and had been recruited on the basis of neighborly relations, friendships struck up at the mosque, or family and tribal ties in northern Morocco or in underprivileged areas of Tangiers and the Rif. In other words, they bore no resemblance to the September 2001 cadres who had entered the United States to carry out professional attacks but had no links with either American society or local Muslim associations.

On the down side, from the perspective of the war on terror, the indigenous character of the new terrorists makes it difficult to dis-

tinguish the attackers from their environment. Local communities often tell the press that the suspects were nice, well-brought-up young men, hard workers, and good Muslims. On the up side, intelligence agents can usually infiltrate home-grown organizations with less difficulty. The arrests in Spain were made very quickly, thanks to the many clues these unprofessional terrorists left behind. Similarly, eight British citizens of Pakistani origin were arrested soon after the discovery of a large stock of ammonium nitrate near London on March 30, 2004. The primitive plot was foiled easily; but it would have been no less deadly had it been conducted as planned.

Adding up all of these attacks, one can conclude that, as of the summer of 2004, the U.S. government's war to eradicate terror has thus far been unsuccessful, despite the massive resources mobilized and the restrictions imposed on public freedom—most critically the imprisonment, without trial or sentence, of hundreds of people on the U.S. military base at Guantanamo. Guantanamo is to the state of law what offshore tax havens are to trade. This detention facility would find a moral (if not a legal) justification only if the interrogations carried out there shed light on the September 11 attacks, helped to capture those who were responsible, and prevented their recurrence, in the United States or elsewhere. Although official spokesmen (uncorroborated by any verifiable information) assure the world that arrests have been made thanks to information obtained in Guantanamo, the two individuals with whom Al Qaeda is identified—Bin Laden, the charismatic financier, and Zawahiri, the ideologue—are still alive and at large. Abu Zubayda, the Palestinian, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, the Yemeni, and Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the Pakistani, may be under lock and key, but their arrests have not stemmed the attacks.

As for the eradication of the Taliban regime, it may well have de-

prived Islamist terrorists of their sanctuary, but it has not had the expected effect of destroying the movement or, for that matter, establishing a viable government in Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai enjoys Washington's backing as well as funding from the international community, but he has not managed to extend his authority beyond Kabul. The remainder of the territory is under the control of tribal warlords, as it was in the early 1990s before the Taliban imposed order.

Finally, the American offensive, which owed much to reasoning inherited from the Cold War, lost valuable time while it focused on the Afghan infrastructure, on overthrowing the Taliban, and especially on the war in Iraq. It set about cutting out the visible parts of the terrorist tumor, but it did not have a systemic cure for the cancerous cells that were metastasizing throughout the world. Terrorism, with a new face, has now spread around the globe, and Washington bureaucrats cannot easily recognize it.

Does this mean that Bin Laden and Zawahiri won the war on terror? On the contrary: the principal goal of terrorism—to seize power in Muslim countries through mobilization of populations galvanized by jihad's sheer audacity—has not been realized. Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, the only state governed according to sharia, has been liquidated, even if its successor state is hardly a political success story. In Sudan, General Bashir has placed Hassan al-Turabi under house arrest and is making friendly overtures to Washington in the hope of a lucrative petroleum-based collaboration. In Libya, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, who made terrorism the *modus operandi* of international relations long before Al Qaeda came on the scene, has "recanted" and admitted his responsibility for the attacks that destroyed American and French airliners over Lockerbie and Africa. Qaddafi has paid considerable damages to the victims' families in order to return to the interna-

tional fold and develop Libya's oil production, with help from Western technology.

But in Palestine—for many, the central focus of world unrest—the situation has continued to deteriorate. While Israeli civilians face increasingly murderous attacks every day, living conditions for Palestinian civilians are becoming more and more unbearable, and the spiral of violence and retaliation tightens. In March and April 2004, Israeli missiles killed first Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder of Hamas, and then his successor, Dr. Abdel-Aziz al-Rantissi. If any further proof was required, these “targeted” assassinations showed that the one-upmanship initiated by Sharon and Arafat in the fall of 2000 will continue into the foreseeable future—a clear demonstration that the war on terror has not achieved its aims.

Finally, and ironically, the persistence of terrorism handed the United States a pretext or a justification—depending on one's point of view—for invading Iraq, overthrowing Saddam Hussein's oppressive regime, and placing American troops in the heart of the most oil-rich region in the world. The occupation—met by devastating resistance—quickly devolved into a quagmire.

Zawahiri conceptualized the use of terrorism in 2001 by positing that dramatic strikes against the “faraway enemy” would terrorize the “nearby enemy”—the heads of state in the Muslim world—and facilitate their overthrow. He was counting on jihad activists to mobilize the masses through grand actions broadcast by Arab satellite television channels like Al Jazeera. Only this magnitude of action would slow the decline of jihad, which by the end of the 1990s had failed in Egypt, Algeria, Bosnia, and elsewhere. Bin Laden has proved a seductive spokesman for Zawahiri's ideas: his slow, composed tones, his husky voice, and his salafist-Afghan outfits gained him supporters on the strength of imagery alone, as the

Casablanca attacks demonstrated. But apart from some narrow and unlikely alliances with intellectuals or black sheep, a few random Islamic bankers, and young, dispossessed bombers, Bin Laden has been unable to unify poor urban youth, the Muslim middle classes, and the Islamist intelligentsia into a coalition capable of repeating the only triumphant Islamic revolution the world has ever seen: the one that took place in Iran in 1979.

Terrorism has missed its political aim, but it continues to manifest its resilience in the face of repression and to cause havoc around the world. It acts as a parasite on international relations and has begun to weigh on social relations inside some Western countries. The war on terror, on the other hand, measured by the political strategy of the Bush White House, has been successful to some extent in mobilizing international support to track down potential threats and, following 9/11, in rallying American voters behind President Bush's initiatives in the Middle East.

Whatever its successes and failures, the war on terror was only one piece in the mosaic of a "new American century" that neo-conservatives held dear. In their Middle East strategy, the war on terror meshed well with calls for reform, which required the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and the creation of a democratic, pro-American Iraq. Once that solid foundation was in place, the Bush administration planned to erect the two pillars of a grand structure for the region: security for Israel and protection of the world's oil supply. The war against terror, from its inception, was in many ways a hostage to this larger aim.