ALTERNATIVES
Turkish Journal Of International Relations
Volume 1 Number 2 Summer 2002

Selected Reflections on the Muslim World in the aftermath of 9-11

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9-11 was a major shock to many Americans and people around the world. On live video feeds, recognized symbols of the economic and military might of the biggest power on the planet were destroyed and damaged. In the US, the corporate mass media has relayed a message of a new "war on terror", and for many Americans this has provided the interpretive framework for understanding many post-9-11 developments.

While much has changed in the wake of 9-11, important continuities remain and some existing trends have been reinforced. Developments have been more complex than simplistic generalizations claiming that "everything has changed". One preoccupation of American scholars has been the question of whether 9-11 was the dying gasp of militant groups or a harbinger of greater things to come. This overarching question has been addressed elsewhere (eg., Fuller, 2002). Another suggestion has been that we are seeing not a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, but a battle "within Muslim civilization, where ultraconservatives compete with moderates and democrats for the soul of the Muslim public" (Hefner, 2001).

In place of responding to a "grand" question, this essay offers selected reflections on mid-level developments in the post-9-11 period as they impact Muslims. These observations are loosely linked and do not rely on a single, consistent theoretical framework for understanding the world. While some Realist assumptions are used, the essay does not survey or evaluate existing

social science theory as it relates to 9-11. Existing typologies that seek to categorize "Muslim responses" to "Western challenges" (such as Hamilton Gibb's modernist, secularist, orthodox, and revivalist classification (Gibb, 1951)) are underplayed in favor of deliberative description and discussion. The observations are partial and illustrative rather than an exhaustive review of all major areas of Muslim communities as they relate to their respective contexts. This comes in part from a recognition that the Muslim world is diverse and plural, and accordingly diverse and context and group-specific reactions and policies should be expected in the aftermath of 9-11.

A description of developments after 9-11 should be informed by an effort to understand why 9-11 happened. Therefore, I start with a short discussion of suggested causes. The context of US hegemony requires some discussion. Selected American policies after 9-11 are then introduced. This provides the backdrop for reflections on specific developments in the Muslim world after 9-11. Finally, some ongoing and speculative policy-relevant challenges are described.

Why the 9-11 attacks?

Many reasons have been suggested for the 9-11 attacks. Listed below are some of the reasons offered to the American public, in descending order of mass media airplay.

Neoconservative American ideologues such as the editors of the New Republic political commentary magazine, and columnists like Charles Krauthammer, Ann Coulter, and Maggie Gallagher typically point to clashes of values. Most prominently, they argue that the attackers were driven by a fanatical hatred of American freedom and democracy combined with a jealous rage at American prosperity. The term "neoconservative" has its original association with Ronald Reagan's supporters, and refers to those who appropriate selected elements of the language of traditional American conservatives, but tend to be militaristic, oriented to unilateralism in foreign

policy, oppose immigration, are supportive of corporate political agendas (such as deregulation on safety and environment issues, lowered taxes, and anti-union laws), and allied to some Christian rightist positions, particularly on foreign policy (see Devine-Molin, 2002 for discussion from a pro-neoconservative position).

The "clash of civilizations" thesis propagated by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington has provided a frequently-used interpretive framework for understanding the 9-11 events. Under this framework, the attacks are the latest manifestation of a latent and emerging clash between "Western" and "Islamic" civilizations. Cultural identity, rather than political grievances, are emphasized as the dominant drivers of conflict. The primary causes of conflict are differences in beliefs and values rather than political domination and resistance. Often, the neoconservative commentators rely on the clash of civilizations thesis for scholarly backing.

Neoconservatives and some other American commentators have also made the argument that the attacks are a reaction of insecure traditionalism against modernity. Andrew Sullivan popularized this argument in his New York Times article titled "This is a Religious War". From this perspective, Islamic "fundamentalism" is a concentrated form of aggravated, intolerant tradition fighting against encroaching secular, modern values. Sullivan and others also argue that Christian fundamentalism is driven by the same sense of insecurity and threatened survival.

Progressives, some Muslims, and other commentators have pointed to a list of political grievances as the main motivating factor for the attacks. Noam Chomsky, Aaron Lehmer, Bill Christison, a longtime CIA analyst, have spelled out four political root causes of 9-11. These are the presence of US troops in the Saudi region (and possibly also the Persian Gulf region), the strong slant in American policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the ongoing, devastating sanctions on Iraq, and the wide US support for repressive dictatorial regimes in the Muslim and

nonMuslim world. The point of the label "root cause" is that dealing exclusively with the current symptoms (eg., stamping out visible portions of Al-Qaeda) will not solve the problem, and may aggravate the situation.

Still others have pointed to the role of "blowback" (meaning the unintended consequences of American activities abroad), social dislocations produced by rapid economic change, world economic inequality, exploitation, and poverty. More specific insights into the 9-11 attacks invoke recent history. 9-11 may be interpreted here as retaliation for American attacks on Afghan camps, a warning to the US against anti-Taliban actions in the wake of Unocal's failure to secure an oil pipeline deal, or an effort to gain publicity for the Al-Qaeda organization and win it more recruits.

In summary, it is possible to find a range of explanations, including explanations that are cultural (relying on a clashes of ideologies, values, religions, or civilizations), psychological (or at least superficially so, invoking the jealous rage of repressed, suicidal young men), sociological (relying on demographic and migratory trends, and the reaction of "tradition" to "modernity"), economic (rooted in poverty, inequality, and exploitation), historical (referring to a pattern of escalation in an ongoing conflict), and political (which treat terrorism as a tactic of political violence, with political motivations and goals). Conspiracy enthusiasts have also had the ears of a small but dedicated segment of American society. In terms of the corporate mass media, cultural explanations have received the most attention, and political explanations have arguably received the least attention. This is unsurprising in the context of an institutional structure of corporate mass media that filters news and other coverage so as to promote powerful interests (for details of this argument, see Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Ahmed, 2001; and Malik, 2002).

The context of American hegemony

A sophisticated understanding of the aftermath of 9-11 in the Muslim world requires reference to the context of American hegemony. International relations in the 20th and 21st centuries continue to be massively affected by the choices and actions of the United States, the major power of our time. Some (eg, Kenneth Waltz, 1979) have chosen to describe the Cold War era as a bipolar period, and others (eg., Goldstein and Freeman, 1990) have written of the tripolarity that emerged with the Sino-Soviet split. Robert Gilpin's (1981) perspective views the US as the preponderant state for most of the 20th century in military, political, economic, and technological terms. According to Gilpin and other analysts such as Rasler and Thompson (1994), the US took over the mantle of world leadership or hegemony (there are definitional disputes over the appropriate use of these terms) from Britain after some hesitation in the interwar period. While the Soviet Union and China emerged as significant competitors in certain arenas, they never matched the military, political, economic, and technological attainments and associated global influence of the United States.

American foreign policy has frequently sought to deflate efforts promoting independent nationalism in the poorer regions of the world. "Independent nationalism" refers to movements of a variety of ideological stripes that seek local autonomy and greater sovereignty in managing their security, resources, and domestic and foreign policies. Such tendencies have the potential to adversely affect the interests of beneficiaries of the status quo. "Realists" in the study of international relations claim that states seek wealth and power. As the most powerful state, the US seeks to retain its position by preventing, undermining, and otherwise combating the emergence of new centers of power. Much of the US hostility toward the USSR can be seen as the attempt to contain a Third World state that sought significant independence and sovereignty

over client, dependent, or subservient status. The USSR was somewhat unusual compared to other Third World countries because of the extent of its landed empire and regional influence.

The end of the Cold War was nevertheless a significant transition in international relations. First, the breakup of the USSR produced many new Muslim countries as independent, legally sovereign entities (such as Tajikistan, Uzbekhistan, Kyrgistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan). Second, developing countries around the world became less able to exploit great power competition to acquire their resources of rule. Instead, they had to rely more on American purse-strings and approval. A marked rise of IMF and World Bank influence in the developing world took place. The US gained substantial new leverage over client states because they had a diminished ability to diversify their portfolios of received foreign aid. In other words, weak states faced altered and sometimes reduced choices in finding alternative sources of revenue. Finally, the US established its continued dominance in regional subsystems by launching the war on Iraq in 1991. The path of this war signaled the future for many Muslim countries. Toothless protests would be followed by acquiescence to American policies.

American policies in the wake of 9-11

American policymakers and media pundits almost immediately described the 9-11 attacks as an "act of war". The term "war" is typically used to refer to interstate military conflict. The phrase "internal war" has been used to describe the military clash between national governments and revolutionary domestic oppositions, and also civil wars in general. The notion of interstate war is clearly inadequate to account for all or most world military engagements because a substantial portion of violent death in the 20th century can be traced to internal war. However, the American usage of the term "act of war" in to describe 9-11 treaded unfamiliar territory that is a step removed from the internal war- interstate war classification. The US was describing an

"act of war" by a private, non-state actor (Al-Qaeda, the alleged planners). This initial framing by prominent figures and members of the policy-making elite greatly increased the probability of a large-scale military operation.

Much of the radical criticism of US foreign policy in the wake of 9-11 has challenged the notion that 9-11 was the beginning of a "war" and had to be fought as a war. Instead, say such critics, the alternative terminology of a "crime" would have been more appropriate and would have provided more international legitimacy to US efforts as well as strengthening mechanisms of law and order around the world (see, for example, Chomsky, 2001, and Bennis, 2002). Use of the term "crime" might have also supported public inquiry into the social context of such crimes, and probably lead to a re-evaluation of the suspected "root causes" of poverty, the support for repressive governments, provocative military bases, unbalanced approaches to conflict mediation in Palestine, and the perceived-to-be genocidal sanctions on Iraq.

After obtaining general nods from the UN about the need for protecting national security, but without seeking approval for specific plans, the US proceeded to launch a large-scale military operation targeting Al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan. Mission creep followed. Unseating the Taliban regime and cobbling together a new national government became a US policy priority. The potential scope of the war effort was broadened to include other states, particularly those dubbed to be members of an "axis of evil" (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea). US policy pundits urged swift and massive military action to depose Saddam Hussein in Iraq. US military advisors went to the Philippines and Georgia, and started expanding their role in various places in Central Asia.

American military aid has been on the rise since 9-11. Specific restrictions on security assistance have been waived in multiple cases (Gabelnick, 2002). Post-nuclear test sanctions on

Pakistan and India were eased. Azerbaijan and Pakistan are both notable gainers in the lifting of restrictions on security assistance. Human rights concerns about aid recipients remain secondary concerns, if mentioned at all. The politics related to safeguarding oil routes in Central Asia out of the Caspian Sea region have produced assistance for the "pipelinistan" states (Pfeiffer, 2002).

Even prior to 9-11, concerns were expressed about unilateralist tendencies of George W. Bush. His limited foreign policy expertise and verbal gaffes estranged many, although the long period of nationalistic "rallying around the flag" at home and empathy for Americans' losses abroad stifled such criticisms. A continued role for NATO as an American-led security coalition appears to have been supported. However, the use of steel tariffs in the US, the continuing refusal to sign the Kyoto treaty to help contain industrial effects on the environment, the about-face on the ABM treaty, and the "unsigning" of the International Criminal Court have brought some of the earlier criticisms of American foreign policy's unilateralist tendencies back to the surface.

Inside the United States, the passage of the Patriot Act heralded substantial changes to basic civil rights typically taken for granted by most people in the United States. Combined with the Office of Homeland Security (which looks like it will carry a new cabinet-level post), and the expanded powers of surveillance, search, seizure and detention by the FBI and other enforcement agencies, the net effect has been a noticeable rollback in civil liberties and traditions that members of US society have enjoyed.

The political atmosphere in the United States can be intolerant and hostile to deep criticisms of major foreign policy commitments, and broadcasters are often unwilling to air such debates in mainstream media. In the aftermath of 9-11, the space for such debates narrowed even further, and fever-pitch nationalistic fervor made even small doses of critical introspection

"unpatriotic". Witness the small critical comment made by Susan Sontag, a well-known cultural and literary figure, in the *New Yorker* magazine. Sontag was vilified on talk shows and castigated by bullying pundits across the country. The knee-jerk opposition to slight criticism was even felt north of the border. In Canada, Professor Sunera Thobani was swiftly and widely attacked for her speech critiquing US policies. Likewise, political cartoonists in the US have find decreasing space for political commentary (Sachs and Pittmann, 2002). These examples only touch the tip of a great iceberg of damnation for those who don't follow the elite-favored version of events, namely that "they hate us for who we are" and that this was at most a security problem, rather than a political one.

Months after the 9-11 attacks, a small space for public debate has opened up. The space still does not allow for major discussions of US policy choices, but is instead restricted largely to discussions of the failures of security agencies. Various elite figures are gradually admitting that a major intelligence failure occurred. These range from FBI Agent Colleen Rowley's accusations of ignored warnings, to the recent declaration of a group of British Ministers of Parliament that "clear signs" of an upcoming attack were not acted upon (BBCNews, 2002), to the recent US Congress findings of an intelligence lapse.

In summary, the US has chosen policies emphasizing the projection of military power abroad and a rollback of civil liberties at home. Inside the US, limited public criticism and debate over these policies has meant a probable lack of serious challenges in the near future. The section below examines some of the developments outside of the US.

The responses of Muslims

Muslim leaders, scholars, politicians, and other public figures generally offered condemnation of the 9-11 attacks and the indiscriminate killing of civilians (a summary listing of such statements can be viewed at Charles Kurzman's webpage (Kurzman, 2002)). The publicity such statements received, however, was lacking, particularly in light of a scene of celebrating Palestinians which was replayed *ad nauseum* on some television news programs in the US. In general, and especially beyond initial statements of condemnation, the Muslim world has not reacted in a unified, solidary fashion. Instead, special interests have all sought to use spin and public relations techniques to further their own goals. 9-11 produced opportunities for some, and demanded some sort of modification of message from many. Many (if not all) countries, groups, and individuals have sought to use 9-11 as a window of opportunity for public relations efforts.

There have been internal adjustments in Muslim countries. Predictably, repressive political establishments around the world have sought to latch on to "war on terror" rhetoric as a way to justify continued or increased suppression of political challenges. Newsweek magazine suggested that a friendly military dictator in Pakistan was preferable to a hostile democratic government- an American strategic perspective that precedes 9-11 (Rampton, 2001). The opportunities for repression were anticipated: Human Rights Watch, in a September 24 open letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell, warned of the danger "that some governments may cynically take advantage of this cause to justify their own internal crackdowns on perceived political opponents, 'separatists' or religious activists, in the expectation that the United States will now be silent" (quoted in Lobe and Aslam, 2001).

Foreign policy changes have also arisen, many of which are related to American policy adjustments. Prominent among these is the breaking of diplomatic relations between Saudi

Arabia and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, followed by the distance between Pakistan and the Taliban, and finally the end of diplomatic ties between Pakistan and the Taliban. The dramatic consequence has been that the Taliban have officially lost power in Afghanistan, and relative unknown Hamid Karzai's government, heavily dependent on American support, faces a shaky situation of warlord infighting and a continuing massive refugee crisis continues.

Below, selected snapshot portraits of Muslim state and non-state actors are listed. A comprehensive overview, survey, or other exhaustive evaluation is avoided in favor of a series of midlevel observations and some concluding thoughts about pertinent policy questions affecting Muslims.

State actors

Repression

Afghanistan and several other countries (including Uzbekhistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan) in the region have become directly or indirectly entangled in "pipelinistan" politics (Pfeiffer, 2002). Corporate investors have pushed for regional stability to make the extraction and transport of oil and gas possible. The US has long-standing aspirations to be the security manager of the region because of its geographic location and resource riches. Zbigniew Brzezinski's well-known arguments have stressed the geopolitical significance of the area, reminiscient of earlier work by Harold Mackinder and others (Brzezinski, 1997). The consequence is the strengthening of repressive, authoritarian state apparatuses in the region, supported by outside military, logistical, and financial aid.

Pakistan was the major sponsor of the Taliban army, providing recruits, supplies, and legitimacy. The American declaration of hostility toward the Taliban and plans to invade Afghanistan forced a major adjustment in Pakistani policy. General Musharraf's ad hoc

referendum in early 2002 to extend his rule by five years has been greeted by allegations of fraud. Musharraf has become an important partner for the American "war on terrorism", and as a result the problematic, extraconstitutional aspects of the referendum are ignored or downplayed by the US leadership. Pakistan appears headed further down the repressive, rentier state route of Jordan, Egypt, or Tunisia.

The Pakistan-India clash over the disputed territory of Kashmir continues with the potential for escalation. Observers frequently express concern about a possible nuclear war in the region. Simulated wargames show conceivable, plausible scenarios in which conventional fighting escalates to include nuclear weapons. Some Pakistanis have claimed that a friendly, closely allied Afghanistan is necessary for the "strategic depth" it provides in the event of an Indian assault, meaning that it offers a retreat from which Pakistani command activities can continue. In the event of a war with India, it's not clear what Pakistan can expect from Afghanistan under current circumstances, where active fighting continues and the Pakistan-friendly Taliban have been dislodged. It is probable that there has been a significant reduction in the tactical wartime options available to Pakistan because of developments in Afghanistan.

Domestic Pakistani opposition has appeared to Musharraf's cooperation with the American war. This was expected, but the more dramatic suicide attacks are nevertheless shocking. The attack on a church near Islamabad, the killing of journalist Daniel Pearl, and the suicide attack on a bus of French military advisors in a well-known Karachi business district are three of the best-known stories in the American corporate mass media. After the car-bomb attack on Karachi's US consulate on June 14, 2002, Musharraf escalated the crackdown on Islamist militants. Some reports have speculated on an emerging "axis of extremism" anti-Musharraf alliance between Pakistani fighters for the Taliban, Pakistani guerrilla fighters in Kashmir, and

militants from Pakistan's Sipahe Sahaba (Guardians of the Companions, a Sunni group known for hard-line anti-Shia positions) (LA Times, 2002).

In her visit to Washington, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri sought to justify Jakarta's crackdown in Aceh, Irian Jaya, and other regions as a campaign against "terrorists and separatists." "She walked away from her meeting with Bush not only with pledges of increased economic and trade assistance, but also the easing of curbs on military ties" (Lobe and Aslam, 2001). In Malaysia, the incarceration of former deputy Prime Minister, the popular Islamist Anwar Ibrahim, continues on charges that have been widely decried as politically motivated and trumped up. Malaysia's ruler Mahathir Mohammad has chosen to prolong the application of special national security ordinances, allowing for political repression and detention. In the early months of 2002, Mahathir has won accolades for his participation in the "war on terrorism" instead of condemnation for his suppression of nonviolent political voices. Mahathir's rise in Malaysia is symptomatic of the post-9-11 ability of dictatorially-inclined Muslim leaders to further consolidate their status as authority figures. His announced resignation has increased the unpredictability of Malaysia's future policies.

Repression of national political autonomy movements

The Israelis attempted to tie their repressive military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to Bush's "war on terrorism". Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon explicitly compared Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to Osama Bin Laden. Pro-occupation PR efforts focused on attempting to define the Palestinian resistance as identical to the 9-11 attackers. The cycle of violence has continued to escalate, with massive Israeli assaults on the West Bank in particular, and a rise in the frequency of suicide bombings as well as the demographic diversity of bombers (Palestinian women have for the first time become bombers).

Like Israel, China, Russia, and India have all sought to use the "war on terrorism" framework to justify their repression of movements for political autonomy in the Xinjiang region, Chechnya, and Kashmir, respectively. Documented evidence of extrajudicial killings, detentions, torture, and persecution of civilians exists in all four of these cases. In each case, the conflation of "radical Islamist" with "terrorist" further blurs the line with the American campaign. The hijacking of American rhetoric is problematic for pro-war American policy-makers because it forces a definition of "terrorism", and because it diverts attention from American military and strategic goals.

State actors and public relations

15 of the 19 alleged hijackers were Saudis. New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani angrily returned a Saudi prince's check to the city of New York after the prince spoke of the Israeli actions against Palestinians. Newspapers and television programs around the US started transmitting negative portrayals of the behavior of the Saudi royal family and Saudi Arabia. It was clearly a public relations disaster for the Saudis, and the public outcry had the potential to threaten the close and consistent ties between successive US administrations and the Saudi royal family.

To wage a public relations campaign, the Saudis hired Burson-Marsteller, a large professional PR firm, for crisis management in the immediate aftermath of 9-11 (Rampton, 2001). Their message had several dimensions, each relatively straightforward. *New York Times* ads expressed solidarity with Americans in crisis. The Saudis also claimed that they were deliberately picked for the mission as a way to "drive a wedge" between the US and Saudi Arabia. Al-Qaeda was a diverse organization, but Saudis were deliberately selected to make an

impression on the American public. Thus, the Saudi royal family tried to align themselves with the American public by suggesting that they were both on the same side in the "war on terror".

American politicians have long declared Libya a rogue state. Perhaps in a bid to counter this image, the Libyans were swift to condemn the 9-11 attacks and to express condolences to the American public. More recently, the Libyans apparently offered a major financial compensation settlement to families of the victims of the PanAm airliner bombing over Lockerbie. These steps may have yielded results, as Australia has recently announced its conviction that Libya is no longer a sponsor of terrorism.

Iran also sought a warming in relations with the United States after 9-11. Candlelight vigils were held in Tehran as expressions of sorrow and condolence. Relations between the EU and Iran had continued to improve with the election of recognized moderate President Khatami. George W. Bush's decision to include Iran in the "axis of evil", however, brought back the war of words that has exacerbated hostility between the two states (Bhatty, 2002). Hardline anti-American factions in Iran's polity have likely received a boost as a consequence.

Nonstate actors

Some traditionalists and participatory political Islamists

Some modern scholars who subscribe to traditional schools of jurisprudence (madhabs), such as Nuh Ha Mim Keller and Timothy Winter (also known as Abdul Hakim Murad), used the opportunity to rail against anti-madhabi Wahabbism, a longtime ideological foe. Both well-known commentators, Keller and Murad have vociferously attacked the Wahhabi sect for promoting anarchy, fanaticism, ignorance, and deviation from traditional Islam. Both Keller and Murad are traditionalists in their strict adherence to established madhabi scholarship, and have long-standing antipathy towards the Salafi and Wahhabi movements (both of which tend to

question traditional scholarship and promote the ability of the lay individual to make religious rulings (fatwas). According to Keller and Murad, it was the anarchy created by disrespect for traditional scholarship and the frivolous approach to making religious decrees (fatwas) that allowed the justification of the 9-11 suicide attacks.

Hamza Yusuf, an advocate of madhabi (classical juristic) traditionalism, and the spiritual equivalent of a rock star figure for many religiously-inclined American Muslims, gained further prominence when he attended President Bush's major address to the nation on Capitol Hill. Yusuf also advised Bush to do away with the name "Infinite Justice" for the US anti-terrorism operation because of possible offense to Muslims. The name of the Afghan campaign was changed to "Enduring Freedom".

Politically involved Muslims in the United States have been in a particularly charged and visible position in the wake of 9-11. Most major American Muslim organizations were quick to condemn the 9-11 attacks. Some national Muslim organizations, such as the American Muslim Council, appeared to unreservedly endorse the proclaimed "war on terrorism". Others, such as the umbrella organization ISNA (Islamic Society of North America), offered qualified support, and pointed to concerns about the Afghan bombing campaign, civilian casualties, and damage to longterm US interests (ISNA press release, Oct . 31, 2001; see www.isna.net).

"Political Islam" can mean a broad spectrum of individuals, institutions, ideologies, and policy positions sharing a belief that the Islamic religious tradition has relevance for modern politics in some aspect. Political Islamists of various stripes have been identified in scholarly literature (eg, see Malik, 1999). While Al-Qaeda is best classified as a militant and violent Islamist organization, many Islamists advocate political participation, civic engagement, and nonviolent methods. Some prominent groups in this category include the Jamaat Islami of South

Asia and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world. Such groups typically have an institutionalized, consultative internal decision-making structure, and tend to have a mass following among professional and middle-class Muslims. Despite or perhaps because of their popular appeal, the participatory, nonviolent Islamists frequently suffer defamation and repression under authoritarian systems of governance. They have been distinguished in their rapid condemnation of the 9-11 attacks. Among those condemning the attacks are the following: Mustafa Mashhur, the General Guide, of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, leader of the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami, Muti Rahman Nizami, leader of the Bangladeshi Jamaat-e-Islami, Rashid Ghannoushi, President of the Tunisian Nahda Renaissance Movement, and Fazil Nour, President of the Malaysian PAS - Parti Islam SeMalaysia, as well as 40 other Muslim scholars and politicians (Kurzman, 2001).

Militant Islamist organizations

9-11 provided a publicity windfall to the Al-Qaeda organization. Their name has become a household word around the world. Bin Laden's image has been broadcast and pasted in thousands of outlets, although the American corporate mass media has generally suppressed the text of Bin Laden's statements. Bin Laden's picture now appears in diverse locations of Africa, South America, and Asia. The first Bin Laden video to appear after 9-11 appeared to be a careful production. If he and his organization were indeed responsible for the 9-11 attacks, they clearly had a public relations strategy in place with their videotaped messages. Such tactics appear rational from the standpoint of maximizing publicity for a political message.

Lichbach (1995) catalogues specific techniques and rational incentives for violent tactics in the effort of dissident groups to gain publicity and recruits. From this and other perspectives that focus on rational incentives, the strategic motivation for the 9-11 attacks may have been to

catalyze a greater conflict, invite massive retaliation from the United States, and exploit the resulting polarization in communities to gain recruits for the attackers' cause. There are some weak indications that this has taken place. Other organizations have sought to join the call to arms against the United States. According to recent American news reports (May 20, 2002), it appears that Lebanese Hizbollah and Egyptian Al-Jihad might be targeting the US on its own territory, although these reports don't appear to be credible. The killing of Daniel Pearl in Pakistan and the bombing of a busload of French military advisors in Karachi may be linked to "Hizbulla Alami", a new group that may contain members of the Taliban or Al-Qaeda. Finally, American leaders continue to insist that another major Al-Qaeda attack is imminent (although these warnings might be primarily designed to ward off domestic political criticism of those US leaders).

Interestingly, the major grievances spelled out by OBL and his supporters have been reiterated by other well-respected commentators as important "root causes" of terrorism. Certain voices have spelled these out clearly. Noam Chomsky, a well-recognized political dissident in the US and a Linguistics Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has been prominent among them (Chomsky, 2001). Bill Christison, a CIA veteran, has spelled out these political grievances, and added general impoverishment as well as the conduct of the ongoing "war on terrorism" as additional aggravating factors (Christison, 2002).

Policy challenges confronting Muslims

Public relations, spin, propaganda, strategic communications, and perceptions management are all terms used to describe the intentional effort to manipulate public opinion. One analyst argues that Bin Laden has been an effective strategic communicator relative to the United States (Zaharna, 2001). Bin Laden may have been effective with some Muslim and

Arabic-speaking audiences, but it is apparent that the specific political content of his message (such as grievances against the US presence in the Gulf, the sanctions on Iraq, and the support for Israel's military repression) have not been aired widely before American audiences. The US State Department and other government agencies have been relatively successful at framing the conflict in terms of a security rather than a political problem, and arguing that the US was attacked for its values of freedom and democracy. However, the US attempt to market its message to the Muslim and Arab worlds has been an abject failure (Zaharna, 2001).

It appears that effective, strategic communication is a vital contributor to shaping the present conflict and its potential trajectories. Inappropriate and inexact use of language has trapped some Muslims. It is tempting to phrase one's personal perspective on an issue as if it is widely or unanimously shared. Instead of saying "I believe that Islam asks me to…", Muslims typically say "Islam says …". Such absolutist use of language has provided fuel for Islamophobes who select the words of Muslims and use them as evidence of a conflict that is primarily religious in character. This has shifted attention away from political grievances of Muslims in some areas which are shared by other non-Muslim observers around the world- such grievances as the counterproductive sanctions on Iraq, the unbalanced approach of the great powers to the Palestine-Israel conflict, the ongoing support for dictatorial regimes and the thwarting of processes of independent nationalism or democratic movements, and the presence of foreign military forces in certain places (most prominently, in Saudi Arabia).

In effect, the use of essentialized, overgeneralized "Islamic" arguments has played into the hands of those wishing to use "clash of civilizations" reasoning to justify aggression and war. Consequently, the need for a consolidated public relations strategy by those committed to a conflict de-escalation is ever more apparent. One major constraint here is resources. For

example, Saudi Arabia has launched a fairly sophisticated PR operation through a hired PR firm. The Saudi effort demonstrates that large-scale financing is a critical factor in developing effective PR. These considerations have been discussed in detail elsewhere, particularly with respect to structures of corporate mass media (Malik, 2002; Ahmed, 2001).

US President Bush took pains in the early phases of "Operation Enduring Freedom" to emphasize that Islam was a "religion of peace". Tony Blair declared that the Western effort was not a "war on Islam". Instead of demonizing Islam, several American leaders have sought the moral high ground by depicting their policies as part of a "war on terrorism". Prominent evangelical Christian religious leaders (including Franklin Graham, closely affiliated with President Bush), however, have declared their antipathy for Islam. Combined with the selective domestic crackdown on Muslim immigrants and the targeting abroad of mainly Muslim regions and groups, this has made the claim of a religion-neutral "war on terrorism" ring hollow to some ears.

Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations model presumes that the primary factors underlying the current conflict are long-term "civilizational" divisions pitting "the West" against "Islam" and China (Huntington, 1997). Civilizational identity eclipses politics and other considerations as the primary fault-line for conflict. This generic thesis has adherents in many places around the world. Huntington's assumptions and logic have been criticized for their implausibility and contradictions (eg., Alam, 2002). In the context of the current conflict, though, it may be the ability for proponents of the "war on Islam" or "clash of civilizations" perspectives to convince others of the validity of their point of view that is most important.

Conflict can be defined as a "perceived divergence of interest" (Rubin, et. al, 1994), and the clash of civilizations model suggests categories of parties in potential conflict. The

assumptions behind the "clash of civilizations" perspective certainly appear to fit the rhetoric of political entrepreneurs and idealogues in various settings (Malik, 2002). Dan Pipes, a prominent commentator with frequent appearances on corporate mass media outlets in the US (such as FOX News), has made the argument that most of the world's Muslim population poses a potential threat to the United States (Pipes, 2002). Al-Qaeda spokesman Suleman Abu Ghaith has described a wide circle of enemies that include "Jews" and "Crusaders", a perspective that presumes a necessary showdown with the West. The self-fulfilling nature of a "clash of civilizations" model suggests that the more people believe it, the more it is likely to become a reality. If enough people behave as if a clash of civilizations is under way, the conflict has the potential to escalate and incorporate more members of those civilizational units.

Despite many analysts' criticisms of the "clash of civilizations" thesis, and such alternative coined phrases as Edward Said's "clash of ignorance", and Tariq Ali's "clash of fundamentalisms", a single alternative has not gained dominance and currency. In part, a well-established competitor slogan is lacking because critiques of Huntington's thesis rely on adding complexity, and complexity is difficult to capture in pat phrases. But it also reflects a wider problem: the tendency to fall into the broad overarching categories of "Muslims" and "the West" as the default group identity from which underlying interests emerge. Students of conflict tend to revert to such categories when analyzing the current situation not because they believe it on its merits, but because a more complex survey, identification, and catalogue of specific actors and special interests is more difficult to apply.

Many see the Muslim world as being hemmed in, under siege and unable to exercise significant choices and control. A widespread sense of the low legitimacy of autocratic rulers persists. In this situation, cooperation of the repressive rulers with the "war on terror" is likely to

be perceived as further evidence of their client status for outside powers. Possible domestic instability may follow, growing from such catalysts as the public demonstrations in Egypt against the Israeli repression of Palestinians. The question of the prospective invasion of Iraq might divide things considerably. Already, Jordan has declared its unwillingness to provide a staging ground for the planned US invasion. The last US-Iraq war was deeply divisive in the Muslim world, and the aftermath of continued bombings and sanctions on Iraq are a frequently voiced grievance against the US.

Inside the US, a gulf exists between the self-image of many Muslims and how they are viewed by consumers of corporate mass media messages. This perceptions gap adversely affects Muslims by feeding fear, war-fervor, racial profiling, and civil liberties restrictions. A portion of the gap comes from simple and deep-rooted racism. But much of the gap should be overcome by a long-term, well-financed public relations campaign.

The big question remains, however, of how much further escalation is likely before the conflict reaches some form of stalemate or resolution. Rubin, et. al.'s, suggested framework for conflict analysis relies on identifying two main actors, the underlying causes of conflict (their divergent interests and choices of tactics), escalation processes, and outcomes (Rubin, et. al, 1994). In the aftermath of 9-11, a conflict has continued to evolve. Some point to the 9-11 itself as a contentious tactic in a pre-existing conflict. American authorities and spokespersons for various militant Islamist groups continue to trumpet warnings of further attacks to come. Billionaire investor Warren Buffett perhaps spoke for a sense of pessimism in the business world when he proclaimed that a nuclear attack on the US was a virtual certainty (Ruff, 2002). It's conceivable that each of these claims may be exaggerated for political or other strategic purposes. Nevertheless, most observers of the situation would probably agree that the conflict

has not reached a stalemate at this point. Several important elements are in flux, including geographic location of future areas targeted by the US, and possible new terrorist tactics such as the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Beyond the widespread initial condemnations of the attacks, Muslims have generally not reacted in a solidary fashion. There is great unease with the American conduct of the "war on terrorism" and furthermore there is a profound sense of political grievances that have been ignored or inadequately addressed. It's clear that effective collective action to petition successfully for the redress of these grievances is nearly impossible. While there is little approaching unanimity on political agendas in the Muslim world, it does appear that the tendency for small groupings to work at cross-purposes undermines broad goals that many would aspire to, especially goals related to social justice.

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