



## Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism

**ABSTRACT** The link between Islam and terrorism became a central media concern following September 11, resulting in new rounds of "culture talk." This talk has turned religious experience into a political category, differentiating "good Muslims" from "bad Muslims," rather than terrorists from civilians. The implication is undisguised: Whether in Afghanistan, Palestine, or Pakistan, Islam must be quarantined and the devil must be exorcized from it by a civil war between good Muslims and bad Muslims. This article suggests that we lift the quarantine and turn the cultural theory of politics on its head. Beyond the simple but radical suggestion that if there are good Muslims and bad Muslims, there must also be good Westerners and bad Westerners, I question the very tendency to read Islamist politics as an effect of Islamic civilization—whether good or bad—and Western power as an effect of Western civilization. Both those politics and that power are born of an encounter, and neither can be understood outside of the history of that encounter. Cultural explanations of political outcomes tend to avoid history and issues. Thinking of individuals from "traditional" cultures in authentic and original terms, culture talk dehistoricizes the construction of political identities. This article places the terror of September 11 in a historical and political context. Rather than a residue of a premodern culture in modern politics, terrorism is best understood as a modern construction. Even when it harnesses one or another aspect of tradition and culture, the result is a modern ensemble at the service of a modern project. [Keywords: Muslims, culture talk, Islamist politics, political identities, terrorism]

**M**EDIA INTEREST IN ISLAM exploded in the months after September 11. What, many asked, is the link between Islam and terrorism? This question has fueled a fresh round of "culture talk": the predilection to define cultures according to their presumed "essential" characteristics, especially as regards politics. An earlier round of such discussion, associated with Samuel Huntington's widely cited but increasingly discredited *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), demonized Islam in its entirety. Its place has been taken by a modified line of argument: that the terrorist link is not with all of Islam, but with a very literal interpretation of it, one found in Wahhabi Islam.<sup>1</sup> First advanced by Stephen Schwartz in a lead article in the British weekly, *The Spectator* (2001), this point of view went to the ludicrous extent of claiming that all suicide couriers (bombers or hijackers), are Wahhabi and warned that this version of Islam, historically dominant in Saudi Arabia, had been exported to both Afghanistan and the United States in recent decades. The argument was echoed widely in many circles, including the *New York Times*.<sup>2</sup>

Culture talk has turned religious experience into a political category. "What Went Wrong with Muslim Civilization?" asks Bernard Lewis in a lead article in *The Atlantic*

*Monthly* (2002). Democracy lags in the Muslim World, concludes a Freedom House study of political systems in the non-Western world.<sup>3</sup> The problem is larger than Islam, concludes Aryeh Neier (2001), former president of Human Rights Watch and now head of the Soros-funded Open Society Foundation: It lies with tribalists and fundamentalists, contemporary counterparts of Nazis, who have identified modernism as their enemy. Even the political leadership of the antiterrorism alliance, notably Tony Blair and George Bush, speak of the need to distinguish "good Muslims" from "bad Muslims." The implication is undisguised: Whether in Afghanistan, Palestine, or Pakistan, Islam must be quarantined and the devil must be exorcized from it by a civil war between good Muslims and bad Muslims.

I want to suggest that we lift the quarantine for analytical purposes, and turn the cultural theory of politics on its head. This, I suggest, will help our query in at least two ways. First, it will have the advantage of deconstructing not just one protagonist in the contemporary contest—Islam—but also the other, the West. My point goes beyond the simple but radical suggestion that if there are good Muslims and bad Muslims, there must also be good Westerners and

bad Westerners. I intend to question the very tendency to read Islamist politics as an effect of Islamic civilization—whether good or bad—and Western power as an effect of Western civilization. Further, I shall suggest that both those politics and that power are born of an encounter, and neither can be understood in isolation, outside of the history of that encounter.

Second, I hope to question the very premise of culture talk. This is the tendency to think of culture in political—and therefore territorial—terms. Political units (states) are territorial; culture is not. Contemporary Islam is a global civilization: fewer Muslims live in the Middle East than in Africa or in South and Southeast Asia. If we can think of Christianity and Judaism as global religions—with Middle Eastern origins but a historical flow and a contemporary constellation that cannot be made sense of in terms of state boundaries—then why not try to understand Islam, too, in historical and extraterritorial terms?<sup>4</sup> Does it really make sense to write political histories of Islam that read like political histories of geographies like the Middle East, and political histories of Middle Eastern states as if these were no more than the political history of Islam in the Middle East?

My own work (1996) leads me to trace the modern roots of culture talk to the colonial project known as indirect rule, and to question the claim that anticolonial political resistance really expresses a cultural lag and should be understood as a traditional cultural resistance to modernity. This claim downplays the crucial encounter with colonial power, which I think is central to the post-September 11 analytical predicament I described above. I find culture talk troubling for two reasons. On the one hand, cultural explanations of political outcomes tend to avoid *history* and issues. By equating political tendencies with entire communities defined in nonhistorical cultural terms, such explanations encourage collective discipline and punishment—a practice characteristic of colonial encounters. This line of reasoning equates terrorists with Muslims, justifies a punishing war against an entire country (Afghanistan) and ignores the recent history that shaped both the current Afghan context and the emergence of political Islam. On the other hand, culture talk tends to think of individuals (from “traditional” cultures) in authentic and original terms, as if their identities are shaped entirely by the supposedly unchanging culture into which they are born. In so doing, it dehistoricizes the construction of political identities.

Rather than see contemporary Islamic politics as the outcome of an archaic culture, I suggest we see neither culture nor politics as archaic, but both as very contemporary outcomes of equally contemporary conditions, relations, and conflicts. Instead of dismissing history and politics, as culture talk does, I suggest we place cultural debates in historical and political contexts. Terrorism is not born of the residue of a premodern culture in modern politics. Rather, terrorism is a modern construction. Even when it harnesses one or another aspect of tradition and culture, the

result is a modern ensemble at the service of a modern project.

## CULTURE TALK

Is our world really divided into the modern and premodern, such that the former makes culture in which the latter is a prisoner? This dichotomy is increasingly prevalent in Western discussions of relations with Muslim-majority countries. It presumes that culture stands for creativity, for what being human is all about, in one part of the world, that called “modern,” but that in the other part, labeled “premodern,” culture stands for habit, for some kind of instinctive activity whose rules are inscribed in early founding texts, usually religious, and mummified in early artifacts. When I read of Islam in the papers these days, I often feel I am reading of museumized peoples, of peoples who are said not to *make* culture, except at the beginning of creation, as some extraordinary, prophetic act. After that, it seems they—we Muslims—just *conform* to culture. Our culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates. It seems to have petrified into a lifeless custom. Even more, these people seem incapable of transforming their culture, the way they seem incapable of growing their own food. The implication is that their salvation lies, as always, in philanthropy, in being saved from the outside.

If the premodern peoples are said to lack a creative capacity, they are conversely said to have an abundant capacity for destruction. This is surely why culture talk has become the stuff of front-page news stories. It is, after all, the reason we are told to give serious attention to culture. It is said that culture is now a matter of life and death. To one whose recent academic preoccupation has been the institutional legacy of colonialism, this kind of writing is deeply reminiscent of tracts from the history of modern colonization. This history assumes that people’s public behavior, specifically their political behavior, can be read from their religion. Could it be that a person who takes his or her religion literally is a potential terrorist? That only someone who thinks of a religious text as not literal, but as metaphorical or figurative, is better suited to civic life and the tolerance it calls for? How, one may ask, does the literal reading of sacred texts translate into hijacking, murder, and terrorism?

Some may object that I am presenting a caricature of what we read in the press. After all, is there not less talk about the clash of civilizations, and more about the clash inside Islamic civilization? Is that not the point of the articles I referred to earlier? Certainly, we are now told to distinguish between good Muslims and bad Muslims. Mind you, not between good and bad persons, nor between criminals and civic citizens, who both happen to be Muslims, but between good Muslims and bad Muslims. We are told that there is a fault line running through Islam, a line that separates moderate Islam, called “genuine Islam,” from extremist political Islam. The terrorists of September

11, we are told, did not just hijack planes; they also hijacked Islam, meaning "genuine" Islam.

I would like to offer another version of the argument that the clash is inside—and not between—civilizations. The synthesis is my own, but no strand in the argument is fabricated. I rather think of this synthesis as an enlightened version, because it does not just speak of the "other," but also of self. It has little trace of ethnocentrism. This is how it goes: Islam and Christianity have in common a deeply messianic orientation, a sense of mission to civilize the world. Each is convinced that it possesses the sole truth, that the world beyond is a sea of ignorance that needs to be redeemed.<sup>5</sup> In the modern age, this kind of conviction goes beyond the religious to the secular, beyond the domain of doctrine to that of politics. Yet even seemingly secular colonial notions such as that of "a civilizing mission"—or its more racialized version, "the white man's burden"—or the 19th-century U.S. conviction of a "manifest destiny" have deep religious roots.

Like any living tradition, neither Islam nor Christianity is monolithic. Both harbor and indeed are propelled by diverse and contradictory tendencies. In both, righteous notions have been the focus of prolonged debates: Even if you should claim to know what is good for humanity, how do you proceed? By persuasion or force? Do you convince others of the validity of your truth or do you proceed by imposing it on them? Is religion a matter of conviction or legislation? The first alternative gives you reason and evangelism; the second gives you the Crusades and jihad. Take the example of Islam, and the notion of jihad, which roughly translated means "struggle." Scholars distinguish between two broad traditions of jihad: *jihad Akbar* (the greater jihad) and *jihad Asgar* (the lesser jihad). The greater jihad, it is said, is a struggle against weaknesses of self; it is about how to live and attain piety in a contaminated world. The lesser jihad, in contrast, is about self-preservation and self-defense; more externally directed, it is the source of Islamic notions of what Christians call "just war" (Noor 2001).

Scholars of Islam have been at pains since September 11 to explain to a non-Muslim reading public that Islam has rules even for the conduct of war: for example, Talal Asad (n.d.) points out that the Hanbali School of law practiced by followers of Wahhabi Islam in Saudi Arabia outlawed the killing of innocents in war. Historians of Islam have warned against a simple reading of Islamic practice from Islamic doctrine: After all, coexistence and toleration have been the norm, rather than the exception, in the political history of Islam. More to the point, not only religious creeds like Islam and Christianity, but also secular doctrines like liberalism and Marxism have had to face an ongoing contradiction between the impulse to universalism and respective traditions of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The universalizing impulse gives the United States a fundamentalist orientation in doctrine, just as the tradition of tolerance makes for pluralism in practice and in doctrine.

Doctrinal tendencies aside, I remain deeply skeptical of the claim that we can read people's political behavior from their religion, or from their culture. Could it be true that an orthodox Muslim is a potential terrorist? Or, the same thing, that an Orthodox Jew or Christian is a potential terrorist and only a Reform Jew or a Christian convert to Darwinian evolutionary theory is capable of being tolerant of those who do not share his or her convictions?

I am aware that this does not exhaust the question of culture and politics. How do you make sense of a politics that consciously wears the mantle of religion? Take, for example the politics of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda; both claim to be waging a jihad, a just war against the enemies of Islam. To try to understand this uneasy relationship between politics and religion, I find it necessary not only to shift focus from doctrinal to historical Islam, from doctrine and culture to history and politics, but also to broaden the focus beyond Islam to include larger historical encounters, of which bin Laden and al-Qaeda have been one outcome.

#### THE COLD WAR AFTER INDOCHINA

Eqbal Ahmad draws our attention to the television image from 1985 of Ronald Reagan inviting a group of turbaned men, all Afghan, all leaders of the mujahideen, to the White House lawn for an introduction to the media. "These gentlemen are the moral equivalents of America's founding fathers," said Reagan (Ahmad 2001). This was the moment when the United States tried to harness one version of Islam in a struggle against the Soviet Union. Before exploring its politics, let me provide some historical background to the moment.

I was a young lecturer at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania in 1975. It was a momentous year in the decolonization of the world as we knew it: 1975 was the year of the U.S. defeat in Indochina, as it was of the collapse of the last European empire in Africa. In retrospect, it is clear that it was also the year that the center of gravity of the Cold War shifted from Southeast Asia to southern Africa. The strategic question was this: Who would pick up the pieces of the Portuguese empire in Africa, the United States or the Soviet Union? As the focal point of the Cold War shifted, there was a corresponding shift in U.S. strategy based on two key influences. First, the closing years of the Vietnam War saw the forging of a Nixon Doctrine, which held that "Asian boys must fight Asian wars." The Nixon doctrine was one lesson that the United States brought from the Vietnam debacle. Even if the hour was late to implement it in Indochina, the Nixon Doctrine guided U.S. initiatives in southern Africa. In the post-Vietnam world, the United States looked for more than local proxies; it needed regional powers as junior partners. In southern Africa, that role was fulfilled by apartheid South Africa. Faced with the possibility of a decisive MPLA victory in Angola,<sup>6</sup> the United States encouraged South Africa to intervene militarily. The result was a

political debacle that was second only to the Bay of Pigs invasion of a decade before: No matter its military strength and geopolitical importance, apartheid South Africa was clearly a political liability for the United States. Second, the Angolan fiasco reinforced public resistance within the United States to further overseas Vietnam-type involvement. The clearest indication that popular pressures were finding expression among legislators was the 1975 Clark amendment, which outlawed covert aid to combatants in the ongoing Angolan civil war.

The Clark amendment was repealed at the start of Reagan's second term in 1985. Its decade-long duration failed to forestall the Cold Warriors, who looked for ways to bypass legislative restrictions on the freedom of executive action. CIA chief William Casey took the lead in orchestrating support for terrorist and prototerrorist movements around the world—from Contras in Nicaragua to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, to Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) in Mozambique<sup>7</sup> and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in Angola<sup>8</sup>—through third and fourth parties. Simply put, after the defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, the United States decided to harness, and even to cultivate, terrorism in the struggle against regimes it considered pro-Soviet. The high point of the U.S. embrace of terrorism came with the Contras. More than just tolerated and shielded, they were actively nurtured and directly assisted by Washington. But because the Contra story is so well known, I will focus on the nearly forgotten story of U.S. support for terrorism in Southern Africa to make my point.

South Africa became the Reagan Administration's preferred partner for a *constructive engagement*, a term coined by Reagan's Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Chester Crocker. The point of "constructive engagement" was to bring South Africa out of its political isolation and tap its military potential in the war against militant—pro-Soviet—nationalism.<sup>9</sup> The effect of "constructive engagement" was to bring to South African regional policy the sophistication of a blend of covert and overt operations: In Mozambique, for example, South Africa combined an official peace accord (the 1984 Nkomati agreement) with continued clandestine material support for RENAMO terrorism.<sup>10</sup> Tragically, the United States entered the era of "constructive engagement" just as the South African military tightened its hold over government and shifted its regional policy from *détente* to "total onslaught."

I do not intend to explain the tragedy of Angola and Mozambique as the result of machinations by a single superpower. The Cold War was fought by two superpowers, and both subordinated local interests and consequences to global strategic considerations. Whether in Angola or in Mozambique, the *Cold War* interfaced with an internal *civil war*. An entire generation of African scholars has been preoccupied with understanding the relation between external and internal factors in the making of contemporary Africa and, in that context, the dynamic between the Cold

War and the civil war in each case. My purpose is not to enter this broader debate. Here, my purpose is more modest. I am concerned not with the civil war, but only the Cold War and, furthermore, not with both adversaries in the Cold War, but only the United States. My limited purpose is to illuminate the context in which the United States embraced terrorism as it prepared to wage the Cold War to a finish.

The partnership between the United States and apartheid South Africa bolstered two key movements that used terror with abandon: RENAMO in Mozambique, and UNITA in Angola.<sup>11</sup> RENAMO was a *terrorist* outfit created by the Rhodesian army in the early 1970s—and patronized by the South African Defense Forces. UNITA was more of a *prototerrorist* movement with a local base, though one not strong enough to have survived the short bout of civil war in 1975 without sustained external assistance. UNITA was a contender for power, even if a weak one, while RENAMO was not—which is why the United States could never openly support this creation of Rhodesian and South African intelligence and military establishments. Because the 1975 debacle in Angola showed that South Africa could not be used as a direct link in U.S. assistance, and the Clark amendment barred U.S. covert aid in Angola, the CIA took the initiative to find fourth parties—such as Morocco—through which to train and support UNITA. Congressional testimony documented at least one instance of a \$15-million-dollar payment to UNITA through Morocco in 1983. Savimbi, the UNITA chief, acknowledged the ineffectiveness of the Clark amendment when he told journalists, "A great country like the United States has other channels—the Clark amendment means nothing" (in Minter 1994:152).

By any reckoning, the cost of terrorism in Southern Africa was high. A State Department consultant who interviewed refugees and displaced persons concluded that RENAMO was responsible for 95 percent of instances of abuse of civilians in the war in Mozambique, including the murder of as many as 100,000 persons. A 1989 United Nations study estimated that Mozambique suffered an economic loss of approximately \$15 billion between 1980 and 1988, a figure five and a half times its 1988 GDP (Minter 1994). Africa Watch researchers documented UNITA strategies aimed at starving civilians in government-held areas, through a combination of direct attacks, kidnappings, and the planting of land mines on paths used by peasants. The extensive use of land mines put Angola in the ranks of the most mined countries in the world (alongside Afghanistan and Cambodia), with amputees conservatively estimated at over 15,000. UNICEF calculated that 331,000 died of causes directly or indirectly related to the war. The UN estimated the total loss to the Angolan economy from 1980 to 1988 at \$30 billion, six times the 1988 GDP (Minter 1994:4–5).

The CIA and the Pentagon called terrorism by another name: "low intensity conflict." Whatever the name, political terror brought a kind of war that Africa had never seen

before. The hallmark of terror was that it targeted civilian life: blowing up infrastructure such as bridges and power stations, destroying health and educational centers, mining paths and fields. Terrorism distinguished itself from guerrilla war by making civilians its preferred target. If left-wing guerrillas claimed that they were like fish in water, rightwing terrorists were determined to drain the water—no matter what the cost to civilian life—so as to isolate the fish. What is now called collateral damage was not an unfortunate byproduct of the war; it was the very point of terrorism.

Following the repeal of the Clark amendment at the start of Reagan's second term, the United States provided \$13 million worth of "humanitarian aid" to UNITA, then \$15 million for "military assistance." Even when South African assistance to UNITA dried up following the internal Angolan settlement in May 1991, the United States stepped up its assistance to UNITA in spite of the fact that the Cold War was over. The hope was that terrorism would deliver a political victory in Angola, as it had in Nicaragua. The logic was simple: The people would surely vote the terrorists into power if the level of collateral damage could be made unacceptably high.

Even after the Cold War, U.S. tolerance for terror remained high, both in Africa and beyond. The callousness of Western response to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda was no exception. Or consider the aftermath of January 6, 1999, when Revolutionary United Front (RUF) gunmen maimed and raped their way across Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, killing over 5,000 civilians in a day. The British and U.S. response was to pressure the government to share power with RUF rebels.

### AFGHANISTAN: THE HIGH POINT IN THE COLD WAR

The shifting center of gravity of the Cold War was the major context in which Afghanistan policy was framed, but the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was also a crucial factor. Ayatollah Khomeini anointed the United States as the "Great Satan," and pro-U.S. Islamic countries as "American Islam." Rather than address specific sources of Iranian resentment against the United States, the Reagan administration resolved to expand the pro-U.S. Islamic lobby in order to isolate Iran. The strategy was two-pronged. First, with respect to Afghanistan, it hoped to unite a billion Muslims worldwide around a holy war, a crusade, against the Soviet Union. I use the word *crusade*, not *jihad*, because only the notion of crusade can accurately convey the frame of mind in which this initiative was taken. Second, the Reagan administration hoped to turn a doctrinal difference inside Islam between minority Shia and majority Sunni into a political divide. It hoped thereby to contain the influence of the Iranian Revolution as a minority Shia affair.

The plan went into high gear in 1986 when CIA chief William Casey took three significant measures (Rashid 2000: 129–130). The first was to convince Congress to step up

the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan by providing the mujahideen with U.S. advisors and U.S.-made Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to shoot down Soviet planes. The second was to expand the Islamic guerrilla war from Afghanistan into the Soviet Republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, a decision reversed when the Soviet Union threatened to attack Pakistan in retaliation. The third was to recruit radical Muslims from around the world to come and train in Pakistan and fight with the Afghan mujahideen. The Islamic world had not seen an armed jihad for centuries. Now the CIA was determined to create one, to put a version of tradition at the service of politics. Thus was the tradition of jihad—of a just war with a religious sanction, nonexistent in the last 400 years—revived with U.S. help in the 1980s. In a 1990 radio interview, Eqbal Ahmad explained how "CIA agents started going all over the Muslim world recruiting people to fight."<sup>12</sup> Pervez Hoodbhoy recalled,

With Pakistan's Zia-ul-Haq as America's foremost ally, the CIA advertised for, and openly recruited, Islamic holy warriors from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Algeria. Radical Islam went into overdrive as its superpower ally and mentor funneled support to the Mujahidin, and Ronald Reagan feted them on the lawn of the White House, lavishing praise on "brave freedom fighters challenging the Evil Empire. [2001]

This is the context in which a U.S./Saudi/Pakistani alliance was forged, and in which religious madrasahs were turned into political schools for training cadres. The CIA did not just fund the jihad; it also played "a key role in training the mujahideen" (Chossudovsky 2001). The point was to integrate guerrilla training with the teachings of Islam and, thus, create "Islamic guerrillas." The Indian journalist Dilip Hiro (1995) explained:

Predominant themes were that Islam was a complete sociopolitical ideology, that holy Islam was being violated by (the) atheistic Soviet troops, and that the Islamic people of Afghanistan should reassert their independence by overthrowing the leftist Afghan regime propped up by Moscow. [in Chossudovsky 2001]

The CIA looked for, but was unable to find, a Saudi Prince to lead this crusade. It settled for the next best thing, the son of an illustrious family closely connected to the Saudi royal house. We need to remember that Osama bin Laden did not come from a backwater family steeped in premodernity, but from a cosmopolitan family. The bin Laden family is a patron of scholarship: it endows programs at universities like Harvard and Yale. Bin Laden was recruited with U.S. approval, and at the highest level, by Prince Turki al-Faisal, then head of Saudi intelligence (Blackburn 2001:3). This is the context in which Osama bin Laden helped build, in 1986, the Khost tunnel complex deep under the mountains close to the Pakistani border, a complex the CIA funded as a major arms depot, as a training facility, and as a medical center for the mujahideen. It is also the context in which bin Laden set up, in 1989, al-Qaeda, or military base, as a service center for Arab Afghans and their families (Rashid 2000:132).

The idea of an Islamic global war was not a brainchild of bin Laden; the CIA and Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) hoped to transform the Afghan jihad into a global war waged by Muslim states against the Soviet Union. Al-Qaeda networks spread out beyond Afghanistan: to Chechnya and Kosovo (Blackburn 2001:7), to Algeria and Egypt, even as far as Indonesia. The numbers involved were impressive by any reckoning. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Ahmad Rashid estimated that 35,000 Muslim radicals from 40 Islamic countries joined Afghanistan's fight in the decade between 1982 and 1992. Eventually Rashid notes, the Afghan jihad came to influence more than 100,000 foreign Muslim radicals. (Rashid 1999). The non-Afghan recruits were known as the Afghan-Arabs or, more specifically, as the Afghan-Algerians or the Afghan-Indonesians. The Afghan-Arabs constituted an elite force and received the most sophisticated training (Chossudovsky 2001). Fighters in the Peshawar-based Muslim "international brigade" received the relatively high salary of around \$1,500 per month (Stone 1997:183). Except at the top leadership level, fighters had no direct contact with Washington; most communication was mediated through Pakistani intelligence services (Chossudovsky 2001).

The Afghan jihad was the largest covert operation in the history of the CIA. In fiscal year 1987 alone, according to one estimate, clandestine U.S. military aid to the mujahideen amounted to 660 million dollars—"more than the total of American aid to the contras in Nicaragua" (Ahmad and Barnet 1988:44). Apart from direct U.S. funding, the CIA financed the war through the drug trade, just as in Nicaragua. The impact on Afghanistan and Pakistan was devastating. Prior to the Afghan jihad, there was no local production of heroin in Pakistan and Afghanistan; the production of opium (a very different drug than heroin) was directed to small regional markets. Michel Chossudovsky, Professor of Economics at University of Ottawa, estimates that within only two years of the CIA's entry into the Afghan jihad, "the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands became the world's top heroin producer, supplying 60 percent of U.S. demand." (2001:4). The lever for expanding the drug trade was simple: As the jihad spread inside Afghanistan, the mujahideen required peasants to pay an opium tax. Instead of waging a war on drugs, the CIA turned the drug trade into a way of financing the Cold War. By the end of the anti-Soviet jihad, the Central Asian region produced 75 percent of the world's opium, worth billions of dollars in revenue (McCoy 1997).<sup>13</sup>

The effect on Pakistan, the United States's key ally in waging the Cold War in Central Asia, was devastating. To begin with, the increase in opium production corresponded to an increase in local consumption, hardly an incidental relation: The UN Drug Control Program estimated that the heroin-addicted population in Pakistan went up from nearly zero in 1979 to 1.2 million by 1985, "a much steeper rise than in any nation" (McCoy 1997, in Chossudovsky 2001). There were two other ways in which the Afghan jihad affected Pakistan. The first was its impact

on Pakistan's military and intelligence services, which were key to giving the CIA an effective reach in Afghanistan and, more generally, in Soviet Central Asia. The more the anti-Soviet jihad grew, the more the intelligence services, particularly the ISI, moved to the center of governmental power in Pakistan. The Islamization of the anti-Soviet struggle both drew inspiration from and reinforced the Islamization of the Pakistani state under Zia (Hoodbhoy 2001:7). Second, the more the Afghan jihad gathered momentum, the more it fed a regional offshoot, the Kashmiri jihad (Hoodbhoy 2001:7). The jihadi organizations were so pivotal in the functioning of the Pakistani state by the time Zia left office that the trend to Islamization of the state continued with post-Zia governments. Hudud Ordinances<sup>14</sup> and blasphemy laws remained in place. The Jameet-e-Ulema-Islam, a key party in the alliance that was the Afghan jihad, became a part of Benazir Bhutto's governing coalition in 1993 (Chossudovsky 2001).

By now it should be clear that the CIA was key to forging the link between Islam and terror in Central Asia. The groups it trained and sponsored shared three characteristics: terror tactics, embrace of holy war, and the use of fighters from across national borders (the Afghan-Arabs). The consequences were evident in countries as diverse and far apart as Indonesia and Algeria. Today, the Laskar jihad in Indonesia is reportedly led by a dozen commanders who fought in the Afghan jihad (Solomon 2001:9). In Algeria, when the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was prevented from taking power by the Algerian military when it became evident that it would win the 1991 election, those in the political leadership of FIS who had pioneered the parliamentary road were eclipsed by those championing an armed jihad. The Algerian-Afghans "played an important role in the formation of the Islamic extremist groups of the post-Chadli crisis." Though their precise numbers are not known, Martin Stone reports that "the Pakistani embassy in Algiers alone issued 2,800 visas to Algerian volunteers during the mid-1980s." One of the most important leaders of the Algerian-Afghans, Kameranedin Kherbane, went on to serve on the FIS's executive council in exile (Stone 1997:183).

The Cold War created a political schism in Islam. In contrast to radical Islamist social movements like the pre-election FIS in Algeria, or the earlier revolutionaries in Iran, the Cold War has given the United States a state-driven conservative version of political Islam in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. In an essay on September 11, Olivier Roy has usefully contrasted these tendencies—radical political Islam as against conservative "neofundamentalism. Islamist social movements originated in the 20th century in the face of imperial occupation; they aimed to rejuvenate Islam, not just as "a mere religion," but as "a political ideology which should be integrated into all aspects of society (politics, law, economy, social justice, foreign policy, etc.)" (Roy 2001). Though it began by calling for the building of an *umma* (supranational Muslim community), radical Islamism adapted to

the nation state and sprouted different national versions of Islamism. This shift has been the most dramatic in movements such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, which has given up the idea of an Islamic state and entered the electoral process, and Hamas, whose critique of the PLO is that it has betrayed not Islam, but the Palestinian nation. Where they are allowed, these movements operate within legal frameworks. Though not necessarily democratic, they strengthen the conditions for democracy by expanding participation in the political process. In contrast, state-driven neofundamentalist movements share a conservative agenda. Politically, their objective is limited to implementing Sharia (Islamic law). Socially, they share a conservatism evidenced by opposition to female presence in public life and a violent sectarianism (anti-Shia). Though originating in efforts by unpopular regimes to legitimize power, the history of neofundamentalist movements shows that these efforts have indeed backfired. Instead of developing national roots, neofundamentalism has turned supranational; uprooted, its members have broken with ties of family and country of origin. According to Roy, "while Islamists do adapt to the nation-state, neofundamentalists embody the crisis of the nation-state."

This new brand of supra-national fundamentalism is more a product of contemporary globalization than the Islamic past" (Roy 2001).

If the mujahideen and al-Qaeda were neofundamentalist products of the Cold War—trained, equipped, and financed by the CIA and its regional allies—the Taliban came out of the agony and the ashes of the war against the Soviet Union. The Taliban was a movement born across the border in Pakistan at a time when the entire population had been displaced not once but many times over, and when no educated class to speak of was left in the country. The *Talib* was a student and the student movement, Taliban, was born of warfare stretching into decades, of children born in cross-border refugee camps, of orphans with no camaraderie but that of fellow male students in madressas, of madressas that initially provided student recruits to defend the population—ironically, women and young boys—from the lust and the loot of mujahideen guerrillas. Born of a brutalized society, the Taliban was, tragically, to brutalize it further. An old man in a mosque in Kandahar, an architectural ruin, which was once an ancient city of gardens and fountains and palaces, told Eqbal Ahmad, "They have grown in darkness amidst death. They are angry and ignorant, and hate all things that bring joy to life" (1995).

Both those who see the Taliban as an Islamic movement and those who see it as a tribal (Pushtun) movement view it as a premodern residue in a modern world. But they miss the crucial point about the Taliban: Even if it evokes premodernity in its particular language and specific practices, the Taliban is the result of an encounter of a premodern people with modern imperial power. Given to a highly decentralized and localized mode of life, the Afghan people have been subjected to two highly central-

ized state projects in the past few decades: first, Soviet-supported Marxism, then, CIA-supported Islamization.<sup>15</sup> When I asked two colleagues, one an Afghan and the other a U.S. student of Afghanistan, how a movement that began in defense of women and youth could turn against both,<sup>16</sup> they asked me to put this development in a triple context: the shift from the forced gender equity of the communists to the forced misogyny of the Taliban, the combination of traditional male seclusion of the madressas with the militarism of the jihadi training, and, finally, the fear of Taliban leaders that their members would succumb to rape, a practice for which the mujahideen were notorious.<sup>17</sup> True, the CIA did not create the Taliban. But the CIA did create the mujahideen and embraced both bin Laden and the Taliban as alternatives to secular nationalism. Just as, in another context, the Israeli intelligence allowed *Hamas* to operate unhindered during the first *intifadah*—allowing it to open a university and bank accounts, and even possibly helping it with funding, hoping to play it off against the secular PLO—and reaped the whirlwind in the second *intifadah*.<sup>18</sup>

My point is simple: Contemporary "fundamentalism" is a modern political project, not a traditional cultural leftover. To be sure, one can trace many of the elements in the present "fundamentalist" project—such as opium production, madressas, and the very notion of jihad Akbar—to the era before modern colonization, just as one can identify forms of slavery prior to the era of merchant capitalism. Just as transatlantic slavery took a premodern institution and utilized it for purposes of capitalist accumulation—stretching its scale and brutality far beyond precapitalist practice or imagination—so Cold Warriors turned traditional institutions such as jihad Akbar and madressas, and traditional stimulants such as opium, to modern political purposes on a scale previously unimagined, with devastating consequences. Opium, madressas, jihad Akbar—all were reshaped as they were put into the service of a global U.S. campaign against "the evil empire."

When the Soviet Union was defeated in Afghanistan, this new terror was unleashed on Afghan people in the name of liberation. Eqbal Ahmad observed that the Soviet withdrawal turned out to be a moment of truth, rather than victory, for the mujahideen (Ahmad 1992a). As different factions of the mujahideen divided along regional (north versus south), linguistic (Farsi versus Pushto), doctrinal (Shia versus Sunni) and even external (pro-Iran versus pro-Saudi) lines, and fought each other, they shelled and destroyed their *own* cities with artillery. Precisely when they were ready to take power, the mujahideen lost the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people (Ahmad 1989, 1992a, 1992b).

#### THE QUESTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Who bears responsibility for the present situation? To understand this question, it will help to contrast two situations, that after World War II and that after the Cold

War, and compare how the question of responsibility was understood and addressed in two different contexts.

In spite of Pearl Harbor, World War II was fought in Europe and Asia, not in the United States. Europe, and not the United States, faced physical and civic destruction at the end of the war. The question of responsibility for post-war reconstruction arose as a political rather than a moral question. Its urgency was underscored by the changing political situation in Yugoslavia, Albania, and, particularly, Greece. This is the context in which the United States accepted responsibility for restoring conditions for decent civic life in noncommunist Europe. The resulting initiative was the Marshall Plan.

The Cold War was not fought in Europe, but in Southeast Asia, Southern Africa, and Central and South America. Should we, ordinary humanity, hold the United States responsible for its actions during the Cold War? Should the United States be held responsible for napalm bombing and spraying Agent Orange in Vietnam? Should it be held responsible for cultivating terrorist movements in Southern Africa, Central Africa, and Central Asia? The United States's embrace of terrorism did not end with the Cold War. Right up to September 10, 2001, the United States and Britain compelled African countries to reconcile with terrorist movements. The demand was that governments must share power with terrorist organizations in the name of *reconciliation*—in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Angola. Reconciliation turned into a codeword for impunity, disguising a strategy for undermining hard-won state independence. If terrorism was a Cold War brew, it turned into a local Angolan or Mozambican or Sierra Leonean brew after the Cold War. Whose responsibility is it? Like Afghanistan, are these countries hosting terrorism, or are they also hostage to terrorism? I think both.

Perhaps no other society paid a higher price for the defeat of the Soviet Union than did Afghanistan. Out of a population of roughly 20 million, a million died, another million and a half were maimed, and another five million became refugees. UN agencies estimate that nearly a million and a half have gone clinically insane as a consequence of decades of continuous war. Those who survived lived in the most mined country in the world.<sup>19</sup> Afghanistan was a brutalized society even before the present war began.

The United States has a habit of not taking responsibility for its own actions. Instead, it habitually looks for a high moral pretext for inaction. I was in Durban at the 2001 World Congress against Racism when the United States walked out of it. The Durban conference was about major crimes of the past, such as racism and xenophobia. I returned from Durban to New York to hear Condeleeza Rice talk about the need to forget slavery because, she said, the pursuit of civilized life requires that we forget the past. It is true that unless we learn to forget, life will turn into revenge seeking. Each of us will have nothing to nurse but a catalogue of wrongs done to a long line of ancestors. But civilization cannot be built on just forgetting. We must

not only learn to forget, we must also not forget to learn. We must also memorialize, particularly monumental crimes. The United States was built on two monumental crimes: the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of African Americans. The tendency of the United States is to memorialize other peoples' crimes but to forget its own—to seek a high moral ground as a pretext to ignore real issues.

#### WHAT IS TO BE DONE

Several critics of the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan have argued that terrorism should be dealt with like any criminal act. If terrorism were simply an individual crime, it would not be a political problem. The distinction between political terror and crime is that the former makes an open claim for support. Unlike the criminal, the political terrorist is not easily deterred by punishment. Whatever we may think of their methods, terrorists have a cause, and a need to be heard. Notwithstanding Salman Rushdie's (2001) claim that terrorists are nihilists who wrap themselves up in objectives, but have none, and so we must remorselessly attack them, one needs to recognize that terrorism has no military solution. This is why the U.S. military establishment's bombing campaign in Afghanistan is more likely to be remembered as a combination of blood revenge and medieval-type exorcism than as a search for a solution to terrorism.

Bin Laden's strength does not lay in his religious but, rather, in his political message. Even a political child knows the answer to Bush's incredulous question, "Why do they hate us?" When it comes to the Middle East, we all know that the United States stands for cheap oil and not free speech. The only way of isolating individual terrorists is to do so politically, by addressing the issues in which terrorists "wrap themselves up." Without addressing the issues, there is no way of shifting the terrain of conflict from the military to the political, and drying up support for political terror. If we focus on issues, it should be clear that September 11 would not have happened had the United States ended the Cold War with demilitarization and a peace bonus. The United States did not dismantle the global apparatus of empire at the end of the Cold War; instead, it concentrated on ensuring that hostile states—branded rogue states—did not acquire weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, the United States did not accept responsibility for the militarization of civilian and state life in regions where the Cold War was waged with devastating consequences, such as Southeast Asia, southern Africa, Central America and Central Asia; instead, it just walked away.

In the first weeks after September 11, the leaders of the United States and Britain were at pains to confirm aloud that theirs was a war not against Islam, nor even just Islamic terror, but against terrorism. To be convincing, though, they will have to face up to the relationship between their own policies and contemporary terrorism. A



useful starting point would be to recognize the failure of the United States's Iraqi policy, give up a vendetta that refuses to distinguish between the Iraqi government and Iraqi people, and to pressure Israel to reverse its post-1967 occupation of Palestinian lands. It is the refusal to address issues that must count as the *first* major hurdle in our search for peace. For their part, Muslims need to break out of the straightjacket of a victim's point of view. This, too, requires a historical consciousness, for at least two good reasons. One, only a historical consciousness can bring home to Muslims the fact that Islam is today the banner for diverse and contradictory political projects. It is not only anti-imperialist Islamist movements but also imperialist projects, not only demands to extend participation in public life but also dictatorial agendas, which carry the banner of Islam. The minimum prerequisite for political action today must be the capacity to tell one from the other. The second prerequisite for action is to recognize that just as Islam has changed and become more complex, so too has the configuration of modern society. More and more Muslims live in societies with non-Muslim majorities. Just as non-Muslim majority societies are called on to realize an equal citizenship for all—regardless of cultural and religious differences—so Muslim-majority societies face the challenge of creating a single citizenship in the context of religious diversity. In matters of religion, says the Koran, there must be no compulsion. Islam can be more than a mere religion—indeed, a way of life—but the way of life does not have to be a compulsion. Islamist organizations will have to consider seriously the separation of the state from religion, notably as Hezbollah has in Lebanon. Instead of creating a national political Islam for each Muslim-majority state, the real challenge faced by Muslims is to shed the very notion of a nation-state. Whatever the terms of the nation-state—territorial or cultural, secular or religious—this political form exported by the modern West to the rest of the world is one part of Western modernity that needs to be rethought. The test of democracy in multireligious and multicultural societies is not simply to get the support of the majority, the nation, but to do so without losing the trust of the minority—so that both may belong to a single political community living by a single set of rules.

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#### NOTES

1. Wahhabi is a strictly orthodox Sunni sect; it is predominant in Saudi Arabia.
2. For an account of bad Muslims, see Harden 2001; for a portrayal of good Muslims, see Goodstein 2001: A20.
3. "While more than three-quarters of 145 non-Muslim nations around the world are now democracies, most countries with an Islamic majority continue to defy the trend, according to a survey by

Freedom House, an independent monitor of political rights and civil liberties based in New York" (Crossette 2001:4).

4. Amartya Sen has highlighted the flip side of this argument in an interesting article on Indian civilization: To think of India as a Hindu civilization is to ignore the multiple sources from which historical India has drawn its cultural resources. Conversely, to try and box civilizations into discrete boxes—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist—is to indulge in an ahistorical and one-dimensional understanding of complex contemporary civilizations. I would add to this a third claim: to see also these discrete civilizational boxes as territorial entities is to harness cultural resources for a very specific political project (Sen 2001a, 2001b).
5. Think, for example, of the Arabic word *al-Jahaliya* that I have always known to mean the domain of ignorance. Think also of the legal distinction between *dar-ul-Islam* (the domain of Islam) and *dar-ul-harab* (the domain of war) that says that the rule of law applies only to the domain of Islam.
6. Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, then a rebel group backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba.
7. Mozambican National Resistance, a guerilla organization formed in 1976 by white Rhodesian officers to overthrow the government of newly independent Mozambique.
8. UINTA, the MPLA's main rival for power after independence from Portugal in 1975.
9. The United States used its leverage with a variety of multilateral institutions to achieve this objective. It successfully urged the IMF to grant South Africa a \$1.1 billion credit in November 1982, an amount that—coincidentally or not—equaled the increase in South African military expenditure from 1980 to 1982 (Minter 1994:149).
10. In less than a year after Nkomati, Mozambican forces captured a set of diaries belonging to a member of the RENAMO leadership. The 1985 Vaz diaries detailed continued South African Defense Force support for RENAMO (Vines 1991:24).
11. On Angola and Mozambique, see Minter 1994:2–5, 142–149, 152–168; Vines 1991:24, 39; Brittain 1988:63.
12. See [Http://www.pmagazine.org/articles/featahmad\\_134.shtml](http://www.pmagazine.org/articles/featahmad_134.shtml).
13. Chossudovsky has also synthesized available information on the growth of the drug trade.
14. The 1979 Hudud Ordinance declared all sex outside marriage unlawful. It also sanctioned the flogging of women accused of adultery.
15. "The ideologies at war—Marxism and Fundamentalism—are alien to Afghan culture. Afghanistan is a diverse and pluralistic society; centralizing, unitary agendas cannot appeal to it" (Ahmad 1991).
16. Rashid (1995) explains that the Taliban did not only ban women from public life, they also banned numerous activities for men, such as any game with a ball, music (except drums), lest any of these entice others socially (See also Ahmad 1995).
17. J. Rubin and Ashraf Ghani, conversation with author, November 16, 2001.
18. A former military commander of the Gaza Strip was quoted in 1986 to the effect that "we extend some financial aid to Islamic groups via mosques and religious schools in order to help create a force that would stand against the leftist forces which support the PLO" (in Usher 1993:19). The Israeli experts on defense policy, Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari give a short account of Israeli policies toward Hamas so far as bank transfers and other margins of maneuver are concerned (see Schiff and Ya'ari 1991:233–234). Finally, Khaled Hroub acknowledges that the Israelis used Hamas and the PLO against each other but discounts any deliberate Israeli role in aiding Hamas (see Hroub 2000:200–203).
19. United Nations Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (in Flinders 2001).

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