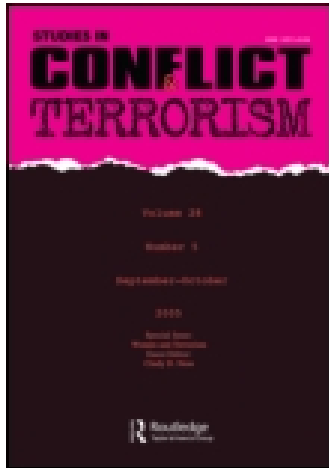


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The Terrorist Calculus behind 9-11: A Model for Future Terrorism?

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Terrorists commit lethal acts of violence in order to realize their goals and advance their causes. They have a mixed record of success. This article explores the question whether the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon outside of Washington, D.C. were successful from the perspective of bin Laden and the Al Qaeda group. Although stunningly triumphant in exploiting the news media for their publicity goals and partially successful in advancing some of their short-term political objectives, the architects of the kamikaze attacks of 9-11 did not realize, and perhaps not even further, their ultimate desire to provoke a cataclysmic clash between Muslims and what bin Laden calls the “Zionist-Crusader” alliance. The argument here is nevertheless that from the terrorist perspective the suicide terror of 9-11 was successful in many respects and could well become an attractive model for future terrorism.

Before he and his Al Qaeda comrades fled their quarters in the Qandahar region of Afghanistan, probably some time in mid-November 2001, Osama bin Laden discussed the twin attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington two months earlier. Referring to the kamikaze pilots whom he called “vanguards of Islam,” bin Laden marveled, “Those young men (. . . inaudible . . .) said in deeds, in New York and Washington, speeches that overshadowed other speeches made everywhere else in the world. The speeches are understood by both Arabs and non-Arabs—even Chinese.” With these remarks bin Laden revealed that he considered terrorism first and foremost as a vehicle to dispatch messages—“speeches” in his words—and, with respect to the events of 11 September 2001 (9-11), he concluded that Americans in particular had heard and reacted to the intended communication.¹

Terrorists used suicide attacks long before the killing of about 3,000 Americans and foreign nationals in New York, Washington, D.C., and near Pittsburgh on that “Black Tuesday” in September. In Sri Lanka the Tamil Tigers have undertaken many suicide missions in their fight against the Sinhala-dominated central government; the Kurdish

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Workers Party, too, used these terrorist methods against Turkish and Kurdish targets. In 1983 members of the Lebanese Hizbollah drove an explosive-laden truck into the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut killing 243 American soldiers. Hizbollah and the Palestinian Hamas have used “human bombs” for years to attack Israel. But the scope and impact of the 9-11 terror operations proved more than any other suicide mission before that weak non-state actors can strike hard against even the strongest of today’s nation states.

There is no evidence of a direct connection between the terror of 9-11 and the unprecedented wave of suicide strikes against Israelis some six months later. But it is noteworthy that the Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigade, part of Yasir Arafat’s Fatah organization and—unlike Hamas, the Palestinian Jihad, and Hizbollah—a secular group, did embrace this strategy for the first time in late 2001—after the 9-11 attacks—and in the process paved the way for female recruits who were not accepted by the religious groups. During the most lethal wave of suicide attacks against Israeli targets this spring, more of these bombers were associated with the Al-Aksa group than with Hamas. It can therefore be asked whether the “human bomb” offensive starting with the Passover massacre on 27 March 2002 that killed 28 and injured 150 Israelis was encouraged by the suicide terror against symbolic targets in New York and Washington and, more importantly, by the impact of those horrific attacks. Whether or not that was the case, the idea of the calculus behind the 9-11 attacks serving as a model for future terrorism is not far fetched, if the operation was and continues to be deemed successful by groups and individuals already involved in or pondering political violence. Although perceptions are often far removed from reality, most terrorists make rational choices and cost-benefit calculations.² Thus the need to explore the following questions: Was the terror of 9-11 successful from the terrorist perspective? To what extent did bin Laden and his followers realize or further their various objectives—or fail to do so?

With the “war against terrorism” far from over, it is too early for a definitive answer to such questions. But bin Laden commented repeatedly on the consequences of the 9-11 attacks as if he deemed them a success, for example, when he claimed that “[t]his is the first time the balance of terror has been close between the two parties, between Muslims and Americans, in the modern age.”³

Terrorism’s efficacy, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder in that those who commit political violence deliberately targeting civilians believe in the success of their deeds even if the consequences are disappointing from the perpetrators’s perspective. In the case of the attacks on New York and Washington, however, there is no doubt that the architects of terror were successful in realizing some of their objectives. It has been suggested that “the success of the military campaign in Afghanistan” in response to 9-11 did hurt Osama bin Laden’s reputation among Arabs and Muslims in that he is increasingly perceived as a loser.⁴ But the conclusion of bin Laden becoming a hero in the Arab and Muslim world is more plausible. One observer, in fact, cast the United States and its allies in the counterterrorist campaign in a no-win role arguing that “[t]he allies are now in a horrible dilemma. If they ‘bring him to justice’ and put him on trial they will provide bin Laden with a platform for global propaganda. If, instead, he is assassinated—perhaps ‘shot while trying to escape’—he will become a martyr. If he escapes he will become a Robin Hood. Bin Laden cannot lose.”⁵ But regardless of the Al Qaeda leader’s ultimate standing among fellow Muslims, in one respect the success of the 9-11 operation is indisputable: The masterminds behind the attack proved the impotence of the mightiest military power to protect its citizens against these kinds of devastating blows. As one expert concluded, “One of the objectives of the terrorist attack was

to prove that the United States was not invulnerable—that it could be hurt by small, relatively weak groups of dedicated fighters. The reaction of most Americans to the attacks have played into their hands.”⁶ It must be added that the reaction of the U.S. government as well proved that the most lethal act of terror on U.S. soil hit a raw nerve in Washington’s power centers. Following the attacks both the legislative and executive branches were preoccupied with anti- and counterterrorist measures apart from the actual “war against terrorism” in Afghanistan. In the four months following the events of 9-11 a stunning “ninety-eight percent of all bills, resolutions, and amendments proposed by the House of Representatives and 97 percent by the Senate related to terrorism. . . . President Bush issued 12 Executive Orders and 10 Presidential Proclamations related to the attacks.”⁷ With their deadly assault Bin Laden and his followers managed to set America’s public agenda for many months, perhaps even years. Given the magnitude of the 9-11 terror, these reactions were hardly surprising, but from the perspective of bin Laden and company, these responses demonstrated day-in and day-out how they had stung America.

Terrorism’s Media-Centered Goals and 9-11

In a popular culture inundated with images of violence, the horror of the quadruple hijack coup and the deliberate flights into the World Trade Center and Pentagon was as real as in the movies, but it was surreal in life. The novelist John Updike, who witnessed the calamity from a tenth-floor apartment in Brooklyn, felt that “as on television, this was not quite real, it could be fixed; the technocracy the towers symbolized would find a way to put out the fire and reverse the damage.”⁸

The greatest irony was that the very terrorists who loathed America’s pop culture as decadent and poisonous to their own beliefs and ways of life turned Hollywood-like horror fantasies into real life hell. In that respect they outperformed Hollywood, the very symbol of the American-led Western entertainment that they despise. After visiting the World Trade Center disaster site for the first time New York’s Governor George Pataki said: “It’s just incomprehensible to see what it was like down there. You know, I remember seeing one of these Cold War movies and after the nuclear attacks with the Hollywood portrayal of a nuclear winter. It looked worse than that in downtown Manhattan, and it wasn’t some grade “B” movie. It was life. It was real.”⁹

From the terrorists’ point of view the attack on America was a perfectly choreographed production aimed at American and international audiences. In the past, terrorism has often been compared to theatre because political violence is staged to get the attention of the audience. Although the theatre metaphor remains instructive, it has given way to that of terrorism as a global television spectacular, as breaking news that is watched by international audiences and transcends by far the boundaries of theatrical events. In the past most, if not all, acts of terrorism resulted in a great deal of publicity in the form of news reporting but 9-11 opened a new chapter in the annals of terrorism as communication because of the choices the planners made with respect to method, target, timing, and scope. To this day the images of airliners crashing as suicide–homicide missiles into the very symbols of America’s economic and military might next to the dominant U.S. and global media organizations remain almost incomprehensible. Those responsible for these deeds could have struck at night, spared many lives, and still rake a great deal of publicity. But the bright daylight guaranteed the most “spectacular” visuals and the loss of life for which they undoubtedly aimed. In all these respects no previous act of terrorism came even close to the events of 9-11.

The Whole World Watching

Those who plan and commit acts of terrorism calculate the consequences of their deeds, the likelihood of gaining media attention, and, most important, the chance of winning entrance—through the media—to what I call The Triangle of Political Communication. The corners of this triangle are the news media, the public, and governmental decision makers. In mass societies in which direct contact and communication between the governors and the mass of the governed are no longer possible, the media provide the links that allow the flow of messages between those in public offices and the general public. Indeed, it has been argued that “politics is communication” and that “[p]olitical communication is therefore the means by which people express both their unity and their differences. Through communication we petition our government, plead our unique and special interests, rally those who agree with us to our causes, and chastise those who do not share our world views.”¹⁰

But groups and individuals who have the urge to communicate their causes and grievances because they do not share the mainstream views may not get any access, or from their point of view not enough access, to the mass media. The fact is, of course, that the news media are not simply neutral and passive communication conduits but rather represent one of the corners in the communication triangle. In that strategic position the media magnify and minimize, include and exclude. The notion of the news media as gatekeepers is useful to explain the concept of mass-mediated political violence, namely terrorists’ expectation that in the face of this sort of political violence, especially spectacular terrorist acts, the media open their gates for all kinds of incident-related reporting to enter the triangle of communication—including the well-calculated messages that terrorists want publicized regardless of whether they claim responsibility for their acts or remain silent. When terrorists strike, their deeds assure them instant media attention and, as a consequence of generous news coverage, of the general public and the government in their particular target country. Moreover, given the global nature of the contemporary communication system, the perpetrators of international and domestic terrorism also tap into the international media and thereby receive the attention of publics and governments beyond their immediate target countries as well.

It has been argued that beginning with the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and the Oklahoma City bombing, the world has entered into a new age of megaterrorism, that this new “terrorism of expression” is no longer dependent on the media, and that therefore claims of responsibility are no longer necessary. However, in most of the recent cases of horrific acts of terrorism the responsible parties either claimed responsibility by contacting the media (i.e., the first World Trade Center case), left clues (e.g., Timothy McVeigh by striking on the second anniversary of the inferno at Waco, Texas), or hinted at their identity and eventually making quasi claims of responsibility (bin Laden and his associates after the bombing of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, after the attack on the destroyer U.S.S. Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen, and, most importantly, after the events of 9-11).

Pulitzer Prize winner Thomas Friedman has suggested that Osama bin Laden “is not a mere terrorist” but a “super-empowered” man with geopolitical aspirations who “has employed violence not to grab headlines but to kill as many Americans as possible to drive them out of the Islamic world and weaken their society.”¹¹ But according to a detailed manual of the Afghan jihad that was used for the instruction of would-be terrorists in Al Qaeda’s training camps, publicity was (and most probably still is) an overriding consideration in planning terrorist acts. Thus, the manual advised holy warriors to target “sentimental landmarks” such as the Statue of Liberty in New York, Big Ben in

London, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris because their destruction would “generate intense publicity.”¹² Whether the extensive terrorism network under the leadership of bin Laden and his associates or a small cell of violent environmentalists, Paul Wilkinson’s astute observation holds true:

When one says “terrorism” in a democratic society, one also says “media.” For terrorism by its very nature is a psychological weapon which depends upon communicating a threat to a wider society. This, in essence, is why terrorism and the media enjoy a symbiotic relationship.¹³

To be sure, publicity via the mass media is not an end in itself; it is a means to more important ends, namely the realization of short- and medium-term or long-term political objectives. But like terrorists at all times and in all places, those who planned the 9-11 attacks were well aware that the news about their acts would first of all help them achieve their media-centered publicity goals and in the process could also advance some or all of their political objectives.¹⁴ In particular, massive news coverage assures terrorists the attention of their target audiences, a discussion of their motives, and a status of prominence for their leaders.¹⁵

If not the perpetrators themselves, the architects of their terror enterprise surely anticipated the immediate media impact: blanket coverage not only in the United States but worldwide. Opinion polls revealed that literally all Americans followed the news of the terrorist attacks (99% or 100% according to surveys) by watching and listening to television and radio and logging on to the Internet. Around the world there was an equally universal awareness of what had happened in the United States. This was a perfect achievement with respect to the “attention getting” goal for which all terrorists strive.

Until 9-11, the terrorist assault on members of Israel’s Olympic team by the Palestinian “Black September” group during the 1972 Olympic Games at Munich, Germany, was considered the one terrorist action watched by an estimated audience of 800 million around the world. But the advances in communication technology and the greater availability of television sets, personal computers, and cellular phones today put the events of 9-11 or “Black Tuesday” for sure into the record books as the most watched terrorist coup ever.

The Intimidation Factor

Closely tied to the objective to get public and elite attention is another terrorist goal, namely to intimidate their target audience, to spread anxiety and fear in a public traumatized by their terror. Opinion polls revealed that the terror attacks on New York and Washington heightened American’s fear of more terrorism to come and of the likelihood that they themselves or a member of their family might become victims. This effect on the targeted population was not lost on bin Laden and his associates. In commenting on the impact of the terror attack on the American enemy, the Al Qaeda leader remarked with obvious satisfaction, “There is America, full of fear from north to south, from west to east. Thank God for that.”¹⁶

Moreover, terrorists hope to strike hard enough so that alarmed governments in democracies adopt anti- and counterterrorist laws and regulations that curb highly esteemed civil liberties and thereby weaken the very fabric of liberal democratic societies. Of the more than 20 federal laws adopted in the United States after 9-11 and before the

end of 2001, many dealt with domestic anti- and counterterrorist matters. This followed the pattern that liberal democracies take in response to terrorism. But, as one terrorism scholar pointed out, the problem was that “these provisions sought to ensure greater security for Americans, [but] many of them made serious inroads into the individual rights of both citizens and non-citizens.”¹⁷ These developments were not lost on bin Laden, who told a correspondent of the Al-Jazeera television network that “freedom and human rights in America are doomed” and predicted that the U.S. government would lead its people and the West “into an unbearable hell and a choking life.”¹⁸ Although few in the general public in the United States and elsewhere in the West believed seriously that civil liberties were doomed as a result of hastily adopted antiterrorism laws, there were uneasy sentiments and outright opposition in some quarters against governments going too far in efforts to protect their citizens from terrorist strikes at the expense of individual rights. It is not clear whether bin Laden seriously aims at provoking political changes in the United States and the West but he certainly wants to demonstrate the hypocritical application of Western values and how easily they are weakened or abandoned. In the wake of 9-11 he saw this goal accomplished, explaining:

The values of this Western civilization under the leadership of America have been destroyed. Those awesome symbolic towers that speak of liberty, human rights, and humanity have been destroyed. They have gone up in smoke.

The proof came when the U.S. government pressured the media not to run our statements that are not longer than a few minutes. They felt that the truth started to reach the American people, the truth that we are not terrorists as they understand it but because we are being attacked in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Somalia, Kashmir, the Philippines and everywhere else.¹⁹

Bin Laden is not the first terrorist and Al Qaeda not the first terrorist organization aiming at trapping liberal states into extreme measures that violate the fundamental values of the state. Indeed, when targeting liberal democracies “terrorism strives and trades on the grave mistakes and misjudgments of the government authorities and security forces, powerful parties and groups within society.”²⁰

Why Do They Hate Us?

After 9-11 there was a tremendous jump in the quantity of news reports about one or the other aspect of and reasons for anti-American sentiments in the Arab and Muslim world. There was an even greater increase in the stories that explained the teachings of mainstream Islam and how it differs from the extreme fundamentalist versions. American television news especially had paid little attention to these topics before the terrorist attacks in the United States. But the switch from scarce and modest reporting on Arabs, Muslims, and Islam before 9-11 to far more news coverage thereafter occurred in radio news and in the print press as well. Although many of these stories focused on extreme anti-American actions by Arabs and Muslims, many others explored the roots of these sentiments, the problems caused by U.S. foreign policy in these regions, and the nonviolent essence of mainstream Islam and its teachings.

The point here is not to criticize the news media for publicizing such contextual reports but rather to point out that this coverage and the accompanying mass-mediated debate was triggered by the events of 9-11 and thus was a direct result of terrorist action. Before the terror attacks U.S. American news organizations—with few exceptions

—reported far less from abroad than their European counterparts. Moreover, foreign news reporting was predominantly episodic, focused on a particular case at hand, rather than thematic and focused on the underlying conditions, developments, and attitudes. This changed in a rather dramatic fashion after 9-11 when the U.S. media tried to answer the question that President Bush had posed in his speech before a joint session of the U.S. Congress: Why do they hate us? In the process, the perpetrators of violence achieved their perhaps most important media-dependent goal, namely to publicize their causes, grievances, and demands. By striking hard at America, the terrorists forced the mass media to explore their grievances in ways that transcended by far the quantity and narrow focus of the pre-crisis coverage. Again, bin Laden was acutely aware that the attacks had resulted in Americans' and Westerners' sudden interest in Islam and the Muslim world. According to a videotaped conversation bin Laden told associates:

[I]n Holland, at one of the centers, the number of people who accepted Islam during the days that followed the operations [of 9-11] were more than the people who accepted Islam in the last eleven years. I heard someone on Islamic radio who owns a school in America say: "We don't have time to keep up with the demands of those who are asking about Islamic books to learn more about Islam." This event made people think which benefited Islam greatly.²¹

Although there is no evidence for the claim of massive conversions to Islam in the West on the heels of the kamikaze attacks of 9-11, many people, especially in America, showed a sudden interest in learning more about Islam—either from books or courses taught in universities and adult education programs. This and the continued coverage of such topics in the mass media increased the American public's knowledge about Islam. According to a CBS News survey, 55% of Americans said at the end of February 2002 that they knew more now about Islam than they did before September 2001. The same survey showed that 30% of the public had a positive, 33% a negative view of this religion. But this was actually a net gain in favor of Americans' positive attitudes toward Islam compared to a 1993 survey conducted by the *Los Angeles Times*, when 14% revealed positive and 22% negative feelings toward Islam.²²

Unfortunately, the aftermath of 9-11 witnessed hate crimes against Muslims, Arabs, and people who were neither but looked to their attackers like "terrorists." There is no doubt that the news about the identities of the 9-11 perpetrators and the endless news images of bin Laden and his followers perpetuated the negative stereotype of the Muslim and Arab as terrorist that American disaster novels and motion pictures had nourished and exploited for decades. The vast majority of U.S. media organizations reported on and condemned this senseless violence giving representatives of these groups opportunities to speak out on behalf of the Muslim and Arab communities. Strangely, in the process the media also seemed to reveal the emergence of a reverse stereotype in the minds and words of some Arabs and Muslims in the United States—that of the Muslim-hating and Arab-hating American, a stereotype that is just as unreal as that of the Muslim and Arab as terrorist.

Osama bin Laden Superstar

What about the third goal that many terrorists hope to advance, namely to win or increase their standing and support in some publics? Here, the perpetrators' number one

audience was not the terrorized American public but rather the population in their homelands and their regions of operation. A charismatic figure among his supporters and his sympathizers to begin with, Osama bin Laden was the biggest winner in this respect. The media covered him as America's number one public enemy and thereby bolstered his popularity, respectability, and legitimacy among millions of Muslims abroad. Although certainly not liked by Americans, bin Laden became a household name in the United States. In the first 10 issues after 9-11, *Newsweek* depicted bin Laden 3 times on its cover, *Time* twice. During this same period *Time* featured the image of President George W. Bush twice, *Newsweek* not at all. This prominent coverage of the Al Qaeda leader was not peculiar to these two leading U.S. news magazines.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and up to the start of the war in Afghanistan on October 7, the U.S. television networks covered Osama bin Laden more frequently, leading newspapers and National Public Radio only somewhat less frequently than George W. Bush. This was particularly noteworthy because during this period the U.S. president made in one form or another 54 public statements whereas bin Laden did not make any personal appearances at all but relied on a few faxed and videotaped statements by himself and close associates that were delivered to the Arab news network Al-Jazeera.

The same coverage patterns prevailed through the next two months and thus during the military strikes against targets in Afghanistan. Again, although President Bush went public more than 70 times during this period, bin Laden remained in hiding or was on the run and in no position to "go public" apart from several videotaped messages. Yet, the 9-11 terrorism and its aftermath turned the world's most notorious terrorist into one of the leading newsmakers—indeed *the* leading newsmaker. From the terrorists' point of view it did not matter that bin Laden got bad press in the United States and elsewhere. Singled-out, condemned, and warned by leaders such as President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Osama bin Laden was covered as frequently and prominently as the world's most influential legitimate leaders, or even more frequently and more prominently. This in itself was a smashing success from the perspective of bin Laden and his associates and supporters. Perhaps the Al Qaeda leader is not a "mere terrorist,"²³ but the attention conferred on him by both the mass media and political leaders elevated him as much to a global figure as did the terror of 9-11 and the fear it struck into Americans.

There is no doubt, then, that the architects of 9-11 had a perfect score with respect to the three media-centered objectives of the calculus of terror: they raked unprecedented media attention, publicized their causes and motives and in the process the grievances of many Muslims, and gained global prominence and notoriety otherwise only accorded to nation-states and their leaders.

The Ultimate Goals

If accomplished publicity goals are merely the means to far more important ends, as argued earlier, it must be wondered whether bin Laden and Al Qaeda succeeded or failed to advance their intertwined political and religious goals and to what extent the media-centered objectives figured into the results. There is no doubt that the interactions and links between the media, the public, and governmental decision makers are stronger in the United States and other democracies than in the mostly authoritarian Arab and Muslim states. Nevertheless, the increased availability of news sources in the non-Western world has bolstered the opportunities for terrorist propaganda directed at both the

masses and the rulers. Although American and Western news organizations—not only CNN—still dominate the global news market, satellite television networks and regional channels have proliferated, especially in the Arab world. And with the exception of Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television that strives for a balance in reporting, the programming is typically one-sided anti-Israel, anti-Jewish, and anti-American—especially in the wake of 9-11 and during the “war on terrorism.” Even Al-Jazeera catered to bin Laden for years and certainly after September 11 by airing interviews with the Al Qaeda leader, carrying his statements, publicizing his views and grievances. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is simply reported in terms of Israelis as aggressors and Palestinians as victims. In addition, the Internet proves an increasingly ideal vehicle for spreading propaganda. Thus, the outlandish idea that thousands of Jews had been warned of the World Trade Center attack and did not go to work on September 11 was spread over the World Wide Web and adopted by many millions of Muslims. This kind of news has incited the masses in Arab and Muslim countries to a degree that governments in the region cannot completely ignore. And this seems to have worked in favor of bin Laden’s policy goals.

Strangely, in the United States even months after the shock of 9-11 some observers claimed that the political goals of “these new terrorists were ‘not even clear’ and remained ‘vague.’”²⁴ The truth is that bin Laden laid out his agenda very clearly in his so-called religious edicts or fatwa of 1996 and 1998 as well as in interviews granted in the years before the terror strikes in the United States. The texts of all of these statements were available on the Internet—and they still are.²⁵ Moreover, his well-publicized post-9-11 statements and documents retrieved in Afghanistan revealed his views and causes. Three grievances in particular were repeatedly articulated:

1. The presence of U.S. forces on the Arabian peninsula—and especially in Saudi Arabia.
2. U.S. sanctions and aggression against Iraq and the alleged plan of the “Crusader-Zionist alliance” to “annihilate what is left of this [the Iraqi] people.”
3. American support of “the Jews petty state” and for the “spilling of blood in Palestine. . . .”

The claim that bin Laden did not talk about the Palestinian question before the Afghan war and simply jumped on the pro-Palestinian bandwagon in a belated opportunistic move to enlist support in the Arab world needs clarification.²⁶ It is certainly true that bin Laden spoke more often and more forcefully in support of Palestinians after 9-11, but he had not been silent on this issue before that date. Addressing his Muslim brothers—particularly those on the Arabian peninsula, he wrote in his 1996 fatwa, that the money they paid to buy American goods would be transformed into bullets and used against their brothers in Palestine and tomorrow against their sons in their own lands. Thus, the more immediate political agenda contained three clearly defined goals:

1. The removal of the U.S. military and thus the reduction or removal of U.S. interest from Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region.
2. The end of U.S. pressure on and sanctions against Iraq.
3. The destruction of the U.S.–Israeli alliance and the strengthening of the Palestinians’ battle against Israel.

So how did bin Laden and Al Qaeda fare on these accounts? For starters, the once symbiotic relationship between the American and Saudi governments—based on Saudi

Arabia's flow of oil to the United States on the one hand and on U.S. military protection of the Saudi rulers on the other, became tense and contentious after 9-11. The revelation that 15 of the 19 9-11 terrorists were Saudi nationals and that the Saudi government financed anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Christian, and anti-Jewish teachings by Wahhabist fundamentalists in Islamic schools and mosques at home and abroad were only the first in a catalogue of grievances on the part of Washington. Once the "war against terrorism" began in Afghanistan, the Al Saud rulers questioned the prudence of continued American military presence inside their borders; later on they declared repeatedly that the United States would not be allowed to use bases on their territory in an attack on Iraq. As Americans prepared to commemorate the first anniversary of the 9-11 catastrophe, the United States retained military bases in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. But considering that bin Laden's initial and most prominent target of discontent was the regime in Saudi Arabia and its alleged collusion with America, the cooling off in the relationship between Saudis and Americans was a move in the direction of his agenda. After all, the U.S. forces on Saudi Arabian soil had been a particular affront all along because of the kingdom's importance as the sacred heartland of the Islamic faith.

Secondly, when President Bush identified Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as terrorist states in what he characterized as an "axis of evil" and potential targets in his declared war against terrorism, he offered a catchy sound bite for the news media and caused an international controversy. Arab governments in particular as well as Muslim regimes elsewhere distanced themselves from Washington—at least for domestic consumption, and so did traditional friends in Europe—including some who were involved or helpful in the fight against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Even Kuwait, which was liberated from the Iraqi occupation by a U.S.-led coalition a decade earlier made clear that its bases were not available for a U.S. attack on Iraq. Most important, 9-11 and the Bush administration's subsequent threats against Saddam Hussein put the Iraqi question once again on the international community's and the United Nations's agenda. Indeed, the attacks of post-9-11 policies provoked the Bush administration to prepare for a war on terrorism well beyond the actions against the Taliban and Al Qaeda's global network of terrorist organizations and cells. The negative reaction on the European continent and especially in the Arab and Muslim world marked one more point on the score card of the 9-11 calculus. Nothing demonstrated this clearer than the embrace between Iraqi and Saudi Arabian representatives at the Arab League's summit in Beirut in the spring 2002 and the signs of a much improved relationship between Kuwait and Iraq.

Finally, the proliferation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict beginning in late March 2002 widened the gulf between Saudi Arabia's rulers and other Arab governments on one side and the Washington administration on the other. Months earlier, one observer had argued convincingly that it is "disingenuous to suggest that the crisis in the Middle-East is unconnected to bin Laden."²⁷ Although the staunch U.S. support for Israel has been a perennial source of anti-American sentiment in the Arab world, there is no doubt that 9-11 and Washington's war on terrorism in Afghanistan intensified these feelings and paved the way for a chill in Arab-American relations. First Al Qaeda's and the Taliban's tough anti-American stance after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but far more so the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan mobilized the Arab masses against the American "paper tiger" and against U.S. aggression. This reaction was further proof that the masterminds of the 9-11 attacks achieved their mass-mediated objectives in their own backyard and, in the process, furthered their policy goals. As the recipient of bin Laden's videotapes and text messages and as the preferred media of the

Taliban leadership before their fall from power, Al-Jazeera became after 9-11 the Arab CNN, often airing exclusives on bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and the war in Afghanistan. National media organizations in the region became even more pronounced in their anti-American news presentations. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the press took its “cue from top Saudi officials who regularly criticized what they termed ‘the media campaign’ against the kingdom in the United States. The Saudi press also highlighted the stories of Saudis and other Arabs who were detained in the United States after September 11.”²⁸ Thus conditioned, the Arab street exploded in unprecedented anti-American protests after Israel’s Defense Forces launched the largest military incursion into the West Bank and the Bush administration failed to pressure Ariel Sharon to withdraw his troops. From Morocco and Egypt to Saudi Arabia the rulers made no secrets of their unhappiness with Washington and President Bush and thus poured oil into the fires of the anti-American rage in the streets amid fears that the mobilized masses could sooner or later turn against their own governments.

Saudi Arabia’s rulers did not kick out the American military or reform their country along bin Laden’s ideas; Iraq continued to protest against trade sanctions and the no-fly zone policed by the United States and the United Kingdom; Israel remained on the map of the Middle East. But the multiple cracks in the formerly cozy Saudi–American relationship, the opposition to threatened U.S. military actions against Saddam Hussein far beyond the Arab world, and the Bush administration’s willingness to speak for the first time publicly about a Palestinian state shortly after 9-11 were all developments in the direction of bin Laden’s spelled-out short- and medium-term objectives.

McWorld and the Clash of Civilizations?

All of this was facilitated by the more recent advances in communication technology, namely satellite TV, satellite phones, and the Internet, and its spread around the globe. Although technologically tied together in the virtual global village, people of different nationality, ethnicity, religion, and ideology are less inclined to search the readily available global marketplace of ideas for a diversity of information and opinions and are more prone to tune in to narrow, parochial media that reinforce their prejudices and stereotypes. Instead of cultivating better understanding, global communication has been more influential as a web of hate.²⁹

These developments have played into the hands of today’s hi-tech terrorists. Mocking Americans for suggesting that bin Laden’s messages after 9-11 may have contained secret codes to instruct his followers, the Al Qaeda leader said that America “made hilarious claims. . . . It’s as if we were living in the time of mail by carrier pigeon, where there are no phones, no travelers, no Internet, no regular mail, no express mail, and no electronic mail. I mean these are very humorous things. They discount people’s intellect.”³⁰ Certainly he and other terrorists have demonstrated that they know how to use literally all of the modern communication technologies for their purposes although condemning other aspects of modernity.

In pointing out the contradiction between Jihad in the sense of societal groups in the West, Islamic countries, and elsewhere that defend their traditional values in morals, religion, economics, and politics and the postmodern McWorld in the sense of mass-production, mass-consumption, and mass-entertainment that transcend national borders, Benjamin Barber identified one important source of bin Laden’s grievances and motivations³¹: In his 1996 Epistle in particular bin Laden lamented the evils of modernization and globalization:

From here, today we begin the work, talking and discussing the ways of correcting what had happened to the Islamic world in general, and the land of the two Holy Places in particular. We wish to study the means that we could follow to return the situation to its normal path. And to return to the people their own rights, particularly after the large damages and the great aggression on the life and the religion of the people. An injustice that had affected every section and group of the people, the civilians, military and security men, government officials and merchants, the young and the old people as well as school and university students. Hundreds of thousands of the unemployed graduates, who became the widest sections of society, were also affected.

And especially speaking of the situation in Saudi Arabia, he wrote:

More than three hundred forty billions of Riyal owed by the government to the people in addition to the daily accumulated interest, let alone the foreign debt. People wonder whether we are the largest oil exporting country?! They even believe that this situation is a curse put on them by Allah for not objecting to the oppressive and illegitimate behavior and measures of the ruling regime.

He blamed the “American crusader forces for a great deal of the catastrophic policies” imposed on the country, especially in the field of oil industry where production is restricted or expanded and prices are fixed to suit the American economy ignoring the economy of the country.” While singling out the United States, modernization and globalization problems were central to this particular catalogue of grievances.

Years before the terror in New York and Washington political scientist Samuel Huntington predicted that the greatest dangers in the post-Cold War era would arise from conflicts between nations and groups of different civilizations, of different cultural backgrounds.³² Several weeks after the events of 9-11, although rejecting the notion that these attacks signaled such a collision, Huntington was sure that “bin Laden wants it to be a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West.”³³ Bin Laden’s statements validate this conclusion. In his 1998 declaration of war against “Jews and Crusaders” he listed the wrongdoings of the “crusader-Zionist alliance” and reminded all Muslims that the “jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries” and that “[n]othing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life.” He then called on all Muslims “to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military . . . in any country in which it is possible to do. . . .” In October 2001, when the U.S. military commenced military strikes against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, bin Laden declared:

The events have divided the whole world into two sides. The side of believers and the side of infidels, may God keep you away from them. Every Muslim has to rush to make his religion victorious. The winds of faith have come. The winds of change have come to eradicate oppression from the island of Muhammad, peace be upon him.³⁴

Because Muslims did not rise in a massive united front to fight the Christian and Jewish infidels in the holy war that bin Laden had declared, the Al Qaeda leader and his sup-

porters did not realize their most ambitious and ultimate objective. On the contrary, they lost their safe haven, headquarters, training facilities, and weapon arsenals in Afghanistan. In this respect, bin Laden and his comrades in arms underestimated perhaps the resolve of the U.S. government and public and the willingness of many other governments to cooperate with Washington. But it is also doubtful that the Al Qaeda leadership expected to provoke the existential clash of civilizations of which bin Laden spoke simply as a result of the 9-11 operation and the anticipated military response. It is far more likely that the plan was (and probably still is) to move with each additional terror attack closer to a confrontation between “the side of believers” and “the side of infidels.”

Certainly, the events of 9-11 increased the tensions between Muslim minorities and Christian majorities in many Western countries—in Europe more so than in the United States. Although singling out Muslim immigrants in the past because of their different cultural and religious preferences, the xenophobic right in France, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, and elsewhere, became far more popular when people feared that Muslims within their borders could commit violence along the lines of 9-11. These fears were fuelled by reports that terrorist “ sleeper cells,” ready to be awakened any time to commit violent acts, existed in many Western countries. In this atmosphere populist leaders who made Muslims the scapegoats for all kinds of ills in their societies became bolder and more attractive. In capturing this trend that began well before 9-11 one observer wrote:

In her best-known campaign poster, Pia Kjaersgaard, the leader of Denmark’s People’s Party, showed a pretty little blond child with the caption: “By the time you retire, Denmark will be a majority Muslim-nation.” Yet in Denmark just 1 person in 15 is of foreign origin and most of these are thoroughly assimilated.³⁵

As new antiterrorism laws and profiling criteria in Western democracies targeted Muslims and Arabs in particular, the gap between Muslim minorities and non-Muslim majorities widened. Far from moving rapidly toward the cataclysmic clash of civilizations of which Huntington warned and bin Laden wished, there was certainly increased distrust and hostility between “infidels” and “believers” in many Western countries and perhaps more fertile ground among the Muslim diaspora for bin Laden’s divisive agenda and final goal.

In the United States, opinion polls revealed that the public in general viewed American Muslims more favorable after 9-11 than before. Thus, in the last poll before 9-11 (March 2001) 45% of the respondents described their attitude toward American Muslims as very favorable or mostly favorable; in the first poll after 9-11 (November 2001) 59% had a very or mostly favorable view of American Muslims.³⁶ However, more than six months after the attacks on New York and Washington 44% of the public believed that American Muslims were not doing enough to help authorities track down terrorist cells in the United States; 32% were not sure; and only 24% thought that Muslim Americans cooperated in this respect.³⁷

9-11 as a Model for Post-9-11 Terror?

Although the attacks on New York and Washington did not realize, or advance significantly, the ultimate goals of the terrorist masterminds, namely a united Muslim front

against and the defeat of the “Crusader-Zionist” alliance, it must be kept in mind what the terrorists did achieve with respect to their media-related and short- or medium-term political goals as described in this article. These successes make the 9-11 calculus of terror an attractive model for future terrorism. In the past suicide bombers struck Americans not in their own country but abroad. The events of 9-11 demonstrated the effectiveness of this terror method within the United States and conceivably within other liberal democracies: Without being able to hunt down and apprehend surviving terrorists, as was the case in the first World Trade Center bombing and the Oklahoma City bombing, a target society is deprived of bringing the perpetrators to justice and likely coaxed into responses that might be deemed disproportional at home and abroad. At the same time, terrorists and their supporters get the opportunity to idolize those who committed suicide in order to kill and use their examples to recruit more volunteers as human bombs.

Religiously motivated Palestinian extremists stepped up their suicide bombings in the months following 9-11 and the secular Al-Aksa group embraced this terror method for the first time. After a total of 42 suicide bombing missions against Israelis in the 8 years from 1993 to 2000, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigade took responsibility for 36 such bombings in 2001 and an unprecedented 30 in the first four months of 2002. By switching to weapons-grade explosives in early 2002, Hamas and other groups assured that suicide bombers killed more Israelis than in earlier missions. Thus, from March 27, when 28 Israelis were killed in Netanya, to May 7, when at least 15 died as a result of a suicide bombing in Rishon Letzion, 76 Israelis were killed and hundreds injured in 6 separate suicide attacks. Yet, once the Israeli Defense Forces moved into the West Bank, the news media focused barely on Israeli victims of terrorism but mostly, or exclusively, on Palestinian victims of Israel’s military might. What the difficult terrain, the political realities on the ground, and a strict censorship imposed by the U.S. military prevented in Afghanistan, namely news reporting and visuals that focused on the civilian casualties in the “war on terrorism,” occurred during the incursion of the Israeli military into the West Bank: The media transmitted gruesome images of death, injury, and destruction that resulted in sympathy for the Palestinian cause and hostility against Israelis—and not only among Arabs and Muslims. Moreover, the media reported extensively about the Palestinian predicament that drove young men and women to volunteer for suicide attacks against Israelis without paying similar attention to the Israeli victims of these bombings. No wonder the leaders of Hamas were “almost welcoming of the Israeli attacks in the West Bank,” convinced that Israel’s actions would result in more Palestinians joining their organizations and in increased prospects “of achieving their goal, the eradication of Israel as a Jewish state.”³⁸

When Chechen separatists seized a Moscow theater in the fall of 2002 and announced their determination to die for their cause, experts suspected that the terrorists had taken their cue from the terror of 9-11.

Above all, terrorists know that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to prevent suicide terror—whether in the form of simple “human bombs” or sophisticated operations, such as those on 9-11—and certainly not with military means. This became very clear in the latest phase of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and this was the lesson of 9-11 as well. Although the possibility of terrorists getting hold of and using weapons of mass destruction some day cannot be ignored, the more immediate concern must be the prospect that 9-11, in one form or another, might well become the most attractive model for terrorism in the near future.

Notes

1. The quotes are taken from the translations of a videotape, presumably made in mid-November 2001 in Afghanistan. Available at: (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/binladentext_121301.html), retrieved 7 April 2002.
2. Martha Crenshaw, "The logic of terrorism: Terrorist behavior as a product of strategic choice," in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 7–24.
3. "Transcript of bin Laden's October interview" with Al-Jazeera correspondent Tayseer Alouni. Available at: (<http://www.cnn.com/2002/world/asiapcf/south/02/05/binladen.transcript/index.html>).
4. For bin Laden's diminished standing in the Arab and Muslim world, see F. Gregory Gause III, "Be careful what you wish for the future of U.S.-Saudi relations," *World Policy Journal* XIX (Spring 2002), pp. 37–50.
5. Michael Howard, "What's in a name?" *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2002), pp. 8–13. The quote is from page 11.
6. Paul W. Schroeder, "The Risk of Victory," *The National Interest* (Winter 2001–2002), pp. 14–21. The quote is from page 34.
7. Laura K. Donohue, "Fear Itself: Counter-Terrorism, Individual Rights, and U.S. Foreign Relations Post 9-11." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, 24–27 March 2002, in New Orleans.
8. Updike was quoted in an untitled contribution in "Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker*, 24 September 2001, p. 28.
9. Governor Pataki made the remark on ABC News "Nightline," on 14 September 2000.
10. For more on the idea of politics as communication see Thomas A. Hollihan, *Uncivil Wars: Political Campaigns in the Media Age* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001), especially chapter 1. The quote is from p. 9.
11. Thomas L. Friedman, "No mere terrorist," *New York Times*, 24 March 2002, sect. 4, p. 15.
12. Hamza Hendawi, "Terror Manual advises on targets." Available at: (http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u+ap/20.../afghan_spreading_terror_), retrieved 11 February 2002.
13. Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy* (London, Frank Cass, 2001), p. 177.
14. Even before Gutenberg invented the printing press terrorists understood the need for publicity and therefore struck their targets in crowded places so that the news spread in a mouth-to-mouth fashion. With the presses in place, terrorists printed their own pamphlets and posters and even their own newspapers. More recently, groups have acquired mobile radio transmitters and television stations. But modern terrorists have mostly relied on the news media for publicity and propaganda.
15. For more about the publicity goals of terrorists see Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
16. "Text: Bin Laden statement." Available at: (<http://www/guardian.co.uk/waronterror/story/0,1361,565069,00html>), retrieved 7 April 2002.
17. Donohue, "Fear Itself," p. 1.
18. Quoted in Howard Kurtz, "U.S. doomed, bin Laden says on tape," *Washington Post* (1 February 2002), p. A13.
19. "Transcript of Bin Laden's October interview."
20. Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism & the Liberal State* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).
21. From bin Laden videotape presumably made in mid-November (see Note 1).
22. The CBS News poll was conducted 24–26 February 2002; the *Los Angeles Times* conducted its poll 18–19 February 1993.
23. Friedman, "No mere terrorist."
24. See, for example, statements made by expert guests on ABC News, "Nightline with Ted Koppel" on 18 March 2002.

25. Unless otherwise indicated descriptions and quotes of bin Laden's objectives are from his 1996 "Ladenese Epistle" and his 1998 "Jihad against Jews and Crusaders." Available at: (<http://www.washingtonpost.com>), retrieved 5 February 2002.

26. This argument was made, for example, by one of the expert guests appearing on "Nightline with Ted Koppel," 18 March 2002.

27. Tony Judt, "America and the War," in Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein, eds., *Striking Terror: America's New War* (New York, New York Review Books, 2002), pp. 17–37. Quote is from page 22.

28. Gause III, "Be careful what you wish for the future of U.S.-Saudi relations," p. 40.

29. For more on this aspect of global communication see Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002). See also, Thomas L. Friedman, "Global Village Idiocy," *New York Times*, 12 May 2002.

30. "Transcript of Bin Laden's October interview."

31. Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1995).

32. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

33. "Q & A; A head-on collision of alien cultures," *New York Times*, 20 October 2001, p. A13.

34. "Text: bin Laden statement."

35. For more on the European far right's anti-foreigner and anti-immigration stands, see Tony Judt, "America's restive partners." *New York Times*, 28 April 2002, section 4, p. 15.

36. Pew Center for the People & the Press & Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

37. Survey was conducted by Fox News, 2–3 April 2002.

38. For more on the reactions by and views of Hamas leaders see, Joel Brinkley, "Bombers gloating in Gaza as they see goal within reach: no more Israel," *New York Times*, 4 April 2002.