

geography frighteningly random, and its objectives often unclear and not negotiable.

TERRORISM'S WIDENING CIRCLE

Successful acts of terror have a way of imprinting themselves on the culture of their victims. On the morning of May 14, 1940, four days after nazi armies had crossed the Dutch border on their way to the shores of the North Sea, the skies over the port city of Rotterdam were suddenly filled with warplanes. Without warning they rained incendiary bombs on the city's historic center and the harbor. Hundreds were killed in the first wave of the assault, and when the survivors tried to douse the flames with fire hoses they were shot by nazi paratroops who had landed at the airport.

The attack was a signal to the Netherlands' government, whose forces were having some unexpected success in resisting the German aggression, to capitulate or risk further death and destruction.

Was this an act of terror or an act of war? And if the former, was Dresden any different? That German city was targeted by Allied bombers beginning in mid-February 1945 for reasons similar to Rotterdam in 1940: to persuade a government to capitulate and thus shorten the war. Perhaps as many as 100,000 civilians were killed, but the sustained campaign had no effect on nazi policy. How about Hiroshima and Nagasaki? The argument over casualties continues: would more American and Japanese soldiers (as well as civilians) have died in the inevitable invasion than perished in the two cities destroyed by United States atomic bombs? Is there such a thing as state terrorism, and if so, do these four cities exemplify it? Certainly the Palestinians have no doubt about the reality of state terrorism. The Palestinian press regularly accuses Israel of it when Israeli warplanes and tanks in pursuit of Arab terrorists kill civilians in Gaza or the West Bank.

The definition of terrorism is no minor issue. It raises heated arguments in the scholarly literature, and it has important legal and fiscal (notably insurance) ramifications. In a book entitled *The Geographical Dimensions of Terrorism*, terrorism is defined as “intimidation through violence,” but without further qualification (Cutter et al., 2003). Neither is the definition written by the United Nations Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change satisfactory: Terrorism is “any action intended to kill or seriously harm civilians or non-combatants, with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling action by a government or international organization” (Annan, 2004). A more considered view defines terrorism as “an unprovoked attack against civilian noncombatants away from any theatre of war by men or women not working for a power openly at war with the victims’ country” (Harvey, 2003). The problem with such carefully qualified definitions is that further definitional caveats arise: what is “unprovoked?” Terrorists claim a host of provocations, from cohorts’ deaths to historic injustices. Does “openly at war” mean that a rebel movement’s declaration of war on a government—which has occurred repeatedly—is enough to negate that clause and thus the charge of terrorism? To such questions, there is no simple answer.

A RISING TIDE OF GLOBAL TERROR

“One person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter” goes a common refrain when it comes to violence to achieve political goals. When the Irish Republican Army (IRA) claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the Grand Hotel in Brighton in October 1984, killing 5 and wounding 31, British public opinion held this to be an act of terrorism whereas many Catholics in Northern Ireland viewed it as justified resistance. When a Palestinian suicide bomber destroys a bus full of civilians on an

Israeli street, Jews see an act of terror, many Palestinians a heroic strike at a hated enemy.

In these and many other examples known to all of us, the violence is an outgrowth of national policies. The IRA fought against British rule in Northern Ireland (the issue is closer to being settled today, but no final resolution has been achieved and the potential for further upheaval remains). Palestinians fight against an Israel they resent as a trespasser, invader, and occupier. Corsicans in France, Basques in Spain, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Chechnyans in Russia, Uyghurs in China—in every instance, their battle is or was against the state that dominates them, and in every case they carried their violent campaigns to the major cities of their adversaries. Corsicans bombed the city hall of Bordeaux; Basques assassinated politicians and civilians from Madrid to Barcelona; Tamils killed hundreds in Colombo, Chechnyans turned Moscow into a war zone, Uyghurs detonated bombs in Ürümqi. None of the longstanding issues provoking these actions is yet resolved except perhaps the Tamil campaign, but their protagonists are well known and their geographies are tangible. What the activists want is a redrawing of the map: an autonomous Corsica, an independent Basque territory, a partitioned Sri Lanka, a sovereign Chechnya, a free East Turkestan.

No such geographic clarity marks the form of terrorism that has become dominant in the twenty-first-century world: Islam-inspired violence. A generation ago, acts of terror punctuated political strife in numerous places around the world, affecting not only the locales where it was endemic but also such countries as Canada, Germany, Italy, India, and Japan. In the United States, occasional terrorist acts tended to be perpetrated by far-right or neo-nazi activists, often operating individually. In Norway in 2011, a deranged extremist vented his anti-immigrant views by killing nearly 80 people in a shooting rampage in and near the capital, Oslo. Elsewhere, shadowy groups with diverse grievances and objectives used bombs, guns,

hijackings, kidnappings, and other means in pursuit of their objectives, which often seemed to be, simply, to create mayhem. Until the early 1980s, although some cooperation did occur, there was no global network coordinating these groups. But circumstances were evolving. Terrorism was becoming more than a local crime problem to be dealt with by local law enforcement. A new and larger wave of terrorist activity was rising, overshadowing all the local movements and creating a global threat, targeting Western interests worldwide. This terrorist network had religious rather than ideological foundations and exhorted Muslims everywhere to participate. It found a ready market among Salafists (Salafism demands strict emulation of Islam's seventh-century founders) and others who espoused Islamic revivalism in its most fundamental forms.

Even so, little was known about this fundamentalist movement just three decades ago. Islamic terrorism had for some time been equated with Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) activity against Israel and Israeli interests, ranging from the deadly attack against Israeli athletes during the 1972 Olympics in Munich to the 1985 hijacking of an American airliner leaving Athens by a group of Shi'ite Muslim terrorists demanding the release of fellow Shi'ites in Israeli prisons. The widening circle of this violence sometimes struck United States interests, but its source remained obscure. In 1982, the name "Islamic Jihad" (Islamic Holy War) began to appear on intelligence reports, a shadowy organization that claimed responsibility for four terrorist attacks during 1983 and 1984 on American military and diplomatic installations that killed nearly 320 people. Yet, as one perceptive observer wrote at the time, "there [are] doubts that Islamic Jihad, as a proper organization, actually exists. No names or locations have been publicly identified ... it is widely believed that 'Islamic Jihad' is a convenient cover name for a host of fundamentalist movements and cells throughout the Middle East"

(Wright, 1986). Speculation as to Islamic Jihad's headquarters centered on Shi'ite Iran, in part because of Lebanon-based Hizbullah and its known ties to Tehran. But in truth there was little concrete information about an enemy proving itself capable of inflicting heavy casualties on American and other Western interests.

SOUTH ASIA AND SAUDI ARABIA

Even as such attacks continued, the seeds for a far more serious challenge to regional security were being sown elsewhere. After the Soviet Union invaded overwhelmingly (Sunni) Muslim, landlocked Afghanistan in 1979 with the aim to establish a secular regime in Kabul, the United States made the fateful foreign-policy decision to support anti-Soviet *mujahideen* (strugglers) by providing them with large quantities of modern weapons as well as money. It was a Cold War strategy that might be charitably described as shortsighted, and certainly appeared contradictory: a United States supposedly committed to principles of secular government helped oust a regime attempting to establish just that, albeit undemocratically. Soviet restraint in the United States struggle for Vietnam was not rewarded with American moderation in Afghanistan, even when it must have been obvious to some policy makers in Washington that a forced withdrawal of Soviet troops would leave Afghanistan a destabilized, faction-ridden, failed state flooded with armaments at a time when Islamic terrorism was on the rise. Soon the factions that had been somewhat united during the anti-Soviet campaign were in conflict, with warlords controlling fiefdoms far from the devastated capital and more than 3 million refugees encamped on the Pakistan side of the border.

The United States, of course, was not the only factor in the struggle for Afghanistan. Another was Saudi Arabia, source of megafunds in support of the mujahideen and wellspring of Islamic

extremism that would find fertile soil amid the cultural chaos that followed the Soviet defeat. For decades, Saudi money had supported numerous religious schools or *madrassas* in Pakistan, schools in which education is confined to intensive study and memorization of the Quran (Koran). These schools had their origins in British colonial times, when Muslims found themselves not only colonized and deprived of their power but also a minority in the dominantly Hindu South Asian realm. In response, as early as the 1860s, Sunni Muslim communities set up such deobandi schools. The cleric-teachers of these *madrassas* were able to issue *fatwas* (legal, interpretive proclamations based on the holy texts of Islam, the Quran or the Hadith, that stipulate how Muslims should live their lives, and thus to protect Muslim communities from undesirable influences). When Pakistan was severed from India and became an Islamic state, the Pakistani *madrassa* network became a potent factor in national life. Supported by taxes and drawing youngsters by the hundreds of thousands from the Sunni majority (the Shi'ite minority generally disapproved and objected to being taxed for this system), the *madrassas* provided lodging, food, and religious education mainly for the sons of poor families. During the war in Afghanistan, when several million Afghans took refuge in Pakistan, many of their sons also enrolled in these schools. Years of indoctrination and rote memorization left them poorly prepared for the real world, and the religious perspective with which they graduated was—and is—retrograde.

In the eyes of their Saudi supporters, however, there was—and is—nothing retrograde about Pakistan's *madrassas*. Indeed, their teachings tend to conform to those of fundamentalist and often extremist Wahhabi dogma that pervades conservative Saudi religious proselytism. The Arabian-born theologian Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), the founder of this movement, was determined to bring Islamic society on the peninsula back to its most

traditional and puritanical form. So strict were his teachings in his hometown near Medina that he was expelled by the locals in 1744, when he moved to what was then the capital of the central territory of Najd, whose ruler was named Ibn Saud (that old capital lies close to the modern one, Riyadh). That was a fateful move, because Ibn Saud liked al-Wahhab's teachings and formed an alliance with him that was facilitated by the fortune al-Wahhab had inherited upon his wife's death. Together they set out on a path of conquest, political and religious, that created a ruling Saudi dynasty over most of the Arabian Peninsula and made Wahhabism the dominant dogma. In 1932, when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially established, the ruling king made Wahhabism the state religion.

The era of oil production, foreign corporations, modernization, and immigration by millions of Arabs and non-Arabs from sources ranging from Palestine to Pakistan changed Saudi Arabia substantially, but Wahhabism survived. The Saudi royal family had grown by the turn of the century to nearly 5,000 members, and while some had Western educations and others had foreign experience in diplomatic and business fields, still others followed Ibn Saud's traditions and remained staunchly conservative, supporting fundamentalist religious institutions within Saudi Arabia and mosques and schools abroad. In Pakistan's madrassas these conservatives saw the values they embraced, and in conservative clerics they found allies in support of their revivalist cause (many Muslims prefer the term "revivalist" to "fundamentalist," arguing that the former is appropriately forward looking). Thus money flowed to mosques and schools abroad, fueling Islamic revivalism while creating channels to funnel such money to fanatics willing to take up arms, and give their lives, on behalf of extremist causes.

From Pakistan came the products of the madrassas, from Saudi Arabia came money. But there was a third element in the transformation of Afghanistan from isolated backwater to terrorist

base. In several ways, the life of Usama bin Laden mirrored that of al-Wahhab: he gained significant wealth through inheritance, in his case from his father; following college graduation he left Saudi Arabia to pursue his causes elsewhere; he returned to denounce his leaders' lack of commitment to Islamic principles; and he was exiled—not just from his local community, but from his country. During the 1980s, though, Usama bin Laden and the United States had a common goal: to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan. He used his own money and an even greater hoard from Saudi royal and religious donors to propel this campaign, watching his fame as well as his war chest grow in the process. In 1988, even before the last Soviet troops had left Afghanistan, he and a group of associates founded an organization called al-Qaeda. Following the final withdrawal of Soviet forces, he returned to Saudi Arabia, leaving behind a large network of allies in the region. Once back in his home country, he publicly denounced his government for allowing United States troops on Saudi soil during the 1991 Gulf War, when an alliance of countries including Arab states, led by American forces, ousted the Iraqi army from Kuwait. By this time bin Laden had become a prominent figure, and the Saudi regime wasted no time in again expelling him from the country, this time stripping him of his citizenship. Allegedly with the help of a conservative member of the royal family, he found refuge in Arab-ruled Sudan, where he established a number of legitimate businesses to facilitate his now-global financial transactions, but also set up several terrorist training camps. Next he convened conferences attended by terrorist leaders and activists representing an ever-growing number of allied organizations ranging from Jemaah Islamiya (Indonesia) and Abu Sayyaf (Philippines) to Islamic Jihad (Egypt) and Hizbullah (Lebanon). When this became known, the Khartoum regime came under strong international pressure to oust him, and in 1996 bin Laden and his circle of confidants transferred their headquarters

back to Afghanistan.

By now bin Laden's role as leader of a terrorist network far more extensive than Islamic Jihad was well understood, and his organization, al-Qaeda, had claimed responsibility for numerous major terrorist strikes, including the first attack (1993) on the World Trade Center in New York City killing six and injuring about one thousand people. Indeed, bin Laden issued a series of *fatwas* against the West and the United States, in one of them actually declaring "war" on America. Bin Laden's forced relocation placed him in physical as well as cultural settings that yielded crucial advantages. The cave-riddled, mountainous terrain of eastern Afghanistan offered numerous hideouts, with limited and controllable accessibility (bin Laden's taped, open-air threats and exhortations, broadcast on Western television, actually induced some geologists to try to identify rock formations to help counter-terrorism specialists to identify his whereabouts). The tribal and clan-ridden cultural landscape of the area enabled bin Laden to use his wealth and influence to protect his seclusion; Mullah Omar, the Afghan Taliban leader, became his most effective ally. It was a combination of geographies that gave the al-Qaeda kingpin a hideout in which to plot his strategy and a perch from which to stoke the anger that would energize his operatives.

GEOGRAPHY OF RAGE

On the walls of many a geography teacher in the Muslim realm hangs a map not unlike Figure 6-2, depicting all areas of the world that are, or were at one time, under Islamic sway. That map shows a contiguous Muslim *umma*, or world, extending from West Africa to Central Asia and from Eastern Europe to Bangladesh, with an outlier in Southeast Asia. It includes most of Spain and Portugal as well as Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, much of India and part of western China. It prompts memories not only of Islam's global reach

but also of its early splendor as a culture whose achievements in science and mathematics, architecture and the arts far exceeded those of Europe. Refer to this map, and even “moderate” Muslims tend to become quite agitated. “I remind myself daily of the humiliations we have suffered and the lands and peoples of God we have lost,” a teacher at an otherwise modern, well-equipped school in Alexandria, Egypt told me in 1980. “This map is our inspiration, our minimum demand on the world.” I was unaware at the time of the portent of those sentiments, versions of which I had already heard in South Asia and East Africa and would hear again in Dubai and Morocco. I thought of this map when Usama bin Laden, in one of his post-9/11 taped diatribes, referred to the “loss” of al-Andalus, now part of Spain, among his justifications for the carnage he had caused.

If ever there was a “civilizational” mental map, [Figure 6-1](#) is it. While this image may be more firmly planted in the Arab world than in, say, Bangladesh or Indonesia, it is seen in Muslim schools from Morocco to Malaysia and from Kosovo to Kenya. It is Islam’s geography factor, although it generalizes a very complex cultural mosaic. It depicts a Muslim world idealized across time as well as space: at no single time did all the areas shown as Islamic fall under Islam’s sway. It is a source of pride, but also dishonor. Such a sense of shame and mortification is widespread, if not universal, in the contiguous Muslim world: Muslims once ruled an Ottoman Empire that reached from present-day Turkey to the gates of Vienna and a Mogul Empire that extended from modern Pakistan to Bangladesh. They lost Iberia and they were ousted from almost all of Eastern Europe. They were battered by the Crusaders and colonized by the Europeans and the Russians, whose geometric boundaries of administrative convenience created eventual states of impractical configuration (Iraq was one of those states). They had no voice when, in the aftermath of a war among Western powers, the United Nations carved out a state of Israel in their Middle Eastern midst. And then

the West's voracious appetite for oil brought foreign economic, cultural, and political penetration of what remained of the Islamic realm, even of the holiest of lands, the Arabian Peninsula, site of Mecca and Medina.

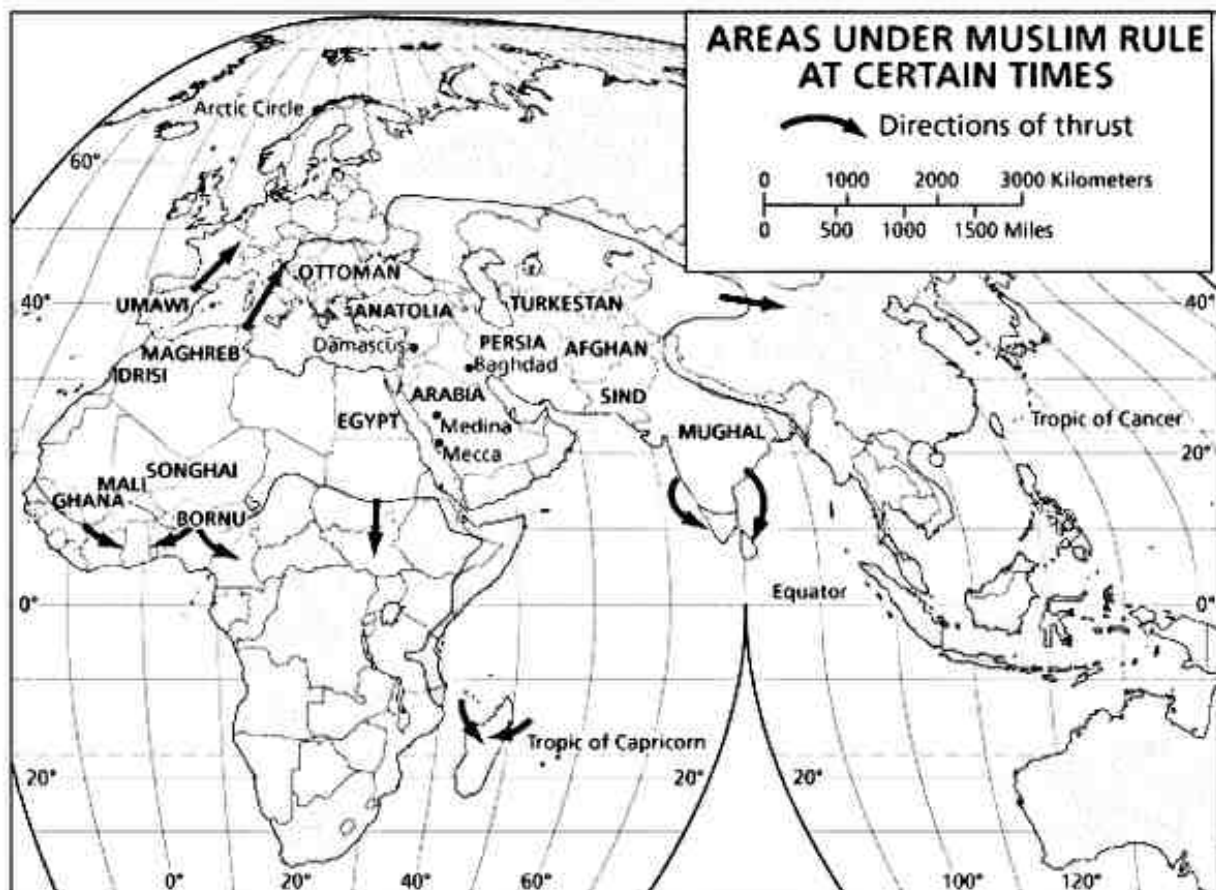


Fig. 6-2. The domain where Muslims ruled has expanded and contracted over time (for example, Muslim rule was ended in Iberia and later in Eastern and Mediterranean Europe). But many Muslims believe that any area once under Islam must be recovered. This map approximates what this would require.

Thus there is no reason to ask, in the aftermath of 9/11, what it is Westerners in general or Americans in particular have recently done

to persuade 15 middle-class Saudis and four other Muslims to send more than 3,000 people to a fiery death in coordinated suicide attacks so terrifying that they unhinged the civilized world. In the annals of history, what was done to Islam and Muslim peoples is proportionately no more dreadful than what was done by European (and Arab) enslavers to Africans, American settlers to Native Americans, Belgians to Congolese, Germans to Jews, and too many other depredations to chronicle. But Africans are not engaged in suicide missions in Brazil, Native Americans are not bombing United States cities, Congolese are not targeting Brussels, and Israelis are not blowing up German commuter trains. If settling historic scores were to have become routine, the planet would no longer be a livable place.

It is often argued that the answer to the question just posed lies in the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and the consequent radicalization of Islamists everywhere, creating a growing cadre of terrorists ready to give their lives in the cause of Allah. But there is little evidence for this. The cycle of violence that has ensnared Israel and the Palestinians has more in common with Northern Ireland, the Basque problem, and Tamil Eelam than with al-Qaeda's campaign, which means that even a two-state solution to the satisfaction of both parties will have little or no impact on the larger issue. No Palestinians are known to have been involved in the planning, funding, or execution of the 9/11 attacks. A majority of Palestinians, their conflict with Israel notwithstanding, would favor a peaceful and territorially fair resolution and would accept Israel as their neighbor. This is not the position of al-Qaeda or its allies, and it is not what that map of the immutable Muslim world reflects.

No amount of behavior modification on the part of the Western world or of the United States can undo what history has wrought, and of course there is no way to return the planet to the circumstances represented by Figure 6-2. Not even a complete

cessation of oil exports and the total withdrawal of all Westerners and Western interests from Saudi Arabia would have been enough to satisfy bin Laden and his Wahhabist associates: they equated the “moderate” wing of the royal family with the former shah of Iran, and nothing short of a theocracy of the Khomeini variety would do. Indeed, Khomeini himself made a move that reveals the intent of those who espouse the true faith: in 1989 he issued a fatwa that reached beyond the world of Islam, the umma, by proclaiming a death sentence against a British author living in the United Kingdom for a work allegedly containing blasphemy. This pronouncement compelled Muslims to attempt to find and kill the offender, who had to go into hiding in his own country. Not just the Islamic world, but the entire world must countenance the laws of Islam.

Let us look again at [Figure 6-2](#) and compare it to maps of world natural environments, especially climate ([Fig. 5-3](#)). It is instructive to note that the contiguous region where Islam prevails today (thus the area shown minus Iberia and most of Eastern Europe; Islam no longer rules but still has strength in India) coincides remarkably with the world’s harshest desert climates. Indeed, the harshest forms of Islam seem to prosper in the toughest environments: Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Sudan; the milder forms of it appear to predominate under more moderate environments in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. This is not to suggest a causative relationship, but it relates to another observation of the spatial character of the faith, which is that its core area remains most fundamentalist while the periphery (not only Indonesia but also Turkey, Morocco, and Senegal) tends to be more temperate. This may be taken to a larger scale: on the Arabian Peninsula itself, coastal Dubai, where women (unlike Saudi Arabia) may drive, and Oman, where some schools admit girls as well as boys, conditions in Islamic society vary. In the Middle East, Saddam’s Iraq was a secular state under the Sunnis’ harsh rule; its leaders wore business suits or military uniforms, not

religious garb. In Lebanon, about one-third of the Arab population remains Christian (down from 50 percent a half century ago), and even some Palestinians remain Christians today. In the Maghreb, the Atlas Mountains form a cultural divide as well as a physical one: the coastal zone with its more cosmopolitan cities and towns and their busy bazaars are a far cry from the Berber interior and its villages and caravans.

Does this mean that moderation has a chance, that urbanization, migration, globalization, and economic interaction will eventually temper the rage that accompanies the revivalism driving Saudi Arabia's angry conservative clerics, their fiscal sponsors at home and their Wahhabist allies abroad? It does not appear so. In the aftermath of 9/11, well-intentioned American colleges began teaching courses about Islam and the Quran, but Islam's holy book, like the Bible, makes discouraging and well as difficult reading. True, it contains hopeful sentences such as "There shall be no compulsion in religion" (Quran, 2:256), but anyone hoping that the contradictions familiar to Bible readers may be fewer in this holy book will be disappointed. "On almost every page, the Koran instructs observant Muslims to despise nonbelievers. On almost every page, it prepares the ground for religious conflict" (Harris, 2004). That bleak assessment actually understates the case. The Quran's angry denunciations of all who qualify as "infidels," its warnings against interaction with "unbelievers" and its promises that "those that deny Our revelations will burn in fire ... no sooner will their skins be consumed than We shall give them other skins, so that they may truly taste the scourge" (Quran, 4:55) are read by the faithful and elaborated by mullahs in sermons too rarely marked by restraint. In Islam, Harris argues, "the basic thrust of the doctrine is undeniable: convert, subjugate, or kill unbelievers; kill apostates; and conquer the world."

Thus the territorial imperative reflected by [Figure 6-2](#) is in fact

exceeded by the Quran's stipulations, and in addition it is matched by the faith's position toward those who might wish to change religions from Islam to, say, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Christianity. Numerous Christians have converted to Buddhism; others have converted to Islam, some now-prominent Americans (found fighting for Islamic causes) among them. But in Islamic law—and, among the major religions, Islamic law alone—conversion from Islam is apostasy, punishable by death. Once a Muslim, always a Muslim; attempt to renounce the faith, and both the convert and he who encouraged the conversion are condemned. The Hadith is quite specific on this point: "Whoever changes his religion, kill him" (Hadith, 37). While apostasy and blasphemy (another capital offense, as Khomeini's fatwa against British author Salman Rushdie reminded the world) may not routinely result in execution, it is noteworthy that reservations against the principle are almost never heard from clerics or commoners, and opposition to condemnations is rare. In Iran in 2002, when a conservative court sentenced a university professor to death for publishing a proposal for an Islamic "enlightenment," thousands of university students did take to the streets in protest. That such a sentence could be handed down at all is indicative of the gulf between the dogmatic and the rational in this historic and civilized society. It is also indicative of the power and prevalence of the dogmatic and the paucity and scarcity of the rational. Thus to express revulsion, or even disapproval, of acts of terror perpetrated in the name of Islam entails risks no "moderate" Muslims can afford to take and few mullahs or imams would encourage.

Importantly, Muslim rage is not directed only at the West in general or America in particular. Terrible, death-dealing conflicts have marked the Islamic realm as they have the Christian world, conflicts born of sectarian issues as well as other, more worldly causes. The war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, which may have

cost as many as a million lives, pitted Shi'ite Iran against a Sunni-ruled Iraq, but it was not primarily a sectarian conflict. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 was over egress and oil, not religion. The strife that began in western Sudan in 2003 and ravaged the Darfur Province on the border with Chad was over land, not faith. Acts of terrorism directed against rulers (such as the 1981 assassination of President Sadat of Egypt) and others reflect the volatility of Islamic society. "In the early 1990s Muslims were engaged in more intergroup violence than were non-Muslims, and two-thirds to three-quarters of intercivilizational wars were between Muslims and non-Muslims. Islam's borders are bloody, and so are its innards" (Huntington, 1996). Twenty years later, the convulsions of Lybia, Syria and other Muslim states in the wake of the "Arab Spring" seem to confirm these assertions.

Islam, as a belief system, is six centuries younger than Christianity. It is worth considering where Christianity was in the 1400s, the time when Joan of Arc was burned at the stake after a church court condemned her of heresy. Roman Catholic ecclesiastical abuses were leading to the Protestant Reformation, and Martin Luther would soon enter the stage. The Spanish Inquisition was authorized by Pope Sixtus IV to combat apostate Jews and Muslims and to pursue heretics; thousands were burned at the stake and countless more were tortured and dispossessed. Still to come was the terrible strife between Catholic and Protestant forces with incalculable civilian casualties and immeasurable cruelty; Catholic armies could have taken a page from the Quran when it came to dealing with unbelievers. In their Bible, Christians found encouragement in the chapters of Deuteronomy (and elsewhere) to engage in unspeakable barbarity. The Enlightenment still was 300 years away.

In the centuries that followed the Reformation, Christians learned to accommodate their sectarian differences, to live in reasonable

harmony with each other, to constitutionally separate church and state, to guarantee citizens not only freedom of religion but also from religion. Except for Northern Ireland, where the conflict has involved more than religion alone, Catholics and Protestants are not killing each other over their religious preferences. Europe has been described as being in a “post-Christian” stage as churches are emptying and congregations are ageing, but this trend is a matter of free choice and there is no coercion to reverse it. Christian fundamentalism has expanded on the religious and political maps of the United States, but it has no violent dimension. Some observers, including courageous Muslim intellectuals, suggest that Islam needs and awaits a Reformation of its own, and the Muslim world an Enlightenment that will obviate the frustrations and anger now pervading the culture. But Islam is not organized the way hierarchical Christianity is, with popes and bishops whose decrees can control, or at least influence, the most remote congregations. While there are ayatollahs and imams in the more structured Shi’ite sect, the overwhelming majority of Muslims are Sunnis, and Sunni clerics are masters of their mosques. No edict or decree will change this; it has taken the Saudi political regime, not the religious establishment, to reign in some (by no means all) of the most extreme voices from the pulpits.

Certainly the successful al-Qaeda attacks of 9/11 were celebrated from some of these pulpits, but it was obvious to all that the world would change in unforeseeable ways in their aftermath, and that the overwhelming majority of people affected by these changes had nothing to do with what happened on that fateful day. President G. W. Bush proclaimed from the rubble of the Twin Towers that “we” would find and punish the perpetrators, and since it was already clear that al-Qaeda’s headquarters were in Afghanistan, it was obvious that a military campaign in that country was in immediate prospect. What was not obvious, at the time, was that another war

was already under discussion in Washington, or that, a decade and thousands of casualties later, neither campaign would have achieved closure.

AFGHANISTAN IN THE CROSSHAIRS

When Usama bin Laden returned to Afghanistan in 1996, the long-term investments made by Pakistan and by Saudi interests in the madrassas were bearing fruit. An Afghan *jiḥād* was in progress, driven by *taliban* (often translated as “students,” although “seekers” is closer to the meaning of this name) trained in these schools in Pakistan and led by teachers who had turned them into religious fanatics. Also on the scene were an assortment of terrorists of note, including a physician named Ayman al-Zawahiri, who had been involved in the murder of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and who was to become second in command of al-Qaeda to bin Laden. Another figure of note was Mullah Omar, the Taliban’s so-called Commander of the Faithful, whose friendship with bin Laden helped make Afghanistan the terrorist redoubt it was.

When the Taliban (the capitalization reflects their role in the holy war) entered Afghanistan from their support bases in sympathetic Pakistan, Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Soviet defeat was a country fractured into several dozen fiefdoms ruled by mujahideen warlords whose forces were in many cases well armed and who controlled all trade and transportation, levying tolls and tribute and taking the country back to feudal times. A skeletal government in Kabul had little power, even in the city’s immediate hinterland, and essentially none in the more remote provinces. But it was clear that the areas where the largest ethnic group—the Pushtuns—were based had some semblance, at least, of stability. Thus when the mainly Pushtun Taliban seized control of the southern city of Kandahar and moved toward Kabul, they had considerable support in a population