

# Bin Laden and Islamist Terrorism

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Islamist terrorism is an immediate derivative of *Islamism*. This term distinguishes itself from *Islamic* by the fact that the latter refers to a religion and culture in existence over a millennium, whereas the first is a political/religious phenomenon linked to the great events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore Islamists define themselves as “Islamiyyoun/Islamists” precisely to differentiate themselves from “Muslimun/Muslims”. In this study Islamism is defined as “an Islamic militant, anti-democratic movement, bearing a holistic vision of Islam whose final aim is the restoration of the caliphate”.

It is militant in the sense that it uses all possible means, including violence and armed fighting. It is anti-progressive in the sense that it considers modernity as a plot against the integrity of Islam. Its vision is holistic and based on the absolute indivisibility of the trinity (Dîn, Dunya and Dwala), that is Religion, Way of life, and State. This indivisibility is permanent and eternal. Its ultimate goal boils down to the fulfilment of this said trinity on a global scale. This goal is justified in Mohammed’s message, prophet of Islam. This definition covers all the great common traits of all Islamist movements (to differentiate it from the Islamic movements). Now that we have defined Islamism we will now search the causes of the emergence of this movement.

The fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 resulting to the rise of the new Turkey as a *secular* and ‘westernized’ state was a shock to huge majority of Muslims. Confronted with the new situation, Muslims took three different and rival directions: 1) *Liberal and democratic*, 2) *Authoritarian* and 3) *Islamists*. The Liberal trend did not succeed, partly because of hostility from some Western countries, United Kingdom in particular. The authoritarian trend reigned the longest in its diverse forms (military, traditionalist and secular). This trend still remains the dominating tendency in the Middle East. Islamists took power in Iran in 1979 and in Afghanistan in 1996. With regard to Marxists, the fact is that they have never played an important role in this region. Marxists however came to power in Afghanistan from 1977 to 1979, followed by the Soviet invasion of the country. This study is focused on Islamists, both as states and as movements.

The Islamist trend came about in Egypt in 1928 and extended to all Muslim countries in its diverse forms and interpretations. This current always did and still seems to proliferate in essentially traditionalist urban, lower and middle class stratum. These stratum embrace a large jumble of different categories such as schoolteachers, lower civil servants, technicians, a few young priests, certain young officers, and particularly shopkeepers, merchants and tradesmen. In spite of their diversity these groups can be very easily mobilised. Mosques, numerous religious centres, societies (dawrah and halqah) serve as their favourite meeting spots.

For them, the West represents one single block without any nuances or variations whatsoever. In their reasoning, the Western political doings directed towards Muslims and other oppressed peoples are simply a direct product deriving from the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the West. In order to successfully fight against these political doings they must imperatively attack and reject the Western theoretical foundations. Therefore, it is this closely related discourse that one finds with Hassan al-Banna, Mawdudi, Hassan al-Turabi, Ayatollah Khomeini, Osama Bin Laden, to cite only the most illustrious theoreticians and practitioners of Islamism. In this particular context, Mawdudi writes that:

“[we] aspire for Islamic renaissance on the basis of the Qu’ran. To us the Qur’anic spirit and Islamic tenets are immutable; but the application of this spirit in the realm of practical life must always vary with the change of conditions, increase of knowledge... We have to arrange these ideas and laws of life on genuine Islamic cross lines so that Islam once again becomes a dynamic force; the leader of the world rather than its follower”.<sup>1</sup>

It is in the same spirit, but in more virulent terms that Ayatollah Khomeini already in the first years of his government declared: “Muslims the world over who believe in the truth of Islam, arise and gather beneath the banner of *tawhid* (divine unity) and the teachings of Islam! Repel the treacherous superpowers from your countries and your abundant resources. Restore the glory of Islam, and abandon your selfish disputes and differences, for you possess everything! Rely on the culture of Islam, resist Western imitation, and stand on your own feet”.<sup>2</sup>

The true sense of this discourse becomes clearer if one takes a retrospective look at the temporal context in which the first Islamist discourse was pronounced. As we indicated above the formulation of such a discourse dates back to 1928. This date is very significant, four years after the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and the restoration of a secular Turkey. At this particular time the fall came across to the Muslim Sunnites as a terrible shock. The latter feared that this event could put an end to Islam as a complete religion. This would inescapably bring the Muslims to abandon the sacrosanct norms of Islam and adopt European norms. It is particularly because of this reflex of loss of identity and fear of total and permanent submission to the West that the most faithful groups to a traditional Islam came into the scene organising themselves under the banners of Islam. The Muslim Brothers organisation (Ikhwan al-Muslimin) founded in Ismailliya in Egypt was the first and by far the most sensational reaction to this fear. Thus Islamism was born and will develop during the course of the 20th century while retaining its initial message.

### **Three stages of Islamist terrorism**

Islamist terrorism has crossed three stages since its birth in 1928 each of which bearing its particularities. We will review beneath these successive stages.

#### *First stage: 1928-1978: the era of Hassan al-Banna*

The first stage of Islamist terrorism lasted just over half a century. A number of groups and associations of Islamist allegiance flourished during this long period. Most of them were latent, staying behind the scenes. They will become active in the second stage as we will see further on. These were the two most active of these organizations: Ikhwan al-Muslimin in Egypt and Fadayian e-Islam (created in Iran in 1941/1942).

These two organizations had important common traits. They had not just implanted themselves in the two most populated countries of the region, but they also had common objectives. Let us recall that their objective consisted in the reunification of the Islamic world under one government and a single flag. They also agreed as to the method to apply in order to reach this objective. The unified government of Islam would be achieved by overthrowing the “corrupt” governments who unfairly imposed themselves in Muslim countries. The use of violence is thus legitimized. There were naturally differences between them. Ikhwan was Sunnite and Fadayian Shiite. However this difference was secondary and did not alter at all

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<sup>1</sup> Nasr, Seyyed Vali Reza, *Mawdudi and the thinking of Islamic Revivalism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Algar, Hamid, *Islam and Revolution : Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1981.

their essential goals. The other difference resided in their organization methods. The Ikhwan had brought about various networks covering domains such as education, propagation, and financial investment. What particularly strengthened the position of the Ikhwan and what enabled their infiltration in the depths of society was to be found elsewhere. Their network of social help brought them a particular prestige. These networks covered huge sectors (medical, matrimonial, financial loans, legal aid, education and so forth). This enabled the Ikhwan to recruit new disciples by having them enroll into activities and operations that were controlled by Ikhwan authorities. On the other hand the range of activities of the Fadayian was extremely limited. On the whole their activity was limited to two areas: propagation and terrorism.

We will now proceed to analyze the characteristics of this first stage of Islamist terrorism.

The major characteristics of this period are the following:

Terrorist acts were directed right at their beginning, exclusively against Muslims. In other words, during this particular period, Islamist terrorism was an *internal terrorism*. According to our investigations no assassination from Islamists was committed in Western countries. Not even against Muslims living in these countries. In addition Islamist terrorism was not destined to spread terror but rather to eliminate political adversaries. Political assassination was used in order to destabilize regimes in power (prime ministers, generals) judged by Islamists as being corrupt and accused of being puppet governments. In some cases “heretical” Muslims were eliminated by Islamists. At the same period a series of other assassinations were committed in the Middle East by Non-Islamists (e.g. various Marxist groups).

Furthermore, terrorist actions of this period were not acts of suicide. No such actions were ever committed by Islamists. Suicidal terrorism *stems* from the second period that we will examine later. There were also no terrorist acts against civilians. In fact that was a *discriminatory* and well targeted terrorism aimed at high-ranking politicians.

Second stage: 1978-1991: *the era of Ayatollah Khomeini*

The second phase of Islamist terrorism starts off with the Islamist revolution in Iran. It was the first time Islamists were acceding to power. This revolution had a tremendous impact on other serious events in the region such as the devastating war between Iran and Iraq, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq just to mention a few. In addition to these events the Islamist revolution had a direct and immediate impact on the raise and radicalization of Islamist movements all over the world. They saw how the Shah’s regime was overthrown by Ayatollah Khomeini, head of the Shiite community, despite being heavily armed and supported by the West. In reality, those who effectively took power in Iran were Islamic fractions issued from Fadayian e-Islam mentioned above as well as other groups who had been directly or indirectly implied in terrorist activities since 1945. Khomeini attempted not only to spread his revolution to non-Iranian Shiite populations but also to Sunnites. This is the reason why he avoided bringing out the Shiite aspect of the revolution and insisted on Islamic ecumenism. Let us now examine the major aspects of this phase.

*First of all* Islamist terrorism altered. Up to this period the terrorist acts of the Islamists were carefully selected and personalized avoiding any repercussions on civilians. This line of conduct was interrupted in 1978 in the process of the Islamist revolution. In order to bring about chaos in Iran and in order to destabilize the regime of the Shah, Islamists put a movie theatre on fire (August 18<sup>th</sup> 1978) in the Rex cinema of Abadan (oil-producing city). About 400 people were killed. This tragic event was in fact the starting point of a new tactic: to attack and assassinate civilians as well as military. From then on Islamist terrorism turns into a blind, generalized and non-discriminatory terrorism. The consequences of which were boundless and tragic on a regional and world-scale: in Lebanon as well as in New York and Washington D.C.

Yet another innovation was the capture of foreign hostages. This also started in Iran under Khomeini's blessing. So-called student groups of the "Line of the Imam" occupied the American Embassy in Teheran, holding people hostage for 444 days. This event was also the model for the capture of hostages in Lebanon. The third and no doubt the most important innovation is *suicidal terrorism*. Up to 1983 Islamists were concerned in preserving their own lives. The first Islamist suicidal terrorist act was committed in Beyrouth in October 1983 by the Lebanese Hizbollah. Trucks filled with explosives dashed into the barracks occupied by American, British and French soldiers killing themselves as well as several hundred Western officers and soldiers. Inspired and encouraged by the surprising Islamist conquest in Iran, numerous Islamist groupings, Shiite as well as Sunnite rapidly formed in the Middle East. Nonetheless one can affirm that during the 1980s Islamist terrorism of Shiite inspiration was dominant. This is based on two major events: the war between Iraq and Iran (1980-1988) and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon as well as the occupation by Israel of southern Lebanon (1982-2000).

The Iraq-Iran war started in September 1980 and lasted eight years. Turning out to be one of the bloodiest wars since World War II its consequence was a backlash of terrorist activities. Iraq in its aggression against Iran received direct and indirect support from Western powers. Saddam Hussein had been provided with an arsenal of chemical weapons from Germany, as well as with *Mirages* and other sophisticated weapons from France. Americans brought their indirect support to Baghdad thus hoping to destabilize revolutionary Iran. The ayatollahs of Teheran, very annoyed with this support, resorted to a number of terrorist actions in Paris, assassinating and wounding several dozens of civilians. These actions resulted in spreading among the French a climate of terror and panic. In order to put an end to the series of assassinations, President Chirac (then prime minister (1986-1988) negotiated with Teheran through Charles Pasqua, the interior minister, in order to reach a *modus vivendi* with the ayatollahs. He succeeded in finalizing an agreement with the Iranians. Part of the agreement was to cease terrorist actions on French territory. The other point was to cease arms transfers to Iraq and to hush the accusations against the presumed *chief of activities* at the Iranian embassy in Paris. Despite the evidence of his involvement planning the terrorist action, he (Gorji) was safely returned to Iran. Furthermore, the French government promised to release from prison a Fundamentalist terrorist, Anis Naccache, who executed the first attempt to kill Chapour Bakhtiar, Iran's last prime minister before the Revolution of 1979. Naccache was released (1990) and sent back to Iran. One year later, Iranian agents assassinated Bakhtiar (August 1991).

The capture of hostages in Lebanon was another method used by the ayatollahs to exercise pressure on the United States. They found substantial support in this venture on the part of the Hizbollah who were also annoyed with the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Occupation of Lebanese territory by Israel brought about additional grounds for the growth of Islamist terrorism. The Lebanese Hizbollah increased its activities by attacking Western soldiers, as well as the US embassy in Beirut (September 1984), in capturing hostages and in firing missiles on Israeli villages. A delicate question arises here: the distinction between a terrorist act and an act of resistance. The Shiites of southern Lebanon justified their actions fairly enough with the legitimate right to fight against the occupant (bearing in mind that the Hizbollah is particularly active in southern Lebanon). When the occupation resumed as of June 2000, one notices a clear reduction of Hizbollah actions against Israeli territory.

Examining Islamist terrorism of Sunnite allegiance, we see it had also been very active and murderous in Egypt. Two terrorist organizations occupied the front of the scene. One is the *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* (*The Islamic Association*) and *Al-Jihad al-Islami* (*Islamic Holy War*). Both these movements derive from the Ikhwan al-Muslimin. Both became active at the end of the 70s;

this was a consequence of the double influence of the peace settlement between Egypt and Israel as well as the Islamist revolution of Khomeini. In 1979 peace with Israel yielded a new sense of fundamentalist outrage. In his anxiety to sustain the momentum of his peace policy, Sadat closely identified with American policy. Thus, in the minds of the Islamists he personified domestic failure and external betrayal. He was seen as neglectful of his Arab neighbors favoring closer ties with the West, particularly Israel and the United States. Sadat's assassination in October 1981 by members of the Jihad group meant that the Islamic militants were able to strike at the very heart of the Egyptian power structure. Simultaneously to signing the peace treaty, Khomeini's success in Iran showed that the "impossible was possible" and that a regime as powerful as the Shah's could be overthrown. This was probably the reason for renewed outbreak of terrorist activities in Egypt. Sheik Umar Abd al-Rahman, instigator of the bombing explosion in the World Trade Center in 1993 is admitted to be the supreme chief of the Jihad (Islamic Holy War) and of Gama'a (The Islamic Association).

Generally speaking, Islamism had been a relatively harmless movement in North Africa. Other than a few terrorist episodes (in Tunisia in 1987 and Algeria 1988), this second phase had revealed itself there a discrete movement in comparison to other countries. Islamism gradually grew into shape following colonialism in the Maghreb. For about twenty years, political life remained mostly secular as seen under the protection of the FLN in Algeria (Front National de la Liberation) as well as in Tunisia under the presidency of Habib Bourghiba. This aspect of the situation was somewhat shadier in Morocco. The repressive regime of King Hassan II, who nonetheless presented himself as the "Prince of Believers", was one of the reasons. Maghrebian Islamists were also encouraged by Khomeini's victory in the 1980s, but were nonetheless busy getting organized before getting involved. Another reason for their moderation was then motivated by the tactic of the time enabling them to acquire power through the way of parliament. Hence the advice to moderation perpetrated by the Islamist allegiance chiefs such as Mustapha Bouyali (in Algeria), Rached Ghannouchi (in Tunisia) and Abdelssalam Yassine's (in Morocco). Those and other Maghrebian Islamists would turn to terrorist acts in the third phase of Islamist terrorism.

*Third stage:1991-2001: the era of Osama Bin Laden*

This phase of Islamist terrorism is the most critical and spectacular of all. The unprecedented scope of the terrorist attacks of September 11th in New York and Washington DC flagrantly point out the substantial changes having occurred in Islamism. To better comprehend the reasons for the escalation of this radicalization, we should take into account the three following factors, consisting mainly of the following: 1) the victory of the Mujahidin in Afghanistan (1989), 2) the settlement of American troops in Saudi Arabia, 3) the Oslo agreements. Without investigating the depths of each one of these phases, we will try to cast light on their respective impacts on Islamist terrorism.

1. Victory of the *Mujahidin* in Afghanistan

The success of the Islamist revolution in Iran occurred the same year Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union (December 29th 1979). A fierce resistance developed against this invasion. This resistance was rather a coalition of three factions: *Afghans*, *Arabs* (Muslims) and *Americans* (the latter being helped by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The first two groups constituted what we call the Mujahidin (Muslim fighters). In ten years of warfare the USSR endured 13.310 dead and 35.478 wounded. One estimates over a million losses on the side the Mujahidin. The true impact of warfare against Islamist terrorism started with the forced withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan (February 15, 1989). Arab Mujahidin originated from various countries, but in particular from Saudi Arabia,

Pakistan, Egypt and Algeria. Once the war was over these thoroughly hardened groups, now experienced in guerrilla warfare, returned to their respective countries. Following their return, one notes a renewed and unprecedented backlash of terrorist activities in Egypt as well as in Algeria. Hence, the terrorist activities of these groups were no longer limited to the geographical limits of their respective countries. The so-called "Afghani" from Algeria extended their terrorist activities to Europe, particularly to France. Nonetheless, Egyptian terrorist groups such as Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya and Al-Jihad resorted to *wild* terrorism whose range of action increasingly exceeded geographical boundaries. From February 1993 to November 1997, that is before the constitution of the Al-Qaida movement (basis/foundation), Al-Gama'a claimed 13 different Islamist bomb attacks, most of which occurred in Egypt but also in Pakistan (Islamabad, November 9th 1995) in Croatia (Rijeka, October 20th 1995), in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, June 26th 1995). There were other unclaimed murderous bomb attacks committed by Egyptian groups to be added to those cited above. The first to figure among these is the attack against the World Trade Center (February 1993). In this latter attack, a tribunal drew up the fact that Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, both spiritual head of the Jihad and Gama'a, as well as several members of these two associations were directly involved. In addition to this spiritual leading figure now imprisoned in New York, another figure will play a very important role next to Osama Bin Laden: Ayman Al-Zawahiri, head of the Al-Jihad (from Egypt). In the 1990s the Egyptian Jihad group carried out attacks against Egyptian officials. Among the group's targets: the chairman of Parliament (1990), and the Ministry of Interior (1993). In 1995 the Jihad orchestrated attacks outside of Egypt against the Egyptian attaché in Switzerland and against the Egyptian Embassy in Pakistan, resulting in the death of 15 people.

On April 18, 1999, one of the largest anti-terrorism trials in recent memory wound to a close in Egypt. The trial involved 107 Islamic fundamentalists, 63 of whom were tried *in absentia*. Al-Zawahiri was also one of those condemned to death. Al-Zawahiri who had been living underground rejoined Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan. One notes that everything starts up in Afghanistan and returns to this very same place. This is why one can assert that Afghanistan, especially after the instauration of Taliban in 1996 had a definite impact on Islamist terrorism. On the one hand this impact leads to the radicalization of this terrorism and on the other to its true internalization.

## 2. Settlement of American troops in Saudi Arabia

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq (August 2, 1990) (contiguous to the evolution of Islamist terrorism) will lead to the two following facts: the building-up of these two previous facts are the major reason for the renewed backlash of Islamist terrorism. Saudi Arabian soil is considered by Muslims, through a widened interpretation, as their Holy Land. Islam was born in Mecca where *the Ka'ba* is to be found and prophet Muhammad formed his government in Medina where he is buried. Military presence by non-Muslim troops on this soil and particularly the indefinite prolongation of their presence is judged by certain Muslims, particularly by Saudis as a flagrant violation of their Holy Land by *infidels*. For them, this presence is seen as a plot fomented by the West in collaboration with Saudi Arabia or at least with their approval. This western plot has in their eyes existed a long time. The West has always tried to reoccupy Muslim territory; this time not just with the aim of plain domination but simply to eradicate Islam. It is therefore logical that the one who headed the revolt against foreign non-Muslim occupation was no other than Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi subject and a "veteran" Afghani.

Retaliation against this occupation came about swiftly. The Gulf war came to an end in April 1991 and the World Trade Center bombs exploded in November 1993. The same

year Bin Laden was involved in operations against Somalia. In a similar vein of reactions the Riyadh terrorist assassination occurred in 1995; so did the explosion of the bombs in Khobar, one of the military bases in Saudi Arabia resulting in several casualties among the American military. However, it was in 1998 that Islamist terrorism of Bin Laden tendency would undergo a new and dramatic transformation owed to the unifying of a number of Islamist movements into one single organization. At this point the chronology here becomes significant and revealing. Four Islamist groups will unite under Osama Bin Laden into a new organization. This one will take the name of “World Islamic Front” later known under the name of *Al-Qaida*. Only a few months later, on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1998 both the US embassies of Kenya and Tanzania will become the blood shedding targets of Al-Qaida, causing the death of 224 people including 12 Americans and wounding over 4000. The suicidal terrorist attack against the American cruiser USS Cole in Aden occurred two years later, causing the death of 17 US Marines (October 12<sup>th</sup> 2000).

Among the four reunited organizations were the Al-Jihad of Egypt whose emir was no less than Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Islamic group of Ahmad Taha (Egypt), Gama’a Al-Ulama of Pakistan (Saheikh Mir Hamza) and Fazul Rahman’s Jihad Movement of Bangladesh. There are no ambiguities whatsoever in the clear declaration signed by the five new partners. It entails a *justification* and a *mode of action*. The declaration argues with the support of several Coran verses that Muslims are under attack from the United States and Israel. The argumentation is illustrated with the three following facts:

- Occupation by the United States of Islamic Soil in the holiest of places in the Arabian Peninsula
- America’s ongoing aggression against the Iraqi people by new crusader-Zionist alliance, and
- America’s aim being also to serve the Jews’ petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and recurring murder of Muslims in this city.

What mode of action is necessary to thwart the American “attempts”? The answer is clear and peremptory: based on these three facts and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: the order to kill Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country where it is possible to carry this out. For the first time in Muslim history, over fourteen centuries old, a group of Muslims widely allows the assassination of civilians (Christians and Jews) everywhere in the world. Not only is assassinating considered lawful, it is ordered as an individual duty, in fact obligatory (*vajib fardi*). In this sense this so-called fatwa constitutes an unprecedented “premiere”. The international blockade against Iraq justifies in the eyes of the Al-Qaida Muslims total war against Americans. Their argument includes two aspects: the suffering and death of thousands of Iraqi children resulting from the blockade. In addition to the imposed restriction from the allies on Iraq’s sovereignty by dividing Iraqi territory into three parts: North, Center and South. The Iraqi state retains sovereignty solely in the North. These very Muslims interpret those two last points like an additional insult perpetrated by the West against Islam. However one could wonder if the Iraqi case did not just serve as a pretext instead of a decisive factor. The settlement of American troops in Saudi Arabia remains the most decisive factor.

### 3. The Oslo Agreements

Compared to the two above factors, the Oslo Agreements made official in Washington in 1993, had a lesser impact: the reason being that since the end of World War II the

Palestinian problem remained a constant one. Furthermore Palestinians, even among their most extremist groups, ( Hamas and Jihad), never had organizational relations nor the remotest affinities with Islamists groups such as Gama'at and Jihad from Egypt. Palestinian authority, and groupings such as Fatah and FPLP, of secular and Marxist tendency are downright opposed to Islamism. Yasser Arafat's very distant attitude toward Bin Laden's pro-Palestinian declarations as well his spokesman's (October 2001), further deepened the gulf separating the two camps. Consequently it is not surprising to note that the Palestinian question comes third behind the occupation of Saudi Arabia and the blockade against Iraq. One should also note the fundamental difference between the Islamists of Al-Qaida and the Palestinian Islamists. While the first group has a universalistic vocation and hopes to reestablish the caliphate of old, the claims of Palestinian Islamists are rather modest and their sole purpose is to see the end of the Israeli occupation. This however does not prevent the Al-Qaida people from considering the Israeli occupation as being an inherent part of the great Western strategy against Islam.

### **Conclusion**

We were able to draw out the fundamental traits of this terrorism at the end of our analysis. What first strikes us is the impressive *consistency of the Islamist discourse* in time and space, with the Sunnites as well as with the Shiites. The discourse remains immutable whether in the 1920s of Sunnite Egypt, the 1940s of a Shiite Iran, in the 1950s of Pakistan or in Afghanistan of 1990 or 2000. The core of this discourse is invariably the same and boils down to a return of Islam's greatness through the restoration of the caliphate. The caliphate should return to be as close as can be to the model of the Medina under Mohammad, and to the caliphate under the four Rightful Caliphs. A return to a rigid discourse, in fact nostalgic, inspired by a glorious past, imagined or real; a form of *recherche du temps perdu*. Totally turned toward the past, the present and the future only have a meaning as far as the past invests one. Totally deprived from their autonomous meaning, the present and the past must bend towards the past. The eagerness to find again and relive this past makes up the quintessence of Islamism. And this is what explains the sacrifice and also justifies it. The sacrifice of the self is just as meaningful as the sacrifice of others.

The different stages to be traversed in order to materialize that dream are the second common trait to be found. These are the following stages:

- To get organized is the first stage;
- To overthrow the established regimes in Muslim countries considered corrupt and "anti-Islamic" in the second phase;
- Parallel to and concomitant with the second phase one must liberate the Muslim territories from
- the yoke of non-Muslim powers;
- Once the "corrupt" Muslim regimes are overthrown and the Muslim territories liberated one must restore the unified Muslim government;
- The unified government will perpetrate what the Prophet and his successors did: fight the non-Muslims with the goal of having Islam reign over the whole world.

There has been a significant evolution as to the forms of terrorist acts. This evolution unfolded in the following way:

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- Initially terrorist acts consisted of merely political assassinations. That was a selective and individualized terrorism. The pistol was used rather than the bomb or the grenade. The targets were chosen among high-ranking government officials. The other characteristic of terrorism in this phase was its intern character. Foreigners were spared from it.
- Islamist terrorism introduced new methods with Khomeini's Islamist Revolution in Iran. From then on, non-terrorist acts would no longer necessarily be selective. Civilians also become targets. The first turning point of this change can be noted in the terrorist burning down of a movie theatre in Iran (1978). Another change is to be noted in the direction terrorism was taking. Non-Muslim foreigners would also and often be targeted. The third and probably most important novelty is that this terrorism becomes suicidal. Chronologically, the first terrorist act of this type occurred in Lebanon in 1983.
- In the third age of Islamist terrorism, terrorist acts remain indiscriminate, non-selective and suicidal. Bin Laden's terrorism is not that much different than the one used in the second phase although it appears to be. What differentiates it is its highly spectacular aspect and the field of action takes place on American soil. Those acts were spectacular in terms of the implacable organizational capability and coordination they revealed, as well as the extension of their networks. It was also spectacular in terms of human casualties and material damages. Finally it was particularly spectacular in its symbolic aspect through the choice of the targets: the USA as the most powerful country in the world and human history, the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the missed target: the White House.
- How can one at all explain the registered development in the use of methods applied by Islamists?

There are two explanations to this: one is political and the other technological. The *political* explanation integrates in the global strategy in the Islamists' first age. The Islamists' priority in this long period lasting half a century was to destabilize the established regimes; they applied themselves to this purpose through means of political assassinations. This political trend remained unchanged until Khomeini's revolution. As political assassinations were judged insufficient, Islamists resorted to widespread terrorism. Civilians and foreigners will become the favorite targets. The technological explanation bases itself on technological advance. Access to high-ranking political and military officials which had been easy in the past has become much more problematical with the sophisticated means of protection. Parallel to this trend, high technological means became available to Islamists too. On the other hand, the settlement of Western troops in Lebanon and later on in the Persian Gulf in well-protected buildings and barracks rendered terrorist acts much harder, if not sheer impossible. The answer to this difficulty is solved through suicidal terrorism. This does not mean that suicidal terrorism did not previously exist (undertaken by Non-Islamists) or that it is exclusively used by Islamists. This is just an explanation illustrating what urged Islamists to use this method of terrorism in a determined period in an unprecedented fashion.

If we really care to examine the most direct and decisive causes of Bin Laden's terrorism we can summarize by searching them in the following events:

- The success of the Islamist revolution in Iran showed that the main objective of the Islamists was feasible. Established regimes, even the strongest among them are not invincible;

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- The Mujahidin triumph in Afghanistan. Although financially and militarily supported by the USA, the Soviet forces' forced withdrawal was perceived and interpreted by Islamists as their own victory. And because the withdrawal of the troops will end up a few months later in the disintegration of the Soviet Union, this event will also be interpreted as a result of the Mujahidins' efforts. It is as if the Mujahidin had caused the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some of the Mujahidin and particularly the most internationalists among them (Bin Laden, Al-Zawahiri and others) reasoned through a simplistic deduction that if the destruction of a superpower was possible, the same fate could also be inflicted to another (USA).
- The settlement of US troops on Saudi Arabian soil was interpreted comparably to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Islamists reached therefore yet another deduction in concluding that they will one more time succeed in having the new invaders draw back. First of all to have US troops draw back from Arabian soil, then from Iraq's flying space and in the third phase to have the Israeli invader retreat from Palestine. Then will come the time to liberate Chechnya from the Russian yoke, Kashmir from India and Xinkiang from China. Once the Islamic grounds are liberated, and the "puppet" regimes overthrown, all the necessary conditions for the establishment of the caliphate will finally be at hand.

At the end of the day this is the quintessence of the aims Islamism has been striving to attain through terrorism.