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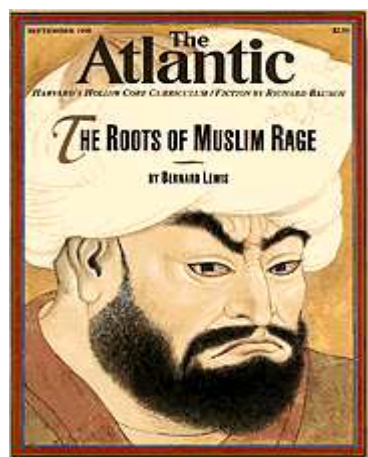
COMING TO GRIPS WITH JIHAD

September 12, 2001

As investigators attempt to trace yesterday's devastating terrorist acts to their source, attention seems increasingly to be focusing on Osama bin Laden and his militant followers—Islamic fundamentalists who consider themselves engaged in a "jihad" (often translated as "holy war" but perhaps more accurately rendered as "righteous struggle") against the Western world. The attacks on New York and Washington (if they are, indeed, the work of bin Laden's men) represent the most audacious expression to date of fundamentalist Islamic hatred for the West. But the jihad is not new. A number of *Atlantic* articles from the early 1990s to the present have considered the movement, addressing its origins and its consequences.

In "[Jihad Vs. McWorld](#)" (March, 1992, *Atlantic*), Benjamin Barber singled out the jihad, along with globalization, as one of the two dominant anti-democratic tendencies in the modern world. In Barber's thinking, jihad is something much larger—and more culturally insidious—than simply an Islamic campaign of terror directed at the United States:

OPEC, The World Bank, The United Nations, the International Red Cross, the multinational corporation ... there are scores of institutions that reflect globalization. But they often appear as ineffective reactors to the world's real actors: national states and, to an ever greater degree, subnational factions in permanent rebellion against uniformity and integration—even the kind represented by universal law and justice. The headlines feature these players regularly: they are cultures, not countries; parts, not wholes; sects, not religions; rebellious factions and dissenting minorities at war not just with globalism but with the traditional nation-state. Kurds, Basques, Puerto Ricans, Ossetians, East Timoreans, Quebecois, the Catholics of Northern Ireland, Abkhasians, Kurile Islander Japanese, the Zulus of Inkatha, Catalonians, Tamils, and of course, Palestinians—people without countries, inhabiting nations not their own, seeking smaller worlds within borders that will seal them off from modernity.



In "[The Roots of Muslim Rage](#)" (September 1990), the historian of Islam Bernard Lewis explored the reasons behind Islamic fundamentalists' antipathy to the West. He contended that "fundamentalist leaders are not mistaken in seeing in Western civilization the greatest challenge to the way of life that they wish to retain or restore for their people." Arguing that Islamic fundamentalists are ultimately struggling against the dramatic changes brought about by secularism and modernism, Lewis went on to write that "Islamic fundamentalism has given an aim and a form to the otherwise aimless and formless resentment and anger of the Muslim masses at the forces that have devalued their traditional values and, in the final analysis, robbed them of their beliefs, their aspirations, their dignity, and to an increasing extent even their livelihood." Lewis brought his piece



to a close with an admonition:

It should now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both. It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival.... The movement nowadays called fundamentalism is not the only Islamic tradition. There are others, more tolerant, more open, that helped to inspire the great achievements of Islamic civilization in the past, and we may hope that these other traditions will in time prevail.

In "[Blowback](#)" (May 1996), Mary Anne Weaver explained Osama bin Laden's rise to power as an example of the manner in which the U.S. support for the Afghan *mujahideen*—the loose coalition of fighters from all parts of the Islamic world who doggedly resisted Soviet occupation during the 1980s—has backfired on the United States. In essence, Weaver wrote, the CIA's training of the *mujahideen* allowed for the creation and development of "an informal network of small, loosely organized underground cells, with support centers scattered around the world: in the United States, the Persian Gulf countries, Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Sudan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan." After describing the enduring relationships forged in this network—between, among others, the Saudi Arabian bin Laden, the Afghan leader Gulbaddin Hekmatyar, the blind Egyptian cleric Sheikh Omar Abdul-Rahman (convicted in 1996 of seditious conspiracy to wage a "war of urban terrorism against the United States"), and the Palestinian Ramzi Ahmed Youssef (considered to have been the mastermind of the 1993 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center)—Weaver noted that such connections, the direct result of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan more than a decade ago, have led to the emergence of "a new breed of terrorist" whose energies are directed against their former sponsors and trainers. The nature of terrorism has changed, Weaver concluded—today, "E-mail and faxes drive the jihad."

More recently, Robert Kaplan visited the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and, in "[The Lawless Frontier](#)" (September 2000), painted a disturbing picture of a region dominated by tribalism, ignorance, violence, and rampant religious fanaticism. The region's fundamentalist religious fervor crystallized in 1994 with the emergence of the Taliban, a militant group devoted to an extremely inflexible version of Islam. In 1996, the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan's government, and, as Kaplan observed during his April, 2000, trip, it now continues to exert a powerful, destabilizing influence on the border regions of Pakistan.

The Taliban embody a lethal combination: a primitive tribal creed, a fierce religious ideology, and the sheer incompetence, naiveté, and cruelty that are begot by isolation from the outside world and growing up amid war without parents. They are also an example of globalization, influenced by imported pan-Islamic ideologies and supported economically by both Osama bin Laden's worldwide terrorist network (for whom they provide a base) and a multibillion-dollar smuggling industry in which ships and trucks bring consumer goods from the wealthy Arabian Gulf emirate of Dubai (less a state than the world's largest shopping mall) through Iran and Afghanistan and on to Quetta and Karachi.

In addition, we've included [an Atlantic Unbound interview](#) from August, 2000, in which the Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid discussed his book, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, and shared insights gained from his extraordinary access to Afghanistan and its radical Taliban movement.

Today, the U.S. has a "get Osama bin Laden policy" but no effective Afghan policy.... Afghanistan is now a major regional threat not just because the Taliban are harboring Islamic extremists from more than twenty countries in the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia but also because of the proliferation of heroin exports, the sales of arms and other weapons, and the cross-border smuggling which is destroying all the economies in the region.

Afghanistan is a black hole sucking in all its neighbors.

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