

Appendix 2C. Islam, conflict and terrorism

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I. Introduction

In 2005 suicide bomber attacks carried out by individuals with links to Islamist groups in Bangladesh, Jordan and the United Kingdom, as well as the ongoing conflict in Iraq and violence linked to Islamists in Thailand, Uzbekistan and other locations, underlined the continuing threat posed by such groups to security around the globe. With an estimated 18 000 al-Qaeda-trained operatives currently at large in the world, the threat posed by violent Islamist groups appeared as potent during the year as it did immediately after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States.¹ Indeed, data collected by the US Department of State indicate that, despite the launch of the ‘global war on terrorism’ to stop such groups, the incidents of international terrorism had reached at least 655 significant attacks per year by 2004, up from 175 in 2003.²

Reflecting the centrality of Islamist terrorism on the contemporary security agenda of the international community, considerable effort has been made to understand the nature of this phenomenon. This appendix outlines the major contours of the debate on the character of Islamist terrorism that have emerged as a result of these efforts. The findings of recent research highlight the diversity of groups and ideas that constitute the Islamist movement today as well as the complex relationship of the movement to Islam, Muslim societies and the international community. The findings also point to a range of factors that have contributed to the emergence of Islamist violence, including terrorism, and draws attention to the dynamism within the Islamist movement.

Research on the emergence and spread of Islamist extremism challenges conventional understandings of the sources of violence within Muslim communities and calls into question key aspects of current approaches to combating violent Islamist organizations, notably the emphasis on counter-terrorism as the primary means to defeat such groups. Indeed, such research suggests that in some instances the US-led war on terrorism may have served to strengthen the threat of Islamist violence and to have facilitated the employment of harsh and counterproductive policies in areas such as Chechnya, southern Thailand, Uzbekistan and Xinjiang. Instead, these findings suggest that security policy with respect to the Islamist challenge is likely to be more effective if it is based on the integration of a variety of elements—including development, counter-terrorism and conflict prevention policies—in frameworks tailored to address the emergence and development of Islamist violence in specific contexts.

Section II notes the significance for the post-cold war world of conflict related to religion. The emergence of extremist violence linked to Islam is considered with respect to the events of 11 September 2001. Section III explores the main charac-

¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2004–2005* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004), p. 378.

² Glasser, S. B., ‘U.S. figures show sharp global rise in terrorism: State Dept. will not put data in report’, *Washington Post*, 27 Apr. 2005.

teristics of Islamist terrorism with particular reference to the methods employed by those engaged in violence. It describes the relationship of Islamist violence to Islam and conflict linked to the Muslim world and outlines the principal explanations put forward as to why elements within the Islamist movement have turned to extreme violence. Section IV notes recent developments in the Islamist movement, especially in response to the war on terrorism. The evolving policy response of the international community to the challenge of Islamist violence is considered in the light of evidence of the shortcomings of the initial approach to the issue. The appendix concludes with a discussion of likely future policy directions for more effectively meeting the challenge of Islamist violence.

II. Religion, conflict and terrorism

Recent years have seen important changes in the extent and nature of conflict around the globe, notably as a result of the end of the two-bloc confrontation in the international system. Research data indicate that with the conclusion of the cold war there has been a marked decline in violent conflict,³ particularly conflict between states. At the same time, while conflict as a whole has decreased, its character has undergone an important shift. Increasingly, it is non-state actors that are involved in conflict.⁴ One of the most important sources of conflict has been identified as violence carried out on the basis of culture, ethnicity and religion, although—as the cases of Rwanda, Timor-Leste and the former Yugoslavia highlight—state-based actors continue to have central roles in conflict.⁵

The move away from state-focused conflicts deriving from political and economic disputes towards a more complex type of conflict involving both state and non-state actors—the latter defined, in large part, by different identities—was viewed by some as the onset of conflict between civilizations.⁶ Such views have appeared to gain credence with an intensification of new forms of violent extremism, including terrorism.

The changing character of conflict in the world and the threat that this poses have stimulated a broad debate about the security challenges facing both the international community and particular states. In this context, the issue of religion and conflict has received increased attention.⁷ Conflict in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Sri Lanka and a number of states in the Middle East, coupled with the rise of religious extremism, has reinforced the view that there is a close and strengthening linkage between religion and conflict.

Religious conflict is not, of course, exclusive to the present day but has existed in various forms for much of known history.⁸ Indeed, it has been suggested that violence

³ University of British Columbia, Human Security Centre, *The Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005), URL <<http://www.humansecurityreport.info/>>.

⁴ On non-state actors in conflict see chapter 2 in this volume.

⁵ Kaldor, M., *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Polity: Oxford, 2004); and Brubaker, R., *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2004), pp. 11–18.

⁶ See, e.g., Huntington, S. P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (Simon & Schuster: London, 1998).

⁷ Reychler, L., 'Religion and conflict', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1997), URL <http://www.gmu.edu/academic/ijps/vol2_1/Reyschler.htm>.

⁸ Ranstorp, M., 'Terrorism in the name of religion', *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 50, no. 1 (summer 1996), pp. 41–62.

is an integral part of religion.⁹ Even at the height of the cold war and in the post-World War II period of national liberation conflicts, religious conflicts continued to flare. According to one scholar's estimates, throughout the 46-year period 1950–96 religious conflicts constituted 33–47 per cent of all conflicts.¹⁰ Since the end of the cold war, the number of religious conflicts has increased relative to other types of conflict.¹¹ Moreover, the salience of religion as a factor in conflict has been strengthened by what many see as the emergence in recent decades of a new type of religious-based violence—‘cosmic war’.¹² As part of this development, religion has been used as a justification not only for violence but also for terrorism.¹³ Within this new environment for conflict, adherents of all the world's major religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism—have been linked to extremist violence.¹⁴

The religious terrorism that has emerged, particularly during the 1990s, as part of a ‘fourth wave of terrorism’ is viewed as being distinct from other forms of terrorism, notably the politically inspired terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵ Religious terrorism tends to ‘be more lethal than secular terrorism because of the radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justification, concepts of morality, and Manichean worldviews that directly affect the “holy terrorists” motivation’.¹⁶ From this view, religion functions as a legitimizing force, specifically sanctioning wide-scale, and often extreme, violence against an almost open-ended category of opponents—since there is little distinction between military combatants and civilians—and having a tendency to ‘satanize’ enemies. As such, those who practice violence in the name of religion are seen as less prone to compromise or co-optation.

While followers of a wide variety of religions have been linked to violent conflict and terrorism, in recent years radical Islamists have been particularly associated with this phenomenon. Indeed, following the attacks by Islamists of 11 September 2001 in the USA, and subsequent attacks in Madrid, Bali and London as well as the use of terrorist methods by groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and al-Qaeda in the Middle East—notably with respect to the Israel–Palestinian conflict and in the context of the

⁹ Juergensmeyer, M., ‘Sacrifice and cosmic war’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1991), pp. 101–17; and Zitrin, S., ‘Millenarianism and violence’, *Journal of Conflict Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1998), pp. 110–15.

¹⁰ Fox, J., ‘Religion and state failure: an examination of the extent and magnitude of religious conflict from 1950 to 1996’, *International Political Science Review*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2004), pp. 55, 64.

¹¹ Fox notes: ‘One factor that seems to have influenced the rise of nonreligious conflict is the cold war. During the cold war, nonreligious conflicts became more common than religious conflicts for conflict types but after the cold war all conflict dropped, with nonreligious conflicts dropping more than religious conflicts. If this trend continues, religious conflict will be a common as other types of conflicts’. Fox (note 10), p. 70.

¹² Juergensmeyer, M., *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (University of California Press: Berkeley, Calif., 2001).

¹³ Drake, C. J. M., ‘The role of ideology in terrorists’ target selection’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1998), pp. 53–85.

¹⁴ Shah, S. A. A., ‘Religious terrorism in other faiths’, *Strategic Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (summer 2005), pp. 126–41.

¹⁵ Rapoport, D. C., ‘The four waves of modern terrorism’, eds A. Cronin and J. Ludes, *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Georgetown University Press: Washington, DC, 2004), pp. 46–73.

¹⁶ Hoffman, B., *Holy Terror: Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious Imperative*, RAND Paper P-7834 (RAND: Santa Monica, Calif., 1993).

civil war in Iraq—Islamist groups have been viewed by many as playing the defining role in contemporary terrorism.

In assigning pre-eminence to Islamist groups, observers have sought to draw a distinction between the practices of such groups and other forms of terrorism.¹⁷ The Islamist terrorism that has emerged in recent years is identified as enigmatic in character and as lacking clear political goals and demands. For Islamists, it appears to be the changes brought about by Western modernity per se and secular globalization that they oppose, rather than some distinct set of political, social or economic practices.

On the basis of this understanding, initial accounts of the new Islamist groups, principally al-Qaeda, drew a vivid picture of the organizations engaged in terrorism. Motivated by religious zeal, supported by wealthy individuals (primarily in Saudi Arabia) and composed of individuals skilled in the use of modern technology (the mass media and the Internet), as well as able to employ highly effective tactics (suicide bombing) to conduct their campaign of terror, these organizations were viewed as being especially difficult to combat. These characteristics enabled the Islamist terrorist groups to extend their reach from bases in Afghanistan and other failing states beyond terrorism's previous main operational theatres in Europe and the Middle East to inflict mass and indiscriminate violence in a wide variety of locations.

Having provided the dominant paradigm for understanding contemporary terrorism, Islamist groups have become the primary target for counter-terrorist and military strategies and operations. Reflecting the understanding of the goals, organization and nature of Islamist groups outlined above, the principal means that have been used to counter the threat of radical Islamists have been to challenge and eliminate the men of violence—the so-called 'capture/kill' policy; to impede and break up the jihadi organizations¹⁸ engaged in terrorism through a variety of security measures (anti-money laundering initiatives, surveillance and heightened security); and to undermine or overthrow the authorities in states that are seen to support Islamist international terrorism.

III. Islamist violence and its context

The methods of Islamist terrorism

As a result of the dramatic impact of Islamist terrorism on Western societies through high-profile attacks, the methods used by Islamist terrorist groups have attracted special scrutiny. Their methods, as much as their motivation and aims, have been seen as setting these groups apart from other terrorist movements. Two particular elements have been closely associated with Islamist terrorism: the use of the modern media and suicide bombing.

Writers on religious extremism have highlighted the essentially symbolic rather than strategic character of violence for terrorist organizations.¹⁹ In this context, the

¹⁷ Hoffman, B., 'Testimony: Lessons of 9/11, Joint Inquiry Staff Request, Submitted for the Committee Record to the United States Joint September 11, 2001 Inquiry Staff of the House and Senate Select Committees on Intelligence on October 8, 2002', RAND, Santa Monica, Calif., 2002, URL <<http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/2005/CT201.pdf>>.

¹⁸ These are militant Islamist groups who believe that they are engaged in a holy war that justifies the use of extreme violence.

¹⁹ Juergensmeyer (note 12).

location and time of a violent act take on a special resonance. Such acts are designed not to defeat an enemy but to demonstrate its weakness and to mobilize further support. In order to achieve this aim, terrorism needs an audience, principally someone to terrify. In addition, Islamist terrorists appear to launch attacks with the aim of provoking violent reactions or crackdowns, in part through widespread media coverage, which can strengthen popular support for an organization and aid recruitment.²⁰ In this sense, there appears to be a strong relationship between the emergence of the modern mass media and the development of religious terrorism. The symbolic dimension of many acts of terrorism inspired by religion has found a global audience that can be reached quickly and directly.²¹ Some have argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the modern mass media.²²

Islamist terrorist groups, more than other groups, have understood and manipulated the global media. Al-Qaeda and the wider jihadi movement are relevant as long as they can stay in the news, and dramatic instances of violence have proved to be the best way to achieve this. The emergence of Arab television stations has been a factor in raising the profile of such groups, although jihadi leaders have expressed frustration that their message is not conveyed as they would wish through these stations.²³ The Internet has also been a vital tool that terrorists have been able to utilize:²⁴ there is considerable evidence that Islamist groups have made extensive use of the Internet for propaganda and organizational purposes and that it has also served as a medium for building a community of like-minded activists.²⁵ In the five years after 2000 the number of jihadi websites was reported to have increased from fewer than 20 to more than 4000.²⁶

The expansion of the global financial system has provided new opportunities to channel resources quickly and confidentially to terrorist cells.²⁷ At the same time, the ability to move rapidly from one location to another throughout the world and to communicate quickly have together been additional elements in developing and sustaining international Islamist terrorist networks.

Perhaps more than any other aspect of Islamist terrorism, the suicide bomber has come to define to the outside world the movement—combining, in a devastating act, fanaticism with an almost unstoppable threat. The popular image of suicide terrorists has been one of lonely, poor, unemployed young people with no real prospects, who feel that they are desperate and who find comfort among extremists advocating a medieval-style religious fervour. However, recent studies have highlighted the com-

²⁰ Schiffauer, W., 'Production of fundamentalism: on the dynamics of producing the radically different', eds H. de Vries and S. Weber, *Religion and Media* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, Calif., 2001), pp. 435–55.

²¹ Schmid, A. P., 'Frameworks for conceptualising terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 16, no. 2 (summer 2004), p. 207.

²² See, e.g., Wilkinson, P., 'The media and terrorism: a reassessment', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 9, no. 2 (summer 1997), pp. 51–64.

²³ Miles, H., *Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World* (Abacus: London, 2005).

²⁴ Weimann, G., *How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet*, United States Institute for Peace (USIP) Special Report 116 (USIP: Washington, DC, 2004).

²⁵ Wright, L., 'The terror web: were the Madrid bombings part of a new, far-reaching jihad being plotted on the Internet?', *New Yorker*, 2 Aug. 2004.

²⁶ Study by Marc Sageman cited in Atran, S., 'The "virtual hand" of jihad', *Terrorism Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation), vol. 3, issue 10 (19 May 2005), URL <<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369701>>.

²⁷ Haslerud, G. and Tranøy, B. S., Forsvarets Forskningsinstitutt (FFI), *Fighting Terrorist Finance: Issues, Impacts and Challenges*, FFI/Rapport 2005/02100 (Norwegian Defence Research Establishment: Kjeller, 2005).

plexity of the elements that produce suicide bombers. Not only have these studies challenged common perceptions about who becomes a suicide terrorist but they have also shed new light on the nature of the act itself.

Analysis of the sociology of Islamist suicide terrorists suggests that the bombers have come from a diversity of backgrounds but that in recent years there is an increasingly common profile. Those who planned and carried out the September 2001 aircraft hijackings, for example, were mostly highly educated, middle class professionals.²⁸ Mohamed Atta was an architect; Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's second in command, was a pediatric surgeon; and Ziad Jarrah, one of the founders of the al-Qaeda Hamburg cell, was a dental student who later turned to aircraft engineering. The new generation of global jihadis is not composed of the urban poor from underdeveloped societies so much as 'the privileged children of an unlikely marriage between Wahhabism and Silicon Valley, which al-Zawahiri visited in the 1990s. They were heirs not only to jihad and the umma but also to the electronic revolution and American-style globalization'.²⁹ Indeed, many of the suicide bombers appear to have had little religious background.

While religion is not seen per se as being at the heart of suicide bombing, it does appear to reinforce this method of violence by providing incentives through the notion of 'martyrdom'.³⁰ The heroic death is the ultimate sacrifice, in which 'martyrs' give up their lives for the community, but it is also part of the narrative of good and evil that underpins 'cosmic war'. The creation of heroes is also a means to demonize the enemy.³¹

Work on the motivation of Palestinian bombers has suggested that the construction of new interpretations of sacrifice/martyrdom by jihadi groups (al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah and others) in loose connection with traditional Islamic theology has been vital to the development of such acts. At the same time, the local community's support for these ideas as part of a national-religious struggle to establish a Palestinian nation state has been a necessary condition for suicide bombers to operate.³² In this sense, religion and nationalism combine and give suicide bombing a distinctly political character.

Other research has also questioned accounts that identify suicide bombing as being motivated primarily by a religious impulse. Instead, it has been suggested that suicide bombing is a highly effective tactical weapon designed to achieve strategic political aims. It was, in fact, in the context of the conflict in Sri Lanka that suicide bombing became most developed during the 1990s, rather than in connection with the activities of Islamist groups. The factor that emerges as the principal objective for suicide bombing, according to this account, is an effort to compel foreign powers to with-

²⁸ McDermott, T., *Perfect Soldiers: The Hijackers: Who They Were, Why They Did It* (Politicos: London, 2005).

²⁹ Kepel, G., *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2004). Umma refers, literally, to the community of believers and thus the whole Islamic world.

³⁰ Oliver, A. M. and Steinberg, R. F., *The Road to Martyr's Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005).

³¹ Juergensmeyer (note 12), pp. 164–84.

³² Strenski, I., 'Sacrifice, gift and the social logic of muslim "human bombers"', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 15, no. 3 (autumn 2003), pp. 1–34.

draw military forces from the occupation of territory that the bombers view as their homeland.³³

The dramatic upsurge of suicide attacks in recent years has, however, led some to question the idea that suicide terrorism is always the product of organized campaigns aimed at achieving clear political goals, such as national liberation. While political motivation may have informed suicide terrorism in Chechnya and the West Bank, this does not appear to be the case for many of the recent attacks.³⁴ Studies based on interviews of would-be suicide bombers suggest that at the root of the actions by persons engaged in religious-based suicide bombing is a sense of humiliation in their own lives or a close identification with others who have faced humiliation.³⁵ Furthermore, these accounts suggest that in order to understand how terrorist networks cohere to act on the sense of humiliation it is necessary to pay close attention to the psychology of small groups and the role of values, for it is these together that can furnish the means to override rational self-interest to produce extreme violence in ordinary people.³⁶

The idea that the nature of suicide terrorism may be changing is reinforced by analysis of the bombings that have been carried out following the launch of the US-led war on terrorism. Research suggests that 81 per cent of the suicide attacks that have occurred since 1968 have taken place after the terrorist attacks of September 2001. Moreover, 31 of the 35 groups held responsible for recent attacks are Islamist militants.³⁷ The motivation of the jihadis that emerges from such work is not the desire to achieve a specified political goal but to oppose a perceived global evil—usually the West.

Work on this new generation of jihadi terrorists—those who have targeted the USA and the West, rather than those involved in the nationalist struggles of Chechnya, Kashmir or Palestine—has provided a more detailed profile of suicide terrorists.³⁸ Groups like al-Qaeda appear in this account as a network of self-selected individuals who are technically skilled and in many cases multilingual. Most are from middle class backgrounds and are university educated; they are geographically and upwardly mobile. The average age of suicide bombers is 26 years, most of them are married, and many have children. The bombers usually only became religious after they had joined a jihadi organization. Because they were the best and the brightest, they were sent abroad to study. More than 80 per cent of known jihadis live in diaspora communities, often marginalized from the host society, and in hard-to-penetrate social networks that consist of about 70 per cent friends and 20 per cent family. Seeking a sense of community, many of these small groups bond as they surf on jihadi websites to find direction and purpose. This is very different from the usual terrorist of the past, someone from one country, living in that country and targeting that country's government.³⁹

³³ Pape, R. A., *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House: New York, N.Y., 2005); and Gambetta, D. (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005).

³⁴ Atran, S. and Stern, J., 'Small groups find fatal purpose through the web', *Nature*, vol. 437, no. 7059 (29 Sep. 2005), p. 620.

³⁵ Stern, J., *Terror in the Name of God* (Harper Collins: New York, N.Y., 2003)

³⁶ Atran and Stern (note 34).

³⁷ Research by Bruce Hoffman, of the RAND Center for Terrorism Risk Management Policy in Washington, DC, cited in Atran and Stern (note 34).

³⁸ Sageman, M., *Understanding Terror Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, Pa., 2004).

³⁹ Sageman (note 38).

The sources of Islamist jihad

The emergence of radical Islamist groups as the principal source of international terrorism has promoted considerable debate about the challenge of countering these terrorist groups. A key question concerns the factors that have promoted the emergence and expansion of such groups. One influential interpretation has highlighted a profound and deep-seated crisis within Islam as the ultimate source of the problems in Muslim society that have produced terrorism.⁴⁰ In this view, it is the failure of Islam to come to terms with modernity and a backlash against change focused on a revival of tradition that have driven the emergence of fundamentalist politics (the Iranian Revolution) and later neo-fundamental jihadi groups. In this theory it is therefore the opposition to modernity within Muslim communities that stands in the way of democratization in the Arab states of the Middle East, rather than more specific political factors such as the Israel–Palestine conflict.⁴¹

Those who argue that Muslims have, in fact, been held back by key elements within their own societies—the military and corrupt elites, usually in collusion with the West—provide a contrasting view. The rise of Islamist radicalism occurs, from this perspective, because Muslims live in societies that are repressive and exclusionary and in which political participation is prevented. In this environment, it is argued, the only effective means to achieve political change is through violence and militancy.⁴² Furthermore, it is noted that in many contexts, notably where Muslims form minorities, it is secular and non-Muslim governments and majority non-Muslim populations that appear to have instigated violence against Muslim communities.

Explanations of Islamist militancy that focus on a process of deep-seated reaction within the Muslim world—either as a result of internal or external reasons—have been challenged by scholarship based on the study of jihadi groups and on the actual practice of Islam in various contemporary contexts, including Muslim communities outside the Middle East. In contrast to the image of al-Qaeda that was often presented following the September 2001 attacks on the USA—as an Islamist front united in armed struggle or jihad at the vanguard of Muslim discontent with the (Christian) West—these studies paint a rather different picture. Al-Qaeda emerges instead as a minority group within the jihadist movement, with its strategies criticized and opposed by religious nationalists among the jihadis, who prefer to concentrate on changing the Muslim world rather than launching a global fight.⁴³

Other writers have questioned the view that the Islamist groups represented by al-Qaeda and other radical factions constitute a unique form of terrorism. Instead, they note that such groups share much in common with other global movements, such as environmentalists and anti-globalization protesters.⁴⁴ The similarities include a decentralized organization and an emphasis on ethical rather than properly political

⁴⁰ Lewis, B., *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 2003).

⁴¹ Lewis, B., *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002).

⁴² Hafez, M. M., *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Lynne Reiner: Boulder, Colo., 2003).

⁴³ Gerges, F. A., *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2005).

⁴⁴ Devji, F., *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality and Modernity* (C. Hurst & Co: London, 2005).

action. Such an analysis of the new jihadi groups locates them squarely within the transformation of political thought after the cold war. The ideas that have emerged associated with the jihadi organizations are neither dogmatic in a traditional sense nor comprehensive in the sense of modern ideologies (fascism or communism); they are concerned neither with correct doctrinal practice in the present nor with some revolutionary utopia of the future. Instead, current jihadi theology is fragmented, disparate and individualistic. The jihadi movement thus emerges from the breakdown of authority in the Muslim world, both traditional religious and secular modern forms, and the failure of Islamic fundamentalism to take hold beyond Iran.⁴⁵

Indeed, from such a perspective the source of conflict for Islamist groups is not situated in the traditional culture and beliefs of Muslim societies but rather in the decoupling of religion from culture (in the sense of the specific forms of Islam practised in various locations around the globe). The jihadi movement, in this interpretation, becomes not an expression of traditional religion—a protest of original cultures under threat or a ‘clash of civilizations’—but a reflection of these cultures’ disappearance. Thus, the rise and spread of jihadi networks is not a reaction to the West derived from tradition but rather a symptom of Islam being transformed by Westernization and globalization.⁴⁶

A vital element of the sociology of modern Islam that underpins this change is a movement of political activity and theological innovation away from the Muslim communities rooted in the traditional cultures of the Middle East and Central Asia to the newly self-conscious Muslim communities in the West, particularly in Europe. The origins of this movement are diverse. A key development was the rise of Islamist mobilization, usually of a peaceful character, especially in British India as a response to colonial rule and the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Iraq, Palestine and Syria in the first half of the 20th century. The subsequent emergence of splits in the Islamist movement and the scattering of splinter groups across the Middle East and Asia promoted an increased pluralism of theological views within Muslim communities. The migration in recent decades of substantial numbers of Muslims from their traditional homelands to Europe and the USA has also served to challenge long-standing structures of authority rooted in traditional religious practices.

The spread of Islam around the globe has, in particular, blurred the connection between Islam, a specific society and a territory. One-third of the world’s Muslims now live as members of a minority. At the heart of this development is, on the one hand, the voluntary settlement of Muslims in Western societies and, on the other, the pervasiveness and influence of Western cultural models and social norms within these immigrant communities. Research on these communities suggests that the ‘neo-fundamentalism’ that informs the jihadi movement has been gaining ground among a rootless Muslim youth—particularly among the second- and third-generation migrants in the West—and this phenomenon is feeding new forms of radicalism, ranging from support for al-Qaeda to the outright rejection of integration into Western society.

In this context Islamic revival, or ‘re-Islamization’, thus results from the efforts of Westernized Muslims to assert their identity in a non-Muslim context. As a result, a schism exists between many of the mainstream Islamist movements in the Muslim world—including Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon—with a focus on

⁴⁵ Roy, O., *The Failure of Political Islam* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

⁴⁶ Roy, O., *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (Columbia University Press: New York, N.Y., 2004).

national struggles and the uprooted militants who strive to establish an imaginary umma that is not embedded in any particular society or territory, whether by violent means, like al-Qaeda, or peacefully, like Hizb-ut Tahrir.⁴⁷ Indeed, the contradictions between the aims of global jihadi groups and the more nationalist insurgency in Iraq have been identified as a principal obstacle to the formation of a single, coordinated movement to challenge the US-led occupation.⁴⁸

The picture of the contemporary Muslim world has been further clouded by analysis of the Islamist movements in different countries. Such work has highlighted the diversity of factors that have promoted the rise of Islamist politics and the turn to violence. In Pakistan, for example, the role of the state as an agent promoting radical Islam has been identified as a key factor behind the emergence of Islamist groups.⁴⁹ Elsewhere, the intersection of local conditions with domestic Islamist groupings, often linked to the global jihadi network, has fostered new and diverse forms of radicalism.⁵⁰ At the same time, such research has in many cases, for example in Africa, highlighted the constraints on radicalization and the challenges involved in governing nation states on the basis of political Islam.⁵¹

Thus, rather than a static vision of Islamic society which informs many previous accounts of the relationship between Islam and Western society, a significant number of recent studies offer a picture of a dynamic and diverse Muslim world—a world undergoing a turbulent transformation in which tradition is being challenged. This transformation is taking place in a variety of geographical locations and involves different issues and actors. At its heart is a struggle over the interpretation of Islam in the light of theological innovations, such as Wahhabism and Salafism.⁵² Within this struggle, relations to the West and to characterizations of the nature of Western society have become a key issue and violence a means of enforcing and highlighting new thinking.

IV. New developments and responses

The changing nature of Islamist terrorism

The West's increased understanding since 11 September 2001 of the complexity and dynamism that characterize the Muslim world has also brought an awareness that one of the principal challenges for countering international terrorism stemming from

⁴⁷ Hizb-ut Tahrir seeks to replace what it characterizes as the Judeo-Christian-dominated nation state system with a borderless umma ruled by a new Caliph. Despite the organization's avowed opposition to violence, the radical nature of its ideas and the practice of indoctrination of recruits has led some, including governments in Europe and Central Asia, to ban the organization. Baran, Z., 'Fighting the war of ideas', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2005, pp. 68–78.

⁴⁸ Ulph, S., 'Al-Zarqawi's group under pressure and seeking allies', *Terrorism Focus* (Jamestown Foundation), vol. 3, issue 2 (18 Jan. 2006), URL <<http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369867>>.

⁴⁹ Khan, A. U., *The Terrorist Threat and the Policy Response in Pakistan*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 11 (Sep. 2005), URL <<http://www.sipri.org>>.

⁵⁰ See the reports on Islamist movements in a wide variety of countries on the website of the International Crisis Group, URL <<http://www.icg.org>>.

⁵¹ De Waal, A. (ed.), *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, Ind., 2004).

⁵² Stanley, T., 'Understanding the origins of Wahhabism and Salafism', *Terrorism Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation), vol. 3, issue 14 (15 July 2005), URL <<http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369746>>.

Islamist groups is the evolving character of the Islamist movement itself. A particular stimulus for recent change has come as a consequence of the ‘global war on terrorism’. As a result of concerted international action against al-Qaeda and affiliated groups, the original terrorist organizations have been broken up and their leaders killed, arrested or forced into hiding. The jihadi movement has not, however, disappeared but has changed to become a ‘networked transnational constituency rather than the monolithic, international terrorist organization with an identifiable command and control apparatus that it once was’.⁵³

Analysts now characterize the movement as divided into four distinct but not mutually exclusive dimensions including a range of affiliates, associates, local groups and a network that works in support of al-Qaeda. Affiliates include Abu Sayyaf, Jemmah Islamiyah, Ansr Al Islam and Jamaat Yarmuk in the North Caucasus, although there is considerable doubt about the degree to which al-Qaeda and its ‘affiliates’ constitute genuine organizations rather than loose collections of like-minded individuals. The Islamist movement has thus transformed into a diffuse and amorphous ideological movement that may have become essentially leaderless.⁵⁴ Indeed, as a result of these changes some have argued that the threat of Islamist terrorism is greater today than before September 2001, with fragments of al-Qaeda dispersed in locations including Kashmir, the southern Philippines and Yemen.⁵⁵

As well as transforming the organizational character of the jihadi movement, many of the measures undertaken in the name of the global war on terrorism also appear to have assisted in shifting thinking within radical Islamist circles, reinforcing the arguments of those who believe that the violent struggle should not be focused on particular countries but on the real enemy: the Western world and its influences.⁵⁶ This change has fostered an intensification of contacts between local, regional and international terrorist networks. The invasion of Iraq, and to a lesser extent the intervention in Afghanistan, appears to have done much to promote a strengthened resolve among jihadi activists around the globe. These interventions have especially fostered political solidarity between groups located in long-standing areas of Muslim settlement and the new migrant Muslim communities in Europe, as indicated in video testimony that has appeared on jihadi websites—notably the statements by al-Zawahiri and Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the London bombers. Indeed, there is evidence that the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent civil war have become a recruiting vehicle for militant organizations.⁵⁷

Evolving responses to the Islamist challenge

The complex relationship of the Islamist movement to Islam as well as to specific Muslim communities around the globe, coupled with the increasingly decentralized structure of jihadi groups, raises major questions about the most appropriate way to

⁵³ Hoffman, B., ‘Does our counter-terrorism strategy match the threat?’, Testimony presented before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, 29 Sep. 2005, RAND, Santa Monica, Calif., 2005, URL <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/2005/RAND_CT250-1.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Bokhari, F., ‘Al-Qaeda leader “has lost control of militants”’, *Financial Times*, 13 Dec. 2005, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Knowlton, B., ‘Greater-than-ever risk of terror is seen by U.S.’, *International Herald Tribune*, 3 Feb. 2006.

⁵⁶ Mattera, O., ‘Jihad, from localism to globalism’, *CeMiSS Quarterly*, summer 2005, pp. 9–21.

⁵⁷ Jehl, D., ‘Iraq may be prime place for training militants, CIA report concludes’, *New York Times*, 22 June 2005. On Iraq see also chapters 1 and 2 in this volume.

combat this form of terrorism. Growing recognition of the difficulties involved in countering Islamist terrorism has led some to conclude that 'it cannot be destroyed or defeated in a single tactical, military engagement or series of engagements'.⁵⁸ The criticism of the initial approach to countering the rise of Islamist groups and the shortcomings that have been identified in key policies have not gone unnoticed in policy circles. Increased awareness of the nature of the challenge has also promoted discussion about the appropriate approach to counter-terrorism and to combating the rise of violent extremism within Muslim communities.

From the outset of the intensification of measures against Islamist terrorist groups after September 2001, distinct approaches have been employed by, for example, the USA and Europe, perhaps reflecting their different strategic cultures.⁵⁹ The USA has tended to employ a 'national security' approach to the terrorist threat and has emphasized unilateralism. In contrast, Europe, based on its past experience of terrorism, has adopted a regulatory style pursued through multilateralism—although Europe, too, has been characterized by differences over counter-terrorism.⁶⁰ These divergences in approach, with potentially major implications for the future of the transatlantic relationship, have appeared to be mitigated by a revised US approach to counter-terrorism that emerged in 2005. In the latter, the US Administration recognized that the war on terrorism is not to be viewed as an exclusively military endeavour but also involves fundamental and parallel political, social, economic and ideological activities. As such, it is a struggle with violent extremism that constitutes the principal task for the USA rather than a war on terrorism.⁶¹ This new view of the threats posed by Islamist groups has led analysts in the USA to argue that what is required is not just cooperation but also collaboration to counter the decentralized extremist groups.⁶²

Such changes have raised important questions about the utility of the concept of terrorism as a primary means to understand the security challenge posed by Islamist groups and by which to organize the appropriate response. Historically, providing a definition of terrorism has been controversial and, as a result, elusive. In recent years a growing consensus has emerged around the idea that it is methods rather than aims and identities that should provide the means to define terrorism.⁶³ Such an interpretation has found support from the majority of states and it was this approach that informed United Nations Security Council Resolution 1617, which sought to define terrorist methods.⁶⁴ This non-political definition of terrorism appears to have won endorsement from some states, at least in part because it assisted them in their struggles with violent challenges to their authority without engaging with the complex issue of the contexts, including state policies, that help to bring forth such

⁵⁸ Hoffman (note 53).

⁵⁹ Rees, W. and Aldrich, R. J., 'Contending cultures of counterterrorism: transatlantic divergence or convergence?', *International Affairs*, vol. 81, issue 5 (Oct. 2005), pp. 905–23.

⁶⁰ Keohane, D., *The EU and Counter-terrorism* (Centre for European Reform: London, May 2005).

⁶¹ Schmidt, E. and Shanker, T., 'Washington recasts terror as "struggle"', *International Herald Tribune*, 27 July 2005; and Shanker, T., 'U.S. crafts a precise strategy to halt terror', *International Herald Tribune*, 5 Feb. 2006.

⁶² Gunaratna, R., 'Responding to the post 9/11 structural and operational challenges of global jihad', *Connections*, vol. 4, issue 1 (spring 2005), pp. 9–42, URL <<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/pubs/ph/details.cfm?id=10676>>; and US Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, 6 Feb. 2006, URL <<http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf>>, pp. 87–91.

⁶³ Schmid (note 21), pp. 197–221.

⁶⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 1617, 29 July 2005.

violence, including terrorism.⁶⁵ Indeed, it has been suggested that in certain cases the popular political support that can result from the engagement of authorities in combating ‘terrorists’ has been a leading incentive for waging such conflicts.⁶⁶ The September 2005 UN World Summit was unable to agree on a definition of terrorism—despite the call of the UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change—in part because of the concern of some states that their actions might be considered as state terrorism within the terms of such a definition.⁶⁷

A focus on methods of terrorism has also won support from those who have stressed counter-terrorism, and the gamut of technical approaches associated with this approach, as the principal means by which to counter Islamist groups. In 2005, however, broad debates emerged both in the UK (with respect to the Terrorism Bill 2005) and the USA (in the light of revelations about the far-reaching measures taken by the US Government in the name of the war on terrorism) about the threat to civil liberties embodied in policies developed to counter the challenge of terrorism.⁶⁸ Growing concern about the narrow focus on counter-terrorism approaches to contemporary security threats has led some to conclude that the war on terrorism may be ‘a good cause’ but the ‘wrong concept’.⁶⁹

Despite the paradigm shift beyond military and counter-terrorism approaches to Islamist violence that was visible in 2005, the changes in policy remain relatively modest. Most significantly, there appears to be little elaborated thinking about alternatives to the former security approaches beyond a broad commitment to democratization as a means to stabilize societies that have been identified as sources of Islamist terrorism.⁷⁰ Here, too, however, recent research has raised questions about the utility of such an approach. Such work has noted that ‘the data available do not show a strong relationship between democracy and an absence of or a reduction in terrorism’.⁷¹ Indeed, genuine democracy in a number of countries with majority Muslim populations, notably in the Middle East, could be expected to give rise to powerful Islamist political movements or even governments. Such suggestions appeared to be confirmed by the strong showing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in elections in 2005 and the victory of Hamas in Palestinian elections in 2006.

While democratization might help to marginalize Islamic neo-fundamentalists and to discredit violence as a political tool, it cannot be expected to dispel, at least in the short term, the sense of economic and cultural alienation and humiliation that appears

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch, ‘In the name of counter-terrorism: human rights abuses worldwide’, URL <<http://hrw.org/un/chr59/counter-terrorism-bck4.htm>>.

⁶⁶ Baev, P. K., ‘Putin’s counter-terrorism: the parameters of a strategic dead-end?’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Mar. 2006), pp. 1–21.

⁶⁷ Lynch, C., ‘Bolton voices opposition to U.N. proposals’, *Washington Post*, 1 Sep. 2005. For the documents of the World Summit, held on 14–16 Sep. 2005 at the UN General Assembly, see URL <<http://www.un.org/summit2005/>>; and for the report of the High-level Panel see United Nations, ‘A more secure world: our shared responsibility’, Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, UN documents A/59/565, 4 Dec. 2004, and A/59/565/Corr.1, 6 Dec. 2004, URL <<http://www.un.org/ga/documentation/list5.html>>.

⁶⁸ Press Association, ‘Terror plans thrown out by Lords’, *The Guardian*, 18 Jan. 2006, URL <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/terrorism/story/0,,1689069,00.html>>; and the Amnesty International USA website, URL <<http://www.amnestyusa.org/waronterror/index.do>>.

⁶⁹ Andréani, G., ‘“The war on terror”: good cause, wrong concept’, *Survival*, vol. 46, no. 4 (winter 2004/2005), pp. 31–50.

⁷⁰ Dalacoura, K., ‘US democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a critique’, *International Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 5 (2005), pp. 963–79.

⁷¹ Gregory Gause III, F., ‘Can democracy stop terrorism?’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 5 (Sep./Oct. 2005), p. 62.

to motivate key sections of the movement. In this context, certain groups are likely to be impervious to efforts at political and socio-economic accommodation and to remain implacably wedded to the concept of violent jihad. Further democracy, with its focus on the concerns of nation states, would not automatically draw Islamist radicals into the political process. Groups such as al-Qaeda have tended not to concern themselves overly with nationalist causes, especially the Palestinian uprising, even if there is a strong Islamic element in them, and they have been disinclined to work towards the establishment of an Islamic nation state. Instead, the focus has been on the global jihad.

V. Conclusions: new approaches to Islamist violence

The research reviewed above highlights that the Islamist terrorist movement that has developed in recent decades has done so against the background of an increase in religious violence and the emergence of new forms of terrorism around the globe. At the same time, much of this work challenges, explicitly and implicitly, the notion of a growing conflict between civilizations and the suggestion that religious, non-state actors have come largely to determine the character of contemporary conflict. Instead, recent studies point to the greater complexity of conflict, within which different types of violence—including terrorism—are carried out by a variety of actors and with a range of motivations. As such, Islamist violence seems at least related to other types of conflict.

In terms of organization and methods, the Islamist movement, particularly in its early incarnation, appears to be similar in many respects to a number of religious- and non-religious-based terrorist organizations that have emerged over the past two decades. In this sense, the rise of Islamist terrorism can only be understood in the context of the interrelated social, political and economic dynamics that are shaping the world. This is not to downgrade the role of particular leaders and organizations within the jihadi movement or their actions to develop the movement and to focus it on certain issues. Rather, it is to note that the emergence of such organizations and their ability to operate have been contingent upon and contributed to the ongoing process of change that is affecting traditional Muslim communities and the new Muslim minority communities that have developed as a result of large-scale emigration, especially to Western Europe.

While research on Islamist terrorism has underlined that the phenomenon needs to be understood in a broad context, its prominence as an issue for the international community suggests that it does, nevertheless, possess distinct characteristics, even if these are essentially ones of degree rather than quality. Given this, a key issue becomes the precise nature of the linkage between Islamist groups, Islam and the diverse Muslim communities around the world. The picture that emerges from the studies that have been undertaken on this issue is a complex one. Islamist terrorist groups are generally characterized by relatively weak links to formal Islam and to the traditional institutions of Islam. While jihadi groups profess to be engaged in a holy war on behalf of their faith, this is a self-proclaimed war in which traditional Islam is as much the target as is the West. Moreover, a number of other factors, notably the bonds of kinship and the psychology of small groups, appear to play at least as important a role as religious conviction in maintaining group identity and cohesiveness.

At the same time, groups such as al-Qaeda are an intrinsic part of the struggle to define Islam in the modern world, and many of their actions, such as suicide bombings, only make sense when viewed through the lens of religious conventions, old or new. Furthermore, although suicide bombers appear most often to have weak links to formal Islam, those undertaking bombing missions seem to understand their actions in terms of religion—as martyrdom. This sense is reinforced in some contexts, particularly the struggle over the state of Palestine, where significant parts of the local community support these actions and express that support in religious and quasi-religious forms.

The relationship of Islamist terrorist groups to Islam is further complicated by the diversity within the Muslim world, which makes straightforward generalizations difficult. The Muslim world is fractured by various fault lines, including between Shia and Sunni, between Arab and non-Arab, as well as socio-culturally in terms of *inter alia* ethnic, tribal and clan divisions.⁷² In a number of contexts, such as the North Caucasus, southern Thailand and Palestine, religious motivations for violence are interwoven, even fused, with separatist aspirations and long-standing ethno-national conflicts involving Muslim communities.

Five years after the attacks on the USA that led to the launch of the ‘global war on terrorism’, understanding of the factors that have produced Islamist terrorism has advanced considerably. At the same time, this increased understanding has brought with it a growing realization that the phenomenon itself is complex, consisting of economic, social, cultural, demographic and political elements. Furthermore, the rise of Islamist violence has occurred in diverse forms in a variety of locations and continues to undergo transformation. Reflecting this better understanding, concern has mounted that a number of the key initiatives that have been launched in response to Islamist terrorist attacks have in fact been counter-productive, provoking a strengthening of the global jihadi movement. Together, these developments suggest that further change can be expected in international policies in respect to this issue.

The dominance in recent years of approaches to Islamist violence based primarily on counter-terrorism appears likely to weaken as increased efforts are made to fashion comprehensive policies that take into account the range of factors affecting the emergence and spread of extremist groups. Such initiatives will need to combine developmental, diplomatic, and political and counter-terrorism approaches within an integrated framework of measures if they are to be effective.⁷³ As recent research underlines, however, such approaches are only likely to succeed if they are employed in the context of a strategy that takes careful account of the diversity of outlooks within political Islamism and in different locations. In this regard it will be important to ensure that the appropriate balance of policies is employed in long-standing conflict environments involving Muslim communities in ethno-national struggles—for example, the North Caucasus, the Philippines, Somalia and southern Thailand—in order to prevent them from emerging as incubators for new Islamist extremist movements.⁷⁴

⁷² Rabasa, A. et al., *The Muslim World After 9/11* (RAND: Santa Monica, Calif., 2004).

⁷³ The Danish Government has been thinking along these lines with respect to its overseas aid programme. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Principles governing Danish development assistance for the fight against the new terrorism’, 4 July 2005, URL <<http://www.um.dk/en/menu/DevelopmentPolicy/DanishDevelopmentPolicy/FightagainsttheNewTerrorism/>>.

⁷⁴ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Somalia’s Islamists*, Africa Report no. 100 (12 Dec. 2005); and ICG, *Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Islamic Converts*, Asia Report no. 110 (19 Dec. 2005).

A particular area for future attention is likely to be the question of recruitment and the motivations and methods that provide the Islamist movement with a steady flow of new members from a wide variety of countries around the world. While spiritual, financial, and emotional factors have been identified as vital elements for recruitment, evidence suggests that political issues also play a role. In part, the source of such recruits appears to lie in the frustrations born from the failure of the authoritarian political regimes in the Middle East, the weaknesses of the nation state-building approach of the post-colonial era in many parts of the globe, as well as reactions to the economic and political policies pursued by the West in respect to these regions.⁷⁵

Key elements of the 'global war on terrorism' now appear to be further strengthening recruitment. This suggests that if the flow of volunteers to violent Islamist groups is to be challenged effectively, some basic aspects of Western policy will have to be resolved, notably the occupation of Iraq. Failure to secure a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians is also likely to stand in the way of efforts to challenge the growth of violent Islamist groups.

At the same time, the internal dynamics of Muslim society emerge as a key factor in both promoting and preventing extremist violence in different contexts and at different times. The events of 2005 also highlighted the increasingly transnational character of Islamist terrorism and the growing significance of the Muslim communities of Europe.⁷⁶ For this reason, new approaches to preventing Islamist violence in Africa, Asia and the Middle East are only likely to achieve success if they are coupled with renewed efforts to promote social integration within Western societies.

⁷⁵ Fuller, G. E., *The Future of Political Islam* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2004).

⁷⁶ Sendagorta, F., 'Jihad in Europe: the wider context', *Survival*, vol. 47, no. 3 (autumn 2005), pp. 63–72.