

# “CONSIDER THAT IT IS A RAID ON THE PATH OF GOD”: THE SPIRITUAL MANUAL OF THE ATTACKERS OF 9/11

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## *Summary*

The document found with three of the four cells responsible for the crimes of 9/11 is unique in providing specific information about how the Muslim suicide terrorists conceived of their action. The document shows that they found justification for violence by emulating the moment in early Islamic history when Muhammad cancelled contracts with non-Muslims and organized raids (*ghazwa*) against the Meccans in order to establish Islam as a political order. No statement in the Manual explicitly identifies the United States as the financial, military, and political center of today's paganism; rather, such identification is tacitly assumed, as was shown by the action itself. Instead, the Manual prescribes recitations, prayers and rituals by which each member of the four cells should prepare for the *ghazwa*, purify his intention and anticipate in his mind the successive stages of the struggle to come. Not the objective aim but the subjective intention is at the center of the Manual. The article places this type of justification of violence in the history of Islamic activism since the 1980s.

On September 28, 2001, the FBI distributed at a Press conference four pages of an Arabic document, and also published it on its website, where it can still be found today.<sup>1</sup> The headline is spectacular: “Hijacking letter Found at three Locations.” Beneath the four pages of Arabic text the website displays three photos, surrounded by information about the hijackers, their flights and the places where the documents were found. Muhammad Atta is connected with the American Airlines flight 11 that crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:45; underneath his photo the FBI informs: “Found in Atta's suitcase.” The next photo shows Nawaf al-Hazmi; the text connects him with American Airlines #77, which crashed 9:39 into the Pentagon,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fbi.gov/pressrel/pressrel01/letter.htm>.

and the document is described as, “Found in Vehicle at Dulles International Airport.” Finally, a photo of the crash site of United Airlines #93 at Stony Creek Township is accompanied by the remark, “Found at Crime Scene.”

Despite the excitement one would expect the discovery to stir, the document was, and still is, widely ignored. Only recently a scholarly edition, with translation and an analysis of the Arabic text has been published in Germany.<sup>2</sup> Careful scholarly investigation has been rare, compared to the importance of the events. Government and scholars alike ignore the document. In this essay I would like to argue that the document is relevant for an understanding what happened and also for evaluating the military answer of the United States to the attacks.

I shall address four major issues: first, the issue of the authenticity of the document; second, the document as a Spiritual Manual turning ordinary young Muslims into warriors and martyrs; third, the social form in which the men operated; and fourth, the “War on Terrorism” in the light of the document.

### *The Authenticity of the Document*

Muhammad Atta, who navigated the first plane into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, came from Boston, where he changed planes. One piece of his luggage did not make it into his plane from Logan airport, whether by chance or not we do not know. When his suitcase was found, two documents were discovered. In a last will, written in English and laid down in 1996, Atta prescribed how his body should be handled after his death in order to prevent pollution. Much more spectacular is the handwritten Arabic text published by the FBI. It anticipates the stages of the attack and prescribes for each stage recitations of the Koran, prayers and rituals. The British journal *The Observer*, published, on September 30, an English transla-

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<sup>2</sup> Hans G. Kippenberg and Tilman Seidensticker (eds.), *Terror im Dienste Gottes: Die “Geistliche Anleitung” der Attentäter des 11. September 2001*, Frankfurt: Campus 2004.

tion of the four pages.<sup>3</sup> Another, better, translation was later made by Hassan Mneimneh for *The New York Review of Books*.<sup>4</sup>

Still on September 28, *The Washington Post* published a leading article on the discovery, “In Hijacker’s Bags, a Call to Planning, Prayer and Death.” The article spoke about five pages instead of four, and later in the same issue (page A18) published two extracts in English:

In the name of God, the most merciful, the most compassionate . . . In the name of God, of myself and of my family . . . I pray to you God to forgive me from all my sins, to allow me to glorify you in every possible way.

Remember the battle of the prophet . . . against the infidels, as he went on building the Islamic state.

Since neither extract is found in the four pages previously published, they must have been derived from the fifth page. The second quotation perfectly fits the Manual, since it conceives of the attacks in terms of the prophet Muhammad’s *ghazwa* at the time when the Islamic polity was established in Medina. But the first of the sentences elicited serious doubts about its authenticity. What pious Muslim would dare to say: “In the name of God, of myself and of my family”? Since the Arabic original of this text has never been published, and the FBI distributed the English extracts during the Press conference, a mistranslation cannot be ruled out.

As was said already, the text found in Muhammad Atta’s bag was not the only one. A second copy was found in the car used by Nawaf al-Hazmi and left at Dulles International Airport. CBS News claimed to have gotten hold of that copy, and published, on October 1, 2001, an English translation of it.<sup>5</sup> It likewise consists of four pages, and the translation agrees widely with that of Muhammad Atta’s text. All scans available on the Internet reproduce one and the same original.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.observer.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,560773,00.html](http://www.observer.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,560773,00.html).

<sup>4</sup> Hassan Mneimneh, “Appendix,” in Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein (eds.), *Striking Terror: America’s New War*, New York: New York Review of Books 2002, 319–27.

<sup>5</sup> “Translated Text: Hijackers’ How-To” (cbsnews October 1, 2001). It can be found under [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com) when entering the title of the article in the “search” box.

Perhaps the CBS journalist misunderstood the law enforcement agents when they distributed copies during the Press Conference. The remnants of the third copy have not been published either.

The document and all information about it derive from US Secret Service sources — a fact that has given rise to speculations about a forgery. It is worthwhile to note, therefore, that independent evidence exists about the Manual of the hijackers. It derives from the reporter for al-Jazeera, Yosri Fouda, who under conspiratorial circumstances met Ramzi Binalshibh in Karachi. Binalshibh acted as the intermediary between the Hamburg group and the chief of the military committee of al-Qa'ida, Khalid Sheikh Muhammad. Fouda did an extensive interview with him and was told how the attacks were prepared.<sup>6</sup> Binalshibh showed him a suitcase with “souvenirs” from his stay in Hamburg, among them a booklet containing handwritten notes in the margin by Muhammad Atta. Since the handwriting differed from that of the document published by the FBI,<sup>7</sup> Binalshibh explained to Fouda that the manuscript in Atta's luggage had been written by Abdul Aziz al-Omari, who was highly respected in the group for his profound knowledge of Islam and his beautiful handwriting.<sup>8</sup>

Though the find was spectacular, the document had no major impact on the examination of the events and was widely ignored. What are the reasons for that? Immediately after its release, the well-known Middle East scholar Robert Fisk drew attention to statements in the document he found suspicious in the mouth of a Muslim. “What Muslim would write: ‘The time of fun and waste is gone’?” he asked in *The Independent* September 29, 2001. As additional evidence he cited the expressions “100 per cent” and “optimistic,” too modern for Arabic theological language. Fisk, who at that time had seen only the English translation, drew a cautious conclusion about possible Christian trans-

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<sup>6</sup> Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror: The Truth behind the most Devastating Terrorist Attack the World has ever Seen*, Edinburgh: Main Stream 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Fouda called the document a “Manual for a Raid.”

<sup>8</sup> See Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, 115, 158.

lators: “The translation, as it stands, suggests an almost Christian view of what the hijackers might have felt.”<sup>9</sup>

Fisk’s remarks gained weight in conjunction with conspiracy theories that started circulating soon after the events. Michael Barkun who had studied the American culture of conspiracy for many years, found it easy to link certain explanations of the events and of the reaction of the US government to long established types of conspiracy. He pointed to certain American groups that did not attribute the attacks to Usama bin Ladin and his organization, but to the interest of the US government of restricting the freedom of the citizens under the pretext of counterterrorism.<sup>10</sup> Other conspiracy theories originated outside the United States. Rumors swept across the Muslim world that the attacks had been perpetrated by the Secret Service of Israel and that four thousand Jews who normally worked in the WTC did not show up for work on September 11 because they had been tipped off by Mossad.<sup>11</sup> All these political conspiracy theories assume that the text is a forgery, fabricated either by the FBI or by Mossad.

Forgery is a common phenomenon in the history of religions. Well-known documents are ascribed to authorities that cannot have written them. The fifth book of Moses and the book of Daniel were not composed in the time they pretend, but much later. In these and other instances the suspicion of forgery has been substantiated by scholarly inquiry. Only after careful investigation and discussion could the suspicion become a plausible thesis. In the case of our document it is the other way around. No serious attempts have been made to prove the

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Fisk, “What Muslim would write: ‘The time of fun and waste is gone’?” *The Independent* September 29, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Berkeley: University of California 2003, ch. 10, “September 11: The Aftermath,” 158–69; other political conspiracy narratives are told by Malise Ruthven, *A Fury for God: The Islamist Attack on America*, London: Granada 2002, 294–98.

<sup>11</sup> John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, Oxford: UP 2002, 74. The Anti-Defamation League rejected these rumours: “Unraveling Anti-Semitic 9/11 Conspiracy Theories,” available on its website (<http://www.adl.org>).

suspicion. Crucial issues are not clarified. Who would be responsible for the forgery? What could be the purpose of it? Who used the document, and for what aim? Since no answers are given to these questions, the notion of a forgery is without any scholarly value. But the popularity of the suspicion has certainly contributed to the disappearance of the document from the scholarly and public debates about 9/11.

Despite all the doubts and uncertainties, qualified attempts have been made to take the document seriously. Hassan Mneimneh and Kanan Makiya published in January 2002, in *The New York Review of Books*, an examination of the “Manual for a ‘Raid,’” followed by the translation mentioned above.<sup>12</sup> The authors explained the contents of the document in terms of Islamic literature, theology and history. In December 2002, the Martin-Marty-Center of the University of Chicago, a research institution for the study of religions, started on its website a debate about the document. Bruce Lincoln, following up on Mneimneh and Makiya, tried to specify the worldview of the perpetrators by pointing to the Egyptian intellectual Sayyid Qutb, a spokesman of the militant wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in the sixties.<sup>13</sup> Sayyid Qutb denounced the Westernization of Egypt’s culture and society as a new paganism, a new era of ignorance (*jahiliyya*). He called upon the faithful Muslim to do the same as the prophet had once done: to fight to overthrow the power of paganism together with a few dedicated men. Sayyid Qutb paid for his subversive version of Islam with his life and was executed by the Egyptian government in 1966.<sup>14</sup> Bruce Lawrence and Mark Juergensmeyer also joined the

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<sup>12</sup> See note 4. Hassan Mneimneh and Kanan Makiya, “Manual for a ‘Raid,’” *New York Review of Books* January 17, 2002 (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15106>); repr. in Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein (eds.), *Striking Terror: America’s New War*, New York: New York Review of Books 2002, 301–18.

<sup>13</sup> See also Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terror: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, Chicago: UP 2003, ch. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Yvonne Y. Haddad, “Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival,” in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, New York and Oxford: UP 1983, 67–98; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, New Haven and London: Yale UP 1990, 2nd ed., 21–28. The concept of a modern *jahiliyya* derives from the Pakistan theorist Abu ’l-A‘la Mawdudi.

debate on the Chicago website and by and large supported Lincoln's approach.<sup>15</sup> Good reasons exist, therefore, to be less concerned with the possibility of a forgery than with missing a unique opportunity to reconstruct the meaning the attackers attributed to their crime.

*A Spiritual Manual Turning Young Muslims into Warriors and Martyrs*

The author of the manual was certainly not a well-educated Islamic cleric. This is clear from the sixth instruction:

You should know that the best invocation is the recitation of the Holy Koran, by the consensus of scholars, *as far as I know* (italics HGK). It suffices for us that it is the word of the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, toward whom you are heading. (I, 6)

The words "as far as I know" suggest a layman as author. In Islam clerics are legal experts, while sermons are often delivered by laypersons. Muhammad Atta may have been the author of the Manual. There is an additional reason for that assumption: the internal hierarchy in and between the four groups. He probably was the head of the four groups, as will turn out later. But according to Fouda, al-Omari was the writer.

If the document was a manual placed in the hands of three out of four groups, it enables us to reconstruct the subjective meaning of the violent action. The concept of 'subjective meaning' derives from Max Weber, who distinguished it strictly from that of individual motives.<sup>16</sup> The motivation of a man to commit a crime at the expense of his life is something different from the meaning he attributes to his deed. Motives must be analyzed in terms of biography (personal emotions, experiences and reflections), subjective meanings in terms of cultural and religious categories. Subjective meanings are not invented *ad hoc*, but are derived from a stock of worldviews and

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<sup>15</sup> <http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/webforum/122002/commentary.shtml>.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hans G. Kippenberg, "Religious Communities Providing Meaning in Social Interactions: The Section 'Sociology of Religion' in Max Weber's *Economy and Society*," in Charles Camic, Phil Gorski, and David Trubek (eds.), *Economy and Society: Max Weber in 2000*, Stanford: UP, forthcoming.

ethical principles that are available in culture and religion. In this section I would like to examine the subjective meaning in this Weberian sense.

The manual conceived of the deed as *jihad/ghazwa*.<sup>17</sup> In Islam to wage a war for the sake of God has a long history. Since early times it was considered a duty for every male believer. When state officials announced a war against infidels and mobilized their armies, the individual Muslim believer was expected to serve in the armed forces. But there existed a stronger version of this duty. A Muslim could prove the sincerity of his faith by participating in a war against the infidels, provided he did so voluntarily. The saying of the Prophet that the monasticism of his community consists in the *jihad* is more than an anti-Christian polemic. It establishes in Islam a positive connection between asceticism and the war against infidels.<sup>18</sup> In the classical Islamic texts the sincere Islamic fighter prepared for war by world denial, exclaiming eulogies of God, reciting from the Koran, performing prayers, saying *dhikr*, and fasting.<sup>19</sup> Albrecht Noth, who painstakingly has studied the relation between ascetic practices and war against the infidels in the classical Arabic literature, drew the conclusion that, “in Islam the struggle against the infidels was regarded and proclaimed as a kind of worship.”<sup>20</sup>

### A Mutual Pledge to Die and a Renewal of Intent

The Spiritual Manual divided the *ghazwa* into three stages: the Night before, on the airport, in the plane. Not the violent act in itself,

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<sup>17</sup> The jihadists conceived of their attack as a *ghazwa*, a raid. Members of al-Qa’ida called it “the Manhattan *ghazwa*,” “the two *ghazwas* from Washington and New York,” or “the Operation Holy Tuesday” (Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, 108, 121 n. 11).

<sup>18</sup> Albrecht Noth, *Heiliger Krieg und Heiliger Kampf im Islam und Christentum: Beiträge zur Vorgeschichte und Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*, Bonn: Röhrscheid 1966, 52–53.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 55–56.

<sup>20</sup> “. . . im Islam [wurde] der Kampf gegen die Ungläubigen als eine Möglichkeit des ‘Gottesdienstes’ angesehen und proklamiert” (*ibid.* 61).



but the way in which it should be enacted stands at the centre of the Manual. It opens with the words: “Mutual pledge (*bai‘a*) to die and renewal of intent.” *Bai‘a* signified in the history of Islamic community formation a solemn act by which faithful Muslims declared their allegiance towards each other and towards their leader.<sup>21</sup> Sufi associations of young men, the *futuwwa*, were based on the same practice.<sup>22</sup> In modern times, the Egyptian Muslim Brothers adopted the principle and admitted new members by an “oath of brotherhood” (*bai‘at al-ukhuwwa*).<sup>23</sup> This practice spread among militant groups at the fringe of the Brothers. The author of the infamous writing *The Neglected Duty*, that formulated the creed of the assassins of President Sadat (1981), Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj (1954–1982) raised the question whether an “oath of allegiance to fight until death” was restricted to the Prophet alone or could also be given to other commanders than the Prophet. Faraj argued that it could (§§ 95–97).<sup>24</sup> The opening of Manual implies that the participants in the 9/11 operation had joined the al-Qa‘ida network by a solemn oath of loyalty given to Usama bin Ladin and his community.<sup>25</sup>

Probably all combatants knew the Manual and prepared for their action by reading it or listening to it. Since the Manual indicated “airport” and “plane” by abbreviations, one may wonder whether all the

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<sup>21</sup> Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, Princeton: UP 1980, 50–54.

<sup>22</sup> Franz Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam: Texte zur Geschichte der Futuwwa*, Zürich: Artemis 1979, 97 and 159.

<sup>23</sup> Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Oxford: UP 1969, 196; “The Muslim Brotherhood tradition in Egypt had not, unlike the Salafis, entirely rejected Sufi ideas” (J. Cole: “Al-Qaeda’s Domsday Document and Psychological Manipulation,” <http://www.juancole.com/essays/qaeda>).

<sup>24</sup> Johannes J. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat’s Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East*, New York: Macmillan 1986, 24, 204; Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 196.

<sup>25</sup> For a reconstruction of the three stages of joining al-Qa‘ida, see Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004, 99–135; on pp. 120–21 he deals with “Formal Acceptance.”

young men actually knew in advance all the technical details of the operation. The abbreviations were certainly also done for reasons of security, in case the documents came in wrong hands. According to an interview given by Usama bin Ladin, the “muscle hijackers” from Saudi-Arabia, who had joined the pilots in order to control flight-deck and cabin, did not know all the details, though the Manual left them in no doubt that they were embarking on a suicidal mission.<sup>26</sup> Only the four pilots, three of them from the Hamburg group, knew all the details.

The faithful fighters are making a “renewal of intent.” In Islamic law, “intent” (*niyya*) is a fundamental category. “An act of worship without *niyya* is invalid, and so is *niyya* without act.”<sup>27</sup> But what does that mean in the case of a *ghazwa*? Later the Manual refers to Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, as a model for how to prepare for a fight:

In one of the early battles in 627 Ali ibn Abi Talib had a duel with a disbeliever, who suddenly spit upon him. After that insult Ali put down his sword. Only later he killed him. After the battle the companions asked him why he had waited before striking him. Ali answered: “When he spit on me, I feared that if I were to strike him, it would be out of vengeance. So I held my sword.” (III, 16–17)

The manual proceeds: “When he became sure of his intention, he struck and killed him,” and draws the lesson: “One has to be sure, that the action is for the sake of God alone” (III, 18). A desire for personal vengeance threatens the correct intention. Only when the intention is purified from all personal emotions, can a violent reac-

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<sup>26</sup> Usama Bin Ladin stated in a TV interview: “The brothers who conducted the operation, all they knew was that they have a martyrdom operation and we asked each of them to go to America but they didn’t know anything about the operation, not even one letter. But they were trained and we did not reveal the operation to them until they are there and just before they boarded the planes” (quoted by Mneimneh and Makiya in Silvers and Epstein, *Striking Terror*, 303–4 n. 2).

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1964, 116.

tion to an injury be turned into a sacred deed. This is the reason that the attack of 9/11 was preceded by and embedded in a rich sequence of rituals, recitations and prayers.

We encounter a similar understanding of violence in *The Neglected Duty*. According to Faraj, *jihad* has three aspects: struggling against ones own soul, against the Devil, and against the infidels and hypocrites. These three dimensions cannot be separated as independent successive stages, as some believe. They all are part and parcel of one and the same action (§ 88).<sup>28</sup> It is tempting to suggest that Faraj's three dimensions concur with the tripartite division of the action in the Spiritual Manual that divides the *ghazwa* in three parts: the struggle with ones own soul takes place during the night before, the mental struggle with the satanic forces at the airport, and the external fight against the infidels inside the aircraft.

#### The Last Night: Nocturnal Recitations, Prayers and Purifications, Turning a Young Muslim into a Warrior

The Manual admonished the young Muslims to prepare the night before their bodies and their souls for the *ghazwa*. 15 exercises are prescribed, from a recapitulation of the plan to recitals, prayers, meditations and purifications. The Arabic word for recital, *dhikr*, carries the broad meaning of remembering. The choice of Suras 8 and 9 to be remembered is highly significant. Both originated at the time when Muhammad had left Mecca, had begun establishing an Islamic state in Medina, and had gone to war against the Meccans. Muhammad the persecuted prophet turned into Muhammad the statesman.<sup>29</sup> Muhammad cancelled all former contracts with non-Muslims (Koran 9:1) and called upon his followers to attack them and kill them wherever they could find them (the so-called Sword Verse, Koran 9:5).

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<sup>28</sup> Since *jihad* is an individual duty similar to prayer and fasting, a young man need not ask his parents for permission (§ 87) (cf. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*, 22, 200).

<sup>29</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, Oxford: UP 1961, 102–26.

The Prophet himself had ordered the Sura to be recited before the raid (*ghazwa*). Rich booty was to be the reward.<sup>30</sup>

In Medina the relationship between Muhammad and the infidels changed fundamentally. While during the years in Mecca kindness and tact in propagating the message was practiced, now warfare for the sake of an Islamic polity was demanded. This shift from tolerance to militancy is a major issue in Islamic theology. At the heart of the issue is the Sword Verse, 9:5:

And when the sacred months are over, kill the polytheists wherever you find them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem [of war]; but if they repent, establish regular prayers, and pay *zakat* then open the way for them, for God is the dispenser of mercy.

A majority of Islamic clerics assume that the Sword Verse has replaced the older, more tolerant revelations, on the basis of the principle of Koran 2:106: “Any sign (or verse) which We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or a similar one.” But not all Islamic clerics understand the verse that way.<sup>31</sup> Abdullah Ahmed An-Na’im, e.g., openly rejects the idea of a literal abrogation (*naskh*) of earlier Suras.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The second excerpt of the fifth page of the document referred to that idea. The attackers should remember the battle of the prophet against the infidels when he set out to build the Islamic state.

<sup>31</sup> M. Ruthven deals with this crucial issue (*A Fury for God*, 42, 47–52) and points to the possibility of a misunderstanding of the sentence: not earlier revelations to Muhammad are superseded, but the former revelations to Jews and Christians. Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni ‘usul al-fiqh,’* Cambridge: UP 1997, deals with the different opinions of jurists regarding abrogation (68–74).

<sup>32</sup> An-Na’im relies on the authority of the Sudanese scholar Mahmud Muhammad Taha, who discerned two stages of the message of Islam, one belonging to the early Mecca period, the other to the subsequent Medina stage. Taha maintained that the earlier message was in fact the eternal and fundamental one; it emphasized the inherent dignity of all human beings, regardless of gender, religious belief, race, and so forth. When that message was violently rejected by the people of Mecca, the more realistic message of Medina was implemented. But the suspended aspects of the

After the recital of the Suras, Sufi practices of self-conditioning are recommended. Juan Cole has examined the psychology of the document and noted remarkable agreements with spiritual techniques among Sufis and Muslim Brothers.<sup>33</sup>

Reminding the self to listen and obey that night. You will face decisive situations which require listening and obeying 100%. You should therefore tame your self, make it understand, convince it, and incite it to action. (I, 4)

“The carnal self is the enemy of the vow to die, selfishly seeking to hang on to life,” J. Cole explains. The young man shall pray in the middle of the night for facilitating matters and for covering (I, 5), recite the Koran (I, 6) and purify his heart. Here we encounter the sentences Robert Fisk regarded as spurious: “The time for amusement is gone”; “We have wasted so much time in our life” (I, 7). But in this context these statements are anything but unexpected. The instruction employs a religious language of world denial, something which is also known in Islam. Then follow the instructions: the Muslim warrior should be optimistic; marriage is ahead (I, 8). If he faces difficulties, they are God’s trial in order to raise his status (I, 9). He can put all his trust in God. With the permission of God, even a tiny group can defeat a big one (I, 10). After more prayers (I, 11) some practical advises are given, including the gruesome sharpening of the sacrificial knife and the proper clothing (I, 12–14). Morning prayers and a ritual ablution mark the end of the first stage (I, 15).

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Mecca message were not abrogated in principle. They were only postponed for implementation under appropriate circumstances in the future. Under the present circumstances the development of Islamic law should return from the Medina stage back to the Mecca stage. By historicizing Muhammad’s revelations Taha and An-Na’im envision an Islamic order that incorporates women and non-Muslims on equal terms. The approach is similar to what happened in modern Jewish and Christian theology (Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law*, Syracuse, NY: UP 1990, 52–60).

<sup>33</sup> In his article cited above (n. 23) Cole translates the word *tanbih* by “admonition,” in the sense of an admonition of the “base self” (*al-nafs*).

This spiritual preparation is part of the imminent attack. The recitals, prayers, and purifications made by the attackers transform them into warriors and martyrs of an ideal past. Their deeds are re-enactments of events that took place in the formative period when Muhammad established Islam as an autonomous political body in Medina in the years after the *hijra*. But the spiritual exercises also serve as a ritual of status elevation. In almost all societies rituals may invalidate binding moral norms based on temporary, local, and social criteria. In times of war, rituals are needed to entitle men to kill, otherwise their actions would not be clearly distinguished from crimes.<sup>34</sup> The first part of the Spiritual Manual contains such a ritual of status elevation. The young man is removed from everyday legal norms and is turned into a warrior-hero beyond the law; the people in the plane and the buildings are transformed into infidels deserving God's punishment.

#### At the Airport: A Hidden Soldier Sent by the Ultimate Power

The second "stage" anticipates the situation at the airport. The main theme of the unit is the protection the warrior enjoys in a world ruled by satanic powers:

Wherever you go and whatever you do, you have to persist in invocation and supplication. For God is with his believing servants, protecting them, facilitating their tasks, granting them success, enabling them, providing them with victory, and everything. (II, 17)

The warrior can remain calm; the angels will protect him even if he does not notice it. Crucial for how to deal with the situation in the airport is the instruction to recite the supplication, "God is stronger than all his creation," and to pray to God that the enemies will be

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<sup>34</sup> Bruce Lincoln, "War and Warriors," in *Enc. Religion*, 15:339–44; Hans-Peter Hasenfratz, "Krieg und Frieden in archaischen Gemeinschaften," in Fritz Stolz (ed.), *Religion zu Krieg und Frieden*, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag 1986, 13–29, at 20; Jörg Rüpke, "You Shall not Kill: Hierarchies of Norms in Ancient Rome," *Numen* 39 (1992) 58–79; Heinrich von Stietencron and Jörg Rüpke (ed.), *Töten im Krieg*, Freiburg and Munich: Alber 1995, indices s.v. Rite, Ritual, Ritualisierung.

unable to recognize him so that he remains undetected (II, 3). “All their equipment, and all their gates and all their technology do not do benefit or harm, except with the permission of God” (II, 7). Only the friends of Satan are afraid of that technology. “Fear is a great act of worship, that only can be offered to God” (II, 8; cf. II, 10). While the friends of Satan are impressed by “the civilization of the West,” the true believer fears God alone (II, 9). Unnoticed by others, the believer is repeating, “There is no God except Allah” (*lā ilāha illā 'llāh*) (II, 11). The Prophet himself has indicated the tremendous power of these words: “Whoever says: ‘There is no God except Allah,’ enters paradise.” “If the seven earths and skies are placed on one scale and ‘There is no God except Allah’ on the other scale, then the scale of ‘There is no God except Allah’ weights the other down” (II, 12).

The manual specifies the enemy only here, nowhere else: It is “Western Civilization” and the fear it inspires in people. The correct fear constitutes the difference between the true believer and the ignorant infidel. “Fear is a great act of worship.” By inciting fear in the friends of the Western civilization, the warrior gives a practical proof of the existence of a power much greater than Western civilization. The traditional notion of God’s absolute power no longer has a metaphysical mooring only, but has been turned into a practice of the believers.

Closely connected with this construction of the superiority of the Muslim warrior is his concealment. The soldier of the ultimate power remains unrecognized in the realm of evil powers. Protection is achieved by the practice of dissimulation. In a world of lies the true believer has to deceive the unbelievers as to his true identity. But his concealment is not his achievement alone. The believer is praying for it (I, 5); it is God who makes it effective. Only He knows his servant. The success of his concealment is proof of his being elected.

The principle of dissimulation has a long prehistory. It was practiced already by the ancient Gnostics, who regarded the material world as created by an inferior evil god. This evil power, ignorant of the existence of a superior God, was also unable to recognize the true God’s servants. Concealing their identity was part of the faith of the Gnostics.

This principle was later adopted by Shi'is, who repeatedly suffered persecution and made dissimulation a theological tenet.<sup>35</sup> Modern Shi'i theologians revised that dogma by emphasizing that the practice depended on the stage reached by the struggle for an Islamic order. They understood the notion more strategically, as Sunnis have long done. On the other hand certain Sunnis have adopted the Shi'i appreciation for secrecy,<sup>36</sup> as the Manual shows. This practice may also explain why some of the attackers lived a Western lifestyle, shaved their beards and drank alcohol.<sup>37</sup>

### In the Plane: A Martyr on the Path of God

Finally, the third stage of the action: the violence. Unnoticed, the hero has entered the plane, faintly reciting Koran and prayers. Now the issue of martyrdom becomes central. "Ask God to grant you martyrdom while you are on the attack, not in retreat, with perseverance and awareness" (II, 9). Martyrdom, too, is not an achievement by the believer, but something granted by God.<sup>38</sup> Prayer is needed to obtain it. But the willingness to sacrifice one's life is necessary.

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<sup>35</sup> Hans G. Kippenberg, "Die Verheimlichung der wahren Identität vor der Außenwelt in der antiken und islamischen Religionsgeschichte," in Jan Assmann (ed.), *Die Erfindung des inneren Menschen: Studien zur religiösen Anthropologie*, Gütersloh: Mohn 1993, 183–98. Fundamental studies: Ignaz Goldziher, "Das Prinzip der takijja im Islam" (1906), in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, Hildesheim: Olms 1970, 59–72; for the link to ancient religions see Heinz Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und die Alawiten*, Zürich: Artemis 1982; Etan Kohlberg, "Taqiyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion," in: Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, Leiden: Brill 1995, 345–80; Strothmann/Djebli, "Taqiyya," *Enc. Islam*, 2nd ed., 10:134–36.

<sup>36</sup> Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon*, London: Tauris 1986, 215; Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam*. Oxford: UP 1988, 112–14.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, M. Ruthven, *A Fury for God*, 300.

<sup>38</sup> There is a tension between martyrdom as one's own deed and martyrdom as bestowed by God; cf. Ivan Strenski, "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim 'Human Bombers,'" in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15 (2003) 1–34, at 12–13; Mneimneh and Makiya in Silvers and Epstein, *Striking Terror*, 317.



Upon the confrontation, hit as would hit heroes who desire not to return to the World, and loudly shout *Allahu akbar* (“God is greater”), since the proclamation of the name of God instills terror in the heart of the nonbelievers. God has said: “Smite them above the necks, and smite off all their fingertips.” (III, 11)

The quotation envisions the attack in terms of the militant Medina scenario of Sura 8. The re-enactment of the sacred action ensures the warrior a superior reward: a wedding with the heavenly brides.

Know that the Heavens have raised their most beautiful decoration for you, and that your heavenly brides are calling you: “Come oh follower of God,” while wearing their most beautiful jewelry. (III, 12)

The topic of the wedding of the martyr with the heavenly brides intensifies the feeling of inconceivability that befalls Western observers regarding Muslim concepts of martyrdom. Malise Ruthven has tried to open a path to an understanding: al-Ghazali (died 1111 CE), he reminds us, saw the sexual imagery of Paradise as an inducement to righteousness. The state of spiritual fulfilment can only be described in terms of familiar experiences.<sup>39</sup>

The brute violence in the plane is seen as a re-enactment of the Medina *ghazwas*. The attackers should be happy to perform it. The killing is a sacrifice, offered for the sake of the parents (III, 13). In accordance with the custom of the Prophet, some form of symbolic booty should be taken from the killed, e.g., a cup or a glass of water, if possible (III, 14; cf. 24). No action is to be performed out of a desire for vengeance, in accordance with the model of Ali ibn Abi Talib (III, 16–18). The capture and killing of the prisoners are prescribed by the custom (*sunna*) of the Prophet (III, 19). When all goes as it was planned, the brothers are to congratulate each other (III, 20–21).

When the end draws close, it is recommended to cite some Koranic or poetic verses regarding the eternal life of the martyrs:

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<sup>39</sup> *A Fury for God*, 102. At this point the framework of comparison should be expanded. The Christian appreciation for ascetic abstention as one of the highest religious values remained alien to Islam. Accordingly, the cultural category of the person in Islam lacks the critical ability to subordinate all natural desires to the reason of the agent — an ability that dominates even the post-Christian Western concept of person. A broader cultural analysis of the wedding topic is desirable.

When the moment of truth comes near, and zero hour is upon you, open your chest welcoming death on the path of God. Always remember to conclude with the prayer, if possible, starting it seconds before the target, or let your last words be: "There is none worthy of worship but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God." After that, God willing, the meeting is in the Highest Paradise, in the company of God. (III, 25–27)

The pedantic emulation of the custom of the Prophet may be seen as answering scruples. We know already from Lebanon in the eighties that forms of fighting that implied suicide caused serious scruples, since according to the accepted theological view suicide was a grave sin, and a person who committed it was doomed to Hell.<sup>40</sup> "The Muslim fighter needed answers to many questions," a Hizbollah cleric told in an interview, and went on to quote the questions that had been raised: "Is resistance to the occupation obligatory on religious grounds? What about the question of self-martyrdom?"<sup>41</sup> Some of the fighters in Lebanon solicited a *fatwa* from Ayatollah Fadlallah that would sanction this kind of attacks once and for all. Fadlallah resisted the pressure, apparently in contrast to Ayatollah Khomeini to whom such a *fatwa* is in fact ascribed.<sup>42</sup> Rumors went around that Fadlallah had blessed the suicide operations against the barracks in 1983, but he himself always denied them.<sup>43</sup> Minor clerics in Lebanon had less hesitation. "We believe that those who carried out suicide operations

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Kramer, "The Moral Logic of Hizballah," in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, Cambridge: UP 1990, 131–57, esp. 142–43, n. 24.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Kramer, "Hizbullah: The Calculus of Jihad," in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalism and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militancy* (The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 3), Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993, 539–56, at 549.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Kramer, "The Oracle of Hizbullah: Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah," in: R. Scott Appleby (ed.), *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*, Chicago: UP 1997, 83–181, at 112, information about Khomeini's *fatwa*.

<sup>43</sup> Kramer, "The Moral Logic of Hizballah," 142–49; Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1997, 42.

against the enemy are indeed in Paradise,” a director of an Islamic institute in Tyre stated in an interview.<sup>44</sup> There are reasons to assume that some kind of — at least tacit — approval by religious authorities or communities was necessary to turn a suicide into self-martyrdom.<sup>45</sup> After the attacks of September 11, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* asked Ayatollah Fadlallah whether the attackers died as martyrs or not. His answer was surprisingly clear. “No,” he said, “they were not killed in a Jihad, a ‘Holy War.’ They simply committed suicide.”<sup>46</sup>

### The Subjective Meaning of the Attacks: Enforcing the Fear of God

The subjective meaning attributed to the violence in the Manual also had precursors in the Lebanon of the eighties. The United States and France had left Lebanon after terrifying suicidal attacks had been carried out on the barracks of their troops in October 1983. Some years later Israel followed. The withdrawal of these powers contributed tremendously to a high esteem of suicidal attacks in the Middle East. No one ever imagined or could imagine that a few dedicated Muslims could drive out the technologically superior American, French and Israeli troops from Lebanon. Yet they did. This success had an impact on Islamic theology. The leader of the Shi‘i community in Lebanon, Ayatollah Fadlallah, praised the actions against military targets as a “rebellion against fear.” Martin Kramer summarized his words as follows:

The great [Western] powers inspire “alarm and fear” among the oppressed, who have no more than “children’s toys” to mount their opposition. But by conquering their fear, through acceptance of the virtue of martyrdom, the oppressed can evoke alarm and fear among the oppressors. America and West, recalls one Hizbollah leader [i.e., Sadiq al-Musawi], “hurriedly ran away from three Muslims who loved martyrdom” and sacrificed themselves in suicidal attacks.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kramer, “The Moral Logic of Hizballah,” 147.

<sup>45</sup> See Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, London: Victor Gollancz 1998: chapter on “Religion and Terrorism.”

<sup>46</sup> *Der Spiegel* 42/2001.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Kramer, *Hezbollah’s Vision of the West*, Washington: Institute for Near East Policy 1989 (Policy Papers, 16), 37–39, quotation on p. 39.

The global arrogance of the West represents a global unbelief, as also Fadlallah in an interview argued.<sup>48</sup> The power of the faithful consists in his ability to overcome the natural fear of death and to make the arrogant Western civilisation tremble. The battle cry *Allahu akbar*, which also resounded in the plane, expresses that aspiration.<sup>49</sup> Just as the Prophet, with only few followers, was able to defeat the superior armies of the *jahiliyya*, so the faithful Muslim today is able to humiliate Western civilization by means of its own panic. By fearing God more than all other powers and acting accordingly, a faithful Muslim can spread terror among the unbelievers. Usama bin Ladin's declaration of war of 1996 opened with three quotations from the Koran, placing the fear of God (*taqwa*) in the centre of the faith.<sup>50</sup>

The Manual convinced the fighters in the plane that they were serving God with their actions. He would assist them as they sacrificed their lives in attacking the citadels of contemporary paganism: the economic power residing in the towers of the World Trade Centre, the military base at the Pentagon, and the political centre at the Capitol.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Social Form of the Attacking Teams: Usar (Families) and Ashira (Clan)*

The attacks of September 11 were committed by groups that understood themselves as communities re-enacting the struggle for an Islamic

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<sup>48</sup> "11 September, Terrorism, Islam, and the Intifada" (interview with Shaikh Muhammad Husain Fadlallah), in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 31 (2002) 78–84, at 83.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Scheffler, "'Allahu Akbar': Zur Theologie des Widerstandsgeistes im Islam," in André Stanislavjević and Ralf Zwengel (eds.), *Religion und Gewalt: Der Islam nach dem 11. September*, Potsdam: Mostar Friedensprojekt e.V. 2002, 21–46.

<sup>50</sup> Scheffler, "Allahu akbar," 31–32; the unabridged document in an English translation is published by Yonah Alexander and Michael S. Setnam, *Usama bin Ladin's al-Qaida: Profile of a Terrorist Network*, New Delhi: Aditya Books 2001, Appendix 1 A. About Usama's declaration of war and its context: Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, New York: Free Press 2001, ch. 5.

<sup>51</sup> We know from Fouda's interview with Binalshibh that the Capitol and not the White House was the target of the plane that crashed prematurely in Pennsylvania (Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, 127, 157–58).

state. Regarding this social form, again a closer look at the Lebanon and the Near East in the eighties is illuminating. The group that took responsibility for the attacks on the barracks in Beirut in October 1983 called itself *Islamic Jihad (al-jihad al-islami)* and was linked to the Shi'i "Party of God," the *Hizbollah*. *Hizbollah* was a network of *ulama* with their students (*taliban*), bonded together by divergent religious, local and political loyalties.<sup>52</sup> But to describe this network as a 'party' or an 'organization' is certainly much too strong. *Hizbollah* leaders denied any direct involvement in the operations of the attackers and contended that *Islamic Jihad* was not a name of an organization, but a common designation for all kind of Islamic militant activities. The militant cells apparently operated independently of each other, only loosely connected by some person in the background, similar to a "brunch of grapes,"<sup>53</sup> or a "telephone organization."<sup>54</sup>

The decentralized structure of Islamic groups was not without precedent, as the example of the Muslim Brothers shows. In Egypt in 1943, at a time of increasing pressure by government and police, the Muslim Brothers established a flexible, controllable and "natural" form of organization, which provided the chief instrument for mobilizing and safeguarding the loyalty of its members. The "family" (*usra*) became the basic unit of the Brothers; it was limited to five members, with one of them as the head. Four of these "families" (*usar*) formed a "clan" (*ashira*), directed by one of the heads of the families.<sup>55</sup> This system spread to the Muslim Brothers in Jordan, Gaza, and Syria, where the number of members of a "family" might grow to ten.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Stephan Rosiny, *Islamismus bei den Schiiten im Libanon: Religion im Übergang von Tradition zur Moderne*, Berlin: Das arabische Buch 1996, 123–36.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Waldmann, *Terrorismus: Provokation der Macht*, München: Gerling Akademie 1998, 61–68.

<sup>54</sup> Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon*, 62–65 ("Use of Cover names and Concealment by Hizb'allah in Abduction of Foreigners").

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 32 (history), 177 (diagram of the entire organisation), 195–200 (function of the basic units).

<sup>56</sup> Denis Engelleder, *Die islamistische Bewegung in Jordanien und Palästina 1945–1989*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2002, 108–11; Johannes Reissner, *Ideologie*

Richard P. Mitchell and Denis Engelleder have examined the ideas and expectations related to that social form. The founder of the Muslim Brothers, Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949) expected from it a “recovery of the Islamic person.” The members would become familiar with each other and take mutual responsibility. To this end they should meet at least once a week to perform common religious duties, engage in establishing Islam in the personal sphere, have common meals, attend the Friday prayer, and contribute financially to a common till. The “family” was seen as a nucleus of Islam in a world ruled by non-Islamic values and norms.<sup>57</sup>

This social form, highly appropriate to Islam in general, became dominant among Muslims who understood the present age in the Islamic countries as a new period of ignorance and paganism (*jahiliyya*). A major proponent of this diagnosis was the already mentioned Sayyid Qutb. The process through which the *jahiliyya* might be driven back and an Islamic polity erected depended on the existence of small, devoted communities. The restoration of Islam required a revolution lead by a vanguard that must begin by purging its own consciousness and by sweeping away the influence of the *jahiliyya* on the souls. The transition would unfold in two stages. From a hidden source, a person would acquire faith in the Koran. When three faithful Muslims had been touched by the faith, they would form a society (*jama‘a*) of their own, separate themselves from pagan society, and become a movement (*haraka*) struggling against it. This Islamization from below, as Kepel has called the model, was not unique to the Muslim Brothers, but was independently propagated in the Islamic World by the Society for the Propagation of Islam, *jama‘at al-tabligh*, founded in India 1927. In a world and age in which a new paganism (*jahiliyya*) ruled, the faithful could preserve their faith only by forming a community

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und Politik der Muslimbrüder Syriens: Von den Wahlen 1947 bis zum Verbot unter Adib Ash-Shishakli 1952, Freiburg: Schwarz 1980, 103; Hans Günter Lobmeyer, *Opposition und Widerstand in Syrien*, Hamburg 1995 (not seen).

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 195–200; Engelleder, *Die islamistische Bewegung*, 108–11.

(*jama'a*) with others, not individually. The social form of “families” and “clans” was an integral part of a particular scenario aiming at re-establishing Islam as a moral and legal order.<sup>58</sup>

The following conclusion may be drawn from this analysis of the Manual and the social form of the attacking teams. The Manual is evidently not equivalent to a letter of confession. But that does not make it worthless for a reconstruction of the events of 9/11, as is often assumed. On the contrary! The Spiritual Manual allows us to reconstruct the subjective meaning connected to the massacre. Max Weber, who introduced the concept of subjective meaning, distinguished between the correctness of an action and its rationality. Most often the two coincide. But there are cases where the scholar must judge an action morally or cognitively incorrect while still acknowledging that the agent acted in a rational manner. For such situations Weber developed a particular approach.<sup>59</sup> The student should suspend his own moral or cognitive values and try to reconstruct the subjective meaning of the action performed. In such cases the rationality of the act is evaluated in terms of coherence.

The violence performed on 9/11 fulfills the requirement of coherence. The *ghazwa* depended on:

1. the purity of the intention of the attackers, uncontaminated by personal feelings of vengeance;
2. a meticulous re-enactment of Muhammad’s raids at the time when he founded the Islamic polity;
3. the fear of God, displayed as a readiness for self-martyrdom and for inspiring terror in the unbelievers;
4. the existence of a group of dedicated young Muslims seeing themselves as the vanguard of an Islamic order.

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<sup>58</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (French original 1984), Berkeley/Los Angeles 2003, 52–56.

<sup>59</sup> Max Weber, “Über einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie” (1913), in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann, Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1968, 3rd ed., 427–74. Eng. transl.: “Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology,” translated by E.E. Graber, *The Sociological Quarterly* 22 (1981) 151–80.

The targets of the attack on 9/11 were chosen in agreement with widespread Muslim grievances about the devastating consequences of the political, economical and military power exercised by the United States in their countries. The *Spiritual Manual* does not explicitly refer to any of the injuries Muslims allegedly or actually had been suffering at the hands of the United States. The vindication for the attack is sought elsewhere. The example of Ali demonstrates this. As the model for every person who prepares for a *ghazwa*, Ali transformed every desire for vengeance into an unemotional act of punishment. The purity of intention is crucial for the correct exercise of violence. Legitimacy is achieved by re-enacting the historical example provided by the founding of the first Islamic state in Medina.

### *The “War on Terrorism” in the Light of the Spiritual Manual*

In his book *Bush at War*, Bob Woodward reports how soon after the events the President and his aides adopted a particular understanding of what had happened, although their interpretation was not the only one possible. “They had declared war on us”; “We are at war.”<sup>60</sup> This interpretation was soon absorbed by a religious concept, which surfaced in speeches of the President, for example in President Bush’s “State of the Union” speech delivered on January 28, 2003 — after the War in Afghanistan but before the War against Iraq.<sup>61</sup>

Bush first addressed such issues as the growth of economy, affordable health care for all Americans, energy independence of the country, and charitable work done by the government nationally and internationally, before he turned to “man-made evil”: international terrorism.<sup>62</sup> There are days, he said, when the citizens hear nothing about the war on terror. But for the President, “there’s never a day when I do not learn of another threat, or give an order in this global war against a scattered network of killers.” “The threat is new; America’s

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<sup>60</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, London: Simon & Schuster 2003, 15, 17.

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/>; see January 28.

<sup>62</sup> Printed version, p. 6.



duty is familiar.” The terrorists are the successors of small groups whose ambitions of cruelty and murder in the 20th century had no limit. It is America’s mission by its might to end the terrible threats to the civilized world; America is defending a world of peace against a world of chaos. All nations are invited to join it in this war.

And yet the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others. (Applause.) Whatever action is required, whatever action is necessary, I will defend the freedom and security of the American people.<sup>63</sup>

The speech here links up with a myth that permeates American popular culture in various forms:<sup>64</sup> whether as Captain America, Rambo, Terminator, or, as in the movie *Independence Day*, as the President himself, a superhero rescues innocent people from unrestricted frightening violence. Though the plot appears to be secular, it is in fact linked to a religious interpretation of the early history of the United States. The protestant settlers, who had left Europe to escape oppression, saw their fate in terms of the Exodus narrative. They were the new chosen people that had been forced to leave their homes. Like the Biblical Israel led by Moses they had to prove their faith in the wilderness. The settlement in America took the form of a struggle against dark hostile forces. Here, the idea was born that the new community in all its actions was responsible to God alone.<sup>65</sup> The recent refusal of the US government to submit to the United Nations is in line with this conviction. George W. Bush expressed this attitude by stating that although the US was asking the free nations to join it, “the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others.” Then he added a sentence that cast the President himself in the

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<sup>63</sup> Printed version, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> The history of that myth is presented by John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2002. A year later, the authors dealt with the recent adoption of it by George W. Bush, in *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2003.

<sup>65</sup> Ulrike Brunotte, *Puritanismus und Pioniergeist: Die Faszination der Wildnis im frühen Neu-England*, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter 2000.

role of a redeemer: “Whatever action is required, whenever action is necessary, I will defend the freedom and security of the American people.”<sup>66</sup> That freedom, however, is not to be understood as America’s gift to the world: “it is God’s gift to humanity.”<sup>67</sup> According to this rhetoric, the “War on Terror” unfolds as an apocalyptic scenario.

The “State of the Union” speech supports the point of view of historians who stress the dependence of the foreign policy of a country on its culture.<sup>68</sup> In the United States, religion has to be taken into account, in particular after its “return to the public square.”<sup>69</sup> A particular brand of Protestantism, successful since the nineteenth century, deserves attention in this context. These Protestants were convinced that the Kingdom of God would not come gradually, but would be preceded by the Second Coming of Christ. While the elect would be saved immediately by “the rapture,” the Antichrist and the godless would be destroyed by fierce battles. This philosophy of history, called pre-millennialism, was and is still popular, not only in the Fundamentalist camp, but also far beyond it, as the excellent study of Paul Boyer has shown by drawing upon a host of sources.<sup>70</sup> Adherents of this belief read the violent history of the twentieth century as the fulfillment of Biblical

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<sup>66</sup> P. 6. We owe to Bruce Lincoln an analysis of the religious rhetoric of President Bush’s speeches: *Holy Terrors*, 19–32; 99–101.

<sup>67</sup> P. 9.

<sup>68</sup> Akira Iriye, “Culture and International History,” in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (eds.), *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, Cambridge: UP 1991, 214–25; Ursula Lehmkuhl, “Diplomatiegeschichte als internationale Kulturgeschichte: Theoretische Ansätze und empirische Forschung zwischen Historischer Kulturwissenschaft und Soziologischem Institutionalismus,” *Geschichte und Gegenwart* 27 (2001) 394–423.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. William Martin, “With God on Their Side: Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in Hugh Heclo and Wilfred M. McClay (eds.), *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Policy in America*, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press 2003, 327–59.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1992.

prophecies. The apocalyptic clock is ticking again; international political developments regarding Israel indicate the time on the clock. The Balfour declaration of 1917, the proclamation of Israel as a state in 1948, the recapture of the Old City of Jerusalem and the occupation of the rest of Biblical Israel in 1967 — all these occurrences were enthusiastically greeted by that brand of American Protestants. The Gulf War of 1991, finally, triggered a new wave of expectations, inspired by Saddam Hussein's plan for rebuilding ancient Babylon. There is no direct link between theology and politics. But foreign policy regarding issues in the Near East can be made plausible by rhetorically striking such religious chords. With the "War on Terrorism" a new chapter in the history of US Near East policies was opened.

In 1983, the US State Department laid down the following definition of terrorism:

Terrorism is premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.<sup>71</sup>

Since this definition determines the foreign policy of the United States, a closer look is appropriate. It turns out that the definition is too narrow and too broad at the same time. It is too narrow since it does not recognize states as responsible for acts of terror. Muslims today complain about violations of their rights perpetrated by states in such places as Palestine and Chechnya. The dialectics of "One Person's Terrorist is Another's Freedom Fighter" is suspended.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand the definition is too broad, since it does not evaluate the violence of sub-national groups in terms of moral reasons. If every kind of violence of sub-national groups against non-combatant

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted from James Sterba, "Terrorism and International Justice," in idem (ed.), *Terrorism and International Justice*, New York and Oxford: UP 2003, 206–28, at 206.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Kennedy, "Is One Person's Terrorist Another's Freedom Fighter? Western and Islamic Approaches to 'Just War' Compared," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11 (1999) 1–21.

targets is simply an evil act, whatever reasons the agents may have become politically irrelevant. The war against terrorism thus becomes a war of uncertain duration against unpredictable outbursts of violence.

Diego Gambetta has brilliantly analysed significant comments made by the secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld in June 2002 during a press conference.<sup>73</sup> Rumsfeld told the audience that he regularly reads intelligence information in order to assess the threat to the US. In the course of doing that he had found that there are things we know and there are things we know that we don't know: "known unknowns." But, he added, there are also certain things "we don't know we don't know": "unknown unknowns." In a country where many people are obsessed with the imminent rise of the Antichrist, such a formula may be more easily accepted than elsewhere. The Antichrist in the US is identical with its political enemies — today al-Qa'ida.<sup>74</sup> Needless to say, in the light of that concept, the Spiritual Manual is at best irrelevant, at worst misleading.

Nothing illustrates this point better than the recent 9/11 Commission Report. It describes the attackers in the following words:

We learned about an enemy who is sophisticated, patient, disciplined, and lethal. The enemy rallies broad support in the Arab and Muslim world by demanding redress of political grievances, but its hostility toward us and our values is limitless. Its purpose is to rid the world of religious and political pluralism, the plebiscite, and equal rights for women. It makes no distinction between military and civilian targets. *Collateral damage* is not in its lexicon.<sup>75</sup>

The report reconstructs with extreme precision the chain of events preceding the attack, but completely ignores the Spiritual Manual. The Manual required that during the last Night, all fighters should

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<sup>73</sup> Diego Gambetta, "Reason and Terror: Has 9/11 Made it Hard to Think Straight?" *Boston Review* April/May 2004 (internet version). Gambetta supplies the quotation from D. Rumsfeld.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession*, New York and Oxford: UP 1995.

<sup>75</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, New York: W.W. Norton 2004, p. xvi.

perform rituals, recitations and prayers. According to the Commission report, however, Muhammad Atta and Abdul Aziz al-Omari that night pursued “ordinary activities: making ATM withdrawals, eating pizza, and shopping at a convenience store.”<sup>76</sup> The concept of a war against evil portrays the attackers as devoid of religious faith.

### Terrorism and International Justice

A collection of articles edited by James T. Sterba under the title *Terrorism and International Justice*<sup>77</sup> envisions the possibility of a different response to 9/11. Though that alternative answer sounds like a utopia, it helps to understand the implications of the answer that was actually given. The interpretation of the violence could have been different: not as a warlike attack upon the United States, but as a crime against humanity. If that interpretation had been chosen, the culprits would have had to be prosecuted and put to trial by international organizations and courts;<sup>78</sup> the defendants would have had to declare in public why they thought they had the right to attack Americans and kill more than three thousand civilians. In a public trial for crimes against humanity the ritualistic performance of the crime would have lost all plausibility. The militant Islamic networks would have been forced to explain their stance with regard to abrogating tolerant verses in the Koran and replacing them by violent ones. All prophetic religions dispose of a store of traditions, many of which contradict each other. It is the believer who authorizes one and ignores the others. The process of selection is his responsibility. Even the choice of an ethic of conviction instead of an ethic of responsibility has to be defended in public.

An additional reason why such a public trial would have been desirable is the spreading of Islamic networks in the Middle East and

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<sup>76</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 253.

<sup>77</sup> See n. 70.

<sup>78</sup> Daniele Archibugi and Iris Maron Young, “Envisioning a Global Rule of Law,” in Sterba, *Terrorism and International Justice*, 158–70.

globally. While Europeans and Americans expect political institutions to ensure the citizens active participation in the social and political processes, in the Middle East civil society often converges with Islamic networks rather than with political institutions. In this situation the developments in the social form of Islam deserve our attention.

A public trial might also have helped to find a language that acknowledges Muslim grievances about the West without diminishing the severity of the crime committed. What we need are voices that help expanding our understanding of today's Muslims. Instead of looking upon 9/11 as an irrational massacre, we need to hear voices that counteract the temptation to ignore the conflicts from which it was born.<sup>79</sup> In this regard, a metaphor used by Ayatollah Fadlallah in his interview may be helpful:

There is no such thing as an Islamic terrorist spirit. What exists is a situation where you corner people and close off all exits, and these people then have to react in an abnormal way.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> One attempt has been made by Ted Honderich: *After the Terror*, Edinburgh: UP 2003.

<sup>80</sup> "11 September" (see n. 48), 83.