The Recovery of Radical Islam in the Wake of the Defeat of the Taliban

DAVID COOK

This article analyses the intellectual and religious processes through which radical Islam has had to confront its defeat in Afghanistan and rebuild during the period since that time, including paradigms of battle, dreams and martyrlogies and apocalyptic readings of history and current events.

The Triumphal March of Radical Islam

For the past decade and a half radical Islam has enjoyed a remarkable string of successes. Until the United States invaded Afghanistan and began its ‘war on terror’, radical Muslims could see a long list of victories and partial successes that would have made most extremist groups envious. After participating in – and taking most of the credit for – the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan (1979–89), radical Muslim regimes took control in that country in 1996; they had already assumed power in the Sudan in 1989. Radical Muslims fought with reasonable success in Kashmir, Palestine, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Somalia, Chechnya, Indonesia and the Philippines, and mounted serious opposition fronts in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and most especially in Algeria.

If none of these latter revolts were unqualified successes, they at the very least promised dividends in the indefinite future, and acquired a measure of popular support in each country for various reasons. Other movements were established with varying degrees of success in most Muslim countries, including Yemen, Nigeria, the Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as well as in the area of the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia). Only in regions where the ruling regime was sufficiently repressive that it was able to eliminate any opposition (Syria, Iraq), or where the legitimacy and/or political ability of the regime was sufficient to co-opt the movements (Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, Malaysia) have radical Muslims completely failed.

What is this movement called ‘radical Islam’? Scholars are divided on the use of this phrase; some prefer ‘fundamentalists’ (if they come from the comparative religion angle) or ‘Islamists’ (if they are influenced by...
European usage). I prefer ‘radical Islam’ because this phrase avoids several pitfalls that the other two do not. Whatever the term, most observers can agree on the characteristics of these groups in the broadest sense. Usually, proponents of radical Islam support a total and global belief system which envisions a unified Muslim state that will eventually encompass all Muslims in the world. This would be ruled by a caliph/imam who will implement the *shari'a* (the Divine Law) in its totality without regard to or dependence upon foreign influences. This messianic vision will be achieved by means of waging *jihad* against the (perceived) enemies of Islam with the purpose of defeating them as well as purifying Islam; although radicals may disagree tactically about the application of force at a given time or against a given enemy, the overall strategic vision is the same.

Radical Islam sees itself as the *sole* representative of true Islam in accordance with the historical tradition, and cultivates this image by using the term ‘Muslim’ for itself alone, and referring to all other ‘Muslims’ as either ‘infidels’ or ‘apostates’.

Radical Islam has a very triumphal and certain vision of the future. This is in accordance with the apocalyptic tradition regularly cited by radical Muslims:

> A group of my [Muhammad’s] community will continue fighting for truth, victorious over those opposing them until the last of them fights the Antichrist (in Arabic, *al-Dajjal*).

Although there is a wide range of variants to this tradition – which is frequently cited in radical Muslim literature – there are several commonalities to all of them that are important for the study of radical Islam. First and foremost, this tradition deliberately ignores most Muslims and considers them to be either of a lesser level of faith or outright apostates (*takfir*). The group that will be saved is characterized by its devotion to actively waging war, and will most probably be found in the border-regions fighting infidels. This continuous fighting is a salvific action and ensures that their pure belief will never be corrupted by the settled or secure ways of those who do not live their lives in daily peril.

Since it is apocalyptic style to direct attention toward smaller groups who can or will be responsive to the apocalyptic call, we find in the above tradition that they are merely a small ‘group’ – or in other variants a ‘remnant’ – within the total Muslim community. The tradition also promises eternal victory to this ‘group’ or ‘remnant’, and that the final action they face will be against the Antichrist at the end of the world. This latter figure is an important one, and is usually identified with either the west or the United States, or with an individual leader in one of these places. In
accordance with the classical sources, he is said to be a Jew, and will rule the entire world, subjecting it to the temptations he will manufacture. Only a small number of true believers will be able to resist him. In the end, Jesus will descend from heaven and kill him near Jerusalem. We will return later to the significance of this apocalyptic vision.

Thus, victory is of crucial importance for radical Muslims, not only because it is their only means to power, but also because it is their means of validating their unique status within the larger group of Muslims (who they regularly castigate and hold in contempt). Victory proves that God is on their side, while defeat brings doubt on the part of the faithful, and hatred on the part of those Muslims they called ‘infidels’ or ‘apostates’. For radical Muslims, therefore, the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan (during October-December 2001) was a devastating blow. Not only was one of the most devoutly and ostentatiously Muslim states (implementing the shari’a in its totality) overrun by the ‘head of infidelity’, the United States, but little time, effort or even casualties on the part of the US were required to accomplish this task.

Coming after the high watermark of the attacks of 11 September 2001, in which radical Islam finally demonstrated to the world that it was a force to be reckoned with and worthy of fighting the ‘Antichrist’ (the US), this defeat was all the more shocking. This disconfirmation and the subsequent soul-searching was expressed by the Center for Islamic Study and Research (that usually publishes Al-Qaeda’s proclamations):

When retreat followed retreat in Afghanistan on the part of the Islamic Amirate [the Taliban], and it started to lose its territories – cities and power-bases – despair began to creep among many of the [radical] Muslims, and feelings of impending defeat and the end of the mujahidin there began to overtake them. During the course of these feelings, mutterings began here and there that the mujahidin had made a mistake in their calculations, and that they were taken by surprise by something they had not expected, and that they had been overhasty, and forced themselves into an unequal conflict.

This article will explore the intellectual and religious means by which radical Islam has recovered after this defeat and the subsequent disillusionment on the part of many of its supporters and sympathizers.

Paradigms of Conflict and Presentations of Enemies

Radical Islam has, over the past 30 years, constructed a number of paradigms for the conflicts in which it has engaged. Many of these are local in nature, directed against the particular government or opponent a
given group has chosen for itself. We will focus upon those groups (Al-Qaeda and its supporters) that are, rather, pan-Islamic, apocalyptic and global in their vision of jihad. During the period leading up to the attacks of 11 September, pan-Islamic radicals defined their enemies according to several different models. It should be noted that all of these models are drawn either from the Qur’an or from the different major battles and conflicts of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632). Therefore, some historical introduction is required.

The Prophet Muhammad’s career is divided into two distinct segments: the period during which he preached in his birth-town of Mecca (approx. 610–22) and the period during which he preached, raided and ruled from his secondary, emigration point of Medina (622–32). Radical Muslims who are quietist in nature (such as the Egyptian group Takfir wa-Hijra) usually define themselves in terms of the earlier period of the Prophet’s life, which was characterized by lonely proclamation, few converts, general opposition and persecution (but no permission from God to fight back in response). On the other hand, radical Muslims fighting the jihad oftentimes define themselves in terms of the Medinan period of the Prophet Muhammad’s ministry, which was characterized by a much more activist role. Muhammad is said to have fought five major campaigns: Badr (624), Uhud (625), the Khandaq (627), the taking of Mecca (630) and Hunayn (630), together with approximately 60 other comparatively minor raids against Bedouin tribesmen. This extensive military history gives radical Muslims a plethora of paradigms upon which to draw.

These campaigns were a mixed bag. Badr was an unqualified success, but the Prophet lacked the strength to follow up on it, Uhud was a defeat, the Khandaq was a draw, which Muhammad managed to turn into a victory by consolidating his position in Medina (which hitherto had been based upon undependable elements), the taking of Mecca was a victory, and Hunayn was a very narrow and somewhat Pyrrhic victory. Contemporary radical Muslims focus upon the battles of the Khandaq and Uhud for their paradigms, so we shall examine them more closely.

The Battle of the Khandaq was the turning point in the Prophet Muhammad’s career; after it he gained the initiative and went from strength to strength until the Muslims became dominant in the Arabian Peninsula at the time of his death (632). For the Muslims, this battle was actually a waiting process; their opponents had gathered a large coalition (called in the Qur’an, al-ahzab) that laid siege to the oasis of Medina. In addition to these enemies outside, the Muslims inside Medina were supposedly faced with treachery on the part of a number of lukewarm believers allied with the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayza (who probably sympathized with the ahzab). In the end, the coalition was split apart by a
lack of supplies and left without achieving its goals (which were apparently to finish the Muslims off entirely), and Muhammad took his opportunity to suppress those disloyal Muslims, and to destroy the Banu Qurayza completely.

Since the late 1970s this battle has attracted the attention of radical Muslims, who have regularly compared their opponents to the *ahzab* and used that situation to define their own. They see a grand coalition ranged against them, including open enemies such as westerners (Europeans, Americans, etc), together with the Jews (Israel and those they identify as ‘hidden Jews’ throughout the world) and apparent Muslims who are really apostates, according to the radicals. They emphasize *jihad*, reasoning (following the tradition cited above) that the only way to tell the true Muslims from the false ones is on the battlefield. True Muslims will be willing to fight and lay down their lives; false and apostate Muslims will make excuses and ultimately betray Islam.

This paradigm appears fully developed in Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Farag’s influential *al-Farida al-gha’iba* (translated as *The Neglected Duty*), and is brought out in such documents as Osama bin Laden’s 1996 ‘Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places’, as well as ‘The Last Night’ (left by the attackers of 11 September). Bin Ladin’s subordinate, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, in his statement of 10 October 2001 (in answer to his question to the American people as to why 11 September occurred) stated:

> The answer is clear and simple: America is the leader of the criminals in the criminal matter of the foundation of the state of Israel... your government besieges the children of Iraq and kills them, and your government is that which supports corrupt governments in our countries, aiding and propping them up. Now America has gathered its forces together just as Quraysh of old gathered its trash and its riff-riff against the group of Muslims in Medina...10

Here we see the coalition (the Jews, those who openly attack ‘Muslim’ Iraq and those who support corrupt, apostate governments) that the radicals wanted to have ranged against them. They clearly hoped to recreate the historical experience of the Prophet Muhammad, and have their opponents turn against one another, whereupon the (radical) Muslims would be able to purify the Muslim world of nominal, corrupt Muslims (establishing a Muslim state in the process), then attack the Jews, and eventually go on the offensive around the world.

However, history did not recreate itself, and after the defeat of the Taliban radical Islam has had to search for another paradigm, which
turned out to be the Prophet Muhammad's defeat at Uhud (625). This battle was fought just a year after the major (and unexpected) victory at Badr, and clearly the Muslims were overconfident in their preparations. The Prophet led his followers to the slopes of the butte called Mt. Uhud, an area to the north of Medina, where he assembled them with their backs against it. He divided them into a forward group and a reserve of archers, to whom he gave the instructions not to move until they were told to do so. The Quraysh had also divided their troops into foot and horsemen, with the horse swinging around to the Muslims' left.

Already at the beginning of the battle, a large number of the less committed Muslims (who would be punished by the Prophet two years later after the Khandaq) abandoned their comrades. Although the initial attack by the Muslims was favorable, the reserve then foolishly joined in the fray, giving the Qurayshi horsemen the opportunity to attack from behind. The remaining Muslims who could extricate themselves reassembled on the slopes of Mt. Uhud, where they were cut off from retreating back to Medina, and could count themselves lucky that the Quraysh did not take this opportunity to finish off their unprotected families there.

This battle easily lends itself to the present-day situation, just as that of the Khandaq did. Many Muslims (as the Center for Islamic Studies and Research quotation above shows) have felt that the mujahidin overreached themselves by attacking the United States so directly, and fought a battle they could not win. The odds in this conflict were lengthened by the betrayal and passivity of many Muslims, even those who sympathized with the mujahidin, similar to what happened at Uhud. But in an even more fundamental similarity both the Prophet Muhammad and the mujahidin experienced difficulties because of the theological weight they had placed upon the winning of victories. As previously noted, the battle of Badr (624) was a victory for the Muslims, and is described in the Qur'an (3:12) in this manner:

There surely was a sign for you in the two armies that confronted each other; the one side fighting for the cause of Allah, and the other consisting of unbelievers. The believers saw them with their very eyes to be twice their actual number. God will strengthen with His might whomever He pleases. Surely, there is a lesson for those who are possessed of vision.12

Because of the capital made of this victory in the Qur'an after the defeat at Uhud the theological reasons for the setback had to be explained (3:65–67):
And when a misfortune befell you after you had inflicted twice as much, you said ‘Whence is this?’; say ‘It is from yourselves’. And what befell you on the day the two armies met was by Allah’s leave, that He might know the true believers; and that He might know the hypocrites…

For this reason we find Sulayman Abu Ghayth, the spokesman for Al-Qaeda, telling the world ‘wars are a back-and-forth issue, sometimes for us, sometimes against us’ and then citing the verse (3:140):

If you have been afflicted by a wound, a similar wound has afflicted others. Such are the times; We alternate them among the people, so that Allah may know who are the believers and choose martyrs from among you.

It is somewhat ironic to find radical Muslims reduced to what is essentially a gambler’s rationale for his losses: you win some, you lose some. But their position is a difficult one: if one ascribes one’s victories to the aid of God or regularly portrays them as part of a divine plan, then defeats become problematic. They can be explained as a test for the believers (as in the second citation from the Qur’an above), to purify the ranks of the faithful, or as a back-and-forth matter.

But this last explanation somehow detracts from the sense of divine assistance. If the Muslims have only the same chances as everyone else in battle, then how is God’s will being demonstrated here on earth in favor of the Muslims? For the immediate future the adoption of the paradigm of the battle of Uhud indicates an acceptance of defeat on the part of radical Muslims, but one should note that in the wake of this defeat the Prophet Muhammad still sent out a number of raids to make sure no one thought that he had been seriously damaged.

There is an additional paradigm not connected to the Prophet Muhammad specifically, but to a small group of Muslims who disobeyed him in the wake of the treaty of Hudaybiyya (628), one of the provisions of which was that new converts from among the polytheists of Mecca who came to Medina should be handed back to the Meccans. A group of Muslim converts, led by Abu Basir and Abu Jandal, formed in opposition to the stipulations laid down by Muhammad and fought a guerrilla war against the Meccans for a period of two years until Mecca was conquered (630).

It is easy to see why this episode would attract the attention of radical Muslims. It promotes the idea that fighting against the enemies of the Muslims is the only acceptable course of action for Muslims, even if it required going against the specific instructions of the Prophet Muhammad.
(or in modern circumstances, the established Muslim leadership). The story appears to mandate personal initiative, and not warfare on the basis of the consensus of the Muslim community, in the waging of *jihad*.

The names that radical Muslims apply to their enemies are also to a large extent taken from the Qur’an. This fact makes up for the lack of prophecies about the United States that is difficult for Muslim apocalyptic writers to fathom:

> Why did God not mention America in the Qur’an, and the Prophet [Muhammad] not mention it in the prophetic *hadith*? This is a question that every Muslim has asked himself, and has been confused in finding the answer to it... 15

Several different code-names for the US (sometimes also including western Europe as well) have accordingly been put forth:

A. ‘Ad

‘Ad was a people mentioned about 24 times in the Qur’an. According to the account in the Qur’an this people had already perished some time prior to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, in a violent cataclysm sent by God as judgment for their unwillingness to listen to His messengers. ‘Ad is best known for its chief city, Iram Dhat al-‘Imad (Iram of the Columns), which has been tentatively identified by archeologists in the Rub’ al-Khali region of Saudi Arabia. Contemporary Muslim apocalyptic believers make a considerable effort to show that the columns of Iram were actually skyscrapers, and that ‘Ad was a developed society like the United States possessing among other things computers, a well-developed weather service and nuclear missiles (all of which they find in the Qur’anic text). ‘Ad was arrogant and refused to submit to God’s messenger and therefore all of its might did not avail.

> As for ‘Ad, they waxed proud in the land unjustly and said: ‘Who is superior to us in strength?’ Did they not see that Allah who created them is superior to them in strength? And they used to repudiate Our signs. (Qur’an 41:15)

As a result of various citations from American leaders in the wake of the Gulf War (1991) – a number of which are fairly close in tone to the arrogance of this verse – it is seen as a prophecy concerning the US. 16

B. Pharaoh

Like the Biblical figure, the Qur’anic Pharaoh is the very definition of an unjust and godless ruler. Oftentimes the United States is compared to Pharaoh (Exodus 514) while Osama bin Laden is compared to Moses (and
the mujahidin to the Israelites). For example, Qur’an 26:52–55 is applied to current events:

And We revealed to Moses: ‘Go forth with My servants at night; for you are being followed’. Then Pharaoh sent out summoning agents to all the cities: ‘These, indeed, are a small band; and they are enraging us. And we are on our guard’.

Radical Muslims have no trouble whatsoever relating these situations that involve a small group of dedicated believers who confront a powerful, tyrannical, godless foe and humiliate him, to the present-day situation. To this end the David and Goliath story (I Sam. 17, and Qur’an 2:249–51) is also invoked. Additional apocalyptic themes taken from the stories of Pharaoh and Moses will be dealt with below.

C. Hubal

The two above groups of stories are both Qur’anic and have been used for a number of years by radical Muslims who wish to show that their confrontation with the United States has roots in the holy book. More recently, since the defeat of the Taliban, radicals have begun referring to the US as the ‘Hubal of this age’. This name is not Qur’anic, but that of one of the idols worshipped by the pagan Quraysh in Mecca (the idol was destroyed by Muhammad in 630 when he captured the city). This particular idol was used extensively as the arbiter for deciding a proper course of action (its intentions were elucidated by means of throwing arrows, banned in Qur’an 5:3, 90).

It seems clear that the term ‘Hubal’ in reference to the US is clearly connected to the adoption of the paradigm of the battle of Uhud (above) after the defeat of the Taliban and constitutes part of the recovery process of radical Islam. After the Prophet Muhammad was defeated by the Quraysh at Uhud, the latter shouted ‘Up with Hubal, up with Hubal!’ on the battlefield. Sulayman Abu Ghayth, in both his article ‘In the Shadow of the Lances’ and his interview with Mu’assasat Sahab, uses this term; however, it is unclear whether it will catch on among radical Muslims.

Apparently the connection with the US is that being the sole superpower it constitutes an idol and an arbiter for this world (more specifically the Muslim world), and perhaps there is also a sense of dislike of the triumphalism felt (or perceived to be felt) by Americans after the end of the Taliban regime. Fighting these mighty and archetypally evil opponents gives radical Muslims stature in their own self-perception as they do the work of God. Let us now turn to the disconfirmation process and watch it unfold as the Taliban were fighting their final battles, and see by what methods the recovery was effected.
Dreams, Martyrdoms and Disconfirmations

Already during the last days of the Taliban’s rule in Afghanistan, observers could see that the belief-system of radical Islam was coming under increasing strain. This was clear from the fact that more and more dreams and visions were being reported as factual to replace the uncomfortable facts originating from the battlefield. The appearance of these dreams and visions – and we can be reasonably certain that only a small selection of the true number came through the news – illustrates the disconfirmation process going on among the Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters.

It is hardly surprising that Mulla Muhammad ‘Umar Mujahid, the amir al-mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful, the caliphal title assumed by the leader of the Taliban in 1996), was among the most prominent people to have significant dreams. Fortunately for us, azzam.com reported them as news. On 3 December 2001 (as the final battle for Kandahar raged), azzam.com reported a number of Mulla ‘Umar’s dreams, after listing the traditions in support of the veracity of a believer’s dreams. According to azzam.com, ‘Umar saw the Prophet Muhammad in a dream, and the latter ordered him to stay in Kandahar and not to leave it, for God would give the mujahidin the victory there.23 (One should note that on 8 December Mulla ‘Umar left Kandahar). Azzam.com also reported that:

Mulla Muhammad Omar [sic] saw in a dream that a cruise missile was fired at him, and he ran away from it as it exploded. Then another one was fired at him and he ran away from it as it exploded. Eventually, the last missile [in the enemy’s arsenal] was fired at him, exploded and a frozen man came out of it. People of knowledge interpreted this dream as… ‘A flame of fire and brass will be loosed upon you, so that you will not receive any support’. [Qur’an 55:35]24

This dream was interpreted according to the news blurb in terms of defeating the enemy – whose technology far exceeded that of the Taliban – by outlasting him, and waiting for winter (the frozen man) to appear and consume the attackers. Clearly here is an attempt to explain the reasons why the radical Muslim regime would decide to confront the technologically superior forces of the US; God will even the balance. The technology of the enemy will be overcome, and has been predicted in any case by the Qur’an. The verse cited receives a radical reinterpretation – as traditionally and contextually it refers to rebellious men and jinn – and becomes part of the tribulations that the believers must endure before they can achieve either paradise or victory in the messianic kingdom (see below).
Another element showing the disconfirmation process was the martyrologies being produced by the fighters. Clearly, these martyrologies were (and are) designed to strengthen the resolve of the faithful, and especially to highlight the sacrifices for the cause made by the dead. Their sacrifices augment the relative worth of the cause for which they died, and ‘prove’ that it was worth it all. God will not abandon those – the living – after such noble sacrifices for Him. Some of these martyrologies were also in dream form. For example, the following was reported by markazdawa.org on 10 December 2001 (after the surrender of Kandahar):

…an old lady from a well-known area in Kandahar, Charsoo, saw a dream before the evacuation of the Taliban from Kandahar in which there was a clear indication to give respite to the disbelievers. The old lady saw a rush of beautiful men and women in the streets who were 200 in number. Their foreheads were shining and the old lady got the feeling that these men, women and children were those who were martyred due to the American bombing. These shuhada’ [martyrs] were indicating to the Taliban to leave the city, and they were reciting… ‘So, give the unbelievers some respite. Respite them slowly’.25 [Qur’an 86:17]

This dream interpretation/justification for the withdrawal from Kandahar is obviously a pretext and designed to mitigate the disconfirmation process for the supporters of the Taliban who were then losing their last stronghold in Afghanistan. The ‘respite’ given to the unbelievers (the US forces) was hardly necessary, as the latter were not in any difficulties. More critical was the portrayal of the martyrs of the American bombardment, whose ‘martyrdom’ had clearly been accepted and honored by God according to the old woman’s dream.

Most of the martyrologies, however, are taken from the battlefield. Several examples will be given of the different types of martyrdom. The radical Islamic news sites emphasized the eagerness of the Taliban and the non-Afghan mujahidin to attain martyrdom. Many examples appeared of the joyous cries that resounded through the radio and communication links as various well-known fighters died and ‘entered paradise’.

These martyrologies also provide us with ‘proof’ that the method of fighting chosen by the mujahidin was an effective one (a conclusion that might be called into question by the outcome of the war in Afghanistan) by providing numerous ‘casualty reports’ listing large numbers of American and Afghan (Northern Alliance) forces together with the inevitable ‘martyrdom operations’. A striking number of these suicide attacks reported by azzam.com involve women, perhaps to defuse the negative publicity the Taliban regime had garnered because of its
treatment of women. For example, on 1 December 2001 a British Muslim woman was reported to have killed several Alliance soldiers. They had captured her, and assuming that she was pregnant, did not check the belt of explosives around her.

Another, more poignant story involves a brother and sister captured near Mazar-i Sharif. They spoke to their captors in English and passed themselves off as relief workers. They were taken by two Americans and four Alliance soldiers in a truck to Kabul to verify their credentials. On the way, the following drama occurred:

The brother brought his face closer to the noble face of his sister and she whispered to him: ‘I am ready’. He then told her to repeat ‘There is no god but Allah…’ behind him which she did in a faint whisper – faint in volume but high in certainty and faith (imán). He then told her to say: ‘There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Upon this we live, upon this we die, upon this we wage jihad, and upon this we hope to be raised up [on the Day of Resurrection]’. She repeated this and then put her hand on the detonator button and pressed it.

The brother managed to survive the blast, having been only injured by the explosion. Looking back he saw:

…a bright, concentrated beam of light shining from the truck into the sky whilst the truck was otherwise in flames…[he] confirmed that the two Crusaders [Americans] did not survive…as for the martyred sister, he saw her noble, pure body largely intact despite the explosion, and he was satisfied that perhaps that beam of light he saw earlier must have taken care of her body.

The brother then took the names of the slain Americans and their weapons, and made his way to Kunduz, where he was later interviewed by Abu Khalid ‘Abdallah al-Walid, who reported the story. The purity and incorruptibility of the body of the sister constitutes proof of her martyrdom being accepted in the eyes of God, as was the case with a number of the alleged martyrdoms described on azzam.com and other radical Muslim websites.

Other miracles include signs of God causing lightning to strike American warplanes (otherwise untouched by the radical Muslim fighters), or causing them to collide and destroy each other. Clearly these items were designed to compensate for the inability of the fighters to strike back at the planes. In a more recent interview with a Taliban commander in eastern Afghanistan the following statement was made:
The truth is that we have started to believe that it is not even us who have attacked those Americans, so all of this is a miracle by Allah, for the mujahidin who are defending Afghanistan...’ [It was not you who slew them, but Allah;] and when you threw it was actually Allah who threw’ [Qur’an 8:17]. All of the brothers here became really confused as to how they killed such great numbers of Americans even though we did not do much in the battle... by the end of the battle 170 Americans [were] killed, and none of the corrupt Afghan forces left the battlefield alive!28

The news given in this interview is implausible – the figures given by azzam.com for American casualties during the first nine months of the war run into the low thousands – but the attitudes of the mujahidin are entirely within character. However, the interpretation of the setback of the loss of Afghanistan cannot be merely described in terms of dreams, visions and martyrologies. A more plausible and relevant vision of the future had to be built. For that purpose the reinterpretation of the historical apocalypse was (and is) employed.

**Apocalypses and Interpretations**

There is a strong apocalyptic tendency in contemporary radical Islam. Apocalypses lubricate the disconfirmations and the failures, and help the believers maintain their sense of hope in the future as well as remind them of the high stakes involved in the present-day battles. One cannot reasonably doubt that the basis for the worldwide support given to the Taliban (funneled into Al-Qaeda) was due to their realization of the messianic vision of the caliphal state. Only Mulla Muhammad ‘Umar has had – since the Ottoman caliph was deposed by Kamal Attaturk in 1924 – the courage or the audacity to actually proclaim himself amir al-mu’minin (the Commander of the Faithful).

Usually the response of Muslims to such claimants since 1924 has been either indifference or ridicule. Although one cannot say that Mulla ‘Umar’s claim was recognized beyond radical Muslim circles during the five years he held this title,29 it is amazing how many different groups from around the Muslim world accepted him. This gave the messianic vision of the Taliban a pan-Islamic feel unique in the recent past. Given the messianic nature of the state, its disappearance was also naturally interpreted by some in terms of apocalypse. This has in fact happened and constitutes one of the methods by which radical Muslims have dealt with the disconfirmation of their hopes. Radical Muslims work with two separate traditions – one messianic and the other more
apocalyptic and historical – with regard to the situation in Afghanistan.

The first and more prominent focuses upon this location and its history in Muslim apocalyptic scenarios. This region in classical Arabic was called Khurasan (including all of present-day Afghanistan, eastern Iran, and the Central Asian republics up to Uzbekistan), and was the site of the successful ‘Abbasid revolution (747-9) against the previously dominant Umayyad dynasty centered in Syria. During the course of the propaganda issued in preparation to that revolution, a number of messianic traditions enjoining loyalty to the future messiah (in Arabic mahdi) were spread, and to a large degree constitute the core of present-day Sunni messianic thought.

Since the ‘Abbasid revolution was fought for the rights of an anonymous figurehead (an unspecified member of the Prophet Muhammad’s family), with the most visible sign of this person’s presence being merely the charismatic army commander Abu Muslim al-Khurasani (d. 755), a dichotomy was emphasized in this variety of messianic tradition. This dichotomy in the traditions speaking of the messianic future that will come from the region of Khurasan consists in there being two messianic figures: one of them the messianic figure himself and the other his commander and more visible partner.

This paradigm also fits remarkably well the relationship between Mulla ‘Umar and Osama bin Laden, who commanded the international coalition of fighters (Al-Qaeda) mobilized both to support the messianic figure and to form the basis of the army of his caliphal state that would eventually encompass all Muslims in the world. Khurasan has other evocative elements as well, since it is a comparatively peripheral territory, renowned both in classical times and during the present (against the British, the Soviet Union, etc.) for fighting against infidels.

Since the perception of Muslim radicals is that the truly Muslim groups (otherwise, ‘the remnant’) are the ones that will be on the front lines of battle, there is also the perception that the messianic figure must come from these fighting groups, and that he will purify the more decadent center in which fighting has fallen into abeyance. We have already noted the significance of the tradition speaking of Muslims fighting until the end of the world, and also its prevalence among radical Muslims – and with good reason. As previously noted, those groups that are actively waging war upon the ‘enemies of Islam’ are those that will continue to be infused with true belief; other Muslim groups will be infected with hypocrisy. These fighting, radical Muslims will be the ones who will confront the Antichrist (the United States).

Clearly Osama bin Laden is very aware of the messianic significance of the region in which Afghanistan is located, and reveals this fact by
signing his initial ‘Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying
the Land of the Two Holy Places’ (1996) from Khurasan. This signature
was invoking a powerful messianic theme, since that is where the
messiah is traditionally supposed to come from and thus implicitly allows
Bin Laden the right to judge and eventually to purify the core Muslim
lands.

In the wake of the attacks on the United States on September another
tradition came to be cited, presenting Bin Laden and radical Islam in a
somewhat different apocalyptic light. This was a tradition that was first
circulated in Syria during the seventh and eighth centuries, when the
early Muslims sometimes fought the Byzantine Christians and sometimes
fought by their side (similar to the situation of radical Muslims with
regard to the United States), and is actually based upon historical events.

You [the Muslims of Syria] will make a peace with them [the
Byzantines] for ten years and during this peace (sulh) a woman will
cross the pass in safety, and you, together with the Byzantines, will
raid beyond Constantinople against an enemy of theirs and be
victorious over them. When you have finished... then you together
with them will raid Kufa and flatten it like leather, and then you
together with the Byzantines will also raid some of the people of the
east, and you [pl.] will be constant over them, and take progeny and
women prisoners, and take possessions. Then while you are camped
returning, you will begin to divide the spoils. The Byzantines will
say: ‘Give us our portion of the progeny and the women’ and the
Muslims will say: ‘This is not possible for us in our religion; but
take from the rest of the things’. The Byzantines will say: ‘We will
only take from the sum total’. The Muslims will say: ‘You will never
get it’. The Byzantines will say: ‘You were only victorious because
of us and our cross’ and the Muslims will say: ‘Nay, because God
aided His religion [Islam]’. While they are doing this, wrangling
back and forth, they will lift up the cross and the Muslims will be
enraged and a man will leap upon it and break it. Some of the group
will move away; and there will be a short fight between them.

According to the interpretation given by supporters of Osama bin Laden,
this particular tradition was fulfilled by the alliance between the Muslims
and the United States against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Obviously,
this calls for a reinterpretation of some of the key players in the above
tradition: the ‘Byzantines’ become ‘Christians’ in general or westerners,
and the different common objectives of this unnatural alliance during the
seventh century – enemies in the Balkans, rebellious Muslims in Kufa
(present-day Iraq), and the ‘people of the east’ – are reinterpreted to be
their contemporary equivalents (the Muslims of Bosnia, the Iraqis and the Russian communists).

Moreover, the tradition speaks of a breaking point at which the Muslims will refuse to hand over their co-religionists to the Byzantine Christians, even though the right of plunder is recognized in general terms. This is related (somewhat more loosely connected to the tradition) to the refusal of Mulla ‘Umar to hand over Osama bin Laden to the United States in the wake of the attack of 11 September 2001. According to the tradition, there is a further disagreement between the two sides, which swirls around the question of whose faith is the one responsible for the victory (in the interpretation) over the communists. Obviously, for the Muslim apocalyptic writer the response involves a humiliation of the Christian cross and an affirmation of Islamic superiority. As the tradition continues, however, this does not lead to immediate and total victory on the Muslim side:

The fight between the Byzantines and the Muslims will rage – victory will be denied and weapons will dominate each other – nothing struck will be unaffected. The caliph of the Muslims will be killed then among 70 commanders on one day, and the people will swear allegiance to a man of Quraysh. There will not be a single peasant or nomad but will join the Byzantines, and tribes in their entirety with their flags will join the Byzantines. The Muslims will be constant – until one part will join with infidelity (kufr), another will be killed and a third will flee, [but a fourth] will be victorious... the Arabs will fight from [their] side, and God will grant the victory – the king of the Byzantines will perish then and the Byzantines will be defeated.

Men will rise from their saddles on the backs of their horses and cry out with loud voices: ‘O Muslims! God will never grant a victory like this again if we turn from it’ and so the Muslims will catch them [the Byzantines] and kill them in every plain and hill. Not a single buried treasure nor city will stop them until they camp in front of Constantinople. The Muslims will find a community of the people of Moses there to join the victory with them. The Muslims will shout: Allahu akbar! (God is great!) from one side, and the wall will be split. The people will rise and enter Constantinople, and while they are guarding their possessions and captives, fire will fall from the heavens on a side of the city, and it will blaze up. The Muslims will leave with what they gathered and camp in al-Qarqaduna. While they are dividing up the spoils God has granted them, they hear that the Antichrist has appeared in the midst of their families, and they
will leave and find the news false. They will go to Jerusalem and it will be their refuge at the Antichrist’s appearance.\textsuperscript{35}

It takes little imagination to relate this to the rest of the scenario. We see the initial victory of the Byzantines (the United States) over the Muslims (in Afghanistan), resulting in the slaughter of many of the best commanders of the faithful. Even the caliph (Mulla ‘Umar) will be killed (according to the tradition). Many of the previously loyal Muslims will either join the enemy, as radical Muslims have accused their opponents of doing, be killed, or sit out the combat. The ‘man of Quraysh’ (the tribe of Muhammad) is glossed as Osama bin Laden himself, even though he is of Yemeni extraction and has no affiliation with Quraysh (although he is from Saudi Arabia). But in the end God will grant the victory and the Muslims will pursue their defeated foes to Constantinople (usually glossed today as Europe) and conquer it. At that time, the Antichrist will appear and the Muslims will go to Jerusalem where they will take refuge from this monstrous opponent of God, who will eventually be killed by Jesus.\textsuperscript{36}

In another apocalyptic interpretation, associated with Palestinian radical Muslims, of the present-day conflict based on the story of Pharaoh, Moses and the Israelites we find another closely related scenario.\textsuperscript{37} This interpretation that relies upon the Qur’anic version of the Exodus involves several figures not present in the Biblical story such as Haman (Esther 3:1; Qur’an 28:68, 40:24, 36) and Korah (Numbers 16; Qur’an 26:76-79, 40:24).

In the Qur’anic story these two figures are said to be supporters of Pharaoh in his opposition to the righteous mission of Moses. In this apocalypse, Haman is interpreted as the United Kingdom; since Moses is Osama bin Laden, and because Korah was of the same people as Moses, Korah is re-interpreted as Saudi Arabia (oftentimes hostility towards Saudi Arabia among Muslim radicals is a hallmark of support for Bin Laden). In both the Biblical and the Qur’anic accounts of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh a major role is played by the magicians, who deceive the people by their trickery in order to distract them from the miracles with which Moses proves the veracity of his mission (e.g., Exodus 7:22, 8:18; Qur’an 7:113, 10:80). These are re-interpreted as the world-wide media:

These without a doubt are the stations and the connections of the media which make truth into falsehood and falsehood into truth; the wronged into the wrong-doer, and the wrong-doer into the wronged. This is beyond a shadow of a doubt an important war [against the media] because of what is written in the [Qur’anic] verse:
in other words they did these things in order to frighten the people. In other words they did these things in order to frighten the people.

It is interesting that radical Muslims in constructing this apocalypse would see the media as major players in the drama unfolding in the world, especially given Al-Qaeda’s (admitted) failure to manipulate it.

After this Pharaoh (the US) will gather his allies from all over the world to pursue Moses and the Israelites (Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda). The excuse that is used for this pursuit is what Pharaoh is said to have stated in the Qur’an (41:26): ‘And Pharaoh said: “Let me kill Moses, and let him call upon his Lord. I fear that he may change your religion and cause corruption to spread in the land”.’ In other words, Pharaoh (the US) fears that people will convert to Islam and spread ‘corruption’ (rebellion against its tyrannical and unjust regime) throughout the world, and therefore must attack and annihilate the believers. By the same token it is permitted for the believers to use any and all means to defend themselves.

From this point on, however, the apocalyptic reading of events is speculation and prediction. The author of the apocalypse feels that the US army will be swallowed up in a sea (just like that of Pharaoh and the Egyptians), but cannot decide whether it is the Mediterranean Sea or the Arabian Sea (the latter is surely more plausible). After the destruction of the American Army, God will complete the downfall of the US (Qur’an 7:137)

‘…and We bequeathed to the people who were held to be weak the eastern and western parts of the land which We had blessed… and We destroyed the houses and towers which Pharaoh and his people were building’.

Thus, the radical Muslims (true Muslims), in the Qur’an Moses and the Israelites, will inherit the earth, and the technological anti-god society in the United States will be destroyed forever. According to the author all of this will happen before the end of President George Bush’s term ‘…so we believe that the United States of America will never see the year 2004, with God’s permission’.

These apocalypses and apocalyptic reinterpretations of current events serve as necessary aids to buffer the Muslim radicals from events that have disconfirmed the anticipated outcome of their vision. In a certain way, therefore, an apocalypse is a theologized analysis of historical events, whether current or distant. We must now ask how this analysis is reflected in the lessons radical Muslims derived from their defeat in Afghanistan and what their reading of this event and the attack of 11 September has been since the fall of the Taliban.
Self-Analysis and Prescription: Does Radical Islam have a Future?

One of the strengths of radical Islam is its self-awareness, the education of its followers and the resourcefulness of its leaders in the face of failure. Not everyone has responded to the disaster by resorting to apocalypse and vision. Some have asked the hard questions: are we strong enough? Was it a good strategic move to provoke the US in this manner? Is the vision feasible? Why did so few Muslims actively stand with us? Will the establishment of a Muslim state have to be deferred yet again? These are all very difficult questions to face, but it is a sign of maturity that radical Muslims did not splinter into quarreling factions over the question of who was to blame for the destruction of the Taliban regime, as so many radical groups have previously in the wake of failure.

There have been several documents issued over the last year by Al-Qaeda or its close ideological supporters with the intent to explain their reasoning behind precipitating a conflict with the US, explain the religious and political justifications behind the attack of 11 September, present the conflict in apocalyptic terms, and answer questions that have been directed towards their group. These make interesting reading and need to be summarized.

Because the attack of 11 September precipitated the attack upon the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, many of these documents are concerned with rationalizing the provocation. According to the ‘spin’ in the documents, radical Muslims had considered that the destruction of the World Trade Center might lead to a violent response on the part of the US (however, there is reason to believe that this foreknowledge was not the case and that they were as surprised as everyone else). At least, with such a presentation, radical Muslims want to make the entire process look as if there is a deeper plan involved, and thereby explain that the subsequent loss of Afghanistan was part of that plan. The explanations of what should have happened following the attack on Afghanistan are those previously discussed in the paradigms of battle, and need not detain us further.

One cannot say that any of these documents demonstrate any regret over the attack of 11 September. They are concerned with responding to outside doubts as to the Islamic legality of ‘martyrdom operations’ against civilians, and to show that the attacks were a net gain for radical Islam. In this latter point they are persuasive, highlighting the publicity gained during this operation in the heart of the enemy’s homeland. (They are less successful in explaining why so few openly rallied to their cause in the wake of 11 September and are reduced to saying that a very high percentage of the world’s population expressed private happiness at this event, even if many did not show it openly).
They present the 11 September attacks as a political, economic and religious call for freedom on the part of the world’s oppressed masses, using a curiously Marxist and universalistic tone, and usually preface their justifications with a long list of real or pretended grievances against the US that amount to a charge of *tu quoque*. Since the US (supposedly) is doing these things to Muslims, Muslims are free to act in the same manner (ignoring the fact that a religion is responsible for a higher code of conduct than a nation is).

Despite the need for justification these documents seem to assume that radical Islam has gained immense spiritual prestige from its actions on and after 11 September. The Taliban refused to hand Osama bin Laden over to the US, which gratified many not normally sympathetic to radical Islam if only because it presented the (rare) spectacle of a small Muslim nation saying ‘no’ to a non-Muslim superpower. For the most part the *mujahidin* were able to wrap themselves in the garb of David versus Goliath while fighting the US, garnering sympathy as the underdogs. Their use of martyrologies has already been noted (although the Al-Qaeda documents recognize that they did a poor job of getting their message out to the mainstream non-Muslim media).

Thus, although this was a defeat, it was far from a knockout blow, and radical Muslims gain from merely staying alive afterwards. Al-Qaeda and its supporters, however, believe that a knock-out blow was delivered to the United States on 11 September and that the US will never again have the same aura of invincibility or be a source of fear to the Muslims.43

However, the most dominant theme of the post-11 September documents is the need to demonstrate that both the attack and the response represent war between Islam as a whole and the West.44 At every point evidence is marshaled to support this conclusion (and many elements in the Middle East who already subscribe to conspiracy theories have very low standards of evidence). The fact that so many Muslims (even those who did not actively render aid to the Taliban regime) have believed this radical Muslim propaganda is perhaps their most enduring achievement. It is clear that the belief in the ‘clash of civilizations’ is a corner-stone of Osama bin Laden’s beliefs, as he stated in his 21 October 2001 interview with Taysir al-‘Alwani of al-Jazira (who asked him whether he accepted Samuel Huntington’s theory):

*I say there is no doubt about it [that the theory is correct]; this is crystal-clear and supported by the Book [the Qur’an] and the *sunna*, and it is impossible for a believer who claims belief to deny these truths… the criterion in our judgment is the Book of God and the *sunna* of our Messenger, but the Jews and America bring a*
counterfeit, selling it as a lie to the Muslims. Sadly, the rulers of the region and many of those to whom education is ascribed have followed them with the call to peace, to world peace. This is a counterfeit that has absolutely no basis to it.45

Therefore, the accusation of ‘warring against Islam’, so frequently leveled against the United States during the months following 11 September 2001, is actually an interpretation strongly pushed by radical Muslims. Concerning the American attempts to separate their war against terror from a putative ‘war against Islam’, one radical Muslim writer says:

When we say that this war is religious, it is because the West does not want for this religion [Islam] to have an existence in a form or a state. Yes, they continually point out that they are not against Islam, but what Islam is that which they are for and not against? It is that false Islam (moderate), that Islam which accepts subservience to America, and subservience to the West. Yes, they want the Islam that allows a Muslim in America to become part of the American Army to fight other Muslims in the lands of Islam...Yes, it is true that it [the US] does not fight the right to pray, to fast, to go on pilgrimage and does not prevent staying the night [in prayer].46

Despite granting the US these points the writer nevertheless says that the latter is making it impossible for Muslims to live as Muslims because of its opposition to the political necessities of the faith. It is clear that this is the major point for radical Muslims – the creation (or re-creation) of religious boundaries – as well as the major point at which they failed to communicate their message. While it may be true (as these radical Muslim proclamations state) that many Muslims privately have accepted Al-Qaeda’s interpretation of the war against terror, very few have done much about it. Obviously, Al-Qaeda and other radical Muslim groups need to emphasize this point repeatedly in order to gain additional allies, especially since they have so obviously burned their bridges with the rest of the world.

So, what is the vision for the future in the post-11 September world? Clearly it involves continuing to fight the enemy. The radical Muslim activist Abu Ayman al-Hilali writes:

The goal of the struggle is the education in *jihad* and martyrdom operations, because they are the only strong components of the helpless (*mustada'fun*) and their weapon against the arrogant and the criminal, just as they are the weak component on the other side because they constitute in reality what we could call a balance of suffering that will give birth in time to terror and fear, just as the
Most High said: ‘if you are suffering, they are suffering too’ [Qur’an 4:104].

Al-Hilali goes on to say that radical Muslims ‘must not allow the enemy to define our position in the world stage in accordance with his plans and strategy’. This is closely in accord with Sulayman Abu Ghayth’s use of the paradigm of the Battle of Uhud (section 2), which demonstrates that the intention is to remain at least partially on the defensive for the foreseeable future, and to attack a target only when it clearly presents itself and is weak, and not to seek out a larger conflict.

Conclusions

Radical Islam has demonstrated a considerable level of ideological sophistication that has enabled it to overcome and even to some extent to assimilate the militarily and theologically problematic trauma of losing one of its prime bases (Afghanistan) and fighting a war with the world’s superpower, the US. It is clear that these setbacks have not brought about any fundamental changes in the agenda of pan-Islamic groups, who still believe in their goal of uniting all Muslims into one state, and dominating the world.

It would be difficult to see how these goals could be modified, since they are believed by most radical Muslim to be those laid down by God. It should be noted that from the analyses and apocalypses cited in this paper there is no sense that respect for the US has replaced the contempt previously held (before 11 September). There is a deeper level of hatred, perhaps, and frustration about the inability of radical Muslims to galvanize the larger community of Muslims into open and complete rejection of the west (or of the US). But the essential message remains the same, and indeed has been sharpened to a degree.

The methods through which radical Muslims have recovered ideologically from their defeats are largely those employed by groups facing disconfirmations throughout the history of monotheistic faiths: renewed exegesis of the holy text (the Qur’an), interpreting the defeat as a punishment from God designed to weed out the weak believers, and explaining it as a true victory to come in the apocalyptic future. These are time-tried themes and appear to have worked for the most part in this case. However, there are some problems with some of the specific analyses laid down by radical Muslims. For example, when Sulayman Abu Ghayth states that ‘wars are a back-and-forth issue, sometimes against us and sometimes for us’ he is demonstrating a reliance upon fate (or God) that seems uncharacteristic for a radical Muslim, and unjustified.
when looking at the balance-sheet for Islam over the past several centuries. Either he is taking a very long view of things, or counting on the pendulum of fate (or God) to swing back in his favor.

In Dec. 2001 Ayman al-Zawahiri (Osama bin Laden’s deputy and head of the Egyptian Gama’at al-Islamiyya) wrote:

Backing and supporting Afghanistan and Chechnya, and defending them with the heart, the hand and the word represent a current duty for these are the assets of Islam in this age... these two steadfast castles may not help us much because of many circumstances... therefore, we must solve this problem [of moving the focus away from Afghanistan and Chechnya into the heart of the Muslim world] ourselves without exposing them to pressure and strikes.50

In retrospect, it seems that radical Muslims were unable to overcome the problem of being located on the periphery, and in their attempts to engage the outside world lost both of their ‘steadfast castles’. The organization has been forced to change as a result of this miscalculation, but as al-Zawahiri implies Al-Qaeda and its radical Muslim allies must relocate themselves in the core Islamic lands anyway or risk becoming irrelevant. The recovery of radical Islam in the wake of its most catastrophic defeat in the past fifteen years has taken comparatively little time, and minimal soul-searching. Most of the faithful and a surprising number of the sympathizers appear to have accepted the various visions and explanations proffered by Al-Qaeda and its intellectuals. It is clear that the movement is well-equipped to move to a different phase of the struggle, this time unencumbered by the burdens of having to defend a state in the wake of the next major attack.

NOTES

1. Many of the websites cited in this article have either been suppressed or have moved from address to address. When this is the case I have placed an asterix in brackets (*) at the end of the URL.
5. The tendency of radical Muslims to accuse large numbers of other Muslims of being non-Muslims (takfir) is one of the characteristics of radical Islam; see the radical Abu Basir (‘Abd al-Mun’im Mustafa Halima), Qawa'id fi al-takfir (available at abubaseer.com);
Khalid bin Muhammad al-Anbari, The Fundamentals of Takfir (Detroit: al-Qur’an was-Sunnah Society of North America, 1999); and see the critique by the three prominent Muslim scholars al-Albani, ‘Abdallah b. Baz and Ibn ‘Uthaymin (published together as Fitnat al-takfir, n.p., n.d.).

6. The figure of the Dajjal/Antichrist in Islam has changed considerably from the monstrous and loathsome character described in the classical sources (see my Studies in Classical Muslim Apocalyptic [Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming, chapter 2, section 7] to one whose temptation is more insidious and in tandem with the conspiracy theories promoted by The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.


9. Trans. Johannes Jansen, The Neglected Duty (New York: Macmillan 1986); see also the translation of Abu Umama, The Absent Obligation (Birmingham: Maktabat al-Ansar 2000), which although it is freer with the text shows that this document can be modified for further use by contemporary Muslim radicals.


11. The Prophet Muhammad’s tribe and chief opposition throughout most of his life.


13. It is even more ironic when one considers that the quote ‘war is a back-and-forth matter’ repeated by Abu Ghayth was originally said by Abu Sufyan, Muhammad’s opponent at Uhud. This philosophy is completely opposed to that of the Prophet Muhammad.


16. This idea was best developed in Bashir Muhammad ‘Abdallah, Zilzal al-ard al-‘azim (Cairo: n.p. 1994), and Khalid ‘Abd al-Wahid, Nihayat Isra’il wa-l-Wilayat al-Muttahida (available at asifal3sim.org (*) and geocities.com/kalwid/index (*)), but has circulated widely beyond apocalyptic circles.


18. Sayyid Qutb wrote a poem on Hubal as the United States in the 1950s, but the theme has not been prominent among radical Muslims since that time.


21. Aloswa.org/bayanat/afghan/boghat.htm (*) (The interview is undated, but apparently took place in June 2002).

22. See also the Moroccan writer Abu Sayf al-Islam al-Wajdi, ‘The Benefits of the Blessed Sept. 11 Raid’ at aloswa.org/adab/moktas_11sep.html (*), who states ‘this was a great blow against the idolatry of America, to which all of the apostate kings and Arab infidel heads make pilgrimage’ (p.2).

23. As cited in azzam.com (*), news, 3 Dec. 2001, the radical Palestinian shaykh Abu Walid al-Ansari in Kunduz had also seen a vision of the Prophet, who told him that 500 angels would come to fight on the side of the mujahidin.

24. Azzam.com (*), news, 3 Dec. 2001. I made modifications to the text in order to improve the English, as well as substituting Fakhry’s translation of the Qur’an for the one given.

25. Markazdawa.org (*), news, Dec. 10, 2001. I have made minor modifications to the English style, and again the Qur’anic translation is Fakhry’s.
26. The story was supposedly verified on 26 Nov. 2001, and reported by azzam.com (*), news, 10 Dec. 2001 ‘to heal the hearts of the Muslims and to boost their morale’; and it was cited by Ayman al-Zawahiri in an interview with Faraj Isma'il, printed in al-Majalla, 16–22 Dec. 2001 (he said that the brother’s name was Abdallah al-Walid—note that this is said by the azzam.com version to be the name of the reporter who verified the story—and the sister’s name was Umm Hafsa and that they were British Jews converted to Islam).

27. Ibid.


29. Although technically speaking he continues to hold the title of amir al-mu'minin during his communiqués since the fall of Kandahar he has favored the title of khadim al-muslimin (the Servant of the Muslims; an obvious play on the title of the King of Saudi Arabia, khadim al-haramayn, the Servant of the Two Sacred Places, Mecca and Medina).

30. In the text (p.2) he also speaks of ‘al-Qa’ida now being safe in Khurasan, above the peaks of the Hindukush Mountains’.

31. Present day Iraq.


33. Jews?

34. Historically Chalcedon, across the Bosphorus Straits.

35. Nu’aym, Fitan, pp.280–1; compare Joshua 6-7.

36. The contemporary interpretations can be found at khurasan.com (*) ‘Afghanistan and Iran in [the] light of the Prophecies’ (issued on 30 March 2002), and ‘The Current Situation and Prophecies of the Holy Prophet’ (issued on 17 April 2002); asifal3sim.org/_private/Khorasan.htm (*) (identifying Afghanistan with the messianic Khurasan); and in Amin Jamal al-Din, Armageddon: Akhir bayan ya ummat al-Islam (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya 2001) pp.65f.

37. The following is taken from al-Shaykh Salah al-Din Abu ‘Arafa (see note 17); its popularity was described by The Jerusalem Post Internet Edition (10 Oct. 2002) ‘Booklet predicting end of US is PA bestseller’ (by Khaled Abu Toameh).

38. The verse (Qur’an 7:116) reads (after Moses tells the magicians to do their tricks) ‘He [Moses] said: ‘You cast’; but when they cast, they put a spell upon the eyes of the people, and frightened them, producing a mighty feat of magic’.


42. E.g., the interesting analysis of Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qurashi, ‘From Munich to New York’ at aloswa.org/adab/sirukn.html (*) which compares the publicity gained for the Palestinian cause by the 1972 attack on the Israeli Olympic team at Munich together with the same for radical Islam in the wake of the ‘raid on New York’ (partial translation at memri.org Special Dispatch #352 [8 March 2002]).

43. See Abu Sayf al-Islam al-Wajdi, ‘In Favor of Decisive Steps by Guarding the Benefits of the Blessed Sept. 11 Raid’ at aloswa.org/adab/moktas_11sept.html (*).

44. I am using this term guardedly in the same undefined manner as Al-Qaeda. Clearly for them it is a catchall term for those nations that either derive their belief-systems from western Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) or the Enlightenment, and are militarily, economically and culturally dominant in the world.

45. ‘Interview with al-Jazira’ (21 Oct. 2001), p.7; compare the translation at azzam.com (202.43.163.180/~acom/afghan/interviews (*)); the above translation is my own.
47. Abu Ayman al-Hilali (note 41).
48. Note the recent proclamation of Al-Qaeda on alneda.com: ‘Kuwait, Yemen and Bali are healing for the hearts of the believers’.
49. Also cited by ‘Umar Mahmud Abu ‘Umar.