

Terrorism Open Source Intelligence Report (TOSIR) No. 415 24 December 2009

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year to all of our readers!

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[Article 1](#) “**Muslims Account for 85 Percent of Casualties in Al-Qaeda Attacks,**” by **Alexander Mayer, Long War Journal/Threat Matrix Blog, 9 December 2009.** *The Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point recently released a stunning report which found that Muslims have accounted for 85 percent of the casualties from Al-Qaeda attacks between 2004-2008. The report’s findings decimate the claims made in 2007 by Al-Qaeda’s second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri. The CTC report’s authors wisely used only Arabic-language reporting in their research, in order to sidestep any complaints of bias. The most powerful potential impact of this report is in the Muslim world.*

[Article 2](#) “**Deadly Vanguard: A Study of Al-Qaeda’s Violence against Muslims,**” by **Scott Helfstein, Nassir Abdullah, and Muhammad al-Obaidi, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, December 2009.** *Since the inception of Al-Qaeda, the organization has claimed to represent Muslim interests around the world declaring itself the vanguard of true Islam, and the defender of Muslim people. Unfortunately for Al-Qaeda, their actions speak louder than their words. The fact is that the vast majority of Al-Qaeda’s victims are Muslims: the analysis here shows that non-Westerners are much more likely to be killed in an Al-Qaeda attack. The overwhelming majority of Al-Qaeda victims are Muslims living in Muslim countries, and many are citizens of Iraq, which suffered more Al-Qaeda attacks than any other country courtesy of the Al-Qaeda in Iraq affiliate.*

[Article 3](#) “**All (Muslim) Politics Is Local: How Context Shapes Islam in Power,**” by **Charles Tripp, Foreign Affairs, September-October 2009—a review of (1) Beyond Terror and Martyrdom: The Future of the Middle East, by Gilles Kepel (Harvard University Press, 2008); and (2) The Crisis of Islamic Civilization, by Ali A. Allawi (Yale University Press, 2009).** *In the effort to understand the role of religion in shaping the political lives of Muslims many in the Western media and even academics have relied on the players’ descriptions of themselves. Thus, it is refreshing to encounter two serious books that avoid this pitfall: Gilles Kepel puts the “politics” back in “Islamist politics,” and Ali Allawi explores the often troubled relationship between worldly power and the spirituality of Islamic beliefs. Both books indicate, in their own way, that all Muslims who seek to reshape the world according to Islamic ideals and traditions, whatever they may define those to be, are confronted by the mundane need to bend an*

often obdurate reality to their will. At the heart of this task lies the old political conundrum of how to engage effectively the existing power structure without compromising one's core ideals.

[Article 4](#) **“The Taliban’s Media Blitz,”** by Jeffrey Dressler, Institute for the Study of War, **24 November 2009**. *The Taliban senior leadership is aggressively attempting to rebrand their image and feed talking points to those in favor of de-escalation in Afghanistan. The Taliban leaders clearly see the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan as an attack not only on their organization, but on Islam writ-large. They will not be satisfied with vanquishing America from their historical homeland, as they see their struggle as fundamental to Islamic missions across the globe. However, the overwhelming majority of the Afghan Taliban’s fighting forces are not deeply committed ideologues from Pakistani religious schools, but disenfranchised locals, increasingly desperate to make a living. If offered a viable alternative, there is no reason to believe that these individuals wouldn’t be willing to switch sides.*

[Article 5](#) **“Bioweapons Could Catch U.S. Cities Off Guard,”** by J. R. Labbe, Tri-City Herald, **24 November 2009**. *If America’s less-than-rapid response to the H1N1 pandemic is an indicator of how the U.S. public health system would react in the event of a bioweapons attack, we are in deep, deep yogurt. It’s taken more than six months to ramp up production of a vaccine for a contagious disease that health officials worldwide knew was coming. The nation’s lack of progress in moving to cell-based vaccine technology should be a concern to every American who has given so much as a nanosecond of thought about the country’s ability to recover from a bioweapons attack. The key to mitigating the long-term terrorism value of a bioweapon is rapid response, recognition, and recovery—and recovery includes having therapeutics available ASAP for those exposed and vaccines to prevent the spread.*

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1. **“Muslims Account for 85 Percent of Casualties in Al-Qaeda Attacks,”** by Alexander Mayer, Long War Journal/Threat Matrix Blog, **9 December 2009**. [KBTQOverview, KBTQStatements, KBTQStrategy, KBTZIslam] From <http://www.longwarjournal.org> we *quote*:

The Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point recently released a stunning report which found that Muslims have accounted for 85 percent of the casualties from Al-Qaeda attacks between 2004-2008.

Even more astounding, **during the last two years of the study (2006-2008), the percentage of Al-Qaeda’s Muslim victims skyrocketed to an almost unbelievable 98 percent.**

The report’s findings decimate the claims made in 2007 by Al-Qaeda’s second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri. In response to questions posted on an online jihadi forum, Zawahiri responded to criticism about Al-Qaeda’s indiscriminate killing of

Muslims by **insisting that “Al-Qaeda has not killed innocents,” and downplayed any “incidental” Muslim casualties** by explaining that “if there is any innocent who was killed in the mujahideen’s operations, then it was either an unintentional error, or out of necessity.”

The revelation that a full 85 percent of the 3,010 people killed by Al-Qaeda between 2004 and 2008 were Muslims serves as a conclusive rebuke of Zawahiri’s claims. Furthermore, while Western columnists and politicians have often remarked that Muslims are “the real victims” of jihadi terrorism, never before has that assertion been so conclusively or overwhelmingly supported by hard data.

A potential public relations disaster for Al-Qaeda

The CTC report’s authors (Scott Helfstein, Nassir Abdullah, and Muhammad al-Obaidi) **wisely used only Arabic-language reporting in their research, in order to sidestep any complaints of bias** that would have inevitably resulted from using English-language news accounts.

Indeed, while this story has some relevance for Western audiences many will no doubt be shocked to hear that **only two percent of Al-Qaeda’s victims since 2006 have been non-Muslims**—the most powerful potential impact of this report is in the Muslim world.

It’s true that Al-Qaeda’s support in the Muslim world has already been steadily declining in recent years—mainly due to this very issue. **But the headline “Al-Qaeda Kills Eight Times More Muslims than Non-Muslims” could well be a final death blow to Al-Qaeda’s efforts to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world.**

The story has already received some limited coverage by a few Arabic news outlets, including Al-Quds, the largest Palestinian daily, as well as the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Jarida, which printed the story complete with the . . . headline, “Vanguard of Death.”

It’s a good start, but **for this story to have the impact it deserves, it will need to be picked up by many more (and bigger) Arabic-language news outlets, including Al-Jazeera.**

TOSIR Note: See http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Deadly%20Vanguards_Complete_L.pdf for the full CTC paper entitled “Deadly Vanguards: A Study of Al-Qaeda’s Violence against Muslims,” December 2009.

The foregoing is Article No. 1 (TR415A01) in the **Terrorism Open Source Intelligence Report** (TOSIR), No. 415, 24 December 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

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2. “**Deadly Vanguards: A Study of Al-Qaeda’s Violence against Muslims,**” by Scott Helfstein, Nassir Abdullah, and Muhammad al-Obaidi, **Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, December 2009.** [KBTQOverview, KBTQStatements, KBTQStrategy, KBTZIslam] We quote from http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Deadly%20Vanguards_Complete_L.pdf:

“We haven’t killed the innocents; not in Baghdad, nor in Morocco, nor in Algeria, nor anywhere else. And if there is any innocent who was killed in the mujahideen’s operations, then it was either an unintentional error, or out of necessity as in cases of *al-tatarrus*.”

— Ayman al-Zawahiri, 2007

[Al-Qaeda, sympathizers argue Western media outlets are only propaganda machines]

In a 2007 online forum, Al-Qaeda’s second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, confronted questions about the organization’s use of violence and especially violence against Muslims. Zawahiri and other leaders have defended Al-Qaeda’s use of violence, arguing that their operations do not kill Muslims, and on the rare occasions they do, such individuals are apostates or martyrs. Since the inception of Al-Qaeda, the organization has claimed to represent Muslim interests around the world declaring itself the vanguard of true Islam, and the defender of Muslim people.

Unfortunately for Al-Qaeda, **their actions speak louder than their words. The fact is that the vast majority of Al-Qaeda’s victims are Muslims: the analysis here shows that only 15 percent of the fatalities resulting from Al-Qaeda attacks between 2004 and 2008 were Westerners. This report used Arabic media sources to study the victim’s of Al-Qaeda’s violence through a non-Western prism. This allows researchers to avoid accusations of bias associated with Western news outlets or U.S.-based datasets.** Almost all of the major terrorism incident databases utilize Western and English language reporting as primary source material.

Al-Qaeda and sympathizers consistently argue that Western media outlets are no more than propaganda machines, and therefore, any reports or data they release distort facts or lack accuracy. English language sources lack credibility in certain parts of the world. In order to ensure both the accuracy and credibility of the analysis and conclusions, **the report relied exclusively on Arabic language media sources when coding fatalities.** All of the sources used in this exercise are available as an appendix to this report to ensure that other researchers can reproduce these results.

[Al-Qaeda violence much more likely to afflict Muslims than Western powers’ actions]

The results show that non-Westerners are much more likely to be killed in an Al-Qaeda attack. From 2004 to 2008, only 15 percent of the 3,010 victims were Western. During the most recent period studied the numbers skew even further. From 2006 to 2008, only two percent (12 of 661 victims) are from the West, and the remaining 98 percent are inhabitants of countries with Muslim majorities. During this period, a person of non-Western origin was 54 times more likely to die in an Al-Qaeda attack than an individual from the West. **The overwhelming majority of Al-Qaeda victims are Muslims living in Muslim countries, and many are citizens of Iraq, which suffered more Al-Qaeda attacks than any other country courtesy of the Al-Qaeda in Iraq affiliate.**

It is interesting to note that **the percentage of non-Western victims increased in the more recent period at the same time that extremist scholars, pundits, and supporters are questioning the indiscriminate use of violence and the targeting of Muslims.** Al-Qaeda leaders stress that these individuals are not formal members of the

organization, but recognizes their legitimacy as scholars and intellectual contributions to the movement nonetheless.

One of the most referenced actors in the movement, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, abandoned his support of *takfir* (the practice of excommunication that is often used to justify murder), and condemned Al-Qaeda for indiscriminate killing.

Even pundits that continue to support Al-Qaeda's vision of jihad and the use of *takfir* still warn against the adverse effects of targeting Muslims. For example, **Nadj al-Rawi**, a well-regarded jihadist pundit, warns that excessive declaration of *takfir* may generate "antagonism of a Muslim toward his religion."

Sheikh Hamed bin Abdullah al-Ali, former secretary general of the Salafi Movement of Kuwait, counseled jihadis to recognize the sanctity of Muslim blood. Even one of Al-Qaeda's important senior leaders, **Abu Yahya al-Libi**, alluded to operational mistakes that might alienate the broader population, and blamed the *ullema* (Muslim clerics) for poor guidance and support.

Despite numerous warnings and ongoing public debates about the indiscriminate use of violence, Al-Qaeda remains committed to its current tactics as displayed by the steady stream of Muslim fatalities from 2006 to 2008. **Al-Qaeda was marginally successful at attacking Westerners in 2004 and 2005, largely resulting from the attacks in Madrid and London.** However, **attacks dropped off considerably in 2006, and there were no Western fatalities recorded from Al-Qaeda attacks in that year.**

In 2007 and 2008 attacks leveled off to 30 and 29, respectively, but there are almost no Western fatalities (12 of 571 victims). Irrespective of statements made by Zawahiri and others, the figures, drawn from exclusively Arabic news sources, show that **the Muslims they claim to protect are much more likely to be the targets of Al-Qaeda violence than the Western powers they claim to fight.**

[Arabic language primary source material used exclusively to code fatalities in the data set]

. . . **The data in the tables [accompanying] this report is from Arabic primary source news material, but the research team generated the initial list of attacks using the Worldwide Incident Tracking System (WITS).**

The WITS database [<http://wits.nctc.gov>] is **an open source dataset of terrorism incidents maintained by the National Counterterrorism Center.** The team in charge of maintaining WITS details the methodology it uses to generate the dataset, attempting to ensure transparency in its coding process.

The WITS dataset was only used [by us] to generate the initial list of Al-Qaeda attacks (date and place), and was not used to generate the fatality data The WITS dataset went online in 2004 and covers the period from 2004 to 2009 (updates are posted quarterly). **To ensure that Al-Qaeda's targeting from 2004 to 2008 remained reasonably consistent over the operational life of the group, the analysis also examines a small set of high-profile attacks from the late-1990s and early 2000s. . . .**

There were two criteria used to generate the list of attacks: (1) the attack had to be carried out by Al-Qaeda or a group publicly associated with Al-Qaeda, and (2) the

perpetrators needed to claim responsibility for the attack. . . . After generating the list of attack dates, the research team exploited the large cache of Arabic news sources available online. Rather than use casualty data from the WITS (or any other) system, this study wanted to differentiate itself from many of the other databases by using Arabic news sources that are widely available.

Each attack observation was used to search for articles or incident records from the Arabic news sources, with hope of culling information about the attack victims. Each time the Arabic press reported an event **the researcher coded the number of fatalities, the number of Western versus non-Western fatalities, and the news source used in the study.** In many instances, multiple news sources were used to ensure accuracy. . . .

[Conclusions]

Irrespective of the ongoing public debates about *takfir* and violence against Muslims amongst Al-Qaeda associates, deeds speak louder than words. Al-Qaeda represents itself as the vanguard of the Muslim community, committed to **upholding Islamic values and defending Muslim people against Western forces, but its behavior represents a callous attitude toward the lives of those the group claims to protect.**

Al-Qaeda absolves responsibility for the deaths of Muslims by claiming that they are either martyrs or apostates. The definition of apostate, however, varies considerably. Al-Qaeda considers any Muslim that impedes their struggle by working with the West or an unfriendly regime as an apostate, and therefore a legitimate target. This includes Muslims serving in the armed forces, serving as police officers, and even those occupying civilian jobs. **Al-Qaeda makes convenient use of this designation to justify its indiscriminate use of violence.**

To justify the killing of innocent Muslims, or martyrs, Al-Qaeda references a sharia rule called *al-tatarrus*. *Al-tatarrus* refers to the use of human shields, the practice of avoiding hostility by hiding behind others. Muslims are not supposed to kill other Muslims, and historically, enemies used this prohibition against Muslim military forces by surrounding themselves with other Muslims. Muslims found the *al-tatarrus* rule was a strategic liability and looked for ways to circumvent the ban. **The notion that it is okay to kill Muslims being used as human shields, is not widely invoked or discussed in other contemporary circles.**

Al-Qaeda resurrected the [*al-tatarrus*] term to justify the killing of innocents, arguing that these people were essentially human shields, and if innocent, they died martyrs. Among the only justifications for this obscure rule is Abu Yahya al-Libi's book entitled *Al-Tatarrus in the Modern Jihad*, and Ayman al-Zawahiri cited this source during his open forum referenced above. Al-Qaeda has acknowledged that assailants should be patient and wait for the right time to carry out attacks (in martyr videos and announcements), but this report shows there is scant evidence of prudence or effort to limit violence.

Irrespective of Al-Qaeda's justifications, if history provides a glimpse into the future, the group and its associates will pose the greatest threat to fellow Muslims.

The foregoing is Article No. 2 (TR415A02) in the **Terrorism Open Source Intelligence Report** (TOSIR), No. 415, 24 December 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

3. “**All (Muslim) Politics Is Local: How Context Shapes Islam in Power,**” by Charles Tripp, **Foreign Affairs**, September-October 2009—a review of (1) **Beyond Terror and Martyrdom: The Future of the Middle East**, by Gilles Kepel (Harvard University Press, 2008); and (2) **The Crisis of Islamic Civilization**, by Ali A. Allawi (Yale University Press, 2009).

[KBTZIslam, KBTRMuslimWT, KBTSIraq, KBTREurope] Gilles Kepel, a French scholar and analyst on Islam and the Arab world, has written on radical Islam. Ali A. Allawi, a Shia Muslim, served as minister of trade, defense, and finance in postwar Iraq (2003-2006). Reviewer Charles Tripp is professor of politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. We *quote* from this item at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65229/charles-tripp/all-muslim-politics-is-local>:

The maxim Islam *din wa-dawla* (Islam is religion and state) is often said to describe a distinguishing mark of Islam the suggestion being that Islam is a religion with a political mission at its core. **Both those who repeat the mantra with approving fervor and those who worry about it assert its essential truth and suggest that all Muslims must make it a part of their worldview.** Some go so far as to claim that this axiom calls for a particular form of state structure or political behavior.

And yet, **of course, the statement is nothing more than a political slogan—an artifact of its time**, its meaning contingent on the setting in which it is used, like any other rallying cry. **This quality does not make the slogan any less meaningful for the Muslims who subscribe to it;** what it does is highlight the fact that this saying reflects a preoccupation with state power in the modern world.

The Muslims who adhere to it, no less than those who do not and no less than non-Muslims, are both the products and the makers of that world. This point is worth stating since **much of the present debate about the role of Islam in world politics tends to downplay the political** or, at least, display a one-dimensional understanding of what drives political ambition. **The political behavior of Islamists, and sometimes that of all Muslims, is often treated as an exotic peculiarity that defies normal analysis and can only be explained as an extension of their faith.**

[Kepel, Allawi books avoid pitfall of relying only on Muslim sources re Muslim politics]

Whatever one’s reference point, however, the sometimes sordid business of politics has a gravitational pull that brings lofty ideals and grand sentiments down to earth with a thump. **To play the game of politics is to grapple with the practicalities of power.** **This requires making sense of why people act as they do and when they do: why they respond to certain calls to action—nationalist, Islamist, whatever—and why they think their political activities are appropriate, ethically as well as practically, to the ends they imagine worthy of achievement.**

Investigating these questions may be an empirical or epistemological challenge, but it does not require singling out religious motivations, Islamic or otherwise. The same searching questions should be asked of the religiously motivated that are asked of

liberals, conservatives, Marxists, fascists, nationalists, and any other group that tries to put into practice its imagined notion of the good life. **One should not rely only on the players' descriptions of themselves. Yet this is precisely what has happened to the effort to understand the role of religion in shaping the political lives of Muslims.** Many members of the Western media, and even many Western academics, have pointed to the most extreme of Muslim political tracts and suggested that these are what Islamism, or even Islam, is really about.

It is all the more refreshing, therefore, to encounter **two serious books that avoid this pitfall: Gilles Kepel puts the "politics" back in "Islamist politics," and Ali Allawi explores the often troubled relationship between worldly power and the spirituality of Islamic beliefs. Both books indicate, in their own way, that all Muslims who seek to reshape the world according to Islamic ideals and traditions, whatever they may define those to be, are confronted by the mundane need to bend an often obdurate reality to their will.**

[Consciously Islamist movements and parties still preoccupied with what works and how]

The exercise of power is bound by time and place, and it depends on the competence of political actors. These conditions determine the political impact of any Islamic ideals. It is worth contrasting, for example, **the very different outcomes of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's calls for revolt in Iran in 1963 and in 1978: the first foundered; the second started a revolution.** In some cases, the venality of political actors can trigger disillusionment and a reappraisal of Islamic obligations, leading some to turn their backs on an Islamic political program. (Iran might become such a case, after the unrest over the presidential election earlier this year.)

A program that does not work—spectacularly, corrosively, or insidiously—loses credibility and purchase. It can no longer move people; it has no traction. **This may be the result of various factors unrelated to religion or ideology, but these factors necessarily affect the ways in which people understand and act on calls to put their ideals into practice.**

Allawi captures this point well in his account of the rise, domination, and decline of secular ideologies and their adherents in the Middle East. **Having lived through Iraq's turbulent years of revolution, he witnessed thousands of Iraqis being drawn to the Iraqi Communist Party and thousands of others coming to believe that Arab nationalism and Arab socialism, Baathist or otherwise, would bring modernity to Iraq.** Unsurprisingly, Allawi is wary of these fallen gods.

For him, **the Islamist political movements that originally emerged in Iraq in the 1950s and gained power, thanks to the U.S. occupation, after 2003, came not simply from the disillusioned secularists. Crucially, he sees them as products of a distinctively Iraqi politics.** They certainly identify themselves as Muslim—Shiite or Sunni—but they also **represent what it means to be political actors in contemporary Iraq:** having to deal with Kurdish secessionists, foreign intervention, and oil-based political economies. **The resources of Islamist groups may be very different now than when these groups first emerged; demographics and power structures have changed.**

But the expression of their political imagination, no matter how self-consciously attached to distinctively Islamic markers, is similar to their predecessors’. Thus their attention to defining community and collective loyalties; the importance they attribute to territorial control and administration; their building of coalitions; their ideas of representation; their use of violence; their cultivation, with money, of patrimonial networks; their competing for political leadership—all are familiar features of political behavior. **Self-consciously Islamist movements and parties, no less than the secular nationalist ones, to which they bear a strong family resemblance, are preoccupied with what works and how.**

[Two “grand narratives” have dominated common understandings of political Islam]

Grounding Islamist organizations and their sympathizers in a local political reality shaped by the histories, predicaments, and preoccupations of the people they seek to mobilize is a central theme of Kepel’s wide-ranging study of various Islamic political movements, chiefly in the Middle East. Part of his intention is to demonstrate how political movements that define themselves based on their readings of Islamic traditions are best understood through a close analysis of the contexts that produced them; they are not the generic symptoms of “resurgent” or “radical” Islam.

Looking at Islamist organizations from Afghanistan to Iraq, from Palestine to Lebanon, **Kepel gives a convincing account of the failure of what he says are the two “grand narratives” that have dominated common understandings of political Islam over the past decade or so.**

The first is the narrative of the “war on terror.” Put forward by the George W. Bush administration and its circle of ideologues, **it implied that the U.S. military would clear the way for the establishment of democratic politics across the Middle East.**

The second is both the target and the mirror image of the first: propagated by Osama bin Laden and his right-hand man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, it holds that jihad directed against the “far enemy” is the best way of establishing Islamic rule in Muslim-majority states and elsewhere.

As Kepel points out, **both theories are delusions, have equally improbable goals, and have inflicted horrific damage—damage that has often provoked local resistance and left the United States and Al-Qaeda bogged down** in the intransigent politics of place, facing criticism, fragmenting alliances, and isolation.

Quite apart from the ethical revulsion these two narratives have provoked among Muslims and non-Muslims alike, another problem, as Kepel points out, is their **remoteness from Muslims’ actual, and diverse, experiences. Both narratives so reify religion as to turn political behavior into the mere reflection of an individual’s attachment to a timeless set of prescriptions called “Islam,”** as if these were removed from the contexts in which Muslim principles and identities drive political actors. **They also suggest that Muslims’ politics can—or, in the case of bin Laden, must—be understood in relation to their faith.**

Yet the truth is more complicated, contested, and contingent than these two narratives allow. Neither can explain why at a given time and place a given group of

Muslims chooses the prescriptions it does from Islam's vast and rich tradition to guide its political behavior. **And neither can account for why other groups of Muslims act on very different understandings of Islam** or why still others see their engagement with power as having only the most tenuous connection, if any, to their religious beliefs.

[Grand narratives about Islam, civilization troubling or irrelevant upon examination]

What does explain these differences is political context. Kepel's account makes sense of the diversity of Muslims' politics, not simply in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia but also in **western Europe, where a series of violent incidents and symbolic confrontations over the past decade has prompted talk of a fundamental incompatibility of values and a "clash of civilizations."** A cursory glance at political reality makes clear that **most of the conflicts involving Muslim immigrants** in, for example, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom **owed more to the policies pursued by these states' governments** than to the Islamic identities or even Islamist proclivities of the protagonists.

For Kepel, **the policy eschewing integration in the Netherlands** ("pillarization," which sees religious communities as separate pillars that help hold together the Dutch republic) **and its counterpart in the United Kingdom** ("multiculturalism," whereby the state lets people of different cultures regulate their own affairs) **created fertile ground for the growth of radical Islamist political sentiments among Muslim immigrants in those two countries.**

These approaches have roots in the Netherlands' and the United Kingdom's imperial pasts: overseas, **Dutch and British colonists favored ruling indirectly and cultivating native leaders to ensure order locally.** In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom today, **policies shaped by these traditions have prompted the authorities to be hands-off** when it comes to their Muslim communities—at least until state security is threatened, at which point the state takes clumsy measures that many Muslims interpret as discrimination.

Kepel holds up **the contrasting example of France, which has pursued clear and, according to some, highly intrusive policies designed to impose secularism in public life.** He does concede that France's "assimilation" policy has been a good deal more successful at integrating Muslim immigrants civically than economically—hence, the politics of contestation, including riots involving French citizens with Muslim backgrounds, that has erupted periodically. But as Kepel's account makes clear, **this is better understood as the rebellion of bored, out-of-work, and marginalized French youths living in dreary suburbs than as anything remotely resembling Islamist politics.**

Whether these differences in policy provide the key explanation for the variety of political views among the Muslim immigrant communities of Europe is still up for debate. Some argue, for instance, that the explanation has more to do with these communities' links to the politics of their countries of origin.

Nevertheless, Kepel's analysis is valuable for taking the trouble to scrutinize the micropolitics of different groups. **He shows that the closer one looks, the more either irrelevant or troubling grand narratives about Islam and civilization become.**

[How to effectively engage the existing power structure without compromising core ideals]

Allawi's otherwise erudite and thoughtful book is, for its part, haunted by the kind of generalization that Kepel eschews. **Allawi is writing about Islam as a faith on the stage of world history, and as the book's title suggests, his central concern is "the crisis of Islamic civilization."** By this, he means a number of things but principally the fragmentation of authority, the loss of unifying cultural referents, and the divergence between the spiritual and the material in Muslims' conduct. **Together, these fractures have deprived Islam of the kind of autonomous, self-rejuvenating drive that Allawi sees in other civilizations** (say, China or the West) **and have made it more vulnerable to domination by the forces of globalization**, be they powerful governments, capitalism, or cultural hegemons.

From Allawi's perspective, Islam has become privatized, an article of interior faith nothing like the framework for public life that he believes it has been historically and should continue to be. **If for Kepel the privatization of religion is a recipe for social harmony and a goal of the secular state, for Allawi it is the beginning of the end.**

This position presents Allawi with something of a dilemma. **On the one hand, he pleads for Muslims to reconnect with the powerful spiritual essence of Islam and to reestablish Islam as a major player in world history. On the other, he is intensely wary of, indeed repulsed by the sight of, political Islamists scrambling to use any means available—graft, corruption, violence—for political advantage, thereby cutting themselves off from the "wellsprings of Islamic ethics."**

The targets of his anger include organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamist parties of Iraq, which he sees as symptoms of the crisis of Islamic civilization rather than as part of the solution. As he rightly says, **these groups reflect the politics of those they are fighting in all its ruthlessness, not the spiritual values at the heart of Islam.**

The question is, how can one have any impact on the existing order without in some way succumbing to the logic of political practicalities? **The harsh truth is that however sublime or spiritual the ideals—and Islam, no less than any other great religious tradition, can provide a dazzling array of such ideals—their champions will need to engage with the politics of place in order to realize them.** There may be many ways of doing this, and disputes about which ways are best are inevitable, but at the heart of this task lies **the old political conundrum of how to engage effectively the existing power structure without compromising one's core ideals.**

Reflecting on this question, **one realizes that political discourse is the very antithesis of civilizational discourse**, even if the latter can sometimes be used polemically in political debates. **The closer one looks at the multitude of hopes, prejudices, fears, and activities that constitute political life, the harder it is to meaningfully apply to a political order an overarching, homogenizing, and essentializing term such as "civilization."**

[Modernity is a composite affair—constantly refashioned by those who engage with it]

It should be little surprise, then, that **Allawi is at his best when he turns to the particular. Some of his book's most powerful passages concern the corruption of governments in the Middle East and, in his memorable phrase, the "sinister cities"**

of the Persian Gulf, which have embraced materialism and an “oppressive modernity.” These grim facets of globalization form the reality of the modern world, as inhabited and created by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Much of Allawi’s concern, in other words, is not really about Islam as a religion, or even about Islam as a civilization, but rather about what has been happening to Muslims. They have had various responses to modernity and in the process have created new ways of being Muslim. **Some of these responses—peaceful or violent, accommodating or rejectionist—could become an inspiration for millions.** But even those will catch on not simply because of Muslims’ professions of faith; **if they do spread, it will also be because they help Muslims make sense of power, in all its forms.**

This is the most important message of these books. Kepel and Allawi are at their strongest when they examine the intellectual and political trends that have shaped the experiences of Muslims across the globe. As Kepel and Allawi demonstrate, these trends have made Muslims full actors in the evolving story of world history, whether they act self-consciously with reference to their Muslim identities or not. **To be a Muslim in the modern world is both to be shaped by that world and to take part in its shaping.**

Modernity, with all its ambiguities and sometimes contradictory impulses, is a composite affair, constantly refashioned by those who engage with it. Kepel’s and Allawi’s books are reminders that politics is rooted in time and place, and that at the same time it nonetheless follows a remarkably similar logic in all its various settings. **Understanding this logic, while also grasping the full significance of context, helps one understand the behavior of political actors—and not just Muslim ones.**

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4. “The Taliban’s Media Blitz,” by Jeffrey Dressler, Institute for the Study of War, 24 November 2009 (<http://www.understandingwar.org/print/937>). [KBTSAfghanGW, KBTCInfo] Jeffrey Dressler is a research analyst at the institute where he recently authored the report, “Securing Helmand: Understanding and Responding to the Enemy.” *We quote:*

As the world awaits the highly anticipated announcement of President Obama’s Afghan war strategy, the Taliban is actively trying to influence the debate in Washington through a sophisticated information campaign. Emphasizing the intractability of the conflict, **the Taliban seek to dissuade the White House from investing more blood and treasure in a war that they contend will be a bloody, drawn-out struggle.** However, **there is little truth in the Taliban’s media blitz. It is a strategic mistake for decision-makers in Washington to buy-in to the Taliban’s propaganda efforts.**

[Taliban see invasion of Afghanistan as attack on their organization—and Islam writ-large]

The Taliban is aggressively attempting to rebrand their image and feed talking points to those in favor of de-escalation. Last month, the Taliban’s senior leadership

released a statement claiming that, “[we] **did not have any agenda to harm other countries including Europe, nor do we have such [an] agenda today.**” This release coincided with a New York Times story claiming that the Obama administration has begun to define the Taliban as a group that “does not express ambitions of attacking the United States.” Of course, **nothing could be farther from the truth.**

Earlier this year, **a spokesman for the Taliban’s media wing said, “After removing America from our homeland and defeating them, we would then have achieved half of the work to free our occupied Muslim countries** because with the collapse America . . . NATO will collapse. **And all the towers of tyranny will collapse in the region, including Israel and Zionism, which receives its military, economic, and political power from America.**” When asked if Afghanistan will become a center to attack targets outside of Afghanistan, he replied, “. . . After liberating Afghanistan we will do what concerns us of principle Islamic missions.”

The Taliban clearly see the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan as an attack not only on their organization, but on Islam writ-large. They will not be satisfied with vanquishing America from their historical homeland, as they see their struggle as fundamental to Islamic missions across the globe. This is precisely the reason why Al-Qaeda was allowed to train, plan, and launch attacks from Afghanistan. The Taliban are closely watching the debate unfolding in Washington and offering their insight on pending legislation.

Recently, **the Taliban’s day-to-day operational leader, Mullah Barader, released a statement directly addressed to President Obama, Senator Carl Levin, and the Senate Armed Services Committee’s proposal to include “re-integration funding” in the Senate’s annual defense appropriations bill.** As in Iraq, Senator Levin envisions doling out financial incentives for Taliban fighters who would be willing to switch sides. **Barader urges the President that this strategy is bound to fail, as his fighters are not simply hired hands, but deeply ideological and committed jihadists** dedicated to the independence of the Afghan state and the widespread establishment of sharia law.

[Taliban strategy appreciates popular opinion is crucial to multinational staying power]

In reality, **the overwhelming majority of the Afghan Taliban’s fighting forces are not deeply committed ideologues from Pakistani religious schools, but disenfranchised locals,** increasingly desperate to make a living. **They accept measly rations to plant improvised explosive devices and conduct ambushes** on U.S., NATO and Afghan patrols. Large-scale Taliban offensives were forcibly delayed over the past year because the majority of fighters were harvesting their crops. Only after harvest season were these fighters available to participate in the leadership’s planned offensives. **If offered a viable alternative, there is no reason to believe that these individuals wouldn’t be willing to switch sides. Nothing terrifies the Taliban’s senior leadership more than the prospect of losing sway over these desperate individuals.**

The Taliban understands that an influx of coalition troops operating at the local level to protect and ultimately improve the lives of ordinary Afghans poses a serious threat to their widespread recruitment and domination over local populations. This is precisely why they are weighing in on the Beltway debate, and their timing is not a coincidence. **The Taliban are often, incorrectly, thought of as a loosely organized**

band of rag-tag fighters. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are well-organized, sophisticated, and thoroughly entrenched throughout Afghanistan.

This is not to suggest that the Taliban are insurmountable. They typically exaggerate the extent of their operations and influence over local Pashtuns. This recent propaganda campaign directed at U.S. and international audiences **seeks to exploit sagging public support for the war effort and convince international leadership that no possible combination of strategy and resources is capable of reversing the momentum of the war**, seizing the initiative from the insurgents.

The Taliban’s media strategy demonstrates an appreciation that popular opinion is crucial to the staying power of a multinational alliance. President Obama and other international leaders must explain the urgency and imperative of the mission in Afghanistan. **General Stanley McChrystal**, in his expert military opinion, **believes that this is a winnable war**, given the necessary resources and commitment from the international community and the Afghan government. **It’s important that the Taliban’s talking points don’t trump the general’s.**

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5. **“Bioweapons Could Catch U.S. Cities Off Guard,”** by J. R. Labbe, Tri-City Herald, 24 November 2009 (<http://www.tri-cityherald.com>). [KBTTBioChem] Jill “J. R.” Labbe is the editorial director of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. We quote:

Colorado Springs, Colorado—**If America’s less-than-rapid response to the H1N1 pandemic is an indicator of how the U.S. public health system would react in the event of a bioweapons attack, we are in deep, deep yogurt**, folks. It’s taken more than six months to ramp up production of a vaccine for a contagious disease that health officials worldwide knew was coming.

[**Improved cell-based vaccine technology essential to cope with a bioweapons attack**]

Fort Worth parents remember all too well the late-April decision by school district officials to **close all 144 local campuses for more than a week** because of concerns about the spread of swine flu. **Wouldn’t it have made sense to vaccinate children against H1N1 before school started this fall?**

“Sure it would have,” said retired Air Force Colonel Randall Larsen, executive director of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Proliferation, and Terrorism and author of Our Own Worst Enemy. **“But there’s a problem. There’s [just] one facility in the United States making H1N1 vaccine, and it’s using the same technology we used 50 years ago.”**

Inoculating eggs—produced at the 35 U.S. chicken farms operated with the sole purpose of vaccine production—with a virus that then creates hundreds of thousands of copies of itself is Cold War technology. **The efficiency of the virus replication determines how**

much and how fast vaccine can be produced. In the case of the H1N1 vaccine, reproduction was “sluggish,” admitted Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius in a 28 October news conference.

The nation’s lack of progress in moving to cell-based vaccine technology—which would cut production time from about 23 weeks to between 12 and 14 weeks and produce more vaccine—**should be a concern to every American who has given so much as a nanosecond of thought about the country’s ability to recover from a bioweapons attack.** Because preventing such an incident is nigh on impossible.

[Mitigate long-term terrorism value of bioattack with rapid response, recognition, recovery]

“It is hard to have a preventive policy for bioterrorism because of the vast variety of agents available,” said retired Major General John Parker, the former commanding general of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Material Command at Fort Detrick, Maryland, to journalists participating in a seminar last week on the weapons of mass destruction threat and America’s communities sponsored by the Heritage Foundation and the El Pomar Foundation.

A December 2008 report issued by **the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Proliferation, and Terrorism** concluded that **terrorists will be more likely to use a biological weapon than a nuclear one in a future attack** on the United States.

As disquieting as it is to hear, **the materials to construct a bioweapon aren’t difficult to obtain,** even in a post-9/11 world. **The level of technological expertise needed to manufacture a bioweapon isn’t high,** said the “World at Risk” report. And the materials needed to make such a weapon aren’t all closely monitored. Many of the pathogens are readily available—in nature, in sick people, and in laboratories.

The key to mitigating the long-term terrorism value of a bioweapon is rapid response, recognition, and recovery—and recovery includes having therapeutics available ASAP for those exposed and vaccines to prevent the spread.

“The point of terrorism is not just to claim victims but to terrorize everyone around them,” said Cliff May, president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies The impact of a dirty bomb or a biological weapon going off somewhere in the United States wouldn’t be confined to the number of people killed or exposed to the pathogen or radiological agent, he said. **“The psychological and economic effects would be far greater than the initial public health threat,”** May said.

As Larsen concludes in his book, **terrorists will again attack the United States.** The appropriate reaction, he wrote, “should be shock, but not surprise. **Americans will always be shocked when ruthless, immoral cowards intentionally kill innocents, but we can no longer justify being surprised.”**

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