ON "ISLAMIC" POLITICS AND THE RESISTANCE IN IRAQ[1]

ARSHIN ADIB-MOGHADDAM*

It must come as a surprise to many strategic analysts who planned the invasion of Iraq, that the US/UK alliance has not been able to sustain a minimal degree of security within the country. Why can't their overwhelming military force control the violence by a militarily inferior few? One of the reasons is that the US is not merely fighting a physical enemy, but that it is "shadow-boxing" with three salient ideational constructs permeating the wider Islamic worlds: "Wahhabi" neo-fundamentalism, "Arab" ultra-nationalism and "Shia" revolutionism; in Iraq embodied respectively by al-Qaeda type terrorist movements, by the remnants of the Ba'thist dictatorship of Saddam Hussein; and by the "parties of the

1. This is a revised and expanded version of section 3.2.1 of my *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A cultural genealogy* (London: Routledge, 2006).

* Prof. Arshin Adib Moghaddam, is senior research Fellow in SOAS, University of London. Aalo6@soas.ac.uk

International Studies Journal (ISJ), Vol. 5, No. 4, Spring 2009, pp. 1-20.

downtrodden" or the poorer strata of Iraqi society such as the Mahdi army led by Moqtada al-Sadr. Despite their different agendas and their profound conflicts with each other, all three currents draw sustenance from the struggle for independence against foreign domination in the post-Colonial Muslim worlds. They thus merge on a pivotal issue: that civil war and total violence is preferable to colonial exploitation.

Thus, understanding what is happening in Iraq and the wider region cannot be detached from analysis of the ideational configuration of the area. Intellectual paradigms opposed to the political, economic and cultural dependency of Muslim societies on imported ("Western") concepts, and favouring instead reinvigoration of Islamic tenets is central to that task. It would go beyond the confines of this article to review comprehensively the political thought of Muslim theoreticians of course.(1) What I shall focus on instead, are the nuances of "anti-imperialism" in the Islamic world. Converging in their opposition to foreign dominance and in their reference to Islamic precepts, the intellectual paradigms differ considerably in their political and socio-economic outlook and in the sanctioning of the methods of opposition. In order to appreciate these variations, I differentiate between "neo-critical Islam" on the one side, and "neo-fundamentalist Islam" on the other. Neo-critical Islam, embraces the ideas and paradigms of both "progressive" *ulema* (Islamic clergy) and lay intellectuals who believe that democracy, pluralism, civil society or other manifestations of political modernity are principally compatible with Islamic precepts, condoning both discursive epistemology and dialectical methodology to bring Islam and modernity into dialogue with the "West." Conversely, neo-fundamentalist Islam purports passive adherence to literal reading of the Quran and the *hadith* (compilation of the Prophets words and deeds), favouring orthodox implementation of the *sharia* (Islamic law) and isolation from the cultural, economic and political determinations of "Western" modernity. In other words, whilst the former accommodates "Western" tenets, the latter promotes violent struggle against everything associated with the "West."

NEO-CRITICAL ISLAM

One of the intellectual forefathers of contemporary Islamic political theories is Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (also Asadabadi) who was born into a Shia community in Asadabad, Iran around 1838.(2) Experiencing Britain as a colonial power during his travels through India and Afghanistan, al-Afghani employed Islamic political philosophy to devise an anti-colonialist programme suitable to mobilise political action against European imperialism. Through his writings and political activism Afghani vigorously opposed the racist notions then current in Europe which claimed that only Europe could produce a culture and civilisation and ignored all highly developed non-European cultures including Islam'.(3) Comparable to (Arab) nationalist theory,(4) Afghani's Islamic paradigm was developed in response to Ernest Renan's assertions about the inherent superiority of European civilisation, and emerged hence in dialogue with— rather than in isolation from ideas produced in Western- and Central Europe.(5)

The anti-imperialist discourse inspired by Afghani and his pupil Mohammad Abduh (1849-1905) presented Islamic tenets within a modernist interpretation, adopting and refining European concepts in an attempt to reconcile the past with the present. Opening up the traditional monopoly of the *ulema* on the interpretation of Islamic law (the textual interpretation or *tafsir*) and jurisprudence (*feqh*) was central to this task. Demanding the resumption of individual interpretation or *ijtihad* of both the Quran and the *hadith*, hence also rejecting uncritical imitation (*taqlid*) of religious verdicts (*fatwa*) central to Shia religious practice, the critical Islam of Afghani and Abduh was in an innovative dialogue with concepts developed in Europe, rather than in opposition to them. Incorporating nationalist ideas into an Islamic framework, Afghani's political Islam was primarily conceived as 'a communal identity—a basis for solidarity that distinguished the conquered from the conqueror and gave the conquered the cohesion and confidence necessary for rebellion and triumph.'(6) In order to resist European imperialism, he urged allegiance to the Ottoman state, whose leader Abdul-

Hamid II co-opted Afghani's ideas as a means to legitimate his domestic rule and mobilise the populace against "Western" forces.(7)

Afghani's interpretation of Islamic political philosophy was developed by his pupil Mohammad Abduh with whom he founded the journal *Al-Urwa al-wuthqa* (The indissoluble Link) in Paris in 1884. Educated at al-Azhar, Abduh became a judge in the Egyptian courts and was appointed "Grand Mufti" of the country in 1899. His institutionalised authority allowed him to emphasise the compatibility between Islam and "Western" science, advocating the reformation of the curriculum of the al-Azhar accordingly. By returning to the "original" Islam of the pre-Umayyad period and a purified understanding of the Quran and the *hadith*, Abduh argued, a synthesis between Islam and manifestations of "Western" modernity was achievable. Modernity as such was not seen as inherently threatening and in opposition to Islam. Rather, it is through reforming Islam (*islihat*) that Muslim societies would be empowered

> *to liberate thought from the shackles of imitation [taqlid] and understand religion as it was understood by the community before dissension appeared; to return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources, and to weigh them in the scale of human reason, which God has created in order to prevent excess or adulteration in religion, so that God's wisdom may be fulfilled and the order of the human world preserved; and to prove that, seen in this light, religion must be accounted a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence, summoning him to respect established truths and to depend on them in his moral life and conduct.*(8)

The ideas and constructs of Afghani and Abduh inspired scholars—explicitly or implicitly— to devise Islamic theories in at least two directions. Prominent Muslim intellectuals such as, Hamid Enayat, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), and Ali Shariati (differences notwithstanding) developed

innovative theoretical constructs as a means to advocate a critical understanding of the plurality of meanings in Islam, rejecting the monopolisation of religious thought by the *ulema*.[9] Backwardness (*ta'akhur*) and inertia (*jumud*) were juxtaposed with progress (*taraqqi*) and evolution (*tatawwur*). In dialectic cross-fertilisation with European thought, the idea of an Islamic awakening (*sahwa Islamiyya*), contributed to a strong "anti-imperialist" culture. "Western" *modernity* on the other side, was not rejected *in toto*. Rather more to the contrary, scientific achievement and technological modernisation were seen as necessary prerequisites for the progress of Muslim countries.

The themes of *islahat* (reform), *tarraqi* (progress) and *tattawur* (evolution) continue to position prominently in the paradigms of contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Abdol-Karim Soroush, Ali Mazrui, Muhammad Arkoun and Rashid Ghannouchi. The *political* translation of neo-critical Islam and its contemporary engagement with the "West" on the other side is exemplified in the *Weltanschauung* of reformist decision-makers such as the former Malaysian Prime Minister Mohammad Mahatir or the ex-Iranian President Mohammad Khatami who both advocate institutionalised dialogue with the West. The former authored the "Dialogue amongst civilisations" theme which was adopted by the United Nations as the motto for the year 2001 and the latter convenes a yearly international conference on Islam and Democracy which has evolved into an international venue, focusing on improving relations between the "Western" and Muslim worlds.[10]

NEO-FUNDAMENTALISM

Historically, "neo-critical Islam" has benefited from the philosophical spiritualism practised by Islamic mystics (*sufis*) and is affiliated with the writings of Ibn-Sina (Avicenna, 980-1037) and Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali and the proponents of dialectical theology (*ilm al-kalam*), developed in the tenth and eleventh century AD.[11] Analytically, this tradition is

distinguishable from the Hanbali school and its interpretation by Ibn Taymiyya in the thirteenth century AD. In agreement in their methodology to return to the precedent of the Prophet and his companions (*al-salaf al-salih*, hence the occasional designation as "salafists"), modern interpretations of those classical writings differed considerably in their tolerance of internal dissent and external co-operation. Whilst adherents to the former tradition demanded deconstruction of traditional Islamic tenets in accordance with the determinations of modernity, the group of Islamic thinkers relating their ideas to the latter tradition reverted to a rather more fundamentalist reading of the Quran and the *hadith*. In contrast to the dialectical reasoning (*kalam*) and the philosophical tradition of Islamic thought presented by Alfarabi, Ibn-Sina, Ibn Rushd, and Fakr al-Din al-Razi amongst others, the school of thought deriving its ideas from the teachings of Ibn Hanbal 'was strongly opposed to all attempts at reducing the principles of Islam to a construction of the human intelligence, but showed great flexibility in applying them to the problems of social life.'(12) The Hanbali school has repeatedly functioned as a point of reference for neo-fundamentalist groups, including al-Qaeda type movements in Iraq. Hence, having sketched the signs and symbols of the philosophical tradition, I proceed with an examination of the neo-fundamentalist system of thought, exploring how the "Hanbali" tradition was developed, politicised and largely perverted as a transnational protest movement.

In the thirteenth to fourteenth century, the Hanbali tradition was revived by Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), who preferred a literal and traditional reading of the revealed texts over the interpretative approach followed by the philosophical schools. In modern discourse, the works of Ibn Taymiyya (most notably the political treatise, *al-Siyasa al-shariyya* and the multi-volume *Fatawa*, religious verdicts and legal opinions) functioned as a point of reference for a host of thinkers who were opposed to philosophical interpretations of Islamic thought and mystical practice within the *umma*, and reconciliation with "Western" ideas outside of the community. The

writings of Rashid Rida (1865-1935) emerged as the most prominent reinterpretation of Ibn Taymiyya and the Hanbali school of thought. Inspired by the politicisation of Islam by his mentor Abduh and al-Afghani, but not engaged in a comparable reconciliation with "Western" modernity, Rida advocated a rather more fundamentalist reading of the Quran and *hadith*, without, however, refuting the principle of *ijtihad*. Perhaps the most consequential political move was his alliance with the Wahhabi movement in central Arabia and the policies of its leader Abdal Aziz ibn Sa'ud. Defending the new movement against allegations of unorthodoxy, Rida turned into an advocate of Wahhabism, condoning the Wahhabi conquest of the Hejaz and the holy cities which led to the foundation of the Saudi Arabian nation-state.(13)

The interpretation of the Sunni Hanbali tradition by Rida was developed by Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Abu A'la Maudoodi, each setting their agendas according to the historical contexts they were embedded in. Hassan al-Banna, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ihkwan al-Muslimun*) in Egypt in 1928 and was assassinated in the same country in 1949 advocated political activism and socio-economic reform according to Islamic principles. During his leadership of the Brotherhood—which evolved into a transnational movement with branches in Syria, Sudan, Kuwait, North Africa, Jordan and elsewhere in the Arab world—al-Banna called for reform rather than revolution, preferring social engagement, spiritual development and moral achievement over political propagation against the state:

> *You are a new soul in the heart of this nation to give it life by means of the Qur'an ... When asked what it is for which you call, reply that it is Islam, the message of Muhammad, the religion that contains within it government, and has as one of its obligations freedom. If you are told that you are political, answer that Islam admits no such distinction. If you are accused of being revolutionaries, say, 'We are voices for right and for peace in*

which we dearly believe, and of which we are proud. If you rise against us or stand in the path of our message, then we are permitted by God to defend ourselves against your injustice.'[14]

Despite al-Banna's apparent political conservatism, the Brotherhood played a pivotal role in mobilising volunteers to fence off Zionist aspirations of statehood in Palestine. Moreover, the organisation's institutional structure, encompassing schools, hospitals, companies and factories, empowered it to conduct a violent campaign against the Egyptian monarchy and Jewish and British interests in the country. As a consequence, Prime Minister Nuqrashi Pasha ordered the disbanding of the Brotherhood on 8 December 1948, less than three weeks before his assassination by the Ikhwan. Two months later, on 12 February 1949, al-Banna himself was assassinated by government agents.[15]

The second earlier Sunni movement that was created within the context of a struggle for political empowerment, the *Jama'at-e Islami* established in 1941, was created by the Indian/Pakistani theoretician Abu A'la Maudoodi (1903-1979). Most of Maoudoodi's theoretical ideas and political activism were developed in British ruled India between 1937 and 1941. Translated into Arabic by Ali Nedvi, Maudoodi's most prominent works—*Jihad in Islam*, *Islam and Jahiliyya* and *The Principles of Islamic Government*—reached a considerable audience in politicised Muslim circles. The central argument of Maudoodi was that the Muslim *umma* had regressed into a state of *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic ignorance). To overcome this all-encompassing crisis, Maudoodi argued, a return to the "true" tenets of Islam and the creation of an Islamic state was imperative. A Muslim in exile in a colonised country, Maudoodi advocated total *jihad* against the manifestations of non-religious (*la dini*) ideas in the Islamic world.[16] Consequently, Maoudoodi argued that struggling against colonialism and imperialism is the central prerequisite for the creation of a purified, supreme society under the aegis of a fundamentalist, pan-Islamic 'kingdom of god.'[17]

The concept of *jahiliyya* anchored in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and

adopted by Maudoodi was popularised by Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) in his publications *Hadha al-din* (This Religion), *Al-Mustaqbal li hadha al-din* (The Future is for this religion) and *Ma'alim fi al-tariq* (Signposts along the Way). Confronted with the loss of Palestine and disillusioned with the conduct of military-authoritarian regimes, Qutb and his disciples dramatised the *jahiliyya* idea, transforming it into a revolutionary ideology, suitable to provide an intellectual underpinning of his leadership of the *Ihkwan*. After a short period of being so close to the movement of Abd-al Nassir's Free Officers, that Qutb was appointed Secretary-General of the regime's Liberation Rally in 1953, relations deteriorated to the degree that members of the *Ihkwan* were jailed and executed. Eventually, the conflict led to the arrest of Qutb himself (after an unsuccessful assassination attempt by one Brotherhood member on the life of Nassir in 1954) and his execution by the regime in 1966. Rejecting the socialist, Arab nationalist populism of the state, Qutb used his prison years to advocate total opposition to the status quo both in Egypt and throughout the Islamic world:

> *We are today in a jahiliyya similar to that contemporaneous to Islam or worse. Every thing around us is a jahiliyya: people's perceptions and beliefs, habits and customs, the sources of their culture, arts and literature, and their laws and legislations. Even much of what we think of as being Islamic culture, Islamic sources or Islamic philosophy and thought is in fact the making of this jahiliyya.*[(18)]

Common to the ideas of Sayyid Qutb is a dichotomous and polarised world-view, permeated by seemingly inconceivable duality: *jahiliyya* vs. *the* Islamic order, the righteous *umma* vs. the infidels, *din* (true religion) vs. *kufr* (impiety) or the rightly guided prophets (*salaf*) vs. the polytheist (*mushriukkun*) or pagans (*wataniyyun*). Confronted with authoritarian regimes and engaged in an escalating power struggle with the post-colonial state, these variants of political Islamic theories laid down some of the

nuances observable in the writings of Abdu and Afghani in favour of radical activism. In the political and cultural sphere at least, critical deconstruction of Islamic tenets in dialogue with the "West" gave away to holist rejection of manifestations of modernity encapsulated in the "Western" sciences and democratic-secular principles.

One would conflate goal-orientation with method, however if one would interpret the theories of al-Banna, Maudoodi and Qutb as anachronistic. Whilst the ultimate political goal was the establishment of a fundamentalist Islamic state and a "morally pure society," method and methodology to achieve this goal accommodated modern strategies. The adoption of revolutionary theory, most notably in the writings of Qutb, (leading to the preposterous charge by Nassir that he was plotting to establish a Marxist regime in Egypt) indicates that advocating religious fundamentalism did not proscribe propagating modern methods to combat the state. Rather more to the contrary, revolution was considered to be the only way to seize political power. In the following decades after the death of Qutb, the synthesis between utopian goal orientation and modern strategy continued to influence the campaigns of neo-fundamentalist groups who advocated armed struggle and political violence against either state or society or both.(19) In its contemporary, "post-modern" manifestation, al-Qaeda's employment of the Internet for propagation purposes and its mode of attack on 11 September 2001, exemplify that advocating fundamentalist ideology is not synonymous with employing archaic strategies. Rather, 'Al-Qaeda's use of the internet and videotapes demonstrate that "perception management" is central to the conduct of its war with the West. In fact, it is possible to view all of Al-Qaeda's operations - including acts of violence - as one vast perception management operation.'(20)

Notwithstanding various differences between contemporary neo-fundamentalist groups, there are at least three issues on which they converge: In order to lead a pious life according to the "true" principles of the Quran and hadith—purified from the "distortions" brought about by neo-

platonic philosophy and logic, Iranian (Persian) mythology and metaphorism, Jewish scripture and Christian theology—Muslims should organise themselves in the "ultimate" Islamic state. Second, because every thing surrounding the *umma* is *jahiliyya*, Muslim's should withdraw from modern society and engage in "self-purification" (in the Islamic state). Thirdly, the urgent need to establish *the* Islamic state legitimates total, offensive *jihad*, against both "the hypocrites" within the community—"apostate" rulers who stand in the way of creating God's laws—and the infidels harassing Islam from *dar al-harb* (the abode of war or the forces of evil). These themes occupy neo-fundamentalist ideologies presented by Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj (see his *Al-Farida al- gha'iba*, The Absent Commandment), Abd al-Salam Yassin, Ayman al-Zawahiri (former leader of the Egyptian *Jihad* which in 1998 merged with Bin-Ladin's organisation to establish the "International Front for Fighting Jews and Crusaders") and Osama bin-Laden himself. Partly because of political expediency, partly because of marginalisation in the various domestic political contexts, neo-fundamentalist groups do not limit themselves to confined opposition anymore. They are engaged in "vertical jihad"—total war against Muslim states and societies which are perceived to have deviated from the true path of Mohammadian Islam—and horizontal jihad—total war against the US which is perceived as morally corrupt, hegemonic and the chief culprit in a Zionist-Imperialist conspiracy to destroy Islam. In Yassin's words:

> *At the head of the Islamist caravan advancing with assurance on the road towards power and autarchy, you will find no Westernised fellowtravellers given over to the enemy both intellectually and culturally. You will find no friendships or alliances with the enemy. Neither will you find anyone of neat appearance and 'position of responsibility', who is in fact a dreary spy and whose life is spent in a succession of 'apparatchniks' conferences and parties where information about the potential of the country is hawked about in exchange for hard currency. You will find no clients of Hilton*

> *hotels, dance halls and other dens of vice or habitués of seminars airing views akin to those of free-masons, Zionism, capitalism or intelligence agencies. You will find only soldiers of God mobilised to serve the material and economic cause of the community and considering this as an act of worship rewarded by God.*(21)

That is the self-other delineation transnational neo-fundamentalist groups, including al-Qaeda identify with. The most radical adherents of the "jihadist" paradigm emerged out of marginalised circles of the Wahhabi establishment in Saudi Arabia.(22) They gained "radical maturity" within three political contexts: the war of independence against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the Second Gulf War against Iraq and here especially the ensuing alliance between Saudi Arabia and the US and, even more exponentially, the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Whereas rather more "moderate" Saudi organisations such as the "Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR)" led by Muhammad al-Mas'ari and the "Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA)" under the leadership of Sa'd al-Faqih largely limited themselves to opposing the policies of the al-Saud leadership domestically, the Advice and Reform Committee (ARC) led by Osama bin-Laden, subscribed to a more ambitious programme.(23) The ARC defined itself as 'an all-encompassing organisation that aims at applying the teachings of God to all aspects of life', which requires 'a comprehensive understanding of Islam, the holy book and the Prophet's tradition as it was interpreted by our Sunni predecessors.'(24) In a communiqué entitled "An Open Letter to King Fahd", bin-Laden outlined his grievances against the foreign policy of the Saudi government:

> *In its foreign policy, your government ties its destiny to that of the crusader Western governments, It is shameful that a government that claims the protection of the Two Holy Mosques pays $4 billion in 1991 to help the Soviet Union before the Soviets washed their blood from killing Muslims in Afghanistan. In 1982, your*

> *government also aided the infidel regime in Syria with billions of dollars as a reward for killing tens of thousands of Islamists in the city of Hama. Your government also aided with millions a tyrannical regime in Algeria that kills Muslims. And finally your government aided the Christian rebels in southern Sudan.*(25)

Apart from radicalising the agenda of bin-Laden, the war experience in Afghanistan and the dependencies of the Saudi state on the US in the aftermath of the Second Gulf War, also constituted his organisation as a *transnational* force. Fighting Soviet occupation for over a decade—fuelled with Saudi money, political alignment and institutional backing and armed and trained by the CIA—the former context led to the internalisation of the ethic of war and the emergence of a transnational mercenary force of "Arab-Afghans," indoctrinated to sacrifice their lives for the millenary cause of the organisation. When the occupation of Afghanistan terminated in 1989, bin-laden and the Taliban appeared to follow the Qutbian notion that escaping the *jahiliyya* of modern society and establishing the ultimate Islamic state requires complete withdrawal from society and the formation of a nucleus of dedicated fighters willing to engage in political violence and martyrdom. A similar logic fuels the civil wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In contrast to movements such as the Palestinian Hesbollah, HAMAS or the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) in Algeria which act within contextual boundaries and do not propagate a wholesale combat against the US, bin-Laden's network self-consciously divorced itself from any regulatory framework. Before the war in Afghanistan ousted the Taliban movement, the Taliban-al-Qaeda coalition had reduced the country to the status of an Emirate, rather than a nation-state, without an official capital, avoiding the definition of Afghan nationhood and adherence to secular law. Accordingly, the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, did not take up the position of "head of state," but declared himself "leader of the faithful," preferring to staying in Kandahar rather than in the Afghan capital Kabul.(26) This explains why bin-Laden continues to propagate that 'it is a compulsive obligation upon the

Ummah today to lend assistance to the Jihad in Afghanistan'.[27] From his perspective, Afghanistan could still be turned into *the* (pan) Islamic state from where he could organise his war against the US and spread his political message throughout the Islamic world.

The second political context that gave impetus to the transnational appeal of neo-fundamentalism was the Second Gulf War and its aftermath. The reinvention of the secular, Ba'thist state by Saddam Hussein, who had personally ordered the execution of religious leaders, as the vanguard of Islamic resistance against imperialism affected public opinion both in the Muslim world and in developing countries.[28] Whilst invoking "anti-imperialist imageries" did not secure the support of the *majority* of Islamic and developing states and their populace, alluding to 'emotionally charged, interconnected symbols in the Muslim political imagination',[29] rekindled opposition to US policies.[30] Pre-existing grievances grew stronger in the aftermath of the war, fuelled by pictures of starving Iraqi children transmitted by burgeoning Arabic and Iranian satellite TV stations. The human suffering in Iraq hence became one of the points of fixations of the Muslim world and was perceived as yet another injustice brought about by "Western neo-imperialism".

From the neo-fundamentalist point of view, the situation in Iraq, together with the Russian war in Chechnya, and since 11 September the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq legitimated and continue to legitimate targeting US interests. Those political struggles are central to the propaganda of neo-fundamentalist groupings such as al-Qaeda al-Jihad, Hizb at-Tahrir or Jama'at al-Muslimin. Intellectually mediocre, their political activism is framed by a radical paradigm which legitimates political violence not only against Christian, Jews and US economic interests but also against Muslim minorities, evidenced by the killings of Shia in Pakistan and the Shia Hazara in Taliban Afghanistan or the bombing of Shia shrines in Iraq and Iran. "Jihadism" is self-consciously invented by selectively taking the combative passages from the Quran and the *hadith* out of context and combining them

with the most puritanical writings in classical Islamic thought. That very perversion of the scriptures, constitutive to the imagery and phraseology of the "jihadist" paradigm, together with the indiscriminate violence employed against civilians, disqualified al-Qaeda as an organisation with structural support even amongst rather more militant organisations in the Islamic worlds. Revealingly, forty-six leaders, including those of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Jama'at-e-Islami in Pakistan and Ahmad Yassin the founder of HAMAS, condemned the attacks of 11 September, stating that the

> *undersigned, leaders of Islamic movements, are horrified by the events of Tuesday 11 September 2001 in the United States, which resulted in massive killing, destruction and attack on innocent lives. We express our deepest sympathies and sorrow. We condemn, in the strongest terms, the incidents, which are against all human and Islamic norms. This is grounded in the Noble Laws of Islam, which forbid all forms of attacks on innocents. God Almighty says in the Holy Quran: "No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another" (Surah al-Isra 17:15).*[31]

AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ

Let me conclude by relating what I have said to the current situation in Iraq. It is perhaps the single most disturbing legacy of the US/UK invasion of the country in 2003, that it has extended the expiry date of al-Qaeda type movements both within Iraq and in the wider Muslim worlds. Before the war, al-Qaeda was largely confined to Taliban Afghanistan which legitimated the US invasion of the country in the first place. With the war in Iraq, the pictures of tortured Iraqi inmates at Abu Ghraib, and the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, the network of the movement has expanded. Indeed, the war in Iraq has led to the unorthodox alliance of previously disparate ideological movements: Iraqi-Ba'thist ultra-nationalists and Sunni neo-fundamentalists.

By invading Iraq without a convincing international mandate, the Bush Adminsitration thus enabled previously marginalized movements to lodge into a powerful narrative permeating the wider Islamic worlds, namely the fight against real and perceived imperialism. Military analysts and some scholars of international relations readily abstract from these ideational factors in favour of brute 'rational-choice' analysis. From that perspective surging the numbers in Iraq makes sense. If the rebels are outnumbered, the argument goes, they will eventually yield to the overwhelming force. But this is not the logic of anarchy in Iraq. Fighting real and perceived imperial domination is a powerful institution in the wider Muslim and third worlds. Recruiting people under this banner will always be possible, especially if the battle is embedded in powerful nationalistic and religious symbols. This is what makes the recruitment policy of al-Qaeda type movements and Ba'thist remnants possible in the first place: an amalgam of different movements has huddled together in order to fight the "invader" and the "illegitimate" order it presides over.

It must follow from what I have said that in order to turn the tide against the rebellion, the very ideational structure of the region needs to be changed, for Arab ultra-nationalist sentiments and neo-fundamentalism have transnational appeal beyond Iraq which explains why there are so many foreigners fighting the American presence in that country. To change that ideational structure may have been the rationale behind the rather unsuccessful "Middle East" democracy initiative spearheaded by the US Department of State. Yet ultimately, it would mean substituting the people of the region with others who do not have access to the intellectual archives permeating it, to the activism of Afghani, Rida, al-Banna, Shariati, or to the political philosophy of Ibn- Sina, Ibn Taymiyya or Ibn Hanbal. To most American/British decision-makers these personalities may not be familiar, but to the peoples of the Islamic worlds, as discussed above, they are part and parcel of their historical consciousness.

From the Iraqi perspective, it is perhaps the single most disturbing

legacy of this war, that it has created yet another discontinuity in their historical consciousness, that it has disempowered them to grow their national narrative organically, to write it under their own authorship. The invasion of Iraq, and the ensuing civil war fuelled by al-Qaeda, has led to the suspension of history in that country, to a suspension of the national narrative holding the Iraqi construct together. In my opinion, this narrative can only be rewritten once Iraqis are empowered to believe that it is in their making, that they are the ones who write the next chapters of their history. Is that still possible after what has happened? I think it is— the vast intellectual archives of the region provide enough material, to be successful in this urgent task. ❖

NOTES:

1. For English translations see John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito (eds), *Islam in Transition. Muslim Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982. For overviews see amongst others Albert Hourani, *Arabic thought in the liberal age 1798-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983; Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London: Routledge, 1991 and Salem, *Bitter Legacy*.

2. Al-Afghani's life and political thought are convincingly chronicled and interpreted in Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: The Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. See also Elie Kedouri, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, London: Frank Cass, 1966 and Hourani, *Arabic thought*, pp. 103-129.

3. Tibi, *Arab nationalism*, p. 90.

4. See Basssam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism. Between Islam and the Nation-State*, third edition, Macmillan: London 1997; Paul Salem, *Bitter Legacy. Ideology and Politics in the Arab World*, Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1994; Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1995.

5. Afghani's reply to Renan is translated in Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, pp. 181-187.

6. Salem, *Bitter Legacy*, p. 92.

7. Tibi, *Arab nationalism*, p. 93.

8. Rashid Rida, *Tarikh al-ustadh al-imam al-shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh*, Vol. 1, Cairo: 1931, p. II. Quoted in Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London: Faber and Faber, 2002, p. 308.

9. See Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Austin: Texas UP, 1982; Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1968; Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: common questions, uncommon answers*, translated and edited by Robert D. Lee, Oxford: Westview, 1994; Ali Shariati, *Man and Islam/lectures by Ali Shariati*, translated from Persian by Ghulam M. Fayez, Mashhad: University of Mashhad Press, 1982.

10. On Khatami, Soroush and the Iranian case see further Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics: the Question of the Islamic Republic*, London: Hurst & Co., 2007.

11. Of course it would be a gross oversimplification to conflate the three topical areas, Ibn-Sina, al-Ghazali and Sufism. The point is that most contemporary critical Muslim thinkers find enough evidence in classical Islamic writings and practice to anchor (and legitimate) their deconstruction of Islamic tenets. The debates between the *Asharites* and the *Mutazilites*; Avicenna and al-Ghazali; and the *Akhbaris* and the *Usulis* support their case.

12. Hourani, *Arabic thought*, p. 18.

13. See Muhammad Rashid Rida, *al Wahabiyyun wa'l Hijaz*, Cairo 1344 (1925-1926).

14. Quoted in Richard P. Mitchel, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, London: Oxford UP, 1969, p. 30.

15. Ayubi, *Political Islam*, pp. 133-134.

16. Ibid., p. 128 and Salem, *Bitter Legacy*, p. 126.

17. Abu-l-Ala Mawdudi, 'Political Theory of Islam', in Donohue and Esposito, *Islam in Transition*, p. 254.

18. Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fi al-tariq*, new edition, Quom: Dar al-Nashr Quom, (no date), pp. 21-22. Quoted in Ayubi , *Political Islam*, p. 139.

19. The *Jama'at al Takfir wa al Hijra* ("The Society of Excommunication and Holy Fight") founded in Egypt after a split with the Muslim Brotherhood in 1967 by Sheikh Shukri Ahmad Mustafa, for instance, advocated armed struggle against both state and society (the same as the Egyptian *Al-Jihad*), whilst the Islamic Liberation Organisation (ILO) established in the early 1970s and led by Salih Siriyya focused its activities exclusively on combating the state. It was another neo-fundamentalist grouping, the *Munazzamat al-Jihad* ("The Holy War Organisation"), however, that was responsible for the assassination of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt on 6 October 1981. Prior to the assassination (in the late 1970s), the founders of the *Takfir* and ILO were both executed in a nation-wide crackdown of political Islamic movements.

20. Paul Eedle, 'Al-Qaeda takes fight for 'hearts and minds' to the web', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 August 2002. Available at <http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/jir/jir020715_1_n.shtml> [accessed 12 August 2002].

21. Abd al-Salam Yassin*, Sur l'économie, préalables dogmatiques et régles charïques*, Rabat: Imprimerie Horizons, 1996, p. 20. Quoted in Mohammad Tozy, 'Islamism and some of its perceptions of the West', in Gema Martín Muñoz (ed.), *Islam, Modernism and the West. Cultural and Political Relations at the End of the Millennium*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1999, p. 170.

22. Notwithstanding the fact that sympathising individuals and groups are converts to Islam who have been socialised in Western European cities or in the United States.

23. These organisations are analysed in Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, London: Macmillan, 1999.

24. Quoted in ibid., p. 181.

25. Quoted in ibid., pp. 189-190.

26. See Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, 'Global Intifadah? September 11th and the Struggle within Islam', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 211.

27. Translation of Osama bin-Laden's tape aired on the al-Jazeera television station on 11 February 2003. Available at <http://www.terrorisme.net/pdf/newcrusaderwar.pdf> [accessed 11 September 2003].

28. See Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation. Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1996, p. 81.

29. James Piscatori, 'Religion and Realpolitik: Islamic Responses to the Gulf War', in James Piscatori (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis*, Chicago: The Fundamentalism Project, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991, p. 3.

30. After the war in April 1991, an amalgam of Arab groups, including the Muslim Brothers and Yassir Arafat, invited to Khartoum by Hassan al-Turabi, reiterated their opposition against the US attack on Iraq.

31. *MSANews*, 14 September, 2001. Available at <http://msanews.mynet.net/MSANEWS/200109/20010917.15.html> [accessed 13 September 2003].