

LONG HISTORY OF TERRORISM

By James P. Lucier

Reports were filtering back into the West about a mysterious spiritual leader holed up in a mountain fortress. He attracted hundreds of young men by offering training in religious doctrine, devotional discipline and terrorism. He singled out for attack those he judged to have been corrupted by power and luxury or who, in his view, were insufficiently dedicated to the principles of Islam. In the dead of night his trained terrorists would enter the highly guarded precinct of the targeted victim and slit his throat, even though they were almost certain to be killed when the alarm was raised. This disadvantage was offset by a carefully taught theological conviction that, when slain, they would be rewarded instantly with the joys of paradise. These terrorists were called assassins, the Hashishiyyin, because they used cannabis to give them courage.

This is how, in the 12th century, the word assassin became part of the vocabulary of the Western languages. According to accounts brought back by the Crusaders, the Old Man in the Mountain had such control over his followers that he would amuse and terrorize visitors to his castle by ordering a few of his young men to jump off a cliff to demonstrate that they would obey his slightest whim. This man, of course, was not Osama bin Laden. Nor were the Crusader accounts mythological.

The Old Man in the Mountain was a real person, Hasan-i Sabbah, and his mountain fastness was the Castle of Alamut, perched on a barren peak at the south end of the Caspian Sea. Its ruins still may be seen today. Alamut was, like al-Qaeda, the base for a secret society, the Ismailis. Hasan's goal was to return Islam to its fundamental roots, and he sent preachers throughout the region, to Baghdad, Damascus and Aleppo. And when preaching didn't work, there was always the dagger. He warred against the Seljuk Turks and assorted caliphs, sheiks and viziers. He was a believer in the Shia' tradition that the true succession of Islam came through Ali, married to the prophet's daughter, Fatima. The bewildering and complicated history is summed up for Westerners in a famous little book, *The Assassins*, by the indefatigable scholar Bernard Lewis.

In the public hearings of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States—the 9/11 Commission—many fingers were pointed. The common theme was that both the Clinton and the Bush administrations recognized al-Qaeda as a threat but there was little they could do about it until the Sept. 11 attacks changed the political calculation. There were no smoking guns. President Bill Clinton issued an order to kill bin Laden, but the CIA refused. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright whined that it would have been impossible to get Congress to approve a military operation (although that didn't stop the Clinton administration from going to war to install Islamic extremists in Kosovo). Former White House terrorism adviser Richard Clarke, a self-important fussbudget, complained bitterly that he didn't have the chummy one-on-one relationship with President George W. Bush that he had enjoyed with Bill Clinton—although Bush was being briefed personally by Director of Central Intelligence George

Tenet every day. And Clarke's own parochial fixation on al-Qaeda blinded him to the fact that the war on terror has to reach much further than the activities of the contemporary Old Man in the Mountain.

The real failure of both administrations was the failure to take the long view of history. The attempt to pigeonhole the terrorist threat in terms of familiar 20th-century ideology and 21st-century political organization, and to try to counter it with law-enforcement, diplomatic and military assets, is bound to fail. And the notion that an advertising campaign or a flurry of public diplomacy will win hearts and minds is even sillier. The strength of al-Qaeda is not al-Qaeda itself. Its power is its preternatural instinct to uncork the bottle and release the dark jinns of the Islamic imagination.

Although President Bush has been careful to say that we are not at war with Islam but with terrorism—and it is prudent to say so—it is also not true to say that Islam is a peaceful worldwide religion that has been hijacked by a small group of bad actors. It is at war first of all within itself, and then with the outside world. There are many kinds of Islam containing splendid mixtures of benevolence and belligerence. The secular Muslim scholar Ibn Warraq, author of *Why I Am Not a Muslim* and *The Quest for the Historical Muhammed*, points out that the approved holy books on the life of Muhammed report that the prophet and his band of followers participated in 80 political assassinations in their consolidation of power. But, of course, he uses Ibn Warraq as a pseudonym, since he has been threatened with assassination for saying so.

Three of the first four caliphs were, in fact, assassinated. But many Muslims belonged to the Shi'atu Ali, the party of Ali, the prophet's son-in-law, and they thought he should become caliph. He did so after the murder of Caliph Uthman in 656. But Caliph Ali was in turn murdered in 661, and the caliphate passed to the rival Umyyads, perpetrating the schism between the Shia' and the Sunni that has caused a bitter division in Islam ever since. Ali's son, Hussein, sought to overthrow the Umyyads, but in the year 680, on the 10th day of the Muslim month of Muharram, Hussein and his family and followers were slaughtered by the Umyyads at a place called Karbala. On March 2, 2004, the worst terrorist attack in Iraq since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein took place in Karbala as tens of thousands of Shia' mourners gathered at the tomb of the seventh-century Hussein on the anniversary of the murders. Islam takes the long view of history.

Within 100 years of the prophet's death, the territory under the control of Islam virtually exploded from the Arabian Peninsula, extending from the far reaches of the Fertile Crescent and Asia to the western gates of the Mediterranean. The campaign of fire, sword and rapine reached up into France until turned back by Charles Martel at Poitiers in 738. But Islam occupied most of the Iberian Peninsula, which the Muslims called al-Andalus. This whole swath of territory was called Dar al-Islam, the Zone of Submission—submission to Allah, of course. It is a received doctrine of the Koran that no part of the Dar al-Islam can ever be ceded permanently to the infidel. But when the Moors were kicked out of the Andalusian caliphate in 1493 by the Spanish Reconquest, it left a wound. On Oct. 7, 2001, the day the United States began bombing

Afghanistan, bin Laden appeared in a videotape, stating, "Let the whole world know that we shall never accept that the tragedy of al-Andalus would be repeated."

The Israelis also are the victims of the Koranic injunction to drive out the infidel. Hamas' advocate of holy murder, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, was Ariel Sharon's bin Laden. So there may be more to the problem than Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's assertion that "The Bush administration has pursued the most arrogant, inept, reckless and ideological foreign policy in modern history."

Under the Ottomans the Dar al-Islam extended to the very gates of Vienna before being repulsed in 1688, collapsing back to Anatolia. But there is another name for the rest of the world: the Dar al-Harb, the Zone of War. For it is still the duty of Islam to bring the struggle to the infidels, offer them conversion or the sword, or occasionally for Jews and Christians (whose sacred books are corrupt and lack the purity of the Koran), the opportunity to be tolerated as a community subservient to Islamic rulers. The silent re-conquest is already going on in the soft underbelly of Europe with waves of Muslim immigration—legal and illegal—the balance of the body politic.

The new mosques are full, but the churches are empty. For Europe is dying. "Old Europe," as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld once called it in an offhand remark, is dying morally and demographically, having embraced the culture of sterility: secularism, abortion, homosexuality and a disinclination for cohabitants to marry. The population is literally aging, as there are fewer and fewer young persons available for work and more and more citizens on retirement and health care. The result may be seen in the victories of the Socialists in the March local elections in France. The French economy is no longer able to pay for its welfare state, so the unavoidable cutbacks of the ruling party, trying to make ends meet, resulted in a substantial Socialist victory. The French, however, were willing to draw a line in the sand at head scarves for schoolgirls.

There were a lot of things that President Bush could not say when he gathered the ambassadors in the East Room of the White House on March 19, the anniversary of the Iraq war. Yet there is some intimation in his words that he truly understands the long view of history: "There is a dividing line in our world ... a dividing line separating two visions of justice and the value of life. On a tape claiming responsibility for the atrocities in Madrid, a man is heard to say, 'We choose death, while you choose life.' We don't know if this is the voice of the actual killers, but we do know it expresses the creed of the enemy. It is a mind-set that rejoices in suicide, incites murder and celebrates every death we mourn. And we who stand on the other side of the line must be equally clear and certain of our convictions. We do love life, the life given to us and to all. ... There is no neutral ground—no neutral ground—in the fight between civilization and terror, because there is no neutral ground between good and evil, freedom and slavery, and life and death."

At this point, some of the ambassadors seemed to stir uneasily in their chairs. They preferred

the neutral ground. But what was Bush saying now?

“The war on terror is not a figure of speech. It is an inescapable calling of our generation. The terrorists are offended not merely by our policies—they are offended by our existence as free nations. No concession will appease their hatred. No accommodation will satisfy their endless demands. Their ultimate ambitions are to control the peoples of the Middle East and to blackmail the rest of the world with weapons of mass terror. There can be no separate peace with the terrorist enemy. Any sign of weakness or retreat simply validates terrorist violence and invites more violence for all nations. The only certain way to protect our people is by early, united and decisive action.”

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