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Radical Islam: Challenge and Response
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DETECTING THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY DEAD?

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Deterrence works because one is able credibly to threaten the center of gravity of the enemy: the threat of inflicting unacceptable losses upon him, whether in a bar brawl or in nuclear escalation. The calculus deterrence relies upon is: *is it worth it?* Is the Price/Earning Ratio of the contemplated action so hugely negative that it would wipe out the capital? Deterrence works if the price to be paid by the party to be deterred hugely exceeds his expected earnings. But deterrence only works if the enemy is able and willing to enter the same calculus. If the enemy plays by other rules and calculates by other means, he will not be deterred. There was nothing the Philistines could have done to deter Samson. If the calculus is: I exchange my worthless earthly life against the triumph of Allah on earth, and an eternity of bliss for me, if the enemy wishes to be dead, if to him the Apocalypse is desirable, he will not be deterred.

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was the Mayor of Tehran, he insistently proposed that the main thoroughfares of Tehran should be widened so that, he explained, on the day of his reappearance, the Hidden Imam, Mohamed ibn Hassan, who went into the great occultation in 941 AD could tread spacious avenues. More recently, he told the Indian Foreign Minister that “in two years, everything will be settled,” which the visiting dignitary at first mistook to mean that Iran expected to possess nuclear weapons in two years; he was later bemused to learn what Ahmadinejad had meant, to wit, that the Mahdi would appear in two years, at which points all worldly problems would disappear.

This attitude, truly, is not new, nor should it surprise us: religious notions and their estranged cousins, ideological representations, determine not only their believers' beliefs

but also their believers' actions. Reality, as it were, is invaded by belief, and belief in turn shapes the believer's reality. The difference between the religious and the ideologically religious is this: the religious believer accepts that reality is a given, whereas the fanatic gambles everything on a pseudo-reality of what ought to be. The religious believer accepts reality and works at improving it, the fanatic rejects reality, refuses to pass any compromise with it and tries to destroy it and replace it with his fantasy.

As Pat Moynihan memorably told an opponent, "you are entitled to your opinions, but you are not entitled to your facts." Ahmadjinedi inhabits his beliefs rather than the common earth. With him we do not share the same facts, even though we share a planet. The sharing takes the form of bombs and bullets.

Ahmadjinedi wants to hasten the reappearance of the Hidden Imam, whose coming, in traditional Muslim, and especially Shiite, apocalypics, will be the Sign of the Hour, that the End of Days is nigh. Ahmadinejad's politics cannot be labelled 'radical,' as opposed to 'moderate.' His politics are apocalyptic and eschatological. Its vanishing point is not earthly but otherworldly. Famously Ayatollah Khomeini said: "We have not made a revolution to lower the price of melon." The task of the Mahdi, when he reappears, will be to lead the great and final war which will bring about the extermination of the Unbelievers, the end of Unbelief and the complete dominion of God's writ upon the whole of mankind. The *Umma* will inflate to absorb the rest of the world.

The politics carried out by the complex in power in Tehran – Ahmadinejad, the Pasdaran, the Basiji, the ministry of Intelligence, Supreme Guide Khamenei – is apocalyptic and millenarian – but it also is autistic: in the world, nothing that contravenes their perverted sense of what is and what ought to be, may be allowed to exist; conversely, anything in the world that contradicts their representations must be eradicated: the only things allowed to exist are their representations. In their revolt against the Order of the world, they are determined to impose upon that world an Order that incompatible with most institutions and people. They are disposed to destroy a world that refuses their *dawa*, as it stubbornly clings to its own ways, in order to make way for their fanciful views.

Contemporary jihad is not a matter of politics at all (of ‘occupation, of ‘grievances,’ of colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism and Zionism), **but a matter of Gnostic faith.** Consequently, attempts at dealing with the problem politically will not even touch it. Aspirin is good, and so is penicillin, but they are of little avail to counter maladies of the mind. I am emphatically not saying here that the jihadis are “crazy.” I am saying that they are possessed of a disease of the mind, and the disease is the political religion of modern Gnosticism in its Islamic version.

Let us flash back in time, if you will, to Sept. 28, 1971, in Cairo. The prime minister of Jordan Wasfi al-Tell, who had been threatened by the Palestinian movement in retaliation for the so-called Black September of 1970, walks into the lobby of the Sheraton Hotel. “Five shots, fired at point-blank range, hit [him]... He staggered... he fell dying among the shards of glass on the marble floor. **As he lay dying, one of his killers bent over and lapped the blood that poured from his wounds.**” The multiplicity of similar incidents tells us that they are neither some ‘collateral damage’ nor incidental occurrences. They do not belong in the sphere of traditional politics, they are instead located in an ‘elsewhere’ of geopolitics.

Soldiers kill. Terrorists kill. Modern Jihadis lap the blood. Inseparable from contemporary Arab-Muslim jihad are the idealization of blood, the veneration of savagery, the cult of killing, the worship of death. Gruesome murder, gory and gleeful infliction of pain, are lionized and proffered as models and exemplary actions pleasing to Allah. These are no merely reflections of a pre-modern attitude toward death. I have collected, as can anybody, dozens of examples of human sacrifice inflicted by the Islamic jihadi of all stripes. This pornography of crime is endless, from the gratuitous killing of a Leon Klinghoffer to Mohammad Atta’s instructions, “You must make your knife sharp and you must not discomfort your animal during the slaughter,” and the *Behesht Zahra*, the ‘Paradise of Flowers’ graveyard near Tehran with its Fountain of Blood, or this report on the killing of an Algerian intellectual: “Dr. Hammed Boukhobza who was killed by a group of Islamist terrorists in the city of Telemly. (...) He was not just killed in his

apartment, but his wife and children who wanted to escape were forced to watch how he was literally cut to pieces, his entrails slowly drawn out while he was just barely alive. The terrorists obviously liked to watch the suffering, and they wanted to family to share their enjoyment.”

The accumulation of such deeds shows that they are not an epiphenomenon but are central to the purpose of the jihadi. They are aired 24/7 on TV channels such as al Jazeera and many others. They are avidly watched and celebrated, private and family screenings are arranged. Think of images and videofilms of assassinations, Daniel Pearl, Paul Johnson, ‘live’ killing for the viewing public. Perhaps the worst symbol of it all was the picture taken on Oct. 12, 2000 in Ramallah: a young man shows his red hands dipped in the blood of two murdered Israeli soldiers to an exultant Palestinian crowd. There is a public demand to meet the supply: snuff movies are served as identity markers. They bespeak the triumph of a theology of death, a ‘manufacture of death’ as the Baathist ideologues used to say (the purported division between supposedly ‘secular’ Arab or pan-Arab nationalists and religious types is meaningless when the matter is life and death, as it is), and an ‘industry of death,’ as leading Saudi *ulama* proudly say. Listen to the hypnotic threnody of the Muslim Brotherhood’s chanted motto: *Allah ghayatuna/Al Rasul zaimuna/Al Quran dusturuna/Al Jihad sabiluna/Al mawt fi sabil Allah asma amanina/Allah akbar*. These are words to be taken seriously, even literally, as events have shown. Hassan al-Banna repeatedly praised to heaven his Brotherhood’s “art of death” (*fann al-mawt*). This is **thanatology**, **martyropathology** or **nihilism**: when an entire society orients itself in this direction, that society is becoming suicidal. A society that gears especially its young toward killing and actively seeking death, it is making choices that bring about its extinction. **“We love death more than you love life.”**

If you depreciate and deprecate life and conversely focus all your desires upon death, the devoutly-wished passage into the glorious afterlife by means of *shahada*, ‘trading’ (as Quran says) one’s own earthly life for one’s afterlife is much easier, and taking the life of others is a mandate, it is an obligation, an offering. Suicide-killing as practiced so much against Israel, India and more recently the United States, is caused by this collective

pathology of the mind, the Gnostic religious ideology. There are secondary, contributing causes, but they are just that, auxiliaries to the ideology.

The believers – here, the jihadis - are the Elect: they, and only they, know God’s plan for the world; they have been chosen by Him to fight and win the final, cosmic battle between God and Satan, and bring about perfection on earth, in this case, the extension of God’s writ and dominion, the *dar al-Islam*, to mankind as a whole. Everybody else is wrong and evil, *jahili*, and an enemy who can and should be killed at will. Reality, Creation, that is, is irretrievably perverted. The Perfect are “an elite of amoral supermen” (Norman Cohn), who know what reality ‘really’ ought to be. They are engaged in transforming the world so that it conforms to the ‘second reality’ that they alone know, thank to their special knowledge, *gnôsis*. In order to get from *A* to *B*, from the evil today to the perfect tomorrow, torrents of blood have to be shed in exterminatory struggle, the blood of all those whose actions or whose very being hinder the accomplishment of the Mahdi’s mission. Owing to their extraordinary status, the Perfects are above all laws and norms. Everything they do is willed and sanctioned by God. Their intent (*niyyah*) vouches for their acts. They alone are able to determine life and death. The power this ideology confers upon its believers is intoxicating. They love death more than we love life.

For five hundred years, from 1100 to 1600, Europe was wracked by Gnostic insurrections, from the Flanders to Northern Italy, from Bohemia to France: Pastoureaux, Taborites, Flagellants, Free Spirits, Anabaptists, etc. The belief-structure just described was theirs. They mobilized hundreds of thousands of people, threatened kingdoms and overthrew dukedoms, they slaughtered Jews, priests and rich people, they created their own, grotesque, bloody, totalitarian ‘republics.’

“Soon we shall drink blood for wine,” one of the leading insurgent writers stated, “those who do not accept baptism... are to be killed, then they will be baptized in their blood.” And another one: “Accursed be the man who withholds his sword from shedding the blood of the enemies of Christ. Every believer must wash his hands in that blood... every

priest may lawfully pursue, wound and kill sinners.” And “the Just... will not rejoice, seeing vengeance and washing their hands with the blood of sinners.” Hear Thomas Müntzer: “curse the unbelievers... don’t let them live any longer, the evil-doers who turn away from God. For a godless man has no right to live if he hinders the godly. The sword is necessary to exterminate them... if they resist let them be slaughtered without mercy... the ungodly have no right to live, save what the Elect choose to allow them... Now, go at them... it is time... The scoundrels are as dispirited as dogs... Take no notice of the lamentations of the godless! They will beg you... don’t be moved by pity... At them! At them! While the fire is hot! Don’t let your sword get cold! Don’t let it go lame!”

By and large, the same screeds are heard from a variety of Islamic radicals. . “Die before you die!” Ali Shariati tells the Shiite believer. “He who takes up a gun, a kitchen knife or even a pebble with which to arm and kill the enemies of the faith has his place assured in Heaven. An Islamic state is the sum total of such individual believers. An Islamic state is in a state of war until the whole world sees and accepts the light of the True Faith,” said Ayatollah Fazlallah Mahalati, organizer of Iranian assassination squads. “To allow the infidels to stay alive means to let them do more corrupting. To kill them is a surgical operation commanded by Allah... we have to kill... war is a blessing for the world and for every nation, It is Allah himself who commands men to wage war and kill... It is war that purifies the earth,” said Ruhollah Khomeiny. And article 15 of the Hamas charter, explains: “I indeed wish to go to war for the sake of Allah! I will assault and kill, assault and kill, assault and kill!” As I said, a soldier kills, a jihadi loves to kill. And what was the dismal arithmetic conveyed by some jihadi that since the Americans had purportedly killed a lot of Muslims, the Muslims were “entitled” to kill 4 million Americans, children included? Torah recounts the end of human sacrifice: it forcefully states that God’s Law is THOU SHALT NOT MURDER that was adopted by Christians. Today’s jihad is a giant regression to pre-Abrahamic times, to Moloch and Baal.

In modern times in the West, as Eric Voegelin and Norman Cohn have shown, the ideology morphed and took on secular forms – Nazis and Bolsheviks in particular. Islam, was heavily burdened by Gnostic contents, and historically shaped by a tribal matrix that

inherently fosters Manichean tendencies (“them”-vs.-“us”). The jump from mere religion to religious ideology was easy. It was achieved in the 19th century by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. It was followed by Abu Ala Mawdoodi, Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Ali Shariati, Ruhollah Khomeiny, Osama bin Laden. Hamas, Hezbollah, the Deobandi of South Asia, the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyya, the Talibans, the Wahhabi, share this outlook.

Knowing this, how do we deter the modern Gnostic warriors, the jihadi?

Mainly, we do not. Those who are dead already, who consider themselves dead to the world and only alive to the Afterworld, those who wish to die, generally cannot be deterred. Faith has been described as a belief in things invisible. Gnosticism is belief in a fantasy that is taken to be more real than the common reality: **they do not believe what they see, they see what they believe**. This cannot be deterred. Imagine Osama bin Laden is in front of you: how do you deter him? Or Zawahiri, or Zarqawi ? Deterrence? Don't even think about it. Deterrence might have worked way before contemporary jihad was able to reach critical mass, sometimes perhaps in the early to mid-1990s.

If our enemy was merely ‘terrorism,’ we could defang it, admittedly at great cost: by destroying the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus and their grip on power, by wiping out the Iranian Ayatollahs’ strength, and by squeezing hard the noxious Pakistani military-intelligence establishment – all in all, the linchpins of Muslim terrorism. Once this infrastructure of terror collapsed, much of terror would. But terror itself is nothing but the principal para-military instrument of jihad: the operative concept is jihad, not terror. The jihadis’ purpose (in Clausewitzian terms, *Zweck*), in the very words of the Quran, is to strike terror in the hearts of unbelievers, it is a quasi-military objective: once terrorized, the Unbelievers, the schismatics and the polytheists will convert, submit or die. The strategic aim (*Ziel*) of jihad is the Gnostic takeover of the world. To some extent, we may be able to lessen, hinder or hamper the *Zweck*. But the *Ziel* is unconditional and cannot be altered. Can we de-fang jihad by pulling its terrorist teeth?

Some workarounds work. The way in which Israeli military and security forces have ruthlessly sapped the strength of Islamic terror, notably by a high-tempo attrition of its leadership cadre, is exemplary and should be studied and emulated elsewhere, different conditions obtaining.

Contemporary jihad, like its emanation, terrorism, is an integral chain: as long as it is islamico-glamorous to be a cleric who issues fatwas calling for the murder of Israeli civilians or American GIs, the cleric will go on. Once dead, he will stop. So will the chairman of a charity that funnels money to jihad. So will the senior intelligence officer who trains or smuggles them, the preacher who incites, the madrasa or university professor who brainwashes, the prince who lies for terror, the ayatollah who sends out teams of killers, etc. This is deterrence after the French expression they have been shot *pour encourager les autres*. Jihad is the operative ideology of a number of states; states can be pinned down and hit. This approach is a variant of the notion of decapitation, or of the formulation of nodal targeting given by air power theorist Col. John Warden. Less than the jihadi hardware, it is the jihadi software that has to be hit – but not by soft power.

What did Europe do to crush the insurrectionary Gnostics in the Medieval and late-Medieval era? Churchill once said: “If Hitler invaded hell I would make at least a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.” Likewise I’ll have a kind word for the Inquisition (not the Spanish one, though), which did quite a job cleaning up the mess. They rounded them up and they killed them. Thomas Müntzer was defeated, captured and beheaded in 1525. The ‘King’ of the Anabaptists of Münster, John von Leyden and his aides, were executed in 1535. As a terrible warning, their bodies were suspended in iron cages from the tower of St. Lambert's church in the town. Those who survived hit in wait for better days. What they had found is that their insurgency was hopeless, that it was useless, and that sticking one’s neck out was a sure way to lose it. Their will had been broken. Enough of a trauma had been inflicted to do so.

One martyr will have followers, ten martyrs will be admired and emulated. One thousand dead martyrs who died unheralded die in vain. If Ahmadinejad and others die in vain and uselessly they will not die as martyrs but as slobs. For the Gnostic, for the jihadi, his death is the only thing that matters to him: take that away and nothing is left. It does not mean, as the jurors of the Moussaoui trial were apparently led to believe, that “you cannot make a martyr out of him, since this is what he wants.” Make his death a lonely, useless, ignored death. Unextraordinary, unromantic, trivial deaths shatter the glory of the jihadi’s death. It was George Patton who said: “No bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country.” The recipe is not pretty nor is it easy.

The defeated European Gnostics went underground, their sole hope resided in the clandestine conveying of their beliefs, especially to their children. Society cannot eliminate the Gnostic beliefs, but can make the strain dormant instead of virulent. Jihad is integral to Islam and derives from its most fundamental tenets. The severing of that link is not going to happen soon. But throughout history, when Islamic conquerors met their match, they stopped. When they met crushing defeat, they retreated, and found the *ulama* and the *faqih* to justify that, like prophets who announced the Rapture for yesterday, 8:09 am, and reschedule it for next year. But let us remember that most of the faithful are not turned off by the ludicrous failure of their prophet’s prophecies, precisely because they live in the ‘second reality.’

Once their leaders had been exterminated, the Medieval insurgents of Europe disbanded and scattered. Applying high-tempo attrition and nodal targeting to the jihadi apparatus worldwide (by which I emphatically do not mean ‘terrorists’ alone or even in the first place) seems to me to be a modern equivalent. If I may say in homage to the chain of command that orchestrated his elimination, Sheikh Yasin was not in the habit of wielding pistols – he wielded death. It is those who deploy the undead who must be the priority targets.