

Al-Qaeda, the mythic enemy

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There's no terrorist attack in the world today that is not automatically attributed to al-Qaeda, an organization considered operational at the transnational, if not at the planetary level, and, in consequence, necessitating a planetary response: the war against terror, dear to American neo-conservatives. Bad analyses very obviously invite bad responses. This is so true that ever since this global war on terrorism has been launched, it has not really improved either world peace or world security. On the contrary, the precipitate action supplied by the American-British occupation of Iraq and the calamitous management of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation only reinforce the Muslim-Arab world's menace and resentment against the new "Crusaders" of a West that decides the standard of good for all civilizations.

The misunderstanding, or contradiction, goes back to the interpretation of the September 11, 2001 attacks, which some thought it right to analyze as an historic rupture as important as the end of the Cold War: the old world ended, a new one began. To this optical illusion, a correction of perspective must be opposed. In September 2001, while the aerial attacks were taking place on New York and Washington, fundamentalist-inspired jihadist groups (influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Wahabites) had already been slaughtering people for over a decade in Algeria, Egypt, the Horn of Africa, and South East Asia. The first attack against the World Trade Center dates to February 1993; sixty-three Western tourists were slaughtered in Luxor in November 1997; August 1998 attacks pulverized the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In response to American soldiers' continued stationing in Saudi Arabia in the vicinity of Islam's holy sites, fundamentalist groups attack Western interests and advocate the restoration of a mythic Caliphate and the establishment of a universal ummah¹. Revived by an old sectarian and satanic filiation, the Bin Laden movement incarnates the ultimate face of this activism that came to a head in the September 2001 attacks. Those attacks are all the more indicative of the end of a cycle in that the Taliban regime which sheltered and armed Bin Laden was destroyed in December 2001.

The Afghanistan campaign opens a second period during which the Bin Laden movement and its Arab Afghans reconstitute and find sanctuary in the Afghani-Pakistani cauldron, especially in the harbor metropolis of Karachi. The fundamentalist groups profit from several welcoming structures there: some 300 madrassahs (Koranic schools) which daily teach hatred of the West to several hundred thousand "students", numerous Islamist parties recruiting for holy war in Kashmir, and the ISI, the Pakistani army secret services, who have protected and trained the Arab Afghans since the Afghanistan War against the Russians (1979-1989). Nearly all the attacks committed since December 2001, notably the assassination of the Journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi (January 2002), the attack against the Djerba synagogue (11 April 2002), then against the French technicians of the Naval Construction Management (DCN) May 8 2002 go back one way or another to the Karachi epicenter.

Finally, a third phase sees a new generation of activists emerge. Educated and trained by Arab Afghans, these neo-fundamentalists, who have never set foot in either Afghanistan nor in Pakistan, are recruited from the Islamist movements that incarnate the opposition to the families and the regimes in place in Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Indonesia, and now, Turkey. For them, Osama Bin Laden has become an icon and al-Qaeda, a symbolic, if not political, reference point. The authors of the Bali attack (October 2002) were trained by the Indonesian army. After the East Timor episode when they had not obtained the realization of the economic and political promises the Indonesian generals had dangled in front of them, they turned against their former

leaders. Those responsible for the murderous May 2003 explosions in Morocco, all came from the slums of Casablanca or Tangiers, where over half the population is a victim of illiteracy, and where an exponentially growing and ever less controllable lumpen-proletariat demands a better distribution of tourist revenues. In Saudi Arabia, the authors of the May 2003 attacks, as well as of those perpetrated two weeks ago against the al-Mohaya residential complex, are, for the most part, sons of Saudi bourgeois families of Yemenite origin, a group that makes the country function and aspires to responsibility. These new activists are careful not to aim at Saudi targets, thus prudently avoiding setting off local or tribal vendettas.

With regard to the latest attacks in Istanbul, the Turkish police almost immediately arrested about twenty local activists duly known to the intelligence services, even if it is politically more profitable for the Turkish Prime Minister to condemn the ancestral Arab enemy and foreign plots.

From then on the demonization of al-Qaeda is very practical. A superb media invention, security haute couture label, consensual poster for the bounty-hunters of another age, a crude, but effective, propaganda: if al-Qaeda didn't exist, it would have to be invented. Since September 11, 2001 the al-Qaeda label has surreptitiously slid from designating a criminal band with Bin Laden at their head, to specifying a high-tech organization, to finally qualifying a planetary network: al-Qaeda has "CNNized" itself, like the al-Jezira channel which serves its communications. Al-Qaeda is everywhere, therefore, nowhere. Just as the hidden Imam, Bin Laden, simultaneously dead and alive, is behind every unexplained bomb explosion. Fortunately, his organization is there to give sense to all the world's disorders.

The phantasm of a planetary, pyramidal al-Qaeda, that of a new orchestration or of an International similar in all respects to Comintern's, is in the process of justifying the biggest American military-strategic redeployment effected since the end of the Second World War. The endless war against terror has replaced the war against the Communist monster. Consequently, it's not surprising to see old U.S.S.R. experts redeploying their old scholasticism on the pretext of an Islamist violence about which they know nothing, applying anachronistic Kremlinology schemas to it. These American neo-conservative ideological go-betweens stand guard on the old continent. For the American Empire, it's important that the al-Qaeda mythology persist. To survive, the empire needs an enemy to its measure and to make war on: endless war.

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