

9/11: Seven Years into History

by
David A. Charters

ABSTRACT

The after-effects of the 9/11 attacks continue to reverberate around the world. It is much too soon to draw any definitive conclusions about its long-term impact, let alone its place in history. But five years is long enough to ask some preliminary questions and suggest some tentative answers. This article addresses only two of the many possible questions. First, did 9/11 represent a “Revolution in Terrorism Affairs”? That is, did it amount to such a profound break with the past practice of terrorism that the world now confronts an unprecedented threat? Second, did it “alter the course of history”? Did it initiate any significant events or have consequences which otherwise would not have occurred?

The development of terrorism over the last three decades calls into question the notion that al-Qaeda and 9/11 marked a ‘revolutionary’ change in the nature of terrorism. In many respects, they seem to constitute a ‘paradigm shift’ rather than a ‘quantum leap’ – more evolutionary than revolutionary.

There are plenty of factors that suggest 9/11 was a ‘world-changing event’: the launching of a “Global War on Terrorism”; the consequent invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan; the rise of major insurgencies in both countries; radicalization of expatriate Muslim communities; the fracturing of the trans-Atlantic alliance; the adoption of harsh anti-terrorism measures by liberal democratic states; and finally, the American adoption of the strategy of ‘preventive war.’ While it is tempting to suggest that none of this would have happened without 9/11, the truth of the matter is less clear-cut than one might think. Granted that five years is still much too close to place an event in its proper historical context, the evidence thus far suggests first that 9/11 may have been less earth-shaking in its strategic consequences than first imagined and second that reactions to it contain some ‘genetic markers’ of longer-term trends that pre-date that event. Its strategic significance will probably be determined by three factors: the outcome of the war in Iraq; the

extent to which 'pre-emptive war' becomes an accepted model of international crisis management; and the ability of democracies to balance security and civil liberties in the face of a prolonged war. At this juncture, perhaps all that we can say with any certainty is that history is a continuum and that 9/11 represents neither a beginning nor an end.

INTRODUCTION

The United States has marked the seventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, but the after-effects of that day continue to reverberate around the world. It is probably much too soon to draw any *definitive* conclusions about its long-term impact, let alone its place in history.¹ But seven years is long enough to ask some preliminary questions and suggest some tentative answers.

This article will address only two of the many possible questions. First, did 9/11 represent a “Revolution in Terrorism Affairs” (RTA)? That is, did it amount to such a profound break with the past practice of terrorism that we now confront an unprecedented threat? Second, did it “alter the course of history”? Did it initiate any significant events or have consequences that otherwise would not have occurred? To answer the first question, the article will identify the key features of the 9/11 attacks and the organization that initiated them and then compare these to the actions and attributes of earlier groups. The second question will be addressed by looking for continuities and discontinuities in policies and actions undertaken by the international community after 9/11.

9/11: Revolution or Evolution?

The basic facts of 9/11 are not in dispute, except among the most strident of conspiracy buffs.² On 11 September 2001, 19 men recruited and trained by the *al-Qaeda* movement based in Afghanistan hijacked four American airliners on domestic flights. They crashed two of them into the World Trade Center in New York, one into the Pentagon in Washington, and one into a field in Pennsylvania — the latter apparently the result of a struggle with passengers who attempted to retake control of the aircraft. Nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks and hundreds more were injured.³ In addition to the human toll, the attack inflicted huge financial losses.⁴ Beyond those basic matters, of course, the field is wide open to interpretation and re-interpretation. Given the magnitude and drama of the event, the many loose ends and unanswered questions, and the political aftermath in the United States and overseas, the controversy over 9/11 — like the Kennedy assassination — is likely to invite extended historical and journalistic debate.

At a cursory glance, it is easy to argue that 9/11 and *al-Qaeda* together represent a ‘revolutionary’ change in terrorism, implying a fundamental break with

the past, turning previous experience on its head. Qualitatively and quantitatively they *appear* to be quite different in organization and capacity from the more 'conventional' terrorist groups that were active from the 1970s to the 1990s. The most persistent groups of that era, such as the IRA (Irish Republican Army), ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*), and the various Palestinian groups, were nationalist movements whose goals were limited to 'liberating' specific lands and peoples. They usually comprised only a few hundred members. The ideologically motivated groups at that time, such as the leftist Red Army Faction, were even smaller because their radical beliefs appealed to only a very limited constituency. Generally speaking, nationalist groups limited their attacks to the 'homeland.' Palestinian groups were almost unique in their heavy reliance on 'international' operations, brought on by their 'stateless' refugee origins and the difficulty of attacking Israel. Since terrorists drew their support from a clearly defined and often small pool of sympathisers at home and abroad, and because state sponsorship was provided covertly and rarely on a lavish scale, most groups had limited funds for operations and related activities. State sponsors also imposed some constraints on capabilities and operations to limit their own liability. Thus, such groups were rarely innovative in their choice of weapons, tactics, and targets, and their capacity for mayhem was relatively constrained. Indeed, until the 1980s, mass casualty attacks were rare.⁵

With this in mind, thirty years ago Rand Corporation analyst Brian Jenkins articulated what became the conventional wisdom about international terrorism; that "Terrorists want a lot of people watching . . . not a lot of people dead."⁶ The aim was to publicize a cause (for example, the Palestinians) and to mobilize supporters for it. So, groups that carried out attacks claimed responsibility for them in very public ways, during or immediately after the attack: on radio, TV, through communiqués, and spokespersons. Casualties and fatalities generally were low, as few as one or two, at most a few dozen. Hostages usually were released. To do otherwise could alienate potential supporters, de-legitimize the cause, or provoke severe counter-measures that might destroy the group.⁷

But since the 1980s, many terrorist incidents have gone unclaimed. This suggests a change in motivation: from mobilization to 'punishment.' The primary motive no longer seems to be to compel states to meet the terrorists' demands, but rather to deliver major damaging physical and psychological blows against the terrorists' enemies, to *punish* them for *being wrong*. In effect, *al-Qaeda* changed the nature of strategic conflict; the contested ground is no longer territory but *values*. The result of this has been a much higher level of casualties. And while mass casualties are not new in terrorism, 9/11 took lethality to a whole new level. The audience is still important, but the communication process has changed. Michael Dartnell argues that 9/11 demonstrated the new power and skills that information technology (IT) has given to non-state actors, such as terrorists. Terrorism is all about sending messages, and in a web-based world, visu-

al images reshape values inherent in messages. On 9/11, *al-Qaeda* shifted the message of political discourse from state-based, 'management' values to the apocalyptic ones of the non-state.⁸ This represents a new form of 'Propaganda of the Deed' in the post-McLuhan IT age; the medium (the attack) is the message. So, now we have "a lot of people watching *and* a lot of people dead."⁹

Al-Qaeda is said to epitomize this so-called 'New Terrorism.'¹⁰ First, its goals, beliefs, and practices define it as a trans-national revolutionary movement. *Al-Qaeda* and its affiliates expound an ideology of *jihadism*, which "is not a religion but an ideology based on religious elements. . . ."¹¹ It could be described as a program of radical social change in the Muslim world. It displays a coherent set of beliefs and behaviours, which have grafted twentieth-century European concepts of revolutionary political struggle onto selected Islamic doctrines appropriated from the *Salafist* and *Wahhabist* traditions, and which together give pride of place to *jihad* — an armed struggle to restore God's rule on Earth.¹² It gives its adherents a reductionist, Manichean ('we vs. they') world view and a motivation that explains and justifies all.

This is married to a messianic vision: to restore the Muslim Caliphate, thus returning *all past* and present Muslim lands to rule by *Sharia* law. Drawing upon both medieval and modern theorists bin Laden claims that his campaign against the US and its allies is a *jihad* — an armed struggle in *defense* of Islam, which is an individual obligation upon all Muslims. The modern theorists whose writings inform *jihadism* include Maulana abul Ala Maududi, Islamic thinker and founder of the *Jamiat-i-Islami*, the most powerful Islamist party in Pakistan; Hassan al-Banna, founder of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood; and Sayid Qutb, the Brotherhood's ideologist, who expanded upon and radicalized the ideas of the first two and left a legacy of revolutionary writing. They, in turn, had been inspired in part by the thirteenth-century jurist Ibn Taymiyyah, who argued that *jihad* was justified to overthrow apostate rulers who did not govern according to the *Sharia*: Islamic law. His modern interpreters saw Islam and *jihad* in this context as forces for revolutionary change, intended to restore Muslim societies to the original precepts and practices of Islam as articulated by God to Mohammed, by cleansing modern Islam of alien and corrupting influences, and of apostate rulers and their foreign allies.¹³

In the name of that ideology, *al-Qaeda* carried out the single most costly terrorist attack in history. The largest death toll from a single terrorist attack prior to 9/11 was 329 — the total number of victims of the Air India bombing in 1985.¹⁴ The twin embassy bombings in East Africa in 1998 caused a higher overall casualty toll but a much smaller number of fatalities and a minimal economic impact.¹⁵ The human and financial scale of the 9/11 attack seems to place it in a league by itself. It started a war that has already toppled two regimes and indirectly claimed another. It inflicted catastrophic human, psychological, political, and economic damage, with major ripple effects on global security and stability.

In fact, bin Laden probably hoped to provoke a war between the West and Islam: a final ‘Clash of Civilizations.’ *Jihadists* see the war in Iraq as a major part of that apocalyptic clash.¹⁶ No terrorist group in history has had that kind of impact.

Second, *al-Qaeda* seems to display some of the features of an apocalyptic cult, not unlike the *Aum Shin Rikyo*, which carried out the 1995 nerve gas attack in Tokyo. In fact, it has become common to describe *al-Qaeda* as a ‘movement’ or even as a source of inspiration rather than as a centrally directed group or organization.¹⁷ Its cult-like features include charismatic leadership. Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, in particular, seem to have created a ‘cult of personality’ among their followers, some of whom swear personal oaths of allegiance (*bayat*) to the leaders.¹⁸ Although he has no clerical training, bin Laden has appropriated some of the iconography of an Islamic scholar. To legitimize their own efforts, *al-Qaeda*’s leaders invoke the central role of the Prophet in founding and propagating Islam. Constant reference to the example and actions of Mohammed provides a precedent for and a model of strong leadership. In an *al-Qaeda* recruitment video produced in 2000, bin Laden exhorted Muslim believers to follow the example of Mohammed and his companions to join the *jihad*.¹⁹ In his key work, *Join the Caravan*, bin Laden’s ideological mentor Abd’Allah Azzam asserted that:

Jihad is a collective act of worship, and every group must have a leader. Obedience to the leader is a necessity in *jihad*, and thus a person must condition himself invariably [to] obey the leader, as has been reported in the hadith. . . .²⁰

Rohan Gunaratna describes bin Laden as “the model Islamist, the pre-eminent leader of the pioneering vanguard” who possesses “charismatic and authoritarian leadership, depends upon a disciplined inner core of adherents, and promotes a rigorous socio-moral code for all followers.”²¹

Third, the trans-national appeal of *al-Qaeda*’s ideology has allowed it to attract to its war three unique pools of recruits. Initially, it based the organization on international veterans of the Afghan war who could not return to their native countries because their militancy and combat experience would be seen as a threat to their home regimes. Later, it used religious leaders, mosques, and religious schools to recruit and indoctrinate new members, who were then sent to Afghan camps for paramilitary training by the veterans. More recently, especially since the fall of *al-Qaeda*’s ‘host’ — the *Taliban* regime in Afghanistan — it has increasingly relied on a ‘leaderless resistance’ of ‘home-grown’ terrorists, largely self-recruited and even self-taught via *jihadist* sites on the Internet. This combination of recruitment and training methods produced a global pool of fanatically motivated and skilled ‘Soldiers of God’ who were willing to sacrifice themselves for the *jihadist* cause to fulfill bin Laden’s vision.²² Borderless recruitment permits a trans-national insurgency; the front truly is everywhere.

Fourth, *al-Qaeda* represents the ‘privatization’ of war and terrorism. Like a character from a James Bond novel, Osama bin Laden — a private citizen — has launched his own war. He created a global fund-raising network of charities and private sources that generated money to support his insurgency. While in Sudan, bin Laden used his businesses as fronts to acquire and deploy weapons, explosives, and other military technologies. In its ‘corporate’ guise, *al-Qaeda* eschewed the traditional hierarchical pyramid organization common to most terrorist groups in favour of the ‘flat,’ de-centralized, IT-driven, ‘hub-and-wheel’ structure. Until the US-led coalition deprived it of a firm base in Afghanistan, *al-Qaeda* functioned as a kind of holding company with ‘branch offices’ and ‘franchisees’ world-wide. Its small central headquarters engaged in long-term strategic planning, using ‘management by objective’ and ‘directive control’ to run a series of terrorist ‘franchises’ in many countries. They shared a common ‘mission statement,’ but the individual franchisees were encouraged to use their initiative to develop a ‘product’ (attacks) best suited to the local ‘market’ (targets). They then submitted their plans to ‘head office’; if it approved, then it subsidized the operation — up to a point (its funding was never lavish). As such, *al-Qaeda* is a creature of the post-modern world. Its war depends heavily on the tools of globalization: open borders, international transportation, ATMs, cell phones, fax machines, and the Internet. It invests money and moves it globally. The ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ is often described as a ‘system of systems’; *al-Qaeda* is a virtual ‘network of networks,’ with the connectivity provided by the intertwined fibres of ideology and technology. The strategic factors driving *jihadi* terrorism, globalization, and IT embodying modernity, and *jihadi* ideology challenging it, had emerged earlier in an *evolutionary*, synergistic, and non-linear fashion. But they converged on 9/11 in an apparently revolutionary way. In *al-Qaeda*, they find symbiosis and synergy, a grandiose vision married to a strategic capability that allows the movement to ‘Think Globally, and Act Locally.’ In this respect, *al-Qaeda* could be called “*Terrorism.com*.”²³

Since the fall of the *Taliban* in November 2001, it has become commonplace to assert that *al-Qaeda*’s regional affiliates have had to operate with less central direction. As a result, it has become a decentralized, trans-national, *post-modern* organization, whose very nature has made it difficult to find and defeat. In fact, this argument runs, there probably is no longer a single *al-Qaeda* organization. Rather, it has mutated into a ‘constellation’ of regionally distributed, like-minded groups who now collectively make up a global *jihadi* insurgent movement.²⁴ However, Bruce Hoffman, formerly Rand’s leading expert on *al-Qaeda*, challenges this perspective. He argues that evidence from the attacks in Spain and Britain indicates that *al-Qaeda* still has a functioning leadership and structure that directs the armed struggle, including the activities of the so-called ‘home-grown’ terrorists. It is also actively engaged in information warfare over the Internet to recruit new *jihadists*, and influence the views of existing and potential sympathisers.²⁵

Thus, it is not difficult to see *al-Qaeda* as something *sui generis* and 9/11 as an unprecedented terrorist act. If nothing else, in scale and in their reliance on modern technology, they seem to be a phenomena peculiar to our age.

But does all this amount to a ‘Revolution in Terrorism Affairs’? While 9/11 and *al-Qaeda* have demonstrated new capabilities, there is much about them that seems familiar. David Rapoport argues that *al-Qaeda* can be seen as part of an evolving historical terrorist continuum. It was not the first but simply the most prominent group in the fourth (religious) ‘wave’ of terrorism that began in the 1970s.²⁶ Likewise, Stephen Sloan reminds us that terrorists first went ‘global’ in the 1970s as a result of two earlier social ‘revolutions’ in transportation and communications. Air travel gave them strategic ‘reach’ and a physical ‘soft target,’ while television provided them with a means to reach a global mass audience. For example, terrorist hijackings of airliners, which is also a way of using an airliner as a weapon, dates back at least to 1968. In fact, it was the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) — not *al-Qaeda* — that carried out the first coordinated, simultaneous, multiple terrorist attacks: the hijacking of four airliners in 1970. And many of the early terrorist attacks attracted extensive media coverage; the Munich Olympics attack in 1972, the seizure of the American hostages in Iran in 1979, and the hijacking of TWA 837 in 1985 are cases in point. 9/11 was not the first mass casualty attack; the trend toward increasing the human cost of terrorism began during the 1980s. Nor was it unusual for the US to be attacked by groups emanating from the Middle East; such attacks can be traced back to the early 1970s. Islamist groups first began attacking the US in Beirut in 1983, and they carried out their first significant attack on the US mainland eight years before 9/11, with the first World Trade Center attack in 1993.²⁷ Contrary to conventional wisdom, *al-Qaeda* was not a wholly independent actor; both Sudan and Afghanistan provided sanctuary and facilities. So, it was state-sponsored, as many terrorist organizations have been.²⁸ *Jihadism* also seems to display many of the beliefs and practices that were common to twentieth-century fascist movements: extreme nationalism, authoritarianism, millenarianism, anti-Semitism, a romanticised view of the past and consequent desire for cultural purification, a nihilist rejection of reason, and a retreat from rationality into mysticism. Its charismatic leaders use oaths of allegiance and militarized rhetoric that emphasize the collective over the individual, glorify violence, de-humanize the enemy, and encourage a will to action.²⁹

So, the development of terrorism over the last three decades calls into question the notion that *al-Qaeda* and 9/11 marked an RTA. In many respects, they seem to constitute a ‘paradigm shift’ rather than a ‘quantum leap’ — more evolutionary than revolutionary.

9/11: A 'Hinge-Point' of History?

In its first issue after the attacks, *The Economist* magazine described 9/11 as "The Day the World Changed."³⁰ But if *al-Qaeda* and 9/11 represent more of an evolution than a revolution in terrorism, then it is legitimate to question the proposition that they changed the world. Have they, in fact, acted as 'drivers of history'?

It is easy to understand why 9/11 could be seen as a new point of historical departure. First, it was in response to those attacks that the United States and its allies launched a 'Global War on Terrorism' (GWOT). While aimed at destroying *al-Qaeda*, a goal which it has not yet achieved,³¹ the GWOT also provided a convenient cover for a larger American agenda. Under the guise of that war, American-led coalitions invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and toppled their dictatorial regimes, both believed to have been linked to terrorism.³² In each case, democratic successor governments have been installed and legitimized by internationally validated elections. If these governments survive — a matter of some uncertainty — they would represent a significant change in the Middle East.

However, the second impact is less positive. In both cases this bold experiment has stalled. The nascent democracy in Afghanistan has made considerable progress since 2001 but suffers from many 'growing pains,' such as corruption, lack of infrastructure, a narcotics-based black economy, and a resurgent *Taliban* insurgency. It remains in dire need of long-term commitment of military, political, and economic support from an international community that seems to have lost its enthusiasm for ensuring that nation-building succeeds in the face of violence. The future of Afghanistan remains uncertain.³³

In Iraq, the situation is much worse. There the United States has become mired in a prolonged and bloody insurgency that has imposed large human, financial, and political costs on the US, and much more severe costs on the Iraqis. The democratization effort in Iraq has been frustrated by factional fighting that could end with a civil war and the fracturing of Iraq into multiple mini-states, along the lines of former Yugoslavia. While there have been significant improvements in the security situation over the last year, support for the war in Iraq has waned in the US, and the Bush administration and its likely successors are now actively seeking a way out.³⁴ So, for the first time in 30 years, the United States faces the possibility of defeat in war. Should it occur, that defeat would have severe ramifications for the US, the Middle East, and global security.

Third, the impact of 9/11 — and the American response to it — extends well beyond Iraq and Afghanistan. The Iraq war and insurgency revived and emboldened the *jihadi* movement, which was 'on the ropes' after being driven from Afghanistan. On the one hand, undetermined numbers of foreign *jihadists* have joined the insurgency inside Iraq and helped to polarize the ethno-cultural conflict there. On the other, *jihadism* has taken root among the large Muslim

minorities in Europe. Only a tiny, albeit active, proportion of them sympathize with the *ihadists*, but many more oppose the Iraq war and GWOT, which they see as campaigns against Islam. In response, ‘home grown’ and expatriate *ihadist* terrorists have carried out mass casualty attacks in Britain and Spain, where these incidents influenced the outcome of a national election that ousted the pro-American government, and its successor withdrew Spanish forces from Iraq.³⁵ That was a significant blow to the unity and legitimacy of the American coalition. Elsewhere, Muslim youths rioted in the Paris suburbs for several weeks in 2005, and the violence in those areas has continued at a lower level since.³⁶ And a radical Islamist assassinated a provocative film-maker in the Netherlands.³⁷ While galvanised more by local conditions than by global geopolitics, these events in France and Holland nonetheless speak to the fact that since 9/11 a festering and potentially bitter divide has come to threaten the internal cohesion, harmony, and security of European societies.³⁸

Fourth, after a brief period of solidarity in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the US and Europe had an angry falling out over Iraq. Most western European nations, France and Germany in particular, opposed the war. In forcing the issue, the Bush administration squandered much of the goodwill it had reaped on 9/11; both sides ‘burned their bridges’ in fits of nasty diplomacy, and relations between Europe and the US have remained cool since. As a result, they have become at best reluctant partners in other American-led endeavours, including the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan. Even America’s relationship with its closest ally — Great Britain — is strained. Participation in the war in Iraq is unpopular in Britain and then-Prime Minister Tony Blair, President Bush’s most loyal supporter at the start of that war, was forced to step down, having lost considerable credibility once the pretext for the war — the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threat — was shown to be false. It may be fair to say that Europe and America have not been so far apart in half a century and this is likely to have negative ramifications for other security cooperation issues, as well as on issues outside that field.³⁹

Fifth, 9/11 led many Western democracies to adopt new anti-terrorism measures that extend the powers of police and security services. Preventive detention and wider internal surveillance powers may improve security against terrorism, but they have done so at the cost of some degree of privacy and freedom. The US established a network of secret detention centers for terrorist suspects outside the jurisdiction of American and even host country laws, and loosened the strictures against torture of those suspects. It has also attempted to circumvent the American legal system by proposing to try terror suspects before military tribunals and execute them if they are found guilty.⁴⁰ Other nations have gone further and imposed new standards on their Muslim populations. The French government banned the wearing of headscarves in schools and even the normally tolerant Netherlands moved to ban wearing the *burqa*.⁴¹ Thus, it could be argued that 9/11 caused these democracies to become less democratic.

Finally, in response to 9/11 the US government adopted a strategy of 'preventive war.' It was applied first to justify the war against Iraq, on the grounds that Hussein's regime was suspected of harbouring weapons of mass destruction that could be given to terrorists, who might use them against the US.⁴² This policy *does* represent a significant departure from past practice and one with potentially serious long-term consequences. Certainly, the strategic calculus that underlines pre-emptive war — the need to act first against an enemy suspected of plotting to strike — could be applied by many states. It could be used to justify an Israeli strike on Iran, a Pakistani assault on India, or perhaps even a North Korean attack on the US itself. By adopting and then applying this policy the US may have established a precedent it might come to regret.

Would any of this have happened without 9/11? The preliminary answer is less clear-cut than one might think. The GWOT was not America's first 'war on terrorism'; journalists used that phrase to describe the US campaign against terrorism in the 1980s, although the Reagan administration did not.⁴³ The US-led war that toppled the Taliban regime was really a continuation of the power struggle in Afghanistan whose origins pre-date the Soviet invasion of 1979 and in which the US had played a role in the 1980s.⁴⁴ And the US had been engaged in a prolonged military campaign against Iraq since 1990.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the US has a long history of intervening to 'remake' smaller states. So, in that sense the Iraq invasion fits a historical pattern. Nor was the dispute over Iraq the first or only clash between the US and Europe over major international issues, and it will not be the last. Since the end of the Cold War, Europe has increasingly tried to assert its own role in world affairs distinct from that of the US. It may be fair to suggest that 9/11 and the war in (and over) Iraq did nothing more than simply accelerate tendencies that were already at work in trans-Atlantic relations.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the post-9/11 'obsession' with 'homeland security' is hardly new. And experience suggests that this is not an irreversible trend. During the Second World War the Allied democracies adopted internal security measures far more stringent than those applied since 9/11. Most of those practices were shed quickly at the end of the war, and although some lingered through the Cold War, it is fair to suggest that the Western liberal democracies emerged from both those periods as substantially 'freer' societies. In short, counter-terrorism security is not a one-way, permanent, dead end street.

And what of "the dog that didn't bark"? While the GWOT, war in Iraq, and (to a lesser extent) that in Afghanistan have done little to improve relations between the West and Muslim world, the much-vaunted 'Clash of Civilisations' has not yet reached the apocalyptic proportions that some have feared and that perhaps bin Laden had hoped to achieve. That is not to say that the situation could not deteriorate, especially in Europe; only that we are not there yet, and the present course is not irreversible. The issues that engaged and enraged bin Laden are 'Arab-centric'; they do not necessarily resonate strongly with the vast major-

ity of Muslims who live outside the Middle East. That, in turn, probably explains why the *ihadists* remain a fringe rather than mainstream Islamic movement.

Furthermore, focusing on the Western versus Muslim aspects of this conflict may blind us to a more significant dispute: the struggle for the 'soul' of Islam, especially over who will define the future shape of Islam and how it will relate to the non-Islamic world. *Al-Qaeda* represents only one of the contending factions. It may be new to the West, but within Muslim history such a group is a recurring phenomenon. Like Christianity, Islam has been shaken periodically by 'reformist' movements and tendencies that aimed to restore the faith to its original precepts and practices. The *Wahhabist* movement, which emerged in the eighteenth century and provided the theo-ideological foundation for the al-Saud dynasty in contemporary Saudi Arabia, is a case in point. The same could be said of the *Salafists* of the nineteenth century, and the original Muslim Brotherhood of the twentieth. The result, some would argue, is a kind of civil war, not unlike the Christian Reformation and Counter-Reformation. In that context, 9/11 was one 'battle' in a much larger and longer conflict. It did not begin with al-Qaeda or 9/11, and will not end with them.⁴⁷

Granted that seven years is still much too close to place an event in its proper historical context, but the evidence *thus far* suggests first, that 9/11 may have been less earth-shattering in its strategic consequences than initially imagined, and second, that reactions to it contain some 'genetic markers' of longer-term trends that pre-date that event. Its strategic significance will probably be determined by three factors: the outcome of the war in Iraq; the extent to which 'pre-emptive war' becomes an accepted model of international crisis management; and the ability of democracies to balance security and civil liberties in the face of a prolonged war. At this juncture, perhaps all that we can say with any certainty is that history is a continuum and 9/11 represents neither a beginning nor an end.

David A. Charters is Professor of History at the University of New Brunswick.

Endnotes

1. See my review of Mary L. Dudziak, *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* (Duke University Press, 2003); and *The International History Review* 27, no. 1 (March 2005), pp. 212-14.
2. Short of the discovery of verifiably credible information that drastically alters the historical record, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: Norton, 2004) is likely to remain the definitive account of the events of that day and much of what preceded it. For a scholar's view that endorses the value of the official report, see Wesley Wark, "Just What Happened on 9/11," *Globe and Mail*, 7 August 2004.
3. The total of confirmed dead as of 8 August 2004 was 2,948. See the list of fatalities at http://www.september11victims.com/september11victims/victims_list.htm, accessed 25 October 2006. Some 215 civilians suffered serious injury. See Rand Corporation news release, 8 November 2004, at www.rand.org/news/press.04/11.08b.html, accessed 25 October 2006.
4. New York City alone suffered financial losses in the range of \$83-95 billion. See William C. Thompson, Comptroller, City of New York, *One Year Later: The Fiscal Impact of 9/11 on New York City*, (New York, 4 September 2002), accessed 25 October 2006, at www.comptroller.nyc.gov/bureaus/bud/reports/impact-9-11-year-later.pdf.
5. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 157-59, 171-73, 187, and 197-98. Hoffman notes that a few groups, such as the Abu Nidal Organization, were very well funded by governments, but they were the exceptions to the rule. On the benefits and limitations of state-sponsorship, see Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 60-61, 88-89, 97-98, 132-33, and 140-43.
6. Brian M. Jenkins, "International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict," in David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf, eds., *International Terrorism and World Security* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 15.
7. Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Countering the Threat* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 141.
8. Thomas Copeland, "Is the 'New Terrorism' Really New?: An Analysis of the New Paradigm for Terrorism," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 21, no. 2 (Winter 2001), pp. 12-13; and Michael Dartnell, "Electronic Hearts and Minds: Web Activism and Global Security," in David A. Charters and Graham F. Walker, eds., *After 9/11: Terrorism and Crime in a Globalised World* (Halifax, NS: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, 2005), pp. 115, and 117-18.
9. John V. Parachini, "Comparing Motives and Outcomes of Mass Casualty Terrorism Involving Conventional and Unconventional Weapons," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24, no. 5 (September-October 2001), p. 389 attributes the first use of this revision of Jenkins's original phrase to NSC officials Steve Simon and Daniel Benjamin.
10. Isabelle Duyvesteyn, "How New is the New Terrorism?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (September-October 2004), p. 443.
11. Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 153 calls it *Islamism*.
12. See David A. Charters, "Something Old, Something New: Al-Qaeda, Jihadism, and Fascism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 1 (2007).
13. *Ibid.*
14. Kim Bolan, *Loss of Faith: How the Air India Bombers Got Away with Murder* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2005), p. 1.
15. Paul R. Pillar, *Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2001), p. 87.

16. On the debate over whether the *al-Qaeda*/US war constitutes a 'clash of civilizations,' see Benjamin Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* (New York: Ballantine, 1995, rev. 2001), pp. xii, xv-xvi; Michael Scott Doran, "Somebody Else's Civil War," in Foreign Affairs, *The War on Terror* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2003), pp. 37-57; Anonymous [Michael Scheuer], *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama Bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2002), pp. 25-28; and Brigitte L. Nacos, "The Terrorist Calculus Behind 9/11: A Model for Future Terrorism?," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 1 (January-February 2003), pp. 11-13.
17. On the debate over *al-Qaeda*'s exact nature, see Xavier Raufer, "Al Qaeda: a Different Diagnosis,," and Bruce Hoffman, "Al Qaeda, trends in Terrorism, and Future Potentialities: An Assessment," both in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 6 (November-December 2003), pp. 392-95, and 430-31.
18. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 67; see also Stewart Bell, *The Martyr's Oath: The Apprenticeship of a Homegrown Terrorist* (Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada, 2005), pp. 107-08.
19. Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), pp.15-16; Robert D. Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: the Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), pp. 67-68, 70-71, and 108; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 85-86; Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 41-42, and 87; Khaled Abou El-Fadl, "9/11 and the Muslim Transformation," in Dudziak, *September 11 in History*, p. 70; Richard Bonney, *Jihad: From Qur'an to Bin Laden* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 358; and Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin, *Anti-American Terrorism in the Middle East: A Documentary Reader* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 178.
20. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, pp. 87-88.
21. *Ibid.* pp. 88-89.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-58, and 84-94; Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), pp. 221-29, and 258-65; Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*, pp. 45-65; Magnus Ranstorp, "Interpreting the Broader Context and Meaning of Bin-Laden's Fatwa," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 21, no. 4 (October-December 1998), pp. 321-30 (includes a translated full text of the 1998 *Fatwa*).
23. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *Staff Statement No. 15 – Overview of the Enemy*, 16 June 2004, pp. 2-4, and 10-11; Jessica Stern, "The Protean Enemy," in *The War on Terrorism*, pp. 227-29; and Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, pp. 54, 56-57, 60-69, 76-77, and 95-98.
24. *Staff Statement No. 15*, pp. 11-12.
25. Bruce Hoffman, *Combating Al Qaeda and the Militant Islamic Threat* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, February 2006), pp. 3-4, and 6. Hoffman made this point more emphatically in his address to the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies, Ottawa, October 2006.
26. David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), pp.46-47, and 61-64.
27. Stephen Sloan, "Almost Present at the Creation: A Personal Perspective of Continuing Journey," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 24, no. 1 (Summer 2004), p 123. See also Copeland, "Is the 'New Terrorism' Really New," pp. 10, 15-16, and 18-20.
28. Byman, *Deadly Connections*, pp. 187-89, 193, and 198-210.
29. See Charters, "Something Old, Something New." Similar ideas and tendencies in *Jihadism* are explored in Manus I. Midlarsky, "Nihilism in Political Chaos: Himmler, bin Laden, and

- Altruistic Punishment,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 3 (May-June 2004), pp. 187-206.
30. *The Economist*, 15 September 2001, cover page and lead editorial.
 31. Hoffman, *Combating Al Qaeda*, p. 1.
 32. Byman, *Deadly Connections*, pp. 215-16; and Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), pp. 10-19.
 33. See Anthony H. Cordesman, *Winning in Afghanistan: How to Face the Rising Threat* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 12 December 2006), slides for 13 December press briefing.
 34. Sabrina Tavernese, “Civilian Death Toll Reaches New High in Iraq, U.N. Says,” *The New York Times*, 23 November 2006; Michael R. Gordon and David S. Cloud, “Rumsfeld Memo Proposed ‘Major Adjustment’ in Iraq,” *The New York Times*, 3 December 2006; David E. Sanger, “Panel urges Basic Shift in U.S. Policy in Iraq,” *The New York Times*, 7 December 2006; and David S. Cloud and Michael R. Gordon, “Attacks in Iraq at record High,” *The New York Times*, 19 December 2006.
 35. Hoffman, *Combating Al Qaeda*, pp. 5-7, and 10-12; Karen J. Greenberg, *Al Qaeda Now: Understanding Today’s Terrorists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 42-52; Robert S. Leiken, “Europe’s Angry Muslims,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 4 (July/August 2005), pp. 122-23, and 127-28. Estimates of the number of foreign *jihadi* fighters in Iraq have varied over time and by source. See *The Washington Times*, 30 April 2004; US Department of Defense, *Defense LINK*, 27 March 2005; *The Washington Post*, 9, 15 May 2005; Sheldon Alberts, “Spain to Quit Iraq War,” and “Terror Wins in Spain,” *National Post*, 16 March 2004; and Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (2004), pp. 355-75.
 36. “In Depth: France Riots. Understanding the Violence,” CBC News Online, 14 November 2005, at www.cbc.ca/news/background/paris_riots/, accessed 27 December 2006; and David Rennie, “Youths Challenge the French State,” *The Telegraph*, 2 November 2006, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/11/02/wfrance02.xml, accessed 27 December 2006.
 37. “Van Gogh Murder Suspect Confesses in Court,” CBC Arts, 12 July 2005, accessed 27 December 2006, at <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/story/2005/07/12/bouyericonfess050712.html>; and “Dutch Courage and the Death of Theo Van Gogh: Counting the Cost,” *The Economist*, 31 August 2006, at www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=7854010, accessed 27 December 2006.
 38. Jodie T. Allen, *The French-Muslim Connection: Is France Doing a Better Job of Integration Than its Critics?* Pew Research Center, 17 August 2006, accessed 27 December 2006, at <http://pewresearch.org/obdeck/?ObDeckID=50>.
 39. Lawrence D. Freedman, “The Special Relationship: Then and Now,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 3 (May/June 2006), pp. 61, 71; and William Drozdiak, “The North Atlantic Drift,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no.1 (January-February 2005), pp. 88-98.
 40. Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “President Moves 14 Held in Secret to Guantanamo,” *The New York Times*, 7 September 2006.
 41. Anthony Browne, “Dutch Unveil the Toughest Face in Europe With a Ban on the Burka,” *The Times*, 13 October 2005, accessed 27 December 2006, at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,13509-1823334,00.html>.
 42. Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 34, 41-42, 129, 131-33, 137-38, 193-95, 197-99, and 203.

43. See, for example, David C. Martin and John Walcott, *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. xi, and 367-68. Reagan administration officials talked of a "battle against terrorism" and going on the "offensive against terrorism," but stopped short of using the term "war," and actually used American military power sparingly. Timothy Naftali, *Blind Spot: The Secret History of American Counterterrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), pp. 130, and 181.
44. See Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004).
45. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 9-11, 14, 23, and 70.
46. On the debate over the 'crisis' in Euro-American relations over the Iraq war, see Philip Gordon, "Bridging the Atlantic Divide," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 1 (January/February 2003), pp. 70-83; and Ronald Asmus, "Rebuilding the Atlantic Alliance," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (September/October 2003), pp. 20-31.
47. Doran, "Somebody Else's Civil War," pp. 40-42, 46-47, and 52; and Fawaz Gerges, *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006), pp. 3-5, 16-18, and 21-24. The *Salafist* (or *Salafiyah*) school of thought was founded as a reformist movement that attempted to reconcile Islam with modernity. By the 1930s, however, the original *Salafist* ideas had taken on the more conservative, ascetic puritanism of Saudi *Wahhabism*, which itself derived from Ibn Tayyimiyyah's thirteenth century strict interpretation of Hanbali doctrine. See Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard University Press 1991), pp. 69, 158-59, and 179-81; and William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000) pp. 124-25, and 230. El-Fadl, "9/11 and the Muslim Transformation," pp. 89-91 argues that by the 1970s *Wahhabism* and *Salafism* had become identical.