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## Cultural Counter-Terrorism

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# TERRORISM: IDEOLOGY, LAW AND POLICY

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TERRORISM:  
IDEOLOGY, LAW AND POLICY

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# CHAPTER 15: CULTURAL COUNTER-TERRORISM

BY PAUL CLITEUR

## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

Is there a relation between terrorism or extreme violence on the one hand and religion on the other? Is the combination “religious terrorism” a *contradiction in terms* or do we have to acknowledge a relationship between these two phenomena? And if a relationship between religion and terrorism could be established what would that imply for a counter-terrorist strategy?

In this contribution I want to focus on these seemingly innocent questions of scholarly analysis and partly philosophical reflection. I call it “seemingly innocent,” because further reflection of the subject matter of this essay will bear out that in fact the relationship between religion and violence is a highly controversial issue, and that the inhibitions to deal with this relationship are huge if not insurmountable.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, we certainly have to deal with these questions because only if our diagnosis of terrorism is sound, a feasible strategy to combat terrorism will be successful.

The center of attention in this article is counter-terrorism and for the most part the cultural or ideological conditions of a successful counter-terrorist strategy. Counter-terrorism could be defined as the set of practices, techniques and policies that governments adopt in response to terrorism. One of those practices is to adopt counter-terrorist laws, which criminalize terrorist behavior.<sup>2</sup> Another is gathering information to prevent terrorist attacks. There is also the criminal prosecution, of course, of terrorists who have transgressed the law in perpetrating terrorist assaults. Here the focus is on prevention, more in particular the cultural conditions that make these policies successful. I will call this “cultural counter-terrorism” to

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier contributions to this theme are: Paul B. Cliteur, “Religion and Violence or the Reluctance to Study This Relationship,” *Forum Philosophicum*, Vol. 15 (2010), pp. 205-226; Paul Cliteur, “Religion and Violence,” in: A. van de Beek, E.A.J.G. van der Borgh, and B.P. Vermeulen (eds.), *Freedom of Religion* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Martin, Gus, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*, 2nd ed., (Thousand Oakes/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), pp. 1-13; Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin (eds.), *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al-Qaeda* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2007), p. 246; Richard English, *Terrorism: How to Respond?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 118 ff.; Peter R. Neumann, *Old and New Terrorism: Late Modernity Globalization and the Transformation of Political Violence* (Malden: Polity, 2009), pp. 56, 153, 156.

distinguish this type of counter-terrorism from the penal and judicial measures taken to combat terrorism.

I will argue that counter-terrorism within western democracies will only be successful if the West regains self-confidence in its own cultural heritage and traditions.<sup>3</sup> The struggle against terrorism is also an ideological struggle. What we encounter in contemporary religious terrorism is not a “clash of civilizations,” to use the famous words of Samuel Huntington, but it is certainly a battle between ideologies.<sup>4</sup>

## 15.2 TERRORISM AND THE ETYMOLOGICAL USE OF RELIGION

Before trying to define “religious terrorism” let me first present some preliminary reflections on religion. “Religion” is a general term used in most modern European languages to designate all concepts concerning the belief in God or gods.<sup>5</sup> With regard to etymology Cicero (106-43 BCE) saw the roots of the word “religion” in *relegere*, referring to repetitive veneration practices typical of his Roman religion.<sup>6</sup> Better known is the designation of the 4<sup>th</sup>-century Christian author Lactantius (c. 250-320) who declared it to be derived from the verb *religare*, meaning “to bind.” From there one may speculate about *what* is bound together. Some people think religion binds people together (stressing a horizontal relationship). Others that religion binds man with God or gods (underscoring the vertical or transcendental tie).

Although the word “religion” is often used as the common denominator of different phenomena some scholars have pointed out that the word was not always used in the meaning we use it today. In ancient and medieval times, e.g. Christianity was considered to be a *fides* (belief), *secta* (line to be followed) or *lex* (law) rather than a *religio*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In Paul Cliteur, “Religieus terrorisme en de lankmoedige elite,” in: Krijn van Beek en Marcel van Ham (eds.), *Gaat de elite ons redden? De nieuwe rol van de bovenlaag in onze samenleving* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2007), pp. 207-235, I commented on the attitude of the Dutch intellectual and political elite towards religious terrorism. See also: Paul Cliteur, “Waarom terrorisme werkt,” in: E.R. Muller, U. Rosenthal, and R. de Wijk (eds.), *Studies over terrorisme en terrorismebestrijding* (Deventer: Kluwer, 2008), pp. 307-347.

<sup>4</sup> See for a further analysis of Huntington’s thesis: Paul Cliteur, “Geen strijd der beschavingen maar de opkomst van een nieuwe ideologie,” in: Hans Jansen and Bert Snel (eds.), *Eindstrijd: De finale clash tussen het liberale Westen en een traditionele islam* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Van Praag, 2009), pp. 180-193.

<sup>5</sup> John R. Hinnells (ed.), *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions* (London: Penguin Books, 1995 (1984)), p. 414. Hinnells uses the words “God” and “Gods,” but I will follow the practice to indicate the theistic concept of god with a capital: “God.” So Hindus revere “gods” and the theistic concept of “god” as a personal, omnipotent and perfectly benevolent is indicated as “God.”

<sup>6</sup> Hinnells, *Ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>7</sup> Hinnells, *Ibid.*, p. 414.

In contemporary usage “belief” is still used interchangeably with “religion.” The word “sect” has changed meaning over the years (and has a derogatory undertone nowadays). The word “law” is still in use, but clearly different from “religion.” Nevertheless, as we will see later, the relationship between “law” and “religion” is interesting for scholars preoccupied with religious terrorism because religious terrorists often refer to a “law” that commanded them to perpetrate the atrocities for which they are condemned by mainstream society. Religious terrorists experience their religion as an eternal “law,” placed over them, with a binding force that supersedes all temporary law.

There are basically two approaches that we may engage in analyzing the relation between religion and terrorism.

### 15.3 TERRORISM AND DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION BY SCHOLARS

The first approach to the relationship between religion and terrorism is to analyze how the concept of terrorism relates to different definitions of religion as given by the great scholars of religion. Take e.g. the famous definition by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834):<sup>8</sup>

The essence of religion consists in the feeling of an absolute dependence.

Here there seems to be a point of departure for reflections on the feeling of absolute dependence of the religious believer and the mentality of religious terrorists. As we know from testimonies during legal trials and letters they pose on the internet or leave behind for their relatives before making an attack, religious terrorists feel an “absolute dependence” of a higher power, implicating that all kinds of criminal and (generally considered) immoral acts can be executed, seemingly unflinching and without moral qualms.

The activities of religious terrorists also seem to square with definitions of religion somewhat similar to that of Schleiermacher. Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) famously stated:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things (...).

Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) and Paul Tillich (1888-1965) presented further well known definitions stressing the “ultimate character” of religious adherence:

Religion is that which grows out of, and gives expression to, experience of the holy in its various aspects.

And Tillich:

Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern.

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<sup>8</sup> Those definitions are to be found in: Hinnells, *ibid.*, p. 415.

This *ultimate* commitment can separate the religious believer from the rest of the community. Ultimately, it is his and his interpretation only (or her and her interpretation only) that counts. Here we see some similarity with religion as defined by Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947):

Religion is what a person does with his solitariness.

“Solitariness” is particularly characteristic of what is called the “lone wolf” or in Dutch “zelfontbrander.” Lone wolves are people who commit terrorist acts outside of any direct command structure. A well known example is the Islamist youngster, reading radical religious literature on the internet, thereby engaging in a process of self-indoctrination which ultimately can result in terrorist attacks or other religiously motivated crimes.<sup>9</sup>

#### 15.4 TERRORISM AND WORLD RELIGIONS

That brings me to a second approach of the relationship between religion and terrorism. It is also possible not to start with a definition of religion (etymologically or otherwise) but with the simple historical fact that the world is full of people who experience their own ultimate commitments to be based on creeds they designate as “their religion.” Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are commonly designated as “religions.” For the purpose of “religious terrorism” the question would be: is there a relationship between these religions and terrorism?

Within the study of those world religions we may focus on two ways to study religions. First we may engage in a study of the attitudes of the *believers* towards violence and terrorist violence in particular. Do adherents of these religions (a) engage in terrorism, (b) actively support religion, or (c) condone terrorism?<sup>10</sup> The second approach would be to try to establish the *central core of a religion* and analyze how this is related to terrorist violence.<sup>11</sup> E.g. does Holy

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<sup>9</sup> See on this: Souad Mekhennet, Claudia Sautter, and Michael Hanfeld, *Die Kinder des Dschihad: Die neue Generation des islamistischen Terrors in Europa* (München/Zürich: Piper, 2008); Zachary Shore, *Breeding Bin Ladens: America, Islam, and the Future of Europe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006); Ed Husain, *The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw inside and Why I Left* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g.: Roel W. Meertens, Yvonne R.A. Prins, and Bertjan Doosje, *In iedereen schuilt een terrorist: Een sociaal-psychologische analyse van terroristische sekten en aanslagen* (Schiedam: Scriptum Psychologie, 2006); Nota Radicalisme en radicalisering, Kamerstukken II, 2004-2005, 29 754, No. 26, pp. 1-31; *The radical dawa in transition: the rise of Islamic neoradicalism in the Netherlands*, General Intelligence and Security Service, October 2007, the Hague 2007.

<sup>11</sup> This is what I try to do in Paul Cliteur, *Het monotheïstisch dilemma: Theologie van het terrorisme* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2010) and more summarily in: Paul Cliteur, *The (continued)*

Scripture advocate terrorism? Are there stories seemingly condoning or glorifying terrorism or is there perhaps direct advocacy of terrorism in those holy books?<sup>12</sup>

Although in what follows I derive elements from all these approaches but the hub of my method is cultural and theological. I am interested in the potential for violence within the world religions, mainly in the three monotheistic faiths. To my mind it is this approach that sheds most light on the contemporary rise of religious terrorism we have witnessed at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That seems also to be in line with the approach of other important scholars in the field of religion and violence such as Amos Guiora, Mark Juergensmeyer and others.<sup>13</sup>

#### 15.4 RELIGIOUS TERRORISM, EXTREMISM AND RADICALISM

The first point we have to make in embarking on this controversial subject is that I do not make generalizations on *religion in general* or *the majority of believers*. The focus in this essay and in my books on this subject is *religious radicalism* or *religious extremism*. Religious terrorism is a subspecies of religious extremism.

Like the work of Juergensmeyer or Guiora my focus is on *religious extremism*. It is not about extremism in general. It is not about religion in general. It is about the *combination* of religion and extremism. For this combination the epithet “religious extremism” is used. Other terms which are more or less similar with what Guiora describes under the heading of religious extremism are “religious fundamentalism” and “religious radicalism.”

An example of religious extremism that might be separated from religious terrorism is the kind of practices that FLDS Church engages in. As Guiora describes in his book *Freedom from Religion* (2009) and in studies especially dedicated to a phenomenon<sup>14</sup> that is largely unknown in Europe he explains that FLDS Church has its roots in one of America’s great religious movements – Mormonism, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). The FLDS church was formed when individuals broke away from the LDS church after the

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*Secular Outlook: In Defence of Moral and Political Secularism* (Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> See on the basis for violence in holy scriptures: Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Quran* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> See e.g.: Mark Juergensmeyer, “Christian Violence in America,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 558 (July 1998), pp. 88-100; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al-Qaeda* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2008); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed., Revised and Updated (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Amos N. Guiora, “Protecting the Unprotected: Religious Extremism and Child Engagement,” *Journal of Law & Family Studies*, Vol. 12 (2010), pp. 391-407.

practice of polygamy was renounced. After their separation the FLDS Church increasingly radicalized in its beliefs and practices.<sup>15</sup> Guiora comments on the FLDS church because it is a good example of religious extremism in the US.

The rise of religious extremism makes it important to analyze its nature. Guiora sees religious extremism as the “greatest danger faced by the liberal state today.”<sup>16</sup> He also speaks of “the greatest threat to civil society that this generation will face.”<sup>17</sup> Another scholar, Frank Barnaby, writes: “International terrorism, particularly fundamentalist terrorism, is one of the greatest threats the international community faces.”<sup>18</sup>

These are heavy words, but the subsequent argument as exposed in Guiora’s *Freedom from Religion* (2009) or Barnaby’s *The Future of Terror* (2007) make clear why they present such an alarming diagnosis.<sup>19</sup> What fascinates me and what I will try to exemplify in this essay are the cultural conditions under which the struggle against religious terrorism must take place. As I will explain in this essay these cultural conditions are not very favorable for an effective counter-terrorist strategy.

The sort of problems one meets if one wants to reform certain social practices with a religious dimension can be adequately illustrated, I think, by presenting a seemingly abstruse example. Let me try to make that clear with an example derived from art history.

The great historian of art, E.H. Gombrich (1909-2001), discusses in his bestselling *The Story of Art* (1950) the reliefs and paintings that adorned the walls of the Egyptian tombs.<sup>20</sup> What is their function? There was no one who could see them. And the person who was put in his grave was dead. But that would be somewhat naïve, of course. These works of art were not meant to be enjoyed by strange eyes but only by the deceased or the “dead man’s soul.” Such ideas may charm a modern reader. Art especially made for the deceased person to watch during his trip to the other world. But religious convictions can also have far-reaching consequences that are more repugnant to modern sensibilities, as we learn from what Gombrich relates about the origin of this custom. “Once, in a grim

<sup>15</sup> Amos N. Guiora, *Freedom from Religion*, Terrorism and Global Justice Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Guiora, *ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>17</sup> Guiora, *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Barnaby, *The Future of Terror: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Handbook* (London: Granta Books, 2007), preface.

<sup>19</sup> Other good introductions to religious terrorism are: Michael Gove, *Celsius 7/7*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006); Walid Phares, *Future Jihad: Terrorist Strategies against the West* (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2005); Walid Phares, *The War of Ideas: Jihadism against Democracy* (Palgrave, Macmillan, 2007); Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York/London: Continuum, 2003); Bassam Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe: Democratic Peace and Euro-Islam versus Global Jihad* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 13th ed. (Oxford: Phaidon, 1978 (1950)), p. 33.

distant past," Gombrich tells us, "it had been the custom when a powerful man died to let his servants and slaves accompany him into the grave. They were sacrificed so that he should arrive in the beyond with a suitable train. Later, these horrors were considered either too cruel or too costly, and art came to the rescue. Instead of real servants, the great ones of this earth were given images as substitutes. The pictures and models found in Egyptian tombs were connected with the idea of providing the soul with helpmates in the other world."<sup>21</sup>

Now let us try to image a discussion in Egyptian society about whether it would be morally permissible to put slaves into the tomb, together with the deceased king or pharaoh. The reformers undoubtedly had to argue that images substituting the "real thing" would serve the purpose as well. But those objecting to the reform of funeral practices have undoubtedly cried out "blasphemy" or "do not meddle with our religious customs!" Under those circumstances those trying to eradicate cruel practices can hardly make progress within entering the tricky realm of discussions about religion. Here a religious conviction mars all social and moral progress with regard to the life chances of the royal household. Religion is intricately bound up with social customs. The same is true, of course, with the contemporary discussion around religious terrorism.

Giving attention to religious extremism does not mean that one has to deny the reality of non-religious extremism. British philosopher John Gray, in a not very convincing critique of Paul Berman's book *The Flight of the Intellectuals*,<sup>22</sup> tries to downplay the role of religion in contemporary terrorism. Berman in his latest book, as in previous books,<sup>23</sup> analyzes the role that the ideology of islamism plays in contemporary terrorism. Gray objects: "A little history shows that some of the first suicide bombers in Lebanon in the early Eighties were members of leftist groups such as the Communist party, while, until the invasion of Iraq, the largest single perpetrator of suicide bombing was a Sri Lankan Leninist group, the Tamil Tigers."<sup>24</sup> But this "little history" fails to make the point Gray pretends to be making. "A little logic" could teach him that the fact that non-religious ideologues threw bombs as well, and sometimes even sacrificed themselves for their political causes, cannot make serious study of the logic of martyrdom operations superfluous.

Indeed, people have perpetrated violence in the light of non-religious causes as well. We should be on our guard, however, to portray this as "secular terrorism" or "secular violence." As a reaction to the analyses of religious violence by authors critical of the social function of religion, apologists of religion reacted

<sup>21</sup> Gombrich, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Berman, Paul, *The Flight of the Intellectuals* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> See: Paul Berman, "Who Is Afraid of Tariq Ramadan? The Islamist, the Journalist, and the Defence of Liberalism," *The New Republic* June 4 (2007), pp. 37-62; Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Gray, John, "A Clash of Ideologies: 'The Enlightenment' versus Islamism," *The National*, July 2 (2010), p. 2.

with the indictment that there is *also* secular violence (Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot).<sup>25</sup> I think this choice of words is misleading and “secular terrorism” is a misnomer. Secular terrorism would be appropriate if a relationship could be established between the ideology of secularism (separation of morals and religion and separation of politics and religion) and terrorism. I think this relationship has not been established. That does not mean that there is no non-religious terrorism. Of course there is. Examples are the RAF<sup>26</sup> or IRA.<sup>27</sup> So “religious terrorism” is an important social challenge, “secular terrorism” is a misleading combination of words and “non-religious terrorism” exists but in the time we are living is a less important threat for the majority of the nation-states in our contemporary world than religious terrorism. As Guiora writes: “Societies worldwide are under attack in the name of God.”<sup>28</sup> This necessitates us to deeply reflect on the nature of the relationship between violence and religion.

### 15.5 DIFFICULTIES ON THE ROAD REFLECTING ON RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

Nevertheless, I am aware as no other how difficult it is to candidly and thoroughly peruse religion. How difficult it is to think and write freely about religion is proven by the fact that humanity needed a special *right* to protect this freedom (the right to freedom of religion).<sup>29</sup> Human history but also Holy Scripture is full of incidents and stories (in *The Secular Outlook* I deal e.g. with the story of Phinehas)<sup>30</sup> in which the free scrutiny of religion is involved. It is an interesting question why this is the case. Why is the free scrutiny of religion so often suppressed? Why churches, prelates, dictators and popes so often obstructed the free development of religious ideas?<sup>31</sup> Why did it take us so long historically to formulate such an elementary right as the freedom to think freely about religion? Why this basic freedom is still not recognized by the overwhelming majority of the countries of the world?<sup>32</sup> One

<sup>25</sup> See on this: Peter Hitchens, *The Rage against God* (London/New York: Continuum, 2010), reacting against his brother's book: Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York/Boston: Twelve, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> See: Stefan Aust, *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*, Erweiterte und aktualisierte Ausgabe, (München: Goldmann, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Pan Books/MacMillan, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Guiora, *ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>29</sup> Including the right to change and reject a religion. See for a dissident voice on this: Gidon Sapir and Daniel Staman, “Why Freedom of Religion Does Not Include Freedom from Religion,” *Law and Philosophy*, Vol. 24 (2005), pp. 467-508.

<sup>30</sup> Cliteur, *The Secular Outlook*, pp. 105-108, 115-116, 118-119, 204.

<sup>31</sup> A good overview presents: J.B. Bury, *A History of the Freedom of Thought* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1932 (1913)). See also: Francesco Ruffini, *Religious Liberty*, translated by J. Parker Heyes, with a preface by J.B. Bury (London/New York: Williams and Norgate, 1912).

<sup>32</sup> See on this: Paul Marshall (ed.), *Religious Freedom in the World: A global Report and Persecution* (Nashville, TN: Freedom House, 2000).

possible explanation is psychological. In *The Secular Outlook* I made a comparison between a father whose lovely wife or daughter is criticized by others and the religionist whose religion is put under scrutiny by outsiders.<sup>33</sup> Outrageous reactions are common. H.L. Mencken wrote: "We must respect the other fellow's religion, but only in the sense and to the extent that we respect his theory that his wife is beautiful and his children smart." Humorous epigrams are often not taken seriously. We laugh about them, but do not analyze their content. That would be a mistake in this case. What Mencken expresses is highly relevant. Mencken's words imply that we often lie about religion. We know that not everything that is being preached and believed under the name of religion is true, but we are supposed not to say this openly. We are supposed to lie a bit, as we lie about the beauty of our neighbor's wife and the smartness of his children. Now, lying about our neighbor's wife and the smartness of his children is rather harmless, and till recently lying about religion was *also* harmless. But the question is: is this still the case? Guiora thinks it is not. He makes a plea "to look the tiger in the eye." He also writes: "Avoiding the truth reflects an institutionalized resistance to acknowledging the elephant in the room."<sup>34</sup> Guiora, doing research for his book, has talked with countless British and Dutch scholars and officials. The picture he presents is that of a community prepared to overlook tigers and elephants. On the United Kingdom Guiora writes: "the overwhelming impression is of a society in a state of denial regarding the threat of religious terrorism."<sup>35</sup> But the picture of the Netherlands he presents us with is not much better.<sup>36</sup>

#### 15.6 THE NATURE OF JIHADIST TERRORISM

Jihadist terrorism is exerted mainly by groups, loose networks or well-hidden cells, not by state-actors.<sup>37</sup> There are nation-states like Iran which are held responsible for contacts with terrorist movements and accused of perpetrating terrorist acts itself, but the most important form of modern terrorism is exerted by Islamic groups seeing themselves as reclaiming Muslim lands from the infidel or from his influence.<sup>38</sup> What makes the struggle between the states who are targeted by

<sup>33</sup> Paul Cliteur, *The Secular Outlook: In Defence of Moral and Political Secularism* (Boston: Wiley/Blackwell, 2010), pp. 80-84.

<sup>34</sup> Guiora, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Guiora, *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> A bleak view of the Netherlands we also find in: Abigail Esman, *Radical State: How Jihad Is Winning over Democracy in the West* (Santa Barbara, CA/Denver, CO/Oxford UK: Praeger, 2010) and Bruce Bawer, "Heirs to Fortuyn," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 23 (2009); Bruce Bawer, *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Alex J. Bellamy, *Fighting Terror: Ethical Dilemma's* (London/New York: Zed Books, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Gilbert, *New Terror, New Wars* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009 (2003)), p. 3.

terrorists and the Islamist groups exerting this terror so confusing, is that both parties depart from completely different presumptions, not to speak of different worldviews. The Islamist groups struggle for the sovereignty of Qur'anic law and Muslim tradition, as Paul Gilbert rightly remarks in *New Terror, New Wars* (2009), while the nation-states targeted by terrorists defend their national sovereignty based on the post-1648 world that came into existence after the Peace of Münster.<sup>39</sup>

In each case the authority that is claimed is authority to act on behalf of a group identified in terms of their values in order to rectify a wrong perpetrated against them by those who lack these values.<sup>40</sup>

This all implies that modern counter-terrorism is very difficult (at least incomplete) without a thorough discussion about values. In its ultimate form it is a discussion about what should prevail: religion (pre-1648) or territory (post-1648)?<sup>41</sup> In the worldview of religious terrorists the world is not subdivided into nation-states, with each state having a government that is the ultimate arbiter of what rules are binding on its citizens. The world is subdivided into religions. And it is *religion* that is the ultimate source of meaning, morals and law. In the worldview of an Islamist radical a British Muslim is ultimately not bound by the law of the United Kingdom but by the law of his religion. So if national law and holy law are contradicting each other the genuine Muslim has to choose for Islamic law, not for the national law of the United Kingdom.

The most serious case with wide ramifications was the fatwa of Ayatollah Khomeini on the British author Salman Rushdie.<sup>42</sup> From the perspective of modern nation states it is perfectly clear that Rushdie was bound by British law on blasphemy and freedom of speech. From the perspective of an Islamist radical, however, this is far from clear. A Muslim who contradicts holy Islamic law (interpreted by the radical clerics) has to suffer the consequences as expounded in Islamic law, not as they are spelled out in British legislation.

Another clear example in which this clash of mentalities was exemplified was 9/11.<sup>43</sup> As Alex J. Bellamy writes in *Fighting Terror* (2008): "The fall of the

<sup>39</sup> Gilbert, *ibid.*, p. 3. See also: Daniel Philpott, "The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations," *World Politics*, Vol. 52 (January 2000), pp. 206-245.

<sup>40</sup> Gilbert, *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> See on this: Daniel Philpott, "The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations," *World Politics*, Vol. 55 (October 2002), pp. 66-95.

<sup>42</sup> The trouble this caused in international relations is described by: Daniel Pipes, *The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, the Ayatollah, and the West*, 2nd ed., with a postscript by Koenraad Elst (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 2003). See for the cultural dimension: Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Legacy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> See on this: Tom Rockmore, Joseph Margolis, and Armen T. Marsoobian, *The Philosophical Challenge of September 11* (Oxford/Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2005); James F. Hoge, and Gideon Rose, (eds.), *Understanding the War on Terror: A (continued)*

Berlin wall has been replaced by 9/11 as the signpost for the contemporary era."<sup>44</sup> The way religious terrorism poses a challenge to national sovereignty is clearly manifested in the fact that religious terrorists have the ambition to exert functions that belong to the traditional realm of the state: retribution and prevention.<sup>45</sup> As Gilbert states, on the Islamist side the aim is retribution for crimes against Islam perpetrated by the Americans and their allies.<sup>46</sup> It is also, I would like to add, meant as a warning of future violations of the territory that is claimed for "Islam." In other words: prevention.

It is often said by western politicians – and quite justly so – that the war on terror should not be interpreted as a "war on Islam." It is also a commonplace that it neither should be construed as a clash between the Judeo-Christian West and the Islamic East. Even the most convinced detractors of former president G.W. Bush give him credit for the way he avoided an imminent antithesis between Islamic and Christian culture. As *Time Magazine* writes in a reportage "Islam in America,"<sup>47</sup> immediately after the 9/11 attacks, Bush visited an Islamic center in Washington and declared that there would be no reprisals against Muslims. Islam, he said, was a religion of peace.<sup>48</sup> "The message was reinforced by top Administration officials like Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell. While Bush's credibility with American Muslims would eventually be blighted by the war in Iraq and the attendant death of tens of thousands of Muslims here, some commentators give him credit for reining in Islamophobes."<sup>49</sup> This somewhat reluctant compliment to G.W. Bush is interesting because in the sentence I quoted we see that the author of the article (Bobby Gosh) writes about the "death of tens of thousands of Muslims there." So he does not refer to "Iraqi citizens," but to "Muslims." And this while Bush was praised who had said there would be "no

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*Foreign Affairs Book*, Foreign Affairs/Council on Foreign Relations (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Alex J. Bellamy, *Fighting Terror: Ethical Dilemma's* (London/New York: Zed Books, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> See on this: R.A. Duff, *Trials & Punishments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 (1986)).

<sup>46</sup> Gilbert, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Bobby Ghosh, "Islam in America," *Time*, August 30 (2010). The article illustrates perfectly the difficulties in commenting on the subject mentioned in the title. The title above the article is most objective and neutral: "Islam in America." As subtitle we read: "America's Islam problem" which is more ambivalent, because it does not indicate what the problem really is. Is it Islam? Or the people who have ambivalent feelings about Islam? The cover of *Time* insinuates an answer. There we read: "Is America Islamophobic? What the Anti-Mosque Uproar Tells Us about How the U.S. Regard Muslims." In the article a long parade of voices is presented of people who insinuate or openly avow that people who are not in favor of building an Islamic center on Groundzero are motivated by racist motives or by "Islamophobia."

<sup>48</sup> Similar remarks are made by Tony Blair in "A Battle for Global Values," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (January/February 2007), pp. 79-90.

<sup>49</sup> Gosh, *ibid.*

reprisals against Muslims.” By that choice of words the author implicitly adopts the language that the religious terrorists use to frame the conflict. We should be very cautious here: whatever we may think of the justification of the war in Iraq, it was *not* meant as a war against a religion or against the adherents of a religion. This is what Islamists want us to believe, of course, but journalists, commenting on this issue, should be careful in their choice of words. The interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan are no religious wars, as the Islamists want us to believe, but wars in self-defence or interventions based on humanitarian considerations,<sup>50</sup> and this all on the basis of the modern state-system as it is in operation from 1648 onwards. Those who talk about the “victims of Muslim side” in these wars and interventions in fact adopt a language of the pre-1648 world. It is much closer to the truth, though, to see in this conflict a contradiction between those who have a secular view of the world (the system of nation-states as it functions since 1648 is basically a *secular* interpretation of the world) and those who see the world as divided by religions. The success or failure of Jihadist terrorism is therefore heavily dependent on the prevalence of its ideology. Islamist radicals try to convince the world population of Muslims that their lifestyle is under threat. They want Muslims to believe that interventions in Iraq or Afghanistan are directed against their faith, against Islam. They make great havoc about “Islam under siege”<sup>51</sup> and they try to convince their audience that criticism of Islam by western critics or dissidents within their own community is basically aimed at the destruction of the Muslim religion or the culture of Muslims. So whereas the Islamists regard the War on terror as a war between peoples identified as Muslims on the one hand and non-Muslims or infidels on the other, the Americans and their allies deny they are fighting against “Muslims.”<sup>52</sup> Western and non western nation-states try to convince their Muslim population that their rights are secured under a secular constitution and sovereign national law, Islamists try to convince Muslims that they are being discriminated against and otherwise unfairly treated. As Gilbert states:

There is thus an ideological struggle between the Islamists and US allies to win over ordinary Muslims to the one kind of identity or the other. On the Islamist side the war is viewed as a conflict *between* peoples; on the American, as fought by them *on behalf* of those peoples who are taken to

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<sup>50</sup> See on this: Kelly Kate Pease and David P. Forsythe, “Human Rights, Humanitarian Intervention, and World Politics,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 15 (1993), pp. 290-314; G. Molier, *De (on)rechtmatigheid van humanitaire interventie: Respect voor staatssoevereiniteit versus bescherming van mensenrechten?* (the Hague: Boom Juridische Uitgevers, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> Something that is reiterated by non-islamist authors who in some respect side with the Islamist interpretation of reality. See for an example of this: Akbar S. Ahmed, , *Islam under Siege* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Gilbert, *ibid.*, p. 7.

espouse the prescribed values, but whose identities as such are threatened by those that reject them.<sup>53</sup>

I think it is basically right to stress the *ideological* character of this struggle. I do not think it is right to see this as a struggle between (or clash of) *civilizations* as Samuel Huntington famously framed the conflict.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, vehemently and emotionally rejecting his thesis of a “clash” might cause us to neglect the ideal or ideological dimension of the whole affair.

If Islamists succeed in convincing the Muslim population of the world that the intervention in Afghanistan or the war in Iraq is directed against Muslims and/or Islam they have made a tremendous step forward in rallying for their cause. As I will make clear in the rest of my argument, they are fairly successful in their propaganda. This is not due to the inherent quality of their argument, but to the disarray of the western progressive-liberal intelligentsia.

### 15.7 THE NATURE OF ISLAMISM

For a proper understanding of the nature of the ideology that sustains contemporary Jihadist attacks it is necessary to know where to look. One thing is certain: we don't have to look in the writings of moderate Muslims nor in those who sympathize with them (and who would not?). So we do not have to study the works by Tariq Ramadan, Abou El Fadl, Reza Aslan and countless other works that flood the market to convince us that there are many non-radical Muslims and varieties of the Islamic belief that are totally peaceful. And we also can refrain from reading the work of John Esposito, a catholic Islam-scholar who sympathizes with the moderate Muslims. Whoever wants to understand the islamist mentality has to study the works of authors like Walid Phares, Ibn Warraq, Robert Spencer, Daniel Pipes, Nonie Darwish, Melanie Phillips, Micheal Gove, Anne-Marie Delcambre, and David Selbourne. The last group of thinkers is accused by the first group of thinkers to confuse “Islam” with “islamism,” to give an unduly negative picture of “Islam,” which in some cases may be a justified reproach, but for practical purposes this semantic debate about what belongs to “Islam” and what to “islamism” is less crucial. What *is* important, is that there is a terrorist movement that draws its inspiration from certain authors like Sayyid Qutb,<sup>55</sup> some scriptural

<sup>53</sup> Gilbert, *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993), pp. 22-49, later expanded in: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Basic Principles of the Islamic Worldview*, translated by Rami David, preface by Hamid Algar (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publication International, 2006); Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, translated from the Arabic by John B. Hardie, translation revised and introduction by Hamid Algar (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2000 (1953)); Sayyid Qutb, *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society*, Albert J. Bergesen (ed.) (New York/London: Routledge, (continued)

passages from the Qur'an, and from some traditions and organizations within Islamic culture, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>56</sup> For a successful counter-terrorist strategy it is important to know what these sources of inspiration comprise and how the ideas advocated there should be met with other ideas.

Although it is possible to analyze a variety of authors to get an idea of the terrorist frame of mind, the most obvious source is Osama Bin Laden. There are several anthologies with the scriptures of Bin Laden on the market. In 2005 Gilles Kepel published *Al-Qaeda dans le texte: Écrits d'Oussama ben Laden, Abdallah Azzam, Ayman al-Zawahiri et Abou Moussab al-Zarqawi*,<sup>57</sup> three years later released in English.<sup>58</sup> In 2005 an English anthology came out, edited by Bruce Lawrence: *Messages to the World: the Statements of Osama Bin Laden*.<sup>59</sup> In 2007 an anthology was published under the title *The Al-Qaeda Reader* and edited by Raymond Ibrahim.<sup>60</sup> I will refer here to one article in particular from *The Al-Qaeda Reader*, i.e. *Moderate Islam is a Prostration of the West*, a reaction by Bin Laden on a document published by the Institute for American Values justifying the war in Iraq.<sup>61</sup> Bin Laden's essay gives a clear and reasonably cogent presentation of the ideology (or "theology," as Ibrahim says) of islamism. The writings of Bin Laden, although certainly not devoid of literary character, are not systematic presentations of arguments. So I will try to bring a little order in his indictments of the West by distinguishing between three basic motives in islamist thought.

The *first* is an emotionally charged critique on the immoral West's presumed assault on Islamic values. Bin Laden's worldview would in western

2008). His most well known book is: Sayyid Kutb, *Milestones* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2001 (1964)).

<sup>56</sup> Udo Ulfkotte, *Heiliger Krieg in Europa: Wie die Radikale Muslimbruderschaft unsere Gesellschaft bedroht*, Vorwort von Bassam Tibi (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2007). See also: Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 30: "Islamist political doctrine originated with the Society of the Muslim Brothers, founded in Egypt at the end of the 1920s with the political goal of establishing an Islamic state."

<sup>57</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Al-Qaeda dans le texte: Écrits d'Oussama ben Laden, Abdallah Azzam, Ayman al-Zawahiri et Abou Moussab al-Zarqawi* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli (eds.), *Al-Qaeda in Its Own Words*, translated by Pascale Ghazalleh (Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Osama Bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, edited and introduced by Bruce Lawrence, translated by James Howard (London/New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Ibrahim (ed.), *The Al-Qaeda Reader*, introduction by Victor Davis Hanson (New York: Broadway Books, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> Institute for American Values, "What We're Fighting for: A Letter from America," February 2002, also in: Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror. The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), pp. 193-218.

terms be qualified as "Manichean."<sup>62</sup> There is an almost obsessive preoccupation with a polarity between good and evil, Islam wholly good, the West being entirely evil. The world is divided in "Muslims" and "non-Muslims," commonly characterized as "infidels" and basically seen and identified as "the enemy." The Muslims are usually depicted as the victims of the aggression of the non-Muslims, under the leadership of America. "(...) Muslims are being drained daily of their blood, honor, possessions, and land all over the world, at the hand of the hateful Christians, led by that leader of international infidelity, America (...)," Bin Laden writes.<sup>63</sup> The conflict is not framed as a war between states and organizations, but as war between groups of people identified by their religion. The actions of America and its allies against Iraq are portrayed as a "war against Islam"<sup>64</sup> and those performing those actions as "Crusaders."<sup>65</sup> The West is characterized as hypocritically concerned about the plight of women under sharia law, while neglecting the situation of women in other cultures. Hindus "burn women along with their husbands when the latter die," Bin Lades tell us.<sup>66</sup> Buddhists sell and buy women as a commodity. In communism women are available for all. So why all the complaints about the way women are treated in Islam? If the Americans claim to battle for freedom and justice, then they should battle these other nations as well.

"The secular West" is by Bin Laden identified with "the immoral West."<sup>67</sup> Practically everything valued by the immoral West is condemned under sharia law. Only a few things Muslims and non-Muslims can agree over, Bin Laden states, but these are matters of minor importance. The issues most prominent in the West, Bin Laden contends revolve around "secularism, homosexuality, sexuality, and atheism."<sup>68</sup> There are people who contend that Islam should evolve. Bin Laden denies that. "Islam improves: it is not improved."<sup>69</sup>

Helping the West in combating terrorism is anathema to Bin Laden. Cooperation with the West against what they call "Islamic extremism" or "fundamentalism" or "radicalism," Bin Laden says, is apostasy from the religion of Allah Most High.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Manichaeism was a widely influential gnostic religion of late antiquity, founded and spread by the Persian Mani (216-277). He taught a radical dualism of good and evil that is metaphysically grounded in coeternal and independent cosmic powers of Light and Darkness. Manichaean morality was severely ascetic. See: Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 519.

<sup>63</sup> Osama Bin Laden, "Moderate Islam Is a Prostration of the West," in: Ibrahim Raymond (ed.), *The Al-Qaeda Reader*, introduction by Victor Davis Hanson (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), pp. 22-62, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>69</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>70</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 54.

A *second* motive in the Islamist ideology is the need of a total submission to the will of Allah and the unconditional implementation of Allah's law in this world. As Gilles Kepel writes in *The War for the Muslim Minds* (2004) about the Islamists: "They relied on religious sources to emphasize the importance of 'submission' (the literal meaning of the word 'Islam'). Such submission must be absolute, and over the course of time must become synonymous with complete obedience and total subjection to the leaders' orders."<sup>71</sup> So submission to the will of Allah is interpreted as submission to those who pretend to know the will of Allah. That duty of submission also extends to non-Muslims. About the Christians Bin Laden writes: their religion is a deviation, and Christians have to know that Allah will never accept either purity or justice "except through Submission (Islam)."<sup>72</sup> The matter is summed up for every person alive: "either submit, or live under the suzerainty of Islam, or die."<sup>73</sup> It is "part of our religion," Bin Laden contends, "to impose our particular beliefs upon others."<sup>74</sup>

Bin Laden also indicts practices that violate the sharia, especially its very foundations.<sup>75</sup> Sharia should be spread all over the world. Especially the learned among the Muslims have a duty to do this. Sharia law is superior to what Bin Laden calls laws under the "umbrella of justice, morality, and rights."<sup>76</sup> "No, the *sharia* of Islam is the foundation," Bin Laden writes.<sup>77</sup>

The *third* motive, and probably what violent Islam is most noted for is Jihad. Bin Laden further criticizes all those who oppose what he calls the Offensive Jihad, meaning that Jihad should not be interpreted as internal struggle but the preparedness to wage war on the enemies of Islam. Jihad, so Bin Laden writes, "is an established and basic tenet of this religion."<sup>78</sup> The infidels should be fought. Not in a spiritual matter, not with words, but with physical violence. Allah said "Fight them! Allah will torment them with your hands" (9:14). He also said: "slay the idolaters wherever you find them – seize them, besiege them, and make ready to ambush them! But if they repent afterward, and perform prayer and pay the alms [i.e., submit to Islam], then release them. For Allah is truly All-Forgiving, Merciful" (9:5).<sup>79</sup>

In fact, Muslims are obligated to raid the lands of the infidels, occupy them, and exchange their systems of governance for an Islamic system, barring any

<sup>71</sup> Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 105.

<sup>72</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>74</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>76</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>77</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>78</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 38.

practice that contradicts the *sharia* from being publicly voiced among the people, as was the case at the dawn of Islam.<sup>80</sup>

Bin Laden quotes the famous verse from the Qur'an to substantiate his case:

You are obligated to fight, though you may hate it. For it may well be that you hate that which is good for you and love that which is evil for you. Allah knows [best]; you do not know. (2:216)<sup>81</sup>

The ideology of islamism is not identical with the religion of Islam. Neither is the ideology of islamism shared by the majority of Muslims (I will comment on this subject later on in this article). But it would be grossly misleading to neglect the religious elements in this ideology. Islamism draws its inspiration from the Islamic tradition reinforced with political motives that are partly derived from secular ideologies, like anarchism,<sup>82</sup> but also with roots in Islamic doctrine and tradition.

#### 15.8 WHY IS THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF RELIGIOUS TERRORISM MISJUDGED?

Before I can continue my argument on the way Islamists and also western commentators see the contemporary conflict around religious terrorism I want to make clear why the religious nature of religious terrorism is so often overlooked. Here, we are confronted with a mix of methodological and ideological motives. In my view the methodological and ideological motives are intertwined. I mean: the choice of a certain methodology is intricately bound up with ideological convictions. I will try to make this clear by, first, a digression on methodology, more in particular the semantics of the word "religion," and subsequently explain what this has to do with ideology.

#### 15.9 TWO CONCEPTS OF RELIGION: SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS

First, religion is a sensitive issue and people can always deny the religious nature of the threat according to the concept of religion that they subscribe to. There are *two concepts of religion*.

There is on the one hand the *social* concept of religion. Religion is simply what socially *manifests itself* as religious. So if Catholics steal more than other people Catholics are more "criminal" than other people. From a social science perspective this makes perfect sense. But it does not if one embraces a *religious* attitude towards the concept of religion. For the religious believer "religion" is a very special phenomenon. Religion is not a set of ideas or an ideology that can do wrong like all sets of ideas and ideologies can do wrong or have their evil sides. Religion *simply cannot be evil*. Religion is from the nature of the concept *good* and

<sup>80</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> Bin Laden, *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>82</sup> See e.g.: James L. Gelvin, "Al-Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian's Reply to Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2008), pp. 563-581.

if there are evil things being done by religious believers, it is their *lack* of belief, the *perversion* of their belief, the fact that they *do not understand the true nature* of their belief – there are myriads of excuses for the religious believer to explain the religious nature of certain religious evils simply away.

This religious concept of religion bedevils many acrimonious disputes about religious terrorism, because not only the religious believer is under the spell of the religious concept, but many scholars as well. Guiora writes: “When religion is promoting the positive development of society, it is an institution that is tolerated or even celebrated. When religion is tearing down the fabric of society, however, it is rarely condemned in any meaningful way.”<sup>83</sup> This is undoubtedly true and this has to do with the fact that different scholars use different concepts of religion. Many commentators simply do not accept the social concept of religion but use the religious concept of religion and that colors all their statements on this subject. The contrast between the social concept of religion and the religious concept of religion accounts for an important rift in the scholarly world. Perhaps I can make this clear by referring to the example of Karen Armstrong because she is probably the most well known author whose whole work is based on this religious concept of religion. Again, let me repeat: characteristic of the religious concept of religion is that religion, from the nature of the concept, can never be wrong.

This has enormous implications for the subject of our study: religious terrorism. Religious terrorism simply cannot exist, as becomes clear when we read what Karen Armstrong writes on this subject in her book *The Case for God* (2009).

Terrorism undoubtedly threatens our global security, be we need accurate intelligence that takes all the evidence into account. It will not help to utter sweeping and ill-founded condemnations of “Islam.” In a recent Gallup poll, only seven per cent of the Muslims interviewed in thirty-five countries believed that the 9/11 attacks were justified. They had no intention of committing such an atrocity themselves but they believed that Western foreign policy had been largely responsible for these heinous actions. Their reasoning was entirely political: they cited such ongoing problems as Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya and Western interference in the internal affairs of Muslim countries. But the majority of Muslims who condemned the attacks all gave religious reasons, quoting, for example, the Qur’anic verse that states that the taking of a single life is equivalent to the destruction of the entire world.<sup>84</sup>

What we can make up from this revealing passage is that Armstrong thinks that if seven percent of the Muslim population thinks terrorism is justified, this is no cause for concern: *only* seven per cent, she says. I will later come back on this figure. In this context I want to comment on what she says about religious

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<sup>83</sup> Guiora, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: What Religion Really Means* (London: The Bodley Head, 2009), p. 287.

terrorism. Religious terrorism is a misnomer according to Armstrong's argument, because she contends that the reasoning of Muslims supporting terrorism "was entirely political." They cited "ongoing problems" as Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya and Western interference in the internal affairs of Muslim countries.

In the course of my argument I will make clear that this contention lacks a basis in historical fact. Muslims supporting terrorism are perhaps *partly* motivated by political reasons (we find these reasons spelled out in the speeches by Bin Laden, as we have seen), but the basis of their argument is *religious*, as I will try to make clear later on when I refer to the religious sources of religious terrorism.

The quote of Armstrong becomes even more interesting when she comments of the Muslims who do *not* support terrorism: the ninety-three percent. Why do they reject terrorism? Now, suddenly religion is the motivating factor for their stance and not political or moral considerations. Those rejecting terrorism "all gave religious reasons." They quoted for example a Qur'anic verse with a peaceful leaning.

Everyone who has studied the literature on this subject knows perfectly well that people supporting terrorism do this with religious reasons, quoting passages from Qur'anic sources that support Jihad. But Armstrong cannot take this seriously, she even overlooks this fact completely. Her stance seems to be thus: if Muslims quote Qur'anic verses to support terrorism this cannot be taken seriously (they are in fact really motivated by political considerations), but if they quote Qur'anic verses to reject terrorism they have to be taken very seriously (they are really motivated by their religion).

This is completely arbitrary.<sup>85</sup> How can Karen Armstrong be so blind? I think this has to do with the fact that she is under the spell of what I call the *religious concept* of religion. She does not consider religion as the social scientist does. Religion is not a phenomenon that can have good *and* bad consequences, all depending on the circumstances and persons. Those using the religious concept of religion simply exclude beforehand all negative consequences of religion and therefore all evils of religion will always be "explained" by political factors. The whole methodology boils down to this: all bad things come from politics; all good things from religion. The ninety-three percent of the Muslims rejecting religion is not simply good because they have moral or political reasons to be good, but because of the Qur'anic verse that prohibits violence, is taken seriously.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Two pages of quotes from the Qur'an justifying violence can be found in: Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (London: The Free Press, 2005 (2004)), pp. 116-117; see also: Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Quran* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), pp. 73-95.

<sup>86</sup> For an opposite view, see: Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York/Boston: Twelve, 2007), p. 29: "I can think of a handful of priests and bishops and rabbis and imams who have put humanity ahead of their own sect or creed. History gives us many other such examples, which I am going to discuss later on. But this is a compliment to humanism, not to religion."

From the perspective of a social scientist studying religion this is an unlikely combination of statements. It is very well possible that people do not think that religion is a motivating factor in human behavior. But then it would be consistent to say that *all* seemingly religiously motivated behavior is actually political.

I hope I do not tax the patience of the reader by elaborating this point so long. I do this because it seems to be the key to understand the confusion on this subject matter. If we follow Armstrong in her inhibitions to adopt the social concept of religion we will never understand the phenomenon of religious terrorism. In my view we have to follow Guiora and other social scientists who implicitly or explicitly use the social concept of religion.<sup>87</sup> Only if we adopt the social concept of religion will we be able to produce a realistic analysis of the nature of religious terrorism and only on the basis of a realistic analysis can we make any headway in combating terrorism.

#### 15.10 THE PROBLEMS WITH JIHADIST TERRORISM

That brings me to a second reason why the religious nature of religious terrorism is so often misjudged. The second reason is ideological. I am inclined to think that the ideological reason is de basis for methodology sketched before. In other words: the choice of a religious concept of religion is motivated (although unconsciously) by ideological reasons. Let me explain what that ideology comprises.

The most important form of religious terrorism nowadays is *Jihadist* terrorism or islamist terrorism. As Gove writes in *Celsius 7/7* (2006): "Islamism is essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon. Like its sibling ideologies, fascism, and communism, it offers followers a form of redemption through violence."<sup>88</sup> So "islamism" is a kind of ideology. It is inspired by a religion (Islam), but not identical with it.

Terrorism is not exclusively religious, as we know from the RAF. And religious terrorism is not exclusively islamist, as we know from the American terrorists intimidating and killing abortion physicians and Jewish extremists killing for the sake of their religion.<sup>89</sup> But quantitatively islamist terrorism poses a more serious threat for western governments than Jewish or Christian terrorism. On the face of it, this would not warrant the expectation that scholars have great difficulties in analyzing this new type of religious terrorism. But further inspection

<sup>87</sup> Guiora does not explicitly adopt a concept of religion himself. He writes: "Many have commented, written, spoken, and pontificated on this question, and it would appear that the answer is relative for it depends on one's particular perspective, milieu, and culture." See: Guiora, *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Gove, *Celsius 7/7* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), p. 12; see also: Bassam Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe: Democratic Peace and Euro-Islam versus Global Jihad* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>89</sup> See on this: Damon Linker, *The Theocons: Secular America under Siege* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

makes us understand that the inhibitions for scholars to gauge the true nature of religious terrorism in its islamist variety are tremendous.

With regard to Islamist terrorism there is the problem that is it perpetrated by Muslims. And according to the terrorists themselves it is presented as protecting the interests of Muslims. Now Muslims are an ethnic and religious minority in western societies. So every student of religious terrorism in the sense of islamist terrorism runs, at best, the risk of being accused of taking the interests of this minority insufficiently taken into account. At worst: someone not prepared to repeat the propagandistic myths of islamists is pilloried as a "racist" or being in the grip of an irrational fear branded as "Islamophobia."

That is a very uncomfortable situation to be confronted with, and the accusation of "Islamophobia" is hugely effective in discouraging intellectuals and scholars to freely scrutinize into this matter. Although accusations of "christianophobia" are also common for those who do not give Christianity its due respect, and those who do not use the religious concept of religion are branded as "enlightenment fundamentalists," these accusations are not as stigmatizing as "Islamophobia." The reason is clear. Being an "Islamophobe" has the overtones of being a "racist." So people who think that the religion of Islam is even *partly* responsible for Jihadist terrorism runs the risk of being excluded from the community of serious and morally integer scholars.

Although silly for all those who recognize the mechanism at work here, it is hugely influential and many serious and responsible scholars will avoid perusing the phenomenon of religious terrorism in an open and rational manner. Once the attention is directed towards the function of religion as a motivating factor merely raising eyebrows is usually sufficient to cow serious scholars into submission.

This uncanny combination of facts and processes all plays into the carts of the islamists. In the beginning of this article I spoke about the clash of worldviews between the religious terrorists and those engaged in counter-terrorism. On the face of it counter-terrorism cannot be too difficult. The terrorists advocate religious law, the abolition or complete destruction of civil liberties, discrimination of homosexuals, women and unbelievers – what serious scholar would be in favor of those things? On the face of it, the worldview of the islamists must be deeply repugnant to freedom loving citizens in modern democratic states. On further inspection, however, things appear to be a bit more complicated. There are all kinds of factors that make counter-terrorism more difficult. The methodological and especially ideological factors mentioned above are such a factor. Let us go a little deeper into this subject by analyzing the research done under the supervision of the renowned Islam-scholar John Esposito.

#### 15.11 JOHN ESPOSITO AND THE SEVEN PERCENT

In 2007 John L. Esposito (1940-) and Dalia Mogahed, a Senior Analyst and Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslims Studies, presented the results of one of the most elaborate researches to "what Muslims think." Esposito's and Mogahed's book *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*

(2007) comprises the results of that Gallup poll, interspersed with Esposito's own commentary on those results. I think especially the commentary that Esposito presents is illustrative of some of the difficulties I mentioned before, difficulties that we also encountered in the work of Karen Armstrong. What I want to show is how the *interpretations* (not the figures itself) of the Gallup Poll that Esposito conducted can be construed as favorable for the further dispersion of the worldview of the islamists. This is, of course, not what Esposito aims at. If I am right in what I am going to say about his views he will resent this deeply. Nevertheless I think my interpretation is right as I will try to make clear in what follows. The point I want to make is that the views of Esposito exemplify how broadly dispersed the islamist interpretation of reality is – so widely dispersed in fact that we cannot feel completely confident that counter-terrorism as developed in the western world will be successful in the short run. We may also frame the problem thus: for counter-terrorism to be effective we have to direct our energies also to ourselves. Broadly shared myths about the West have to be abandoned. But let me first present the views of Esposito as expounded in his book *Who Speaks for Islam?*

Presenting the results of their poll Esposito and Mogahed write this:

In totality, we surveyed a sample representing more than 90% of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, making this the largest, most comprehensive study of contemporary Muslims ever done.<sup>90</sup>

That such a comprehensive study could be undertaken is indeed good news. Another good sign is that this research was conducted by two people with an undeniably favourable attitude towards Muslims and towards Islam. This is important because under those circumstances the research cannot be easily cast aside as another token of ill will against religious minorities. No one can accuse John Esposito of "Islamophobia."

Nevertheless, as I will try to make clear in what follows, the research of Esposito and Mogahed is vitiated by the sometimes arbitrary and ideology-laden *interpretations* that they give of the figures they present. They more than once engage in conclusions on the basis of the figures they represent that are far from convincing and manifesting views that no critical scholar can and should embrace. I want to focus especially on the support for violence in the Muslim community. This is a crucial figure for the subject of this article. How much support is there for the worldview of the religious terrorists within the Muslim community? Are Bin Laden and Ayatollah Khomeini virtually isolated figures in their advocacy of violence? Or is there a certain support for the Jihadist worldview? And how great is that support?

Esposito and Mogahed frame the question in precisely these words: "How much public support is there for terrorism?"<sup>91</sup> In my view that is identical with:

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<sup>90</sup> John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), p. xi.

how successful is the Jihadist or Islamist interpretation of Islam? If that Jihadist interpretation is successful there will be great public support for violence. If the Jihadist interpretation is not (or less) successful there will not be a high figure of support for violence.

The crucial question here is though: what percentage is considered to be high? And what is considered to be low? Most authors in the field contend that “anti-Western terrorism, while of international concern, involves a very small minority of Muslims, and has thus far spread far less than many feared after 2001.”<sup>92</sup> The news media are often criticized for dispersing a false view in this regard: “The news media act like a distorting mirror at a fairground, exaggerating the militancy of the few while minimizing the quietism or indifference of the many,” the well known Islam-scholar Malise Ruthven writes.<sup>93</sup> But Ruthven, as so many others, fails to indicate what he considers a “distortion.” How few is “a few?” How many exactly are “indifferent?”

Before commenting on Esposito and Mogahed’s Poll let us first direct our attention at another survey of a more limited significance than the one conducted by Esposito and Mogahed because it is only based on British figures. A Poll by ICM Research, prepared for the *Sunday Telegraph* from February 2006, indicated that four out of ten British Muslims want sharia law introduced into parts of the country.<sup>94</sup> The opinion poll also designated that a fifth have sympathy with the “feelings and motives” of the suicide bombers who attacked London July 7, 2005 killing fifty-two people, although ninety-nine per cent thought the bombers were wrong to carry out the atrocity.

Now let us look at the results of Esposito’s research.

According to the Gallup Poll, 7 % of respondents think that the 9/11 attacks were “completely” justified and view the United States unfavorably. Among those who believe that the 9/11 attacks were not justified, whom we’ll call “moderates,” 40% are pro-United States, but 60% view the United States unfavorably.<sup>95</sup>

This is an important empirical figure and Esposito and Mogahed deserve credit for their extensive research. As I said, most discussions on what Muslims think are highly speculative or vague. Even serious scholars refer to “people they know” or

<sup>91</sup> Esposito and Mogahed, *ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>92</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, “Secularism & Its Discontents,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 132, No. 3, On Secularism & Religion (Summer, 2003), pp. 14-30, p. 25.

<sup>93</sup> Malise Ruthven, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 (1997)), p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> “Muslims Poll – February 2006,” ICM Research, prepared for *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2006; see also: Patrick Hennessy and Melissa Kite, “Poll Reveals 40 pc of Muslims Want Sharia Law in UK,” *The Sunday Telegraph*, 19 February (2006). See also: Peter R. Neumann, “Europe’s Jihadist Dilemma,” *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Summer 2006), pp. 71-84, p. 75.

<sup>95</sup> Esposito and Mogahed, *ibid.*, p. 70.

that their “livelong experience has learned them that...” or other unscientific remarks. Whoever wants to generalize about what Muslims think should not do this on the basis of personal impressions but on the basis of hard empirical evidence, if available. Nevertheless, even if we have that evidence we still have an important task to accomplish and this is *giving a rational interpretation* of these data. It is here, to my mind, that Esposito and Mogahed are less convincing.

I will not comment on the forty percent Muslims who are “pro-United States” or the sixty percent who view the United States “unfavorably” because this figure is not very important for our subject: the prevalence of religious terrorism, in particular the brand of religious terrorism in its Islamist brand. Besides: what does “pro-United States” mean? Is the question “are you pro-United States?” not much too broad and therefore bound to be misleading? What aspect of the United States are you supposed to be in favor of, or against? Its legal system? Its constitution? Its politics? Its present president, the former president, all the presidents since Lincoln? Answers to such questions are as good as meaningless.

We may also pose semantic questions with regard to the passage just quoted. Apparently Esposito and Mogahed define someone who thinks the attacks of 9/11 not justified as “moderate.” Is that a fruitful definition of a “moderate?” One might say that their view on “moderateness” does not exemplify a high level of ambition. If we can earn the title of “moderate” simply by not being a supporter of *Al-Qaeda* or other terrorist organizations that “moderateness” is easily established. The following example can make this clear. Suppose someone would say: “I think that women should know their place. They should be subservient housewives. I consider homosexuality to be an infectious disease. Unbelievers should not run for office, because as long as they do not subscribe to the moral principles enshrined in Holy Scripture they are dangerous moral nihilists. But I do *not* advocate physical violence against any of those groups.” What would be our judgment about the person saying this? Would we call such a person “moderate?” If we were to adopt the definition of Esposito and Mogahed we should answer affirmatively. Many people will hesitate, though.

Yet, let us not elaborate on this and concentrate on the material that Esposito and Gallup present us with and which is useful for the questions we are discussing here.

#### 15.12 WHAT SEVEN PERCENT TERRORISM-SUPPORTERS MEANS

As I said before, Esposito and Mogahed give *interpretations* to the figures they present that are dubious or at least controversial. I will now further go into that question by commenting on the seven percent that supports terrorism.

Esposito underscores the *hope* that we may entertain on the basis of the fact that ninety-three percent of the Muslims are “moderate.” Nevertheless, almost unnoticed, he discloses what seven percent of 1.3 billion means in actual numbers. This is ninety-one million. In other words: ninety-one million Muslims think that the attack of 9/11 was “completely justified.”

This figure is something that usually gets no attention of commentators (like Malise Ruthven or Karen Armstrong, quoted before) who speak of a “great majority” or “overwhelming majority” of Muslims who do not support a violent interpretation of their belief. And indeed, seven percent is a small minority. Nevertheless, ninety-one million is a considerable support for a terrorist movement. In a time of globalization where borders do not have the significance they had in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ninety-one million terrorism-supporters poses a considerable challenge indeed. The expert on terrorism and violence Walter Laqueur (1921-) seems more convincing than Ruthven, Esposito and Armstrong when he writes: “It has been endlessly repeated that the majority of Muslims want to live in peace with their neighbors, a statement that is as correct as it is irrelevant. The believers in jihad are a minority, but they can count on a substantial periphery of sympathizers, more than sufficient to sustain long campaigns of terrorism.”<sup>96</sup> It is important that we rightly interpret what this ninety-one million means. It does not mean that Islam without further ado is a violent religion. It does not mean that the majority of the Muslims is not to be trusted. But it *does* mean that jihadist propaganda, the Islamist interpretation of Islam, is more successful than one might hope.

I am inclined to think that this figure of ninety-one million in the interpretation I have just given is an important challenge for the targets of terrorism and an important figure in the context of the successes and failures of counter-terrorism.

We have seen in the beginning of this article that Guiora made a plea to look the tiger in the eye and not to overlook the elephant in the room. This is, to my mind, precisely what Esposito and others are doing in their unbecoming joy over what they consider to be the low figure of seven percent terrorism-supporters.

### 15.13 THE STORY OF JOHN

To substantiate this contention I want to tell a story. I will call this “the story of John.” Suppose we tell someone, let’s call him John, that we have met ten people. Nine out of those ten people are fond of John and they tell us they are going to invite John over for coffee and apple pie. That’s good news. John is very happy. But now we tell him that there is also one hit-man on the road coming to kill him. What would John’s reaction be? He is probably not thinking mainly about coffee and apple pie, but about the evil that could befall him.

Why is John so preoccupied with the bad news? Why does he not focus on the coffee and apple pie? The reason is obvious. John will tell us that if the hit man is successful this will end all coffees with apple pie in the future. Only under

<sup>96</sup> Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York/London: Continuum, 2003), p. 210. See also: George Weigel, *Faith, Reason, and the War against Jihadism: A Call to Action* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 72.

the condition that John is a firm believer in eternal coffee with apple pie in a hereafter would this change his position.

Now one may respond that this example is not entirely appropriate, because the seven percent terrorism-supporters are not *actual terrorists* themselves. They are not about to kill someone, they only *sympathize* with the people who do. What would be interesting is if we could have statistical material that tells us how many people are prepared to commit a suicide attack themselves. But for obvious reasons it is not so easy to get that information, and the Gallup Poll does not inform us about this figure either. Therefore the example of John should be modified somewhat. We do not tell him that there is one man who is about to kill him but we tell him that he is living in a world where there are killers around (how many is difficult to say). At the same time we present him some information about what is the support for his death by people who are not doing the killing themselves but who nevertheless have an opinion about it. Subsequently we tell John that nine out of ten people will tell the killer that he should *not* do it or are indifferent about it and “only” one person who says: “Please, kill John – he deserves it.”

Even if that one person does not do the killing himself, the idea that he condones killing or even urges others to do the killing, is uncomfortable, especially if we know that the killers only need scanty support and have all the instruments available to execute their plans.

I hope this story can stimulate us to reflect on Esposito’s and Armstrong’s joy about the low figure of seven percent terrorism-supporters. This may be a more uncomfortable figure than the pure numerical seven percent suggests. What is lacking in their analysis is a reflection on what percentage may be considered high or low *in relation to the phenomenon that we are discussing*. Against the background of Bernard Lewis’s observation that “terrorism requires only a few” seven percent or ninety-one million may pose the targets of terrorism before a daunting task that should not be underestimated.<sup>97</sup> Changing the attitude of the seven percent undoubtedly requires that we do not estrange the ninety-three percent. But the whole discussion turns around the question what are sensible policies here. In my mind what authors like Armstrong and Esposito advise us in this respect is a risky strategy. In the following paragraph I will exemplify what I

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<sup>97</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam. Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p. xxviii. The same idea is to be found in: Amos N. Guiora, *Fundamentals of Counter-terrorism* (Austin, TX: Wolters Kluwer, 2008), p. 2: “What motivates individuals to commit acts of terrorism? Theories abound, some predicated on research, others on anecdotal evidence. ‘Know thy enemy’ must be the guiding light for any nation-state in developing operational counter-terrorism policy.” Guiora also states “that religion is certainly a primary motivator for modern day terrorists.” Another author who does not underestimate the religious factor is Christopher Catherwood. See: Christopher Catherwood, *Making War in the Name of God* (New York: Citadel Press, Kensington Publishing Corp., 2007), p. 163: “If we are to deal effectively with the threat of terrorism, we need to understand that millions of people around the world think in a entirely different way from us.”

think their strategy is. Their strategy boils down to: blaming the West for the attitude taken by the islamists. Islamism is not seen as an autonomous ideology, based on religion and nurtured by some texts in Islamic Scripture, but as a *reaction* on crimes, misdemeanors and ill chosen policies of the West.

#### 15.14 ESPOSITO ON THE WEST DOMINATING THE EAST

This is what Esposito tells us:

There are 1.3 billion Muslims today worldwide. If the 7% (91 million) of the politically radicalized continue to feel politically dominated, occupied, and disrespected, the West will have little, if any, chance of changing their minds.<sup>98</sup>

This is a revealing passage and it clearly exposes what he sees as the cause of radicalization of some of the Muslim population. This cause is domination, occupation and disrespect by non-Muslims or "the West." This passage contains also the "solution" that Esposito has in mind for us. The supporters of terrorism *feel* politically dominated, occupied and disrespected. And the primary task for "the West" is to make them *feel* differently. How should we do that? By simply ceasing to dominate them, relinquish occupying them and start to respect them, according to Esposito.

The problem with this "solution" is that it presupposes what should be proven, *viz.* that the extremists are extreme because Muslims are "dominated," "occupied" or that "disrespect" for them is prevalent. Is that really true? This is a staple argument in the work of Bin Laden, Sayyid Qutb, Ayatollah Khomeini and other protagonists of the most fundamentalist brand of Islam, but should we blindly believe them?

You can only stop dominating people if you have begun to dominate them in the first place. And the problem is that we can only acknowledge that we are dominating extremists or even Muslims in general if we adopt the worldview of Al-Qaeda that the war in Iraq, the US-led intervention in Afghanistan or other places in the world where the United States or the United Nations intervene is about "domination."

The problem is that much of the terrorists' rhetoric has to do with a worldview of theirs that should be contradicted, not affirmed. And precisely that is what is lacking in the work of Esposito and Armstrong. For all its sympathetic tone the danger with books as those of Esposito is that they may reaffirm the same misconceptions as we encountered in the speeches by Bin Laden.

There are other problems with Esposito's poll. What Esposito has not done in the poll is to make some fine subdivisions in his questions. It would be interesting, for instance, to know what people with an Islamic background *explicitly reject* terrorism and deny the claims of the terrorists. Here there is an

<sup>98</sup> Esposito and Mogahed, *ibid.*, p. 97.

important difference between what I, in *The Secular Outlook*, have called the distinction between “liberal Islam” and “secular Islam.”<sup>99</sup> Those subscribing to the position of “secular Islam” explicitly make a commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, even if those ideals, ideas and institutions do not have an explicit support in Islamic doctrine or Islamic Scripture. It would be interesting to know how many “secular Muslims” there are in the world. Secular Muslims, like secular Christians or secular Israelites, do not base their political policies on a religious foundation. Unfortunately even among the most committed combatants of terrorism the need of a secular view on state politics is not very common. An important example in this respect is Tony Blair.

Former Prime Minister of Great-Britain Tony Blair (1953-) published an essay in 1997 in which he set out the background of his struggle against terrorism. In *A Battle for Global Values* he indicated that you cannot defeat a fanatical ideology just by imprisoning or killing its leaders; you have to defeat its ideas.<sup>100</sup>

This is certainly true and it is in line what I have advocated throughout in this essay. And although some people will become suspicious about what follows I think that Blair also strikes the right note when he writes: “We will not win the battle against global extremism unless we win it at the level of values as much as that of force. We can win only by showing that our values are stronger, better, and more just than the alternative.”<sup>101</sup>

The whole notion of “our values” has been discredited in our time. To many ears this sound self-complacent, arrogant, euro-centric, absolutist, priggish – and what more. My feeling is that we simply cannot do without this. That commitment to values should be open, non-dogmatic, and universalistic. I mean, those values should in their application not be restricted to “us” (although they are, by choosing them, “our” values) and should be applied to others as well. But it is definitely a commitment to values.

So Blair is right. So far. He formulates what I have brought under the term “cultural counter-terrorism.” But then he makes one of the strangest concessions to what I consider the islamist worldview when he presents holy scripture as the basis of modern politics. He says:

To me, the most remarkable thing about the Qur’an is how progressive it is. I write with great humility as a member of another faith. As an outsider, the Qur’an strikes me as a reforming book, trying to return Judaism and Christianity to their origins, much as reformers attempted to do with the Christian church centuries later. The Qur’an is inclusive. It extols science and

<sup>99</sup> Cliteur, *The Secular Outlook*, pp. 274-281.

<sup>100</sup> Blair, Tony, “A Battle for Global Values,” in: *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 86, No. 1 (Jan./Febr.), 2007, pp. 79-90, p. 79.

<sup>101</sup> Blair, *Ibid.*, p. 79.

knowledge and abhors superstition. It is practical and far ahead of its time in attitudes toward marriage, women, and governance.<sup>102</sup>

Such a passage could have been written by Karen Armstrong and it will leave Blair's readership puzzled I am afraid (at least, I hope so). Is the Qur'an "far ahead of its time" in attitudes toward marriage, women, and governance? This is simply ludicrous. Stating this simple fact does not testify of an excessive negative attitude towards Islam, towards the Qur'an or any other religion. That a book written centuries ago is "far ahead of its time in attitudes towards marriage, women, and governance" would be nothing short of a miracle. This remark by Tony Blair is of the same order as when someone would say that the system of punishments meted out in Deuteronomy of Exodus is "far ahead of its time" and should be the basis for our contemporary penal law. Religious critic Sam Harris would vehemently disagree with Blair. In his *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006) he writes: "The idea that the Bible is a perfect guide to morality is simply astounding, given the contents of that book."<sup>103</sup> One does not have to go all the way with Harris to acknowledge that with regard to ideas about homosexuality, relations between the sexes and blasphemy holy books are no reliable moral signposts. Proclaiming they are, is an irresponsible statement that accounts for much unnecessary human suffering.<sup>104</sup> Such a remark is of the same order as if someone would say that the ideas on women and marriage as to be found in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssee* or Hesiod's *Theogony* would be the exemplary models for our modern laws. It can even be compared with the convictions of people who think (also a staple argument among Christian, Jewish and Islamist fundamentalists) that Holy Scripture comprises the general ideas of all subsequent discoveries in the physical or mathematical sciences. Harris writes that the Bible does not contain a formal discussion of mathematics and even comprises some obvious mathematical errors. In I Kings 7:23-26 and II Chronicles 4:2-5 the Bible states that the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter is 3:11. "As an approximation of the constant  $\pi$ , this is not impressive."<sup>105</sup> Why doesn't the Bible say anything about electricity, Harris asks? Or about DNA? Or about the actual age and size of the universe?<sup>106</sup> The truth

<sup>102</sup> Blair, *Ibid.*, p. 80. See on Blair's diagnosis of the roots of terror also: Frank Furedi, *Invitation to Terror: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown* (London/New York: Continuum, 2007), p. xii.

<sup>103</sup> Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), p. 8.

<sup>104</sup> See on this: Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom, *Does God Hate Women?* (London/New York: Continuum, 2009). On the cultural and ideological presuppositions on which the misconception that religion must be the foundation for moral and political questions the discussion initiated by Susan Moller Okin is still relevant. See: Susan Moller Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? With Respondents*, edited by Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, and Martha Nussbaum (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>105</sup> Harris, *ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>106</sup> Harris, *ibid.*, p. 61.

is that during the ages people have sought cues for such pressing questions in holy books, usually with disastrous results inhibiting serious scholarly research.<sup>107</sup>

Blair's ideas in this respect do not only lack a factual basis but are probably harmful from a point of social policy as well. If the Qur'an is so much ahead of its time "in attitudes toward marriage, women, and governance" why not substitute British family law, penal law and constitutional law for sharia-law, the seven percent followers of Bin Laden will retort? Is the British prime minister not a bit hypocritical? In that respect the archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was much more consistent in his opaque and controversial remarks insinuating a conciliatory attitude towards sharia-law in Great Britain.<sup>108</sup> If you *really think* that the Qur'an in matters of family law is ahead of its time, it is difficult to explain why the Taliban in Afghanistan should be stopped in meting out scriptural punishments for transgressions of blasphemy law or family law.

The problems with Esposito, Armstrong and Blair (*bien étonnés de se trouver ensemble*) is that in their attempt to reach out to Muslims they inadvertently pay compliments *not* to the worldview of the ninety-three percent, but to the worldview of the seven percent. In their mistaken views they think they support tolerance, respect, and dialogue with the ninety-three percent, but the reality could be that they inadvertently support the Jihadist worldview. How can this paradoxical situation be explained?

One of the factors that are often adduced to explain this unfortunate predicament is the prevalence in the Western world of a kind of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is the conviction that there are no universal moral values. Every culture has its own values. Criticizing the values of another culture is a grave infringement of the cultural integrity of that other culture. So moral criticism has to be restricted to our own culture. Within the compass of this article I cannot present an elaborate analysis of cultural relativism,<sup>109</sup> but what I want to briefly indicate is that it is an important point of view to reckon with, something that colors the attitude of many political commentators and that is highly influential in the discussion on religious terrorism. Let me illustrate this by one single example: some remarks on this subject by Noam Chomsky.

<sup>107</sup> The classic account of this quest is still: A.D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, two volumes (New York: Dover Publications, 1960 (1896)).

<sup>108</sup> Rowan Williams, "Archbishop's Lecture – Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective," in: [www.archbishopofcantgerbury.org/1575](http://www.archbishopofcantgerbury.org/1575); also supported by: Speech by Lord Phillips, Lord Chief Justice, "Equality before the Law," East London Muslim Centre, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2008. Williams is criticized by: Melanie Phillips, *The World Turned Upside Down: The Global Battle over God, Truth, and Power* (New York/London: Encounter Books, 2010), p. 401.

<sup>109</sup> See e.g.: A.A.M. Kinneging, "Multiculturalisme, relativisme en mensenrechten," in: P.B. Cliteur and V. Van Den Eeckhout (eds.), *Multiculturalisme, cultuurrelativisme en sociale cohesie* (the Hague: Boom Juridische Uitgevers, 2001), pp. 79-103; P.B. Cliteur, *De filosofie van mensenrechten*, 2nd ed. (Nijmegen: Ars Aequi Libri, 1999 (1997)), chapter 2: "Cultuurrelativisme als uitdaging voor universaliteit."

## 15.15 THE MORAL VALUE OF CRITICIZING THE TALIBAN IS ZERO

On youtube there is a short fragment (6:12 minutes) derived from de DVD "Noam Chomsky – Distorted Morality: America's War on Terror?" (2002). Chomsky is taking questions from the public and he is asked what he thinks of the Taliban and why he does not criticize the Taliban. Visibly annoyed, his answer is enlightening. He says that we have to criticize what we are able to influence. The Taliban, we cannot influence. We cannot influence the Taliban like we cannot influence Djenges Khan – it's something outside our sphere of influence. Chomsky states: "You and I are responsible for what you and I can do, and what we do. We don't have responsibility for what other people do we can't affect. We may hate it but we can't do anything about it. (...) When you tell me what the Taliban can do, it is exactly the same. The moral value of that is zero."<sup>110</sup> And then there is applause on the video.

Is this a justifiable approach? Before answering that question let me first state it is hugely influential. Based on this logic many intellectuals only criticize their own culture and not the culture of the Taliban. It's an important policy to discuss here, because if what Chomsky advises is a sensible approach the whole idea of cultural counter-terrorism as advocated here would have to be abandoned. So let's see whether his advice makes sense. There is a lot at stake.

Chomsky's approach presupposes a distinction between "us" and "them." "We" are living under democratic governments, subjected to the law, and accountable for what they do. "They" live under Djenges Kahn-like rulers that are – no doubt – reprehensible people, but not responsive to the values and rules that we honor in our constitutions and human rights treaties. Measuring "them" with "our" standards is senseless. The moral value of that is zero.

Let me first judge the factual claim that Chomsky and those applauding for his remarks make and subsequently the moral claim that is derived from that.

The first question is: can we really divide the world that easily in "our" territory and "their" territory? Are our world and their world really that easily separated? E.g. is the Taliban really only on their territory? In London and other European capitals (but especially in London, so it seems)<sup>111</sup> preachers of religious hatred have ignited an influential campaign against what they see as the western style of life: godless, secularized, sexually promiscuous and literally debauched. This is the same reproach as we encountered in Bin Ladens speeches. Taliban-like worldviews are certainly influential in our part of the world.

There is also a lively intercourse of ideas. What the cleric in South Afghanistan thinks and says about our part of the world has ramifications in the

<sup>110</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bugC2RvGBQw>, last viewed August 25, 2010.

<sup>111</sup> See on this: Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan: How Britain Is Creating a Terror State Within* (London: Gibson Square, 2006); Melanie Phillips, *The World Turned Upside Down: The Global Battle over God, Truth, and Power* (New York/London: Encounter Books, 2010); Dominique Thomas, *Le Londonistan: Le djihad au Coeur de l'Europe* (Éditions Michalon, 2005).

cities of Europe, as Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard can testify. On January, 1, 2010 he was visited by a Somali radical, with links to the religious fundamentalist group Al Shabab, armed with an axe and Westergaard was a whisker away from death by decapitation.<sup>112</sup>

What this all means is that religious radicals, living in a world that may be mentally far away from the world we live in, are physically among us. The comparison with Djenges Kahn fails. Djenges Kahn is a historical figure. He can never enter our world. But the Somali terrorist trying to kill Westergaard can. And in a globalized world even with all the security measures being taken on airports we know that terrorists have a considerable amount of freedom to move.

That brings me to the moral and strategic dimension of Chomky's proposal. Is his advice really helpful? The problem in not criticizing the Taliban seems to be that, first, all kind of atrocities that take place in countries like Afghanistan will continue. Let's take a few topical examples. First: stoning. In August 2010 it was announced that a man and woman had been stoned for having committed adultery in the province Kunduz, in Afghanistan. In the beginning of the same month a woman was flogged and shot dead on the basis of an extramarital relationship.<sup>113</sup>

In September 2010 in many capitals in Europe and the rest of the world demonstrations were held against the stoning of Sakineh Ashtiani, incarcerated in an Iranian prison. The International Committee Against Stoning organized protests all over the world, in the Netherlands coordinated by Nahed Selim. Selim says: "If there would not have been an international campaign Ashtiani would have been stoned by now."<sup>114</sup> She also refers to the proposed stoning of Amina Lawal in 2003. Lawal escaped simply because of the international attention for her case.<sup>115</sup> Selim organized a demonstration in Amsterdam against the announced stoning of Ashtiani. In an article in the Dutch newspaper *Trouw* she posed the question: "Suppose a dog or a monkey would be dugged in the ground with only his head above the ground. Subsequently all bystanders would throw stones to those animals till they die."<sup>116</sup> Everyone would immediately be undignified by such cruelty. Why do we remain passive when this happens to a forty-three year old Iranian woman, mother of two children? Dutch author Hafid Bouazza supported her protest with an

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<sup>112</sup> See on the consequences of this attack: Henryk M. Broder, "Westergaard's Life Sentence – Muhammad Cartoonist Defiant after Attack," interview with Kurt Westergaard, *Spiegel Online International*, 20 January 2010.

<sup>113</sup> "Taliban stenigen man en vrouw om overspel," *De Volkskrant*, 17 August 2010.

<sup>114</sup> Peter Wierenga, "Ook moslimlanden boos over steniging," *De Pers*, 25 August 2010.

<sup>115</sup> See on this: Ann van Elsen and Inge Ghijs, *Amina is niet alleen: Vrouwenrechten zijn mensenrechten* (Antwerpen/Amsterdam: Houtekiet, 2003).

<sup>116</sup> Nahed Selim, "Steniging is geen natuurramp, maar mensenwerk. Protest helpt," *Trouw*, 28 August 2010.

article in *De Volkskrant*.<sup>117</sup> If Chomsky is right, the moral value of the protests of Selim and Bouazza would be zero.

Chomsky's contention that criticizing the Taliban is without moral value seems to be contradicted by the facts. Chomsky would be on firmer ground when he would defend that protesting against the Taliban would never make us forget that not all is well in the West, but that is a crucial difference. The proposed course of action of only criticizing the West and not the Taliban can have very cruel consequences that undoubtedly no Chomskian explicitly wants, but may nevertheless the unintended result of their attitude.

We may put it this way: the attitude by the cultural relativists of only criticizing the west seems to be a considerable advantage for terrorists, organized and unorganized. Therefore, being self-critical may be a laudable attitude, but we should also pose the question: where does self-criticism develop into political suicide? Here Blair *pace* all his naïve ideas about religion is right: we cannot win the battle against religious extremism if religious extremists are portrayed as alien to our culture. Unfortunately there are some modern Djenges Khan's among us, or they are preaching to a disaffected youth in western societies from their caves and failed states in faraway countries, trying to make western states as "failed" and disorderly as the regions where they try to build their kingdoms.

#### 15.16 WHAT WILL HELP

The only way to maintain respect for ourselves and, what is more important, also in the eyes of the ninety-three "moderates," seems to me that we patiently explain the principles upon which civilization is built. Not only *Western* civilization, but *all* civilization. In a notorious performance on Al-Jazeera tv on February 21, 2006, Arab-American psychologist Wafa Sultan said "the clash we are witnessing around the world is not a clash of religions or a clash of civilizations. It's a clash between two opposites, two eras. It's a clash between a mentality that belongs to the Middle Ages and another mentality that belongs to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It's a clash between civilization and backwardness, between the civilized and the primitive, between barbarity and rationality."<sup>118</sup> I think that cultural critic Roger Kimball (1953-) is not far from the truth when he writes:

the truth is that what we are facing today is nothing less than the destruction of the fundamental premises that underlie our conception both of liberal education and of a liberal democratic polity. Respect for rationality and the rights of the individual; a commitment to the ideals of disinterested criticism

<sup>117</sup> Hafid Bouazza, "Bij steniging past de lacht van een leeuw," *De Volkskrant*, 28 August 2010.

<sup>118</sup> See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISNpOkpcWqg&feature=related>. See for a more elaborate presentation of her views: Wafa Sultan, *A God who Hates: The Courageous Woman Who Inflamed the Muslim World Speaks out against the Evils of Islam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009).

and color-blind justice; advancement according to merit, not according to sex, race, or ethnic origin: these quintessentially Western ideas are bedrocks of our political as well as our educational system. And they are precisely the ideas that are now under attack by *bien pensant* academics intoxicated by the coercive possibilities of untethered virtue.<sup>119</sup>

The only *caveat* I would like to make is with regard to the words: “quintessentially Western.” The values and institutions enumerated by Kimball are “Western” ideas in the sense that they are better protected in Western-Europe or the United States of America than in Sudan or Saudi-Arabia (something even Chomsky will not deny, if I am not mistaken). Yet the appeal of those ideas should not be limited to the Western hemisphere; neither should it bring people living there to the haughty attitude that they are – as *people* – inherently better or superior: “My culture is better than your culture, so *I* am better than you.” What we are talking about is not about people but about culture. Having a critical look at cultures is *not* discriminating against persons. Making that identification is exactly the fallacy on which postmodernism and cultural relativism is based and what explains the enormous attraction it has exerted on many confused intellectuals. The ultimate consequences of this mentality are dangerous because it makes us defenceless against terrorists and other people who want to destroy a liberal and democratic culture. Caving in to the demands of political extremists or affirming that they are indeed being discriminated against or “dominated,” is not likely to be part of a solution, so it seems, but part of the problem.<sup>120</sup> As George Weigel wrote: “Cultural self-confidence is indispensable to victory in the long-term struggle against jihadism.”

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<sup>119</sup> Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*, revised edition, with a new introduction by the author (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 1998 (1991)), p. xii.

<sup>120</sup> George Weigel, *Faith, Reason, and the War against Jihadism: A Call to Action* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 109. See on this also: Pascal Bruckner, *La tyrannie de la pénitence: Essai sur le masochisme occidental* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2006); Mark Steyn, *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2006), p. xx.