

Armageddon and the War on Terror
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Historic Seventh-day Adventism rests on a fundamental conviction about history. It is the conviction that somewhere in the Nineteenth Century the world entered into the Time of the End. Our pioneers, including Ellen White, went so far as to attach dates to that transition, dates like 1798 and 1844 AD. But whether or not you feel that such precision is appropriate, virtually all Adventists share the general conviction that we are living very close to the end of history.¹

Since each Adventist generation has felt that it could be the last generation of earth's history, major wars have inevitably led to speculation whether they represented the beginning of the Battle of Armageddon. The outbreak of World War I, in which Turkey was one of the major combatants, coincided with the conviction of many that Turkey and the Euphrates River (Rev 16:12) would play some role in the final conflict. Turkey ended up on the losing side of that war, lost control of the key part of the Euphrates River, and yet time went on.

The horrific nature of World War II, and the Japanese role in it, likewise attracted the attention of Adventist evangelists. Many suggested that the Japanese were the "Kings of the Rising Sun" (Rev 16:12) and would sweep their way all the way along the southern coast of Asia and insert themselves into the Middle East. Their arrival would precipitate the Battle of

Armageddon. But the Japanese never got that far (their attempts to reach India petered out on the “Road to Mandalay” in what was then called Burma and today is Myanmar) and time went on.

After World War II came the Cold War, thought by some to be the prelude to World War III. For the first time in human history, people had the tools to destroy all life on earth. The nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union seemed to have all the ingredients of the final battle of earth’s history. It was the bulwark of Christian faith in conflict with the forces of atheism. Yet the Soviet Union collapsed and a “New World Disorder” took its place. There is only one superpower in the world today. But that superpower finds itself almost helpless in the face of a nameless fear, a sense that the very foundation of civilization is in question, not from a governmental system of equal power, but from a handful of religious believers willing to blow themselves up in order to change the world. As was the case with the early church, once again the blood of martyrs is seed, but this time the seed of what?

Is the war on terror World War IV? Is it the beginning of the Battle of Armageddon? Have we finally reached the place where the curtain closes and God plays taps over the mangled remains of human history? Before we take a careful look at the biblical evidence for the Battle of Armageddon, I thought it would be helpful to do a careful analysis of the situation in today’s world. This is not easy to do. History is best written after the events described are over. While the war on terror is a major part of each day’s news, few analysts have been able to step back from each day’s events to see the larger picture that is developing. But we gain nothing by not trying. The mere attempt at drawing the big picture can stimulate us all to think more carefully and to see more clearly.

The Origin of Al Qaeda

Where did al Qaeda (the self-appointed leadership of worldwide islamic terrorism) come from? What is the source of its rage against the West in general and the United States in particular? Is the war on terror destined for success or doomed to failure? Was the war in Iraq a colossal blunder or in some way the key to the whole conflict? The broad perspective of history can help us get a handle on these issues. As we apply that history to the perspective of Bible prophecy, I believe that we will be prepared to see more clearly the hand of God in developing events. Although we don't know when Jesus will come, prophecy offers many clues as to the events that will surround His return. This book will attempt to clarify these issues and more.

The Rise of Islam

To fully understand today's events you have to go far back into history. The story of al Qaeda begins in the desert sands of the Hijaz, the western part of the Arabian peninsula, in the 7th Century of our era. According to Christian tradition, a conviction shared by the nomadic residents of the Arabian Desert, the twelve disciples of Jesus spread the gospel throughout the then-known world. There was one exception to this nearly universal spread, the Arabian peninsula. The Arabs of Arabia did not have an apostle of their own and they did not have a Scripture in their own language, as the Jews and the Christians did.² Distressed by the inconsistencies and confusion they perceived in the two earlier monotheistic faiths, Arabs of the desert developed the conviction that God would one day give them a Messenger of their own and a Scripture in their own language.

This expectation became fulfilled in their minds when a man named Muhammad ibn

Abdallah went on a spiritual retreat in 610 AD to a cave on Mount Hira, overlooking the city of Mecca (Makkah). Muhammad was one of a handful of Arab seekers who were longing for a restoration of the pure faith of Abraham (Ibrahim). One night in the cave, Muhammad was torn from his sleep by the sense of an overwhelming divine presence. He felt the powerful embrace of an angel who commanded him to recite what God (Allah) was placing in his mind. After a struggle Muhammad found the words of a new scripture pouring from his mouth. This type of experience was repeated scores of times over the next 22 years. These “recitations” were collected into a book known as the Qur’an.

The teachings of the Qur’an precipitated a powerful spiritual revival that began in Muhammad’s lifetime. The Qur’an affirmed that the God of the Bible was the one true God. It affirmed that the prophets of the Old and New Testaments were prophets of the one true God. It called the Arab people to abandon idols and submit fully to this God that the earlier scriptures had proclaimed (the word for in Arabic is “Allah”). The Qur’an called for a society that would transcend tribalism and revenge. It called for justice and compassion and forgiveness. It called on everyone to do battle (jihad) with the forces of evil in their own lives. It was a call to restore the pure faith of Abraham (Ibrahim), which to a large degree had been distorted by the earlier followers of God (a conviction Adventists share). To a people who had felt left out of the divine plan before this time, this was a message of transforming power. It brought such change into their lives that more and more Arabs became convinced that Muhammad was a true prophet of God, even the pre-eminent prophet of God.

Whether or not you believe that God had His hand in the rise of Islam, it cannot be denied that Muhammad was one of the most significant change agents in the history of the

world. The energy unleashed by his recitations turned the Arab people from idolatrous bandits³ to one of the greatest civilizations the world had known up until that time. The Islamic Empire was the great superpower of the Middle Ages and played a dominant role in world affairs right up to time of the so-called Enlightenment (18th Century).

Then something went wrong with the islamic dream. Some scholars trace the beginnings of decline as far back as the islamic reaction to the Crusades, others trace it back to social developments in 13th Century Spain. The energy unleashed by Muhammad's vision was dissipated by narrow thinking. Scholarship that had transformed the arts, the sciences and literature became focused on maintaining the status quo. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the rebirth of ancient Greek and Roman ideals created the kind of energy in Europe that had characterized the early islamic empire. The torch of science and learning somehow passed to the West, and the power and wealth of the world went with it. By the 18th Century of our era the islamic world was in serious intellectual, political and economic decline. By the mid-19th Century it was largely "colonized" by the West and has never recovered.

The Rise of Saudi Arabia

In the face of this long-term decline, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) founded an islamic "back to the Bible" type of movement. He wanted to restore the pure Islam of the desert, free of all later additions and innovations. He called for careful exegesis (ijtihad) of the sacred texts in order to undo the changes that had led to Islam's decline. In other words, he taught that all the resources needed to restore the greatness of Islam lay in the past.

This is the basic conviction shared by today's Muslim fundamentalists. Much like

Fundamentalist Christians and historic Adventists, they seek to restore the faith to its former greatness by careful attention to the teachings of the faith's pioneer (s). The key to Islam's salvation lies in replicating her past. The Muslim world has deviated from pure Islam and only a return to its origins would safeguard it from domination and exploitation by the West. This conviction is strongly exhibited in the "Wahabis" of Saudi Arabia and the Taliban of Afghanistan. This is the kind of intellectual atmosphere in which Osama bin Laden and his compatriots were raised.

So the foundation for the development of al Qaeda was a reaction to the decline in the Islamic world, with a call to revival of the original fundamentals of the faith. This "Wahabism" is closely entwined with the Saudi royal family (the House of Saud) that came to rule the Arabian peninsula in the wake of World War I and the decline of the British Empire (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1923).⁴

The second foundation for the development of al Qaeda occurred in 1938. The King of Saudi Arabia, Abd-al-Aziz ibn Saud, authorized a team of American engineers to explore the trackless desert bordering the Persian Gulf, an arid landscape marked only by the occasional palm-fringed oasis. He hoped they would find water. A tribal leader with precarious finances, Ibn Saud believed the Americans might discover places where he could refresh his warriors' horses and camels.

But the team, from Standard Oil of California, had something else in mind. Oil had been discovered in other countries in the region, and the engineers thought they would find more in Saudi Arabia. Over several years, they drilled more than half a dozen holes without result. They could easily have given up in frustration. Instead, they decided to see if going deeper than normal

might make a difference. So they set up their equipment again at well number 7 and dug deeper than they had ever dug before. They burrowed all the way to a depth of 4727 feet and finally hit the first sign of what would turn out to be the largest supply of crude oil in the world.

Oddly enough, the King did not appear to appreciate the discovery at first. He ignored the news about the oil for an entire year afterward. Finally, he and his retinue arrived in a caravan of 400 automobiles at the pumping station of Ras Tanura in time to witness the first tanker hauling away its cargo of Saudi crude. This discovery would change everything.

Up until this time, the primary source of income in the Saudi kingdom came from servicing pilgrims in Mecca, Islam's holiest city. But even the first shipment of oil produced wealth beyond all expectation.⁵ The lives and lifestyles of Arabian bedouin would never be the same. This isolated country with no other exportable product now became a major factor in global politics. The Saudi royal family became major players on the world scene. Their wealth became a crucial factor in Middle East politics and the bargaining over global energy supplies. The stage was set for the events of the late 1970s.

The First War in Afghanistan

The immediate context for the rise of al Qaeda was the war in Afghanistan that began in the late 1970s. To understand the motivation of those involved we need to understand something about the geography of politics. You see, the Eurasian landmass (from Great Britain to Singapore) is the dominant feature in world affairs. Its sheer size and the more than four billion people who live there make it so. Any power that can completely control the Eurasian landmass will rule the world. That means it is in the interest of all powers based elsewhere (like the United

States) to keep the Eurasian landmass divided politically.⁶

The closest any power has come (at least since the Mongol Empire around the year 1200 AD) to dominating the entire Eurasian landmass is the Soviet Union. It is no wonder, therefore, that in spite of the inherent weaknesses of the Communist system, Americans rightly feared Soviet power. So a primary focus of American policy in the 1970s was containing Soviet power by encircling it with a system of alliances from the northern shore of Norway, across the continent of Europe, through the Middle East, along the southern coast of Asia all the way north to the Bering Strait. By preventing the Soviets access to warm-water ports, the alliance system limited Soviet power to manageable proportions. The Soviets sought ways to break through this encirclement and the Americans did all they could to keep them boxed in.

But two events threatened this encirclement. The first was the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, a key American ally in the encirclement project. If the Soviets could exploit Iran's sudden weakness and punch through to the Persian Gulf, they would break the encirclement and also probably capture the Saudi Arabian oil fields. This would tip the balance of world power decisively in their favor. Thus the invasion of Afghanistan less than a year after the fall of the Shah seemed like America's greatest nightmare. The Russians were on the move and could potentially drive America completely out of the Eastern Hemisphere.

As the leaders of the American military game-planned for a possible Soviet invasion of Iran, they concluded that they did not have sufficient forces to prevent the conquest of Iran if the Soviets had decided on such a course. So the Soviets must be stopped in Afghanistan. It must somehow be turned into another Vietnam, but this time with the shoe on the other foot. So President Carter authorized the CIA to engage in covert operations in Afghanistan. Agents were

to encourage and support Afghan guerillas to harass Soviet troops in Afghanistan and keep them pinned down there. But how could this be accomplished? Where would the money come from?

Congress was in no mood to appropriate extra funding for the CIA, whose reputation had recently taken a beating. And anyway, going to Congress to fund a covert war would mean it wasn't a covert war anymore. But it dawned on President Carter that America was not the only country worried about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia had even more to lose in Iran and Afghanistan than America did. So the Americans approached the Saudis with a proposal. If the Saudis would fund this guerilla war and recruit Islamic fighters to resist Soviet power in Afghanistan, the CIA would provide training, coordination and intelligence.

But there was one further wrinkle. The Saudis were not comfortable funding this war directly from government coffers either. Instead they turned to wealthy, private families, asking them to contribute to the cause of Islamic restoration. Here was an opportunity to reverse centuries of islamic decline. Many Saudi families contributed vast sums to the project, and the largest and wealthiest of these families had come to be known as (can you guess it?) the "bin Laden" family.⁷ So President Carter presided over the creation of an international army of Islamic fundamentalists. As has so often happened in history, an ally in one war becomes the enemy in the next. To be fair to Carter, however, his policy was followed with enthusiasm by the presidents that followed, Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. It was a low-cost, low-sacrifice (for Americans) way to keep the Russians bottled up in the vast interior of the Eurasian landmass.

A major element of this situation was the willingness of the American intelligence and military apparatus to pass on their skills to these islamic fighters. The *mujahedin* learned about

covert and special operations. They learned the skills of stealth and hand to hand combat. They learned what American intelligence knew and how they got such information. They learned both the advantages and limitations of military technology. No doubt the Americans thought their islamic allies ignorant and incapable of using such information against them. But many of Osama bin Laden's fighters were relatively wealthy and highly educated. They listened and learned, and they learned well, as the West has come to discover, much to its regret.

The Afghan war was long and brutal. It drained the Soviet Army of strength and credibility and was a decisive factor in the eventual fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. But it also create thousands of hardened and experienced Islamist soldiers, many of them trained by the CIA and American Special Forces. And the fall of the Soviet Union had a powerful impact on those Islamic soldiers. It was the first time in centuries that an Islamic force had defeated non-islamic forces. And this defeated army belonged to a major world superpower which collapsed in the wake of that war. So this was not just an Afghan victory, it was an islamic victory, powered by islamic fighters and fueled by islamic money, the fruit of Saudi oil fields (the gift of Allah). In the minds of islamic fundamentalists, it was an islamic army that gave America its greatest victory over the Soviet menace.

And was the United States suitably grateful for this islamic sacrifice? To the contrary, America believed that Afghanistan was only a minor factor in the fall of the Soviet Union (no doubt both viewpoints were at least partly right). And America considered itself the driving force behind the resistance. From the American point of view the islamic world owed America a debt of gratitude. So as America pulled out of Afghanistan after the fall of the Soviet Union, the stage was set for a confrontation between a resurgent Islam and the world's only remaining super

power.

You see, America never entered the Afghan war out of some altruistic motive of defending Islam against atheistic powers. It used the islamic fervor of Osama bin Laden and others as a tool to keep the Russians encircled in the northern part of the Eurasian landmass. When the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan, the United States completely lost interest in the country and pulled out, leaving a devastated and impoverished landscape filled with warring tribes and a highly trained, international islamic army recruited from the entire islamic world.

What was this army to do now? Just go home? That was not an option. These skilled fighters were as much of a threat to their secular governments back home as they had been to the Soviets. So no government in the islamic world wanted them back. They were essentially stranded in Afghanistan, without external support and without purpose. What America and its allies had done in Afghanistan was to train an army of highly diverse people bound together by the common experience of the war against the Soviets, a sense of betrayal by their own governments as well as the Americans, and the awareness that they had the power to change the world. Highly trained people who have lost their designated purpose tend to find a purpose of their own, and that new purpose may not be what the trainers had intended. Al Qaeda was the unintended consequence of short-term American political objectives.

The Gulf War

The trigger point for the war between America and al Qaeda was Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. America regarded this as the action of an isolated rogue state that needed to be put in its place. George Bush Sr. believed that his decision to intervene in this

conflict would be received by all Muslims as an act of American solidarity to save an Islamic state from aggression. So the Americans approached the Saudis about basing American troops in the Kingdom.

The Saudi ruling family knew that welcoming hundreds of thousands of Western soldiers into the Kingdom was a very risky business for them. For many Muslims, the holiness of Mecca and Medina extends over the entire nation in which those cities are located. The Saudis were caught in a hard place. While Saddam Hussein was an unsavory and dangerous character, inviting Western troops into the land of Mecca and Medina was a fundamental violation of Islamic law. On the other hand, if they didn't extend the invitation, it was likely that Hussein himself would occupy the land. In the process the wealth and power of the Saudi leadership would be destroyed. So the Saudi leaders opted for the route that best allowed their own political survival. *Operation Desert Storm* was the result.

In the past such "abominations" against Islam would have been greeted with impotent rage. But the war in Afghanistan made it different this time. Those Afghan veterans who were allowed to return to Saudi Arabia did not feel vulnerable and weak the way the Saudi leaders did. They were ready to defend the Kingdom against all comers if need be. They felt no dependence on the United States for the "protection" of the holy places. They saw that the governments in the Arab countries were corrupt and secular and could not possibly lead this fight. So international, militant, anti-American Islam was born in the wake of the Gulf War, an unintended consequence of what Americans had thought of as a noble action.

Here we see the great philosophical divide between the Islamic world and the West. To the West the militant warriors of resurgent Islam are merely "terrorists," lawless bandits who

have no respect for human life and civilized values. They hate everyone, including most fellow Muslims, and everything that does not agree with their hateful rantings. But to many in the Muslim world these agents of terror are true patriots, freedom fighters willing to give their lives in the cause of God. They are the only thing standing between the islamic world and the horrific moral assaults of Hollywood, gay pride and American cruise missiles.

It is easy in the passion of the moment to overlook that the word “Islam” is closely related to the word “salaam,” which means “peace” in Arabic. A careful reading of the Qur’an will expose far more statements in support of mercy and compassion than in support of jihad. And most of the “jihad” texts are better read in the context of the battle against sin in one’s life than in warfare against others.

We in the West also tend to forget that Christian history is full of fundamentalist extremists who have committed similar acts of terrorism. Adventists should be at the forefront of those willing to acknowledge the terrorist side of the Crusades and the Inquisition, for example. The Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 AD resulted in the slaughter of the entire population of the city; man, woman and child. These thousands of civilians included many Muslims and Jews. Some reports even suggest that some of the Orthodox Christian inhabitants of the city were slaughtered along with the rest. The Crusaders were about as indiscriminate in their slaughters as were the followers of Osama bin Laden on September 11.

Because of this great philosophical divide and at the risk of offending many in the West, I will refrain from using the word “terrorists” to describe these islamic warriors in the rest of this essay. I will instead follow the lead of George Friedman, who coined the term “jihadists” as a more accurate description.⁸ It is my desire in this essay to build bridges of understanding rather

than give in to popular prejudices, although I will be the first to confess that this is hard to do. For lack of better terminology, I have retained the overall descriptor of “war on terror” to describe the West’s battle to eradicate al Qaeda and all who live by similar principles.

The Case Against America

Why do these “jihadists” hate America so? What fueled the destruction of the Twin Towers and so many other acts of seemingly mindless aggression? Osama bin Laden and those like him are not insane. They are not fueled by endless, seething emotion. They have thought through what they are doing and their sense of purpose is calculated and clear. Osama has articulated five main grievances as the basis for his case against America. We now have enough background to understand his thinking, at least in part.

1) The Decline of Islam

The root grievance is tied to the overall history we have just reviewed. For at least a thousand years the Islamic Empire and its Turkish successor were superpowers in the world. But over the last couple hundred years the Western powers divided up the Muslim world among themselves. Since that time the Muslim world has been a backwater in world affairs; were it not for the fact that much of the world’s oil is located in the Middle East, the major powers might pay no attention at all.

In a Western-dominated world Muslims seem to be humiliated on every side. The Israelis (Palestine and the regional wars of 1956, 1967 and 1973), the Serbs (in Bosnia and Kosovo), the Russians (in Chechnya and other Muslim republics of central Asia) and the Indians (in Kashmir

and various parts of India) have all found ways to marginalize Muslim interests around the world. On top of these slights the West has “imposed” Western law codes on Muslim states, enforced Western economic ideas, including the charging of interest (contrary to Islamic law), and exported alcohol, drugs, pornography and crime. It is frustrating to an Islamic zealot to believe that the Islamic culture is superior, yet to acknowledge that America has vastly superior power and wealth.

2) The Israeli-Palestinian Situation

While securing a homeland for Jews made a lot of sense in the West after the Holocaust, the original partition of Palestine came at the expense of Arabs whose ancestors had been in the land for centuries. The British had promised, during World War I, to support Arab independence in exchange for Arab support against the Turks (remember the movie *Lawrence of Arabia?*). Then during World War II President Roosevelt promised at least one Arab leader that the major powers would not do anything about Palestine after the war without consulting the Arabs first.

Nevertheless, world-wide sympathy for the plight of the Jews during the war resulted in a UN partition which ceded over half of Palestine to the Jews, although only a third of population was Jewish and Jews owned an even smaller percentage of the land. In subsequent fighting the Israelis gained control of the entire land for decades, despite UN resolutions requiring the return of land conquered in 1967. To Arab eyes this looks suspiciously like a revival of the Crusades, with Israel at the forefront and America guiding behind the scenes.

I do not want to be misunderstood here. I know that the story can be told very differently from the Israeli perspective. But I think it is important for our purpose to see through Osama’s

eyes, the eyes of a “terrorist,” as far as that is possible for us to do. Jewish desperation after the Holocaust was real and for many Jews the homeland in the Middle East was the only spark of hope at the time. But the desperation of the Palestinian refugee camps remains to this day. From the Muslim perspective this is a serious injustice that is ongoing and has never been addressed. For bin Laden the injustice was criminal.

3) Secular corruption in the Middle East

A further major grievance of Osama bin Laden had to do with the corrupt and secular governments ruling over most Muslim countries. Governments of countries like Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq were seen as unelected, oppressive, pandering to the West and soft on Islam. It is not surprising that bin Laden, himself a Saudi, was no longer welcome in Saudi Arabia, he was a greater threat to the sheiks of Saudi Arabia than he was to the United States. He believes that secular Arab leaders are mere tools of the West, using the power of the West to cement their own personal position at the expense of the Muslim masses. While the United States did not set up these governments directly, in the minds of the jihadists they would not stand without American support.

In a real sense islamists like bin Laden see the secular corruption of the Middle East as the primary enemy. Afghanistan proved that the great powers could not stand against the faithful, if the faithful were resolute and patient. Over time the political powers behind Christianity, Judaism, Hinudism and Communism could be dealt with as needed. For Muslim fundamentalists what really holds Islam back is the corruption and inefficiency in the political and economic realm of the Middle East. It is the corruption of the secular governments that allows the West to

exploit Islamic weakness. It is against these that the decisive battle must be fought. A strategy needed to be developed in order to destroy the corrupt systems of the Middle East which were keeping Islam from taking its rightful place in today's world. As long as these systems remained in place, Islam would be politically and economically impotent in the larger world.

4) Betrayal in Afghanistan

While the first three grievances are real, they are of long standing and by themselves would not have created the jihadist movement. As we have seen, there were two trigger points around the year 1990 that lit the fuse of Osama bin Laden's anger. The first of these was the American betrayal in Afghanistan. When the Russians left Afghanistan in 1989, the Americans immediately lost interest. Bin Laden and his *mujahedin* were abandoned to their own devices. Afghanistan disintegrated into a multitude of factions. Bin Laden felt abandoned and betrayed. The stage was set.

5) Western militaries in Saudi Arabia

The final trigger point, as we have seen, was the physical presence of the American military in Saudi Arabia during and after the Gulf War. This has been perhaps the crucial issue for bin Laden. In the 1980s he was not hostile to America, in spite of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. There is even evidence he may have been on the CIA payroll for a time. While bin Laden also opposed the aggression of Saddam Hussein in Kuwait, he was distressed and then infuriated by the decision of the Saudi government to invite the Americans and other Westerners to "occupy" the holy land. The alcoholism, materialism, immorality and relative nudity exhibited

by Western troops in Saudi Arabia seemed sacrilegious to even moderate Muslims. To bin Laden it bordered on blasphemy.

Why “Terrorism?” Why September 11?

For Osama bin Laden the crucial question became how to restore Islam to a dominant place in the world again. Could diplomacy accomplish that? Experience told bin Laden that diplomacy would not work. The West had been “negotiating” with the Middle East for more than a century, and what was the result? The establishment of Israel, for one. Another result was the colonial powers dividing the Middle East into artificial nations with no consideration of tribal borders and local interests. Meanwhile the West grew richer and more powerful and the Muslim world became increasingly irrelevant.

Should the Muslim world stand up and fight in military terms then? In its present state of weakness that would be foolish. Anyone unconvinced by the dominance of the Israeli attacks in 1967 and 1982 (in Lebanon) should have no further doubts after the Gulf War and the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. In an age of information technology both the American and Israeli military are overwhelming and incontestable. Any form of direct, frontal assault would be the equivalent of pointless suicide. One would lose thousands of soldiers in exchange for a mere handful of casualties on the stronger side. No one could pursue warfare for long on those terms. So for bin Laden, there was only one alternative to helplessness, and that was what the West calls terrorism.

In the minds of jihadist leaders, “terrorism” is nothing more than a negotiating tool. It is a way the weaker party in a disagreement is able to project a sense of power greater than its

numbers or its military prowess would otherwise allow. The actual physical damage of terror attacks is not significant in political or economic terms. What is significant is the psychological effect, it is far greater than the sum total of the physical damage or loss of life. Terrorism puts those who practice it on the political map. It allows the weaker party to go on the offensive. It puts powerful nations on the defensive. There are so many potential targets and it is so costly to defend them all that the jihadist entity can always find a soft spot somewhere. “If you’re throwing enough darts at a board, eventually you’re going to get something through,” said a Pentagon strategist. “That’s the way al Qaeda looks at it.” The secrecy and seclusion of the jihadist makes the attacks very difficult to anticipate and defend against.

The only safe defense against what the West calls terrorism is one that anticipates every possible angle of attack, particularly against assets for which adequate defenses are not yet in place, like water supplies and transportation systems. To make matters worse, every mile of the US coastline is a potential entry point for nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. In a sense eradicating this threat is like finding a way to detect and apprehend criminals *before* they commit their crimes.

The ability of the jihadists to attack at will and keep powerful enemies on the defensive gradually wears down a powerful nation’s will to resist. As happened in Spain in 2004, people often prefer peace on jihadist terms to the constant stress of watchfulness and defensive measures. In this battle vast amounts of money, intelligence assets and personnel must be expended to track jihadists at home and abroad. In a sense the attempt is being made to surround the United States with a “protective net.” But, as *Time* pointed out on March 3, 2002, “all nets have holes.” So if the jihadists are patient enough and determined enough, they can wear down

and outlast enemies who are more concerned with personal comfort than with ideological purity.

The Strategy of Osama bin Laden

This gives us some insight into the mindset of bin Laden when he gave the go-ahead for the attack of September 11, 2001. While the actions of the hijackers were gruesome and incomprehensible to Westerners, they are part of a strategic plan to change the balance of power in the world. The leaders of al Qaeda see the Islamic world being occupied by non-Islamic forces. To change the balance of power in the world al Qaeda must find a way to end the “occupation” and re-unite Islam. Since the United States is the leading power in the world and the patron of many “islamic” regimes, it is the power behind the “occupation” and, therefore, the great enemy that motivates and controls the anti-Islamic agenda.

Defeating the United States directly is not a realistic option. But the kind of war bin Laden has unleashed burdens America with billions of dollars of expenses to fight “terrorism” at home and abroad. It distracts Americans with the constant fear of unsuspected attacks. It makes Americans feel as insecure as Europeans and Israelis have felt for decades. It makes isolationism look more attractive. If, in the process, the United States can be caused to withdraw from the islamic world, other anti-islamic powers such as Russia, India and Israel would be helpless to intervene. Corrupt and secular governments in the Muslim world would then have no base of outside support and would be overthrown by the islamic masses.

So al Qaeda does not expect to destroy the United States directly, unless some doomsday weapon comes into its hands. The United States is too powerful and too distant to defeat. Rather, bin Laden's strategy has been to force the United States into a series of actions that destabilize the governments of those Middle Eastern countries that are dependant on Washington. If the

United States could be made to look weak and vulnerable in the eyes of the Arab street, the governments of the Middle East would lose their credibility. If pressure from the United States then forces those governments to join the US in fighting Islamic militants or to remain silent in the face of Israeli aggression, popular uprisings could easily lead to their collapse. The ultimate goal would be the establishment of an Islamic superpower, a vast Islamic state stretching from Morocco to the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, governed by Islamic law.

Could a bin Laden achieve such goals? He clearly believes the United States does not have the stomach to suppress a mass, popular uprising. Unlike al Qaeda, Americans as a rule do their best not to hurt innocents. The same military that is virtually invincible in battle would have a difficult time handling an army of unarmed women and children. Although the United States has important interests in the Islamic world, they are not on a scale to justify the expense and casualties involved in a long-term occupation. To the degree that further jihadist acts in the US should occur, the American populace could easily sway toward an isolationist stance. If this isolationism should lead to withdrawal from Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia and even the partial abandonment of Israel, the political world would have changed considerably in favor of the Islamic agenda.

So from bin Laden's perspective war in diplomatic, economic or military terms would only result in the further humiliation of Islam. But this new kind of war has altered the battlefield odds. Since the targets vastly outnumber the defenders, al Qaeda has designed a war strategy in which it has significant advantages. U.S. power is weakened in that defensive action must be widely dispersed. Suicidal fervor creates a low-tech battlefield in which superior technology is neutralized as a weapon.

The goal of the attacks on September 11, 2001 was not to defeat America. America was too powerful and too distant for that to happen. Osama bin Laden's goal was a very strange one from the Western perspective. He wanted to provoke America to attack the Islamic world. More specifically he wanted to provoke America to attack Saudi Arabia. Did you notice that 15 of the 19 hijackers on September 11 were Saudis? While the trained pilots were generally from other countries, the "beef" of the operation (the muscle-men who would take over the plane) were almost all from Saudi Arabia. Osama wanted it to appear that this was a Saudi attack on America. While he anticipated the attack on Afghanistan in 2001, he was sure that President Bush would not stop there. In order to stop al Qaeda he would have to control Saudi Arabia as well.

Why provoke an attack on Saudi Arabia? Because that is the holy land of Islam, the place where Allah met the prophet Muhammad, the place of pilgrimage, the land of Mecca and Medina. If any action could be calculated to inflame the passion of the Islamic masses in the Middle East it would be a Western occupation of the holy places. Osama bin Laden wanted above all else to arouse the fervor of the people to rise up against the invaders and make life so miserable for them that they would be forced to withdraw, as the Soviets were forced to withdraw from Afghanistan. Yesterday, Afghanistan. Today, Saudi Arabia. Tomorrow? The world! Does it sound like the demented scheme of a madman? To many it does. But when you consider what other options were available to stimulate a rebirth of Islamic power in the world, bin Laden's scheme doesn't sound so crazy. It was a shrewd calculation that the only way to get rid of corrupt and secular governments in the Middle East was to find a way to humiliate the sponsor of those governments, the United States. Once the sponsor proved powerless, these Arab

governments would fall and the Islamic Empire would be reborn.

So let me summarize Osama bin Laden's dream scenario. His goal for September 11 was to do something so horrific that the United States would feel forced to invade the Middle East, preferably Saudi Arabia. Osama and his friends could then label it an attack on Islam itself. A guerilla war against the invaders would provoke the Americans to kill and wound many innocent bystanders. The "Arab street," the common, everyday man and woman in the Middle East would rise up in righteous anger against the occupiers. The military might of America would prove helpless against an uprising of "people power," unarmed men, women and children who would be willing to die for their faith.

In the face of such an enemy, America would have little choice but to pull back into bases and leave the streets in the hands of the insurgents, much as had occurred in Vietnam years before. Eventually, America would grow tired of the conflict. Media and congress would unite to force the president to withdraw and leave the Middle East to its own devices. In the wake of that superpower defeat, the masses in the Middle East would embrace Islam and Sharia law and the stage would be set for an islamic superpower that could extend from Morocco to Indonesia. That was Osama's dream and it will likely outlive him regardless of the outcome in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East.

The question that cannot be avoided is this. Why did President George W. Bush play right into Osama bin Laden's hands with his invasion of Iraq? Was he just stupid, as some of his detractors imply? Or did he know something bin Laden did not know? If Saudi Arabia was the real source of al Qaeda, why attack Iraq? And what does any of this have to do with Armageddon? Stay tuned.

End Notes

1. For an analysis of the 1260 days/years of Bible prophecy, see my unpublished paper, "The 1260 Days in the Book of Revelation," presented to the Biblical Research Institute Committee of the General Conference on Sept 29-30, 2003 at Loma Linda University. The paper is available upon request from the Biblical Research Institute and can also be obtained in electronic form on a CD from the web site thebattleofarmageddon.com.
2. For an excellent outline of the events surrounding the rise of Muhammad, see the sympathetic portrait by Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).
3. The key to distribution of wealth (social justice) in the Arabian world before Muhammad was the *ghazu* or raid, in which a poorer tribe would seize a portion of a richer tribe's wealth by raiding its trade caravans. It was an early "Robin Hood" mentality. One historian has called the raiding party the "national sport" of Arabia in the 7th Century.
4. For a helpful overview of the Wahabi movement and the rise of Saudi Arabia see Clinton Bennett, *Muslims and Modernity: An Introduction to the Issues and Debates* (London: Continuum, 2005), 18, 53-56.
5. Adam Zagorin, "Finding the King's Fortune," *Time*, March 31, 2003, A20.
6. The best analysis of these matters can be found in the work of George Friedman, the founder and chairman of Stratfor Corporation (Strategic Forecasting), sometimes called a "shadow CIA." George Friedman, *America's Secret War: Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle Between America and Its Enemies* (NY: Doubleday, 2004).
7. I am well aware that "bin Laden" is not a family name in the way Western names function. It is a patronymic, it merely expresses that Osama is one of the sons of a man named Laden (?). Rather than "bin Laden" it would be more accurate to simply call him by his first name, Osama. I have for convenience, however, adopted the common way in which Osama bin Laden is described in the Western press.
8. See George Friedman, *America's Secret War*, cited above.