

Suicide Attacks or “Martyrdom Operations” in Contemporary *Jihad* Literature

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ABSTRACT: Martyrdom operations are a factor in contemporary radical Islam. These operations have their roots in classical *jihad* literature, but fundamentally are a by-product of widespread frustration and perceived humiliations on the part of Muslims. The attacks of 11 September 2001 are rooted within this tradition.

INTRODUCTION

Suicide attacks or “martyrdom operations”¹ are a relatively new phenomenon in Muslim warfare.² Given that Muslim religious culture abhors innovation, one is compelled to ask what religious and historical justifications account for the appearance and glorification of this weapon during the past twenty years, and to consider the additional factors at work in the rationalization process. One must also note that although “martyrdom operations” nominally fall under the category of *jihad* they are fundamentally different in kind from other activities permitted in warfare. “Martyrdom operations” differ from classical *jihad* in that they necessitate a greater degree of reliance upon intangible factors, such as the intentions of the attacker, in order to judge the relative purity of his motivation—which as we shall see is extremely important—as well as frequently being directed toward non-military targets that are problematic from the perspective of the *jihad* literature. Ultimately “martyrdom operations” rely not upon the classical *jihad* literature (although as we shall note they can be justified up to a cer-

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tain point from this material), but upon the overwhelming sense of collective Muslim inferiority on the part of Muslim radicals during the present time to justify any and all tactics needed to win a given war or conflict.

It is important to note that “martyrdom operations” are, in fact, a new phenomenon in Islam, although, as we shall see, some similar cases can be culled from the history books.³ For the most part it is extremely rare to find examples of Muslims who have committed suicide.⁴ In Islamic history there is no equivalent to the “noble suicide” tradition of the Bible (cf. the story of Samson in Judges 16:23-30), modern Europe or Japan, where there is widespread cultural understanding (although usually not on the part of the religious establishment) of people who take their own lives in despair or as a result of guilt. Perhaps no one tries to justify such suicides, but everyone is familiar with the spectacle of a businessperson committing suicide as a result of failure, or political figures who take their own lives as a result of scandal. There is simply no equivalent of this in Muslim history, and until contemporary times it is difficult to point out even one name of a prominent Muslim who committed suicide in the wake of personal failure. After the debacle of the Six Day War in 1967 the commander of the Egyptian army, ‘Abd al-Hakim Amer, took his own life,⁵ but this must be seen as an event influenced by contemporary ideologies and not as one resulting from an indigenous tradition enjoining him to do so. Time and again prominent prisoners are taken to torture chambers in Arab or Muslim countries under various pretexts; there is virtually no evidence that any of them take their own lives to spare themselves the torture, as Westerners often have done in analogous situations.

In terms of contemporary and modern history, Muslim groups have used suicide attacks as a weapon since the early 1980s. (Others such as the Kurdish PKK and the Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka have also used suicide attacks.) Although there are stray reports of suicides at the time of the “Indian Mutiny” against the British Raj in 1857, it does not appear that large-scale suicide attacks were popular in the Muslim world previous to 1982. In 1983, Shi‘ite resistance groups in Lebanon began using suicide attacks first as a means to expel American and other foreign troops, and during subsequent years as a weapon against the Israeli Army until its withdrawal in 2000. However, this suicide-martyrdom activity was still seen as a marginal, predominantly Shi‘ite weapon not legitimate for Sunnis. Whereas for the most part these Shi‘ite suicide attacks were conducted against military targets, more recent attacks have been focused on civilian targets and carried out largely by Sunnis. None of the 1980s Sunni *jihad* literature concerning Afghanistan, for example, speaks of “martyrdom operations,” although it is difficult to believe that no “martyrdom operations” occurred in such a desperate war.⁶ Starting in 1994, however, first the Islamic Jihad and then Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza began using “martyrdom operations” as a weapon against Israel, and following their example militant Algerian

Muslim groups began to do so as well. From these groups the practice has spread deep into the radical Sunni Muslim world—in Kashmir, India and Chechnya for example—with remarkably little religious or legal opposition, probably because “martyrdom operations” are closely associated with the very popular theme of attacking Israel, and lately Russia (in Chechnya).

What is incontrovertible is that suicide attacks are qualitatively different from other attacks. Because the nature of the attack is one which precludes any form of retribution against the attacker (although some regimes have taken revenge upon family or friends of “martyrs”), the population absorbing the attack is denied any form of action that could channel its anger into an institutional form, such as the justice system. The possibility of seeking justice is denied while the attacked population is still in the white-hot heat of anger, and therefore this rage is more likely to be channeled into an uncontrolled search for vengeance. This anger invariably drives a wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims, because under many circumstances the anger provoked by suicide attacks requires an outlet, and many will make the (irrational) leap that as the attack did not differentiate between guilty and innocent, neither should the revenge.

It is also true that suicide attacks are almost always directed not against military targets but civilian ones, usually in democratic (or at least non-dictatorial) societies. The reasoning is simple: no true military benefit is expected to result from the attack. The sole purpose is to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy, either by killing in large numbers and exposing a weakness within the enemy’s ranks, or more commonly by causing the other side to suffer what the avenging side is suffering, thereby justifying the attack (according to the attackers’ perception) as an equalizing factor in the warfare. These goals are not achievable in large enough numbers against military targets, which have the ability to use force to protect themselves and can be alerted quickly against a foe. Suicide attacks for the most part, therefore, rarely occur against truly military targets. Usually one attack is sufficient for possible military targets to tighten security and make it difficult if not impossible for further suicide attacks to achieve their goals. These goals, however, are achievable against civilian targets, which can be driven into a state of terror by an ever-escalating series of attacks. It is for these reasons that fundamentally the “martyrdom operations” are directed against civilians, even though the rationale is military in nature.

“Martyrdom operations” do not occur in an intellectual vacuum; they have some basis in the Muslim doctrine of *jihad*. I will examine several documents on the subject of “martyrdom operations,” including one of the principal opinions on the subject, “The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations” (an exploration of the legal issues conducted for *jihad* fighters in Chechnya).⁷ In order to elu-

cidate the thinking behind this innovation to the Muslim law of *jihad*, I will also examine the published statements of a number of radical Muslim⁸ leaders such as Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj (executed 1982), ‘Abdallah ‘Azzam (killed 1987), Yusuf al-Qaradawi,⁹ Salman al-‘Awdah, Safar al-Hawali, Hamud b. ‘Uqla al-Shu‘aybi (d. 2002), ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Rahman (imprisoned 1994), Muhammad Masood Azhar (the leader of the Kashmiri group Jaysh-i Muhammad), Usama b. Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri, culminating in an analysis of the document left by the suicide attackers of 11 September 2001 conventionally called “The Last Night.”¹⁰ The object of this article is to set forth the manner in which “martyrdom operations” are justified in contemporary radical Sunni Muslim literature.

JIHAD AND MARTYRDOM IN ISLAM

Jihad is based upon the salvific compact detailed in the Qur’an:

Allah has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth in return for Paradise; they fight in the way of Allah, kill and are killed. That is a true promise from Him in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur’an and who fulfills His promise better than Allah? Rejoice then at the bargain you have made with Him; for that is the great triumph. (9:110)¹¹

Clearly this idea of the Muslims as an eternally warring group gained widespread support as a result of both the injunctions of the Qur’an as well as the astounding conquests that occurred during the first century of Islam.¹² This does not imply that there were not other types of Islam at this early period, but that *jihad* as the foremost and most prestigious expression of the faith early on became a widespread, if occasionally latent, feeling throughout the Muslim community. From this early *jihad* literature it is clear that most, if not all, Muslims saw themselves as a community empowered by God to conquer the entire world, probably initially with the year 717 C.E. (the year 100 *hijri*, remembering that the Muslim lunar calendar loses time against the solar one) as the goal for either the establishment of a messianic kingdom or for God to end the world.¹³ It is significant that shortly after the passing of this date without any of these eschatological events having taken place the Muslim armies suffered a collapse that stopped the conquests for several hundred years and allowed the faith to develop in other ways.

The extent to which fighting is emphasized both in the primary religious document of Islam, the Qur’an, and in the secondary tradition literature, the *hadith* (traditions purportedly originating with the Prophet Muhammad or his close companions), is extraordinary, even unique. There is no other major religion in which, for example, fleeing from the battlefield is actually designated a grave sin (Qur’an 8:16).¹⁴ The amount

and early date of the *jihad* literature is also significant, as is the fact that most of the early prominent religious figures in Islam (up to and including the tenth century) were fighters or participated in the *jihad* on a volunteer basis. Therefore, it can be said confidently that the writings of these religious figures are not merely theoretical exercises, but practical guides to what was still a very important component of their religious experience.

What was the classical Muslim definition of *jihad*? In the classical handbooks, conveniently summarized recently by Muhammad Khayr Haykal in his impressive *al-Jihad wa-l-qital fi al-siyasa al-shari'iyya (Jihad and Fighting according to the Shari'i Policy)*, *jihad* is characterized as closely regulated warfare enjoined by God upon the Muslim community with the express purpose of either expanding or defending the community.¹⁵

In the Qur'an and early Muslim literature there is a strong concentration upon embracing death and focusing upon it to the exclusion of all else, as well as a vast morbid tradition of contemplation of death and the grave in early Muslim ascetic literature.¹⁶ Although there is nothing in this tradition that would indicate a positive attitude toward actually taking one's life in order to speed up the process, Muslims have frequently characterized their community as one that is indifferent to death (as opposed to polytheists, who love life).¹⁷ This attitude is already found in the Qur'an:

Indeed you will find them [the evil-doers] of all people the most attached to life, even more than those who associated other gods with Allah. Every one of them wishes to live for one thousand years. This long life, however, will not spare them the punishment. (2:96)

The correct attitude of the fighter is to see death as the goal, not because of a hatred of life but because of the reward to be gained by passing through it. The only regret to be felt is that one cannot die a martyr over and over:

There is no servant [of God] who dies—who receives a good [reward] from God—who would be happy to return to this world, because he has [the equivalent of] this world and what is in it, except the *shahid* — because of the advantage of martyrdom, he would like to return to this world and be killed again.¹⁸

Thus, since seeking death as a martyr is considered virtuous while seeking death for its own sake is not, the issue of who is a martyr (*shahid*) is significant in the discussion about *jihad*. In the Qur'an, where the word *shahid* appears only in its sense of "witness" rather than "martyr" (in the sense of dying for the sake of bearing witness to a cause or idea), we find the following idea:

And do not think those who have been killed in the way of Allah as dead; they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for. Rejoicing in what their Lord has given them of His bounty, and they rejoice for those who stayed behind and did not join them; knowing that they have nothing to fear and that they shall not grieve. (3:169-70)

Clearly the integral part of the process of becoming a martyr is “being killed in the way of Allah.” At some point during the first century of Islam the word *shahid* acquired its derivative and more important meaning of “martyr,” probably under the influence of the Christian Syriac word *sahedo*.¹⁹ However, one should note that the Arabic word has a connotation that the Syriac word never had—that of being an active martyr in the sense of seeking out one’s martyrdom on the battlefield. In other words, in contrast to the Christian theory of martyrdom, in which the martyr usually passively suffers but can also seek out death to some extent, the Islamic process of martyrdom was not one (necessarily) in which the future martyr was the passive recipient of death as a testament to his beliefs. In Islamic usage, the *shahid* was allowed and even encouraged to seek out circumstances under which death was certain. Although some *shuhada*’ (plural of *shahid*) in Muslim history have achieved their martyrdom through giving testimony, for the most part the focus of the term has been on those who have died fighting or unnatural (non-human induced) deaths.

What circumstances enabled a person to be designated with the coveted title of *shahid* were (and are) the subject of controversy, and probably gave birth to a split in the definition of *jihad* that persists to this day. It is undeniable that many more people desired the title of *shahid* than were willing to die on the battlefield. Most probably this fact led to the creation of numerous *hadith*, indicating that circumstances other than death on the battlefield were acceptable as constituting martyrdom. For example:

The Messenger of God said: “What do you consider [the acceptable circumstances of] martyrdom?” They said: “Being killed in the path of God [*jihad*].” The Messenger of God said: “There are seven [types] of martyrdom other than being killed in the path of God: the one who dies of the plague is a *shahid*, the one who drowns is a *shahid*, the one who dies of pleurisy is a *shahid*, the one who dies of a stomach complaint is a *shahid*, the one who dies in a fire is a *shahid*, the one who dies in a building collapse is a *shahid*, and the woman who dies in child-birth is a *shahida*.”²⁰

This type of tradition was only the beginning of a flood of similar ones during the course of which the word *shahid* lost all meaning. If all of these traditions (recounted for us by al-Suyuti in his book on the circumstances of martyrdom) were to be taken literally, it is difficult to imagine a person who would die without being a “martyr.” Clearly these

traditions circulated at the same time as a radical change emerged in the definition of *jihad*. This was the idea, first promoted by the Sufis during the ninth century, that *jihad* was to be defined as the internal struggle between the upper and lower natures of the believer.

The conquests were largely a memory by this period, and this latter definition became an important part of the *jihad* literature. It enabled large numbers of Muslims to participate in the prestigious spiritual exercise of *jihad* without the inconvenience of having to travel to a distant border in order to fight an infidel enemy and die on the battlefield. This fact should not be taken to imply that all Sufis were of a pacifist bent. Clearly they were not. Many participated in both types of *jihad*, and it is very probable that the originators of the idea of *jihad al-nafs* (*jihad* of the soul) had in mind a considerably different goal than to excuse the bulk of the Muslim community from actual fighting. However, the overall effect was to diminish the allure of fighting for the majority of Muslims. Indeed, today many Muslims, disregarding all of the evidence to the contrary, insist that this internal definition of *jihad* is in fact the primary and not the derivative one.²¹

To a large extent *jihad* in classical times was fed by a sense of inevitable victory. Most felt that the conquests and the dominion they brought to the Muslim community were the only necessary proofs for the inherent right of the method employed. The goal of this *jihad* was clearly stated in the Qur'an, to raise the Word of God to the highest (9:41). Victory on the battlefield was seen as conclusively proving the veracity of the revelation of the Qur'an and the prophetic identity of Muhammad: "Behold! God sent me [Muhammad] with a sword, just before the Hour [of Judgment], and placed my daily sustenance beneath the shadow of my spear, and humiliation and contempt on those who oppose me."²²

History was therefore inevitably leading to a foregone conclusion: the ultimate victory of Islam throughout the Earth. If the Sufis and other Muslims temporarily abandoned *jihad* during the ninth century and to some extent (with the exception of the episode of the Crusades and the advances of the Ottomans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) until the nineteenth century, the feeling was not that the method was invalid or ineffective. Rather, victory seemed so inevitable and self-apparent that it would simply fall into the hands of the Muslims by God's decree and in His foreordained time.

PERCEPTION OF INFERIORITY AS THE MOTHER OF NECESSITY

Therefore, it was all the more of a shock for Muslims—perhaps more than any civilization other than the Chinese—to find at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that far from being the dominant group on Earth and on the verge of achieving God's divine plan of realizing the

worldwide spread of Islam, they were a comparatively insignificant and backward community. From having so often despised European Christians and humiliated them on the battlefield, they had to come to realize that precisely the people they had thought were only semi-human²³ now had achieved a level of civilization and power that left their own in the dust. Many radical Muslims (and others) are very conscious of this sudden change or reversal of fortune. The radical cleric al-Qaradawi says that this lack of development has some bearing upon the perception of Islam, as God said concerning the Muslims in the Qur'an, "You are the best nation brought forth to mankind, bidding the right and forbidding the wrong and believing in Allah" (3:110).²⁴ Comparison of this expectation of superiority with present-day perceived humiliation produces a strong sense of the wrong turn that history has taken, cheating the Muslims of their rightful place on the world's stage.²⁵

This view also gave the Muslims something of a latent admiration for fighting as a spiritual exercise. There can be no doubt that 'Abdallah 'Azzam, the formulator of so much of the radical jihadist ideology and the mentor of Usama b. Ladin, had taken this admiration and formulated it into something of a Nietzschean philosophy, as is clear from his text, "Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations." In it, he says:

History does not write its lines except with blood. Glory does not build its loft[y] edifice except with skulls. Honor and respect cannot be established except on a foundation of cripples and corpses. Empires, distinguished peoples, states and societies cannot be established with examples. Indeed those who think that they can change reality or change societies without blood, sacrifices and invalids, without pure, innocent souls, do not understand the essence of this Deen [Islam] and they do not know the method of the best of Messengers [Muhammad].²⁶

This message seems a little stark when compared with the overall magnificence of Islamic civilization and history, and it completely ignores the spiritual heritage of Islam; nonetheless, it is a popular view among many radicals.

By virtue of the amazing sequence of the conquests and the centuries-long perceived superiority of Islamic civilization, there exists among contemporary radical Muslims a strong imperative to rule. The dominant radical attitude is that, although others can exist as minorities in Muslim countries, Muslims can never be in the minority or ruled by non-believers. To a large degree, this attitude explains why there are so many Muslim separatist movements in the world today. It is doubtful that Muslims are any more or less oppressed than any other group in the world, yet contemporary radical Muslims tend to magnify their relative "oppression" because of their collective historical consciousness of a necessity to be superior.²⁷ This imperative to rule has not been realized

in events, magnifying the humiliation of present-day Muslims.²⁸ In contemporary radical and apocalyptic Muslim literature, thus there is a tendency to cite traditions indicating a strong sense of humiliation among many Muslims. These traditions have as their source the beginnings of Islam, when many of the peoples who found themselves subject to the Muslims strongly resented the fact that they were in a subordinate position to a people (the Arabs) whom they considered to be inferior. The *hadith* literature responds to this reality to some extent, and even cites some of these attitudes, although usually they are projected into the future. For example:

‘Abdallah b. Hawwala said: “We were with the Messenger of God [Muhammad], and we complained to him about the poverty, the nakedness and the general lack of things.” The Messenger of God said: “Take heart, because I am more worried about the plethora of things for you. This matter [of Islam] will continue until you have conquered the lands of Persia and the Byzantines and Himyar [Yemen]—you will have three army-districts (*ajnad*): one in Syria, one in Iraq and one in Yemen—and until a man will be given 100 dinars and be insulted by it [because of the general wealth].” Ibn Hawwala said: “O Messenger of God, who could possibly take Syria when the many-horned Byzantines (*al-rum dhat al-qurun*)²⁹ are in it?” He said: “God will conquer it for you and appoint you as successors in it, until a group of them [the Byzantines] will become white-robed, with shaved necks, standing in service for a little black man (*al-ruwayjil al-usayawid*)³⁰—whatever he tells them to do, they do it. [This will happen] even though today there are men in it [Syria] who view you as more contemptible than the lice which inhabit the buttocks of camels (*ahqar fi a’yunihim min al-qirdan fi a’jaz al-ibl*).”³¹

The juxtaposition of the contempt of the conquered peoples for the Muslims with those very people’s new servitude to their Muslim masters, and the unlikely nature of the latter’s victory over the powerful Byzantines, provided a strong emotional proof, in Muslim eyes, for the veracity of Islam. Nowadays when this tradition is cited, it appears in the context of what present-day Westerners (supposedly) think of Muslims. Obviously the parallel to be brought out is that at the beginning of Islam the world powers were also dismissive of its position, but the Muslims—with God’s aid—taught them a lesson. What happened once will happen again. Additionally, the sense of contempt (supposedly on the part of non-Muslims) reinforces the desire to strike back in any manner possible to avenge the loss of dignity on the part of the Muslims.

Another commonly cited tradition reflecting low self-esteem in contemporary writers is, “You will be many on that day [in the apocalyptic future], but like scum.”³² In other words, the numerical preponderance of the Muslim community will not be representative of their influence or power. Other traditions cited are those that emphasize the power of

the Byzantines (usually currently glossed as Europeans or Westerners) vis-à-vis the Muslims.³³ These portrayals of the present day position of Islam in such humiliating terms—far exaggerating the reality, in fact—reinforce the idea that Muslims must regain the power they held centuries ago through the means they used then: *jihad* against the world. They present the situation in very stark terms, in which either Islam is ruling the world righteously, or is being oppressed and ultimately will be annihilated from the face of the Earth. One should note that Qur’anic verses can also be used to present this picture. In the 11 September 2001 hijackers’ letter, “The Last Night,” many of the verses from the second page are taken from the part of the Qur’an (*surat Al ‘Imran* 3) that was, according to the Muslim tradition, revealed in the wake of the Prophet Muhammad’s worst defeat at the Battle of Uhud (625). It is clear that these verses are meant to be an encouragement to a group under considerable strain as a result of defeat.

It is obvious that under such circumstances many radical Muslims (and those influenced by their interpretations of current events) are open to the idea that at this point in history the needs of the community demand that they not only participate in *jihad*, but also that because of the awesome power of the enemy (the entire world, but more specifically the Western “Christian” world), any and all methods of fighting are justified to obtain the victory, or, in some cases, to stave off total defeat. For many radical Muslims “martyrdom operations” are one method of overcoming despair. It is attractive because it accomplishes something and generates a spirit of optimism (note that in “The Last Night” point 8 speaks to this issue), and others are encouraged by the sense of self-sacrifice implicit in the action.³⁴

“MARTYRDOM OPERATIONS”

Part and parcel of the victory-at-any-cost attitude is the justification of suicide attacks or “martyrdom operations.” In classical times, we can find the example of groups that were said to have sworn an oath unto death (*bay‘a ‘ala al-mawt*) either to the Prophet Muhammad or one of the caliphs.³⁵ It is significant that the very first line of “The Last Night” (translated in the Appendix) speaks of the two cardinal elements of the “martyrdom operation”—the “oath unto death” and “intention” (about which, see below). It would be interesting to know to whom they took this oath and under what circumstances it was administered, but the letter leaves us ignorant of these details. The process of an “oath unto death” was described as having taken place when the Prophet took the abortive pilgrimage to Mecca in 627 that culminated in the Treaty of Hudaibiyya.³⁶ (This pilgrimage was conducted under difficult circumstances; at one time there was the possibility that the Prophet and his followers could be attacked and wiped out, which was the background

for this “oath to the death.”) It is apparent that this “oath to the death” was introduced into contemporary radical Islam by Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj, author of *The Neglected Duty*, who devotes a small section to it.³⁷

The radical Muslims from Saudi Arabia who composed “The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations”³⁸ define “martyrdom operations” as “those performed by one or more people, against enemies far outstripping them in numbers and equipment, with prior knowledge that the operations will almost inevitably lead to death.”³⁹ The writers of “Permissibility” further clarify the nature of “martyrdom operation” by saying:

The name “suicide operations” used by some is inaccurate, and in fact this name was chosen by the Jews to discourage people from such endeavors. How great is the difference between one who commits suicide—because of his unhappiness, lack of patience and weakness, or absence of *iman* [faith] and has been threatened with Hell-Fire—and between the self-sacrificer who embarks on the operation out of strength of faith, and to bring victory to Islam, by sacrificing his life for the upliftment of Allah’s Word!⁴⁰

Clearly this statement is designed to pull the focus away from the questionable methodology being employed to the positive benefits in the next world for the martyr and in this world for the victory of Islam. Victory is everything and, therefore, the manner in which it is achieved is meaningless. In this statement, the authors enumerate the political benefits achieved by suicide attacks, not noting the usual lack of military importance to the operations.

It is interesting to follow the reasoning of the writers of this document, as they take us through the Muslim legal literature in order to provide the justification for “martyrdom operations.” They begin with several Qur’anic verses, the first of which is 9:111, “Allah has bought from the believers . . .” cited above, then, “And some people sell themselves for the sake of Allah’s favor. Allah is kind to His servants” (2:207), and, “How many a small band has defeated a large one by Allah’s leave. Allah is with the steadfast” (2:249).⁴¹ Although none of these verses specifically permits suicide attacks, together they definitely leave the reader with the impression that this is what is being referred to. The salvific covenant begins with God’s having promised paradise to the believers on the basis of their fighting, then progresses to the verse speaking of people being willing to sell themselves for the favor of God, and God’s kindness being extended to those making such a sacrifice, and ends with the final verse speaking of a numerically inferior group defeating a larger. The implication is clear.

However, the writers of this legal justification do not link the Qur’anic verses together at this point; instead they take us through a

series of sixteen traditions in which various people are seen to die for the faith.⁴² Not all of these involve situations of warfare; the first two, in fact, involve martyrdoms for the sake of the truth of God's existence that greatly resemble Christian martyrdoms from the pre-Constantine era.⁴³ But the balance of the traditions emphasizes the idea that one who attacks an enemy either alone or in a manner which makes it unlikely that he will survive the battle is indeed a martyr. On this particular point, there can be no doubt that the balance of Muslim tradition and legal opinion stands with the writers of "Permissibility."⁴⁴ However, in examining this rationale I would say that there is a substantial difference between one who dies in battle—which is an open and declared event, even if it is waged in a ferocious and death-defying manner—and a suicide or "martyrdom" operation, which is by definition a secretive act designed solely to strike terror into the hearts of the foe, or to carry out selected assassinations or demolitions and is fulfilled by the death of the person sent. Other military operations are counted successes if the soldier survives; "martyrdom operations" can succeed only if the perpetrator dies. The writers can argue convincingly that to have death as a goal (or perhaps, more precisely, the probable outcome) on the battlefield is not against early Muslim practice; they have not yet shown whether they can take the logic further.

To accomplish this goal, the writers of "The Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations" then probe the legal literature:

Having established the permissibility of plunging into the enemy and attacking alone even when death is certain, we proceed and say that the martyrdom operations are derived from this principle. . . . There is one difference between the martyrdom operations and their classical precedent, namely that in our case the person is killed by his own hand, whereas in the other he was killed by the enemy. We also explain that this difference does not affect the verdict.⁴⁵

It is unfortunate that, in fact, the authors in the end do not explain the differences between one who is slain in battle and one who "is killed by his own hand," because they seem to be substantial. Instead, after reviewing the legal material dealing with attacking an enemy against overwhelming odds, the writers come to the (unsupported) conclusion that classical Muslim scholars would have allowed "martyrdom operations" with the following conditions: 1) intention; 2) infliction of losses upon the enemy; 3) frightening the enemy; and 4) strengthening the hearts of the Muslims.

I return below to the question of intention, because it is clear that this is one of the core issues of "martyrdom operations." Essentially these writers have come to the conclusion that if the benefit to be gained is sufficiently important for the Muslims, the operation can and should

be carried out. After dealing with several other issues such as using prisoners as human shields, the judgment concerning one who assists in the killing of Muslims, and the definitions of *shahid* and suicide, the writers of this opinion come to their conclusions. However, we need to examine one of their fundamental points of departure before turning to their conclusions; this is the question of “intention” and how it influences the justification for “martyrdom operations.”

INTENTION AS THE JUSTIFICATION FOR ACTION

One cannot understand the justification of “martyrdom operations” without understanding the importance of “intention” in the Muslim process of waging war.⁴⁶ One of the first traditions on *jihad* in the authoritative collection of al-Bukhari reads: “There is no immigration (*hijra*) after the conquest [of Mecca], but there is *jihad* and ‘intention’; when you are called to arms, respond.”⁴⁷ Clearly it is an anachronism to ascribe this tradition to the Prophet, yet it is still a significant tradition for the development of Muslim attitudes toward warfare. The process of *hijra* (perhaps better understood as “emigration with the purpose of tactical regrouping”) was only to persist until the conquest of Mecca (in 630),⁴⁸ and it was to be replaced by the twin pillars of *jihad* and “intention.” It is unclear whether traditions of this nature mean (or meant) that the “intention” to fight the *jihad* was the equivalent of doing so, although perhaps “intention” in this context is best understood as “maintaining a warlike attitude” or “being on one’s guard.” But as a result of this tradition, actions in waging *jihad* are judged according to the person’s intentions. This “intention,” however, was far from insubstantial—clearly it was part of the process of waging war—and, as we note from the tradition, the Muslims were to hold themselves ready to fight continuously.

From the early *jihad* collection of ‘Abdallah b. al-Mubarak (d. 797) we find the following tradition:

The slain [in *jihad*] are three [types of] men: a believer, who struggles (*jahada*) with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights them until he is killed. This *shahid* is tested [and is] in the camp of God under His throne; the prophets do not exceed him [in merit] except by the level of prophecy. [Then] a believer, committing offenses and sins against himself, who struggles with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights until he is killed. This cleansing wipes away his offenses and his sins—behold the sword wipes [away] sins!—and he will be let into heaven from whatever gate he wishes. . . . [Then] a hypocrite, who struggles with himself and his possessions in the path of God, such that when he meets the enemy [in battle] he fights until he is killed. This [man] is in hell since the sword does not wipe away hypocrisy.⁴⁹

This important and early tradition clearly shows the importance of fighting with the correct motivations and intention.

In the contemporary literature justifying “martyrdom operations” we find “intention” mentioned a number of times. It is apparent that “intention” is a necessary justification because it is only at the point of “intention” that “martyrdom operations” differ from other types of suicide. If the intention is to uplift the Word of God (Qur’an 9:41), then the action falls under the category of *jihad* and the actor is a martyr. I have already noted that the writer of “The Last Night” mentions “intention” in the document’s very first point. One could argue, in fact, that the entire purpose of this document is to ensure the purity of the participants’ intentions in the 11 September 2001 hijackings. There is no mention of justification for the ethical, moral or political ramifications of these events; apparently, these matters were not problematic. The principal purpose of the process described, therefore, was to purify the martyrs of any possible non-spiritual motivations or thoughts. This idea is in accord with what the writer of “Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations” states after giving examples of this nature:

These examples, all based upon the *hadith* “Verily, actions are only according to intentions . . .” clearly support the notion that the verdict concerning the *shahid* does not differ based upon who the killing party is, provided the intention is pure. So, one who has a bad intention and is killed by the enemy is deserving of the Fire, as would be the case if he kills himself out of pain. And one who has a sincere intention will be in Heaven, whether he is killed by the enemy or kills himself in error. And, one who helps in killing himself for the good of the religion will be in Heaven.⁵⁰

One must note that this statement creates a sense of ambivalence as to how the martyr is to be judged. Objectively speaking there is no way for the living to know precisely what the motivations of the person were at the moment of death.⁵¹ So, in fact, it is not the “intention” that creates the martyrdom, but the action itself by virtue of its strategic value in the process of uplifting the Word of God.⁵² These highly subjective criteria enable Muslim radicals to create a whole new group of legitimate martyrs.

Additionally, one must ask the following questions. If all actions in warfare are only to be judged by their intentions (which can never be known except by God), then what are the boundaries of legal behavior? Is everything right and just if the person performing the action intends it for the good of Muslims? Is one to assume that correct intentions excuse every type of behavior?⁵³ Modern apologists of “martyrdom operations” do not appear to confront these questions seriously, in stark contrast to their medieval predecessors who established clear boundaries for warfare. Although one must admit that these boundaries were

not always observed, they certainly provided Muslims with a yardstick by which to judge the relative rightness or wrongness of a given battle or campaign. Because of the extensive use of “intention” as the yardstick by which “martyrdom operations” are to be judged, even this element of control over violent actions is lost.

ANALYSIS OF “THE LAST NIGHT”

The document left behind by the suicide attackers of 11 September 2001 entitled “The Last Night” is an interesting and important window into the mind of a person preparing attacks of this type.⁵⁴ Without attempting to place the planned events within a larger context, the document apparently is designed to assist the “martyr” through the difficult task of taking his own life (not to mention those of many others) in such a way that this act would be one of spiritual worship and not merely mass murder. It is very probable that the four pages we have of this document are a fragment; there is no introductory formula (“In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,” which precedes every document written by a Muslim) and there is a stray reference at the top of the document apparently referring to a previous page. The larger document presumably contained instructions for the days previous to the “martyrdom operation” of 11 September. Most probably these preceding pages were ripped off and disposed of as they became irrelevant. As it now stands, “The Last Night” is divided into three sections: a list of fifteen points for the final night of the martyr’s existence, then the “second phase” from the time of leaving the apartment or hotel until boarding the plane, and the “third phase” from the time that the airplane is boarded until the end of the “martyrdom operation.” The fifteen points listed in the first section are a mixture of piety and preparation. Points two, twelve, thirteen and fourteen are the only ones that deal with non-spiritual preparations, and even of these only point two is free from any mention of a spiritual component. The other points are all spiritual and focus upon the subordination of the soul, recitation of the entire Qur’an—which is clearly the most important element, as individual *suras* are mentioned for preferred reading material and verses are cited to elucidate specific points—as well as prayers and devotions. There are also points which deal with problems, such as possible disobedience or lack of unity in the group, the possible desire to betray the group, and, strangely enough considering what the hijackers intended to do, the feeling that those about to die might have wasted their lives and should be performing good works during their final hours to make up for this waste.

“The Last Night” has a strong basis in Muslim pious literature. The author, presumably Muhammad Atta, is well acquainted with the Qur’an—although one should note that he only cites verses from the

later, longer *suras* of the holy book, primarily those which were revealed at the time of the battles of Uhud (625), the Khandaq (626) and Hunayn (630).⁵⁵ Part of the text, in fact, is exegetical, covering the Qur'anic verses 3:173-75.⁵⁶ Although point three (of the fifteen points on the first page) instructs the reader to consider *suras* al-Anfal (8) and al-Tawba (9), the text does not cite any verses from al-Tawba, a *sura* that abounds in verses concerning *jihad*. In total, seventeen verses are cited, eight from Al 'Imran (3), four from al-Anfal, two from al-Baqarah (2), and one each from al-Nisa (4), al-Mu'minin (23), and al-Ahzab (33). These verses can be divided into several broad themes: five deal with obedience or standing fast in the face of opposition, four with death, four cover receiving support from God or defeating a larger group, three promote indifference to fear, and one deals with the question of executing prisoners. One should note that comparison of the Qur'anic verses cited in "The Last Night" with those by the radical Muslim writers cited throughout this article, and especially with the published statements of Usama b. Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri, reveal that they are working from the same ideological standpoint.

The author of "The Last Night" is well steeped in the *hadith* literature and early Muslim history. For the most part the traditions he cites are from al-Bukhari or other standard collections, but his knowledge clearly indicates a good grasp of early Muslim history as well (for example, the story of 'Ali at the Battle of the Khandaq). Prayers from the pious *idhkar* (devotional) handbooks—which are well known to Muslims and are available in bookstores everywhere—are extensively represented in the text. The author has conceived of this mission in religious terms and presents it as a spiritual sacrifice designed to purify the heart and the final actions of the participants preparatory to their entrance into heaven. There is no doubt in the mind of the author that this type of "worship" is acceptable to God; indeed it appears that, as the authors of "Permissibility" also state, participation in a "martyrdom operation" enables the believer to ascend to the highest rank in heaven.⁵⁷ There does not seem to be any doubt in the mind of the writer that "martyrdom operations" are valid according to the *shari'a* (although as one reads in the opening paragraphs of "Permissibility" some have severely criticized this type of operation).

If one had to point to the dominant theme of "The Last Night," it would have to be prayer. Prayer is mentioned in points five, eleven and fifteen of the first page; additionally, specific prayers such as the prayer of shelter (protection from airport security devices), the prayer to overcome the fear of enemies, the prayer of the traveler (as the attackers were "traveling towards God"), and two other specific but unnamed prayers are mentioned in the following pages. The devotionals (which are also largely prayers) cited are those of travel, entering a town and that of praise, in addition to other unnamed devotionals. Beyond these

specific prayers, the injunction to pray is given a further seven times and appears to be the fall-back attitude of the “martyr” (the action that he should be doing when nothing else is going on). Behind the constant attitude of prayer lies a complete confidence in its efficaciousness as one is passing through airport security, boarding the plane, slaughtering passengers who resist, and ultimately facing the target and the death of the “martyr.” Clearly the author was completely convinced that the best way to ensure success was to maximize prayer.

One of the most interesting prayers cited is the ritual prayer against the *ahzab*, the Confederates (from page 3): “O God: Revealer of the Book, Mover of the clouds, Defeater of the Confederates, defeat them and grant us victory over them. O God, defeat them and shake them!”⁵⁸ It is clear that the writer of “The Last Night”—following Faraj,⁵⁹ Usama b. Ladin⁶⁰ and many other previous leaders of radical Islam⁶¹—chooses to refer to the enemy as *al-ahzab*, the Confederates [against God] (cf. Qur’an 11:17, 33:20, 22, 38:11-12), who are mentioned three times in the text, including the last paragraph just before the target is hit. It is interesting how this final Qur’anic reference (38:11-12) includes a list of groups that opposed God’s messengers at various times, of which a number have become code-words for the United States in radical Muslim literature (‘Ad, Pharaoh, the people of Lot).⁶² The authors of “The Last Night” apparently went to great lengths to recreate the situation of the original *ahzab*, who gathered together to fight the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims in 626 during the Battle of the Khandaq.⁶³ These Confederates included (according to the Muslim perception) both enemies from without (the Prophet’s tribe of Quraysh and other tribes affiliated with it) and within (the Jewish tribes of Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayza, and those Muslim “hypocrites” who opposed the Prophet).⁶⁴ According to the Muslim account, the Jews of Medina sent to the Quraysh asking them to render aid in completely uprooting Muhammad and the Muslims.⁶⁵ Contemporary radical Muslims note that there is an alliance between what they refer to as “Muslim” rulers (who are apostate in their opinion) and the non-Muslim West, similar to the situation during the time of the earliest Muslims.

The Prophet Muhammad’s response to this alliance was to build a fortified ditch (the Khandaq) to defend Medina, and from this position to send out sorties against the *ahzab* outside. He cursed these *ahzab* using the prayer cited in “The Last Night,” and a number of the Qur’anic verses cited in the document were revealed at this time. This strategy shows that the place of the true Muslims will be on the front lines fighting the *ahzab*; only traitors and apostates will remain behind.⁶⁶ After the *ahzab* retreated (their supplies were exhausted), the Prophet Muhammad proceeded to deal with the Jewish tribes and the Muslim hypocrites, exiling some and executing others.⁶⁷ Clearly this is part of the overall strategy of this manner of waging *jihad*: to fight the unbe-

lievers and to use the war process as a time during which true Muslims will be separated from false Muslims. All true Muslims will come out to fight; false ones will stay home. After the (future) retreat of the enemy (the Americans), Islam will be cleansed of the traitors, apostates, and hypocrites.

Taking into account the references to the *ahzab* and the historical situation in the background of “The Last Night,”⁶⁸ a plausible scenario for the “martyrdom operation” of 11 September 2001 seems to be that it was designed as a provocation to induce the United States to attack Muslims worldwide. True Muslims would be willing to fight against the *ahzab* (the United States), and many others would eventually join them either in horror because of atrocities committed by the United States, or because they were scape-goated by its response to the suicide attack.⁶⁹ Remembering that *jihad* is also a form of missionary proclamation for these radical Muslims, the 11 September attack was also clearly designed to attract people to convert to Islam.⁷⁰ Additionally, the action would have the effect of exposing weakness in the enemy, and providing leadership by example to those true Muslims fighting the United States and to those others sympathetic to the idea of fighting but who were overwhelmed by despair. Possibly the time (11 September) was chosen with the idea of using the holy months that immediately follow this date (Rajab, Sha‘ban and Ramadan) with their superior spiritual merit.⁷¹ However, as yet, conclusive evidence for this idea is lacking.

Methods of killing are also discussed in “The Last Night.” This issue is addressed primarily in the third and fourth pages—although there are references to the necessity to kill people on other pages as well, and it is clear this was a problematic point for the author. This does not imply that the author was unwilling to kill; merely that he saw the necessity to stress the method of killing (without causing pain) and the manner in which one should kill (with correct intention). The murderer is encouraged not to think of himself during the act of murder, but to focus completely upon God, and essentially to persuade himself that the act he is committing is solely for God’s sake.⁷² Of course, this enables the person to shut down all critical faculties.

One must also note that the author of “The Last Night” gave a great deal of thought to the problems and pitfalls likely to occur in this type of operation. One is group cohesion. This is revealed in the constant focus upon the ties—first spiritual, but then of blood—which bind the group together. They are told to display unity and discipline in accordance with the gravity of their mission and to subordinate their individual needs to those of the larger group. However, the text of “The Last Night” does not establish any hierarchy of command, and the frequent reminders to obey seem to imply that it is possible (or even likely) that members of the group could disobey and jeopardize the mission.

It is clear that one goal was to ensure that during the period of time

covered by “The Last Night” the attackers would consider themselves to be dead. Much of the material about preparing oneself (in terms of cutting the hair, shaving, putting on cologne, etc.) is designed not with the purpose of personal grooming, but with the idea of preparing a corpse. One should note that in Islam, although normally corpses are prepared after death, the body of a *shahid* is deemed to have been purified by the act of martyrdom, and the body is buried in the state in which the person died. It is probable that the hijackers realized that their bodies would never be recovered or buried properly, and so made their preparations prior to their “martyrdom.”⁷³

Additional elements of interest include the strong mystical bent of the writer, which is revealed by his focus upon the letters of the *shahada* (the Muslim confession of faith)—how none of them have diacritical points, and how this fact enhances the spiritual value of the statement—is an interesting interlude in the contemplation prescribed for the attackers at the moments close to death. The attitudes toward the soul are equally intriguing. It is probable that when the writer speaks of “spiritually exercising” the soul we are witnessing the inclusion of the secondary type of *jihad*, the subordination of one’s lower nature. Thus the “martyr” is to benefit from both types of *jihad* at the same time.

In short, this document is a very powerful and sobering one to read, especially when one considers the enormity of what the hijackers intended to do. No hint of this aspect of the operation is allowed to creep into the text—with the exceptions of the references to the possibility of the necessity to slaughter—and it is striking how the victims are entirely irrelevant to the entire line of thought. This is especially chilling as one reads, interspersed with details of how to slaughter innocents, comments such as to bring a coffee cup or glass of water to ease the attacker’s last moments. “The Last Night” focuses entirely upon the needs of the Muslim attackers, and how they will achieve their own personal spiritual experience of martyrdom without taking into account the cost exacted from others.

CONCLUSIONS

After confronting the question of suicides and rejecting their connection with “martyrdom operations” as a result of the difference in intention and effect, the authors of “Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations” state that suicide involves only one person, but “martyrdom operations” involve many:

We have arrived at the conclusion that martyrdom operations are permissible, and in fact the *mujahid* [fighter] who is killed in them is better than one who is killed fighting in the ranks, for there are gradations even among martyrs, corresponding to their role, action, effort and risk under-

taken. . . Martyrdom operations should not be carried out unless certain conditions are met:

1. One's intention is sincere and pure—to raise the Word of Allah [9:41].
2. One is reasonably sure that the desired effect cannot be achieved by any other means which would guarantee preservation of his life.
3. One is reasonably sure that loss will be inflicted on the enemy, or that they will be frightened, or that the Muslims will be emboldened.
4. One should consult with war strategy experts . . . for otherwise he may upset the [overall] plan and alert the enemy to their presence.⁷⁴

The writers note that if the first condition is absent, the deed is worthless—again indicating the importance of “intention.” It is clear that the reasons given are nothing more than simply saying that whatever is beneficial to present-day Muslims in their war against unbelievers is justified—in the opinion of these radical exegetes—because of the grave situation in which the community finds itself. Once again, it must be pointed out that this style of reasoning is considerably different from that of the larger historical tradition of Islam, in which *jihad* is very much a regulated type of violence and has rules which cannot simply be abrogated because of convenience or perceived short- or long-term benefit to the community.

In addition to these problems, one must note that nowhere in these documents do the authors confront the most problematic part of “martyrdom operations”—that they frequently kill (and oftentimes target) civilians. This fact should result in the invalidation of the entire practice, but such has not been the case thus far,⁷⁵ despite a few rulings from religious authorities in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.⁷⁶ It is most probable, therefore, that the force which drives the use of suicide or “martyrdom” as a weapon is not its basis in Muslim law—which is tenuous at best⁷⁷—but the popular support for a type of weapon that is low in cost to the Muslim community, but entails (oftentimes) great loss to its enemies. It is for this reason that the issue of the inferiority complex continually comes up. Since many contemporary radical Muslims see their community as being essentially powerless, usually referring to themselves as the *mustada'fun*, those thought to be helpless, cf. Qur'an 7:137, 8:26, 28:5,⁷⁸ they also perceive themselves as truly innocent of all possible guilt, and even outside any moral or ethical law. Anything they do is by definition justified, since they are the victims in every case (according to their own self-perception).⁷⁹

As previously noted, according to radical interpretations, spiritual prestige in Islam at the present time flows from those closest to the front-lines backwards. This attitude has a basis in the Qur'an where it says:

Those believers who stay at home while suffering no injury are not equal to those who fight for the cause of Allah with their possessions and per-

sons. Allah has raised those who fight with their possessions and persons one degree over those who stay at home; and to each Allah has promised the fairest good. Yet Allah has granted a great reward to those who fight and not to those who stay behind. (4:95)

A scholar in Egypt or Saudi Arabia, or any other location in the core Muslim lands, simply does not have the moral authority that one in Chechnya or Palestine or Kashmir does.⁸⁰ When there is a disagreement among these different scholars, the feeling one gets from contemporary radical Muslim literature is that the former are viewed as representing a less valid expression of Islam and more of a collaborationist type of authority (even though the evidence is that Palestinian religious authorities are just as much under the thumb of the Palestinian National Authority as are those religious figures in other Muslim countries; Chechnya is probably a different matter).⁸¹ Part of the attractiveness of the process of “martyrdom operations” is its inherent selflessness. When this is juxtaposed with the corrupt and tyrannical nature of much of Muslim society (including the religious authorities), purification through self-immolation becomes attractive.⁸²

In addition to these more political factors, there is the personal spiritual journey of the individual believer. Clearly a number of those who commit suicide in “martyrdom operations” are pious by nature (although in their representations of themselves, they may present themselves as grave sinners); but just as many of the martyrs are probably marginal figures whose lives have been stained by various sins. It is only natural for many of these latter Muslims to be attracted by the fiery purification of the “martyrdom operation.” In Islam, one’s final actions are the key to the judgment accorded to a person’s entire life.⁸³ Therefore those who have sinned have all the more reason to expiate their sins by such a finale, especially after the “spin” put on this type of martyrdom by the likes of Hamud b. ‘Uqla al-Shu‘aybi, Sulayman al-‘Alwan and Salman al-‘Awdah, and other more reputable radical scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi.⁸⁴

What ramifications does the extensive use of suicide attacks as a weapon have on the moral and ethical foundations of Islam in today’s world? A close identification of Islam with suicide attacks, or even their extensive glorification such as currently is prevalent in the Muslim world, would definitely compromise the moral voice of this faith. There is already a stark incompatibility between protests concerning killing of innocents by Western armies and legal opinions such as “The Islamic Ruling with Regard to Killing Women, Children and the Elderly in War” which permit radical Muslims to kill such non-combatants. There are also social effects to the lauding of “martyrs,” such as a weakening of the taboo against committing suicide under other circumstances. Certain Muslim journals have noticed an upswing in the prevalence of suicides

in the Muslim world, most likely the result of the frequent emphasis given to this subject in the news.⁸⁵ It will probably be necessary at some time in the near future for Muslims to disassociate themselves from those who follow a radical interpretation of *jiḥād*, perhaps by declaring the latter to be non-Muslims. For the present, it remains to be seen whether “martyrdom operations” as a weapon will be legitimated or expunged by the larger community of Muslims. This is not a small choice for Muslims to make, because it is clear that the nature of this weapon and its effects drive a wedge between Islam and the rest of the world,⁸⁶ and also represent a trend of thinking that is reactionary in its attitude toward widely accepted Islamic teachings as well as toward non-Muslims.

Appendix: Translation of “The Last Night”⁸⁷

The Last Night⁸⁸ [Page 1]—He said: one of the Companions said: the Messenger of God ordered us to recite it previous to a raid, and we recited it, took booty and were safe.⁸⁹

1. Mutual swearing of the oath unto death and renewal of [one’s] intention. *Shave excess hair from the body and apply cologne. Shower.⁹⁰
2. Knowing the plan well—all the angles, together with the [likely] reaction and opposition from the enemy.
3. Reading/recitation of *suras* al-Tawba [9] and al-Anfal [8], and considering their meanings together with Paradise that God has promised to the believers, especially to the martyrs.
4. Reminding the soul of hearing and obedience⁹¹ that night [the “Last Night”] for you will be faced with what will cause it [the soul] to be less than 100 percent in its hearing and obedience, so spiritually exercise its purification, understand it, subordinate it and incite it [to good works] at that time. The Most High said: “And obey God⁹² and His Apostle and do not quarrel among yourselves lest you lose heart and your strength dissipates. And stand fast, for God is on the side of those who stand fast.” [8:46]
5. Staying the night [praying], pressing onward in prayer, divination (*jafn*), strengthening [oneself], [obtaining a] clear victory,⁹³ and ease of heart that you might not betray us.
6. Much remembrance [of God], and know that the best way of remembrance is to read/recite the Noble Qur’an—according to the consensus of the knowledgeable people so far as I know. It is sufficient that it is the Word of the Creator of heaven and earth—to whom you are going.
7. Purify your heart⁹⁴ and cleanse it from all uncleanness. Forget and become oblivious to that thing called “this world.” The time for play is over and the appointed time for seriousness has come. How much of our lives we have wasted! Is it not [right] that we should occupy ourselves during these hours with advancing in acts pleasing to God and obedience?
8. Let your breast be open, tranquil to the bounty of God because it is only a few minutes before the happy, satisfying life and the eternal Paradise begins in the company of the prophets, the upright people,

the martyrs and the righteous, may God have mercy on all of them. We ask God of His bounty. Be optimistic, because [Muhammad] “loved optimism (*fa l*) in everything he did.”⁹⁵

9. You should consider how—if you fall into temptation—you will be able to resist, remain steadfast and recover. You know that whatever happens to you would never detract from your [spiritual level] and whatever would detract from you would never happen to you. This is nothing but God’s test in order to raise the level [of your martyrdom] and to expiate your sins. You can be certain there are only minutes left until the merit will be clear—with God’s permission—of that great reward from God. The Most High said: “Or did you suppose that you will enter Paradise, before God has known who were those of you who have struggled, and those who were steadfast.” [3:142]
10. Remember the Word of God Most High: “You were yearning for death before you actually met it. Now you have seen it and you are beholding it.” [3:143] And also remember: “How many a small band has defeated a large one by God’s leave [God is with the steadfast].”⁹⁶ [2:249] And His Word Most High: “If God supports you, no one will overcome you; but if He forsakes you, then who will be able to support you after Him? And in God let the believers put their trust!” [3:160]
11. Remind yourself of the prayers—and [those] of your brothers—and contemplate their meanings (morning and evening devotionals, [the devotional of entering] the town, the devotional of traveling, and the devotional of meeting the enemy [in battle]).⁹⁷
12. The expectoration (from the soul, into a siphon;⁹⁸ and the clothes, the knife, your personal belongings, your ID, your passport and all of your papers).
13. Check your weapon before you leave and again before you leave. “Sharpen your knives so as not to cause pain to your sacrifice.”⁹⁹
14. Tighten your clothing tightly around you. This is the way of the pious forefathers. They would tighten their clothing around them previous to a battle. Tighten your shoes well. Wear socks so that your feet will fit in the shoes and not come out. All of these things are circumstances of this present [world]. God suffices for us, and what a Guardian!
15. Pray the morning [prayer] in a group, and meditate on its merit. Repeat the devotionals after it [the prayer], and do not leave your apartment without performing the ritual ablutions.

Continue to pray [. . .]¹⁰⁰ Read His Word: “Did you, then, think that We

created you in vain and that unto Us you will not be returned?”
[23:115] *surat al-mu'minun*¹⁰¹

THEN YOU BEGIN THE SECOND PHASE

[Page 2] When the taxi is taking you to the a[irport], then recite the devotional of travel, the devotional of [entering a] town, the devotional of praise and other devotionals.

When you have arrived and you see the a[irport] and have gotten out of the taxi, then say the prayer of shelter; every place you go say the prayer of shelter in it. Smile and be tranquil for this is pleasing to the believers. Make sure that no one of whom you are unaware is following you. Then say the prayer: “God, make me strong through your entire creation,” and say: “O God, make me sufficient for what You wish,” and say: “O God, we place you on their [the enemies’] throats, and we take refuge in You from their evil,”¹⁰² and say: “O God, make for us a barrier before them and one behind them, and then fool them when they are not looking,” and say “God suffices for us; He is the best Guardian” in accordance with His Word Most High: “Those to whom the people said: ‘The people have been arrayed against you; so fear them.’ But this increased their faith and so they said: ‘God is sufficient for us. He is the best Guardian.’” [3:173]¹⁰³

Then you when you have said it, you will find matters straightened; and [God’s] protection will be around you; no power can penetrate that. [God] has promised His faithful servants who say this prayer that which follows:

1. [They will] return with grace [from God] and His bounty¹⁰⁴
2. Evil will not touch them
3. [They will be in] accordance with the grace of God

The Most High said: “Thus they came back with a grace and bounty from God. No harm touched them; and they complied with God’s good pleasure. God’s bounty is great.” [3:174] All of their devices, their [security] gates,¹⁰⁵ and their technology will not save them nor harm [anyone] without God’s permission.

The believers will not fear it [death]; only the followers of Satan will fear it—those who at the core are fearful of Satan, and have become his followers. The servitude belongs to God, for fear is mighty servitude towards God, [making certain that one is] turned only towards God—praised is He and Most High—and He alone is worthy of it. Those who said—fearing to perish—the verses: “That indeed is the Devil frightening his followers . . .” [3:175] [those] who are impressed by the civilization of the West, those who have drunk of hell; it has given them to drink together with cold water (?),¹⁰⁶ and they have feared its weak and perishing abilities: “. . . but do not fear them and fear Me; if you are true

believers!” [3:175] Fear is inside of God’s followers, but the believers do not look other than to God, the One and Only, who has everything in His hand and the power of the people.¹⁰⁷ The most certain form of belief is that God will overturn the guile of those unbelievers, for the Most High said: “That was done, so that God might foil the machinations of the unbelievers.” [8:18] Then you must remember the most important of all the [possible] remembrances, and that is that it must not be lost upon you to remember the statement “there is no god but God.”¹⁰⁸ For if you said it 1000 times none would be able to outdo it—even if you were silent[ly praying] or if you were remembering God [out loud]. Of the greatest [remembrances] are the words of [Muhammad] “Whoever says: ‘There is no god but God’ truly in his heart will enter paradise.”¹⁰⁹ Or as he said with the same meaning: “If the seven heavens and the seven earths were placed in one palm and ‘there is no god but God’ in another palm then ‘there is no god but God’ would outweigh them all.”¹¹⁰ You should be able to consider the awesomeness of this statement when you fight the Confederates (*al-ahzab*).¹¹¹

The one who considers it will find that there are no pointed letters—this is a sign of perfection and completeness, as the pointed words or letters lessen its power.¹¹² This is made perfect by the repetition of the word of the unity [of God] with which you affirm to your Lord through fighting under its banner as did the Messenger of God. It is incumbent upon Him to raise them [to Paradise] on the Day of Judgment.

[Page 3] And additionally, do not show outward signs of embarrassment or nervousness, but be joyful and happy, open of heart and calm because you are going towards God’s welcome and His favor; then this will be a day—with the permission of God—that you will finish with the *houris* (women) in Paradise:

Smiling towards the face of the perished one (dead):

O youth[:] You are coming to the Gardens of Eternity[.]

In other words, you are going towards it [paradise], and saying: “We are coming towards you!” with remembrance and prayer: “God is with His servants, the believers, to protect [them], ease [their way], guide [them] and to make certain of the victory in everything.”

THE THIRD PHASE

When you board the p[lane], the first step you take as you enter should be to give the prayer and the supplications. Visualize that this is “going out in the morning” in the path of [God] as [Muhammad] said: “Going out in the morning and coming back in the evening in the path of God are better than this world and all that is in it”¹¹³ or whatever he would say. When you place your foot into the p[lane] and take your seat, then say the devotionals, and give the prayers as a good deed to God as we have mentioned previously. Then stay occupied with the remem-

brance of God—maximizing it. The Most High said: “O believers, if you encounter an enemy host, stand fast and remember God frequently, that perchance you may prosper.” [8:45] Then when the p[lane] starts to move toward lift-off, and it begins to advance f[orward?],¹¹⁴ say the prayer of the traveler, because you are traveling towards God Most High—and how blessed is this journey!

Then you will find it stop and then take off.¹¹⁵ This is the time of the meeting of the two groups,¹¹⁶ and so pray to God Most High as the Most High mentioned in His Book: “Lord, fill us with forbearance, enable us to stand fast, and help us against the unbelievers,” [2:250]¹¹⁷ and His Word: “Their only words were: ‘Lord, forgive us our sins and our excess in our affairs. Make firm our feet and grant us victory over the unbelieving people,’” [3:147] and the word of His Prophet: “O God, Revealer of the Book, Mover of the clouds, defeater of the Confederates (*ahzab*); defeat them and grant us victory over them. O God, defeat them and shake them!”¹¹⁸ Pray for victory for yourself and all of your brothers, and that they might strike their targets. Do not be afraid to ask God that He would grant you [the rank of] martyr, as you advance without retreating, patient and hoping for God’s reward.

Then each one of you should prepare to fulfill his part together with the one with whom God is satisfied, and to clench his teeth just as the pious forefathers did previous to entering into battle.¹¹⁹

At the beginning of the confrontation, strike in the manner of champions who are not desirous of returning to this world, and shout: *Allahu akbar!* (God is great!), for this shout causes fear to enter into the hearts of the unbelievers. The Most High said: “[And when your Lord revealed to the angels: ‘I am with you; so support those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve.] So strike upon the necks and strike every fingertip of theirs.’” [8:12] You should know that the Gardens [of Paradise] have been decorated for you in the most beautiful way, and that the *houris* are calling to you: “O friend of God, come,” after dressing in their most beautiful clothing.

When God requires one of you to slaughter, go to it as if [the order] came from their father and mother for it is necessary for you. Do not dispute, but listen and obey. When you have slaughtered, loot those whom you have killed—for this is one of the Ways (*sunna*) of the Chosen One [Muhammad]. But he made this conditional upon being certain that no one would be occupied with looting, and consequently abandon that which was more important: watching the enemy—whether [they are occupied with] trickery or attack—this danger is much greater. And if it is thus that [page 4] they are led according to the necessity of action, and if the group does the opposite to the action of the individual, then forbid him because the action [. . .]¹²⁰ the Way [of Muhammad] (*sunna*)—and necessity overrides the Way.

Do not take vengeance for yourself, but strike every blow for God

Most High. This is in accordance with ‘Ali b. Abi Talib¹²¹ who fought one of the unbelievers in [a spirit of] vengeance against the unbeliever and the latter pressed upon ‘Ali, and he brandished his sword, and then struck him and then struck [again]. When the battle finished, the Companions [of the Prophet] asked him about this action—why was it that he had not struck [back at] this unbeliever, who had struck him and struck him again. ‘Ali said: “This was because I was afraid that I would strike him in vengeance for myself, so I lifted my sword [only in defense],” or whatever he said.¹²² Then when he had summoned [correct] intention, he went and struck him [the unbeliever], killing him. “All of this was my religion¹²³ in the hands of God, seeking to do well to myself before God, so that this action would be for the sake of God alone.”

Then follow the law regarding prisoners and pay very close attention to them, fighting them as the Most High said: “It is not up to any prophet to take captives except after too much blood is shed in the land. You desire the fleeting goods of this world, but God desires the Hereafter, and God is Mighty, Wise.” [8:67]¹²⁴

When everything is finished according to what is planned complete that which you have begun, striking whoever resists in the c[ockpit]¹²⁵ or in the p[lane] and the c[abin], remembering that this action is for God, Exalted and Lifted Up. The brothers should not become gloomy because of what is imposed upon them, but proclaim good news to them, calm them, remind them [of God] and give them courage. How beautiful that the man should read/recite verses from the Qur’an! According to the Word of the Most High: “So let those who sell the present life for the life to come fight in the way of God. [Whoever fights in the way of God and is killed or conquers, We shall accord him a great reward]” [4:74] and His Word Most High: “And do not think those who have been killed in the way of God as dead; [they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for]” [3:169] and others that are similar, or declaim them just as the pious forefathers would compose poetry in the midst of battles to calm their brothers and to cause tranquility and joy to enter their hearts.¹²⁶

Do not forget to take from the spoils, even if it is just a coffee cup or a glass of water for yourself and your brothers to drink so that it is easier for you, as now the True Promise is near and the hour of victory comes.

Open your heart and part your breast as a greeting to death in the path of God; be always remembering [God], and renew your prayer so that it will be easier to follow just before the [sight of the] goal causes one to waver and let your last words be: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger.”

After that—if God wills—there will be the meeting [with God] and the opening into the mercy of God. When you see the masses of the

unbelievers, remember the Confederates (*al-ahzab*), whose numbers were approximately 10,000 thousand fighters¹²⁷ and how God gave victory to His servants the believers [Muslims].¹²⁸ The Most High said: "When the believers saw the Confederates, they said: 'This is what God and His Apostle have promised us, and God and His Apostle are truthful.' And it only increased them in faith and submission." [33:22]¹²⁹

Prayers and peace be upon Muhammad

ENDNOTES

1. "Martyrdom operations" is the common radical Muslim term for suicide attacks; it is in quotation marks because I do not want to take a stand on the question of whether people who die during the course of these actions are actually martyrs or not.

I would like to thank my parents, Dr. W. Robert and Elaine Cook, as well as Deborah Tor and Jean Rosenfeld for reading this essay and making corrections and suggestions for improvement. Thanks are also due to my anonymous readers for helping me to clarify myself in numerous instances. Readers should note that as a result of frequent suppression of radical websites, some of the citations given may not be accessible.

2. Although the Isma'ili sect of the Assassins (during the ninth through twelfth centuries) popularized political assassinations from which the assassin oftentimes did not survive, this is different from actually committing suicide in order to achieve the goal of the operation.

3. See Etan Kohlberg, "Martyrdom and Self-Sacrifice in Classical Islam," *Pe'amim* 75 (1998): 5-26 (in Hebrew); and A. J. Wensinck, "The Oriental Doctrine of the Martyrs," in *Semietische Studien uit de Natalenschap van Prof. A. J. Wensinck* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1941), 90-113.

4. Suicide is condemned in Qur'an 2:195 and 4:29, and classified as a grave sin in al-Dhahabi, *Kitab al-kaba'ir* (Amman: Dar al-Fikr, 1984), 93-95.

5. Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49.

6. See Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), chapters 11-12.

7. It is unclear precisely who wrote this opinion (although comparison with the numerous *fatwas* of Hamud b. Uqla' al-Shu'aybi reveals his influence if not active participation) and others of its type, other than what is written on the document: by "a group of scholars from [the Saudi Arabian] Peninsula." "The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations: Did Hawa Barayev Commit Suicide or Achieve Martyrdom?" at <<http://www.minna.com/html.articles/martyrops.htm>>, 2, accessed 18 September 2001. For other materials see Brother Abu Ruqayah, "The Islamic Legitimacy of the 'Martyrdom Operations,'" *Nida al-Islam* 16 (December 1996-January 1997), at <<http://www.ict.org.il/articles/islam1.htm>>; and Abdul Rehman al-Makki, "Fidayee Activities in

Shariah," *Voice of Islam*, July 2001, <<http://www.markazdawa.org/English/magazines/VOICE/200107/fidayee%20activities.htm>> (these are merely summaries of the first opinion, however); and see also Part XI of Ayman al-Zawahiri's so-called *Final Testament* available in translation at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ayman_bk11>, accessed 8 January 2002.

8. I have chosen to refer to the Muslim groups actively involved in fighting *jihad* and working to establish either an Islamic state or a pan-Islamic caliphate as "radical Muslims." See William Shepard, "What Is 'Islamic Fundamentalism'?" *Studies in Religion* 17 (1988): 5-26. These people refer to themselves as "Muslims," but a scholar must distinguish between them and the larger Muslim community. I cannot accept the term "fundamentalist" with regard to Islam, as Shepard clearly demonstrates the meaninglessness of this word with regard to Islam. Their writings and actions do emphasize their fixation upon returning to the root, the beginning of Islam, hence I term them "radical Muslims."

9. See al-Qaradawi, *Khutab al-Shaykh al-Qaradawi* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1998), 208f. for his attitude towards "martyrdom operations"; also his collection of legal opinions, "Martyrdom Operations Are the Greatest Pictures of *Jihad*," at <http://www.qaradawi.net/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=1461>, accessed 26 February 2002.

10. Translated by the author in the Appendix.

11. All Qur'anic translations are from Majid Fakhry, *The Qur'an: A Contemporary English Translation* (London: Garnet Publications, 1997).

12. See M. J. Kister, "Land, Property and *Jihad*," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34 (1991): 270-311; and David Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihad*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 66-104.

13. Suliman Bashear, "Early Muslim Apocalyptic Materials," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1991): 173-207; Suliman Bashear, "Muslim Apocalypses and the Hour: A Case-Study in Traditional Reinterpretation," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 75-99.

14. See al-Haythami, *al-Zawajir 'an iktiraf al-kaba'ir* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1997), 2: 341-43; and al-Dhahabi, *Kitab al-kaba'ir*, 54.

15. It is a pity that Haykal wrote prior to the time when "martyrdom operations" came into widespread use among Sunni Muslims; he does not mention them at all. But he speaks of analogous situations while discussing the possible use of "weapons of mass destruction" (nuclear, chemical, biological, etc.) and addresses the question of whether their use is permitted because they are directed at women and children as well as fighters. He comes to the conclusion that if it is to the benefit of the Muslims, these weapons can be used. See *Jihad* (Beirut: Dar al-Barayiq, 1993), 2: 1343-61.

16. E.g., Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Kitab al-qubur* (Beirut: Dar al-Ghuraba' al-Athariyya, 2000); al-Samarqandi, *Tanbih al-ghafilin* (Cairo: 'Isa al-Babi, n.d.); Ibn Rajab, *Ahwal al-qubur* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 2001). See also the address by Salman b. Fahd al-'Awdah, "Death Workmanship," at <<http://www.azzam/html/articles/workmanship.htm>>, accessed 16 February 2002.

17. Compare the 9 October 2001 statement of Sulayman Abu Ghayth (al-Qa'ida spokesperson), in which he said concerning Americans, "there are among the youth of this community (Islam) thousands desirous of death in the

same way as the Americans are desirous of life," <<http://www.q8/webland.com/personal/BuGaith/2.html>>. See also al-Qaradawi, *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1998), 204; and Usama b. Ladin, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," *Declaration of War*; trans. Abu Umamah (n.p.: Khurasan Publications, n.d.), 16.

18. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), 3: 267 (no. 2795).

19. Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, Oriental Series 18 (Baroda: Gaekwar of Baroda, 1938), 187, s.v., *shahid*.

20. Al-Suyuti, *Abwab al-sa'da fi asbab al-shahada* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qayyim, 1987), 36-37; compare Nasir al-Din al-Albani, "Signs of a Good End," at <<http://www.islaam.com>>, accessed 4 December 2001.

21. E.g., <<http://www.thetrue religion.org/jihad/htm>> and <<http://www.thetrue religion.org/terror.htm>>; <http://www.al-muslim/reality/faq1_main.htm>; <<http://www.wislamcentral.org/misconceptions/misconceptions/003.htm>>; <<http://www.whyyislam.org/faqs/q4.htm>>; and <<http://www.al-islam/al-serat/jihad>>, among many examples, accessed 16 February 2002.

22. 'Abdallah b. al-Mubarak, *Kitab al-jihad* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1971), 89-90 (no. 105), cited in the very first paragraph of Usama b. Ladin's "Declaration of War against Jews and Crusaders," *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 23 February 1998; also in Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, *al-Farida al-gha'iba* (n.p., n.d.), 6; trans. Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 161; also trans. Abu Umamah, *The Absent Obligation* (Birmingham: Maktabat al-Ansar, 2000), 14. (Note that Appendix I of *The Absent Obligation*, 95-99, discusses "martyrdom operations"—something not envisioned by Faraj in the original text—and cites in part the text of "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations.")

23. Gustave von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Publications, 1953), 33-42; Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: Norton, 1982), 135-70.

24. Al-Qaradawi, *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya*, 147f.; note also Safar al-Hawali's "Open Letter to President Bush," at <<http://www.azzam/afghan/html/afghan-fatawaopenletter.htm>>, 15 October 2001, in which he states, "I write to you as a member of an oppressed and persecuted community in a condition like that of Jesus. . . ."

25. 'Abd al-Akhir Hammad al-Ghanimi, *Marahil tashri' al-jihad* (Amman: Dar al-Barayiq, 1999), 101, discusses the psychological reasons for "martyrdom operations."

26. 'Abdallah 'Azzam, "Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations," <<http://www.azzam.com>>, 1, accessed 20 November 2001.

27. Yohanan Friedmann, "Islam Is Superior," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 11 (1979): 36-42; Faraj in his foundational *al-Farida al-gha'iba*, 7-8, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 162-64, also makes this clear. For an English summary of the prophecies, see Mohammed Azad and Bibi Amina, *Islam Will Conquer All Other Religions and American Power Will Diminish* (Brooklyn: Bell Six, 2001), esp. 121f.

28. 'Abd Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf (pseudonym), *Akhi al-Muslim* (Peshawar: n.p., 1989), 16-17.

29. The phrase *al-rum dhat al-qurun* was probably chosen because of its association, and later interpreted with the image of a many-headed hydra in mind.

30. Although one must admit this is the meaning of *al-ruwayjil al-usaywid*, it is apparent that this is supposed to symbolize the Arabs, who did not usually portray themselves in these terms.

31. Al-Tabarani, *Musnad al-Shamiyyin* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1996), 3: 396 (no. 2540); al-Fasawi, *al-Ma'rifa wa-l-ta'rikh* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), 2: 166-67; Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 3: 314.

32. In classical texts, Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 5: 278; Ibn al-'Adim, *Bughyat al-talib fi ta'rikh Halab* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 1: 98; and see Faraj, *Farida*, 23, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 186; 'Abdallah 'Azzam, *Ilhaq bi-l-qafila* (Peshawar: Mu'assasat al-Maswadi, 1987), 28, trans. *Join the Caravan*, part I (London: Maktabat al-Ansar, n.d.), 15 (also at <<http://www.alribat.com/JTC-Part1.htm>>).

33. E.g., Sidheeque Veliankode, *Doomsday Portents and Prophecies* (Toronto: Al-Attique Publishers, 1995), 251-52; Muhammad 'Arif, *Al-Mahdi and the End of Time* (London: Dar al-Taqwa, 1997), 50-52; compare "The Will of 'Abdallah Yusuf 'Azzam, Who Is Poor to His Lord," at <http://www.alribat.com/will_of_abdallah_yusuf_azzam.htm>, 3, accessed 27 September 2001; and "The Islamic System," *The Islamic Truth*, 21 January 2000, 1-2.

34. See Salman al-'Awdah, "Death Workmanship," 4.

35. A standard work on the *bay'a* in Islam, Mahmud al-Khalidi, *al-Bay'a fi al-fikr al-siyasi al-Islami* (Amman: Maktabat al-Risala al-Haditha, 1985), does not mention this type of oath.

36. See al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 4: 10-11 (nos. 2958-62), describing the situation; Muslim, *Sahih* (Beirut: Dar Jil, n.d.), 6: 25-27; and al-Nasa'i, *Sunan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 7: 141.

37. Faraj, *Farida*, 27, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 204.

38. One should note that a great many legal rulings about questionable military practices—the execution of prisoners, torture of prisoners, use of weapons of mass destruction against civilians, etc.—bear the title, "The Islamic Ruling Concerning . . .," clearly an attempt to arrogate to these groups the title of "Muslim."

39. "The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," <<http://www.minna.com/html/articlesmartyrops.htm>>, 2, accessed 18 September 2001.

40. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 2; compare al-Qaradawi's ruling at <http://www.qaradaw.net/topics/article.asp?cu_no+2&item_no1461&version=1&template>, 22 April 2001.

41. This verse, which is often quoted in the contemporary *jihad* literature, was originally stated in the context of the Qur'anic version of the David versus Goliath story (see Appendix, "The Last Night," point number 10).

42. A note states that the original study in Arabic contained forty traditions, but the translation abbreviated them.

43. It is interesting to note that the one classical example of a "suicide squad" (*shurta li-l-mawt*) mentioned in the apocalyptic literature is not adduced by this legal ruling in support of "martyrdom operations." See Nu'aym b. Hamad, *Kitab al-fitan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993), 263; 'Abd al-Razzaq, *Musannaf*

(Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1972), 11: 386 (no. 20812); and al-Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkira li-ahwal al-mawta* (Cairo: Dar al-Zahid al-Qudsi, n.d.), 669.

44. For example, this is as far as Faraj, *Farida*, 45, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 215-16, goes.

45. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 5.

46. Intention is important to all actions in Islam. See Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *al-Ikhlas wa-l-niyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Basha'ir, 1992), 30-76.

47. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3: 263 (no. 2783), cited by all of the major collections.

48. The historical reality was that the early Muslims took the title of "immigrant" for a considerable time after the conquest of Mecca, because of their "immigration" to the conquered lands.

49. Al-Mubarak, *Kitab al-jihad*, 30 (no. 7).

50. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 11.

51. Although frequently suicide attackers leave taped messages or notes behind with either statements for family and/or political testaments, these do not constitute indication of intention at the moment of death, which is the decisive point according to the tradition.

52. As al-Ghanimi, *Marahil*, 106, admits.

53. For example, in a counter-*fatwa* (against permitting American Muslims to fight against the Taliban), Salah al-Sawi stated at <<http://www.maktabah-alsalafiyah.org/English/MilitaryOperations.htm>>, 11-12, accessed 30 November 2001:

In the case of killing innocent civilians, one of them [radical Muslims] may say: We did not intend these people as our targets originally; so what results as a consequence and without an original intent, then that is at a [sic] level of forgiven matters . . . and one of them may also say: These civilians are the financiers of these crimes—that the United States has committed in its opposition to this Ummah [Muslims]—by what they pay the United States in taxes.

Additionally, see Hamud b. 'Uqla al-Shu'aybi, "Fatwa on Events following Sept. 11," where he discusses the necessity for even apparent innocents to die, at <<http://www.azzam/afghan/html/afghanfatawahammoud1.htm>>, 2-5, accessed 30 November 2001.

54. See also Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," *New Yorker* (19 November 2001), <<http://www.ny-2.live.advance.net>>, for a good synopsis of the way "martyrs" are chosen and how they think.

"The Last Night" document was discovered in Muhammad Atta's luggage, which was not placed on the airplane that he hijacked.

55. The Qur'an is divided into two parts: those *suras* revealed in Mecca (from approximately 610 to 622), which are usually shorter and apocalyptic in nature, and those revealed in Medina (622 to 632), which are longer, more legal and administrative in nature.

56. Much of this exegesis is taken from Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1996 reprint), 1: 517-23.

57. As al-Qaradawi had stated explicitly in his statement on the subject (see note 40).

58. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3: 307 (no. 2933); on this type of ritual curse see Suliman Bashear, "Qunut in *Tafsir* and *Hadith* Literature," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 19 (1995): 36-65.

59. Faraj, *Farida*, 42, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 210 (according to Faraj, fighting the *ahzab* means using stratagems and unusual methods of warfare); in Abu Umamah's translation, *The Absent Obligation*, 11, the entire (much longer) prayer is cited in the preface.

60. See his "Declaration of War against the United States," *Declaration of War*, 22, among the final prayers and curses.

61. Mohammed Masood Azhar, *The Virtues of Jihad* (n.p.: Ahle Sunnah Wal Jama'at, 1996), 122-23, details the significance of this prayer.

62. See Bashir Muhammad 'Abdallah, *Zilzal al-ard al-'azim* (Cairo: n.p., 1994) for a complete explanation of the Qur'anic references to the United States.

63. See statement of Ayman al-Zawahiri to the American people on 9 October 2001, <<http://www.q8/webland.com/personal/BuGaith/2.html>>: "America has gathered its forces together just as did Quraysh of old, together with their allies, followers and rabble, against the group of Islam in Medina" (then citing Qur'an 33:22).

64. Radical Muslims are very conscious of these two types of enemies: see Safar al-Hawali's speech, "Infidels Without and Within" (delivered during the Gulf War), 1991, <<http://www.npq.org/issuesv82/p850.html>>.

65. Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), 3: 229.

66. Many radical Muslims emphasize the "Jewishness" of contemporary Muslim rulers, so to compare them with the Banu Qurayza and the Banu Nadir is not illegitimate in their opinion; see Ayman al-Zawahiri's statement of 9 October 2001; also Salman al-'Awdah, "Fear of War," 7 December 2001, at <<http://www.coralweb.net/jihad/html/wtc/salman2.html>>.

67. M. J. Kister, "The Massacre of Banu Qurayza," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 61-96. Radicals frequently refer to apostate (in their opinion) Muslims as Jews (e.g., President Parviz Musharraf in the news column of <<http://www.azzam.com>>, accessed 12 January 2002).

68. Note that according to Muslim accounts, God dispersed the *ahzab* by sending a violent wind that caused them to retreat. See Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa-l-nihaya* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'arif, n.d.), 4: 114. This could have contributed to a plan using airplanes.

69. See Ayman al-Zawahiri's *Final Testament* at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ayman_bk11>.

70. In this context, one should note the "Videotape of Usama b. Ladin" (transcript by CNN released 13 December 2001) conversing with Khalid al-Harbi, who stated that 11 September made non-Muslims think about "true Islam" and want to convert. Similarly, when the Prophet Muhammad ordered assassinations of political opponents (see Uri Rubin, "The Assassination of Ka'b

b. al-Ashraf," *Oriens* 32 [1990]: 65-71), more people converted to Islam (Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 2: 441, and 3: 313).

71. Note the email posted by M. Muhammad on 10 September 2001, <<http://www.barutiwa.com/tijaniyyah/messages/493>>, in which he reminds his readers that Rajab (starting on 19 September 2001) is the month for prayers against one's enemies. Given the fact that the 11 September attacks were moved up because of complications, it is not impossible that there is significance to the time of year chosen; on this subject, see M. J. Kister, "Rajab Is the Month of God," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): 191-223.

72. Compare Heinrich Himmler's statements cited in Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 193-213, and especially 434-37.

73. For example, on the news at <<http://www.azzam.com>> (e.g., 1 January 2002 and 27 March 2002), the bodies of Muslim "martyrs" are frequently characterized as "sweet-smelling," while those of their American or Afghan enemies are said to give off a foul stench.

74. "Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," 12.

75. Compare al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 4: 26 (nos. 3014-15); Faraj, *Farida*, 46-47, trans. Jansen, *Neglected Duty*, 217; and al-Qaradawi, *Mustaqbal al-usuliyya al-Islamiyya* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 2000), 22, in which killing of civilians during *jihad* is specifically forbidden, with the contemporary radical Muslim legal opinion by 'Abdallah 'Azzam, "The Islamic Ruling with Regards to Killing Women, Children and the Elderly in War," <<http://www.islamicawakening.com/Sahar/Islamic%20Ruling>>, and the ruling of Sulayman 'Alwan on killing Jewish children, <<http://www.salsalafyoon.com/SuliemaAlwan/kitalBabyYhood.htm>>, accessed 7 March 2002. In both, we find that if such killing benefits Muslims it is permitted.

76. Compare "Confusion over *Fatawa* on Martyrdom Operations by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia," <<http://www.maktabah.net>>, accessed 16 December 2001; and <<http://www.asharqalawsat.com/pcdaily/21-04>>, with the *fatwa* issued by Ibn 'Uthaymeen which categorically forbids these actions, <<http://www.thetrue religion.org/suicidebomb.htm>>, accessed 16 February 2002.

77. Usama b. Ladin seems to recognize this, as he states in CNN's "Video-tape of Usama b. Ladin" (released 13 December 2001) — "Those youth who conducted the operations did not accept any *fiqh* [law] in the popular terms, but they accepted the *fiqh* that the Prophet Muhammad brought."

78. See Salih al-Sawi, "A Commentary upon the Fatwa Issued concerning the Permissibility of Muslims Participating in Military Operations against the Muslims in Afghanistan," <<http://www.maktabah-alsalafiyah.org/English/MilitaryOperations.htm>>, 10 (citing Qur'an 42:41-2); and in Arabic at <http://www.jihad.net/maqalaat_47.html>, both accessed 30 November 2001.

79. Note how many Muslims in their denial of Muslim involvement in the 11 September 2001 hijackings used the rationale that Muslims could not have accomplished such an action because they are (supposedly) technologically incapable. See Cameron Brown, "The Shot Seen around the World: The Middle East Reacts to September 11," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5, no. 4 (December 2001): 20-1; also <<http://www.coralweb.net/jihad/HTML/wtc/whobenefits2>>, accessed 15 October 2001; and "Bush Doctrine Versus the Spirit

of Islam,” 5 January 2002, <<http://www.khilafah.com/4121/printable.php?DocumentID=3013>>.

80. “Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations,” 1.

81. This is based upon the classical material as well; see Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1996), 1-11; and also Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihad*,” 96-104. This is stated outright in <http://www.jehad.net.maqaalat_38>, accessed 26 February 2002, citing Ahmad b. Hanbal and ‘Abdallah b. al-Mubarak.

82. Talib Shaheed, “The Battlefield: The Safest Place on Earth,” <<http://www.alribat.com/TheBattlefield.htm>>, accessed 27 September 2001.

83. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 7: 269-70 (nos. 6606-7).

84. Al-Qaradawi had closely associated himself with legal justifications for suicide attacks against Israeli targets (see note 40); on 13 September 2001 he issued a statement condemning “martyrdom operations” against civilians, “Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi Condemns Attacks against Civilians: Forbidden in Islam,” <<http://www.jannah.org/qaradawi>>.

85. Muhammad Tahir, “Suicides and Self-Immolations,” <<http://www.mar kazdawa.org/English/magazines/VOICE/200202/suicide.htm>>, accessed 19 February 2002.

86. Ayman al-Zawahiri in his so-called *Final Testament* at <<http://www.ashar-qalawsat.com>>, 13 December 2001, trans. at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ayman_bk11.htm>, says that “martyrdom operations” are divisive by nature and are attempts to introduce clarity in the struggle between good and evil.

87. This text is translated by the author from the reproduction in the *New York Times*, 28-29 September 2001, <<http://www.nytimes.com/library/national/092801letter.htm>>. I would like to thank Carolynne White for her invaluable help in reproducing this document.

88. Although this is page one, there is no *basmala* (“In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate”); hence, this is most probably not the beginning of the document.

89. This tradition is a paraphrase of Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 5: 248-49, 255, 258, and apparently refers to something cited on the previous page (it is also marked off by a line from the material below it). It is not clear, however, what “it” is (most probably a *sura* or a verse, since according to the gender it cannot be the Qur’an). In this tradition, a person came to the Prophet asking that he pray to God for martyrdom, but the Prophet only prayed that he be granted booty and safety.

90. It is clear that this section marked with an asterisk in the text is an afterthought on the part of the writer.

91. Cf. Qur’an 2:285.

92. Minor modifications have been made to Fakhry’s translation of the Qur’an cited throughout this translation of “The Last Night.” The writer prefers to use the name “Allah” for “God”; for the sake of consistency I have used “God” throughout.

93. Cf. Qur’an 48:1.

94. This is the first verb in the command form; all the previous points are introduced by verbal nouns.

95. Cf. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 2: 332. The word *faʿl*, here translated as “optimism” (the way the writer is using it), meant “an omen for good” (divined by various methods) during the Prophet’s time, so it is rather surprising for someone knowing the *hadith* literature to see this tradition cited in this manner; see Salman al-Awdah, “Fear of War,” <<http://www.coralweb.net/jihad/html/wtc/salman2.html>>, 7, accessed 15 October 2001.

96. Verse material in brackets is supplied because the text indicates that the citation was abbreviated, but that the rest of the verse is also meant.

97. All of these devotional prayers are listed in small prayer books well known to Muslims.

98. For this process, see A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1936-62), s.v., *naflh*. This expectation is designed to rid the believer of the devil’s influence.

99. Muslim, *Sahih*, 6: 72; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 4: 123; cited in al-Nawawi, *Forty Hadith*, trans. Ezzedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1976), 64-65 (no. 17).

100. There is another line that is partially cut off in the reproduction, which presumably dealt with transportation to the airport.

101. It is curious that the writer of this document would identify this verse as from *surat al-muʾminun* (23) as the other verses in the text are not identified.

102. The devotional for when one fears someone.

103. This verse was cited by Sulayman Abu Ghayth in the statement of 9 October 2001, who added, “this is a creedal statement among us and a certainty we carry in our hearts.”

104. As the verse specifies that the servants will “return” from whatever mission to which they were sent, the logic of citing this idea in a document involving a “martyrdom operation” is problematic.

105. This is the section designed for passing through the security devices of the airport.

106. This line is very difficult to read and the translation is conjectural. Apparently the sense is that they (those who are impressed by the West) think that they are drinking cold water, but they are really drinking hellfire. This idea appears in al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 4: 173 (no. 3450), where we are told that the Antichrist will induce his followers to drink hellfire that they think is cold water.

107. Compare Qur’an 4:76.

108. The first half of the *shahada*.

109. See multiple versions in al-Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿummal* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risala, 1987), 1: 48f.

110. I could not find this precise tradition in this version, but the formula is clear and others of its type exist; cf. al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-awliya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1997), 8: 368 (no. 12529); Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 1: 258; and al-Hindi, *Kanz*, 6: 133 (no. 15144).

111. The euphemism for the enemy (Americans).

112. An interesting mystical idea that stands out in an otherwise radical Muslim text.

113. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3: 266 (no. 2792), is slightly different. This is one of the most common traditions about *jihad*.

114. As simply the letter *q* is written I assume that stands for *qubl* or “forward.”

115. Probably what is meant by this statement is the brief stop that an airplane frequently makes just prior to takeoff.

116. Perhaps this means those of the hijackers who were the leaders (and ultimately flew the planes) and those who were there for “muscle” (see the CNN “Videotape of Usama b. Ladin” released 13 December 2001), or perhaps the two sides, meaning the hijackers and their enemies.

117. It is significant that this prayer in the Qur’an is uttered by those Israelites who fought with David against Goliath. One cannot help but notice the parallels between the perceptions of the hijackers fighting against a superior enemy in a hopeless battle.

118. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3: 307 (no. 2933).

119. I cannot find any mention of this practice.

120. Two words are too blurred to read. The context seems to imply that if an action is taken by a lone individual who departs from the necessity of the larger group, that action should not be allowed according to the *sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad.

121. The cousin, son-in-law and fourth successor to the Prophet Muhammad (d. 661).

122. Cf. Ibn Kathir, *Bidaya*, 4: 106-7 (story of the Battle of the Khandaq), and compare al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 4: 201 (no. 3560).

123. It is difficult to know whether to read this as *din* (religion) or as *dayn* (loan); either one would make sense.

124. This verse is one that is used to permit the slaughter of prisoners in cold blood according to “The Islamic Ruling Concerning the Permissibility of Executing Enemy Prisoners,” <<http://www.azzam.com>>, 2, accessed 20 February 2002. What is being said is that there is no religious reason why the prisoners on board the airplanes cannot be slaughtered.

125. This is conjecture. The letter *m* here probably stands for *muhaddab* (cockpit), but it is impossible to be certain.

126. It is interesting that someone of a radical Muslim bent would mention poetry, which is usually rejected as lacking in spirituality, but one should note that the second half of Usama b. Ladin’s 1996 “Declaration of War on the United States” is filled with poetry, and note the comments of Moulana Mohammed Masood Azhar, in *The Virtues of Jihad*, 141-49, where he speaks of the recitation of poetry as a laudable activity.

127. A considerable exaggeration.

128. Cf. Qur’an 33. This event took place in 626 during the second siege of Medina by the infidel Quraysh.

129. This verse was cited by Ayman al-Zawahiri in his statement of 9 October 2001.

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