Defensive Reconstructionsim:
A New Lens for Viewing Islamic Extremism

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INTRODUCTION

For a significant portion of Western history, the study of Islam and Muslim culture has been a highly specialized area of scholarship. To most, Islam was a distant mystery which did not often hold much significance in day-to-day Western living. However, in 1979, the religion of Islam surfaced as a cause for further inquiry when 66 American Embassy workers were taken hostage by Iranian revolutionaries, and Islam was shoved to the forefront of the media, not only as a religion, but as a dangerous political force. The concept of "Islamic extremism" gripped public attention for a time, but was still a distant phenomenon affecting far-off mysterious lands. That is, until American soil was shaken by an explosion from a botched al-Qaeda attempt to destroy New York's World Trade Center in 1993, and the threat of Islamic extremism was suddenly imported. Yet it was not until airplanes smashed into the skyscrapers in 2001 that the towers fell and inquiry into Islamic extremism sprang up as an issue necessitating intense and immediate inquiry. On September 11th, a militant Islamic group used airplanes to create a violence so loud that America would no longer be able to ignore its call for global change. But instead, the towers' collapse threw Americans into such a sensational clamor that the historical, political, and cultural motivations behind the attack were drowned out by the gruesome appeal of a religion that called people to kill.

Today, through Western discourse, news media, and popular television, Islam has become almost synonymous with violence and terrorism. Whether it be the ceaseless depiction of graphic acts committed by vaguely labeled "Islamic extremists," or the Muslim terrorists who set off nuclear weapons in the US on ABC's hit show "24," the frequency with which Islam has been correlated with terrorism in the West is undeniable.

Unfortunately, these depictions are often the basis for Western preconceptions of Islam as a religion. The association between Islam and political violence has become so strong that the ideology of extremist Muslim groups has been deemed "Islamism" (a term that will be explicated more fully below). Even though study of Islam has become a high priority in Western discourse, such inquiry is usually aimed at quenching a pop-culture thirst for the extreme rather than a serious exploration of the wide spectrum of Islam as a religion of culture. Currently, extremist groups receive attention grossly disproportionate to their numerical significance in this spectrum. Thus, violence is seen as the standard form of Islam—a religion that is perceived to cause, encourage, and lead inevitably to acts of extremism and terror.

The purpose of this study is to show that a single variable, like religion, will not explain Islamic extremism. To understand extremism fully, the West must comprehend the multi-faceted historical, political, and cultural motivations behind the issue rather than reducing it to a conflict driven by religion. Islamic extremism must be viewed, not only as an action in and of itself, but also as a *reaction* to particular global forces that have shaped, and continue to shape our world. To do this, we must find a new lens through which to view Islamic extremism that does not filter out all motivations that are not on the wavelength of religious fervor. In order to understand the events that are shaping our world's future, a new model for conceptualizing extremism—one that does not ignore historical, political, and cultural contexts—must be formed. This new lens, which I call *Defensive Reconstructionism*, will enable us to examine the root causes of extremism in a broader sense. Through this lens, Islamic extremism can be viewed in its place as part of a much larger force that has surfaced throughout history in many cultural,

historical, and religious contexts. In the end, we will see that no culture or religion can be judgedby its most extreme acts of Defensive Reconstructionism, as is frequently the case with Islam. Ultimately, this study will show that while religion is often the *vehicle* that mobilizes Defensive Reconstructionism, it is not the *driver*. In sum, we need to look to the deeper motivations that fuel Defensive Reconstructionsim.

To reach this end, we will explore the contexts and writings of various religious extremists. These sources will be analyzed as products of their historical and cultural situations rather than quoted as pejorative justifications devoid of context. Scholars who have explored various perspectives on the causes of extremism will be brought into dialogue, and juxtaposed with these primary texts and historical contexts. Sociological perspectives will be used to determine what role religion actually plays in the justification of extremism.

Chapter one will explore Defensive Reconstructionism in a wide range of religious traditions to demonstrate that this phenomenon was not created by, and is not limited to Islam. These studies will show that Defensive Reconstructionoism is not bound by historical period, nationality, or religion. Chapter two will then explore the Islamic branch of Defensive Reconstructionism. We will focus on three modern-day icons of Islamic Extremism—Sayyid Qutb, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Osama bin-Laden—to contextualize their ideologies and historical impacts. We will examine the cultural and historical similarities that characterize their extreme aversion to Western society and "modernity." After these explorations, we will have grounds on which to compare different scholarly perspectives on the motivations behind Islamic extremism in Chapter three. In this chapter, we will determine how we must view Islamic extremism in light of

Defensive Reconstructionism, rejecting single variable equations and taking historical, economic, and cultural context into account alongside religion to more fully understand the issue.

Terminology

Before we revolutionize our ideas, however, we must revolutionize the language that currently exists as a stumbling block to our progress. *Defensive Reconstructionism*, the term I employ in this study, came out of a frustration with the lack of adequate and accurate language surrounding Islamic extremism today. This section will define the term after an exploration of its unsatisfactory alternatives.

Today, we are blocked in our attempt to understand Islamic extremism by language of the meaningless sort—buzzwords that are tossed around carelessly by scholars, media, and the general population whose vagueness and inaccuracy muddy attempts at meaningful discourse. I am speaking primarily of the convoluted terms and neologisms used to refer to political Islamic movements. The first term, which is unfortunately unsalvageable, is the term "Islamism." The word seems to have surfaced in popular discourse, perhaps to save breath or newsprint, as an abbreviation for "Islamic extremism," which is often a problematically vague phrase in the first place. In academic works and news media, the term "Islamism" is used as a blanket statement for any violent, anti-Western, fundamentalist act perpetuated by a group Muslims. Aside from its inherent vagueness, the word "Islamism" is dangerously easy to associate with "Islam" itself in the structure of the English language. For example, "Capitalism" is the standard ideology of "Capitalists." "Romanticism" is the movement understood as the standard ideology of "Romantics." Therefore, though inaccurate, it is a small linguistic leap to

view "Islamism" as the standard ideology of "Islam." The very definition of the word defines Islamism as "An Islamic revivalist movement, often characterized by moral conservatism, literalism, and the attempt to implement Islamic values in all spheres of life," and alternatively as "The religious faith, principles, or cause of Islam."[1]

The entire religion, therefore, becomes guilty by association, and the stigma of radical violence is extended to all things Islamic. To express the oddity of the term's wide acceptance, imagine the uproar if newspapers referred to the 1985 abortion clinic bombings by the Reverend Michael Bray and associates as "Christianism" or if the Black Panther movements of the 1960's were put under the blanket of "African-Americanism." This was never done, and would never have been tolerated, because it would be argued that these extremist minority factions do not represent the majority groups to the point where they could be deemed their "isms." With no other group is the ideology of a radical minority group deemed the "ism" as with "Islamism." So how do we justify the verbal carelessness of this term?

Some writers, such as Graham Fuller, attempt to use the term in a broader context, designating an "Islamist" as one who:

> … believes *that Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim World and who seeks to implement this idea in some fashion.*[2]

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[1] "islamism." *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/islamist (accessed: February 24, 2007).

[2] Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Macmillian, 2003), xi.

Unfortunately, this definition does not lead to any further clarity. How many followers of *any* religion would not say that their faith community has *something* important to contribute to politics and society and should manifest itself in some fashion? Once again, most of the members of the Islamic religion are encompassed by the term, making it a meaningless distinction. Fuller wanted the term to be used neutrally, not as a pejorative label for a radical group, but rather to indicate a spectrum of political-religious ideologies. But sadly, the term still carries the connotation extreme violence in popular discourse. Thus, it remains a pejorative, depthless term that merely serves as a blurring agent to useful argument. Needless to say, I will not be employing the term and I apologize for quotations in which it must be used.

Discouragingly, there is currently no term that expressly points to the type of movement we are discussing. One common method is to paste interchangeably the words "extremism" and "fundamentalism" behind "Islamic." The words, however, have two distinct meanings. "fundamentalism" is defined by *The American Heritage Dictionary* as:

> A usually religious movement or point of view characterized by a return to fundamental principles, by rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism.[3]

This is almost exactly the type of rigid, anti-secular movement we are discussing. However, this word deals only with the *beliefs* of a movement, not its *actions*. So while a person may be a fundamentalist, that does not necessarily mean he or she will attempt to act on that belief through violence as is characteristic of the groups we will examine. Therefore we move to the term "extremism" which is simply defined as, "One who

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[3] Ibid., "fundamentalism." (Accessed: March 03, 2007).

advocates or resorts to measures beyond the norm, especially in politics."[4] While the

term does not clearly outline the beliefs behind the action, the term is advantageous

because it indicates that actions done by an extremist are "beyond the norm." In this light,

the terms would work best together for our purposes as "extreme fundamentalism,"

indicating both belief and action. But the terms will be employed separately:

"fundamentalist" as one who *believes* in the above-defined principles of fundamentalism,

and "extremist" as one who resorts to measures beyond the norms (usually violence) to

further those beliefs—understanding that while an extremist is a fundamentalist in this

case, a fundamentalist is not necessary an extremist.

As is the case with "Islamism," the terms "fundamentalism" and "extremism"

carry an overwhelming amount of baggage in the form of negative connotations. While

these words will still be used in this work when their more subtle connotations are

desired, I have chosen the phrase "Defensive Reconstructionsim" as an alternative. This

is not meant to be a euphemism, but rather a phrase that explains the movement without

the unnecessary preconceptions inherent to the other terms. Defensive Reconstructionism

is a fundamentalist ideology that aims to *defend* tradition by *reconstructing* a society

based on traditional, organic, and oftentimes spiritual values. The Reconstructionist

yearns for a return to the more traditional, collective, romantic, spiritual values of a pure,

home-grown culture. It is a reactionary movement, characteristically against "the

modern." I do not use the term "modern" in its common usage to mean all things post-

European Enlightenment. For our purposes, modernism refers to that which is at odds

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[4] Ibid. "extremism." (Accessed April 14th 2007).

with spiritual traditionalism—society as based on urbanization, secularization, capitalist

individualism, and materialism, often imported though "foreign" ideas.

While the specific motivations vary with context, certain characteristics are

recurrent in Defensive Reconstructionsim. It is characterized as a response to a real or

perceived:

- *Violation of Tradition*—This includes rapid modernization, secularization of government, state violation of religious law, or other policies that supersede the traditional system. This violation is often seen as a result of foreign influence.
- *Foreign Occupation or Influence*—Direct conquering by a foreign power, colonization, foreign political intervention, or acculturation though globalization and media can all cause the rapid importation of foreign, modern ideals. This sudden and often irreversible change can result in cultural disenfranchisement.
- *Cultural Disenfranchizement*—In this way, a people can become distanced from their traditional way of life and marginalized from the modernizing society. The culturally disenfranchised are often impoverished, but may also come from an educated class with little to no future prospects within the system. Generally, they also lack legitimate political influence.

The response to these violations is often characterized by:

- *Absolutist Polarization*—An absolute dichotomy is set up between the traditional/organic and the modern/foreign. Strict battle lines are drawn between which there can be no compromise or coexistence.
- *Assimilator as Enemy*—Those who acquiesce to the foreign influence, accepting the foreign or modern culture, are often targeted as traitors. Governments and leaders who are perceived to embrace or compromise with the modern system are often deemed illegitimate.
- *Religion as Justification*—Religion is often used to frame the conflict as a moral obligation. Religion serves, not only to provide divine justification, but also as a unifying base of shared, organic tradition. In this way, religion can be an extremely effective mobilizer of Defensive Reconstructionsim, but once again, it is not the driving force.
- *Symbolic Violence*—This type of violence serves little to no military purpose. Symbolic Violence targets individuals, areas, or structures that symbolize modernity or the foreign influence.[5]

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[5] In addition, all of the movements examined in this work (with the obvious exception of the Hebrew-based Sicarii) exhibited vehemently anti-Semitic rhetoric. I

Defensive Reconstructionism is an ideology. Moreover, it is a cultural phenomenon. It is not meant to explain the thought process of an individual fundamentalist. It does, however, identify the type of cultural climate from which fundamentalist movements can emerge, and explain why they become so attractive in certain contexts. Furthermore, the actions that come out of this ideology depend on the individual movement. Defensive Reconstructionism is not inherently violent, but can lead to a continuum of actions ranging from fundamentalism, to extremism, to outright violence and terrorism. Since this work deals primarily with extremism, all of the movements examined have employed extreme violence, and most have been labeled "terrorists." It must be kept in mind, however, that just because a group aims to return to traditional societal forms, this does not mean it will necessarily employ the violent extremism characteristic of the following cases.

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have not focused on this aspect of anti-modern movements in this work, but it is a notable constant that deserves further study.

CHAPTER 1

An Islamic Phenomenon?
Examining the Root Causes of Fundamentalism

What drives Islamic extremism? Is it a de-facto hatred of the West? The result of

a backward religious system? A chronic historical grudge? To find an answer, we must

examine the root causes of Defensive Reconstructionism in a broader sense. As we will

see in this chapter, Defensive Reconstuctioism emerges in a wide variety of historical,

cultural, and religious contexts. Each individual or movement examined in this chapter

reacts to specific grievances—mostly modernity and abrasive foreign influence. Almost

all of them use religion or spirituality as a primary means to mobilize their causes.

However, one can see that while each movement draws on a *different* religion, the larger,

common force of Defensive Reconstructionism is a constant throughout each case,

demonstrating that this form of extremism is not bound to any historical period, culture,

or religion.

Islam did not invent Defensive Reconstructionism. The conflict existed long

before the religion of Islam was even established. To demonstrate the timelessness of this

conflict, we look back to the beginning of the Common Era to examine a Defensive

Reconstructionist movement that emerged out of Judaism: The *Sicarii*, a sect of the

Jewish Zealots (whose members, some scholars believe, may have included Judas

Iscariot and the amnestied murderer Barabbas[6]) were active for a relatively short period

of time, but had a substantial effect on Jewish history. As stated by David C. Rapoport,

"It would be difficult to find terrorist activity in any historical period which influenced

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[6]Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1997), 179.

the life of a community more decisively [than the Sicarii]." [7] The group was named after

the curved daggers (Latin–*sica*) members often used to assassinate their targets. The

Jewish historian Josephus chronicled the acts of the Sicarii in his work, *The Jewish War*:

> The Sicarii committed murders in broad daylight in the heart of Jerusalem. The holy days were their special seasons when they would mingle with the crowd carrying short daggers concealed under their clothing with which they stabbed their enemies. Thus, when they fell, the murderers joined in cries of indignation, and through this plausible behavior, were never discovered… there were numerous daily murders. The panic created was more alarming than the calamity itself; everyone, as on the battlefield, hourly expected death. Men kept watch at a distance on their enemies and would not trust even their friends when they approached. [8]

As in all cases of Defensive Reconstructionism, the Sacarii must be viewed in

light of group's specific motivations and choice of targets. Since the Sicarii drew heavily

on religion in their rhetoric and justifications, one could easily incriminate religion as the

primary motivation behind the groups' extremist actions. However, their primary concern

was political. [9] The Sicarii were active while the Roman Empire controlled Judea—a

foreign occupation by an "idolatrous" empire whose political system was at odds with

Jewish law. [10] While the Romans allowed the Jews to practice their native religion with

relative freedom, the Sicarii viewed compliance to Roman rule, in any form, as an

idolatrous recognition of another god, Caesar, and a direct violation of the group's

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[7] David C. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions" in *The American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (Sept 1984): 669.

[8] Josephus, "The Jewish War," in *Works* (London: Heinemann, 1926), 254-257, cited in Rapoport, 670.

[9] Rapoport, 674

[10] For example, graven images, outlawed in Jewish tradition, were manufactured and even worshipped by the Romans within the Jewish territory. As this idolatrous action was also criminalized by Torah law, it was not only religious, but political effrontery.

fundamental philosophy: "No Lord but God."[11] Therefore, the Sicarii did not limit their attacks to Roman officials. A majority of their targets were, in fact, Jewish leaders who the Sicarii viewed as having submitted to Roman rule and culture. The Sicarii felt these assimilators had acquiesced for personal benefit instead of resisting for the benefit of society as a whole, and therefore, were no longer legitimate leaders. Thus, in addition to encouraging resistance against the Romans, the Sacarii also terrorized those they viewed as traitors to the Jewish cause.

> When Quirinius was sent to Judea to take the census, Judas of Galilee [the leader of the Sicarii movement] incited the Judeans to revolt against Rome and urged them not to pay taxes. He maintained that there was only one master, God, whose rule they should acknowledge, and held that any one who acknowledged Caesar as master was a traitor. The [Sicarii] plundered the properties of those who submitted to the conquerors, and kidnapped and killed those of their compatriots who joined the Romans. They maintained that such Judeans were in no wise different from the Romans.[12]

One of the Sicarii's main goals was to prevent this assimilation by setting up a polarization in which Jewish and Roman cultures could not coexist. Through their assassinations and rebellious instigations in Judea, the Sicarii aimed to create enough social chaos to ensure that there would be no chance for reconciliation—keeping the Jewish people in a "constant state of war readiness"[13] Oftentimes, the targets of their threats and assassinations were prominent Jewish leaders who advocated compromise with Roman rule. By silencing these leaders and instigating social upheaval, the Sicarii

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[11] David M.Rhoads, "Zealots," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* 14, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2005): 9940.

[12] Soloman Zeitlin, "Zealots and Sicarii" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, (Dec. 1962): 396.

[13] Rapoport 670.

made sure Jews did not fall into passive coexistence with or acceptance of Roman society. While not entirely due to the Sicarii, a coexistence never materialized, and Jewish dissenters increasingly resisted Roman rule, leading to the destruction of the temple and the fall of Judea in 70CE.

While ostensibly religious, the actions of the Sicarii were not driven by a religiously based inclination to violence inherent or particular to the Jewish faith. Religion in any form, however, adds a dangerous divine justification to acts of violence. The Sicarii drew on the ideology of "*herem*" (עברית:חרם), the Torah concept of Holy War.[14] As explained by scholar of ancient religious "terrorism," David Rapoport, "The word *herem*, it should be noted, designates a sacred sphere where ordinary standards do not apply, and in a military context, a *herem* is a war without limits."[15] As a theme that will recur throughout incidents of divinely sanctioned political action, religion can serve to unbridle extremist actions, removing moral hurdles, often in deadly ways.

In sum, the Sicarii viewed Roman rule as an attempt to supersede Jewish law and culture, undermining their traditional religion and society. In response to this cultural disenfranchisement, the Sicarii used assassinations, intimidation, and general terror in an attempt to oust the idolatrous foreign occupation so the Jews could freely return to their traditional, organic system of governance—*defending* their tradition and *reconstructing* their organic system. While the extreme religious ideology of the Sicarii, "No Lord but God," added divine sanction to their political actions, this Defensive Reconstructionism was not solely driven by religion. The Sicarii were reacting to cultural

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[14] According to the book of Judges, God commanded Israel to wage *herem* against the Canaanites for the possession of the Promised Land**.**

[15] Rapoport, 670.

disenfranchisement from a foreign system that threatened their fundamental way of life.

Polarizing the conflict, the Sacarii rejected compromise or assimilation, even terrorizing

their own people to ensure the continuation of the pure traditional system. The fate of the

Sicarii exemplifies this rejection of submission: After other Jewish revolutionary groups

forced the Sicarii out of Jerusalem during the war for Judea in 66 CE, the Sicarii held fort

outside of Jerusalem in Masada, where, rather than face Roman capture, they committed

mass suicide in 74 CE.[16] Most likely, at the very end, their last words were "No Lord but

God."

Defensive Reconstructionism in the Twentieth Century

The politically motivated, religiously justified actions of the Sicarii and their

demand for a return to tradition are part of the spectrum that, today, has become known

as "fundamentalism." Through modern-day scholarship and media, this term is usually

associated with Islam. This was not always the case, however. The Defensive

Reconstructionist movement that was responsible for the emergence of the term

"fundamentalism," as well as its connotation of rigidity and militancy, was actually the

American Evangelical movements of the early Twentieth century.

> The term [fundamentalism] originated in the Untied States in 1920 and referred to
> evangelicals who considered it a chief Christian duty to combat
> uncompromisingly "modernist" theology and certain secularizing cultural trends.
> Organized militancy was the feature that most clearly distinguished
> fundamentalists from other evangelicals. Fundamentalism originated as primarily
> an American phenomenon….[17]

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[16] Rhoads, 9940.

[17] George M. Marsden and William L. Svelmoe, "Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* 14, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2005): 2887.

The difference today is that the conflict has gone global in scale. It is no longer limited to conflicts within a single nation (though this conflict still exists), nor is it even bound to confrontations between individual nation states. Today, the issue of traditionalism vs. modernism is often personified by particular global powers. Boiled down, it is often viewed as "the West vs. the Rest." This confrontation was skyrocketed in scale by the Colonial era and subsequent expansion of Western culture, power, and influence. Now the conflict is continued by Colonialism's new-age cousin globalization. Globalization is a seemingly unstoppable force viewed by many traditionalists in non-Westen nations as "neo-Colonialism," or as Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit suggest, "…shorthand for U.S. Imperialism."[18] America, as the sole superpower of the age, is often perceived as the face of this movement—the Goliath—front man of the modern-day Philistines. "The Rest" refers to the developing nations who, due to globalization, are increasingly affected by the political will and cultural influence of the West. To extend the David-Goliath metaphor, the role of Reconstructionists can be understood as the low shepherd wielding sling and stone who will defeat the Goliath only by the will of God.

So, to trace the lineage of the conflict: the movement that began long ago as anti-idolatrous foreign oppressor becomes anti-modern in the twentieth century; Anti-modern then becomes anti-West; and anti-West essentially becomes anti-America. However, while anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism are usually the ostensible targets of Defensive Reconstructionism, when one considers root causes of this fundamentalism, it is not specifically a battle against America, or even the West as a whole. It is the reaction of a people who feel increasingly marginalized and disenfranchised by the modern

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[18] Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 8.

Western culture—a foreign influence that forcefully blanketed a significant portion of the world through colonization, and continues to act through globalization. In the end, it is a battle against that which America and the West represent and proliferate, against that for which they are seen to stand as a symbol—mechanical modernism.

Twentieth Century Case Studies

While Islamic fundamentalism makes headlines for its anti-Western movements, Islam is not the sole proprietor of such ideals. Rather, Islamic fundamentalism is part of the spectrum of Defensive Reconstrucionism which occurs throughout the world. To demonstrate, we will examine three case studies of non-Islamic Defensive Reconstructionist movements in the twentieth century: Against America from outside (Japan/Germany during World War II), against America from inside (Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing), and against a traditionally non-Western nation from the inside (Japan and the Aum Shinrikyo subway attacks). Only the latter two cases are widely considered "terrorism," not the first—due to the fact that recognized nations are privileged to commit the same atrocities, if not on a larger scale, and are spared the shameful stigma. All of the cases, however, show that Defensive Reconstructionism, taken to the extreme, has resulted in acts of appalling violence in a range of cultural and religious contexts.[19]

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[19] It should be reasserted here that no culture or religion can be judged by its extremists. Therefore, we must be cautious in dealing with religious affiliations in this chapter. For example, the "Christianity" of Timothy McVeigh and the Christian Identity movement is highly discredited by mainstream Christianity as it bears almost no resemblance to the teachings of Christianity other than in title. In the same way, Aum Shinrikyo's Buddhist justifications for violence are far beyond the norm and would not be considered "Buddhist" at all by most adherents of the faith. Though the movements examined in this chapter will be labeled "Christian," "Buddhist," or "Islamic," this is

World War II Japan and Germany:
An unlikely alliance

Among the glaring political, social, and economic forces that led to World War II,

aversion to Western modernism is often overlooked. Anthropologically, Japan offers

unique insight into the culture-shaking effects of modernization due to its history of

intentional isolation. In 1641, the Japanese shogunate enacted a foreign relations policy

that would later become known as *sakoku* (鎖国, literally "country in chains" or "lock up

of country")—the concept of a "secluded nation."[20] Under this policy, no foreigner could

enter Japan, and no citizen could leave Japan under penalty of death. The policy remained

in effect for almost 200 years until the United States, represented by U.S. Navy

Commodore Matthew Perry, pressured Japan into opening its borders for trade in 1854.

This opening, or *kokusaika* (国際化, "internationalization"), was followed by a long

period of rapid, intentional Westernization led by the newly instated emperor with the

goal of "modernizing Japanese industry and gaining economic and military parity with

the West."[21] According to Baruma and Margalit:

> The main slogan of the Menji period (1868-1912) was *Bunmei Kaika,* or
> Civilization and Enlightenment—that is, Western civilization and enlightenment.
> Everything Western, from natural science to literary realism, was hungrily soaked
> up by Japanese intellectuals. European dress, Prussian constitutional law, British
> naval strategies, German philosophy, American cinema, French architecture, and
> much, much more were taken over and adapted.[22]

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simply due to the fact that these are the traditions from which they draw their radical
interpretations. The individuals examined here are in no way representative of the
religions on which they draw. We move on with this in mind.

[20]Mayumi Itoh, *Globalization of Japan: Japanese Sakoku Mentality and U.S.
Efforts to Open Japan* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1998), 13.

[21] Ibid., 24.

[22] Buruma and Margalit, 3-4.

Such rapid importation of Western modernism, however, did not come without a backlash. By the 1940's, young Japanese scholars and leaders started to speak out against Western cultural influence, claiming that it would soon replace the rich traditional Japanese culture with spiritually empty values of Western modernism. As Baruma and Margalit observed, Japan started to suffer from "intellectual indigestion. Western civilization had been swallowed too fast."[23] Bloated with Western modernism, Japanese ideology moved towards Defensive Reconstructionsim—demanding that Japan defend itself, and the rest of Asia, from the rapid spread of empty Western culture, even if it meant military action.

> …the war against the West was a war against the "poisonous materialist civilization" ... All agreed that culture—that is, traditional Japanese culture—was spiritual and profound, whereas modern Western civilization was shallow, rootless, and destructive of creative power. The West, particularly the United States, was coldly mechanical. A holistic, traditional Orient united under divine Japanese imperial rule would restore the warm organic community to spiritual health. As one of the participants put it, the struggle was between Japanese blood and Western intellect.[24]

The West was characterized as a cold, mechanical modern society—a culture that would destroy the pure, organic, divinely ordered Japanese tradition. Thus Japan sought to defend its tradition through military action.

While certainly not the sole cause of Japan's military action against the West in World War II, the cultural disenfranchisement that resulted from Japan's rapid importation of Western modernism added ideological justification to the anti-Western fervor. More importantly, this anti-modernist ideology served as a partial basis for the

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[23] Ibid., 4.

[24] Ibid., 3.

unlikely alliance between expansionist Japan and Hitler's Germany.[25] According to

Buruma and Margalit, through a meeting of Japanese intellectuals in Kyoto on "how to

overcome the modern," the participants found an ideological ally in Hitler's

characterization of the modern West:

> …participants in the Kyoto meeting…pointed to the rise of industrialization, capitalism, and economic liberalism in the nineteenth century as the root of modern evil. They spoke in dire terms of "machine civilization" and "Americanism." Some of them argued that Europe and Japan, with their ancient cultures, should make common cause against the noxious blight of Americanism. Such talk fell on fertile ground in some parts of Europe. Hitler, in his table talk, was of the opinion that "American civilization is of a purely mechanized nature. Without mechanization, America would disintegrate more swiftly than India." Not that an alliance with Japan came easily, for he also believed that the Japanese were "too foreign to us, by their way of living, by their culture. But my feelings against Americanism are feelings of hatred and deep repugnance."[26]

In all actuality, I feel that Buruma and Margalit, for the sake of their argument,

gloss over the fact that World War II was a conflict driven by expansionist empires'

attempts to gain power and influence, not purely by anti-Westernism. In light of this, we

cannot classify Japan and Germany's actions as *motivated* by Defensive

Reconstructionism as we can with the rest of our cases. Japan and Germany are examples

of a nation attempting to *spread* its traditional culture rather than simply to *defend* or

restore it. However, we can see that Germany and Japan's anti-modernist rhetoric—

ideological fuel during World War II—drew heavily on Defensive Reconstructionism. In

addition, Japan's *kokusaika* shows the potential effects of rapid, unrestrained

modernization at the expense of tradition. This "intellectual indigestion" and cultural

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[25] Though Germany is considered part of "the West" today, at this point in history, Hitler had drawn a sharp cultural distinction between Germany and the rest of Western Europe. In this way, I am labeling Germany's distaste of American and Western European forms of modernism as an aversion to "the West," of which Hitler did not consider Germany a part.

[26] Ibid., 8.

disenfranchisement can lead to a crisis of culture and vehemently anti-Western ideology.

In addition, this case shows the unifying power of Defensive Reconstructionism. The

shared anti-modern ideals and a desire to return to a system of tradition helped to form a

deadly alliance between two nations considered "too foreign" to unite. The nations were

united in a fundamentalist desire to return to tradition—a traditional Germany and a

traditional Japan respectively—based on home grown, organic ideals rather than the cold

spiritless ideals of Western society. Japan, infected by the West, and Germany,

surrounded and stifled by it, lashed out together in a militant movement, burning with

Defensive Reconstructionism, in an attempt to oust empty Western modernism and to

reconstruct their parts of the world into empires based on their traditional systems.

Timothy McVeigh and Christian Identity:
Home-grown terrorism

Defensive Reconstructionism is not limited to non-Western contexts, however.

This was exemplified by the militant American Evangelicals of the Twentieth century—

the first official "fundamentalists"—and other reactionary Christian extremist groups that

still exist. As an example of this branch of Defensive Reconstructionism, we will

examine Timothy McVeigh and his ideological affiliation with the Christian Identity

movement.

Timothy McVeigh, a 27-year-old Gulf War Veteran, was responsible for the 1995

bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The attack killed

168 people and injured over 800 making it the deadliest act of domestically perpetrated

terrorism in US history. The Oklahoma City bombing baffled America. Instantly assumed

to be the work of Islamic terrorists, America was later shocked to find that America itself,

and the Christianity it holds dear, helped to breeed this young, middle class, white, perpetrator—a home-grown Christian terrorist.

Evidenced by phone records, mailing subscriptions, and his favorite book, *The Turner Diaries* (which a close friend deemed "his bible"[27]), McVeigh had frequent exposure to the ideology of a racial sect of Christianity known as Christian Identity.[28] The group bases its ideology its own interpretation of the bible, characterized by Aryan-protestant supremacy (including the prediction of a great "race holy war" in the future) and an anti-government philosophy in which overthrowing the federal government is the only way to restore white sovereignty.[29] The Christian Identity movement views the American government as a conspiracy for a "New World Order" in which the enemies of true Aryan-protestants (Blacks, liberals, homosexuals, Catholics, Hispanics, etc.) aim to restrict the rights of white people and pollute the white bloodline.[30] In this way, the movement feels that these "enemies" aim to pervert the traditional system of white-Protestant values on which America was founded. The New World Order conspiracy aims to take away the exclusivity of what it means to be American (aka a white Protestant), and threatens to water down and eliminate that pure, traditional American culture. According to the website of William Pierce, author of *The Turner Diaries*,

> The truth of the matter is that the New World Order people ultimately aim to create a New World Population of serfs for their global plantation, a

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[27] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (London: University of California Press, 2001), 32.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Tanya Telfair Sharpe, "The Identity Christian Movement: Ideology of Domestic Terrorism" in *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no. 4. (Mar. 2000): 605-609.

[30] Ibid., 609.

homogeneous population of coffee-colored serfs—a population of docile, predictable, and interchangeable serfs….[31]

Pierce and the Christian Identity movement fear a global government conspiracy that would take away the exclusivity of the white-Protestant culture, blending races and cultures into a "coffee-colored" society. The movement is reacting against the "New" world, against a culture in which people are "docile, predictable, and interchangeable" cogs in a form of serfdom without identity. Responding with Defensive Reconstructionism, the group demands a return to a traditional, white American society unaffected by foreign (read interracial) influence. In the same way the Sicarii often believed that Jewish leaders were in cahoots with the foreign Roman influence, the Christian Identity movement views the federal government as conspiring to supersede white-Protestant tradition, replacing it with "coffee-colored" pluralism. As stated by Tanya Telfair Sharpe, "[Christian] Identity followers consider the government an illegal, foreign occupying force."[32]

The government is not only illegitimate, but idolatrous in the sense that the Christian Identity movement accuses the secular federal government as seeking to replace God. According to Marc Juergensmeyer, "Pierce and Christian Identity activists yearned for a revolution that would undo America's separation of church and state… they wanted to merge 'religion and state' in a new society governed by religious law,"[33] seemingly an echo of the Sicarii's "No Lord but God."

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[31] Pierce, William, "The New World Order," in *Free Speech* (Sept. 1997), www.natvan.com/free-speech/fs979d.html (Accessed: March 26, 2007).

[32] Sharpe, 609.

[33] Juergensmeyer, 32.

In *The Turner Diaries,* Peirce wrote of an attack hauntingly parallel to McVeigh's bombing. Peirce wrote of a hero who bombed a federal building using a truck filled with approximately 5,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer mixed with fuel oil[34] for the purpose of instigating an attack against the dictatorial secularism of an American government bent on uprooting the Christian values of America.[35] In what was likely a self-made fulfillment of Pierce's prophecy, McVeigh targeted a symbol that epitomized the federal government's "foreign occupation." According to Juergensmeyer, "If one had to choose a single building that symbolized the presence of centralized federal government power in this region of mid-America, the Murrah building in Oklahoma City would be it."[36] This violence served no military purpose against the federal government. Rather, it was an attack on secular government operations, a symbol of the occupation, and against the "docile, predictable, interchangeable serfs" who worked in the building. Hundreds of workers were killed or injured in the blast (including many white-Protestants), who also served no military purpose. But, as with the Sicarii, those who had submitted to the oppression and did not resist for the greater good of society were incriminated and sentenced to death for perpetuating the corrupt system.

As evidenced by Timothy McVeigh's attack, the rhetoric of William Pierce, and the movement itself, Christian Identity is a uniquely American example of extreme Defensive Reconstructionism. The movement is deeply religious in ideology and rhetoric, but acts for a political purpose, aiming to defend its tradition from secular modernism.

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[34] McVeigh used 4,400 pounds of the prescribed mixture, transported in the same way.

[35] Juergensmeyer, 32.

[36] Ibid., 130.

The movement reacts to a perceived disenfranchisement by a federal conspiracy to eliminate religion from public life and pollute racial purity, eliminating the traditional Aryan-Protestant system that the movement sees as the foundation of American culture.

Today, most Americans and Christians ignore (or are totally unaware of) this radical sect of their culture. Almost every Christian would denounce McVeigh's actions and would heartily disagree with Christian Identity's extremist claims about Christianity and American tradition. A Christian reader would likely take one look at Christian Identity and say, "That's not *Christianity* at all." But imagine if the rhetoric of Christian Identity, and the acts of McVeigh were viewed from outside as the standard ideology of America and Christianity—its "ism"—in the same way the ideology of al-Qaeda and the acts of Osama bin Laden are often viewed as representative of Islam. Most Muslims look at the bombing of the World Trade Center and say "That's not *Islam* at all," echoing the Christian community's reaction to McVeigh. In this way, we can clearly reassert that a religion or a culture cannot be accurately understood through its most extreme acts of Defensive Reconstructionism.

Aum Shinrikyo:
Buddhist terrorism?

For an example of Defensive Reconstructionism against a non-Western nation, we return to Japan to examine the Aum Shinrikyo movement. Relying heavily on religion to further its anti-modernist ideology, Aum Shinrikyo demonstrates that even the renownedly pacifistic religion of Buddhism is not exempt from use in justification of violence. Recognized as a legally registered religious group in 1989 with 4,000 members,

the group's membership skyrocketed to 40,000 in 1995 throughout Japan and Russia.[37]

Aum Shinrikyo is most infamous for its 1995 attack on a Tokyo subway in which five

members boarded trains and punctured bags of liquid sarin nerve gas as the trains

converged in the center of the city's governmental district—killing twelve and injuring

well over 5,000. The devastating attack prompted further government investigation into

the group, which revealed a long and chilling trail of kidnappings, torture, murder, and,

of course, massive development of chemical weapons.

The members of Aum Shinrikyo were mostly well educated young men who had

been trained in science and technology.[38] Led by self proclaimed Buddha/Messiah Shoko

Asahara, the group offered its members purpose and spiritual guidance in a modernizing,

"mechanized" Japan. According to millennial terrorism scholar Catherine Wessinger,

> Aum Shinrikyo was attractive to educated, urban young people dissatisfied with
> being cogs in the Japanese economic system and interested in cultivating mystical
> experiences. Aum offered an alternative to lifetime employment in unfulfilling
> work for modest wages.[39]

Aum Shinrikyo reacted against a perceived cultural disenfranchisement of Japan

in the wake of World War II. The nation, occupied by Western forces, had opened its

doors to the outside in another rapid period of *kokusaika*.[40] Japan increasingly

incorporated Western aspects of modernism—distancing the nation from its traditional

roots and culture. Aum Shinrikyo appealed to a sub-generation of youth who craved a

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[37] Catherine Wessinger, *How The Millennium Comes Violently* (New York: Seven Bridges, 2000), 131.

[38] Ibid. 133.

[39] Ibid. 131.

[40] Itoh, 27.

more spiritual sense of purpose than was offered by life in modern Japan. Through

Defensive Reconstructionism the group aimed to defend Japan from mechanical Western

(and the Japanese version of) modernity and to reconstruct society through a return to

spiritual tradition over modern materialism.

As the end-all religious authority within the group, Asahara taught a radical

interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine of *karma*.[41] Asahara claimed that it was better for

those living in the corrupt, mechanical Japanese system to face an early death than to

incur more bad *karma* by continuing their spiritually empty lives. Through this

interpretation, the group's murderous sarin attacks were divinely sanctioned as "mercy

killings" enabling the victims' souls to move on to a higher karmic plane than would be

attainable if they continued their corrupt existence.[42] Aum Shinrikyo's violent resistance

to mainstream Japanese culture was framed as a religious obligation to save souls and

rekindle the nation's spirituality.

As in the ideology of the Christian Identity, there could be no compromise

between the foreign secular influence and genuine spirituality. Ideologically, the group

set up an absolute polarization between the modern (materialists) and the traditional

(spiritualists). In Asahara's own words:

> Let us look at today's situation: we have reached the peak of materialism;
> socialism has collapsed and only materialism seems to thrive. I have made the
> following prediction of polarization. It is the polarization between the genuine
> materialists and the genuine spiritualists…the polarization is ready to take place.

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[41] Karma, in brief, is the sum of a living being's actions. Karma is cumulative and
carried on into future lives through reincarnation. Whether that karma was "good" or
"bad" will have a direct effect on one's future lives.

[42] Juergensmeyer, 115.

The genuine spiritualists will grow full and shine like the sun, while the genuine materialists will be collected to be burned.[43]

A deeper analysis of Aum's subway attack reveals a self-made fulfillment of this prophecy. Staging the attack in the center of Tokyo's business district was most likely a deliberate choice to affect the maximum number of people. However, in dealing with Defensive Reconstructionsim one must view actions for their symbolic value as well. The Tokyo business district is the hub of modern Japanese capitalist culture. Similar to McVeigh's reasoning behind targeting the Murrah building, Aum Shinrikyo's victims would not only be traveling to and from their duties as "cogs of the Japanese economic system," but the sarin gas release was also an attack on the heart of the area which most symbolized all that Asahara detested about materialistic modern society. The Tokyo business district stood as a symbol of the secular modernism from which Asahara purportedly sought to defend his nation and religion—even if it meant extreme violence.

Through Japanese and German rhetoric during World War II, we see that Defensive Reconstructionism can be a catalyst for world-shaking conflict, creating unlikely allies. From the example of McVeigh, we can conclude that Defensive Reconstructionism is not exclusively a phenomenon of non-Christians or even non-Westerners. Through Aum Shinrikyo, we can see that even the renowedly peaceful teachings of Buddhism can be used to justify violent acts of Defensive Reconstructionism. These cases should not be viewed as a monolithic movement fighting with a unified or even similar front. Context is *essential*—each group has its own unique grievances, ideologies, and reactive tactics. Their differences, however serve to accentuate this overarching similarity: in each of the above cases, the groups' historical

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[43] Wessinger, 149.

context, nationality, specific target, and religion are all variables. The one constant in each case, however, is Defensive Reconstructionism—each movement aimed to defend its traditional view of culture from the modern, and exhibited a desire to reconstruct society by ousting "foreign" influence, reinstating a more organic, spiritual society.

Most notable, perhaps, is the obvious historical, national, and religious diversity within just the miniscule sampling of Defensive Reconstructionist movements which has been examined in this chapter: A biblical-age Jewish movement, an early twentieth century American evangelical movement, a German/Japanese national purity movement, a recent Christian extremist sect in America, and even a Buddhist spiritual revolutionary group. As demonstrated by the above cases, Defensive Reconstructionism, violent or otherwise, does not emerge from, and is not bound to any specific culture, historical period, or religion.

CHAPTER TWO

The Islamic Branch of Defensive Reconstructionism

We have seen that Defensive Reconstructionism is not and never has been bound to a specific religion. However, today, it is undoubtedly true that the Islamic branch of this extremism accounts for many of the most widespread and violent reactions against modernism and the West. Through the lens of Defensive Reconstructionism, this chapter will analyze three figures that have emerged from a variety of Islamic countries and ideologies: Sayyid Qutb (Egypt), Ayatollah Khomeini (Iran), and Osama bin Laden (Saudi Arabia, et al). These widely influential figures are essential to an understanding of Defensive Reconstructionism in Islamic culture today.[1]

First of all, however, we must narrow down our conversation about "Islamic culture." To talk about Defensive Reconstructionism as if it were part and parcel to "Islamic culture" would be an inaccurate generalization. Islamic culture does not imply anti-modernism. Islam is a widespread religion that has contributed to shaping widely diverse cultures not only in the Middle East, but in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. Oftentimes, Muslims in these cultures have little to no aversion to modernity. For example, India—the country with the world's second largest Muslim population[2]—is a rapidly modernizing democracy. Even living as a minority in a

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[1] Once again, we must keep in mind that while these figures and their respective movements will be labeled "Islamic," their actions often conflict with the teachings of mainstream Islam. These individuals are Islamic in title, but the legitimacy of their interpretations of the faith is highly debated among Muslims. As in the previous chapter, we cannot take these individuals to be representative of Islam as a whole.

[2] India is home to approximately 174,755,562 Muslims, second only to Indonesia with 213,420,000 according to *Muslim Population Percentage from U.S Dept. of State* (2006), http://www.state.gov. (Accessed April 9th, 2007).

vastly Hindu nation, Muslims in India have exhibited relatively little activity in the realm of Defensive Reconstructionism. As India, and many other Muslim populated nations exemplify, Islamic does not imply Reconstructionist. The "Islamic culture" we deal with in this chapter is specific to the Middle East, the birthplace of Islam, but not its exclusive residence or representative constituency. While the Middle East is the hotbed of Islamic Extremism today, and thus draws the most attention to Islam, in actuality, the Middle East accounts only for approximately 17% of the worlds Muslims.[3] While the region is historically and religiously significant for the religion of Islam, it is not even close to the most numerically significant region to be speaking of "Islamic culture." Furthermore, many Muslims in the Middle East do not even identify with the extremist ideologies of the following figures. So we are here dealing with a fraction of a fraction of "Islamic culture." We move on with that in mind.

Sayyid Qutb:
The philosophical father

As we have seen, Defensive Reconstructionism is an age-old ideology that has appealed to many different cultures, historical periods, and religions, including Islam. While movements of Defensive Reconstructionism have emerged multiple times throughout Islamic history, many scholars assert that the father of modern-day Islamic

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[3] Ibid., 252,219,832 of the approximated 1,522,813,123 Muslims in the world live in the Middle East(16.6%). While the exact figures may be disputed, it is clear that the Middle East does not even come close to holding a majority of the world's Muslim population.

fundamentalism was the Egyptian writer, Sayyid Qutb, who laid a philosophical

foundation for many of the anti-modern and anti-Western movements of today.[4]

Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) was born into a rapidly changing Egypt. The country

was in the process of gaining an "independence" of sorts from the longstanding British

colonial occupation.[5] The new (relatively liberal) regime, the Wafd Party, had not been

able to cope with Egypt's widespread poverty as promised, and many Egyptians lived in

desperation. According to Middle Eastern Historian Ira M. Lapidus, it was a period of

"deep ambiguities about Egyptian cultural and political identities."[6] Egypt, after

independence, was undergoing a period of rapid modernization and urbanization,

resulting in a displaced rural population, and a growing number of educated urban youth

who had no work or future prospects due to the stagnant economy.[7] As we have seen

through Aum Shinrikyo, rapid modernization coupled with a lack of fulfilling future

prospects for an educated youth population can provide fertile soil for Defensive

Reconstructionism.

Through his work at the Egyptian Ministry of Education, Qutb was sent to the US

in 1948 to examine the American education system. During his stay, Qutb traveled

extensively, primarily in California, Washington DC, and Colorado. It was this first hand

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[4] Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin, *Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 7.

[5] Egypt was able to negotiate "independence" as far as a relatively autonomous government, but the British maintained provisions of military alliance and control of the lucrative Suez Canal.

[6] Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge, 1988), 625.

[7] Ibid., 633.

experience of life in America that served as the bases for Qutb's unflattering critique of

the West—observations that served as a basis for many future Islamic fundamentalists'

perceptions of the US. Qutb's writings painted a picture of a technologically advanced,

but spiritually empty American lifestyle:

> Whoever studies the life of the American people will at first be perplexed by a strange phenomenon not visible elsewhere on earth. A people who have attained, in the world of science and labor, the summit of growth and progress, have in the world of feelings and behavior, remained primitive, unable to rise above the lowest level of human development. In fact, Americans have sunk in some spheres of feelings and behavior to a level lower than that of primitiveness.[8]

Qutb further characterized the West as "primitive" due to its hedonistic behavior and

machine-like lack of "feelings." Also critical of the West for its hurried culture, lack of

artistic sophistication, and casual attitudes toward sex and gender roles—his writings

served as a narrative of personal disgust towards the culturally dry and mechanical

society of America.

In his Reconstructionistic ideology, Qutb exhibited a Romantic longing to return

to a past, spiritual worldview in which society was ordered by religion rather than

science:

> In the ancient world man believed in the power of unknown nature. He fashioned around that mysterious power superstitions and fables, and he had faith in religion; his soul was submerged in the light of religion and dreams. He believed in art, while his yearnings took various colors, melodies, and patterns. Later he believed in science. Whereupon his soul split between forms of faith and all kinds of senses and patterns of life, imaginary phantoms.[9]

Qutb viewed the modern West as having traded the roots of the spirit for science and

materialism. Just like the rhetoric of Japan and Germany during World War II, Qutb

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[8] Sayyid Qutb, cited in "Fundamentalism," in *From the outer World,* Oscar Handlin and Lilian Handlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 211.

[9] Ibid., 211.

described the West as materialistic and mechanical, lacking spirit and morality. "The American conscience is… a materialistic conscience, the conscience of a machine lacking feelings, of merchandising, which is not God-fearing or interested in truth, justice, or shame. Can such a machine generate a conscience?"[10] Qutb went on to extend this critique to the West as a whole:

> This is not just a matter of country or nationality. The Americans are not better than the English, or the latter better than the French, or the French better than the Dutch. They are all sons of one civilization, a materialistic and loathsome civilization, without heart or conscience… a civilization that takes but does not give, which injures but does not care, a selfish and puny civilization, regardless of the fact that from the outside its greatness glitters and clamors. It is a fake civilization, because it has not added any spirituality to humanity's stock and does not attempt to elevate mankind above the law of bestiality.[11]

Qutb's most notable contribution to Islamic fundamentalism was his popularization of the Islamic concept of *jahiliyya* (جاهليـة) as a justification for Defensive Reconstructionism and violence. In the Qur'an, *jahiliyya* refers to the state of pagan pre-Islamic Arabia—literally "ignorance" or "chaos." Qutb popularized a reinterpretation of the term as a denunciation of any cultural system that was not based in Islamic law—*Shari'a*[12].[13] This is characteristic of Defensive Reconstructionism in that the spiritual system (in this case Islam) is seen as ordered and correct, whereas all that exists outside that system is chaos and falsehood. Qutb's ideology frames the world as an absolute polarization between the spiritual ally and the modern enemy. Similar to Sicarii and

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[10] Ibid., 225.

[11] Ibid., 225-226.

[12] *Shari'a* (شــريعة), Islamic law based on The Qur'an and the *Hadith* (a collection words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad himself, not considered the direct words of God spoken through the Prophet as in the Qur'an).

[13] Rubin, 12.

Islam cannot accept any compromise with *jahiliyya*… Either Islam will remain, or *jahiliyya*; Islam cannot accept or agree to a situation which is half-Islam and half-*jahiliyya*… [Islam says] that truth is one and cannot be divided; if it is not the truth, then it must be falsehood.[14]

In Qutb's interpretation, the Qur'an itself states that the system of *jahiliyya* is inferior and undesirable to that of God. He drew on Qur'anic verses such as the following: "Is it a judgment of the time of (pagan) ignorance [*jahiliyya*] that they are seeking? Who is better than Allah for judgment to a people who have certainty (in their belief)?"[15] This verse can be interpreted to mean that a Muslim submits only to the will of God and does not need to be concerned with the judgment of a system of *jahiliyya*. In this way Qutb laid a foundation for resistance, not only against the West itself, but against Islamic governments that did not fulfill their duties. Qutb asserted that the primary responsibility of a government is to facilitate God's law. As long as those in power carried out this sacred duty, Muslims must obey. However, if rulers lose sight of the principles of *Shari'a* (as is often perceived to occur through embracing the modern), the government ceases to be Islamic and becomes *jahiliyya.* Thus, Qutb stated that it was the duty of true Muslims to oust *jahiliyya* governments at any cost and restore the order of *Shari'a*.[16]

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[14] Sayyid Qutb in *Milestones,* cited in Rubin, 13.

[15] Surah 5:50, *The Glorious Quran,* trans. Muhammad M. Pickthall (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc), 2005.

[16] William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 432.

As with the Sicarii, this ideology served as a catalyst for resistance to a lingering foreign (British) influence, and also for violent internal resistance to leaders who were seen to perpetuate that foreign culture and ideology. Former Egyptian President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, began his career as an Islamic hero for his anti-colonial policy, but later incurred the wrath of fundamentalist opposition groups when he attempted to bring Islamic religious activity under control of the government.[17] Qutb's ideology also served as justification for the murder of Nasser's successor Anwar Al Sadat, who was assassinated by the Egyptian Islamic Jihad[18] for encouraging Egyptian relations and negotiations with Israel and the West.[19]

Qutb's philosophy of Defensive Reconstructionism emerged from his detest of a mechanical West and longing for a more spiritual society. His Egyptian context provided fertile soil for this philosophy as it was a nation struggling to decolonize, both physically and culturally. The cultural disenfranchisement—the "deep cultural ambiguities"— and rapid modernization faced by Egypt in this colonial wake attracted a large segment of the population (especially educated youth with few future prospects) to the idea of a traditional, organic solution for the nation's cultural and economic ailments. For Qutb and his readers, the religion of Islam was the most authentic cultural system on which to reconstruct society. Qutb called Muslims to defend themselves, their religion, and their traditions from further Western cultural colonization. This foreign culture was *jahilyya,*

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[17] Lapidus, 632.

[18] The Egyptian Islamic Jihad was an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood movement of which Qutb was a member.

[19] Ibid., 634.

and for Qutb, the Muslim future rested on defending Islam from this foreign system and reconstructing society on traditional Islam.

Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution:
The story of success

Perhaps the most well known movement of Defensive Reconstructionism in the Middle East, which relied heavily on the ideology of ousting a "non-Islamic" regime, was the Iranian revolution of 1979. The revolution put millions of Iranian civilians up against the Shah,[20] Mohammad Reza Pahlavi under demands of a return to a traditional society based on egalitarian Islam. The movement is widely viewed as the first successful Islamic revolution of the modern-age.[21] The Iranian Revolution, and its main ideologue Ayatollah[22] Ruhollah Khomeini, are essential to understanding Islamic Defensive Reconstructionism for two main reasons: First, the revolution set a precedent for an Islamic movement to take over an unsatisfactory (and on top of that, a Western-supported) regime. Second, its wide publicity, especially involving the Iranian Hostage Situation, alerted the West to Islamic extremism and continues to influence Western perceptions of Islam today.

Iran at the time offers a classic example of conditions ripe for Defensive Reconstructionism: Its government was highly reliant on and influenced by foreign powers, there was a rapid push towards modernization, and a majority of the Iranian

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[20] *Shah* (شـاه)*,* Persian term for "monarch" or "ruler."

[21] Daniel Brumberg, "Khomeini's Legacy," in *Spokesmen for the Despised,* ed. R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1997),16.

[22] *Ayatollah* (الفيـت), Persian, a title given to major Shi'a Muslim clerics, Literally "Sign of God."

people were struggling with poverty. The Shah himself was a product of foreign influence: During World War II, Iran had close ties with Nazi Germany and the Allies saw Iran as a potential ally of the Axis powers. Thus, the Allied powers initiated a preventative invasion in which they forced the elected Shah, Reza Pahlavi (Sr.), out of power and abdicated rule to his son—who became the target of the revolution as he was viewed by many Iranians as a pawn of the West.

To further Iran's experience with Western political intervention, a coalition of Iranian citizens, tribal leaders, and religious councilmen under the leadership of Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq passed a bill through parliament in 1951 that would nationalize the Iranian oil company (ending foreign profit from Iranian oil, assuring that all proceeds would go to Iranian companies). The Western powers reacted by boycotting Iranian oil, essentially collapsing the Iranian economy. In the ensuing chaos, the American CIA helped orchestrate a coup to oust democratically elected Mosaddeq and aid the army of the Shah in establishing an authoritarian regime. In exchange the Shah allowed foreign companies to continue to maintain control of Iranian oil marketing.[23]

Thus, under absolute control of the Shah, Iran was established as the US's closest ally in the Gulf Region. As former US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, stated, "Iran under the Shah, in short, was one of America's best, most important, and most loyal friends in the world."[24] Due to his "loyal friend" status, the Shah was kept in power with

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[23] Lapidus, 584.

[24] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1979), p. 1262, cited in *America and Political Islam,* by Fawaz A.Gerges, (New York: Cambridge, 1999), 44.

billions of dollars worth of US arms "in order to enable his country to protect U.S.

interests…." [25]

This friendship was not appreciated by all, especially as the Shah's ties to the US

seemed to be benefiting his own extravagant lifestyle while a large segment of the

population dwelled in poverty, increasingly marginalized by a regime that pushed

modernity. According to Lapidus:

> The resumption of state-sponsored modernization led to the far-reaching
> economic and political changes which lie behind the Iranian revolution. The
> Pahlavi program called for the construction of a centralized secular and nationalist
> regime and the further modernization of society along Western lines… The
> combination of falling per capita agricultural output, inefficient industry, heavy
> purchases of foreign manufactured goods and weapons, with a booming oil
> economy led to severe inflation and probably to a lower standard of living for all
> Iranians not directly involved in the modern sector of the economy.[26]

Not only did this hastily implemented Western form of modernization cripple the

public economically, but rapid urbanization and the ensuing unemployment left a large

population of citizens dislocated from their rural lifestyle, with little prospect for

advancement in the modern sector of society. The last straw for many devout Iranians

was the Shah's 1975 consolidations of power in which he eliminated the two-party

system and extended governmental control over religious matters in an attempt to "reduce

the role of Islam in daily life and [glorify] the monarchy at the expense of Islamic norms

of identity."[27] Needless to say, all of these factors enraged many interest groups in Iran.

But the individual groups were not cohesive enough to truly threaten the regime. That is,

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[25] Cleveland, 410.

[26] Lapidus, 585.

[27] Cleveland, 411.

until a figure emerged with a unifying solution and a rallying cry: Unite under the banner

of Islam and return to the traditional Islamic principles abandoned by the Shah.

This figure was Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah Mosavi Khomeini (1900-1989), a

renowned Iranian cleric. Khomeni was exiled in 1964 due to his opposition to the Shah,

but still managed to spread his revolutionary message through Iran using smuggled

publications and audio tapes. Khomeini believed that a return to the clerical rule of the

Islamic *ulema'*[28] would return the justice and dignity denied to the Iranian people under

the Shah, and cure the spiritual and social alienation faced by many Iranians.[29] Other

revolutionary groups had aimed for a more secular government, but just as Defensive

Reconstructionism provided common ground for the alliance between Germany and

Japan in World War II, Khomeini was able to unite the motley sects of Iranian

revolutionaries by appealing to their common goal of combating the modern. According

to Cleveland, "He stood for a religiously based political activism that transcended

generations and classes because it was embedded in Iranian society at large."[30]

Khomeini's movement, his call for Defensive Reconstructionism, had mass appeal

because it was grounded in organic Islamic values, based on his interpretation of an ideal,

spiritual society. The pure Islamic authenticity of Khomeini's Reconstructionism

appealed greatly to a people who saw their plight as caused by foreign associators and

modern systems. Furthermore, Iran's close association with the West and adoption of

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[28] *Ulema' (علماء)* A council of respected Islamic clergy who arbitrate *Shari'a* law in traditional Islamic Society.

[29] Appleby, 39-40.

[30] Cleveland, 414.

Western systems was widely viewed as benefiting the Shah and his elite,[31] not the people

at large. Thus, by Khomeini's definition, in accordance with Qutb's interpretation of

jahiliyya, the regime was no longer upholding Islamic values, making it every true

Muslim's duty to depose the Shah at any cost.

Similar to Qutb, Khomeini used powerful language to set up a moral polarization

between the spiritual values of Islam and the primitive values of those who associated

with Western systems: "Islam's *jihad*[32] is a struggle against idolatry, sexual deviation,

plunder, repression, and cruelty. The war waged by [non-Islamic] conquerors, however,

aims at promoting lust and animal pleasures."[33] In this statement, characteristic of his gift

for religious-revolutionary oration, Khomeini appealed to traditional Islamic morals

(against idolatry, sexual deviation, lust), the Iranians' economic and social strife

(repression, cruelty), and characterized the West as barbaric crusaders (plunder, animal

pleasures). Framing the revolution as a continuation of Christian-Islamic confrontation

and resistance to further colonization, Khomeini set up a scenario in which the very

future of Islam was in jeopardy:

> The Crusades made the Christian West realize that Islam with its laws and beliefs
> was the biggest obstacle to their control and domination of the world. That is why
> they harbored resentment and treated it unjustly. Then more than three centuries
> ago, came the evil colonists who found in the Muslim world their long-sought

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[31] Lapidus, 588.

[32] *Jihad* (جهاد) The Islamic call to strive for God's cause, primarily in one's personal life, but also (as is more often emphasized by extremists), in society as a whole.

[33] Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam is Not a Religion of Pacifists,* from *Holy Terror,* by Amir Taheri, published by Century Hutchinson, reprinted by permission of the Random House Group Ltd., cited in Rubin, 29.

object. To achieve their ambitions they labored to create the conditions that would lead to the annihilation of Islam.[34]

For Khomeini, the only resistance to this foreign oppression and subsequent religious annihilation was a return to the traditional Islamic form of governance. In Khomeini's scenario, Iranians were kept subjugated to the West by accepting Western secularization and by distancing themselves from spirituality:

> They [the West] teach that Islam has no relevance to society and government and is only concerned with private rituals. These enemies have implanted their falsehoods in the minds of the Muslim people with the help of their agents, and have managed to eliminate Islam's… laws from the sphere of application, replacing them by European laws. The colonialists and their lackeys [presumably referring to the Shah's regime] claim there is a separation between state and religion, so they can isolate Islam from the affairs of society and keep the ulama' away from the people. When they have separated and isolated us they can take away our resources and rule us.[35]

Khomeini wanted to mobilize the growing educated population who were disenfranchised by corrupt modern society. As he put it "We want to take our youth [out of] the bars to the battlefield…" Apparently, the revolution gave the young population something to strive for, as Iranian students were often the most zealous forces of the revolution. It was a group of students, in fact, who managed to forcefully bring the Iranian revolution to the West.

On November 4th, 1979, approximately 300 Iranian students belonging to "The Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line" ("the Imam" being Khomeini) stormed a

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[34] Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, "Islamic Government," in *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives,* Ed. John Donohue and John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 314-315.

[35] Ibid.

US embassy in Iran's capital city of Tehran.[36] Among the students' demands were that the US return the Shah to Iran (he had gone to America for medical treatment—perceived by the group to be a hoax) to face trial and execution, and that the US apologize for its interference in deposing Mosaddeq after the oil crisis. Perhaps of equal importance to the revolutionaries (similar to McVeigh's and Aum Shinrikyo's chosen targets) was the fact that the embassy was viewed by many Iranians as a symbol of foreign oppression—"a Western spy-center."[37] Sixty-six American hostages were taken, fifty-two of which were held for a total of 444 days before they were released.

The most important result of the hostage situation, for our purposes, was its formative effect on the Western consciousness in dealing with Islamic extremism. The Iranian revolution is widely recognized as the event that spurred the widespread American fear of Islamic terrorism—popularizing the idea of Islam as a force of violence. According to Fawaz A. Gerges, Professor International Affairs at Sarah Lawrence College, "It was under the impact of the Iranian revolution… that Islamism replaced secular nationalism as a security threat to U.S. interests, and fear of a clash between Islam and the West crystallized in the minds of Americans."[38] This conflict, involving betrayal, US negotiations with "terrorists," 444 days of humiliation, and Khomeini's characterization of the West as "The Great Satan," left a deep impact on the American awareness of the Middle East and continues to frame current conflicts. As stated by

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[36]Khomeini supposedly was not aware of the student organization's plan, but later gave it his support.

[37]Radio Tehran analysis, *No Room for Leniency* (November 12, 1979), cited in Rubin, 108.

[38] Gerges, 42.

Gerges "The politics of Islam were confused with the politics of Iran, with many Americans unable to imagine relations with an Islamist government in which the United States was not cast in the role of the great Satan."[39]

The Iranian Revolution is a case of Defensive Reconstructionism that gathered enough momentum to take over a nation. Among other factors, the revolution was an attempt to defend against foreign influence, both in a literal sense of foreign intervention, and in a cultural sense of disenfranchisement and distance from traditional spirituality. Khomeini and the revolutionaries exhibited a desire to return to traditional, home-grown values. Also, the revolution reacted to a government perceived to have close ties to the West that benefit only the elite. As with the Sicarii's assassination of Jewish leaders, the revolutionaries accused the Shah's government of fulfilling its own desires and those of the West rather than fulfilling its duty to society. Similar to the reasons Aum Sharinkiyo targeted the modernized business class, and the Muslim Brotherhood assassinated Sadat, the Iranian Revolution attacked their own "corrupted" society from within. Furthermore, as we have seen, the Iranian revolution was key in establishing the way the West views Islamic Extremism today—with confusion, anxiety, and fear.

Osama bin-Laden:
Spokesman of modern-day extremism

This fear was realized and further reinforced on September 11th 2001. When commercial airplanes were used to attack the US from within, America itself was taken hostage by fear. That day, glued to television sets as the awesome footage was replayed again and again, Americans were under attack by faceless enemies in airplanes. The pressing questions of "Who?" and "Why?" were soon answered by the incrimination of a

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[39] Gerges, 45.

man who would come to represent everything Americans feared about Islamic Extremism; A man who—unfortunately—became a leading representative of Islam in the eyes of the West.

The fact is often overlooked, however, that Osama bin Laden's career did not begin with attacks on the West itself as on September 11th or with the 1998 American embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. His dissent began much in the same way as did Qutb's or Khomeini's—an internal opposition to a "corrupted" system of governance in his home country.

The case of Saudi Arabia has key differences from Iran and Egypt that isolate its example of Defensive Reconstructionism in the Middle East. The most notable difference—a *huge* difference—is that Saudi Arabia was never under Western colonial occupation as Egypt had been. In contrast with Iran, Saudi Arabia was not subject to foreign occupation and the implementation of a foreign-supported leader. Thus, the country has remained relatively untouched by direct Western political and cultural influence. This factor cannot be overstated in its importance in the development of Saudi Arabia's society and government. As stated by Kilip Hiro:

> Since Saudi Arabia had undergone neither Western colonization nor governance by a local Westernized elite, which regarded the West as being the pace-setter in all endeavors of life, Saudi monarchs genuinely believed that as a social-moral system Islam was superior to any other.[40]

Therefore, Saudi Arabia did not go through a rush to incorporate Western systems and values as we have seen with other cases. Saudi Arabia has remained grounded in its traditional culture and governmental system with little interference. The ruling Saud

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[40] Dilip Hiro, *War Without End: The Rise of Islamist Terrorism and Global Response* (London: Routledge, 2002), 128.

family is deeply rooted in the nation's history rather than having been imposed by an

outside power. While the ruling family is well known for opulence, financial corruption,

and occasional scandal, there has never been a nation-wide movement to oust the regime

as in the case of Iran. Even when the 1973 oil embargo[41] helped to create a wealthy,

educated middle class who were still excluded from politics by the ruling class (strikingly

similar to pre-revolutionary Iran), there was still no mass revolutionary resistance.[42]

Defensive Reconstructionism demands a return to traditional systems. This is

rather difficult to implement in Saudi Arabia as its government is deeply rooted in

traditional Islam. Deemed "The oldest fundamentalist state" by Dilip Hiro,[43] there is not

really enough deviation from the traditional system to warrant reconstruction. The state

even has a longtime policy of having no state constitution as many Saudi kings have held

that "the Quran is the oldest and the most efficient of the world's constitutions."[44]

Furthermore, the Saud regime tactfully shares a good deal of domestic power with the

traditional *ulema'* in the realm of education, public morality, and other traditional

authorities—keeping a balanced relationship in contrast with the Shah's Iran.[45] As one

can see, there's not much room for reconstruction in the realm of social and religious

traditionalism, hence the lack of a national movement of Defensive Reconstrutionism.

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[41] When President Nixon requested $2.2 billion of military assistance to Israel in 1973, Arab oil producers placed an embargo on oil shipments to the US and cut back on production to reduce the amount of oil on the market. This resulted in a large profit for Saudi Arabia, and a substantial increase in the purchasing power of many Saudi citizens.

[42] Cleveland, 448.

[43] Hiro, 113.

[44] Ibid., 123.

[45] Cleveland, 446.

Nevertheless, due to the regime's opulence and close ties to the West, some groups have denounced the Saud regime as un-Islamic. In 1979, the Grand Mosque of Mecca was seized by a group of militants to protest corruption in the Saudi government and the *ulema'*. The militants held the mosque for two weeks, using its massive prayer-call speaker-system to broadcast anti-government messages. According to Cleveland, the militants were mostly young people and "university dropouts, who had been marginalized by modernization."[46] The seizure of Islam's holiest site attracted world-wide attention. Among those captivated by the event was a 22-year-old Osama bin Laden, an educated civil engineer who was inspired by the resistance of Muslims who had "followed a true path."[47]

That year, bin Laden left for Afghanistan to fight a Soviet invasion, where it is often speculated (but not officially proven) that bin Laden may have been given CIA military training. Regardless, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia as a military hero. Years later, during the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia became increasingly nervous about an Iraqi invasion. Bin Laden, through his close connection with the royal family, proposed that the Prince employ 30,000 of Bin Laden's war-experienced Afghani Arabs to protect the Islamic homeland against Saddam Hussein. The prince rejected the plan, and instead opted for American military support.[48]

It was this decision that created the bin Laden we know today. The presence of foreign troops in Islam's holy nation was seen by bin Laden, and many other Muslims, as

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[46] Ibid., 447.

[47] Hiro, 142.

[48] Ibid., 160.

an affront to Islam. The Prophet Muhammad's last injunction was that no two religions

exist in Arabia. This call to spread the word of Islam and to create religious unity was

interpreted by bin Laden as a divine mandate against foreign occupation. Moreover, the

American troops did not leave after the Gulf War as promised. Thus, drawing heavily on

Qutb's ideology, bin Laden had the fuel he needed to denounce the Saudi regime as

illegitimate, and begin his campaign against Saudi rule and the Western powers that

defiled Islam's holy land. In his published declaration of war on the US and Saudi

Arabia, bin Laden cited the regime's failure to respect Islam and alliance with the West

as cause for resistance:

> Through its course of actions the regime has torn [up] its legitimacy:
> 1. Suspension of the Islamic *Shari'a* law and exchanging it [for] man-made civil law…
> 2. The inability of the regime to protect the country, and allowing the enemy of the *umma*[49]—the American crusader forces—to occupy the land for the longest of years. The crusader forces became the main cause of our disastrous condition, particularly in the economical aspect due to the unjustified heavy spending on these forces. As a result of the policy imposed on the country, especially in the…oil industry, where production is restricted or expanded and prices are fixed to suit the American economy, ignoring the economy of the country [that produced the oil].[50]

Here, bin Laden asserted that in allying themselves with the US, and though their

generally corrupt regime, the Saudi government as well as the *ulema'* had embraced

"man-made" law—violating tradition. In accordance with the Sirarii ideology, bin Laden

demanded "No Lord but God," or rather, no law but God's law in accordance with

Khomeini. The presence of US troops was framed as a foreign occupation—

characterizing the troops as "crusader-Americans" (one of bin Laden's favorite terms for

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[49] *Umma* (أمة), "Community of Believers" for bin Laden, the Islamic World.

[50] Osama bin Ladin, *Declaration of War* (August 1996), cited in Rubin, 137.

the US), calling Muslims to defend against this conspiracy of colonial imperialism. At the same time, bin Laden accused the Saudi-run economic system as benefiting the foreign power rather than the Muslim people. Thus, in accordance with Qutb's call to oppose non-Islamic regimes, bin Laden commanded all "true" Muslims to resist the Saudi rulers and their ties to the West.

The Gulf War was viewed by many Muslims as evidence that the West was aiming to re-colonize the Middle East.[51] Infidels on Islam's holiest ground were an affront to Muslims around the globe. Bin Laden, from his exile rallied mass support by appealing across sectarian boundaries in an attempt to unite the Islamic world against the West. According to Barry Rubin:

> What characterizes bin Ladin is his pan-Islamic stance, which does not recognize internal divisions in the *umma,* [and] his sense of grievance over its weakness and its continued humiliation at the hands of the West. His capabilities in administration and technical matters, as well as his charisma, motivating powers and ability to form alliances across a wide spectrum of ideologies, have placed him at the forefront of radical Islamists…[52]

Thus bin Laden draws on the history of a unified, ideal, Islam in an attempt to unite the Islamic World against a common enemy. It seems an unlikely goal, but just as Germany and Japan were allies around a common goal of Defensive Reconstructionsim, bin Laden, in the future, may also be able to find an unlikely but deadly ally whose aversion to the West or to the modern may provide common cause.

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[51] Rubin, 26.

[52] Ibid.

Like Khomeini and Qutb, bin Laden views American influence as detrimental to Islamic youth, rendering them subservient. Through American media and cultural influence, in his view, a generation is being lost to modernity.

> …we acquired a generation of people seeking education who had not experienced the reality of *jihad,* and they have been influenced by the American culture and media invasion that stormed the Muslim countries. Without even participating in a military war, we find this generation has already been psychologically beaten.[53]

Like Ashara, or Qutb before him, Bin Laden has set up an absolute polarization between spiritual Islam and the empty West. "These incidents divided the entire world into two regions—one of faith where there is no hypocrisy and another of infidelity, from which we hope God will protect us."[54] Bin Laden attributes the fact that none of his followers has ever attempted to betray him, even though the US has placed a $5 million bounty on his head, to this dichotomy of moral character. Bin Laden does not fear this bounty due to what he sees as a fundamental difference between his followers who are loyal to their spiritual ideology (*jihad)* and American materialism:

> These men left the world and came to these mountains and land, leaving their families, fathers and mothers. These men left the world and came for the *jihad*. America however, which worships money, believes that people here are of their caliber. I swear that we have not had the need to change a single man from his position even after these reports [of the bounty] were made.[55]

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[53] Osama bin Laden, *Interview with Usama bin Ladin* (December 1998), cited in Rubin, 155.

[54] Osama bin Laden, *Bin Laden's Warning: Full Text.* Broadcast BBC News (October 7, 2001). http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1585636.stm (Accessed April 9, 2007).

[55] Osama bin Laden, *Interview,* Rubin, 156.

In reaction to the September 11th attacks, bin Laden denounced the US for not taking its own actions into account. Bin Laden characterized September 11th as a long overdue reaction to American oppression and violence upon the Islamic world:

> What happened on September 11 is nothing but a reaction to the continuing injustice being done to our children in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, southern Sudan, its entirety. This is something that requires people to rise from their slumber and rush to find a solution to this disaster, which threatens mankind.[56]

The symbolic aspect of targeting the World Trade Center in New York holds haunting similarities to McVeigh and Aum Sirinkyo. Bin Laden could have chosen to attack a military target, even one within Saudi Arabia which may have furthered his cause of ousting the American "occupation." Instead, bin Laden struck out at a symbol of modern economics and power. He chose the center of modern world economic power as his stage and his victims were the "cogs" that operated the American machine. As bin Laden said himself "The real targets were America's icons of military and economic power."[57]

While bin Laden has not been able to mobilize the same support as Khomeini, the simple fact that he is an Islamic figure who stands up to the West has made him an ideological hero for Islamic fundamentalists worldwide. In the same way other charismatic figures, such as Asahara or Khomeini, attracted a following, bin Laden's rhetoric may appeal to many Muslims who feel disenfranchised and humiliated by Western hegemony and feel marginalized by the modern systems that perpetuate that power. While still denounced as illegitimate by most Muslims, bin Laden remains a

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[56] Osama bin Laden, *Dawn Interview with Usama bin Ladin* (November 10, 2001) cited in Rubin, 261. (*Dawn* is a Pakistani Newspaper).

[57] Ibid., Osama bin Laden,

dangerous influence in Defensive Reconstructionsim—advocating extreme violence to reconstruct a true Islamic society at any cost.

While they come from different nations and sects of Islam, all of the figures in this chapter have significantly influenced world history through Defensive Reconstructionism. Each of the figures sought to defend Islam from the secular forces of modernism and the foreign cultural influence of the West. Reacting to histories of foreign colonialism, intervention, and occupation, these figures aimed to reconstruct a traditional Islamic system in which their people could thrive and reconnect with their true culture and spiritual calling.

CHAPTER 3
Why Islam?

In light of the previous cases, Islamic extremism fits into the spectrum of

Defensive Reconstructionist movements that have occurred throughout the world,

history, and religions. But the point remains that the Islamic branch of this extremism

accounts for many of the most widespread and violent reactions against modernity and

the West itself. Why is this so? Why does Islamic culture seem so particularly reactive

today? What is the attraction between Defensive Reconstuctionism and modern-day

Islamic culture?

As mentioned, many believe that the problem is inherent to Islam itself, especially

in dealing with "terrorism"—the most extreme form of Defensive Reconstructionsim.

This view is a gross oversimplification, which, sadly, often stems from general ignorance

and preconceptions that blur many non-Muslims' vision when it comes to Islam. Vague

terminologies such as "Islamism," or boiling events down to "religiously inspired

terrorism," as if they had no outside motivation, add to these misconceptions. Eager to

compartmentalize the issue as simply and efficiently as possible, terrorist activity is

framed by some as a necessary outcome of being a Muslim. As expressed by Nigerian

Priest and scholar Ferdinand Nwaigbo, "Terrorism is inseparable from religious ideology,

especially from the Islamic religion."[1] Like many before him, Nwaigbo framed the

September 11th attacks as a consequence of the Muslim religion: "The aim of the suicide-

attackers sprang from a false religious ideology based on the [Islamic] tenets of Holy

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[1] Ferdinand Nwaigbo, "The American War on Terrorism in the 21st Century," in
African Ecclesial Review 48, no 2 (June 2006): 48.

War—the idea or theory of killing others and destroying innocent fellow human beings, all in the name of Allah."[2] While the September 11th terrorists were convinced their actions would please God, God's pleasure was not their sole inspiration (according to bin Laden's previous statement[3]). So while perspectives such as Nwaigbo's are, in a sense, correct from a simplistic standpoint—religion *was* used—the implication that Islam demands terrorism like some sort of animal sacrifice to please a hungry god blocks out the multitude of other factors seen through the lens of Defensive Reconstructionsim.

Furthermore, if Islam is the true cause of terrorism, then it is odd that the vast majority of its followers are not being very good Muslims, as they are not currently involved in blowing up themselves or others. As terrorism is apparently "inseparable" from Islam, these Muslims are obviously ignoring the *true* calling of their faith— something must be wrong with all of these peaceful Muslims. Along with the media and simplistic scholars, many Islamic extremists also attempt to couple Islam with violence. Osama bin Laden claims that it is every Muslim's duty to oppose the West, and kill Americans by any means necessary.[4] But once again, the majority of the Muslim world seems to disagree. Apparently, *extremists such as bin Laden are not the executors of Islam.* As we can see, the "Islam causes terrorism" view does not accurately address the

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[2] Ibid.

[3] As cited in Chapter 2: "What happened on September 11 is nothing but a reaction to the continuing injustice being done to our children in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, southern Sudan, its entirety. This is something that requires people to rise from their slumber and rush to find a solution to this disaster, which threatens mankind." in Rubin, 261. Note that "destroying innocent fellow human beings, all in the name of Allah" conspicuously absent.

[4] Rubin, 42.

situation at all, leaving anyone trying seriously to understand extremism with a false impression of its causes.

Islam itself is not the *cause* of the problem. If it is, there is a conspicuous lack of a world-wide movement of Islamic extremism. So why does only a fraction of the Muslim population interpret its religion as a call for violence? Since, as we have seen, these extremist movements emerge out of some Islamic contexts, but not others, the answer must be in the context rather than in Islam. The question, therefore, is not "What is it about Islam that it lends itself to interpretations of violent extremism?" But, rather, *"What is it about a specific context that causes these interpretations to flourish?"*

As exemplified by our case studies, the answer, while not pivoting on a single variable, relies heavily on the factors that can lead to violent movements of Defensive Reconstructioinism. Dealing specifically with Islamic extremism, Defensive Reconstructionism finds its causes in accordance with Shireen Hunter's "Neo-Third Worldist" approach, which views "the latest wave of the Islamic resurgence not as the consequences of Islam's peculiarities but rather as a combination of economic deprivation, social alienation and political disfranchisement,"[5] Defensive Reconstructionism takes all of these factors into account in dealing with the causes of extremism in the Middle Eastern context—but adds one emphatic factor—*cultural disfranchisement resulting from a long history of abrasive foreign influence.*

We must not forget history, especially that of the Colonial era. The fact that, at the peak of colonialism, various European empires controlled a majority of the non-European

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[5] Shireen T. Hunter, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilizations or Peaceful Coexistence?* (London: Praeger, 1998), 71.

world[6]—rapidly introducing total societal reconstruction with little regard for existing social systems—cannot be overplayed in its culturally disenfranchising effects. In times of little Western influence, The Muslim world thrived as a center of progressive world culture, philosophy, and technology—a golden era of Islamic rule. At the peak of the Islamic Empires,[7] their culture would have been considered much more progressive and "modern" when compared to Europe at the time. It was the Arabs who preserved the writings of Aristotle and Socrates when such philosophical writings were all but eliminated in Europe by zealous Christian fundamentalism. However, after the break up of the Islamic empires in the era of Western colonialism and two World Wars, the Middle East was left in shambles. Muslims are aware of this history, and oftentimes, this decline in Islamic cultural parity is viewed as a consequence of Western intervention and influence—turning away from the Islamic rule that characterized the golden age of Islam. In light of this past, it is plain to see why a people attempting to recover an authentic, organic culture would aim to reconstruct the ideal Islamic society of old, making sure to defend their culture, at any cost, from further influence of Western modernization.

Islam's link to Defensive Reconstructionsim stems from these abrasive encounters with Western modernism—through colonialism, and today, through globalization and increasingly pervasive Western political, cultural, and economic hegemony. As the world, undeniably, starts to look more and more like the West,

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[6] While not every country in the world was under European rule, most *areas* of the world (especially Africa, the Middle east, and the Americas) have had some history of colonial rule—excluding some of East Asia (China, Japan) and the USSR (which was in a sense, a Russian Empire).

[7] Approximately 1400-1699 CE were the peak centuries of Islamic power under the Ottoman Empire.

Defensive Reconstructionism offers an alternative. It is an organic ideology of tradition, authenticity, and resistance.

CONCLUSION

The New Lens:
Ceasing to blame the airplanes

Fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism are issues of vast complexity. Attempting to deal with the issues through single variable equations—such as incriminating a religion—will not lead to an understanding and will *never* lead to a solution. In the same way, Defensive Reconstructionism is not the end-all cause that will explain all acts of violence and extremism in a culture. While it is a useful lens through which to view the type of fundamentalism we have dealt with, there are some situations in which the lens of Defensive Reconstructionism will *not* work.

As mentioned earlier, in the case of World War II, Defensive Reconstructionism is not meant to explain expansionist ideologies in which a nation aims to *spread* its culture, power, and political influence. Defensive Reconstructionism motivates groups to *defend* or *restore* a native culture, but the lens starts to go out of focus when a nation tries to forcefully spread that culture. In this way, Defensive Reconstructionism will not explain the spread of the Ottoman Empire, American manifest destiny, European Imperialism, or Nazism. It also cannot be stated that through globalization, the West is engaging in Defensive Reconstructionism to "defend" its political, economic, and cultural influence. This is a misuse of the term. While expansionist movements may draw heavily on Defensive Reconstructionism in their rhetoric and ideologies, power is the motivation behind expansionism, not restoring tradition.

Also, certain geo-political conflicts are not necessarily applicable to Defensive Reconstructionism, especially in the establishment of new nations or conflicts over national boundaries. As we have seen, Defensive Reconstructionism is usually a force behind ousting foreign influence from a traditionally established nation. In this way, conflicts in areas such as the former Yugoslavia, Kashmir, or even Israel/Palestine[8] are not necessarily within the scope of this lens. While Defensive Reconstructionism may help to clarify some of the traditionalist motivations behind the movements, or (as in Israel/Palestine) the religious and cultural polarizations used by extremists to reinforce nationalism, these are not specifically movements to oust a foreign influence as much as they are geo-political—which is often a different type of conflict entirely.

Perhaps most importantly, Defensive Reconstructionism is not meant to *explain* the acts of extremists in the sense of justification. Extremists, by definition, exist outside the box, and often, outside the realm of reason. While Defensive Reconstructionism helps us to understand the motivations that drive some extremists and how they may be able to mobilize a following, it does not normalize their actions. They remain at the extremes of Defensive Reconstructionism. Extreme violence and terrorism are not justified by the fact that they stem from a sense of disenfranchisement or marginalization. The fact that it is an act of cultural desperation does not outweigh the fact that reckless, brutal violence is unjustifiable from any side of the conflict. Extremists, especially terrorists, are often

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[8] Zionism could be considered Defensive Reconstructionism as it deals with a desire to return to the holy land of Jewish tradition. But the Palestinian desire to return to their homeland can be considered a movement of Defensive Reconstructionism in the same way. This case, however, requires further study and modifications to the lens to take into account the plethora of complications of Israel/Palestine. In the end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict demands a new lens all its own.

motivated by power, glory, twisted religious interpretations, and most likely, deep psychological conflict.[9] Defensive Reconstructionism does not serve to moralize terror. It does, however, emphasize the examination of an extremist's *context*, which is essential to any understanding of the roots of that terror.

Finally, the lens of Defensive Reconstructionism is certainly not meant to *leave out* religion as a factor in extremism. Religion can act as an integral part of the justification and mobilization of Defensive Reconstructionism, especially in Islamic extremism. In order to understand Islamic extremism, we *must* understand the aspects of the religion through which extremists attempt to justify their cause. This may be the most useful tool in understanding and confronting Islamic extremism. A real understanding of Islam will allow us to see just how far extremists have twisted the religion. This understanding will help to delegitimize extremists as religious figures, and we will be able join a significant portion of the Muslim world in realizing that the violence of many extremist groups is more aptly labeled *un*-Islamic extremism. Religion *cannot* be ignored in Defensive Reconstructionism. It would be like taking yeast out of a recipe for bread (as religion truly is often the ingredient that significantly expands these movements). But in the end, you cannot make bread out of yeast alone. In this way, we must be highly skeptical of anyone that claims Islam is the driving force behind this extremism.

In a sense, blaming Islam for terrorism is like blaming the airplanes for the attacks of September 11th. After all, the attacks would not have happened without the airplanes. The towers would not have fallen and the victims would still be alive today. So why doesn't anyone blame the airplanes? The answer is simple: it would be ludicrous to blame

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[9] For further information on the psychological motivations behind an individual's tendencies for extremism, see Richardson, 38.

the tool for how a person used it. The irony is that anyone can recognize the stupidity of blaming the airplanes, yet many continue to blame Islam. Like the airplanes, Islam was a vehicle through which a group of extremists unleashed its terror—it did not create that terror. As New York resident Dr. Faiz Khan put it, "Islam was hijacked on that day."[10]

Now that we can view extremism through the lens of Defensive Reconstructionism, we can see the wide spectrum of its causes. It is a resistance to the proliferation of a foreign, "mechanical" culture that goes against tradition. It is an attempt to exhume that tradition, which is often buried under years of rapidly imported modernism. It is the reaction of a people desperately trying to reconstruct society through a return to spiritual, organic, cultural tradition.

Though it is not a justification for violence, Defensive Reconstructionism can help us see the tangible motivations behind such actions instead of dismissing extremists as madmen driven solely by some quizzical, unbendable religious fervor. We have seen in Defensive Reconstructionism, that religion can be used to justify acts of horrible violence. But we have also seen that no religion is immune to this perversion, and such interpretations are the ideologies of minority factions. Ultimately, we can see that *no* religion or culture can be judged through its most extreme acts of Defensive Reconstructionism.

If anything, Defensive Reconstructionism is a lens that lets in more light— multiple variables—allowing us to see more clearly that which motivates extremism. Through this lens, we can finally begin to ask the right questions: What is the context of a particular movement of Defensive Reconstructionism, and why is it surfacing a particular

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[10] Faiz Khan, quoted in "Tomorrow's Islam." ABC (Australia) news: *Religion & Ethics*. http://www.abc.net.au/religion/stories/s978445.htm. (Accessed April 9th 2007).

time? What is causing the marginalization and cultural disenfranchisement of this particular group? What factors have, and will continue to lead to violent movements of Defensive Reconstructionism, and can they be avoided? As a result, instead of rushing to prescribe Western "modernization" as an end-all solution—like an emergency shipment of culture for those who have none, or use the wrong one—we can find solutions that allow culturally disenfranchised groups to participate in world affairs while still preserving their right to connect to an authentic sense of culture. At the least, through the lens of Defensive Reconstructionism, we can conceptualize extremism for what it truly is, and stop trying to solve the problems by blaming the airplanes.

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       Ian Buruma, who studied Japanese and Chinese history, literature, and cinema before starting a career as an international journalist and is currently a professor at Bard College in New York, paired up with Avishai Margalit, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Hebrew University of Jerusalem to write this book. In defining Occidentalism, the authors focused on "the dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies" and aimed to examine the historical roots of this apparent prejudice. In accordance with my thesis, the authors demonstrate that this "Occidentalism" is not particular to Islam and has roots and histories in other cultures as well.

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    Hunter is Visiting Fellow at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at
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the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Hunter takes the ("Neo-Third Worldist") position
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