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# Ideological Shifts and Structural Changes of Al Qaeda

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## **Acknowledgements**

*At the time when I started to write this paper at the end of my study abroad in The Netherlands in April 2003 I was convinced, that – after the events of September 11 and the subsequent actions and interventions taken by the U.S. and their allies – the author of those terrifying attacks, a terrorist organization being referred to as ‘Al Qaeda’, had undergone a basic ideological shift both unique in its own history and in the history of radical Islamist groups at large. Affected by the novelty of the attacks and astonished by the subsequent disclosure of their planning and carrying out by some individuals that had been leading a double life in Western societies, I had no doubt that the ideology that had motivated those terrorists to sacrifice their own lives and the lives of civilians in Western heartlands, was of an exclusively apocalyptic kind.*

*Now, having seen what further effects those events have had on both global and regional politics one-and-a-half years later – following the argumentation of the U.S. and their allies in reference to tackle international terrorism, recalling their argumentation before the invasion of Iraq and their strategies of coping with insurgents after the regime-change, as well as being shocked by the uninterrupted series of new terrorist acts performed both in Muslim and in Western countries that are revealing more and more a superior pattern or goal –, I partly revised my initial opinion about the ideological motives that were and are driving those terrorists: It is not an exclusively apocalyptic ideology. Still, in some respect, it differs from the former – but still valid – utopian outlook of realizing ‘the expected society’ in Muslim heartlands. Therefore, I would call it an apocalyptic-utopian ideology. This modification of my opinion is expressed in the present paper.*

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## Introduction

This paper takes an unbiased look at the ideology of Al Qaeda and its predeceasing organizations. In particular it tries to put the information collected by Rohan Gunaratna, a specialist on terrorism, about this “first multinational terrorist group of the twenty-first century” (Gunaratna 2002: 1) into the framework of Bassam Tibi’s general analysis of ‘Islamic fundamentalist’ ideology.<sup>1</sup> To bring some order into the various strains, origins, and interrelations of ‘Islamic ideology’ the paper profits especially from Amin Saikal’s historical-political analysis of the ‘conflict or cooperation’ between the ‘domain of Islam’ and ‘the West’. The paper tries to answer the following questions: What kind of ideology does Al Qaeda advocate in essence? Can the organization best be described as an ideological, utopian, and/or rather apocalyptic group? In what respect has the organization’s ideology undergone changes since the early 1990s, and possibly with/after September 11?

The paper is structured into three parts. Chapter 1 introduces the subject, trying to clear up the relation between radical Islamism and modernism. Chapter 2 presents Tibi’s thesis of ‘semi-modernity’, an utopian ‘condition’ that according to him contemporary radical Islamist, or ‘modern Islamic fundamentalist’ ideologues and activists seek to realize. The paper then takes a look at the contribution of some key ideologues and activists to the phenomenon of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’.

Chapter 3 summarizes Gunaratna’s findings about Al Qaeda. Referring to its leadership, targets, and strategies, he distinguishes three main phases in the establishment of the organization. Chapter 4 identifies Al Qaeda’s ideology to be not only of a *‘jihadi’*, but also of a substantial modernist kind. Two major ideological shifts are detected during its establishment. Those ideological shifts are then connected with some structural changes that the organization has undergone to date, and will possibly undergo in the future.

Finally, chapter 5 tries to determine some implications of the findings that could help to improve the counterterrorist strategies Western countries have come up with to date, as well as start a promising dialogue between the ‘domain of Islam’ and ‘the West’.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a debate about the term that could apply to all the different sorts of movements that connect themselves with Islam. For a German speaker – like Bassam Tibi – it is essential *not* to use the German terms *‘Islamist’* and *‘Islamismus’* as superterms for them. When Tibi uses the term ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, it matches to the term ‘radical Islamism’, as for instance Amin Saikal uses it – and as I will use it in this paper, too. With reference to organizations like Al Qaeda Tibi identifies a new strain of ‘Islamic ideology’, which he calls *‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’*. To retain the context of his argumentation I will use this term (put in quotation marks), too – despite of its linguistic, in content, however, inappropriate resemblance to the term ‘neo-fundamentalist Islamism’, that for instance applies to the ideology of the Taliban.

## 1. Radical Islamism and modernity

In an essay in autumn 2002, Charles Kurzman wrote: “As the United States wages war on terrorism, media coverage has portrayed the radical Islamism exemplified by Osama bin Laden as medieval, reactionary, and eager to return the Islamic world to its seventh century roots.” (Kurzman 2002: 13) The essence of Kurzman’s statement is that radical Islamists – like the leading figures of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda – may not be mixed with traditionalists such as the Taliban of Afghanistan. Kurzman rather gets to the conclusion that those radical Islamists are modernists in fact. This statement not only refers to their – by media coverage well portrayed – use of modern technologies and methods of warfare to reach their goals, but also to the goals themselves. As Kurzman puts it, their “goal is to ‘Islamicize modernity’, [...] to forge an alternative modernity that combines basic elements of modernity with selected elements of Islamic heritage” (ibid.: 17). The question, however, is how this ‘alternative modernity’, or – using Tibi’s terminology – this ‘semi-modernity’, may look like?

First, it is necessary to take a distinct look at the historical roots of radical Islamism in general. Those roots have to be situated in the historical relationship between Islam and Europe. In the Middle Age and during the Ottoman period, Islam was superior to the West. The military defeat of the Turks in Vienna in 1683, however, put an end to the Islamic project of conquering the world.<sup>2</sup> The ‘decline of the East and the rise of the West’ (M. P. Aminéh) manifested itself not only in the evolution of modern science and technology, but also in the European concept of the ‘cultural modernity’, out of which the principle of subjectivity and an anthropocentric world view emerged. The individualistic principles of the European Enlightenment opposed the Islamic concept of universalism and its theocentric world view. Whereas nowadays reactions out of the Muslim world to this conceptual conflict are often reduced to – not to diminish the terrifying effects they can have – violent social forces with the intention to purge Islam from Western influences (‘traditionalist’, ‘puritanical’, and/or ‘neo-fundamentalist Islamists’), in those days the Muslim call was rather to compete with the West by acquiring the knowledge of modern science and technology and, in doing so, to imitate the Western concept to a certain point. The dilemma, however, how far to imitate and where to make concessions, actually exists for Muslims to date. The attempts over the last three centuries to establish a ‘semi-modernity’, a condition

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<sup>2</sup> Tibi refers to that project as the “*first project of conquering the world in history*” (Tibi 2002: 47; accentuations by BT).

that could unify the theocentric world view with the material achievements of the scientific modernity, while avoiding the products of the cultural modernity, not only failed but even led to an intensification of the internal crisis of Islam. The failure of Islamic reform – both modernist and reactionary – to come up with a genuine and working concept as how to cope with modernity and emerging social change, finally contributed to the rise of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’. Tibi emphasizes that this

fundamentalism is neither a neo-traditionalism nor a ‘renaissance of religion’, because its primary goal is a *new* shaping of the *political* world order. Religious fundamentalism, like its Islamic variety shows, is a *political* ideology, that has arisen from the confrontation with modernity. (Tibi 2002: 241; accentuations AA)

Radical Islamists want to reshape the order between sovereign states that had been established after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. In the aftermath of the French Revolution those states had developed into nation states, and the European expansion had led to the global spreading of this system. Tibi states that “above all the wave of decolonization following the Second World War has led to the globalisation of this originally European system of states” (ibid.: 242). In their fight against colonial suppression a majority of the anti-colonial movements at that time advocated the European concept of the nation state with its values and norms. These developments sped up the rise of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’. Contemporary radical Islamists claim that those secular, anti-colonial movements have virtually betrayed the ‘domain of Islam’<sup>3</sup> to ‘the West’ and its secular socio-political order by neglecting Islam’s fundamental combination of religious *and* socio-political rules.

## 2. ‘Modern Islamic fundamentalist’ ideology

The ideological foundations of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’ could be assumed to be as manifold and differing as the large variety of groups generally referred to as ‘radical Islamist groups’. However, it is possible to bring some order into this complexity by looking at the origin of those groups (and their leaders and members), and by focusing on the influences – both historical and personal – they possibly have been exposed to in the course of their development.

First, let us have a look at their motivations, interests, and goals. The question is, what do ‘modern Islamic fundamentalists’ want to achieve? If their goal is to ‘reshape the political world order’, as Tibi put it, what would this new order look like? In media coverage, and in contemporary ‘popular’ literature about the ‘new’ phenomenon of terrorism one still finds time and again statements that all those contemporary radical Islamists want

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<sup>3</sup> The term refers to both Islam as religion *and* as community of the Muslim people.

to revive the seventeenth century caliphate. Is this true? In the case of Al Qaeda it is not correct at all, as I will point out in Chapter 4. Moreover, Tibi sets off in principle that this modern kind of “fundamentalism doesn’t strive vor the re-establishment of the caliphate” (Tibi 2002: 242), as we will see in Chapter 2.2. He rather argues that

modern Islamic fundamentalism represents a *fully new*, contemporary synthesis between religion and politics [...]. [...] it is a new phenomenon in modern Islam, that is not comparable to the classical connection between politics and religion in early and medieval Islam. (ibid.; accentuation AA)

In contrast to that argumentation Tibi expands his thesis of the ‘semi-modernity’, a ‘condition’ that, according to him, ‘modern Islamic fundamentalist’ ideologues and activists *in fact* seek to realize. And he reckons such a ‘condition’ to be utopian, since a combination of the “institutional-instrumental modernity with medieval theology” (ibid.: 55) could neither be achieved nor sustain because of some basic internal contradictions.

## 2.1 In search of a ‘semi-modernity’

We have seen that Tibi proceeds from the basic statement that ‘religious fundamentalism’ – in whatever religion – is the consequence of a missing coping with modernity. In Europe, the cultural and institutional modernity had developed from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, parallel to the “genesis of the West as civilization” (Tibi 2002: 46).<sup>4</sup> On the basis of this process, the military revolution took place, allowing the West to achieve a state of global supremacy. At the beginning of the “competition between jihad and crusade” (ibid.: 47), the Islamic civilization was superior to the West. With the dawn of the new era of modernity in Europe, however, Islam tended to be on the losing side, what led to a general feeling of deep insecurity among Muslims. As a consequence of that development, Tibi makes out two different kind of reactions in the Muslim world: first, the formation of ‘*wahhabiyya*’ (‘Wahhabism’) as an utmost reactionary interpretation of orthodox Islam, launched in eigteenth century Arabia by Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), and second, the efforts toward a modernist reform of Islam, undertaken by the Afghani–Iranian ‘modernist’ and ‘anti-imperialist’ Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), and by the Egyptian ‘modernist’ Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> In my opinion Tibi uses the term ‘civilization’ not in a so cultural-essentialist manner like for instance Samuel Huntington. In his book *The Clash between Civilizations* Huntington places ,religion’ as *the* (only) decisive factor determinating a ,civilization’. On the other hand, I doubt if Tibi’s concept corresponds fully with Senghaas, who argues that there aren’t any distinct ‘civilizations’ or ‘cultural regions’ nowadays, and that ‘cultures’ aren’t rigid, invariable structures at all (cf. Senghaas 2002). I consider that Tibi would agree to the latter, however, not to the former statement. Using the term ‘civilization’ in this paper myself, I am referring to Senghaas’ concept.

the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Reviving the argumentation of the medieval Islamic reformer Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) the Wahhabi strain of political Islam advocated extremism as the medium for revolutionary change. The modernist respectively liberal strain, on the other hand, opted for “an evolutionary process of change, in which education, not extremism, would play a central role” (Saikal 2003: 36).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, when both reactionary and modernist reform projects didn’t manage to solve the Muslim dilemma substantially, and after a “short secular interlude” (Tibi 2002: 47)<sup>6</sup>, it came to what Tibi defines as the rise of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’.

According to his argumentation, those newly emerged modern Islamic “fundamentalists are no traditionalists” (ibid.: 49). Rather, he thinks their guiding ideological concept is

to acquire the achievements of the modern era, though they refuse the rational human-oriented world view of the cultural modernity. The desire for a synthesis of pre-modern religious prescriptions and arbitrarily selected elements of modernity, that is for a contemporaneity of non-contemporarities [*‘Gleichzeitigkeit von Ungleichzeitigem’*, in German], represents the central problem of fundamentalists; they want to acquire the material goods of modernity, yet not its world view and its thought (among other things its pluralism, religious tolerance and individual human rights as well as its secularity). (ibid.)

Their goal and their attitudes toward modernity Tibi describes as follows:

The ideal condition for Islamic fundamentalists is the Islamic past and the prime Islam of the Prophet in particular. Therefore their utopia is turned backwards. On the other hand they don’t fail to see that the Islamic civilization cannot get along without knowledge and technology. (ibid.: 51)

The crisis Muslims are in, Tibi identifies as twofold: first, as a “structural”, and second, as a “civilizational identity crisis” (ibid.: 52). And as he concludes, in their “forlornness”, they – “most of them are townspeople, which have at least some basic school education” – tend

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that liberal Islam is by definition not a secular ideology, such as nationalism and socialism, and thus not identical with Western liberalism. Liberal Islam – as a third socio-religious interpretation of Islam besides customary and revivalist Islam – also calls upon the early period of Islam, but in the name of modernity. There are several versions of liberal Islam. One common element is the critique of both customary and revivalist Islam for their ‘backwardness’, which is claimed to have prevented the Islamic world from enjoying the benefits of modernity: democracy, legal rights etc. The liberal tradition argues that Islam is indeed compatible with Western liberalism. Liberal Islamic thinkers were present in anti-colonial movements in the 1920s and 1930s (cf. Muhammad Iqbal (North India, 1877–1938), also being referred to as the intellectual father of Pakistan). Since the 1970s, liberal Islam has enjoyed a renewed popularity (cf. Mehdi Bazargan (Iran, 1907–1995), Abd al-Karim Soroush (Iran, \*1945)).

<sup>6</sup> Tibi refers – as I assume – to the constitutional reforms in the Ottoman Empire (1876), and to the creation of the modern state of Turkey (1922), as well as to the constitutionalist revolution in Iran (1906), which was based on the theoretical works of the Iraq-Iranian ‘constitutionalist’ Muhammad Hussayn Gharawi Na’ini (1860–1936). In fact, state sponsorship in Iran and in the former Ottoman Empire had given the liberals a substantial advantage over their ‘theological’ opponents. Subsequently the new democracies, however, succumbed to the combined onslaught of revivalist Islam and secular military might.

to fall back on Islam as the panacea of their crisis, and “politicize their religion what results in the appearance of fundamentalism” (ibid.). He argues that

the cause for their misery contemporary Muslims find in the West that has created their disorientation. Hate arises as a result, and a corresponding ‘foe image of the West’. (ibid.)

And he continues that

beyond functioning as a vehicle for anti-Western attitudes Islamic fundamentalism can also function as a religious-political ideology of the opposition against existing regimes. (ibid.: 53)

Such attitudes are not outnumbered among Muslims. Having undertaken a systematic investigation relying on interviews of Muslims of different strains, Tibi comes to the following results: first, that today there are just a few among Muslims that reject modern science and technology altogether, second, parallel to their preservation of the organic Islamic world view, including all spheres of life, a majority – as far as they have some basic school education – pleads for the adoption of modern convenience, and third, that at the same time cultural modernity is rejected (v. ibid.: 54).<sup>7</sup> He comes to the remarkable conclusion that “the fundamentalist world view is forming the predominant attitude among today’s Muslims” (ibid.). As he puts it,

the rise of this world view not only correlates with the decline of all secular orientations in the world of Islam – which are mostly normative, that is without a social substratum –, but signifies also the decline of the modern tradition of an Islamic liberalism that got stuck at the very beginning, but nevertheless has been important, although there isn’t a significant trace of it left anymore. (ibid.)

Regarding Tibi’s conclusion it is important to distinguish between ‘world view fundamentalists’ on the one side, and ‘political fundamentalist activists’ – appearing today as ‘*jihadifighters*’ – on the other side. The former “are forming no minority in today’s reality” (ibid.), the latter, however, are clearly representing a minority.

Tibi’s concept of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’ becomes clear: ‘Modern Islamic fundamentalists’ preserve an ideology that is turned backwards, but they definitely are no traditionalists, “however much they are referring to the tradition and verbally aggressively are rejecting cultural modernity” (ibid.: 55). They rather

want to connect the institutional-instrumental modernity with medieval theology to realize by it their dream of a semi-modernity. (ibid.)

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<sup>7</sup> The results of this empirical investigation can be consulted in: Bassam Tibi (1992/2001): *Islamischer Fundamentalismus, moderne Wissenschaft und Technologie* (‘Islamic Fundamentalism, Modern Science, and Technology’). Frankfurt a.M., chapter V.

How exactly do they make this connection? Tibi argues that their “falling back on the golden past of Islam [...] serves instrumentally to the indictment of the [European] modernity” (ibid.: 56). To be clear, Tibi reduces it to the following formula:

The Islamic fundamentalism is a politicalization of Islam, and its primary content is a revolt against the West in the sense of a rejection of cultural modernity and its values. (ibid.)

Why, however, is fundamentalism the means to articulate the rejection of cultural modernity? To answer this question, Tibi turns toward the investigation of the ideological basis of fundamentalism. He finds that fundamentalists – called ‘*usuliyyun*’ (ibid.) in the Orient<sup>8</sup> – advocate a certain interpretation of Islam as ‘*din wa daula*’ (ibid.), that is ‘religion and state’ or ‘kingdom of God on earth’ (‘*Gottesstaat*’, in German) (ibid.). As he puts it,

this interpretation of religion as an integral world view [or ideology] aims at an absolute harmony of the political, social and economical life of Muslims with the religious prescriptions of Islam, as they are laid down in the *Koran* and in the tradition of the Prophet/*Hadith*. (ibid.: 56f; accentuations by BT)

‘Modern Islamic fundamentalists’ believe in the exclusive authority of the text and aim for its most suited application. As Tibi appropriately states, also orthodox Muslims are “among monotheists those, who believe in the exclusive and absolute truth of their revelation” (ibid.: 57), but as fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon, modern contents are projected into the sacred texts. As an example, Tibi refers to the fact that adherents of a fundamentalist interpretation of the texts of Islamic revelation are making political demands for an ‘*al-nizam al-Islami*’, an ‘Islamic system’ (ibid.). He states that this kind of political interpretation of Islam is truly new, also referring to the fact that “the term ‘*nizam*’ (‘system’), is a neologism” (ibid.). Consequently Tibi identifies *two* basic internal contradictions of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’:

As well as fundamentalists don’t see the inconsistency [‘*Antinomie*’, in German] of their thinking (accepting the conveniences of modernity, and at the same time rejecting the anthropocentric, rational world view, out of which the first have emerged), also the inconsistencies of their confessions – which are connected to the correlation ‘text–context’ – remain inaccessible to them. (ibid.)

The second contradiction I consider to be of major significance. It shows the basic internal weak point, why the fundamentalist concept of ‘semi-modernity’ cannot succeed. It is the contradiction between an interpretation, that projects modern contents selectively into old texts on the one hand – a procedure that Tibi describes as highly arbitrary, and further defines as ‘*Ahistorizität*’ (ibid., in German) – and, on the other hand, a strong emphasis of the

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<sup>8</sup> The term ‘*usuliyyun*’ is derived from ‘*usuli*’ (‘doctrinaire’).

application of the ‘true’, original meaning contained in the text, or as he puts it, the emphasis of a ‘true’ “belief in the [absolute] literality of the text, or *sola scriptura*” (ibid.; accentuation by BT). Regarding the contradictory correlation of ‘text–context’, the fact has to be recalled that “the text is almost fourteen centuries old, the context framing the text, is the crisis of Islam in the modern era” (ibid.: 58). Tibi concludes that the “product of this historic situation is the crisis of modern Islam as a cultural system with premodern norms and values” (ibid.). ‘Modern Islamic fundamentalists’ can be identified then as a product of this crises, while the religious-political ideology they believe in is – as Tibi cites Ernst Bloch – “the ecstasy [...] of the persistent, rebellious, most serious will”<sup>9</sup> to overcome the crisis.

By preaching and acting in such a way they, first, want to force non-fundamentalist Muslims, whom they reproach for apostasy, or, as they put it, for a backslide into ‘*jahiliyya*’ (‘ignorance’), to return to the ‘right path’. Second, they are widely believed to aim *in principle* at imposing their genuine, new order into the whole world. Whereas the first statement is unquestionable, the second, expansive statement would need further examination to determine if it is correct in general.

## 2.2 Ideological foundations and relations

The religious-political ideology ‘modern Islamic fundamentalists’ are founded on has its primary roots in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is clear though that it also refers to earlier eras, since it is a particular characteristic of this strain of political Islam to incorporate all kinds of thoughts and ideas – sometimes even contradictory – from whatever revivalist and modernist ideologies and concepts, if they serve the theoretical explanation of its own ideology, and the moral justification of its actions. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two key ideologues of radical Islamism can be identified in Egypt: Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966). The former, an Islamic reformer, founded the ‘*ikhwan al-Muslimin*’ (‘Muslim Brotherhood’) in 1928, the latter, an Islamic activist, acted as one of the movement’s principal ideologues.

The main contribution of **Hasan al-Banna** to radical Islamism lies “in the practical realm of organization and action” (Commins 1994: 149), and in his definition of the idea of an Islamic state. Building on some of al-Afghani’s and Abduh’s ideas he stressed the need for modern education to enable Muslims to acquire what was good in the fields of science, technology, industry, as well as social welfare. His concept of state, however, represents a comprehensive order for all aspects of human life, in which Islam is determining

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<sup>9</sup> Ernst Bloch (1972): *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution*. Frankfurt a.M., p. 56.

politics, jurisdiction, society, culture as well as the economy (v. *ibid.*: 135). The Muslim Brotherhood itself provided a model of organization and action many radical Islamist groups in other Muslim countries followed. Though the movement's goal was mainly domestic – “to create an Islamic society based on the model of earliest Muslim generations” (Martin 2004: 104) in Egypt – it was already “firmly entrenched in regional politics by the late 1940s through branches in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and Sudan” (*ibid.*). Though al-Banna rejected Arab nationalism and advocated pan-Islamic ideas, he argued in terms of state and for a top-down strategy, declaring that “the establishment of a just society would not occur through righteous thinking and good works alone, but required institutions, state intervention, and progressive taxes on income and wealth” (Esposito 2003: 36). But first, a leadership of “committed and informed Muslims” (Martin 2004: 105) had to be educated and formed, that could advance the idea and perform actions, to finally take over state power.

The main contribution of **Sayyid Qutb**, “the father of Sunni radicalism” (Sivan 1990b: 39), has to be seen in his definition of the concept of *'jahiliyyah'* ('ignorance'). Its purpose is to make believers “aware, that there is a constant struggle between the Islamic worldview and that of *jahiliyyah*: a struggle between faith and disbelief” (Haddad 1983: 86). During the 1950s and 1960s, Qutb radicalized the implications of his concept, emphasizing that

it is not the function of Islam to comprise with the concepts of jahiliyya which are current in the world or to coexist in the same land together with a jahili system. (Sayyid Qutb: *The Right to Judge*. In: *The Jihad Fixation* 2001: 111)

In doing so, he became a main reference for radical Islamists, who tended to extremist, militant actions, to justify their use of violence. Initially he had been arguing for violence against a *Muslim* government to be “justified only in cases where the government used violence” (Esposito 2003: 257) itself. Finally, however, he expanded the justification, and explicitly urged Muslims to perform *'takfir'*, that is to *forcibly* “overturn the corrupted state of Muslim Societies (the new ignorance or neo-*jahiliyya*) and establish a true Islamic order based on God's laws ('shari'ah)’” (Martin 2004, 568).<sup>10</sup> Qutb describes his concept of an Islamic order as follows: It is

a system that provides us with the bread that communism provides, and frees us from economic and social disparity, realizing a balanced society while sustaining us spiritually. (Qutb 1975; in: Haddad 1983: 70<sup>11</sup>)

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<sup>10</sup> cf. Qutb, Sayyid (1964): *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*. ['Milestones']. Haddad/Voll/Esposito state that *Milestones* is “considered to be *the* Islamic revolutionary text of this century”, and its “ideology was adopted by the radical Egyptian movements of *al-Jihad* and *al-Takfir wa'l Hijra*” (Haddad/Voll/Esposito 1991: 139).

<sup>11</sup> cf. Qutb, Sayyid (1975<sup>4</sup>): *Maarakat al-Islam wa-al-Rasmaliyyah*. Beirut, pp. 34–38.

Again, the comprehensiveness of such a political order becomes clear. It, however, does not imply the rejection of modern economic and scientific achievements which Qutb explicitly acknowledged.

Further influences on the ideological development of radical Islamism have to be assigned to the Indo-Pakistani Muslim revivalist thinker and founder of '*jamaat-e-Islami*' ('Islamic society') Sayyed Abdullah al-Mawdudi (1903–1979), and to the Egyptian Islamic activist and ideologue Yusuf al-Qaradawi (\*1926).

**Sayyed Abdullah al-Mawdudi**, who had been an “ardent nationalist” in the 1920s in former British-India, believed that “the salvation of Muslim culture lay in the restitution and purification of Islamic institutions and practices” (Esposito 2003: 197). After the foundation of Pakistan, he “advocated an Islamic state on the Prophetic model” (ibid.) to be built up. His concept of such an order can be described by the formula that “an Islamic state must correspond to the Islamic ideology through which the divine order can be realized on earth” (Martin 2004: 443), emphasizing the supremacy of the belief “in the sovereignty of God rather than in the idea of a government of the people, through the people, and for the people” (ibid.). As Martin concludes, according to al-Mawdudi’s Islamic political ideology “Muslims [do] not represent a nation, but the party of God, which acts as God’s agents on earth (*khalifa*)” (ibid.). Concerning the strategy to achieve that goal, he too opts for a top-down reform process from within the existing order, rather than “mobilizing the masses to [forcibly] overthrow” (Esposito 2003: 197) it, i.e. to perform '*takfir*'.

**Yusuf al-Qaradawi** addresses the collective affiliation of all Muslims and promotes the concept of a unified pan-Islamic religious-political order (v. Esposito 2003: 253). After the humiliating defeat of Egypt and other Arab nations in the 'Six Day War' against Israel in 1967, he argued for a return to 'true' Islam – also in a political sense. Referring to the Israelis, whom he identified “to stand by their religion not only spiritually, but also politically” (Tibi 2002: 61<sup>12</sup>), he emphasized the necessity for an '*al-nizam al-Islami*', a genuine Islamic political order. Regarding the strategy to achieve that goal, it is important to note that al-Qaradawi condemns any 'illegitimate' use of violence, rejects '*takfir*' (v. Esposito 2003: 312), and sees “both religious and secular extremism as distort-

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<sup>12</sup> Tibi refers this statement to: al-Qaradawi, Yusuf (1980): *Al-hall al-Islami wa al-hulul al-mustawrada*. ['The Islamic solution and the imported solutions']. Beirut.

tions of the image of Islam” (ibid.: 253) in general.<sup>13</sup> Rather he advocates a top-down strategy carried out by a both spiritual and political leadership (v. ibid.: 254).

In conclusion and with reference to the ideology of Al Qaeda, the following points are of major significance. First, all four ideologues and/or activists advocate the *goal* of a comprehensive, genuine Islamic order to be realized in the Muslim world. Sayyid Qutb goes beyond that in laying down that there is no coexistence with non-believers possible at all. Second, regarding the *strategy* to achieve that goal, all, apart from Qutb, opt for a top-down process in the first place. He, in turn, justifies and explicitly calls on every Muslim for performing ‘*takfir*’ from below, contrary to al-Qaradawi who unequivocally condemns the use of that kind of violence. Third, concerning the *organizational structures* able to carry out those strategies, all four figures emphasize the necessity of a well-educated leadership with clear responsibilities – whereas the Muslim Brotherhood already anticipates the transnational linkage, or ‘network’-structure that Al Qaeda is notorious for nowadays.

### **3. The origin and development of Al Qaeda**

To get an idea about the ideology of a rather clandestine radical Islamist organization such as Al Qaeda, one can rely on three main sources: first, the organization’s public announcements, and second, its internal conduct, as far as there is reliable information available about that. From this point of view, Gunaratna’s book is very useful, as it both presents and interprets excerpts of original statements made in the organization’s name as well as by its single figures. Moreover, it also provides detailed insights into its conduct, that is its organization, internal formation and external strategies and tactics. A third and fruitful way is to look at its establishment and its external conduct over a certain time. The perspective on its leadership and, even more important, on changes of its composition that possibly can be linked to changes in its strategies or tactics, can provide substantial information about the organization’s internal conduct and its ideology, too. Gunaratna unrolls Al Qaeda’s establishment and discusses the respective key figures involved in this process.

Two historic events in 1978/79 “marked the rise of a new wave of Islamist movements [...] and precipitated the creation of over one hundred contemporary Islamist movements”

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Qaradawi, being meanwhile widely known due to his periodically question time on *al-Jazeera*, in January 2003 defined terrorism as “the use of violence between people that have no controversial demands [*Streitforderungen*; in German] on each other” (NZZ, 18 January 2003). Once more he clearly rejected hostage-taking, hijacking, and the assassination of tourists – regarding the Luxor attacks, the Bali bombings, and the 9/11 attacks. On the other hand he emphasized that the resistance fight against members of foreign occupation forces has nothing to do with terrorism (v. ibid.), and is a legitimate use of violence.

(Gunaratna 2002: 3) all over the world: the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Although Al Qaeda's roots lie exclusively in Sunni radicalism, the initial point of the establishment of the organization has to be put into the context of the Shi'ite Islamic revolution in Iran, too.<sup>14</sup> According to Gunaratna, one can distinguish three main phases in the establishment of the organization today referred to as 'Al Qaeda', and led by Osama bin Laden (Saudi Arabia, \*1957) and Ayman al-Zawahiri (Egypt, \*1951).

The **first phase** comprises the era of the MAK ('*Maktab al Khidmat lil Mujahidin al-Arab*', or 'Afghan Service Bureau Front'). The MAK was founded in Peshawar in 1984, by the Palestinian-Jordanian ideologue Abdullah Azzam (1941–1989), and by Osama bin Laden as a co-founder.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of this organization was to organize and provide financial, material and personnel support for the Afghan mujahidin in their fight against the Soviet occupation of their country, what Gunaratna refers to as the "anti-Soviet Afghan jihad" (ibid.: 4). The fundraising and recruitment activities of the MAK were already both global and regional. It, however, is important to note that its executive operations were local, that is restricted to Afghanistan. The **second phase** started, when the defeat of the Soviet occupation forces was becoming more apparent, and finally intensified, when they withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. MAK's main purpose had been accomplished but, at the same time, the organization would have become 'useless' without a reform. Azzam already had been initiating reforms in 1987/88 by conceptualizing out of MAK's resources '*al-Qa'idah al-Sulbah*' ('The Solid Base') as "the pioneering vanguard"<sup>16</sup> for the purpose of realizing "the expected society"<sup>17</sup>. According to Gunaratna's interpretation, that concept stands for a society that is "founded on the strictest Islamist principles" (ibid.: 3). Consequently, the training guidelines of the leadership of this "pious group"<sup>18</sup> to be established reflected the emphasis on strictness in belief and ideology.

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<sup>14</sup> Contributing to the preparation and finally being able to seize the leadership of Iran's mass revolution Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989) had "determined to use Islam as a political ideology to organize public resistance" (Saikal 2003: 74), as Saikal states. This strategy – especially after it has proved a success – is widely believed to have had a strong influence on the emerging 'modern Islamic fundamentalism'. On the whole the regime that Khomeini installed subsequently "inspired and emboldened many political forces of Islam from both sides of the Sunni–Shi'ite sectarian divide to challenge the influence of the West in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Muslim world" (ibid.: 77; cf. Tibi 2002: 248).

<sup>15</sup> Gunaratna refers to Abdullah Azzam, the leader of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, as to the "ideological father of Al Qaeda [and] the mentor of Osama bin Laden" (Gunaratna 2002: 3). Azzam had left Jordan in 1980 to fight in Afghanistan, where he was also editing the Arab magazine *Al-Jihad*. The 1991 CERVIP atlas states that he had been close to Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf – a Wahhabi, Pashtun, and emir of the movement '*Ittehad e-Islami*' – as well as close to the Saudi intelligence services (v. CERVIP 1991: 39–40).

<sup>16</sup> Abdullah Azzam: *Al-Qa'idah al-Sulbah*. In: *al-Jihad* 41, April 1988, p. 46 [Translated into English].

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

Azzam's intention must have been the formation of a firm pan-Islamic core of highly ideologized people, originating from different Arab and Asian countries, to precipitate the stuck – since separated – campaigns of domestic Islamist groups against national rulers and regimes. They were seen as illegitimate and corrupt, since promoting Western values and secular state-society-relations, and furthering Western imperialism in the Muslim world. The returning Arab and Asian mujahidin joined opposition movements in their home countries, leading their campaigns more violently and beginning to successfully interlink those domestically focused movements transnationally. The **third phase** in the establishment of Al Qaeda starts with the complete takeover and change of the organization by Osama bin Laden in late 1989, following up the object to turn it noteworthy “contrary to the vision of Abdullah Azzam [...] into a global terrorist front” (ibid.: 2).<sup>19</sup> Gunaratna recognizes the reasons for this orientational stretch – that he describes as the opening of a “second front” (ibid.: 5) alongside the domestic front aimed at toppling the illegitimate regimes in the Muslim world – in the rather slow progress these domestic campaigns were showing. The purpose of that stretch was to target the Western supporters of the unrepresentative Muslim regimes, to precipitate their fall. The end of all those activities has to be kept in mind: it was (1) to throw all non-believers – and their troops particularly – out of Muslim land, (2) to topple the “non-believing leaders”<sup>20</sup> (*‘neo-jahiliyya’*) in the Muslim world, and (3) to realize instead of their regimes ‘the expected society’ aforementioned.

But, as I will argue subsequently, the dominance that Al Qaeda's ‘second front’ gained both in organizing and performing the September 11 attacks, as well as in profiting from the attention in their aftermath, concerning for instance the recruitment of new and the boost of the willingness of former members, could indicate a further ideological shift of the organization. Developing Tibi's terminology, it would be the shift from an utopian toward an ‘apocalyptic-utopian’ outlook.

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<sup>19</sup> The exact circumstances of Azzam's death remain unsolved to this day. The fact is that he and his sons were killed in a murder attempt in Peshawar, Pakistan, on November 24, 1989 (v. *The Jihad Fixation* 2001: 83). In the context of Osama bin Laden's subsequent takeover and change of Al Qaeda there have been rumours that Bin Laden could have eliminated Azzam. In 1995 an article in *Nida'ul Islam* claims “Arab governments, the Kremlin, and the White House” to be responsible for his death, stating that Azzam, “the reviver of the jihad ideals in the modern world, [...] fell martyr as he was assassinated [...] at the hands of the enemies of Allah” (*Nida'ul Islam*, Aug.–Sept. 1995. In: *The Jihad Fixation* 2001: 327). Moreover, that article explicitly compares Azzam's ‘martyrdom’ with Sayyid Qutb's fate in 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from: “Declaration of Jihad Against the Country's Tyrants, Military Series”, according to Gunaratna a document recovered by Manchester Police from home of Nazihal Wadih Raghie, May 10, 2000, and translated into English (v. Gunaratna 2002: 75).

## 4. The ideology of Al Qaeda

### 4.1 A 'jihadi' and 'modernist' ideology

Gunaratna introduces Al Qaeda's ideology as "founded on Islamism and the pursuit of *jihad*" (Gunaratna 2002: 84). First, let us take a look at the '*jihadi*' element. Gunaratna argues that "various Islamists, including Al Qaeda, have misinterpreted – or at times reinterpreted – *jihad* as 'holy war'" (ibid.).<sup>21</sup> Beyond the versatile concept of *jihad* laid down in the *Koran*, it can also specifically be described "in a military context" (ibid.: 85). Referring to a crucial distinction, Gunaratna states that in that context *jihad* "can have two roles, either offensive or defensive" (ibid.):

The former is performed when the enemy is attacked in his own territory; the latter when an enemy is expelled from the jihadist's homeland. Unlike offensive *jihad*, defensive *jihad* is a compulsory duty. (ibid.; accentuations by RG)

In regard to that a first contradiction of the justification of defensive, and, as we will see, of offensive *jihad*, too, can be identified. Gunaratna cites the *Koran*:

Let there be no compulsion [or coercion; RG] in the religion [Islam; RG]. The right direction is distinctly clear from the error.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the '*usuliyyun*' refer their commitment and *compulsory* performance of defensive, *as well as* of offensive *jihad* also to the authority of the ancient texts directly. Moreover, dealing with the justification of offensive *jihad* during the last decades has led to a specific 'argumentative system', that is characterized by a certain coherence. In a pamphlet that had been available on the internet<sup>23</sup>, one could find a clearcut file of "six rules of *jihad*" (The Jihad Fixation 2001: 32). Stating the aforementioned distinction, the pamphlet argues that the offensive type – called "Combat of Quest" (ibid.) – is "*communally* obligatory, at least once a year" (ibid.; accentuation AA). In detail the procedure is described as follows:

The khaleefa (Caliph) invites rulers of neighbouring nations to accept Islam, or to enter into the Islamic social order. If they resist (and prevent their people from receiving the Message of Islam), *jihad* is performed to remove this corrupt authority, but forcible conversion of the population is not undertaken. (ibid.)

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<sup>21</sup> Literally the term '*jihad*' can be translated as "to exert the utmost in one's cause" (The Jihad Fixation 2002: 406). The interpretations of the concept of *jihad* laid down in the *Koran* reach from the general effort for being a 'better' Muslim to the controversial form of expansion of Islam by performing a 'holy war'. '*Jihad*', however, comprises the effort for a peaceful promotion of Islam, too. The aforementioned pamphlet selectively defines '*jihad*' as "(legal) fighting to make the word of Allah supreme" (ibid.).

<sup>22</sup> *Koran*, surah 2, verse 256.

<sup>23</sup> Originally it had been available at <http://www.members.tripod.com/~Suhayb>, but later was removed.

In my opinion, the statement clearly reveals a strategy of ‘wear and tear’, or in a sense, a strategy of blackmail behind the concept of offensive jihad. One could also argue that it is not the ‘rulers of neighbouring nations’, but the rulers of present Muslim countries to whom is given once a year the chance to put an end to the militant actions performed by the ‘*usuliyyun*’. If they refuse to comply with their conditions – what amounts to hand over their power – the ‘counter-measures’ continue. The argumentation of the pamphlet, however, continues as follows:

Of course, this type of jihad, which is fard kifaya [=collective duty; AA] (i.e. if a sufficient number fulfill the obligation, the sin falls from the majority) is *not possible* at the present time [because; AA] the Muslims do not possess an Islamic state [...]. (ibid.; accentuation by AA)

Therefore the second, defensive type of jihad – called “Counteractive Combat” (ibid.) – is applied. It has to be emphasized that it “becomes immediately obligatory when the enemy attacks, or advances toward the Muslim lands” (ibid.), and is “*absolutely* obligatory on all Muslims, including women” (ibid.; accentuation by AA).<sup>24</sup> The pamphlet defines it as

fard ‘ain [=duty of the individual; AA], i.e. every single Muslim that is physically capable of fighting the kufar [=unbeliever; AA], must go forward, and unlike the situation with fard kifaya no number of people will fulfill this jihad – except that *all* Muslims must go forward – i.e. the woman without the permission of her husband and the son without the permission of his parents – and this is so, even if the kufar conquer and possess only a hand-span of Muslim land. (ibid.; accentuation by the text)

This argumentation brings to light that this specific kind of political ideology differs widely from the guiding collective concept of the ‘*ummah*’ (‘world Muslim community’) in traditional Islam. It introduces individual motives that also could be interpreted as ‘individual rights’ into Islam – understood as political ideology.

The idea of *individual rights* is an absolutely modern phenomenon, and thus the ‘*jihadi*’ ideology of a radical Islamist organization like Al Qaeda represents a modern political ideology, too. It not only adopts modern science and technology to achieve its goal, but its goal itself is of a modern kind. The ideology voiced in that pamphlet explicitly appeals to every single Muslim – man or woman, son or daughter – even to transcend the traditional social hierarchy in Islam to perform jihad. Like Kurzman puts it, that again is a modern element in Al Qaeda’s ideology: “In place of the clear social hierarchies in early Islam based on tribe, lineage, and seniority, Islamists emphasize *human equality*.” (Kurzman 2002: 17; accentuation by AA) Kurzman’s next statement emphasizes that “in place of personal regimes, Islamists insist on *codified law*” (ibid.; accentuation by AA). With

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<sup>24</sup> Sayyid Qutb for instance “declared that Muslims had an obligation to engage in individual, rather than collective, jihad” (Esposito 2003: 36).

this argument he refers to those aspects of Islamic law that deal explicitly with, or have implications for the institutional structure of a political order. Radical Islamists reject ‘personal regimes’ in the sense of monarchies and dictatorships, when respectively because these institutional systems are not integrated into an Islamic order, or – more precisely – because they are not compatible with *the* institutional interpretation of the sacred texts that the former advocate.

Kurzman’s last argument, why Al Qaeda’s ideology is of a modern kind, refers to bin Laden’s “demand [...] for *national self-determination*” (Kurzman 2002: 16; accentuation by AA). As a matter of fact bin Laden seems to deliberately avoid to define any precise characteristics of the political order to be established in the Muslim lands after the expulsion of the ‘*kufar*’ and the defeat of ‘(neo-)jahiliyya’.<sup>25</sup> In an interview with the magazine *Nida’ul Islam* in autumn 1996 he, however, specified that the new order to be established in Saudi Arabia would include to “practise real Shura (consultative government)”<sup>26</sup>, stating that “this option is dependent on the agreement of the people who hold the solution and have the ability to affect change”<sup>27</sup>. According to bin Laden’s argumentation those decision-makers, however, are not ‘the people’ in a *democratic* sense. He rather refers to “the honest scholars”<sup>28</sup>. On the other hand, bin Laden’s statement could also supply evidence for Tibi’s argument that with the two Gulf Wars “Islamic fundamentalism has taken the seat of secular Arab nationalism” (Tibi 2002: 250), or is at least connected with it.<sup>29</sup> Tibi states, that both were respectively “are totalitarian, and never democratic orientated” (ibid.), admitting that contrary to Pan-Arabism ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism “represents an universalism that intends to establish a world order” (ibid.). However, it has to be made clear once more that it is incorrect to impute the striving for a global ‘(re-)establishment of the seventeenth century caliphate’ to bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Unfortunately this wrong, but effective argument is still stated in the 2004 *CRS Report for Congress* about

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<sup>25</sup> I suppose one reason for that is his intention not to divide the different strains of political and religious Islam. He, rather, has worked “to put aside differences with the Shi’ite Muslim organizations, trying to unify them under Al Qaeda against their common enemies” (Alexander/Swetnam 2001: 5).

<sup>26</sup> *Mujahid Usamah Bin Ladin Talks Exclusively to Nida’ul Islam About ,The New Powder Keg in the Middle East’*. In: *Nida’ul Islam* (,The Call of Islam’), Oct.–Nov. 1996. [In: *The Jihad Fixation* 2001: 263.]

<sup>27</sup> ibid.

<sup>28</sup> ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Tibi states that secular Arab nationalism “had originally served as an expression of the right for a cultural unity of all Arabs respectively of political demands for Arab autonomy that were directed against the Islamic legitimated Ottoman Empire. [...] Arabism had to be secular, because on the basis of its goal to found an Arab national state it opposed the concept of an Islamic universal empire.” (Tibi 2002: 250)

‘Foreign Terrorist Organizations’ that is forming a decisive informative basis for the U.S. Congress and Senate to act.<sup>30</sup>

Gunaratna argued that key figures of Al Qaeda – referring to al-Zawahiri and bin Laden – “are engaged in an unprecedented exercise of corrupting, misinterpreting and misrepresenting the word of God” (Gunaratna 2002: 85). I have tried to show, why those key figures handle the ‘word of God’ this way: that is – as Gunaratna puts it – “to generate support for their political mission” (ibid.). Actually, it is this mission, or those goals that have undergone some major shifts during the establishment of Al Qaeda, as we have seen in chapter 3. Now, I will try to describe those shifts within an ideological framework.

## 4.2 Ideological shifts of Al Qaeda

During the establishment of Al Qaeda I detect two major ideological shifts. It is, first, the shift from an ideological to an utopian, and, second, from an utopian to an ‘apocalyptic-utopian’ outlook.

The phase of the MAK from 1984 to 1989 is characterized by Azzam’s leadership. He waged a defensive jihad against the foreign, atheistic Soviet troops, as well as against secular, communist Muslims in Afghanistan. He interprets defensive jihad to be a compulsory duty, and states that those abstaining from it would be punished by Allah.<sup>31</sup> MAK’s activities regarding fundraising and recruiting were already global and regional, its executive activities and targets, however, were domestic, that is restricted to Afghanistan. Regarding the use of violence he announced that it is justified against the ‘*kufar*’ who attacks the ‘*ummah*’, as well as against those Muslims that are in the mujahidins’ way to free it.<sup>32</sup> Regarding the degree of radicalization it has to be noted that he can see possibilities for making peace treaties with the ‘*kufar*’, if Islam in general, and certain conditions – such as for instance not to “relinquish even a hand span of Muslim land to the *kufar*”<sup>33</sup> – are not violated. His Wahhabi ideology, moreover, was characterized by a deep hostility against the Shi’ites, whom he opposed at all times as ‘*kufar*’ in his magazine *Al-Jihad* (v. CERVIP 1991: 40). Azzam’s argumentation to that date – in my opinion – clearly reveals an ideo-

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<sup>30</sup> “Al Qaeda seeks to destroy the regimes of Muslim countries it deems as ‘non-Islamic’ in order to establish a worldwide Islamic religious government based on the ancient model of the Caliphates. The group believes the United States and its allies are the single greatest roadblock to that goal [...]” (CRS Report for Congress 2004: 83)

<sup>31</sup> Azzam, Abdullah (w/o yr): *Defence of Muslim Lands: The Obligation*. [In: <http://www.qital.tripod.com>] In: *The Jihad Fixation* 2001: 84.

<sup>32</sup> Azzam defines ‘those Muslims’ as ‘Muslim aggressors’ (Azzam, ibid. In: *The Jihad Fixation* 2001: 85), whereas the mujahidins represent the ‘soldiers of God’ who exert effort for the sake of God.

<sup>33</sup> Azzam, ibid. In: *The Jihad Fixation* 2001: 90.

logical outlook. He emphasizes that to free the Muslim lands “first the domestic, then the nearest Muslims are obliged to performing (sic!) defensive *jihad* until it becomes fard’ayn upon the whole world”<sup>34</sup>. He, however, did neither argue for a focal extension of the concept of defensive jihad to attack members of foreign occupation forces outside Muslim lands nor for waging an offensive jihad against his main opponent, the Soviet Union. Moreover, for him to advocate an offensive jihad against ‘the West’, or the U.S. in particular was unreasonable, too, since during the late Cold War era the latter had been among his main supporters.

In 1986 bin Laden, who was contributing to Azzam’s activities above all financially, while fighting against the Soviets personally, too, decided to chart a separate course from the MAK. “Believing Azzam’s perspective to be too narrow and limited” (CRS Report for Congress 2004: 84) he started to train his own fighters which he was recruiting mainly in the Gulf states, to “carry on his *jihad* on a worldwide scale” (ibid.).<sup>35</sup> In 1987/1988 Azzam – in my opinion – to a certain degree ‘responded’ to that step of bin Laden by specifying the outlook of his ‘own’ organization by conceptualizing ‘*al-Qa’idah al-Sulbah*’. He defined its purpose as to topple the ‘non-believing Muslim leaders’ (‘*neojahiliyya*’), and to realize instead of their illegitimate regimes ‘the expected society’. These statements reveal more about the ideological outlook of Azzam in the course of the emerging defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan. However, they – in my opinion – were not yet representing a real ideological shift of the organization from an ideological to an explicitly utopian outlook. It is to note in particular that Azzam’s specified outlook was still regional, as well as his targets and tactical strategies.

After his death and the complete takeover of Al Qaeda by bin Laden in late 1989 the organization’s outlook expanded substantially. The regional goal remained the same, on the other hand, the strategies to achieve it, underwent a decisive change. In his biography of Ayman al-Zawahiri the Egyptian radical Islamist Montasser al-Zayyat distinguishes the ideologically justified targets of radical Islamists between the ‘near’ and the ‘far enemies’ (al-Zayyat 2004: 60). He states that in the early 1990s the attempts to topple the ‘near’ enemies, like the Saudi, or the Algerian regime, by more violent strategies and tactics that were also directed against and severely harming Muslim civilians had led to a strong decrease of popular support for radical Islamists. Probably bearing such ‘undesirable’ effects in mind bin Laden has been “rarely refer[ing] to outright *takfir* of the [Saudi]

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<sup>34</sup> Azzam, ibid. In: *The Jihad Fixation* 2001: 84.

<sup>35</sup> cf. Alexander/Swetnam 2001: 4; 37.

royal family in his writings and speeches” (International Crises Group 2004: 16, footnote 116) to date. The Saudi regime’s allowance, or, rather, its demand for the U.S. troops to enter Saudi Arabia in late 1990 substantially contributed to the radicalization of the new leader of Al Qaeda, and – in my opinion – has started a real ideological shift of the organization to an explicitly utopian outlook. Moreover, the Saudi regime’s conduct stands for the final break of bin Laden with that regime, still not with Saudi Wahhabism. After his move to the Sudan he and other Al Qaeda members have actually been making extensive efforts to “put aside their differences with the Shi’ite Muslim organizations and [been trying] to unify them under *al-Qaida* against their common enemies” (Alexander/Swetnam 2001: 5), but apart from this ideological gap that – by way of contrast – Azzam had always been ardently arguing for, they did not give up their Wahhabi ideological roots.

Since then the organization’s tactics increasingly have been directed at members of foreign forces, and at foreign civilians, too – first in the Muslim world, later also in the West. It is true that these strategical modifications still serve the radical Islamist ideological, as well as the utopian goal. However, the pattern of Al Qaeda’s executive actions, as well as the 1996 ‘*fatwa*’<sup>36</sup> have revealed more about another goal of the organization: ‘the global challenge of the West’. The question that has spread widely through the public discussion in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, whether that goal could be described as ‘a challenge for the sake of the challenge’, cannot be answered quickly and unequivocally. If one agrees to it, Al Qaeda’s ideology has to be defined as of an exclusively apocalyptic kind. I, however, am of a different opinion: In those days prior to 1998 Al Qaeda just had extended its regional goal (i.e. its utopian outlook) to a second, global target. With the 1998 ‘*fatwa*’<sup>37</sup> it then, however, got more obvious that the organization had in fact undergone a substantial change: Since then it has “distinguished itself from familiar jihadi thinking by focusing primarily on the ‘far enemy’, the ‘Jews and Crusaders’ and princi-

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<sup>36</sup> The origin of the 1996 ‘*fatwa*’ was a topic of particular interest in the course of the U.S. investigation in the aftermath of the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. The *United States Indictment vs. Mohamed Rashed Daoud al-Owhali et al.* reads: „On or about July 31, 1996, Khalid al-Fawwaz created, using a computer in his residence in London, a file entitled ‘the Message’; [...] ‘Message from Usamah bin-Muhammad bin-Laden to His Muslim Brothers in the Whole World and Especially in the Arabian Peninsula: Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques; Expel the Heretics from the Arabian Peninsula’ [...]” (Alexander/Swetnam 2001: Appendix 3, p. 4) After that, on August 23, 1996, the ‘Declaration of War [...]’, signed by ‘Usamah bin Muhammad bin Laden, [...] Afghanistan’, was disseminated (cf. full text in: *ibid.*: Appendix 1 A, pp. 1–22).

<sup>37</sup> About this the above mentioned U.S. indictment (cf. footnote 36) reads: „In February 1998, the defendants Usama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri endorsed a fatwah under the banner of the ‘International Islamic Front for Jihad on the Jews and Crusaders.’ This fatwah, published in the publication *Al-Quds al’Arabi* on February 23, 1998, stated that Muslims should kill Americans – including civilians – anywhere they can be found [...]” (Alexander/Swetnam 2001: Appendix 3, p. 5) Cf. full text in: *ibid.*: Appendix 1 B, pp. 1–3.

pally the U.S.” (International Crises Group 2004: 16). Its outlook, however, has not shifted toward an apocalyptic kind completely, since the second, global target to date – and as I argue for: intentionally – serves the first goal.

The ‘positive’ experiences that Al Qaeda, and the groups which it has subsequently supported, have made – in my opinion: mainly – in the aftermath of the 1998 bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, however, have led to a degree of radicalization that I would identify a second ideological shift of the organization. It is the shift from an utopian toward an ‘apocalyptic-utopian’ outlook. This shift has been boosted with every successful executive action, and above all with the September 11 attacks. Since I consider the masterminds of those attacks to have been widely aware about the tremendous impact that such a large-scale operation in the Western heartlands would have, it is – in my opinion – incorrect to deny the existence of an apocalyptic element in their guiding ideology. Whatever degree one may define Al Qaeda’s ideology to be apocalyptic, one fact is clear: At the latest with the September 11 attacks it turned obvious that the organization had changed the order of precedence of its two main targets. As Benjamin/Simon put it: “The power that propped up these illegitimate [Muslim] rulers and desecrated the holy soil of Arabia [...] was [...] the preferred target” (Benjamin/Simon 2002: 118) now.

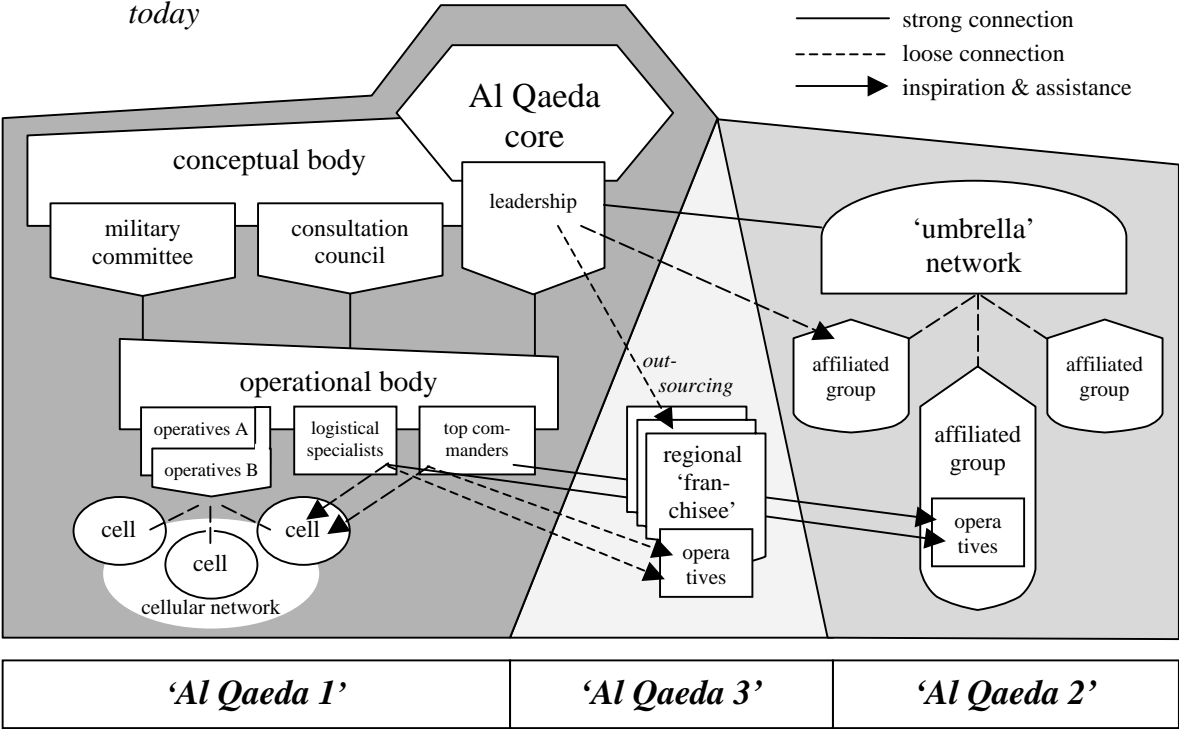
The U.S. and their allies started their counteractions. Regarding Al Qaeda’s ideological reinforcement I doubt that the attack and toppling of the Taliban’s regime has had any other effect than to strengthen, and further radicalize it. The subsequent attack and toppling of Saddam Hussein’s regime I consider to have boosted this development, too. Radical Islamist ‘*jihadi*-fighters’ cannot be persuaded to cease their militant actions by the use of force. It is to question, however, if and in which way the Bush administration has ever intended to apply a ‘persuasive’ strategy. Its counteractions have not yet revealed the unbiased intention to tackle the ‘*jihadi*’ problem by specific – and that comprises also: political – strategies and tactics which are based on substantial analyses of the phenomenon. Rather, they seem to be reduced to materially and personally ‘root out international terrorism’ (George W. Bush) by military means. However, I consider them to have been conceptualized also to deter radical Islamists from seizing militant actions, and Muslims in general from supporting and joining militant groups. Pointing out the status of defensive jihad among many of today’s Muslims, an aggressive, military strategy will not be able to achieve these goals. Rather, such a strategy represents a collective, and highly offensive punishment of the Muslims, and therefore can never contribute to a real ‘détente’ between them and ‘the West’. Much less is it able to further any ‘less-anti-Western’ ideological

shifts among radical Islamists. In the course of the U.S. ‘war on terrorism’ Udo Steinbach, the director of the ‘Deutsches Orient-Institut’ in Hamburg argues that “bin Laden’s stock of ideas to fight against everything that is vaguely seen as ‘Western-American-decadent’ has developed to an actual ideology of terror, to a programme of struggle against the West” (NZZ, 23 November 2003). The effects of those mounting ideological tensions any Western efforts to further and secure peace in the Muslim world will have to face. This problem applies not only to the military efforts but – what is even worse – also to any efforts that focus on political, as well as civil means which – at least in general – are more promising.

**4.3 Structural changes of Al Qaeda**

The U.S. and allied counterstrikes have not only furthered the ideological radicalization of Al Qaeda. Moreover, they have also substantially contributed to a mounting mobilizing appeal of radical Islamists in general, as well as to a structural transition of Al Qaeda. I will deal here with the latter development, because I consider it to supply some decisive evidence for the accusation that the Bush administration is still lacking a long-term, both military *and* political strategy to successfully tackle the contemporary phenomenon of radical Islamist militancy. Despite of some particular successes of the ‘war on terrorism’, that strategy has actually failed to reduce Al Qaeda’s danger in the course of its structural transition.

Tab 1.: *Al Qaeda’s structure today*



Since bin Laden has taken over the principal leadership of *Al Qaeda 1*, its structures can be distinguished between two main constituents, or ‘corporate bodies’: first, between the conceptual, and, second, the operational body.<sup>38</sup> At the beginning of the setting up of Al Qaeda’s ‘second front’ the development of the conceptual body was in the centre of interest. It was formed, on the one hand, by the remnants of the Azzam’s ‘old’ Al Qaeda, and, on the other hand, by the activists that bin Laden brought along. Moreover, bin Laden contributed to the ‘new’ Al Qaeda a database of transnational contacts of radical Islamist activists. In 1988 he started to document those people which he was training, and whose activities he was supporting financially (cf. Alexander/Swetnam 2001: 4). He then used that virtual database to establish a real transnational network of different radical Islamist groups which he conceptually affiliated under the ‘umbrella’ of the ‘International Front for Jihad on the Jews and Crusaders’ (v. Tab. 1: ‘*Al Qaeda 2*’).<sup>39</sup> Operationally *Al Qaeda 2* was activated for the first time in 1992. Iraq had invaded Kuwait, and it was obvious that the U.S. and their allies would intervene on the spot. The organization’s conceptual body had been warning the Saudi regime against letting foreign troops into the country. Moreover, bin Laden had offered the regime to supply his own troops (v. Tab. 1: ‘*operatives A*’) to throw the Iraqis back. The Saudi regime, however, ignored both the warnings, and the offer altogether. At that point the organization’s leadership issued several internal ‘*fatwa*’ calling on *Al Qaeda 2* to attack the foreign troops at the Horn of Africa, in Saudi Arabia, as well as in Yemen.<sup>40</sup> The following bombing of a hotel in Aden, Yemen, in December 1992 is taken for the “first official attack” (Alexander/Swetnam 2001: 39) of *Al Qaeda 2*. The bombing was directed at U.S. troops en route to Somalia, but missed its target.

The attacks that subsequently had been committed between 1993 and 1996 within the framework of the ‘second front’ have some characteristics in common.<sup>41</sup> They all were planned, and executed by operatives that had been passing through one of *Al Qaeda 1*’s training camps, and/or had received theoretical assistance by its commanders, and/or logistical support by its specialists on the spot. As a matter of fact the operational activities of

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<sup>38</sup> Up to this point I have been calling Al Qaeda an ‘organization’, and for instance not a ‘group’, or a ‘network’. Those terms just apply to some of its constituents, still not to the organization as a whole.

<sup>39</sup> Along with Al Qaeda the Egyptian groups *al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya*, *al-Zawahiris al-Jihad al-Islami*, as well as the Sudanese *National Islamic Front* have been instrumental in the creation of the ‘umbrella network’ (v. Alexander/Swetnam 2001: 6).

<sup>40</sup> cf. Alexander/Swetnam 2001: Appendix 3, p. 3; *ibid.*: 39.

<sup>41</sup> I want to point in particular to the World Trade Center bombing in New York in February 1993, to the killing of U.S., Belgian, and Pakistani peacekeeping troops in Somalia in October 1993, to the killing of U.S. military trainers of the Saudi National Guard in Riyadh in November 1995, to the massive bombing of the ‘*al-Khobar*’ U.S. Air Force housing complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in June 1996, and to the bombing of the Paris underground in December 1996.

*Al Qaeda 1* in those days were concentrated on the theoretical education and practical training of both its own members, those of affiliated groups of *Al Qaeda 2*, as well as of globally recruited individuals that were not yet organized. Intelligence on the trainings reveals a top-down educational strategy that is not bound territorially: for instance, in September 1992, first, some top commanders of *Al Qaeda 1* had been trained in Khost, Afghanistan. Second, while in 1993 some of its operatives were receiving training in Khartoum, the Sudan, one of *Al Qaeda 1*'s top commanders, Ali Mohamed, was sent to Somalia to build training camps for Somali tribesmen that later attacked the U.S. peacekeeping troops. In 1994/1995 affiliated operatives of *Al Qaeda 2* – for instance of the GIA<sup>42</sup> – had been trained. Finally, in December 1996 some of them were involved in the bombing of the Paris underground.

Regarding the 'new' *Al Qaeda*'s operational activities and its tactical strategy bin Laden stated in the 1996 'fatwa':

[...] due to the imbalance of power between our armed forces and the enemy forces, a suitable means of fighting must be adopted i.e. using *fast moving light forces that work under complete secrecy*. In other words to initiate a *guerilla warfare*, were (sic!) the sons of the nation, and not the military forces, take part in.<sup>43</sup>

He further called the killing of five U.S. trainers of the Saudi National Guard in Riyadh in November 1995, and the bombing of the 'al-Khobar' U.S. Air Force housing complex in Dhahran in June 1996 two important tactical successes of the organization. At that point it had actually spread both its conceptual, and its operational activities far beyond the Arabian peninsula already.<sup>44</sup> The expansion and structural strengthening of *Al Qaeda 2* finally became apparent by the 1998 'fatwa' that was signed by the leaders of five different 'jihadi' groups. This development I would describe as a process of institutionalization that is bound directly to the extending ideological focus of the organization as a whole.

While *Al Qaeda 2* was prospering, *Al Qaeda 1* set up a new tactical means within the framework of the 'second front': it provided training to some particular individuals (v. Tab. 1: 'operatives B'), and sent them to both Muslim and Western countries where they

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<sup>42</sup> i.e. the Algerian 'Groupes Islamiques Armes'.

<sup>43</sup> *Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places. A Message from Usama bin Muhammad bin Laden unto his Muslim Brethren all over the world generally, and in the Arab Peninsula specifically.* [v. Alexander/Swetnam 2001: Appendix 1 A, p. 11; accentuations by AA.]

<sup>44</sup> The above mentioned U.S. indictment (cf. footnote 36) states that „by September 1997, the Grand Jury investigation focused, in part, upon the structure and operational status of al-Qaeda in countries including the Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jemen, Somalia, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bosnia, Croatia, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, the Philippines, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan, and the Chechnya region of Russia and the Kashmiri region of India, as well as in Kenya and the United States“ (Alexander/Swetnam 2001: App. 3, p. 8). In retrospect it is interesting that the investigation did not mention any activities in Western Europe.

resumed a 'normal' life outwardly. In fact they were organized in small cells, and – by order of the conceptual body – started to prepare, and to execute terrorist operations on the spot. The first large-scale operation that was put into action by such cells were the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998. The new tactical means had proved a success – too, because the members of an activated cell did neither know what the occupation of each member exactly was nor what the action in full was targeted at. The following U.S. missile counterstrikes which were directed at 'terrorist sites in Afghanistan and the Sudan' (Bill Clinton) were not able to substantially cut the capabilities of *Al Qaeda 1*. First, its 'sleepers' were living inside several Western, and particularly European countries already. Second, the organization's conceptual capabilities, anyway, could never be seriously endangered by military means alone. They, on the contrary, have been prodded by that reaction of the Clinton administration. It was probably not yet aware of the actual dimensions of the phenomenon of *Al Qaeda*, however, subsequently it had failed to sufficiently compensate the lack of information and strategical farsightedness, too. Two years later the September 11 attacks represented the single biggest success for the *cellular network* of *Al Qaeda 1*. On the other hand, the West went through an unprecedented state of shock.

It is not true that the U.S. and allied counterstrikes in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks were ineffective. The toppling of the Taliban's regime was a crucial and necessary step, and in retrospect its outcome looks quite positive, too: "Approximately half of the senior *Al Qaeda* leadership have been captured, the group's previous communications network has apparently been crippled, and its Afghanistan base has been largely eliminated." (CRS Report for Congress 2004: 84) On the other hand, these massive military strikes have just partly been able to affect the activities of the cellular network. Without much doubt alleged members of *Al Qaeda* that could be captured have been forced to give information on the cells, and their operatives. Seeing their degree of secrecy, however, the actual knowledge of low- and mid-level members about the cellular network is most likely rather limited. Second, both the ongoing U.S. strategy, and *Al Qaeda 1*'s temporary slow-down have been contributing to another structural change of the organization: generally it is the "transition from a territorially-based, centrally-directed structure to a more decentralized, mission-driven organization" (ibid.). Moreover, in response to the external pressure the conceptual body has increasingly proceeded to source out the entire operational planning of actions to regional 'franchisees' (v. Tab. 1: '*Al Qaeda 3*'). Those operative groups like

for instance the one that has been operating since early 2003 in Saudi Arabia under the name of ‘Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula’ (QAP)<sup>45</sup>, or the one led by the Jordanian extremist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq link themselves openly to the conceptual leadership of *Al Qaeda I*, but act independently – and are therefore less predictable, too. In the course of its structural transition Al Qaeda has actually become more dangerous for Western societies, as well as more difficult to combat, too. First, since the bombing in Djerba, Tunisia, in April 2002 we can find an accumulation of attacks that are directed at Western tourists and workers in Muslim countries, as well as at Western civilians in their homelands. Second, the U.S. strategy to topple Saddam Hussein’s regime has opened not only a new combat area, but probably also a new territorial basis for dispersed Al Qaeda operatives. So the strategy of the ‘war on terrorism’ has brought the U.S. and their allies to a position of deadlock: This military counterstrategy can only be complete with the extinction of all armed opposition to the occupation of Iraq, for if the Western alliance fails in Iraq – as well as in Afghanistan, too – the ‘*jihadi*-fighters’ will become more powerful.

## 5. Conclusion and outlook

The relationship between ‘the West’ and the ‘domain of Islam’ has always been characterized by a variety of mutual stereotypes. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century this relationship has been exposed to a large amount, and high intensity of conflicts. It is no wonder that the experiences Muslims have made in the course of these conflicts have formed their image of ‘the West’ – and generally not to the better. On the other hand, ‘the West’ for the most part has closed its eyes to the realities that its strategical activities have started or contributed to in the ‘domain of Islam’.

The radicalization of Islamist extremists, and the emergence of the phenomenon of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’ is connected with that specific kind of Western ignorance, too. The setting up, as well as the ideological development of Al Qaeda represents a particular example of the regional, and global effects that inconsiderate, inconsistent, and short-term Western strategies can have. The U.S. and its North Atlantic partners have closed their eyes to the developments which have boosted the phenomenon of ‘modern Islamic fundamentalism’. In this connection I want to point, first, to the ‘double standard’ policy of ‘the West’ in relation to Israel, and of the U.S. as its protecting power in particular, second, to the highly inconsistent Western, and especially U.S. policy in Afghanistan

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<sup>45</sup> This group for instance was responsible for the shooting rampage and hostage standoff in May 2004 in Saudi Arabia’s oil industry hub Khobar which killed twenty-two people, mostly foreign workers (cf. International Crises Group 2004).

during the Soviet invasion, in the aftermath of their withdrawal, as well as up to date. Third, the highly problematical support of autocratic, oppressing regimes in the Muslim world, and the anti-liberal effects of that policy have to be stressed in particular. These three 'stories' of Western ignorance have affected the everyday life of a majority of the Muslims in the region in a negative way. Not only the actual activities but also the latent Western ignorance has contributed to an aggravation of the conflict between the 'domain of Islam' and 'the West'.

To counter that development it is, first of all, for Western actors crucial to acknowledge their ambiguous role in the relationship with the 'domain of Islam'. Strategically and politically 'the West' has the advantage. It, however, does not in the least serve its own, innermost interests – i.e. security, stability and liberal progress – to rashly gamble away these cards to probably score a quick win, instead of setting up a consistent, and long-term strategy that would really improve its relationship with the Muslim world. In my opinion an effective easing of the conflict cannot start before 'the West' acknowledges and publicly admits the failures and negative effects of its strategies. For the 'domain of Islam', on the other hand, it is crucial to stoop to the opening of a new framework of intercultural dialogue. Such a framework, first of all, would have to define the new rules of co-operation between the partners to keep away as well as possible any structural disadvantages from the actual discourse. If 'the West' continues to cease to acknowledge its strategical failures, and, by way of contrast, continues to commit them, the contemporary state of conflict and instability will not change to the better.

One of those failures of 'the West' – and a key necessity for analysts like Amin Saikal and Bassam Tibi – is the lacking incorporation of reformist, including liberal Islamic forces into a constructive, political dialogue. Western actors have to acknowledge, address, and to encourage those political forces. To encourage them, however, must neither imply to make them dependent on Western means nor to mainly use them for one's own short-term strategical interests. This simply represents an artificial, and also less sustainable support of a few domestic elites, or movements, but would neither encourage them to increase their social, and political influence on the premises for the benefit of any innermost, and long-term Western interests, nor lessen anti-Western feelings in the Muslim world. A policy of mutual cooperation, on the other hand, would both advance the Western interests, and open up new possibilities for Muslims at the same time to find *their* way out of the contemporary state of political oppression and socio-economic disparity.

To acknowledge, first, the difference of the 'other' is making it possible to incor-

porate him – despite of his difference. In the course of a cooperative framework one is able to obtain positive outcomes even if one actor doesn't agree with the other right away: after all, they both are engaged as partners in a constructive discourse. The next step would be to institutionalize this framework, and make it a strong and reliable body to solve intercultural disputes. It is true that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a political framework has been established, and an international institution been founded to tackle such problems: the United Nations. However, to ease the contemporary crises between the 'domain of Islam' and 'the West' the U.N. will only be able to contribute substantially, if its political bodies, and the Security Council in particular are reformed, and – not only but also – the Muslim world is given a stronger role. This, on the other hand, is realistic but only if Muslims are given the chance to develop their societies politically by themselves. To that both its internal socio-religious, and socio-political forces, as well as 'the West' have to stoop.

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