

ANALYSIS - The War On Terrorism (*Australian Aviation*, November 2001, p 36-39.)

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August 30, 2002

The events of September 11 were a rude awakening for a complacent Western world. In broad daylight, terrorists dived two hijacked airliners in to the World Trade Center towers and one in to the Pentagon. The full death toll in the New York attacks may never be known.

In the two weeks following these horrific events, the Western democracies have erupted in a mix of anger, sorrow and sadly, misdirected malice. At the time of writing the US is forming a large coalition to support operation 'Enduring Freedom', the opening round in what could be a protracted series of campaigns across Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

The 'September 11' attacks have been hailed as ingenious, revolutionary, innovative, brilliant and lateral in their execution and their aims. These assertions generally deny the reality that every single aspect of these attacks has been at various times the subject of techno-military fiction, academic analysis or military-doctrinal debate. Osama Bin Laden's followers synthesized established ideas from existing Western public domain literature and executed them. They were anything but original.

We could ask: 'what is the difference between a IJN kamikaze pilot in 1945, a Waffen SS 12th Division Panzergrenadier in 1944, or an terrorist kamikaze in 2001?' Sadly, differences lay only in the ideological dressing of the players and their manner of force deployment.

This month's analysis will explore the background to the this conflict, and identify some key issues to be considered.

1 Islamo-Fascism - New or Old Adversary?

The relationship between the West and the Islamic world has been turbulent. Islam threatened Western Christendom in the 8th century, via expansion from Muslim Spain (conquered in 711),

later through the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. The Ottoman Turks were only stopped at the gates of Vienna in 1532.

The 'Golden Age of Islam' fell between 750 to 1258 AD, during which the 'Islamic Empire' stretched across North Africa and the Middle East to Western India and the Indonesian archipelago. During this period Islam led the world in science, education and administration. At the same time, the West was scientifically and culturally backward, often poorly governed, even chaotic.

The four Crusades were religious wars, aimed at reconquering the Holy Land and establishing a foothold for Western Christendom in modern Israel, Syria and Lebanon. While the Crusaders achieved temporary success between 1097-1291 AD, they were eventually defeated by Muslim armies.

Muslim Spain, after 400 years of relative stability, was finally reconquered by Spanish kings, culminating in the fall of Granada in 1492. The Inquisition was originally formed to root out remaining Muslims and Jews - medieval Christendom considered Islam a Christian heresy and its Prophet Muhammad a schismatic.

The Islamic 'Golden Age' ended with the sacking of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258. It never recovered its prominent position after this period, becoming politically stagnant by comparison with the now vibrant West. While Europe experienced the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Islam remained divided into the relatively prosperous and stable Ottoman Empire, Persia (now Iran) and a gaggle of anaemic kingdoms scattered across North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and India.

The imperial expansion of the West saw most of the Muslim world colonised by Western powers. Islamic societies could not compete with the industrial age West and its advantages in military technology and technique, industrial capacity and education. By 1900, only Morocco, Persia and Afghanistan remained independent: the rest colonised by Britain, France, Holland, Russia and Turkey.

The twentieth century saw an Islamic revival - combined with Western nationalism. This process was speeded by the breakup of the Ottoman Empire after the Great War, decolonialisation and the partition of India in 1947.

During the Cold War, newly decolonialised Muslim nations split down political fault lines, often receiving generous military and economic aid packages from both West and Soviets to secure allegiance and strategic position for military basing.

Syria, Iraq and Egypt attempted repeatedly to destroy Israel, but the technological and operational superiority of the Israeli military machine made this futile - even before Israel received significant military aid from the US.

Seeds for the current conflict were sown in the late 1970s. Two defining events occurred: the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, aiming to secure an Indian Ocean port to choke off the Persian Gulf, and the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, was deposed after his attempts to produce a modern Western aligned state produced major cultural dislocation. Iran became a theocracy - melding characteristics of medieval Islam with the ideology of modern nationalism - and virulently hostile to the 'satanic' secular West.

Afghanistan's Soviet invaders were defeated by a sustained war of attrition conducted by Afghan groups, financed and supported mostly by Saudi Arabia and the West. This produced a pool of experienced guerilla combatants, many ideologically wedded to fundamentalist Islam. Refugee camps on the Pakistani border became a hotbed of fundamentalist, especially Wahhabi, theology.

These two events are pivotal to understanding current developments. After decolonialisation, virtually all Muslim nations either became secular kingdoms or secular republics. This was a development which partly paralleled the West's social evolution in the post-medieval period, when Church and State separated. This turbulent process did not end until Napoleon, by which time the influence of the Papacy on Western politics had decisively diminished. The intervening period was one of often vicious religious persecution, mass murders of Protestant minorities and Jews, and the reign of the Holy Inquisition in Catholic Europe.

Two modern models can be used to analyse this process.

Toffler's model of 'First (agrarian), Second (industrial) and Third (information) Wave' societies and economies is one. Marx's argument that 'changing the means of production causes changes in wealth distribution and results in social upheavals from changes in power relationships' is another. Both yield consistent results when applied to the modern Muslim world.

Most of the Muslim world has been urbanising and industrialising simultaneously. A huge rural-urban population drift as peasant agriculture becomes non-viable is now taking place. Culturally dislocated peasants were the 'factory fodder' of the industrial revolution in the West, but also the 'cannon fodder' of the revolutionary armies of fascism, Nazism and communism. Moving from the stability of traditional religious rural communities to the instability and economic uncertainty of urban society produced a large group of dislocated, disenfranchised and discontented citizens in the West. What we see in the Muslim world today differs very little. To expect anything but extreme instability is to deny the trauma of the Western experience, staggered over several centuries of civil and nation state wars.

Islam is now divided across several boundaries. Secular republics and kingdoms, which emulate western development, and theocracies which aim to export 'Islamic revolution' and restore the 'Golden Age of Islam' is one such division. The second is defined by differences between (minority) Shi'ite Islam and (majority) Sunni Islam, the latter split between moderate interpretations and fundamentalist Wahhabi beliefs. A third is one of class, between the educated and often wealthy urban middle classes and poorly educated, poverty stricken peasants and urban working classes. Another divide is across boundaries of national wealth, natural resources, strategic position and GDP per capita, exacerbated by the end of Cold War US/Soviet allegiance-purchasing. The sixth is ethnic, with hundreds of diverse ethnic groups throughout the Muslim world.

Modern Muslims live in environments which fit into any possible permutation of these groupings. The modern West, which has largely transitioned from industrial age economy to information age economy framed by liberal democracy, is remarkably monolithic in economic, cultural and political terms when compared with the Muslim world. With the West's Asian allies and the former Soviet Bloc nations progressively moving to a similar level of economic and social development, the fragmented and unstable Muslim world faces a bleak future in a competitive, globalised information age.

It is this environment which has spawned the modern phenomenon of 'Islamofascism', a term coined by analyst Stephen Schwartz.

Islamofascism is a movement which melds the ideology of the fascist/communist single party totalitarian state with the theology of Islamic fundamentalism. Its aims are the unification of the Muslim world under a single Islamic fundamentalist ideology, and the restoration of the 'Golden Age of Islam', where the Muslim world becomes a cohesive, powerful, wealthy political bloc capable of competing with the West. Similarities with Nazism and communism are plain:

1. It is not a monolithic entity, with Shiite and Wahhabi/Sunni offshoots scattered across the Muslim world and Muslim emigre communities in the West.
2. It preys upon disaffected intellectuals and the disenfranchised poor. Key Islamofascist players like Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are typically maladjusted members of the middle-class, not unlike Dr Goebbels, Goering, Lenin and Trotsky.
3. Islamofascism exploits 'out-group' psychology to unify its followers and focus their hostility. It targets all Jews for extermination, and some groups expand this to include all citizens of the West.
4. It uses the techniques of urban and rural 'revolutionary warfare' as a means of subverting existing governments, so as to impose an Islamic fundamentalist single party state.
5. It exploits ideology and propaganda to seduce recruits. These are psychologically conditioned to demonise opponents and commit mass murder without restraint.
6. It exploits wealthy backers and third party nation state sponsors, all of whom believe they can profit strategically or materially as a result. Good historical comparisons are Imperial Germany's support for Lenin's Bolsheviks and European industrialists funding Hitler's embryonic NSDAP.
7. It advocates 'pan-Islamism', or dominance of the world by a single Islamic regime, not unlike the pan-Germanism advocated by the Nazis, or world communism espoused by Soviet ideologues.
8. It mimics Nazism's marginalisation of women, seeing them primarily as 'breeding stock' who should not be given social and political equality with men. Here, however, the Islamofascist marginalisation of women is exacerbated by a theology which treats women as morally inferior to men.
9. Islamofascism also uses mass media as a propaganda tool. Uncritical regurgitation of such propaganda by Western media has given Islamofascism global reach and effect.

Terrorism is the principal military tool of Islamofascism, since nation states sponsoring it are unable to compete in open combat against the overwhelming military power of the West.

For the last two decades, moderate and secular nations in the Muslim world have been subjected to an ongoing campaign of subversion, propaganda, and guerrilla warfare, including bombings and assassinations of moderate politicians, intellectuals, journalists, unveiled women and other secular

citizens. These individuals are the driving force behind the process of urbanisation and secularisation in the Muslim world and are subjected to the same terror as opponents of fascism and communism once were.

The September 11 WTC and Pentagon attacks were thus the tip of a much larger iceberg of terror usually directed against moderate Muslims. As the West serves as an example for moderate Muslims, it is a primary target of Islamo-fascist hostility.

Islamofascism is thus not new: it is a fusion of medieval Islamic fundamentalist theology with the methodology of fascist/communist revolutionary warfare, plus the exploitable technological tools of the information age.

However, unlike Nazism and communism, it does not possess the massive military resources of populous and highly developed economies. It makes up for this with a tenacious and fanatical medieval ideology.

Harvard academic Prof Samuel P. Huntington coined the term 'Clash of Civilisations' to describe ongoing conflict between the Muslim world and the West: he saw both as essentially monolithic entities. This is a dangerous oversimplification which aligns closely with the aims of the Islamofascist movement: it sees large scale conflict between the West and Muslim world as a tool to unify all Muslims.

2 The Military Challenge

The military challenge faced by the US-led coalition in the 'War against Terrorism' is formidable. The technological, numerical and operational advantage held by the West cannot be challenged, indeed no individual Muslim nation or group of nations could survive the type of focussed air campaign which broke Iraq in 1991 and Serbia in 1999. However, Western nations are very open, with large immigrant populations, exposed political institutions and economic infrastructure. This makes the West extremely vulnerable to urban terrorism - like the destruction of the WTC - or individual assassinations.

The WTC attack was symbolic: a propaganda tool for rallying the faithful and demoralising the West; political as a means of goading the West into an indiscriminate military attack on the Muslim world; economic as it was a direct attack on the heart of the US financial system; and racial as America's Jewish community is concentrated in the New York. It was also aimed at promoting hatred for Muslims in the West, a strategy which has sadly had some success. From a targeting perspective, it was a carefully thought out strike with very focussed aims.

A Western military thinker planning this strike would have dived four kamikazes into the four largest Middle Eastern oil terminals to force up the price of oil and thus systemically attack Western economies. However, this would impair the terrorists' capacity to siphon funding from wealthy sympathisers in the Middle East and would alienate many Arabs.

It is very likely other 'assymetric' attacks of this ilk are planned, aimed at selectively damaging other parts of the Western world's highly integrated economies, and sowing discord between Western nations and groups within the West. With nuclear, biological and chemical weapons being prized commodities in the Muslim world, we should not be surprised if these are used in future attacks. The strategic aim of the Islamo-fascists is clearly to destroy the West's capacity and will to support its allies, both Muslim and Israeli, in the Middle East.

US President George W. Bush has defined the West's opponents in this conflict as terrorist groups, their supporters and nations which harbour and sponsor them. While the immediate focus of the 'Enduring Freedom' campaign is the defeat of Osama Bin Laden's groups hosted in the Taleban controlled portions of Afghanistan, it is clear that the US has broader aims of defeating the Islamo-fascist movement across the Muslim world. This means effecting political changes away from Islamo-fascist centred governments in some Muslim nations and the direct task of destroying this movement and its practitioners.

The West faces some broad and serious challenges in its conduct of this war.

1. Maintaining the solid economic growth which has been the cornerstone of the West's wealth and military power. Systemic attacks such as the destruction of the WTC towers can produce large economic disruptions on a global scale.
2. Maintaining internal security against urban terrorists without destroying the freedoms and the integrity of the West's internal institutions. The temptation to introduce 'police state' measures will disrupt economies and political cohesion in the West.
3. Maintaining cohesion between the various nations in the Western alliance. The traditional propensity of the EU to impose their frequently incoherent aims upon an alliance can seriously undermine a collective effort, as seen in their unhelpful political meddling in both the Desert Storm and Allied Force campaigns.
4. Maintaining community cohesion and support within Western nations. Within two weeks of the September 11 attacks we have seen a chorus of anti-American rhetoric from left wing intellectuals and commentators emerge, reminiscent of the appeasers who did their utmost to accommodate Hitler before WW2, and the Soviets throughout the Cold War. Over the same three weeks numerous attacks on Muslim emigres and mosques in the West have occurred. By undermining the cultural tolerance characteristic of the West these indeed amount to 'aiding and abetting the enemy'.
5. Developing and refining established counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and strategic doctrines to yield a better return on military effort in combating such opponents. The West had its successes and failures in combating terrorism, insurgency and fascist/Nazi/communist ideologies during the last century, and these lessons must be carefully mined for insights in order to defeat the terrorist movement as quickly and effectively as possible.
6. Devising ways of exploiting the assymetrical advantages in military capabilities, such as air power, space and information warfare, held by the Western world, to maximise the damage effect and minimise collateral damage in upcoming campaigns. Fighting the opponent symmetrically is to cede the West's greatest strength and 'play the enemy's game' rather than drive the tempo of the war to the West's advantage.

7. Understanding the psychology, and the ideological and military vulnerabilities of the Islamofascist terrorist enemy. The West developed a sophisticated understanding of the inner workings of the WW2 fascists and the Soviets, and used this to great effect in defeating these opponents. Penetrating a medieval mindset across cultural boundaries will be a much bigger challenge than understanding the thinking of a Nazi or communist.
8. Reconciling self imposed constraints to warfighting conduct, enshrined in the Law Of Armed Conflict, with the central role played by clerics in the command structure and propaganda machinery of the Islamofascist movement.

These are not trivial challenges since they cut across every aspect of how the Western world does its business, be it economic, political or military.

There will be no simple 'one fits all' method for defeating the Islamofascist terrorist threat, since the enemy is a dispersed, diverse, hidden opponent, accustomed to covert warfare and contemptuous of the protocols of military conduct (Law of Armed Conflict) which have been politically imposed upon Western defence forces.

A Western defeat in this war could have incalculably grave strategic consequences, with the potential for Middle Eastern and Central Asian oil reserves, and key strategic choke-points being monopolised by hostile Islamofascist opponents with an ideology and aims even more repressive than the Nazis or the Soviets. An alignment between the PRC and a winning Islamofascist side could escalate into nuclear conflict very quickly indeed. The PRC's track record in facilitating Pakistan's nuclear capability and Iran's ballistic missile capability should not be ignored in the strategic calculus.

The 'War on Terrorism' is likely to be protracted, bloody, complex and risky, and there is no guarantee of success, especially if Western governments and military establishments fail to understand the nature and absolute ruthlessness of this opponent. In an age of globalisation, the West faces a globalised enemy in many respects unlike any fought in recent times