9/11: Wahabism∕Hegemony and Agenic Man/Heroic Masculinity

Strategic Insights, Volume IV, Issue 3 (March 2005)

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Introduction

This article will explain terrorism within the context of hegemony—the rise of Western hegemony and decline of Islamic hegemony and hence the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The need for an alternate thesis has arisen given that politicians, generals and intellectuals have grappled dismally in understanding the causes and even more so the political, military and social significance of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. They have failed as dismally as they did a decade previously in predicating or explaining the end of the Cold War.

Intellectual discourse assists in explaining this article's thesis. Robert Keohane instructed "systemic theory is important because we must understand the context of the action before we understand the action itself."[1] This builds upon C. W Mills who told us, the "sociological imagination" should locate individual biographies in larger social-historical contexts.[2] Robert Cox identifies this for security studies noting "the most promising form of critical theory is historical materialism, which sees conflict as a possible source of structural change rather than as a recurrent consequence of a continuing structure."[3] This critical theory is based upon Karl Marx's writings on historical materialism furthered by the Frankfurt School.[4] It follows that the essential program of contextual historicism involves finding connections between people's ideas and the material world.

Explicitly the decline of Islamic hegemony and the rise of Western hegemony provoked the social-historical context for an Islamic minority to embrace fundamentalism vented in terrorism. A Senate Judiciary subcommittee on terrorism has taken evidence that the 9/11 attacks were an expression of anger and rage expressing sentiments that embraced martyrdom rooted in an especially strict austere minority Islamism traced back to the fanatical Puritanism of the Bedouin zealots known as the *Wahabis*.[5] This article takes *Wahabism* through hegemony showing it as the systemic context key to unlocking 9/11 as acceptance by the perpetrators that the ultimate sacrifice of a soldier is to give his life for a cause. The cause was perceived to have been fueled by *Wahabi* fundamentalist sentiments, where *jihad* or holy war, became a compensatory, default position. The Al-Quaeda terrorist network found this tolerable given the historical Islamic suicide wars of *Aflt.* This gave substance to justify terrorism as a means where a warrior legacy of "heroic masculinity" was resurrected within a framework of an anti-modern and anti-Western holy war.

The choice of America as the target is indicative of its hegemonic role expressing military asymmetry—small players can harm the powerful easily.[6]

It is not the purpose of this article to retread the theoretical literature, now that it has been identified. It is sufficient to infer from these the explanations of the causes of 9/11 as arising from various contemporary political and military social realities as outcomes of longer historical movements that influence people's lives. Such realities, drawing on globalization, warlordism, de-regularization, entrepreneurship and philanthropy, provide the context of how cultural production, political economy and the politics of cultural texts, model the nature of human interaction in communities, societies and civilizations. Such a thesis matters to provide crucial strategic insights essential to the rapidly evolving structure of international society. States can no longer be considered the sole actors while the hegemonic power can no longer rely on its actual and perceived strength for its defense and to deter any offense. Asymmetrical networks flank hierarchical state structures in the world order generating different notions of intangible power struggles. Rationality is no longer a reliable constant given the advent of rogue states and substantial terrorism. Such a thesis matters to provide a deeper meta-narrative thereby taking issue with preceding scholarship on 9/11.[7] Following this line of argument this article continues under the headings: The Rise and Decline of Islamic Hegemony; The Dignity of Agenic Men and the Social Psychology of Rage; The Joys of Fundamentalism and Heroic Masculinity; and the Aftermath of September 11.

The Rise and Decline of Islamic Hegemony

The hegemonic decline of Islam is systemically understood relative to the rise of hegemonic Western Christendom both as an outcome of rational capitalism, democratic nation state construction and the massive applications of science to technology and industry, including the mass printing press.[8] For the perpetrators of 9/11 hegemonic Islam is best contextually understood as more than a religion; it is an entire way of life having roots in Muhammad, as a prophet and arbiter. In its formative period, hegemonic Islam as a way of life was typically spread by conquest or *jihad*, holy war. At its origin in Mecca, subsequently in Medina and in the evolution of early Islamic communities, the religion was transformed into a widespread Arabic, status oriented, warrior religion. For Islam, political control was more important than the conversion of the conquered. There was dialectic of hegemonic Islamic imperialism in which violence was used to eliminate tribal parochialism and create and enforce religious universalism. Early Islam, as a religion of knightly warriors, had little room for sin, humility, or vocational asceticism.

This rise and spread of Islam depended in part on conquest by Muslim warriors, bequeathing a legacy of "heroic masculinity" that would endure long after the demise of Islamic hegemony. This is not that different from other civilizations also based on conquest that celebrate their soldiers and valorize patterns of "heroic masculinity" typically on the qualities of war. To be a hero, to embody the heroic, is to gain respect and admiration. In the feudal eras, both Christian and Muslim knights were highly esteemed and respected. But the Christian knights were typically elites whereas many of the Muslims came from peoples where everyman was a warrior. This element is formative in explaining suicide terrorism as an event for and by "the man the street." The context still needs to be elaborated on as the cause - this being hegemonic Islamic decline.

Many trajectories are evident in considering the historical materialism and sociological imagination of declining hegemonic Islam. All lead to the understanding that without changes in social organization and facing advances in the technologies of weapon production, Islamic military power would decline vis-à-vis the growing economic and political power of Europe.[9] Part of the decline of Islamic hegemony was the lack of an Islamic landed upper class to exploit and repress peasants. Their presence in Europe enabled a strong military class loyal to the central State that contributed to internal stability. While there was a great deal of conflict over who would rule, the basic forms of Islamic governance remained fairly stable. Consequent stagnation saw Islamic societies not having internal impetus or class pressures to modernize. Neither the

dynastic elites, nor the merchant classes wanted changes that would undermine their status. There were no proletariat, nor peasant revolts against landlords. Social rationality was closely tied to the foundations of specific religious categories, beliefs, and exercises in relation to everyday life, commerce, and governance. In practice while there were few pressures for internal change of the system, there would be many conflicts over succession, and competing claims, if not civil wars over the "true" heir of the Prophet. Adding to the demise of the Islamic hegemonic power was the lack of distinction of sacred and secular law.

There were further reasons both internal and external why Islam did not, could not embrace democratic, industrial, modernity starting with material factors. Its political economy and class relations did not creative an elective affinity to modernization - trade, commerce, land ownership and tenure.[10] Islam was shaped by the needs of merchants who wanted secure caravan routes and warriors who made sure they lived in a tranquil empire of trade. Islam saw events or actions, fatalistically, as the will of Allah. Islamic civilization reached great heights, but turns to orthodoxy and stability would eventually lead to its demise—as Christendom was emerging from its feudal era. After the 14th Century, Islamic societies actively maintained various barriers to external cultural influences. While this reproduced Islamic cultures and preserved social arrangements, it created barriers to incorporation of Western innovations from factories to nationalism. Previous highly advanced Islamic pursuits of science, medicine and philosophy ceased to develop. Independent inquiry virtually came to an end, and science was for the most part reduced to a veneration of a corpus of approved knowledge. Not to be left out is the profound impact of printing. The Islamic world had learned the art of paper making from the Chinese. But they preferred elaborate calligraphy to simple type and as result it was not possible to use printing technology of the day to foster mass literacy in the Islamic world. Consequently the population at large in the Islamic world was not empowered nor was it enlightened as it was in Europe .

In Europe new ideas about science, politics and culture would be debated and discussed. These ideas included critiques of despotism, inalienable rights, and popular sovereignty that lead to emancipator struggles. Europe evolved through the Reformation, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution and entered the 20th Century with a system of European core countries that would relatively render the Islamic world a number of poor, weak, peripheral and semi peripheral counties, dependent on Western markets for advanced technologies and manufactured goods. Given the richness and level of its Golden Age, and its current relative class oriented financial depravation and lack of democracy it is not surprising that the declining Islamic hegemony became the spawning ground for fundamentalisms and indeed the emergence of terrorist organizations.

While it might be argued than no single factor was crucial, it is evident historical, structural, legal and ideological barriers factors colluded with colonialism and imperialism to sustain dependency and subordinance. In these the legacies of feudal Europe would give rise to democratic industrial and technologically advanced and literate capitalist societies while the legacies of feudal Islam would act as barriers to a secular, capitalist, democratic and literate modernity. At the end of World War II, the Islamic countries stood at basically the same economic levels as Asian countries like Taiwan, Korea or Thailand. The Asian "tigers" have prospered—while the development of most Islamic countries has stagnated. Dictatorial leadership has not invested the oil revenue in the populace. Today, save oil producing Gulf States , most Muslim societies remain agrarian or in some cases, extractive. The curve of relativism is rapidly increasing.

Today the dominant economic and cultural force in the world is globalization, and save some tourism and oil extraction, or garment/toy assembly, the positive forces of globalization has by and large bypassed the Islamic world. The negative forces of globalization have had impact on the Islamic world including unequal distributions oil wealth, structural adjustment programs, and exposure to secular western values—seen as hedonist indulgence rather than virtues. There is little investment, little economic growth, few factories, and fewer state of the art science research centers. Rather a wide swath of poverty, unemployment, destitution and hopelessness. These are

the breeding grounds of fundamentalism and terrorism, understood as reactions to multiple crises of legitimacy from fiscal mismanagement, misguided economic polities, failures of secular Western ideologies (nationalism, socialism), corruption of local elites and growing frustration. It was within this contextual setting that Al-Quaeda was born and plans set forth for the suicide hijackers of 9/11.

Heroic Masculinity

This article commenced analyzing declining Islamic hegemony as the systemic context for historical change and transformation of social factors. This provides the global cause for the 9/11 attacks but is not sufficient as a singular reason. It is necessary to consider that within this social-historical factors mediate the processes whereby social-psychological factors shape individual behavior and consciousness. This process, "structuration," consists of actions and beliefs in which individual desires find gratification and/or amelioration of anxiety, in reproducing the social structure. The framework as well as the notion of the context in which the individual lives offers a way of linking such socio-historical considerations to the everyday life and social structure of the terrorists, their thoughts, feelings, desires, opportunities and constraints.

In these the linkages of society and the individual become the most important units of analysis. Given the discussed context, it is a clear suggestion that whatever else might inform human conduct there are at least two affective moments of individual behavior:

1. people seek dignity, respect and recognition for themselves or their actions, and
2. they seek agency, impact upon the world. Indeed far more men have died for the sake of honor in combat than for the love of a woman.

Following struggles for recognition/dignity may be seen as central to both the person and his/her groups. Conversely, shame and humiliation, assaults on honor and denigrations of selfhood foster rage to assuage the insult. The failure to acknowledge unconscious shame fuels individual rage, collective destructive conflicts and violence. In this light the perpetrators of 9/11 perceived themselves as the "wretched of the earth" and sought self-dignity to overcome the denigration of Islamic hegemonic selfhood through cathartic violence.

Turning back to the context to understand the individuals incident of terrorism offers the act of martyrdom promising a means of communal restoration of a mythical past to resurrect the dignity of the golden age of Islamic hegemony. Cyclically it would also restore a major element of that past. This would be the "heroic masculinity" of the warrior to make the ultimate sacrifice to kill or be killed in combat. Most cultures have archaic legacies that celebrate models of "heroic masculinity" as symbols to be followed. The Islamic cultures have legacies of Saladin's triumph over the Christians, or the Saracen victories in the Steppes or Sultan Mehmed II who defeated Byzantium.[11] There is no doubt that the Al-Qaeda network glorified the suicide wars of *Aflt* creating a warrior legacy of "heroic masculinity" resurrected within a framework of an anti-modern and anti-Western holy war—*Jihad.* Such a combination of the attainment of self-dignity and the satisfaction of death for a cause would be a powerful incitement for would-be martyrs to consider a target that was *kafir*, not believing in the Islamic way of life. Namely the ultimate sacrifice of a soldier is to give his life for a collective cause and that would also perpetuate for eternity his individual martyrdom. This provided the contextual "sociological imagination" for the 9/11 attacks as an expression of individual heroism for both self and communal dignity.

The Joys of Fundamentalism (Wahabism) and The Social Psychology of Rage

Such heroic masculinity finds expression as terrorist rage through fundamentalism as taught by *Wahabism*.[12] It generates the singular most important linkage in one direction having worked

downwards from hegemony to terrorism via heroic masculinity—the context having generated the event. This linkage can be also warranted by reversing the order of argument upwards from terrorism to hegemony via heroic masculinity—the event as a cause of the context. Contemplating both directions shows *Wahabism as* teaching: that denigration leads to resentment and rage; that the martyrs acts of suicide grant ideological compensations that would be reaped by their living communities; that a harvesting of suicide martyr compensations would hasten the creation of "public spheres" for the hitherto silent to find voice and articulate alternative visions and paths to secular globalization; that this would harking back to earlier, more glorious time. The rise of fundamentalist *Wahabism* by Al-Quaeda being reactionary to the contemporary globalized world and the rapid changes taking place such as population growth, rapid urbanization, changing class/gender structures and exposure to Western (secular), materialist and often hedonistic (erotic) values. Noticeably the first response to Western culture-based globalization would be to affirm traditional forms of Islamic community, identity and values. Indeed the growth of fundamentalism does just that: it provides a dignity granting community of meaning based on imagined traditions and values. Such fundamentalism could be classified as "reactive ethno-nationalism."

Thus conditions of degradation and despair find dignity and honor when joined with the legacies of the "heroic masculinity" of "warriors." Terrorism, when seen as the action of a "heroic warrior," serves to redirect rage to the perceived oppressor and thus empowers the person and restores his/her dignity and honor. Violence to the oppressor is not only cathartic, but becomes viewed as the means to overcome political, economic or cultural domination. Projecting resentment outwards, a small number of radical fundamentalists, young, unattached, underemployed males, turned militant and turned to terrorism. And of these, an even smaller number, become suicide bombers, fully accepting the belief that fallen warriors, martyred in battle, *shaheeden*, get a special place in heaven.

On September 11, 2001, nineteen men changed the course of history by hijacking and flying commercial passenger aircraft as an act of suicide into the World Trade Center in New York City and The Pentagon outside Washington DC, while a further attempt was thwarted into a crash in the Pennsylvania countryside.[13] Possibly the perpetrators of 9/11 considered their act as a *Wahabi* based form of heroic masculinity that offered a way of the morass of the community. The morass and resentment to the West in general and America in particular, stemmed from a perception that these were responsible for declined Islamic hegemony, for economic hardships and the perceived collective inferiority not simply in the sense of being colonized and/or impoverished, but the condition of denigrated and suppressed selfhood denied of dignity.

The Aftermath of September 11

The event of 9/11 was a wake-up call to the advent of international terror on American soil by a fundamentalist non-state network of individuals. The perpetrators died in the act leaving America without recourse to bring legal justice other than to elusive individual planners. In this 9/11 was a form of terror unknown to America. Terror has been a tool of wars since war became an instrument of the struggle of man against man. It is not a weapon of the weak, but a weapon of barbarism amongst warriors who have relinquished the fear of civilization. Terror is fear. Both citizens and soldiers without discrimination know this fear. This is the political discourse of terrorism. The fear is not the act of violence. The dead remain the dead. The wounded live in fear of the next act of violence based upon their experiences of the previous act of violence. The next act of violence may never happen, but the fear lives on. In ancient times terror came after battle had ended. The victor never had absolute victory, but the loser had absolute loss. The loser would face the enslavement of the men, the rape of the women and the castration of the boys. Prior to the nuclear age violence prevailed once the military force had ended. There was the fear of losing that brought about wars and victory till the death on the battlefield. In contemporary terror times, the media creates a narrative of fear to those who have not been present at the act of military force or that of violence. Those watching the media also fear the next act of violence

based upon their perceptions of the previous act of violence, which might never happen. Time is a double-edged sword. Paranoia can set it as time progresses where there has been no further act of violence. Similarly the longer the time after an act of violence, the less vigilant a population becomes. The longer the time after an act of violence, the greater the paranoid a states security forces become. In this terror can succeed in a single act of violence in changing the texture of a society.

The martyr act by a minority few did not attain Agenic Dignity as it was repulsed by the majority of Islamic religious leaders and followers. 9/11 did not topple Western hegemony nor did it resurrect Islamic hegemony. It may never be known if Al-Quaeda had ever thought through their actions in terms of changing the texture of American society; however, this may be recorded as their eventual success.

In an understandable reactionary fashion to combat the fear of the next act of terror the American hegemonic state embossed methods that would sustain its hegemony and dignity. President Bush's 2002 State of Union Speech placed American political policy firmly on a footing for control and direction of the military resting on a fear based psyche of vulnerability replacing the previous Cold War's footing of a threat based psyche.[14] From this policy has come the Bush Doctrine of pre-emptive war where it is understood that the offense is the best form of the defense, which takes as a given that deterrence has failed in asymmetrical conflict between terrorist networks and hegemonic sovereign states.[15] The acts of violence in one morning have brought about a global war against terrorism and the rogue states that sponsor terrorist organizations. Following this has been implementation on the strategy level of new structures such as the Department of Homeland Security and Northern Command.

Strategic insight into the aftermath of 9/11 shows that the implementation of the beliefs and values of democratic American society are more in danger than the American territorial state or its structures of government. On the tactical level there is a clear micro-management of the military by the political. On the societal level the Patriot Act has shown that America is monitoring individuals and not states in controlling the space of communication between individuals rather than the space of trading routes between states. America the hegemonic state persists but potentially at a price of civil liberty. The threat to civil liberty stems from enhanced governmental regulation. On the macro level the positive aspects of globalization are being regulated and constrained. On the micro level tourists entering America are being warned that they will be photographed and fingerprinted. The failure of a second attack of the dimension of 9/11 has led to a search for pre-emptive retribution to placate paranoia. Vengeances may diminish the moral structure and principals of society. In this asymmetrical networks can succeed by the mere threat of terror in changing the texture of a society. The true threat to democracy comes once fear of acts of violence no longer exists on both sides. Anarchy becomes the alternative to civilization.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to explain the events of 9/11 by first understanding the specific event within context. The argument commenced by quoting Robert Keohane's systemic theory[16] and C. W Mills who told us, the "sociological imagination" should locate individual biographies in located larger social-historical contexts.[17] These and Karl Marx's writings on historical materialism furthered by the Frankfurt School assisted by Robert Cox provided theoretical security links utilized by this article in the linkage of hegemony and terrorism. As shown in this article, the legacy of a distant past, ideology, religion, and interstate relations weigh upon the present. Following the decline of Islamic hegemony, most Islamic societies, elites or commoners shunned Western secular modernity, democratic governance and remained poor and undemocratic. No doubt this was aided by colonization, globalization and domestic dictatorial political systems. This gave rise to a minority-embracing fundamentalism as comforts to, if not expressions of resentment in face of poverty, stagnation and despair. *Wahabism,* a particularly stern version of Islam, furthered this fundamentalism. The extreme expression of this

fundamentalism coupled with heroic masculinity embraced terrorism. To be sure the *shaheed* became the default mode, insure the reproduction of adversity conditions, and dared the unthinkable in asymmetrical conflict for the dignity of the community through the act of the individual. The individuals were 19 suicide hijackers in a terrorist network asymmetrically attacking the world's sole hegemonic sovereign state. To be sure the event of 9/11 expressed in terms of hegemony needs a strategic reevaluation of policies and doctrines within context of hegemony: to sustain democratic expression of the citizen as greater than the state; for globalization, trade and communication to progress unhindered by state regulation; and for the political to resist micro-management of the military.

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