SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 & TERRORISM

Fact Sheet

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

- On September 11, 2001 the United States of America was attacked by terrorists using hijacked commercial passenger airplanes, which were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington DC, and a field in Pennsylvania.

- The Twin Towers at the World Trade Center in New York City were destroyed, the Pentagon suffered serious damage, and a third target escaped damage, when the passengers aboard flight United 93 attempted to retake the plane causing it to crash in Shanksville, PA.

- The attacks were carried out by 19 members of an international terrorist organization known as Al-Qaeda.

- 2,996 people died in the attacks, including the 19 hijackers.

- The victims represented 90 countries and all major world religions.

AL-QAEDA

- Al-Qaeda is a religious extremist militant group founded sometime between 1988 and 1989 in Pakistan by Osama bin Laden, who was heavily influenced by Islamic author and thinker Sayyid Qutb (1906 – 1966).

- Fatwas are religious opinions concerning Islamic law traditionally given by a scholar of Islam. Fatwas can differ in interpretation. Muslims are not obligated to follow any particular leader or fatwa, and independently choose whether to follow them. The following is an excerpt from a fatwa that Osama bin Laden, an engineer by training, purported to issue in 1998, in which he authorized the killing of American civilians and their allies:

  “In compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa mosque and the holy mosque [in Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.”

- During the attacks on the U.S. on 9/11, many Muslims were killed. Al-Qaeda relied on Sayyid Qutb’s concept that many Muslims are actually apostates (that is, they have forsaken their religion). As such, Al-Qaeda deemed it both permissible and obligatory to execute those Muslims who they characterize as apostates.

- Although Al-Qaeda leaders say they work in the name of Islam, they do not represent the beliefs and practices of mainstream Muslims. Note for example the fatwa issued on September
27, 2001 by senior Middle Eastern Muslim clerics that called the 9/11 attacks un-Islamic and gave permission to Muslims in the U.S. armed forces to fight in the war in Afghanistan. The ruling was requested by the U.S. military’s top Muslim chaplain. Parts of the fatwa read:

If the terrorist acts that took place in the US were considered by the Islamic Law (Shar’iah) or the rules of Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), the ruling for the crime of “Hirabah” (waging war against society) would be applied to their doers. God (Glory be to He) said: “The recompense of those who wage war against God and His Messenger and do mischief on earth is only that they shall be killed...” 5: 33-34.

Therefore, we find it necessary to apprehend the true perpetrators of these crimes, as well as those who aid and abet them through incitement, financing or other support. They must be brought to justice in an impartial court of law and punish them appropriately, so that it could act as deterrent to them and to others like them who easily slay the lives of innocents, destroy properties and terrorize people. Hence, it’s a duty on Muslims to participate in this effort with all possible means, in accordance with God’s (Most High) saying: “And help one another in virtue and righteousness, but do not help one another in sin and transgression.” 5:2.

In this case [where a Muslim is a citizen of a state and a member of a regular army], he has no choice but to follow orders, otherwise his allegiance and loyalty to his country could be in doubt. This would subject him to much harm since he would not enjoy the privileges of citizenship without performing its obligations.

The Muslim (soldier) must perform his duty in this fight despite the feeling of uneasiness of "fighting without discriminating." His intention (niyya) must be to fight for enjoining of the truth and defeating falsehood. It’s to prevent aggression on the innocents, or to apprehend the perpetrators and bring them to justice...Moreover, even if fighting causes him discomfort spiritually or psychologically, this personal hardship must be endured for the greater public good, as the jurisprudence (fiqhi) rule states.

- Stated ideology and goals of Al-Qaeda include:
  - Creating a single “Islamic state” that would bring together all Muslims around the world under a single government and would follow a single interpretation of Sharia as state law.
  - Removing the leadership of countries Al-Qaeda perceives as permitting corrupted forms of Islam and foreign (e.g. American) occupation.
  - Removing American military, as well as all Western economic and cultural influence, from the Middle East and largely Muslim countries.

- The current leader of Al-Qaeda is believed to be its founder Osama Bin Laden.
- Al-Qaeda has no home base. Rather, it maintains cells in countries around the world.
- Since 1998, Al-Qaeda has carried out attacks in several countries including the US, Turkey, Kenya, Tanzania and Yemen.
- Al-Qaeda mainly uses bombings and suicide attacks.
- Muslim groups and leaders across the globe have denounced Al-Qaeda and its actions as un-Islamic. These include religious leaders, politicians, academicians, journalists and public figures.
MAINSTREAM ISLAM’S POSITION ON TERRORISM

Islam views terrorism and suicide bombings as actions that are totally prohibited. Both the Qur’an (Muslim scripture) and hadith (prophetic sayings) place supremacy on the sanctity of life and the importance of security and peace. In fact, taking an innocent life is considered one of the most condemnable acts in Islam. Terrorism is a modern day aberration that was adopted in the 20th century. In addition to being practiced by various extremist Islamic groups, it is also used by non-Muslim organizations, such as the Tamil Tigers and the IRA. Such actions are alien to Islam's 1400 years of history, teachings, and tradition.

Terrorism—which is defined as the use of violence and threats to intimidate, coerce, or terrify people, especially for political purposes—directly contradicts Islamic rules of conduct during war which prohibit targeting civilians. These principles are based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his early successors, who forbade harming civilians during wartime, specifically women, children, clergy, and the elderly. These teachings also prohibit damaging churches, cutting down trees, poisoning wells, and slaughtering civilians’ livestock. In a modern context, this means avoiding the destruction of any infrastructure that affects the lives of civilians, such as food sources, water, hospitals, roads, and bridges.

Suicide is also prohibited in Islam based on the belief that no one has the right to take away a life given by God, except God. To engage in a suicide bombing where one takes one’s own life, as well as the lives of innocent people, is thus one of the most condemned acts in Islam.

Islam’s laws of warfare are comparable to “Just War” beliefs from other traditions in that it stipulates that war should only be fought between combatants, not with civilians, and should be fought in self-defense or against oppressive forces, but not as an act of aggression.

Terrorists who maintain that their actions are based on Islam are misappropriating the religion, just as many extremists and extremist groups from a variety of backgrounds misappropriate their religions to justify their actions.

Dozens of scholars of Islam issued a statement condemning the violent attacks of September 11th. "We are grief-stricken at these horrifying events," they wrote; "the murder of innocents can never be justified and must not be tolerated." The co-signers of the statement are the steering committee and members of the Section for the Study of Islam at the American Academy of Religion. They represent many scholarly societies in the United States and Canada and include:

Professor Asma Afsaruddin, of Notre Dame University
Professor Ghazala Anwar of the University of Canterbury, New Zealand
Professor Abdullahi Gallab of Hiram College (Arizona State University)
Professor Behrooz Ghamari of Georgia State University (University of Illinois)
Professor Alan Godlas of University of Georgia
Professor Hugh Talat Halman, of University of Arkansas
Professor Marcia Hermansen of Loyola University, Chicago
Professor Qamar ul-Huda, of Boston College (USIP)
Professor Amir Hussain of California State University, Northridge (Loyola Marymount University)
Professor John Iskander of Georgia State University
Professor Ahmet Karamustafa of Washington University in St. Louis
Professor Tazim Kassam of Syracuse University
Professor Zayn Kassam of Pomona College
Professor Ruqayya Khan of University of California at Santa Barbara (Trinity University)
Professor Omid Safi of Colgate University (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)
Professor Walid Saleh of Middlebury College (University of Toronto)
Professor Zeki Saritoprak of Berry College (John Carroll University)
Other professors, scholars of Islam, and political activists who condemned terrorism include:

Dr. Hina Azam, professor, Texas
Dr. Robert Crane, political activist, advisor, Center for Understanding Islam (former Chairman)
Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl, professor and author, UCLA
Dr. Hesham Hassaballa, physician and political activist, Illinois
Dr. Maher Hathout, physician, Muslim scholar, political activist, author, renowned speaker and board member of Muslim Public Affairs Council
Sheikh Kabir Heminski, religious scholar and author, California
Dr. Sherman Jackson, professor and scholar of Islam, author and renowned speaker, University of Michigan
Dr. Muqtedar Khan, professor, author and political commentator, University of Delaware
Shaikh Nuh Ha Mim Keller, scholar and religious leader, based in Jordan
Sheila Musaji, editor, The American Muslim, Missouri and compiler of Muslim condemnations of terrorism.
See: www.theamericanmuslim.org
Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina, professor and author, Franes Meyers Ball Chair of Religious Studies, University of Virginia
Dr. Agha Saeed, National Chair of the American Muslim Alliance
Imam Zaid Shakir, scholar, author, and religious leader, founder of Zaytuna College

Dr. Ingrid Mattson, professor of Islamic studies and Muslim-Christian relations at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, and president of the Islamic Society of North America, October, 2001:

"Islamic law is very clear: terrorism is not permitted. Even in a legitimate war — even if Osama bin Laden were a legitimate head of state, which he’s not — you’re not permitted to indiscriminately kill civilians, just to create terror in the general population."

Shaikh Hamza Yusuf, scholar, author, religious leader, and renowned media figure, and founder of Zaytuna College:

“The attackers were ‘enemies of Islam.’” Not martyrs, but ‘mass murderers, pure and simple.’ One of the worst crimes in Islam is brigandry -- highway robbery, or today we’d say armed robbery -- because it disrupts the sense of well-being and security among civilians. San Jose Mercury News, Sept. 16, 2001