

# Political Islam at the Close of the Twentieth Century

ESTHER WEBMAN

Discussing the state of Islamist movements on the eve of the twenty-first century, Sudanese Islamist researcher and former diplomat 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Effendi chose the late Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, as his "man of the century." Banna, Effendi claimed, "succeeded in creating a particularly potent mass political and cultural movement that has proven itself in most Muslim countries, and has, in fact, spread out to include Muslim communities worldwide." The refusal of the Egyptian government and other Arab regimes to allow Islamist movements to participate in government is "a clear admission" on their part, according to Effendi, that the Brotherhood "has the potential to become the dominant political force, wresting the reins of power from the hands of those holding them today."<sup>1</sup>

Effendi's view reflected the approach of Islamist commentators who addressed the issue of the future of Islamist movements in 1999, in light of a series of significant events. One such event was the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Islamic revolution in Iran, which provided an opportunity for appraising its achievements in comparison to other political Islamic experiments, such as in Sudan and Afghanistan. In Egypt a major trial of Islamists known as "the returnees from Albania," which began in February, and a parallel trial in Yemen of the "Aden-Abyan Islamic Army" illuminated the nature of Islamist terrorist activity, recruitment methods and worldwide links. In another arena, prospects for the renewal of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and between Israel and Syria following the election of a new Israeli government in May created new dilemmas for Hamas and Hizballah. These were exacerbated by the Jordanian clampdown on Hamas activities later in the year.

The convergence of these events with the turn of the century prompted debate over the ability of Islamist movements to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. It also evoked pivotal questions such as whether the Islamist movements were in crisis, whether they could coexist with democratic, pluralist regimes, and whether violence was an inherent part of their ideology. Could they adapt their modus operandi to changing circumstances? Furthermore, should they withdraw from political activity and concentrate on the social sphere in order to regain the popularity and credibility lost from within their ranks as a consequence of their terrorist actions?

These questions were given greater urgency by the preoccupation in both the West and in Arab countries with "Islamic international terrorism," personified by Saudi renegade Islamist Usama bin Ladin. Fears of attacks against Western targets persisted through the year, especially on the eve of the millennium, and pursuit of Bin Ladin and his associates remained high on the agenda of the American security services.

## ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS AT A CRITICAL IMPASSE

### PERSPECTIVES AND VIEWS

Discussing the prospects of political Islam in the new century, commentator Ghasan al-Imam reviewed the extant Islamic experiences and showed their failure to sustain a viable Islamist regime. In Iran, he contended, President Muhammad Khatami's Islamism "has yet to prove its ability to become the middle way between a conservative, obscure fundamentalism and a national Iranian patriotism." In Sudan, the Islamist "militocracy" unsuccessfully attempted to form multiple alliances with all political movements in order to bring about social change. In Algeria, the Front islamique du salut (FIS) realized its grave mistakes but lost control to far more radical splinter groups that sought to Islamize society by brute force. The Taliban experience in Afghanistan spoke for itself in its obscurantism and oppression.<sup>2</sup>

Twenty years after the Iranian revolution raised the possibility of Islamists sweeping to power throughout the region, the Islamist movement in the Arab world faced a critical impasse. No single coherent regional movement had evolved. The two Islamist regimes in the region — the Iranian and the Sudanese — were too saddled with internal problems to export their models or even to finance Islamist groups elsewhere. As funding became privatized, such groups were increasingly assisted by the earnings of migrant laborers or by wealthy individuals and families, especially in the Gulf Arab states. The Islamist movements, moreover, were extremely varied; deep divisions over objectives and strategies also served to fragment their ranks and undermine their effectiveness. Although their social presence continued to grow, this was not translated into political power.<sup>3</sup>

Olivier Roy of the French National Center for Scientific Research attributed the inability of the Islamist movements to broaden their political base to their hegemonist ideology. Nonetheless, he viewed them as "legitimate actors in the political game...as long as they forgo violence."<sup>4</sup> Others thought their weakness was the result of an inability to coexist with each other.<sup>5</sup> Complexity and pluralism threatened most contemporary Islamists, according to Pakistani writer Eqbal Ahmad, because they sought "an Islamic order reduced to a penal code, stripped of its humanism, aesthetics, intellectual quests, and spiritual devotion." Ahmad criticized all variants of contemporary fundamentalism for "reducing complex religious systems and civilizations to one or another version of modern fascism."<sup>6</sup>

In a similar vein, sharp criticism of the Islamist movements was voiced by Tunisian scholar Muhammad Talbi, who accused them of distorting the image of Islam by turning to violence in the name of jihad and sowing the seeds of terrorism in Arab and Islamic societies.<sup>7</sup>

Islamist stagnation was also evident in their failure to Islamize society. Paradoxically, although the Middle East had witnessed a dramatic Islamization of state institutions and of social, cultural and political practices of Muslim societies in the last two decades, the process was waning in states under Islamist control. The best example was offered by Iran where youth were turning away from Islam and seeking alternatives (see below). The other side of the coin was that Islamist activism was strongest in countries most exposed to Western influence.<sup>8</sup>

Not all Islamic thinkers, however, shared the view that Islamists were in crisis. Many saw the movement as experiencing a temporary setback, the product of soul-searching and crucial changes that would lead to "a comprehensive Islamic revival and to the return to true Islam."<sup>9</sup> "Islamism contains an evident and powerful element of self-

renewal, of reconstruction and reconsideration of the self/past,” claimed Egyptian academic Bashir Nafi‘ in an interview.<sup>10</sup>

The leader of the Egyptian Vanguard of Conquest (Tala‘i‘ al-Fath), Ahmad Husayn Mustafa ‘Ujayza, cautioned that the Islamic situation in the region ought not be generalized. The Islamic movement in each area “has its own engine that is subject to the conditions and circumstances of its birth.” Temporary failures in one movement in a particular country should not be interpreted as a defeat for the Islamic plan as a whole, not even in that country, ‘Ujayza argued.<sup>11</sup>

Several commentators and scholars thought that Islamist movements were becoming mainstream, and that this trend constituted the most significant change they had undergone. Egyptian pro-Islamist writer Fahmi Huwaydi identified the most salient feature of the Islamist trend as a whole, barring certain fringe groups, as its abandonment of clandestine and/or violent methods and confrontational thinking. Although he and Diaa Rashwan, of the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, focused on Egyptian Islamist groups, other groups, too, were rethinking their positions regarding terrorism and political participation (see below). While acknowledging that years of violence had “undermined and distorted the Islamic message,” Huwaydi optimistically concluded that this had boosted the Islamist advocacy of “tolerance, coexistence, participation and peaceful reform among both intellectuals and activists.”<sup>12</sup>

Lebanese Shi‘i cleric Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah interpreted the Hizballah tendency toward moderation and political participation as “a cultural Islamic” trend “that wants to accept others” and coexist with secularists and with other Islamists as a response to changing realities. Fadlallah detected a similar tendency in the Egyptian Jama‘a Islamiyya movement and the Algerian FIS in recent years.<sup>13</sup>

In the view of Islamist thinker Shaykh Yusuf al-Qardawi, the future belonged to the moderate (*wasati*) Islamic movement “because the Islamic community (*umma*) is inherently a moderate *umma*.” As he saw it, “the present situation of the Islamic movement is better than it was a few decades ago and is getting even better.”<sup>14</sup>

### **The Challenge of the Peace Process**

The prospect of progress in the Arab-Israeli peace process following the election of a new Israeli government in May posed yet another challenge to Islamist movements, especially those involved in armed opposition — Hamas, Hizballah and the Islamic Jihad. Consequently, they were forced to rearrange their priorities and redefine their goals. Nonetheless, they all reiterated the centrality of the struggle against Israel on their agenda and pledged to keep “the flame of hatred burning.”<sup>15</sup>

The challenge, according to one American Muslim academic, was to “stimulate the Islamic masses out of [their] apathy, frustration and defeatism vis-à-vis Israel, into the highest state of alert.”<sup>16</sup> In contrast, another approach praised “the core of the Arab and Islamic street,” to which it attributed the determination to remain steadfast, and the rejection of a settlement or any form of normalization with Israel.<sup>17</sup>

According to Bashir Nafi‘, “the defeat of Zionism and the lingering spirit of imperialism, the two evils and immoral forces that are at the heart of the Western-Islamic conflict,” would also lead to a modus vivendi between Islam and the West.<sup>18</sup> Diaa Rashwan, too, accorded the developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict an important role in the reordering of priorities of the Egyptian Jama‘a Islamiyya and Jihad movements. Reviewing statements, articles and political programs issued by two newly-proposed

Islamist parties in Egypt, al-Islah (Reform) and al-Shari'a (see chapter on Egypt), he claimed that Arab-Israeli dynamics and evolving US-Arab relations "were crucial in [Islamists'] move from violence against state and society to a search for [domestic] political integration." After long years of struggle against society and the state, militant Islamists had concluded that priority should now be given to the most dangerous enemy, the "external enemy," namely, the Jewish state and the US.<sup>19</sup>

The application of this strategy, however, became increasingly difficult. Hamas, for example, was subjected to frequent arrests and harassment by the Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces (see chapter on the PA).<sup>20</sup> Hamas offices in Amman were closed down in August, several activists were rounded up, and warrants were issued for four of its officials — Khalid Mash'al, head of the political bureau; Musa Abu Marzuq, former head of the political bureau; Ibrahim Ghawsha, movement spokesperson; and Muhammad Nazzal, the Hamas representative in Jordan. At the time, Mash'al, Abu Marzuq and Ghawsha were all in Iran, presumably to discuss possibilities for training and other assistance. Immediately after their return on 22 September, Abu Marzuq, who held a Yemeni passport, was expelled and the others were arrested. They were held in prison until 21 November and then deported to Qatar, together with two other prominent Hamas members, 'Izzat al-Rashk and Sami Khatir (see also chapter on Jordan).<sup>21</sup>

The move against Hamas, timed to precede a tour of the region by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to revive the peace process, was seen as the outcome of Palestinian, American and Israeli pressure to neutralize the ability of Hamas to obstruct the process. What happened in Jordan, said Hamas spiritual leader Shaykh Ahmad Yasin, "is part of a US plan to press Hamas to join the peace process," perceived by Hamas as "an attempt to liquidate the Palestinian cause."<sup>22</sup>

However, these steps must also be viewed in the broader context of the widespread Arab effort to counter-terrorism (see below), particularly in Jordan, where Hamas had gained much influence within the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. The crackdown on Hamas in Jordan weakened the movement and exacerbated the alienation between Hamas leaders within and outside the West Bank and Gaza. Tension rose in 1999 over the two major issues of contention within most Islamist movements: participation in extant political systems, and the continuation of terrorism. The attendance of Shaykh Yasin at a PLO central council session in April which decided to postpone the proclamation of the Palestinian state signified a softening of ideological rigidity in the territories. The following month, Hamas agreed to temporarily halt military activity so that it could not be held responsible should Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu be reelected in Israel (see chapter on Israel). Moreover, it appeared that for tactical reasons Hamas leaders inside the Palestinian territories, including the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam military arm, considered a halt to suicide bombings and attacks on Israeli civilians.<sup>23</sup> These steps were at odds with the guidelines set by the leadership in Jordan.<sup>24</sup>

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad, adopting a new strategy of operating from southern Lebanon, was also pressured to cease its military activity. Lebanese Prime Minister Salim al-Huss called on Palestinian resistance movements in November to refrain from carrying out any armed actions in southern Lebanon that were inconsistent with Lebanese interests.<sup>25</sup> The Islamic Jihad, however, reportedly formed a partnership with other parties in the Lebanese "resistance movement" to take over the role of Hizballah should that organization agree to lay down its arms as a result of Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations.

A peace agreement was also expected to reduce both Iranian and Syrian support for

Hizballah, possibly hastening the transformation of Hizballah from an organization with both a political and a military agenda to a more purely political and social movement.<sup>26</sup>

In response, Hizballah, Hamas and Jihad all appeared to intensify mutual coordination and cooperation. In May, during a visit to Syria, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami met with Palestinian opposition forces.<sup>27</sup> In October Iran hosted another meeting of the three groups (for more on Iranian backing, see below). Also in May, according to a report in the Paris-based *al-Watan al-'Arabi*, the head of the Hamas political bureau, Khalid Mash'al, met secretly in Lebanon with Hizballah officials led by Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah. Discussion reportedly centered on the situation in the region following the Israeli general elections, means of cooperation, and the coordination of military operations.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, three Hamas leaders in Jordan were visiting Iran in August to seek support when the Hamas offices in Amman were raided (see above). In October a rally at the Palestinian Yarmuk refugee camp outside Damascus was organized by the Islamic Jihad to commemorate the assassination of the movement's former leader, Fathi al-Shiqaqi. The event was attended by Abu Marzuq of Hamas and Nasrallah of Hizballah.<sup>29</sup>

#### **THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION AT TWENTY — A TENTATIVE BALANCE SHEET**

The impasse of the Islamist movements was epitomized by the circumstances of the Islamic revolution in Iran as it marked its twentieth anniversary in February 1999. The revolution, which was a source of inspiration for Islamist groups worldwide, had apparently failed to realize many of its initial goals and retreated from, or at least moderated some of its basic principles. The shortcomings of the Islamic regime in two major spheres had particular bearing on other Islamist movements: the inability to apply Islamization domestically, and the inability to export the Islamic revolution. It did, however, manage to keep alive the flame of animosity toward the US and Israel.

Evidence of tension between reformist and conservative forces was manifested during and after the first-ever municipal elections on 26 February: the closure of newspapers; arrests, murders and trials of reformists; and, most dramatically, student disturbances in July (see chapter on Iran). These events reflected the polarization of Iranian society and the failure of the regime to inculcate the principles of the revolution in the new generation.<sup>30</sup>

Assessing the lessons learned from twenty years of Islamic rule, Iranian opposition politician and former foreign minister Ibrahim Yazdi, a liberal Islamist, explained that an Islamic government did not necessarily produce an Islamic society. The Islamic government of Iran, he claimed, "tried hard to exhort the people to follow the Islamic code." However, since these exhortations came from a dictatorial authority, people complied out of coercion rather than conviction.<sup>31</sup>

The regime, Azar Nafisi pointed out, promoted a polarized view of Iranian society which reduced all issues to the struggle between hardliners and moderates, a perspective adopted by the West. In reality, he argued, the main conflict was between efforts by the regime to impose an ideology in the name of religion, and resistance by a dynamic society.<sup>32</sup> The very concept of a supreme religious leadership was losing ground. Indeed, the politicization of the function had molded it into a "national and statist structure" that contradicted the original idea of a transnational clergy, explained Olivier Roy. "The vanishing of the revolutionary dreams has left the clergy largely divided...on political issues, [especially on] clerical participation in state politics," he observed.<sup>33</sup>

The other primary failure of the regime — its inability to export the revolution — led to a readjustment in Iranian foreign policy, paving the way for rapprochement with Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and with the West. The results of this shift were especially evident in 1999.

The Islamic Republic of Iran celebrated its twentieth anniversary no longer isolated regionally or internationally nor introverted.<sup>34</sup> A prominent Jordanian Islamist politician, Bassam al-'Umush, observed that since the Shah was overthrown, Iran “oscillated between opening up to the outside world and giving an enlightened image of Islam on the one hand, and looking inward, showing hostility to the world, and repeating unrealistic and anachronistic slogans, on the other.”<sup>35</sup> The pendulum had now swung to the former approach. In May President Khatami toured several Arab countries — Syria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain — in order to boost Iranian relations with its neighbors and reestablish itself as a regional power.<sup>36</sup> Khatami replaced the universalist vision of the revolution with a theme he called a “dialogue of civilizations.” The Islamic Republic thus broke out of its “ideological cocoon” and set about reestablishing relations with its neighbors on the basis of shared interests.<sup>37</sup> Such interests, argued Olivier Roy, dictated that Iranian strategic alignments had less and less to do with Islam per se or even with Shi‘i Islam. Rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, overtures toward the US, and links with Russia and the Muslim republics of Central Asia all showed that the clerical influence, which had been instrumental in mobilizing Shi‘i communities in the region in favor of the Islamic Revolution, had been either weakened or alienated from the Iranian government.<sup>38</sup>

Distancing himself from the universalist doctrine and concurrently halting acts of terrorism in Europe by Iranian agents, Khatami sought to enhance “legitimacy and recognition” for Iran and to end its status as a rogue state. On a first-time visit to Italy in March, during which he met with Pope John Paul II, and to France in October, he promoted the idea of dialogue between religions and civilizations. Addressing the annual UNESCO conference in Paris, Khatami preached peace, tolerance and coexistence in the age of globalization “to make a better world in the next millennium.” He concluded: “If the twentieth century focused on the force of the sword, with winners and losers along the way, we should know the main focus of the next century will be one of dialogue.”<sup>39</sup>

Some analysts, such as former CIA official Edward Shirley and Azar Nafisi, thought the Iranian revolution was becoming, or had already become moribund and that the Islamic regime in Iran was crumbling.<sup>40</sup> The revolution was a spent force, an Arab commentator observed, if revolution was defined as a violent movement aiming at forcing change. In such a case, “the revolution which broke out twenty years ago and set up the Islamic Republic of Iran as a prelude to exporting [that] revolution is over,” he stated. Its plan to export the revolution could not be implemented at a time when the world balance of power had shifted in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a US-led unipolar order. However, if revolution was defined as a movement aimed at continually changing and reforming society, he continued, then the Iranian revolution was still viable, having assumed a more modern guise under Khatami. Moving toward political pluralism, the reformers were thwarting any attempt to turn the Islamic Republic into an “emirate” along the lines of the Taliban “emirate” in Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup>

Some commentators maintained that the Islamic Republic had matured to the point of attaining a level of democracy on a par with other parts of the developed world, notwithstanding serious economic problems, and that it was being led by Khatami from

the revolutionary era into an era of normalization.<sup>42</sup> Khatami, however, held that his actions marked a “continuation of the same revolution which took place some twenty years ago.”<sup>43</sup>

In reality, the only surviving aspect of the revolution’s fundamental doctrine, as formulated by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was ongoing hostility toward Israel. By contrast, relations with the “Great Satan”, (the US), were on the mend. Iran hoped that improved ties with the US would bring economic benefits at a time of stagnation, social deprivation and falling oil prices, according to Syrian author and political analyst Riyad Najib al-Rayyis. However, in order to deal with the US indirectly, Iran had to continue to pressure the “Little Satan” (Israel), as well as maintain the 1989 edict (*fatwa*) condemning British author Salman Rushdie to death (see below). “The Iranian leadership understands that it cannot tear up overnight all the mantras laid down by Ayatollah Khomeini,” Rayyis wrote.<sup>44</sup>

The unrelenting approach toward Israel was expressed during processions marking the twentieth anniversary of the revolution and on other occasions, such as Jerusalem Day in December or the anniversary of the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy on 4 November (see *MECS* 1979–80, pp. 474–75).<sup>45</sup> Iran also continued to nurture the relationship with the Lebanese Hizballah and Palestinian resistance movements, increasing the flow of arms and money to them and coordinating between them in an effort to thwart the Arab-Israeli peace process. While in Syria in May, President Khatami met with a Hizballah delegation headed by Hasan Nasrallah and with representatives of the Palestinian Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the PFLP-General Command (PFLP-GC), pledging Iranian support for the armed struggle against Israel.<sup>46</sup> In October Hizballah leaders held a strategic meeting in Tehran, reportedly with the participation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders. Iran was believed to be fostering cooperation between them and encouraging them to carry out attacks against Israel and against Jewish targets worldwide in order to derail the peace process. According to American, European and Israeli intelligence reports, Hamas and Hizballah members were training in Lebanon under Iranian supervision in coordination with the Damascus-based PFLP-GC, and Hizballah had acquired long-range artillery from Iran.<sup>47</sup>

The case of Salman Rushdie constituted the other “mantra” that was not conceded. Although Iran repudiated the death edict (see *MECS* 1989, pp. 174–75; 1998, p. 144) in 1998, which led to the restoration of British-Iranian diplomatic relations, appeals to “all Muslims of the world” were reiterated on the tenth anniversary of the *fatwa*. The semi-official charity, Khordad, which offered a \$2.8m. reward to Rushdie’s killer, declared that the idea of Rushdie’s annihilation was “still very much alive and seeks only the right moment.” Most Western experts on Iranian politics discounted these renewed appeals, dismissing them as a product of conservative factions at odds with the Iranian government. Despite the “continued clamor” for Rushdie, said an official at the British Foreign Office, there was no reason to suspect that the Iranian government had backed off from its assurances. Nevertheless, responding to a question about Rushdie at a press conference during his visit to Italy, Khatami criticized European countries for praising “a person who has insulted the sanctities of more than one billion Muslims,” thereby keeping alive “the memory of war among civilizations.”<sup>48</sup>

## THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION — ELUSIVE UNITY

The Iranian record as president of the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) since 1997 reflected the changes that the country had undergone. Iran sought both to improve its standing among Muslim states and to promote the role of Muslim countries in world affairs, especially in the settlement of crises that influenced the Muslim world or involved Muslim minorities. Yet, except for inaugurating the new Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union (IIPU) in June, and convening the ICO foreign ministers forum that same month, the performance of the ICO was skimpy and marginal. Crises in 1999, such as those in Kosovo and Chechnya, demonstrated the confusion and divisions in its ranks.

Delegates from over forty countries, including twenty-eight speakers of parliament of ICO member states, inaugurated the IIPU, which convened on 15 June in Tehran, its designated headquarters. The decision to set up a parliamentary union, reached at the ICO summit in December 1997 (see *MECS* 1997, pp. 161–63), was modeled on the European Parliament. The aims were to pave the way for closer cooperation and unity in settling regional and border disputes among Muslim countries, solving the problems of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim states, and coordinating the stance of ICO member states on international issues.<sup>49</sup>

The event was immediately followed by the twenty-sixth conference of ICO foreign ministers held in Burkina Faso between 28 June–2 July. Issues discussed included developments in Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli sphere, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the Lockerbie question. The Iranian foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, delivering the opening address, urged the conference to “utilize it to devise appropriate solutions to the problems and crises” affecting the Muslim world, since it was the “last opportunity in this millennium to open new horizons of cooperation and solidarity.” The conference supported Khatami’s initiative to launch a dialogue between civilizations, ratified the establishment of the IIPU, and adopted a draft agreement on the struggle against terrorism. The foreign ministers accepted a Turkish proposal to coordinate aid extended by the Red Crescent organizations of ICO member states to the Kosovar refugees and to participate in the international aid campaign for Kosovo. The conference commended the Security Council resolution that called for the return of Kosovar refugees to their homes (see below), supported the UN peace initiatives in Afghanistan (see below), and welcomed UN efforts to solve the Iraqi crisis.<sup>50</sup>

### A WEAK RESPONSE TO THE KOSOVO CRISIS

The ICO response to the crisis in Kosovo replicated its policies during previous crises, such as in Afghanistan: alarm accompanied by ineptitude. Basically, it relied on the international community, and ironically, primarily on the West to impose a settlement.

The situation in the Serbian province of Kosovo, where 90% of the population of two million was Muslim, deteriorated in February 1998 when tension between the Serbian authorities and the ethnic Albanians who sought independence escalated into full-blown fighting. Serbian forces backed by Yugoslav army units launched a major crackdown against Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) guerrillas and their alleged supporters. Hundreds of fighters were killed and thousands of Albanians were uprooted. Both the UN and NATO tried to promote negotiations between the combatants and to end the conflict. Initially, the international community regarded the conflict as an internal matter. The

objective of all intervention was preservation of Yugoslavia and containment of the conflict to avoid a spillover into Albania and Macedonia, and the reestablishment of Kosovan autonomy. Throughout 1998, NATO, together with a UN contact group consisting of the US, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy, attempted to initiate direct peace talks between the Serbian authorities and the separatist Kosovo Albanians. Ultimately, it was the shuttle diplomacy of US envoys Chris Hill and Richard Holbrooke (broker of the agreement ending the Bosnian crisis in 1995), coupled with an explicit NATO warning that it would launch a military strike against the forces of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, which paved the way for a unilateral KLA cease-fire on 8 October 1998 and an agreement between the sides on 13 October. The agreement stipulated the withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo, the return of Albanian refugees, the establishment of an international monitoring force, and a timetable for autonomy talks.<sup>51</sup>

However, the crisis took a new turn in early 1999 following renewed attacks by the Serbian forces against the Kosovar Albanians in December 1998. On 6 February the Western allies succeeded in bringing the warring sides to negotiations in Rambouillet, France. There, the Albanians were ready to sign a peace deal which called for interim broad autonomy to be implemented by NATO troops but the Serbian delegation refused. On 24 March, following the rejection by the Serb parliament of NATO demands and the failure of all diplomatic efforts, NATO launched an air campaign against Yugoslavia, aiming to force Milosevic to withdraw troops from Kosovo. The attacks continued until 20 June, when Milosevic finally agreed to a deal negotiated by Russia, the US and the EU. This allowed the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops and the return of over half a million Kosovar refugees to their homes under the supervision of a peacekeeping force.<sup>52</sup>

In all these developments, involvement by the ICO or by any Muslim state was conspicuously absent. In contrast to Bosnia, when Islamist veterans of the war in Afghanistan played an active role in the fighting and the ICO, Saudi Arabia and Iran were all engaged variously in supplying arms, relief aid and negotiations for a settlement (see *MECS* 1995, pp. 98–100), the response to the crisis in Kosovo was late in coming. The reaction of the Muslim world, in the words of Fahmi Huwaydi, was “a deafening silence.”<sup>53</sup>

At the start of the crisis, Arab and Muslim governments mainly issued denunciations and appeals for swift action against the Serbs. Typically, Saudi Crown Prince ‘Abdallah in March 1998 deplored the “ethnic cleansing” against the Muslim Albanians. He also urged the world to stop Serbian aggression and protect the Muslims in the province.<sup>54</sup> A statement in the same vein was issued by Shaykh al-Azhar Muhammad Tantawi.<sup>55</sup> Contradictory statements were also issued, attacking the West for dragging its feet, on the one hand, and dismissing American intervention as a ploy to increase its influence in Europe, on the other.<sup>56</sup>

Confusion in the Arab and Muslim worlds intensified when NATO initiated its air attacks. Shaykh al-Azhar expressed tacit support for the NATO operation, while Islamists categorically opposed Western intervention. Coverage of the Kosovo crisis in the Arab press gave the impression that it was NATO that was committing atrocities against the Kosovar Muslims.<sup>57</sup>

Isolated Islamist appeals to prepare to fight in Kosovo did not gain momentum.<sup>58</sup> Although Belgrade accused “fundamentalist Islamic states” and Albania of supporting the KLA by providing arms, training and Islamist fighters, media reports did not

substantiate this claim. Quoting an unidentified Islamist, *al-Hayat* reported that Islamists had offered to join the KLA but had been rejected, allegedly because of American intervention.<sup>59</sup> Iran, moreover, was keen to demonstrate that it repudiated violence and had not transferred any arms to Kosovo. Conceivably, the coordinated pursuit by various Western security forces of Islamists in Albania and Bosnia, which led in June 1998 to the capture of three members of the Egyptian Jihad movement (see *MECS* 1998, p. 139, and below), also limited Islamist attempts to reach Kosovo.<sup>60</sup> An Islamist newspaper published on the Internet actually claimed that the reason for the crackdown on Islamists in Saudi Arabia in March 1998 on the eve of the hajj season was to prevent mujahidin from traveling to Kosovo.<sup>61</sup> According to a British Muslim report, Muslim relief agencies were also banned from Kosovo.<sup>62</sup> “The schizophrenia afflicting the Arab and Islamic intelligentsia,” wrote one analyst, “owed much to ideological leftovers, and to an exaggerated desire to oppose anything the United States does.”<sup>63</sup>

Arab and Iranian commentators criticized the Muslim response and urged the ICO to define its position promptly. They appeared convinced that the crisis could not be resolved by international organizations and that the solution lay in the ability of Muslims to achieve some kind of “balance of terror” vis-à-vis their enemies.<sup>64</sup> The ICO response, however, remained meek throughout the Kosovo crisis. Initially, it justified its stand by arguing that Kosovar leaders themselves were inclined to rely on European countries and the US.<sup>65</sup> However, when the crisis was rekindled in the beginning of 1999, the ICO did take some action. Saudi Foreign Minister Sa’ud Al Faysal flew to Russia on 29 March to urge Moscow to intervene and to convince Milosevic to stop the onslaught against Kosovar Muslims. Another trip to Russia was made by an ICO delegation a month later.<sup>66</sup> In his capacity as ICO president, Khatami attempted to counterbalance Iranian criticism of the air strikes by condemning Yugoslav treatment of ethnic Albanians as well and calling for a “principled solution.”<sup>67</sup> Early in April an emergency meeting in Geneva of a contact group of eight ICO member states — Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, Senegal and Pakistan — voiced support for NATO moves. It also expressed readiness to send troops to participate in a peacekeeping mission once a political agreement between the Kosovar Muslims and the Serbs was reached.<sup>68</sup>

The caution of officials contrasted with popular displays of solidarity with Kosovar Muslims organized primarily by Islamists in the West. Various Muslim forums and organizations, such as the American Muslim Council (AMC), the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) and several British bodies — Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid, al-Muhajiroun and Liberty of the Muslim World — staged demonstrations against Serbia and collected donations for Albanian refugees. In contrast to their counterparts in the Arab world, Muslim regional and national organizations in the West, which formed a united Kosovo task force, were unanimous in their support of the American and the NATO response to the crisis.<sup>69</sup>

### UNANSWERED CHECHEN APPEALS

Other crises that evoked confusion among Muslims were the renewed outbreaks of war in Chechnya and Dagestan in August. The war in Dagestan went through two phases. It began in early August when a group of Chechen and Dagestani separatists crossed into Dagestan from Chechnya and took control of a number of villages but were driven back by Russian troops. In late August trained Chechen-based fighters, led by the hard-line Chechen militia commander Shamil Basayev and the enigmatic Jordanian Islamist Ibn

al-Khattab (commander of the Dagestani Islamist forces in 1996), invaded Dagestan with the stated aim of establishing an independent Islamic republic in the Caucasus region of northern Russia — Chechnya and Dagestan. The second bout of fighting coincided with a spate of bombings in Moscow that claimed the lives of several hundred civilians. Attributed to Chechen separatists, the bombings prompted Russia to withdraw its recognition of Aslan Maskhadov as the Chechen president and launch military operations against Chechnya in October, accusing it of harboring Islamic terrorists.<sup>70</sup>

According to Russian intelligence reports, two bases had been set up in neighboring Azerbaijan to train Islamist preachers, financed through a Lebanese bank and operated by members of organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Algerian FIS, Islamic Jihad and the Sudanese National Islamic Front (NIF). The reports also claimed that financial aid reached the rebels from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar and various Islamist groups in Pakistan and Turkey, and that Chechen rebels were joined by fighters from a number of Gulf Arab states, as well as Islamists who were trained in Bosnia. Still, Russia was anxious to avoid a deterioration in its relations with the Muslim world, dispatching emissaries to Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan and other Muslim countries to explain its offensive in Chechnya.

Nevertheless, a month later, on 9 November, Russia banned flights between its southern territory bordering Chechnya and several Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, in an attempt to stop mercenaries from joining Chechen forces.<sup>71</sup> Saudi Arabia promptly denied Russian allegations, declaring its consistent opposition to any intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, a position reiterated by Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayif bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz.<sup>72</sup>

Facing a massive Russian offensive, Ibn al-Khattab urged the Muslim world in early November to extend immediate help to Chechen rebels in their “holy war” against “infidel Russia,” which, he explained, was an “obligation for Muslims under the Shari‘a.” His appeal, however, went unanswered. The silence of the Muslim states was bitterly criticized by Chechen commander Basayev in an interview on Qatar’s al-Jazira television channel.<sup>73</sup>

Pakistan alone urged Russia to halt its military assault of Chechnya and seek a peaceful solution to the problem in keeping with the fundamental rights of the Chechen people. The ICO, for its part, sent a delegation to Moscow to salve its conscience, but Iran, concerned about its relations with Russia, did not sympathize with the Islamist rebels.<sup>74</sup> Early in December the grand mufti of Egypt, Nasir Farid Wasil, called on all Muslim countries to cut political and economic ties with Russia and requested the international community to intervene in order to stop “the collective massacres committed by the Russian military forces.”<sup>75</sup> The official reaction, however, was mute. Scattered demonstrations took place in Jordan and Yemen against the Russian invasion of Chechnya, and emergency relief operations were organized by Muslim groups in the West to provide food, water and health care services for Chechen refugees.<sup>76</sup>

## ARAB COUNTER-TERRORISM

Terrorism in Egypt and other Arab countries continued to decline in 1999. Egyptian security officials attributed this decline to new preemptive strategies adopted by the police after the attack in Luxor in November 1997 (see *MECS* 1997, pp. 143–44).<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Arab governments were determined to eradicate militant Islamist violence by any means. The Arab agreement on combating terrorism was put into effect (see below);

Arab governments continued their crackdown on Islamists; and show trials were conducted in Egypt and Yemen. Islamists themselves were divided over the issues of violence and political participation. While seeking to weaken Arab-Western ties, paradoxically, they stimulated a confluence of interests between Arab regimes and the West.

### **THE ARAB AGREEMENT ON COMBATING TERRORISM**

Driven by Egypt, Arab countries continued to coordinate efforts to contain terrorism within their territories. The sixteenth annual meeting of Arab interior ministers convened in Amman in January to discuss further security cooperation aimed at apprehending criminals, terrorists and drug traffickers, and at implementing the 1998 inter-Arab agreement on combating terrorism (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 138–39). Concern was expressed about opportunities for Islamist militants to find refuge in European countries. Egyptian Interior Minister Habib al-‘Adili condemned the use of Europe “as a springboard for action against Egyptian interests.” Egypt repeatedly reprimanded Britain, in particular, for granting Islamists political asylum and residence permits.<sup>78</sup>

The agreement on combating terrorism, ratified in April by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, Algeria, the PA, Egypt and Tunisia, came into effect in May.<sup>79</sup> In August a joint committee of five Arab ministers of interior and five ministers of justice chaired by Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayif bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz met in Jidda to draw up the practical and legal articles of the agreement.<sup>80</sup>

### **THE RETURNEES FROM ALBANIA**

Concerted Arab and international efforts to combat terrorism during the latter 1990s engendered some success. Egypt used bilateral agreements to bring about the extradition of a number of wanted Islamists.<sup>81</sup> Among these were thirteen alleged Egyptian Jihad members caught in Albania in 1998 (see *MECS* 1998, p. 139), reportedly with the help of the CIA. The trial of the thirteen, part of a larger group of 107 defendants (sixty-three of whom were tried in absentia), was held in a military court in February. Attracting widespread attention, it was dubbed by the Arab press the “returnees from Albania case.” Among the defendants were some of the most prominent leaders of the Egyptian militant Islamist organizations — Jihad and al-Jama‘a — who were tried in absentia, including: Ayman Muhammad Rabi‘a al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian Jihad leader and a close associate of Usama bin Ladin in the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 129–30); Muhammad Shawqi al-Islambuli, brother of Sadat’s assassin and an al-Jama‘a leader who lived in Afghanistan; Yasir Tawfiq Sirri of the Islamic Observatory Center in London (al-Marsad al-I‘lami al-Islami); ‘Adil al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-Quddus, of Jihad in Austria; and five other Egyptian detainees held by Britain since September 1998 (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 134, 140). All were charged with conspiring to topple the government, membership in an outlawed group, plotting to assassinate state officials and police officers, involvement in terrorist attacks, possession of weapons and explosives, and forging official documents.<sup>82</sup>

The Supreme Military Court issued its verdict on 18 April. Nine defendants were sentenced to death, eleven to life imprisonment with hard labor, and sixty-seven to prison terms ranging from one to fifteen years. Twenty defendants were released. Among those sentenced to death in absentia were: Ayman al-Zawahiri, his brother Muhammad Muhammad Rabi‘a al-Zawahiri, Nasr Fahmi Nasr Hasanayn and ‘Adil Sayyid ‘Abd al-

Quddus. Among those sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor was Ahmad Husayn 'Ujayza, leader of the Jihad splinter group Vanguard of Conquest.<sup>83</sup>

The interrogations shed light on the modus operandi of the Islamist movements, verified previous reports on the ties between the various organizations and factions, and highlighted the pivotal role of Usama bin Ladin in unifying and financing them. Most revealing was the confession of Ahmad al-Najjar, who had previously been sentenced to death in absentia in connection with the Khan al-Khalili incident (see *MECS* 1992, pp. 370–72) and was handed over to the Egyptian authorities by Albania. His experience in the Jihad could be regarded as typical: after serving for a few years in Egypt as a religious propagator (*da'wa*), and as a recruiter for the military wing of the organization, he was sent to Yemen with a forged passport, where he met with Ayman al-Zawahiri. After an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Prime Minister 'Atif Sidqi in 1993, he left Yemen for Sudan. Following the 1995 bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Pakistan (see *MECS* 1995, p. 110), Najjar, along with several other Jihad members, relocated to Albania under the cover of employment in charitable organizations.

Bin Ladin, according to Najjar, objected to Jihad attacks inside Egypt because they evoked negative reactions and because their costs were “exorbitant.” Instead, Bin Ladin insisted, only American and Israeli interests should be targeted. Najjar, who was sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labor, confirmed that until 1992, no efforts had been taken to unify the Jama'a and Jihad. Thereafter, however, Bin Ladin made systematic attempts to unite their leadership on the grounds that they shared the same objectives. Its efforts were limited, however, by disagreement between the two movements over the religious issue of “excusing ignorance” (*jahiliya*), and on an organizational issue concerning the leadership (*imara*) and the consultative process (*shura*).

Another defendant, Shawqi Salama, revealed that significant efforts to bridge the views of the two organizations had also been made by several Sudanese Islamists, particularly speaker of the Sudanese parliament Hasan al-Turabi. However, in 1998 when Bin Ladin announced the formation of the World Islamic Front they were prompted to address the issue of merger. Yet another defendant, Sharif Hazza', linked the formation of the front to the period that Bin Ladin settled in Afghanistan (1996) and set up military training camps for elements from all the Islamist trends. He imposed rules on the newcomers agreed upon with the Taliban, which stipulated that Bin Ladin was responsible for all the Arabs there. In the event of conflicts between the various factions that could undermine security, they would all be expelled. Given that leaders of the Jama'a and the Jihad were being sought by international security forces, they had no choice but to accept these conditions. Bin Ladin was able to take advantage of this situation in order to bring all the groups under the umbrella of the new front and thereby settle the leadership issue. Organizationally, Bin Ladin maintained control, with some twenty followers, foremost among them Ayman al-Zawahiri and Shawqi al-Islambuli, assigned to assist him. Bin Ladin was also said to assume most of the financial burden. However, he required each faction in the front to attempt self-sufficiency.

According to the confessions, Bin Ladin continued to conduct his business activities, which ranged from import-export to trade in arms and ammunition from the former Soviet Union, and construction and road surfacing projects for the Taliban and other Asian Islamist groups and governments. Confessions also confirmed that elements loyal to Bin Ladin had obtained germ and biological weapons from East Europe, and samples of anthrax and other poisons from East Asia.

Ayman al-Zawahiri, who evidently had much influence on Bin Ladin, was reportedly in the US in 1995 under a forged passport, where he met with Islamists and raised money for his organization. A year later, he was arrested in Dagestan for several months until Bin Ladin intervened to secure his release.<sup>84</sup> The relationship between Zawahiri and Bin Ladin was described by the Islamists' lawyer, Muntasir al-Zayyat, as one between "mind and body." Zawahiri, he said, was Bin Ladin's brain, determining his actions and reactions. Bin Ladin's thinking underwent a metamorphosis after he first met Zawahiri in Peshawar in 1986. It was then that he was said to have become a militant Islamist, embracing Jihad principles.<sup>85</sup>

Additional details about the Islamist network were revealed during interrogations in another extradition case in 1999, which became known as the case of the "returnees from Azerbaijan, South Africa and Kuwait." Twenty of the seventy-seven defendants were extradited to Egypt from these three locations, among them Ihab 'Abdallah Saqr, 'Isam al-Din Hafiz and Ahmad Salama Mabruk, who were arrested in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan. Saqr belonged to the Vanguard of Conquest, which, together with Jihad, was involved in several terrorist attacks, among them an attack on the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad in 1995.<sup>86</sup>

In a conciliatory gesture following a reaffirmation by Jama'a to abide by its 1997 truce (see below), the Egyptian authorities released some 1,200 jailed Jama'a militants in April,<sup>87</sup> but continued its clampdown on Islamists. In October *al-Sharq al-Awsat* issued a list of Islamists wanted by Egypt for involvement in terrorist activities, which was reportedly published on the Internet site of the Egyptian Information Department. The list included Ayman al-Zawahiri; 'Adil 'Abd-al-Quddus 'Abd al-Bari, believed to be in Austria; Mustafa Hamza; Muhammad Shawqi al-Islambuli, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, leader of the military wing of Jama'a; 'Uthman al-Samman; 'Adil 'Abd al-Majid 'Abd al-Bari, detained in London as a suspect in the bombing of the US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar al-Salam in August 1998; Yasir Tawfiq al-Sirri; Ahmad Husayn 'Ujayza; Tharwat Salah Shahada; Usama Khalifa; Husayn Shumayt; and Usama Siddiq 'Ali Ayyub, who was granted political asylum in Germany in October.<sup>88</sup>

### **THE ADEN-ABYAN ISLAMIC ARMY**

Islamists in Yemen were dealt a blow in the wake of the kidnapping incident in the province of Abyan, northeast of Aden, on 28 December 1998 when four of sixteen Western hostages were killed (see *MECS* 1998, p. 665).<sup>89</sup> A trial of fourteen militants charged with the kidnapping and other subversive activity, eleven of whom were tried in absentia, was promptly begun (on 13 January). All the defendants were members of a splinter group of the Islamic Jihad that called itself the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army.<sup>90</sup>

Two weeks later, the trial of another group of militants, the "group of eight," opened. Five of the defendants — four British Muslims and one French Muslim of Algerian extraction — had been arrested before the kidnapping, on 23 December 1998, but were linked to the abductors by circumstantial evidence. Three other British Muslims and one more Algerian were arrested at the end of January in connection with the case. The group included Muhammad Mustafa Kamil, son of Egyptian Islamist Abu Hamza al-Misri who headed the London-based Supporters of the Shari'a (Ansar al-Shari'a) organization. They were charged with associating with armed groups, plotting to blow up British and American targets in Aden, and illegal possession of weapons. Some of

the defendants confessed that Abu Hamza had sent them to be trained in the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army camps for two months. Upon their return to London, the Islamists were to be sent to Kosovo or Kashmir to carry out jihad.<sup>91</sup>

The verdicts of the first trial were announced on 5 May. The mastermind behind the kidnapping and key defendant, Zayn al-'Abidin al-Mihdar (Abu al-Hasan), leader of the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army, was sentenced to death along with two other convicted abductors. Another defendant was sentenced to twenty years in jail, and ten others were acquitted. Mihdar, who acted as his own defense attorney, appealed to Yemeni President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih during the last session of the Court of Appeals on 4 August to pardon him and close the case if his organization ceased military activities. He also demanded: the release of all eighty of his supporters in detention; a general amnesty for others sought by the security forces; and political asylum in Yemen for Islamists who fled Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria. Warning that jihad would not end with his death, he urged his supporters in the Islamic Army to rally behind their new leader (*amir*) after his execution. Bomb incidents in San'a during the month of August were attributed to his followers. Mihdar was executed on 17 October, a day after the Yemeni Supreme Court upheld his death sentence.<sup>92</sup>

The second trial concluded on 9 August. Seven defendants were sentenced to prison terms of three to seven years. Three were freed following a decision that the eight months they had spent in jail since their arrest was sufficient punishment.<sup>93</sup>

The kidnapping and trials shed additional light on the motives and ideology of Islamists who perpetrated terrorist acts and on their supranational ties. The Aden-Abyan Islamic Army reportedly consisted largely of Egyptian and Yemeni Islamic Jihad members who had received military training and ideological indoctrination in Afghanistan and thereafter joined Yemeni government troops during the 1994 civil war. After the war, the Yemeni authorities proposed a plan of "social integration" and assimilation of Jihad members into Yemeni society, provided they renounce violence, lay down their weapons and dismantle their organization (see *MECS* 1994, pp. 718–19, and chapter on Yemen). Some accepted this offer, including the leader of the Islamic Jihad fighters, Tariq al-Fadli; others, led by Mihdar, turned down the prospect of civilian posts and insisted on being accepted into the military establishment only. The exact size of this group was unknown, although Mihdar claimed that it consisted of 50,000. The government, declining to integrate them into the military, took various measures to curb their activity. Nevertheless, Yemen reportedly became a base for subversive Islamist activity, including the planning of the bombing of the American embassies in Tanzania and Nairobi (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 131–32), and was cited as a possible refuge for Bin Ladin.

The formation of the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army was announced in 1998. Although it did not belong to Bin Ladin's World Islamic Front, its terminology and objectives were similar. The Islamic Army described the secularist Yemeni regime as infidel and deemed its overthrow a religious duty. Tourists and other foreigners were warned to stay away from Yemen on the grounds that it was "Muslim land." The kidnappers of the sixteen tourists demanded the release of members of the Islamic Army, including the detained British Muslims, whom they described as their "guests." They protested the Anglo-US military strike against Iraq in November 1998. Additionally, they claimed to have a religious edict sanctioning the killing of their captives on the grounds that they were infidels and had not secured permission from their leader, Abu al-Hasan, to be on Islamic

soil. In a statement submitted to *al-Hayat* in March the Islamic Army demanded that the American and British ambassadors to Yemen leave the country, warning that “a painful blow” would be struck to the “enemies of Islam.”<sup>94</sup>

Mihdar rejected the legitimacy of the court and asked to be judged by an Islamic court. He admitted that the Islamic Army was determined to bring down what he called the infidel secular regime in the country and replace it with an Islamic one. He also revealed that his organization planned to kill American and British citizens in Aden. “One of our objectives was to expel the Christians and Jews from our land,” he said. The abduction of the tourists aimed to pressure the “Christians,” the authorities, and the countries from which these tourists came to stop the air strikes against Iraq and end the blockade imposed on the Iraqi people, he explained. Mihdar revealed that he had met Bin Ladin in Afghanistan but claimed he had had no further contact with him since his return to Yemen in the early 1990s. He did, however, confirm his ties with London-based Mustafa Kamil, better known as Abu Hamza al-Misri, head of the Supporters of the Shari‘a organization. He admitted that Abu Hamza had sent him new communications equipment brought in by Muhsin Ghilan, one of the arrested British Muslims; communicated with him from Britain; and maintained telephone contact with him during the kidnapping.<sup>95</sup>

Western intelligence agencies, which reportedly took part in the investigation, were concerned specifically with possible links between Mihdar’s group and Bin Ladin. They wanted, inter alia, to establish the source of financing for Mihdar’s group. Captured members of the Islamic Army were found to own an extensive weapons arsenal and a satellite telephone, suggesting substantial backing. Inquiries, however, showed no “operational links” between the Yemeni group and Bin Ladin.<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile, Yemen sought the extradition of Abu Hamza al-Misri from Britain on charges of “exporting terrorism.” He was accused of dispatching the eight British Muslims and two Algerians to Yemen to carry out attacks on British and American interests, and involvement in the kidnapping of the sixteen Westerners in December 1998.<sup>97</sup>

Abu Hamza, together with Abu Bassam, the self-declared temporary leader of the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army while Mihdar was on trial, vowed to avenge his execution. He accused the Yemeni authorities of turning the country into an American base and warned Westerners against traveling there, although he denied his organization’s involvement in the kidnapping. He was detained in Britain in March but released shortly thereafter (see below).<sup>98</sup>

### **ISLAMISTS DIVIDED OVER ISSUE OF TRUCE**

On 24 March, on the occasion of ‘Id al-Adha, the Egyptian Jama‘a Islamiyya reiterated its commitment to the unilateral truce declared in July 1997 by its jailed leaders (see *MECS* 1997, p. 144). The statement emphasized that Jama‘a units both inside and outside Egypt were responding positively to a new appeal by their jailed spiritual leader, Shaykh ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Rahman, to abide by the truce and halt all military operations for “the sake of Islam and Muslims.” However, according to the statement, this did not mean that the Jama‘a was abandoning its goal of setting up an Islamic state in Egypt by non-violent means.<sup>99</sup>

The reiterated commitment to the truce was perhaps the most important development since the organization was founded in the mid-1970s. Although ‘Abd al-Rahman reportedly prohibited party activity, commentators believed that mainstream political

life was the only option for the group after the renunciation of violence, and that the Jama'a would emulate the Muslim Brotherhood and campaign via a political party and/or trade union (for the attempts to form a political party, see chapter on Egypt).<sup>100</sup>

Explaining the move, Islamist defense lawyer Muntasir al-Zayyat said that leaders of Islamic movements abroad faced difficulties as a result of globalized security measures and the mobilization of these mechanisms by the US to pursue Islamists in various European countries. This forced the leaders to seek new strategies to safeguard them from pursuit.<sup>101</sup> British-based Shaykh Muhammad Mustafa al-Muqri', the most prominent Jama'a leader and a candidate to replace 'Abd al-Rahman, acknowledged that Islamists were weakened but denied that the initiative to halt military operations meant a truce. The group, he maintained, rejected the democratic experience and would not forsake jihad.<sup>102</sup>

Meanwhile the Egyptian Jihad issued a counter-statement urging continued military action against the Egyptian government as well as against US and Israeli interests throughout the world. The group also rejected "any truce with the Egyptian government, which is fighting Islam and defending the US occupation of Egypt and the Arab states through US military bases."<sup>103</sup>

The controversy since 1997 over the issue of violence as a means to achieve political goals also continued among Algerian Islamist organizations. As in the case of the Egyptian Jama'a, harsh treatment by government security authorities, the gradual loss of popular support due to indiscriminate violence, and government conciliatory efforts had led the largest Islamist movement, the FIS, to seek a unilateral truce in 1997 (see *MECS* 1997, pp. 146–47). In April 1999, following the election of President 'Abd al-'Aziz Bouteflika and his proposal for a civil concord and amnesty to Islamists who laid down their arms, FIS leaders reiterated their commitment to the truce. In June Madani Mezraq, the commander of the FIS military wing, the Armée islamique du salut (AIS), reached an agreement with the regime to formalize the October 1997 truce, and announced the permanent end of the war. FIS leader 'Abbasi Madani endorsed this step in a letter to Bouteflika and expressed support for the president's reconciliatory moves.

This trend, however, was not supported by all FIS leaders. A group of leading FIS figures responded equivocally to the announcement in a statement on 20 June, distancing themselves from the wholehearted endorsement of the pact voiced by Madani. Reportedly, jailed leader 'Ali Belhaj considered the deal to be a sellout to the military-dominated regime. This rift was reflected in the publications of rival FIS supporters in Europe, *al-Sabeel* and *Sawt al-Jabha*. While an editorial in *al-Sabeel* on 18 June warmly praised the "bold steps toward national reconciliation," *Sawt al-Jabha* castigated both Madani and Mezraq, describing the October 1997 truce as a capitulation to an oppressive and anti-religious military dictatorship. It cited letters Belhaj had written in jail earlier, warning against any "settlement between oppressor and oppressed" designed to usurp the rights of the latter, and calling for the continuation of the battle against the regime.<sup>104</sup> In contrast, the FIS representative abroad, Rabah Kebir, issued a statement supporting the position of Mezraq and Madani and calling on all FIS members to join the process of national reconciliation. Anwar Haddam, the imprisoned FIS spokesperson, also backed the presidential policy of civil concord, admitting that "the FIS was wrong in resorting to violence." Interviewed in his prison in the US state of Virginia, he denied any divergence between Madani and Belhaj.<sup>105</sup>

On the other hand, the Groupe islamique armée (GIA), responsible for much of the

violence in Algeria, denounced the AIS truce and threatened to step up its campaign of violence both inside Algeria and abroad.<sup>106</sup>

A splinter group of the GIA, the Salafi Group for Call and Combat (al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya lil-Da'wa wal-Qital), founded in 1998 under the leadership of Hasan Hattab (Abu Hamza), also opposed the truce and the notion of civil concord. As a former veteran of the Afghan war, Hattab reportedly had ties with Bin Ladin, who promised him financial and logistic support if he formed an "alternate organization to GIA," which had "strayed from the right path" when it targeted the people instead of the state, and besmirched the image of Islam. In March al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya reasserted the slogan "no dialogue, no truce, no reconciliation with the apostates," while distancing itself from massacres and the targeting of civilians. The group, said to comprise about 700 armed militants, attracted separatists from the GIA who opposed indiscriminate violence, and FIS members who rejected the truce.<sup>107</sup> It gained the support of the London-based mufti of the GIA, al-Sayyid 'Umar Mahmud Abu 'Umar (Abu Qatada al-Filastini), and of Qamar al-Din Khirban, another Afghan veteran who founded the Salvation Coordination Office in Europe as a rival organization to the FIS executive office headed, by Rabah Kebir. Khirban also reportedly received promises of financial assistance from Bin Ladin in order to activate alternative Algerian networks in Europe in order to undermine supporters of the truce.<sup>108</sup>

The difficulties in implementing the civil concord, and the setbacks suffered by the Islamists, including the murder on 22 November of 'Abd al-Qadir Hachani, a prominent FIS leader, undermined even the confidence of Mezraq and Madani in the reconciliation process and threatened to embroil Algeria in violence once again (see chapter on Algeria).<sup>109</sup>

## EFFORTS TO APPREHEND BIN LADIN

The bombings of the American Embassies in Nairobi and Dar al-Salam in August 1998 (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 131–32) "created a tremor in the heart of the most powerful country in the world" whose dimensions and repercussions went beyond the 259 dead and thousands injured.<sup>110</sup> Throughout 1999, the US devoted extensive resources and international efforts to apprehending Usama bin Ladin, who topped their list of the ten most wanted terrorists. Along with twenty-seven other groups, his organization, al-Qa'ida, was designated as a terrorist organization by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright under the 1996 Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act.<sup>111</sup> In accordance with this legislation, the US sought to curb the activity of such groups, which appeared to be making inroads in Muslim communities in the West, especially the US and Germany.<sup>112</sup> The hunt for Bin Ladin and his followers was part of an American plan to eliminate "Islamic terrorism" and prevent efforts to torpedo the Arab-Israeli peace process.

## BIN LADIN'S LONG SHADOW

Bin Ladin seemed to be everywhere and to be involved in every crisis involving Muslims. His name was implicated in mid-1999 in two new areas — India and Chechnya. India, which claimed that Bin Ladin's personal bodyguards were playing a leading role in Kashmir in keeping supply routes open for Kashmiri Muslim rebels, was concerned that a dangerous connection was building up between the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Bin Ladin. He was said to be masterminding and funding military activities

backed by an opium syndicate, working closely with the major Kashmiri Islamic movements.<sup>113</sup>

*The Washington Post* reported in February that he was financing the Harakut-ul-Jihad group in Bangladesh, which aimed to transplant the Taliban's militant brand of Islam to Bangladesh. Suspects involved in a foiled attempt on the life of a leading Bangladesh poet in January had close ties with Bin Ladin.<sup>114</sup>

More elusive was Bin Ladin's link with Khattab Jadib 'Abd al-Rahman (Ibn al-Khattab), leader of the Chechen and Dagestani rebels. Ibn al-Khattab's name was not mentioned in the leaks about American investigations into Bin Ladin's activity following the bombings of the two US Embassies in East Africa. However, Russia insisted that Bin Ladin was among those ultimately responsible for developments in Chechnya. He had reportedly visited a training camp used by the Chechen rebels before the incursions into Dagestan began. This was the first such claim since White House officials warned in August that Bin Ladin was planning to target Russia's "soft underbelly" as part of a global terrorist campaign against the perceived enemies of Islam. According to the Paris-based *al-Watan al-'Arabi*, the Taliban, together with Bin Ladin, had decided to export the Taliban Islamic model to the Russian republics and appointed Ibn al-Khattab as commander of the Islamist rebel group, Army of the Soldiers of God (Jaysh Junud Allah). Russia linked Bin Ladin and Ibn al-Khattab to the Moscow bombings in September, claiming that Bin Ladin had provided the rebels with \$25m. in financial aid and had sent some 150 activists from Afghanistan to the northern Caucasus in response to a request from Khattab. Ibn al-Khattab, however, denied any connection to the Moscow incidents or to the allegation that Bin Ladin financed jihad operations in Dagestan.<sup>115</sup>

Ibn al-Khattab, groomed in the Afghanistan war, had moved to Chechnya after the Russian withdrawal in 1990. Sharing Bin Ladin's world view, he announced the establishment of an Islamic state in the northern Caucasus and condemned the US air strikes against Iraq. There was no difference between the American and Russian armies, he maintained, since both had seized Muslim territory. Muslims, he declared, had the right to seek their retrieval by any means.<sup>116</sup>

The identification of the rebels in Chechnya and Dagestan with Islamists and with terrorism prompted Russia to join international efforts to counter-terrorism. To that end, it signed an agreement with Turkey in November on fighting terrorism.<sup>117</sup>

### **MOBILIZING FORCES AND MOUNTING ALERT OPERATIONS**

The coordination between Western and Arab intelligence services reportedly led to the arrest of dozens of suspected terrorists all over the world and thwarted further plans by Bin Ladin to attack American targets. In April Egyptian officials confirmed that Egyptian, Somali and Jordanian Islamists belonging to Bin Ladin's group had been arrested in Latin America while trying to set up a base there in order to shift their operations from Afghanistan.<sup>118</sup>

Under the British Prevention of Terrorism Act, Abu Hamza al-Misri, Yasir Tawfiq al-Sirri, and a third Egyptian activist identified as Abu 'Imad, were arrested in London on 15 March. They were released on bail three days later after interrogation on the planning of terrorist acts abroad. Abu Hamza, whose extradition was sought by Yemen and whose son and son-in-law both belonged to the group of British Muslims arrested in Yemen (see above), complained via the media in October that his activity had been restricted.<sup>119</sup> A British national, he used his London mosque as a platform to declare war against the

entire world and to justify the killing of British tourists and expatriates working in Yemen. In previous statements he supported attacks against tourists in Egypt and the killing of civilians in Algeria. In February he organized a conference of Islamist movements in London, during which he unveiled what he claimed to be his latest invention — “airbound mines,” or flying bombs, to fight arrogant Western powers and target their planes. In interviews to *al-Hayat* and *al-Wasat*, he revealed that British Muslim youth were undergoing military training in camps located in Britain. In a similar vein, Sirri’s center served as a media center for Arab and Islamic militant organizations fighting their home governments. In April Sirri was sentenced to death in absentia in Egypt (see above).<sup>120</sup>

These arrests, and the ongoing detention in Britain of five Egyptian Islamists who were arrested in September 1998 and were among the defendants in the case of “the returnees from Albania” (see above), troubled Islamists in London. They were concerned about remaining in Britain, where they traditionally enjoyed freedom of expression and movement and opportunities for political asylum.<sup>121</sup>

In July two Egyptian Islamists, ‘Adil ‘Abd al-Majid ‘Abd al-Bari and Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Hadi ‘Aydarus, were arrested in Britain on US extradition warrants on charges of conspiring with Bin Ladin and others to murder American citizens. The prosecution claimed that they were associates of a third Islamist, the Saudi Khalid al-Fawwaz, who was in custody awaiting extradition since 1998 (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 134, 140). The British courts refused to release them on bail and all three remained in custody to face extradition hearings in connection with the bombings of the US embassies in 1998.<sup>122</sup>

In France a French national of Algerian origin, Ahmad al-‘Uthayna, was arrested in Paris in January while boarding a train for London. Reportedly, he was one of four aides of Bin Ladin, sent to France as a “financier of terrorist operations.” He allegedly attended training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and visited London in 1998 to obtain visas for those countries.<sup>123</sup>

American commandos were reportedly poised near the Afghan border from the beginning of the year, hoping to capture Bin Ladin. He, in turn, appeared to respond to the American maneuvering by shifting locations, and disseminating rumors of his move outside Afghanistan.<sup>124</sup> However, rumors in February to the effect that he was considering relocation to Iraq or heading for Somalia proved false. He remained in Afghanistan, moving from Qandahar to Jalalabad in the east after ascertaining that a group of US commandos had arrived at the Baluchistan border in an effort to apprehend him.<sup>125</sup> Fearing a US attack in July, he abandoned his Jalalabad hideout and, according to *al-Hayat*, moved to a secret location elsewhere in Afghanistan, supervised by Taliban army officers. Bin Ladin was accompanied by his family and supporters, including his military chief, Muhammad ‘Atif, and his trusted advisor, Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>126</sup>

The two months preceding the first anniversary of the 1998 embassy bombings witnessed a large mobilization involving close coordination between Western, Asian and Arab intelligence agencies. A state of emergency was declared in all CIA bureaus and US embassies and missions abroad. Several US embassies in Africa and Asia were closed and commando units intensified operations in Afghanistan and neighboring states. Teams of US commandos and foreign intelligence agents traveled from Peshawar to Afghanistan through southern tribal areas of the North-Western Frontier Province with the cooperation and support of several international NGOs working in Afghanistan. A Taliban official reported that three US military ships were positioned near Pakistani territorial waters for a possible attack on Afghanistan. According to another report, US

Special Forces joined anti-Taliban Afghani leader, Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, in an effort to help him overpower the Taliban forces as a punishment for their support for Bin Ladin.<sup>127</sup>

After the imposition of UN sanctions against Afghanistan in November (see below), the US and the UN tightened security at their premises in Pakistan and throughout Central Asia, having received warnings that Islamic militants with links to Bin Ladin might be planning attacks in the region. On 12 November, two days before the sanctions came into effect, militants fired rocket-propelled grenades at the US embassy and the local UN headquarters in Islamabad, and protesters subsequently attacked several UN facilities throughout Afghanistan.<sup>128</sup>

Although American efforts to hunt down Bin Ladin by force did not prove successful, they apparently continued, even as diplomatic methods were pursued as well (see below). In the meantime, in December the Taliban reportedly executed a Jordanian and a citizen of a Gulf state for spying on Bin Ladin.<sup>129</sup>

### **MILLENNIUM ALERT**

An FBI report on the year 2000 (Y2K) problems relating to computer networks that was declassified in November warned of the "serious implications" of potential attacks by Muslim and non-Muslim extremists. The report, named "Project Megiddo," was the result of nine months of intelligence gathering by the FBI domestic terrorism unit. It aimed to provide a "strategic assessment" of the potential for domestic terrorism linked to the year 2000. The report stressed that "Islamic extremists" might launch a "symbolic attack" in Jerusalem on Christians celebrating the millennium. London was also singled out as an "area of concern," along with other European capitals and locations throughout the world that were to be the site of millennium celebrations. Concern about possible attacks coordinated by Bin Ladin "from the Middle East to the West Coast" was heightened by several events in late 1999. Bin Ladin's name was invoked during the arrest in Pakistan in mid-December of over two hundred individuals suspected of planning attacks on American targets. His name was also mentioned in connection with the arrest of Ahmad Ressay, an Algerian who tried to enter the US from Canada in a car packed with bomb-making materials.<sup>130</sup>

Jordan arrested eleven Jordanians, one Iraqi and an Algerian who entered Jordan on 5 December with forged passports. Alleged to be followers of Bin Ladin who were trained in camps in Afghanistan, they were suspected of planning millennium-related attacks on local tourist sites and of establishing terrorist cells in Jordan. Three members of the ring remained at large outside Jordan. Jordanian sources claimed that the detainees were financed by Abu Qatada, a close associate of Bin Ladin who had arrived in Britain in 1993 and was granted political asylum a year later. Abu Qatada had been sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment in Jordan in 1998, accused of leading a militant Islamist group known as the Movement for Reform and Challenge (Harakat al-Islah wal-Tahaddi). He denied any links to the arrested men or to Bin Ladin. Later in December a man identified by Jordanian authorities as Khalil Dik, a Palestinian who carried a US passport and was sought by the American authorities for links with Bin Ladin, was extradited from Pakistan to Jordan. Dik was regarded as the head of the arrested terrorist cell. The arrest prompted the US State Department to advise American citizens worldwide to stay away from large gatherings in foreign countries during the holiday season. The US also warned the Taliban that it would hold them responsible for attacks on Americans by Bin Ladin's followers.<sup>131</sup>

On Christmas Eve, an Indian Airlines flight carrying 178 passengers from Katmandu to New Delhi was hijacked and, after traversing the Asian subcontinent and the Gulf, landed in Qandahar, Afghanistan. The hijackers, Islamist supporters of Kashmiri independence from India, demanded the release of Mawlana Mas'ud Azhar, a Pakistani Islamic cleric, and several Kashmiri fighters held in Indian jails. Azhar, a member of Harakat al-Mujahidin, had been arrested in Kashmir in 1994. After a week of negotiations, the Indian government freed Azhar and two Kashmiris in exchange for the release of the passengers. Although never directly linked with Bin Ladin, the incident proved one of the assertions of the American report on terrorism, namely that South Asia was replacing the Middle East as the focus of terrorist activity. India accused Pakistan of backing the hijack and claimed that the Taliban had provided guns and hand grenades to the hijackers.<sup>132</sup>

### NEGOTIATING BIN LADIN'S EXTRADITION

Alongside attempts to apprehend Bin Ladin by force, the Americans continued to cultivate diplomatic channels to bring about his extradition. The US offered to provide the Taliban with extensive political and economic aid in exchange for their help in apprehending Bin Ladin. The Taliban, desperately seeking international recognition, cooperated with the US and the Six Plus Two Group (comprising Afghan neighbors China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, plus Russia and the US) to reach a solution on the Bin Ladin issue. Negotiations continued throughout the year, intensifying in periods of crisis, such as in August when a US military action was feared, and in October when the threat of sanctions was imminent.<sup>133</sup>

Ultimately, the Taliban did not yield to US pressure to extradite Bin Ladin or expel him from Afghanistan. They maintained that he was their guest and that extradition meant violating a religious tenet. Periodically, however, they blocked his means of communication, kept a close watch on his activities, and restricted his movements. According to *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, they also urged him to moderate his rhetoric, refusing to sanction the indiscriminate killing of Americans.<sup>134</sup>

The Taliban reportedly made several proposals during the negotiations. They suggested trying Bin Ladin before a Shari'a panel of respected religious scholars from Muslim states; alternatively, putting him under permanent surveillance by the ICO; or, allowing him to leave Afghanistan if he wished to do so. Bin Ladin reportedly offered to leave Afghanistan provided the Taliban helped him reach another secret destination. The US, however, rejected the Taliban offers, stressing its determination to put him on trial for the bombings in Tanzania and Kenya.<sup>135</sup>

Bin Ladin was also an issue in negotiations between the rival Afghan factions to end the civil war held on 10 March in Ashgabad, Turkmenistan, and on 19–20 July in Tashkent.<sup>136</sup>

### US AND UN SANCTIONS AGAINST AFGHANISTAN

Failure to extradite Bin Ladin through diplomatic channels led the US to seek other methods to compel the Taliban to comply with its demand, namely by enhancing their international isolation and limiting their ability to support Bin Ladin and his terrorist network. On 6 July President Bill Clinton issued an executive order banning all trade between the US and the Taliban-controlled parts of Afghanistan, and freezing any assets in the US owned by the movement or its leaders.<sup>137</sup>

Several months later, the US submitted a draft resolution to the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Afghanistan unless it handed over Bin Ladin within thirty days “to a country where he has been indicted” or “would be brought to justice.” The resolution, adopted on 15 October and implemented on 14 November, required UN member states to “deny permission for any aircraft to take off from or land in their territory if it is owned, leased or operated by or on behalf of the Taliban.” Member states were also required to “freeze funds and other financial resources, including funds generated from property owned or controlled directly by the Taliban.” Exemptions to the ban on flights could be made for humanitarian reasons or to allow Muslims to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The US welcomed the resolution, with State Department spokesperson James Foley describing it as “a clear demonstration of international consensus and international recognition of the fact that Usama bin Ladin and his terrorist organization, al-Qa’ida, are a global threat.”<sup>138</sup> The Taliban representative at the UN, ‘Abd al-Hakim Mujahid, described the sanctions as “cruel” and “unreasonable” and suggested that they would only make the Afghan people suffer.<sup>139</sup>

### **RENEWED RESOLVE TO CONTINUE JIHAD**

Negotiations, military preparations and sanctions, however, did not weaken Bin Ladin’s resolve to continue what he perceived as his mission. His first message after a high-profile interview in January in *Time* (see *MECS* 1998, p. 135),<sup>140</sup> and going into hiding in February, was timed to mark the anniversary of the bombing of the two US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August. Two weeks earlier, he had been challenged in an open letter by Omar Bakri Muhammad, leader of the British-based Islamist organization al-Muhajiroun, to deal another blow to the West immediately. Bin Ladin’s message, published in posters bearing his photograph and a picture of the American flag, was a declaration of jihad against the US. Pasted on the walls of mosques and prominent locations in Peshawar, it stated that there was no greater terrorist in the world than the US. Jihad would continue, Bin Ladin vowed, until the US left Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Islamic countries. In a second open letter to Bin Ladin, read out in mosques across Britain and published on the Internet in September, Bakri called on Muslims to rise up in a jihad against America and its allies.<sup>141</sup>

On 16 September Bin Ladin issued another threat, which appeared in the Pakistani daily *Jang*, calling for an all-out jihad against India. Declaring that “India and America are now our biggest enemies,” he called on all mujahidin groups in Pakistan to target India and expressed his readiness to help the Kashmiri mujahidin.<sup>142</sup>

Following the imposition of the UN sanctions in November, one of Bin Ladin’s aides threatened that special forces were poised to take revenge. Taliban leader Muhammad Omar, too, reportedly issued a letter to the American people warning of “surprises” if the decision were not revoked.<sup>143</sup>

### **BIN LADIN’S POPULAR SUPPORT**

Bin Ladin enjoyed strong support from Islamist movements in Pakistan, Kashmir and Bangladesh. Popular empathy and solidarity were reflected in the naming of newborn babies and newly-established businesses after him. A Palestinian daily described him as “a symbol of rebellion against exploitation, cruelty and discrimination.”<sup>144</sup>

Responding to information on a possible American attack on Afghanistan, Fazlur

Rahman, leader of the Jihad movement in Bangladesh, which belonged to Bin Ladin's front, warned of the results of such an attack. According to Pakistani media, a large number of Kashmiri fighters had moved from bases in the Kargil region of Kashmir toward Afghanistan to defend Bin Ladin. Rahman, accusing the Pakistani government of granting US personnel permission to infiltrate into the Pakistani tribal region for better access to Afghanistan, urged the Taliban government to protect the life of "their dear guest" at any cost. The Islamist organization Jam'iyat 'Ulama'-e-Islam of Pakistan staged a protest rally in support of Bin Ladin on 13 August, warning the US of the reaction to any attack on Afghanistan.<sup>145</sup>

With the UN preparing to implement sanctions, thousands of Taliban soldiers and Afghan civilians demonstrated in the streets of Qandahar, the Taliban headquarters, in protest. Shouting "Down with America," the demonstrators stoned the local UN office with stones, burned the American flag, and torched an effigy of US President Bill Clinton. In Islamabad, the US embassy and other American and international installations were attacked on 14 November, injuring six people. In Pakistan, several Islamist groups publicly threatened to avenge any foreign move against either Afghanistan or Bin Ladin.<sup>146</sup>

#### **BIN LADIN — SCAPEGOAT OR GENUINE MENACE?**

In the view of Yossef Bodansky, director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, who compared the situation of international terrorism to a rumbling volcano ready to erupt, Bin Ladin's role was vital. He was the "linchpin" connecting the terrorist activity of rogue states with "the myriad of Islamic terrorists, radicals, [and] networks who are spread all over the world."<sup>147</sup>

American efforts to hunt him down reflected the importance attached to his role and the perception of international terrorism as posing a real danger internationally and to the US in particular. American National Security Adviser Samuel Berger asserted that the threat of large-scale terrorist attacks on US soil was "a reality, not a perception."<sup>148</sup> Increasingly, however, certain experts, analysts and politicians challenged the advisability of the American policy and doubted the degree of threat that Bin Ladin posed. Some commentators thought that the issue had lost momentum and that the campaign against Bin Ladin had become highly defensive. Brian Jenkins, an expert on terrorism at the Rand Corporation, questioned the wisdom of the preoccupation with Bin Ladin who had become the object of a single-minded pursuit. "There was somebody before Bin Ladin, and there will be somebody after Bin Ladin," he said.<sup>149</sup>

Bin Ladin was seen as a product of globalization, who skillfully exploited worldwide communications opportunities to create Islamist networks.<sup>150</sup> Following the adoption of the UN resolution on sanctions against Afghanistan, some observers criticized the US for being obsessed with him instead of developing a regional strategy to develop allies and contain the spread of Islamic terrorism.<sup>151</sup> Warnings about the threat of terrorism on the eve of the new millennium were seen by 'Ali Abunima, leader of an American Arab organization, as hysteria and as "a completely unjustified overreaction which puts at risk all civil liberties and freedoms."<sup>152</sup>

US-based analyst Ismail Royer pointed out that in reality, Muslim terrorists were few in number, isolated from the larger Muslim community, and with limited capabilities.<sup>153</sup> Gulf analyst 'Abd al-Ilah Bilqaziz maintained that "Bin Ladin has become an international scapegoat" blamed by the great powers for any real or perceived political problems.<sup>154</sup>

Assessing the menace posed by Bin Ladin, Milt Bearden, a retired CIA senior officer who served in Pakistan during the Soviet-Afghan war, claimed that the real source of his power came not from his network of contacts but from his ability to evade capture and stay in the headlines. "That ability only increases his influence among terrorists and provides inspiration to others."<sup>155</sup>

It is doubtful, however, if Bin Ladin, the most celebrated representative of the Islamists on the eve of the new century, would leave his mark on the century as had Hasan al-Banna. Bin Ladin remained an enigma: his power and capabilities are intangible, far from reflecting the myth around him. In this sense he perhaps symbolizes the real impasse of the Islamist movements.

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