

Introduction

The Essence of the Jihadist Evil

I will assault and kill, assault and kill, assault and kill.

Hamas “Charter of Allah,” Article Fifteen

In his analysis of modern Islamic Jihadism, Laurent Murawiec writes, “Jihadis of all stripes in the modern age share the same highly toxic mix of messianism, revolution, and the cult of blood and violence. Modern jihad is the tapestry resulting from the weaving together of different warps and woofs: Pan-Islamism and Bolshevism, Nazi and fascist ideology and practices, and Gnostic-Manichean beliefs within Islam.”¹ Commenting on Pan-Islamism, he rightly underscores the universal scope of the fanatic call to jihad. Like the Bolsheviks, the Jihadists believe that any means can be justified to achieve their aim – namely, the Islamization of the world. As for Nazi and fascist ideology, Murawiec notes a similar glorification of force and power in the Jihadist movements. What he has in mind by “Gnostic-Manichean beliefs” is their view of the human condition as a war between absolute good (the Muslims) and absolute evil (the rest of humanity). As in the case of the Nazis, however, the reverse may be the case: although the rest of humanity may not fall into the category of absolute good, Islamic Jihadism certainly falls into the category of absolute evil.

¹ Laurent Murawiec, *The Mind of Jihad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 269.

One thing Murawiec all but leaves out of his otherwise insightful analysis is Jew hatred. “Jihad and Jew-hatred belong together,” Matthias Küntzel correctly observes. “Approval of antisemitism strengthens jihadist barbarism. Any variety of anti-capitalism that wittingly or unwittingly has recourse to antisemitic forms of thought strengthens jihadism as well. The struggle against jihadism therefore requires zero tolerance for antisemitism. Were Jew-hatred to be ostracized, isolated, prosecuted and punished on a global scale, then jihadism would be a thing of the past.”² The “evil” that the Jihadists oppose through murder is the Jewish presence in the world. “Just like National Socialism was propelled by a utopia which advocated salvation through destruction,” explains Küntzel, “Islamism is propelled forward by a similar utopia. In both cases, it is the distorted image of a perceived enemy which provides the perpetrator with his own identity. In both cases, the annihilation of evil is considered to be the precondition for the realization of an idealized dream of homogeneity. In both cases this evil is projected onto ‘the Jew. . . .’ Fighting Islamism demands zero-tolerance of antisemitism.”³ The resemblance to National Socialism that Küntzel notes is not accidental; among the most prominent contributors to this Jihadist thinking are the Nazis.

Serge Trifkovic argues convincingly that “the most potent heirs to the Nazi worldview in our own time as regards the Jews are not skinheads and Aryan Nation survivalists. They are schools, religious leaders, and mainstream intellectuals in the Muslim, meaning primarily Arab, world.”⁴ There can be no doubt that Jihadist movements have had a huge impact on mainstream Muslim culture. Anyone who has followed the developments in the tensions between the Jewish state and Islamic terrorists is familiar with scenes of Palestinian toddlers dressed as suicide bombers ready for martyrdom. There are the photographs of kindergarten kids, hands raised and painted blood red, imitating the gesture of the blood-covered Muslims who butchered

² Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11*, trans. Colin Meade (New York: Telos Press, 2007), 149.

³ Matthias Küntzel, “National Socialism and Anti-Semitism in the Arab World,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* (17, Spring 2005): <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-kuntzel-so5.htm>.

⁴ Serge Trifkovic, *The Sword of the Prophet: Islam: History, Theology, Impact on the World*, (Boston: Regina Orthodox Press, 2002), 188.

Yossi Avrahami and Vadim Norjitz in Ramallah on 13 October 2000. In the Behesht Zahra (Paradise of Flowers) in Tehran, there is a fourteen-foot Fountain of Blood, “symbolizing the essence of Islam’s message.”⁵ (In what other capital of the world can one imagine the creation of a glorified Fountain of Blood?) Furthermore, there are the music videos with lyrics calculated to incite acts of murder and hatred, such as the one broadcasted from Hezbollah’s Al-Manar (“The Beacon”) Television Station: “We will wear coffins until every inch of our world is liberated.” Of course, “our world” means *the* world, the world inhabited by all humanity. Liberated from what? The lyrics explain: from the international Jewish conspiracy to take over the world,⁶ liberated by the Jihadist Islam that is determined to rule the world.

The Jew hatred that characterizes Islamic Jihadism is not about Zionism or the Jewish presence in the Middle East; it is about the Jewish presence in the world. As Salafist Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Yaqoub (b. 1956) declared in a broadcast aired on Egypt’s Al-Rahma TV, 17 January 2009,

If the Jews left Palestine to us, would we start loving them? Of course not. We will never love them. Absolutely not. The Jews are infidels – not because I say so, and not because they are killing Muslims, but because . . . it is Allah who said that they are infidels. . . . Your belief regarding the Jews should be, first, that they are infidels, and second, that they are enemies. They are enemies not because they occupied Palestine. They would have been enemies even if they did not occupy a thing. . . . Our fighting with the Jews is eternal, and it will not end until the final battle . . . , until not a single Jew remains on the face of the Earth. . . . As for you Jews, the Curse of Allah upon you, you pigs of the earth!⁷

Islamic scholar Ziad Abu-Amr has correctly pointed out that in keeping with – and informed by – Nazi thinking, “the Islamic Jihad theoreticians believe that the danger of Israel lies . . . in the spread of Jewish

⁵ Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror: Inside the World of Islamic Terrorism* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1987), 125.

⁶ See Avi Jorisch, *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah’s Al-Manar Television* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004), 75. The name of the Hezbollah station is taken from the Salafist journal published by Rashid Rida (1865–1935), which promoted murder as a means of “purifying” and spreading Islam; see Murawiec, 30–31.

⁷ Muhammad Hussein Yaqoub, “We Will Fight, Defeat, and Annihilate Them,” Al-Rahma TV (17 January 2009): <http://memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=SD227809>.

corruption.” Because of “Israel’s evil,” Israel “was born to be annihilated.” All Muslims must “eliminate the element of corruption, Israel.” They must fight the “Torah adherents to the bone.”⁸ For Torah, in the minds of the Jihadists as well as the Nazis, is the source of the “corruption” of all humanity.

As far as “Palestine” is concerned, even a faithful Muslim could argue that the Muslims should support a Jewish presence in Israel because the Quran designates the Land of Israel as a dwelling place for the Jews, to which the Jews in exile will be returned when the last days approach (17:104). The fact that this verse is seldom mentioned by the Jihadists underscores their rebellion against God and what they view as “the Holy Quran,” against the spirit and the meaning of Islam itself, which they do not follow but rather exploit to suit their own ends. (Nevertheless, as Chapter 2 shows, it is not for nothing that this exterminationist Jew hatred has sprung up within Islam.) With their accent on killing, moreover, Islamic Jihadists transgress the Quran’s prohibition against killing Muslims (4:93) by placing the “virtue” of killing Jews above the prohibition. Al-Qaeda operative and spokesman Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966–2006), for example, declared, “The shedding of Muslim blood . . . is allowed in order to avoid the greater evil of disrupting jihad.”⁹ Once again, the exterminationist agenda of Islamic Jihadism eclipses what other Muslims deem the holy word of Allah.

The Jihadists’ transgression and exploitation of the Quran is a form of the appropriation and usurpation of God used not only to justify but to sanctify the murder of Jews. They engage in a similar exploitation of holy days to serve their ideological agenda, as when Ramadan, a holy month of fasting, is transformed into “a month of jihad and sacrifice.”¹⁰ This means that Islamic Jihadism entails far more than terrorism. It is no more reducible to terrorism than the Nazis’ extermination of the Jews is reducible to genocide. Beyond committing genocide, the Nazis set out to commit deicide.¹¹ Similarly, the radical

⁸ Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 101–2.

⁹ Quoted in David Aaron, *In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2008), 103.

¹⁰ See Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001), 126.

¹¹ Recall passages such as the one from Judith Dribben’s memoir in which a Nazi beholds a synagogue in flames and declares, “The Jewish God is burnt to ashes!” See Judith Dribben, *And Some Shall Live* (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 1969), 24.

anti-Semitism that defines Islamic Jihadism far exceeds the parameters of mere terrorism: it is a usurpation of God that assumes other forms more horrific than those dreamt of by any terrorists that history has ever seen.

Some people are horrified by the sounds and the images of Muslim children whose upbringing is so steeped in Jew hatred that they declare their adamant desire to murder themselves in the process of murdering Jews, duped into the belief that by doing so, they become martyrs and thus have purchased their ticket to paradise. This Islamic Jihadist morphing of murder into martyrdom is a new turn in the history of evil.¹² In most other sacred traditions, the martyrs among the faithful do not take themselves to have purchased anything; for them, martyrdom is not a commodity for which they expect due compensation – it is a summons from on high, to which they respond. True martyrs offer all to God, without expectation of reward. They choose martyrdom not by committing murder but *instead of* committing murder. The Jihadist evil, to the contrary, represents a radical perversion of the most ancient, most fundamental evil – murder – into the highest good. Whereas in Jewish tradition, as in other traditions, martyrdom means dying in a refusal to commit murder and thus to sanctify life, in the Jihadist teaching it means dying precisely to commit murder for the glorification of God. But the Jihadist martyrs neither glorify God nor sanctify life. Rather, they glorify an ego made into Allah and thereby sanctify murder made into martyrdom – including the murder of their own children.

In the Torah decried by the Islamic Jihadists, who insist on choosing death over life, it is written, “I set before you this day life and death, blessing and curse; therefore, choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). To choose life is to choose holiness, to choose the good, to choose loving kindness toward the other human being, including the stranger in our midst. It means making one’s own life a blessing to the lives of others. It means choosing *not* to murder. In a stark contrast to this Jewish teaching, Islamic Jihadism not only chooses death but venerates it,

¹² It should be noted, however, that Jihadists have ancient precedents to justify this innovation. An official Chinese source from the tenth century reads, “Every seventh day the king [of the Arabs] sits on high and speaks to those below, saying, ‘Those who are killed by the enemy will be borne in heaven above; those who slay the enemy will receive happiness.’” Quoted by Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrine and Practices* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 72.

in a show of an idolatry with an appetite for human sacrifice that is insatiable. Murawiec explains: “The constant repetition of the same stock phrases that prescribe and exalt killing and the veneration of death means that Allah wants blood, needs blood, that blood pleases Allah, whether the blood is that of His martyrs or that of His enemies. Allah demands blood as evidence of worship. In turn, society must be organized according to what Allah demands. A society that needs blood in so fundamental a way is a society whose mind is set on human sacrifice.”¹³ Such a mind-set is a defining characteristic of Islamic Jihadist society. And it is characteristic of evil.

In his seminal study of the Muslim Brotherhood, Richard P. Mitchell writes of Hasan al-Banna saying, “Death, as an important end of *jihad*, was extolled by Banna as a phrase which came to be a famous part of his legacy: ‘the art of death’ (*fann al-mawt*).”¹⁴ Indeed, al-Banna declared that “the Muslim Community . . . excels in the art of death.”¹⁵ Article Eight of the Charter of Hamas, a branch of al-Banna’s Muslim Brotherhood, sets forth the Hamas slogan: “Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Quran is its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes.”¹⁶ Hassan Nasrallah (b. 1960), head of Hezbollah, boasts that Islamic Jihadists choose death over life.¹⁷ Said Osama bin Laden (b. 1957) to CNN reporter Peter Arnett in March 1997, “We love . . . death . . . as much as you love life.”¹⁸ In a sermon delivered on 25 May 2001, the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s mufti of Palestine from 1994 to 2006, Ikrima Sabri (b. 1939), declared, “We tell them [the Jews]: in as much as you love life – the Muslim loves death.”¹⁹ Thus, not only is the Torah’s

¹³ Murawiec, 59–60.

¹⁴ Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 207.

¹⁵ Quoted in Ronald L. Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations: A Muslim Fundamentalist’s View of the Jews* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1987), 18.

¹⁶ Dimitry Kapustyan and Matt Nelson, *The Soul of Terror: The Worldwide Conflict between Islamic Terrorism and the Modern World* (Washington, DC: International Affairs Press, 2007), 128.

¹⁷ Quoted in Jorisch, 80–81.

¹⁸ Quoted in Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, revised and expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 135.

¹⁹ Quoted in Efraim Karsh, *Arafat’s War: The Man and His Battle for Israeli Conquest* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 104–5.

summons to choose life abrogated, but so is its prohibition against murder.

The evil that surrounds the Jihadist love for death lies in a love for the death of *the other human being* – specifically, the death of the Jew. That is what they love – not the death of oneself for the sake of another, not the death that affirms life in an affirmation of the One who commands us to choose life and forbids us to murder. No, the Jihadists love inflicting death: witness the mass celebrations that occurred throughout the Muslim world over the murders committed on 9/11. The Jihadists love inflicting death so much that they are literally dying to kill – or rather, they are bent on indoctrinating their *children* in the desperate longing to kill, as stipulated in Article Eighteen of the Hamas “Charter of Allah.”²⁰ Here and elsewhere their discourse makes it clear that they have no love for the One who forbids both self-murder and the murder of others. Simply stated, the Islamic Jihadists’ love for death is a love for murder, a love for making their children into murderers. Murder is as much a defining feature of Islamic Jihadism as, in the words of Emil Fackenheim, it was the “pure essence” of “the Nazi empire.”²¹ There lies the essence of the Jihadist evil.

Inasmuch as Hamas’s referring to its charter as the “Charter of Allah” implies an equivalence between itself and Allah, it becomes clear that the declared love of death, which is a love of murder, on the part of Islamic Jihadists amounts to a rebellion against God, against Allah. Here, too, lies the evil: crying out “*Allahu Akbar!* – God is great!” in the process of murdering the children of God amounts to a radical eclipse of God. If Islamic Jihadists are religious fanatics, they are the fanatics of a false religion, fanatics of a self-styled idolatry, who bow to the false god of their own ego. When God gave the world the Ten Commandments, He divided them into two categories, two tablets – not because He could not write small enough to get them onto one but so that He could reveal to humanity the sanctity of two realms of relation. The first five pertain to the relation between God and

²⁰ See Yonah Alexander, *Palestinian Religious Terrorism: Hamas and Islamic Jihad* (Ardley, NY: Transnational Publishers, 2002), 58.

²¹ Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 246.

the human being, beginning with the utterance of “I am the Lord your God.” The second five pertain to the relation between human and human, beginning with “Do not murder.” The two parallel one another, as the sages have taught: to transgress the most basic of the human-to-human commandments, “Do not murder,” is to deny the divine affirmation “I am God.”²² To which the Jihadist replies, “No, I am God. And I command the faithful to murder.” In reply to the God who chose the Jewish people to be a light unto the nations – a light that forbids murder – the Jihadists choose the Jewish people for extermination, thus extinguishing such a light for the sake of their own dark aim of dominating humanity and usurping divinity.

Usurping God, the Jihadist murderer undertakes an assault on God. His is an evil as old as Cain. Feeling rejected by God, Cain set out to murder God by murdering his brother: he took the place of God by making his brother a sacrifice unto himself. Further, as in the case of Abel, the murdered victim is always our sibling: homicide is fratricide – another teaching jettisoned by the Jihadist. The one form of rebellion against God that is more radical than murder is suicide, the murder of oneself. To be sure, the seeds of suicide lie in the act of murder: killing my brother, I kill my own soul. The Jihadist evil takes up this radical rebellion against God by merging these two forms of unseating God – murder and suicide – into one. Like all evil, it preys on what is highest within us, on the selfless desire for meaning and purpose, on the readiness to serve something holy, for the sake of humanity. Like all evil, its first victims, its designated targets, are children, both from within and from without. Like all evil, its lure is deadly to all.

What exactly is *Jihadist* about this evil, other than the fact that the perpetrators invoke the word *jihad*? It is said that *jihad* pertains to an inner spiritual struggle to purify the soul. In the discourse of Islamic “purist” movements, however, *jihad* is an outward, violent endeavor aimed primarily at Jews and those who have been “Jewified.”²³ If the true meaning of *jihad* lies in an inward struggle, then this movement of turning it outward is a perversion of the concept from a struggle to

²² See, for example, the *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Vol. 2, trans. Jacob Z. Lauterbach (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961), 262–64.

²³ Nonie Darwish, who grew up as a Muslim in Egypt and Gaza, has told me that in all of her experience, the word *jihad* never pertained to an inner struggle but only to the violent struggle of Islam against the world.

serve God into a struggle to kill God. The Islamic Jihadists' invocation of God to justify their actions echoes the inscription on the Nazi SS belt buckles: *Gott Mit Uns* – “God [is] with us.” In both cases we have a struggle – a *Kampf* – to oppose God by becoming as God, even as the murderer invokes the name of God. To be sure, the assault on God is nearly always undertaken in the name of God. It is the most ancient temptation to the most ancient evil. The Nazi influence on Islamic Jihadist ideology is not accidental: the Jihadist program of the modern Jihadist ideologues is, as we shall see, very much informed by National Socialism. Chapter 1, then, begins by examining the numerous echoes of National Socialism in Islamic Jihadism, both as parallels and as points of influence.

Forging murder and suicide into a single action of “martyrdom,” the Islamic Jihadist evil exceeds the Nazi evil. For the Nazi assault on God took the form only of mass murder, with no mutation into martyrdom; in their deadly assault on Jews and Judaism, they were bent on destroying the teachings of Judaism in the process of destroying not only the body but also the soul of Israel. Whereas the Nazis made the Führer into God, the Jihadists make God into the Führer, *and not the Father*, a god whose commandment is not merely to choose death but to love death, as the Jihadists themselves boast. Once the “divine” injunction is to pursue death over life – death through murder – we face an evil even more radical than the Nazi evil. Hannah Arendt once declared that “we cannot conceive of a ‘radical evil.’” Unable to accommodate the Nazi evil, writes Arendt, all we can say is that “radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous.”²⁴ With the Jihadist evil, not only are all men equally superfluous – all men must be enlisted into the project of making all men equally superfluous. Facing *this* radical evil, we are compelled to address its genealogy, so that, understanding where it comes from, we may see where it is going – and respond to it.

“Our world seems not unlike a pit of snakes,” writes Abraham Joshua Heschel. “We did not sink into the pit in 1939, or even in 1933. We had descended into it generations ago, and the snakes

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979), 459.

have sent their venom into the bloodstream of humanity.”²⁵ Referring to the years 1933 and 1939, Heschel has in mind, of course, the evil of National Socialism: on 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) became chancellor of Germany, and on 1 September 1939, the Germans invaded Poland. But National Socialism, with the Jew hatred that defined it, was not just a *cause* of the evil that plagues the world today – it was the *outcome* of a long philosophical process of thinking God out of the picture and situating man at the center.

Commenting on the rise of modern thought, Fackenheim has rightly said that “the denial of the living God was an essential aspect of man’s scientific and moral self-emancipation. If man was to be fully free in his world, God had to be expelled from it.”²⁶ Further, “The moment the living God became questionable, Jewish existence became questionable.”²⁷ The same egocentric thinking that helped to pave the way to Auschwitz now plays into the hands of the Islamic Jihadists. Like the Nazis, the Jihadists introduce their own absolutes, determined by the ostensible obedience not to the divine commandment but to the murderous, ego-centered will to dominate. “Now that Marx has failed,” writes Serge Trifkovic, “Islam offers a helping hand to those who want to subvert the tradition of the West.”²⁸ Yet the tradition slated for annihilation is far older than the West. It is the tradition of Judaism and of the Christianity that stemmed from Judaism, both of which Islam believes it has superseded. The supersessionism that fueled centuries of Christian Jew hatred has added to the fire of Jihadist Jew hatred, which deems anything that falls outside of *Dar al-Islam*, the “realm of Islam,” to be either illegitimate or evil.

In the post-Holocaust era, the world has become filled not so much with the venomous Nazi Jew hatred as with the anti-Semitism that defines Islamic Jihadism. Chapter 2 shows that the world did not descend into this pit in 1928, with the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood, or in 1979, with the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Rather, the teachings and texts that feed the Jihadists’ Jew hatred are centuries old.

²⁵ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *I Asked for Wonder* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 126.

²⁶ Emil L. Fackenheim, “Jewish Existence and the Living God: The Religious Duty of Survival,” in Arthur A. Cohen, ed., *Arguments and Doctrines: A Reader of Jewish Thinking in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 260.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

²⁸ Trifkovic, 281–82.