

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green gradient. It is decorated with several stylized olive branches, each bearing two olives. These branches are positioned diagonally across the cover, with some appearing in the top left, middle, and bottom left, and others on the right side.

ISLAMIC TERROR

Conscious and Unconscious Motives

Avner Falk

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ISLAMIC TERROR

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PRAEGER SECURITY INTERNATIONAL
Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Falk, Avner.

Islamic terror : conscious and unconscious motives / Avner Falk.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-313-35764-0 (alk. paper)

1. Terrorism—Psychological aspects. 2. Islam—Psychology. 3. Terrorism—Religious aspects—Islam. I. Title.

[DNLM: 1. Islam—psychology. 2. Terrorism—psychology. 3. Motivation. 4. Unconscious (Psychology) WM 460.5.U6 F191i 2008]

RC569.5.T47F35 2008

363.325—dc22 2008015609

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2008015609

ISBN-13: 978-0-313-35764-0

First published in 2008

Praeger Security International, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>Introduction: Infantile Terror and Adult Terrorism</i>	ix
The Meaning of Terror	1
The Psychology of Religion	4
Religious Terror and Academic Disciplines	7
Terrorists and Their Mothers	13
The Nature of Islamic Terror	17
Historical and Sociological Explanations	21
Narcissistic Rage and Islamic Terror	24
The Narcissistic and Borderline Personality Disorders	29
Are Terrorists Normal?	32
The Infantile Development of Terrorist Pathology	37
Non-Psychoanalytic Theories of Terrorism	40
Globalization and Islamic Terrorism	44

The World Trade Center Tragedy	48
The Muslim Brotherhood and <i>Al-Qaïda</i>	51
A State of Denial	56
The Futile and Tragic “Global War on Terror”	61
The Irrationalities of Islamic Terror	71
Terror, Love, and Hate	83
The Psychological Role of the Mass Communication Media	109
Terrorism and Anxiety	113
Self-Knowledge and Understanding Others	114
A Clash of Civilizations?	117
Amir Taheri and Iran’s Humiliation	125
The Emotional Structure of Muslim Families	128
The Structure of Muslim Society	131
The “Arab Mind”?	135
The Muslim Child’s Ambivalence Toward Its Parents	138
Terror, Basic Mistrust, and the Lack of Object Constancy	141
The Abuse of Women and Children in Muslim Society	144
Biased Views of Islamic Terrorism	151
Religious Extremism, Psychic Regression, and Terror	154
Fantasies of Rebirth through Violent Death	158
History’s First Islamic Terrorists?	162
Suicide Murder as Unconscious Fusion with the Mother	166
The Roots of Muslim Rage	171
Muslim Love, Hate, and Rage, from the Family to the Political	174
Case Studies	184
<i>Bibliography</i>	211
<i>Index</i>	251

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge with thanks the valuable comments and suggestions of my old friend, colleague, editor, and mentor, Vamık Volkan. I also wish to thank my editor at Praeger, Debbie Carvalko, as well as Nicole Azze at Greenwood Press, and Christy Anitha and Kay Berry at BeaconPMG, for their skillful and helpful work on this volume.

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Introduction: Infantile Terror and Adult Terrorism

This book is an interdisciplinary attempt, with psychoanalysis at its center, to understand one of the most striking, most dramatic, and most dangerous human phenomena of our time. It applies the insights of psychoanalysis along those of psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, and Islamic studies. The subject of this book being the psychology of Islamic terror, it also discusses the religion and culture of Islam, the psychology of religion in general and of Islam in particular, the Muslim family and the Muslim society from which the terrorists originate, and the psychological origins of the emotions that fuel terror, which, as we shall see, are not only rage, hatred and fear, but also, surprisingly, love and longing. The book also studies the psychology of those who wage a “global war on terror.”

One of the basic ideas in this book is that one’s attitude to terror and terrorism, as well as whether or not one becomes a terrorist, or whether one wages a “global war on terror,” have to do with one’s terrifying experiences, or personal terror, in one’s infancy and childhood. This terror, which is first experienced in one’s earliest relationship with one’s mother, is symbolically expressed in fairy tales and myths about terrifying witches and female monsters. Further terror may be experienced in one’s relationship to one’s father, and also in various traumatic experiences occurring in one’s young life. In addition to terror, there are feelings of helplessness, shame, humiliation, and boundless, overwhelming narcissistic rage.

This book discusses non-psychoanalytic theories of Islamic terrorism, which focus on its conscious aspects, and then the psychoanalytic ones, which focus on its unconscious motives. It has chapters on the origins and meaning of terror, on the psychoanalysis of love and hate, on the history and culture of Islam, on the sociology and psychology of the Muslim family, on religious and political terrorism, and on the special characteristics of Islamic terrorism. The last chapter discusses in psychological detail the cases of the terrorists Osama bin Laden, Ramzi Yousef, and Mohamed Atta, as well as that of the leader of the “global war on terror,” George W. Bush.

The Meaning of Terror

The words “terror” and “terrorism” have several definitions, including the linguistic, academic, legal, and psychological. The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary tells us that the word *terror* derives from the Latin verb *terrere*, meaning “to frighten,” and that it is akin to the Greek word *trein*, meaning “to be afraid” or “to flee,” and to the Greek word *tremein*, meaning “to tremble.” Terror, says the dictionary, has several different meanings: a state of intense fear, one that inspires fear, a scourge, a frightening aspect (as in “the terrors of invasion”), a cause of anxiety, an appalling person or thing, a terrifying political state (as in “the Reign of Terror” or simply The Terror), a violent or destructive act (such as bombing) committed by groups in order to intimidate a population or government into granting their demands (as in revolutionary terror).

It is no accident that a universally accepted legal definition of terrorism does not exist. “Cynics have often commented that one state’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime document on terrorism). In 1937, when the Nazi rulers of Germany practiced terror on their own people, the League of Nations attempted to adopt this internationally acceptable convention: “All criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public.” This convention never came into existence. The United Nations has since grappled with the legal definition of terrorism. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime admits that “the question of a definition of terrorism has haunted the debate among states for decades” (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime document on terrorism).

As its member states still have no agreed-upon definition, the United Nations cannot formulate a universal convention on terrorism to supplant its twelve piecemeal conventions and protocols on the subject. "The lack of agreement on a definition of terrorism has been a major obstacle to meaningful international countermeasures" (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime document on terrorism). To solve the problem, the United Nations turned to Alex P. Schmid, a Dutch scholar in Terrorism Studies, who later became the head of the Terrorism Prevention Branch of the United Nations. In 1992 Schmid advised the UN Crime Branch, the predecessor of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, to define terrorism as "the peacetime equivalent of war crimes." Schmid said that if the core of war crimes were deliberate violent attacks on civilians, hostage-taking, and the killing of prisoners in wartime, then the core of terrorism were the same criminal acts in peacetime.

In 1998 Schmid formulated what he called the "academic consensus" definition of terrorism:

Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby—in contrast to assassination—the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime document on terrorism).

In 1999 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that "strongly condemns all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, wherever and by whomsoever committed [and] reiterates that criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them" (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 51/210).

To my mind, however, the academic and legal definitions of terrorism are less interesting than the psychological ones. In common usage, from which we have much to learn, the two most important meanings of the word "terror" are a profound fear, petrifying anxiety, panic, or mortal fright, and the acts of terrorists that inspire such fear. Psychologically, *sheer terror is the feeling of the overwhelming fear of death that infants and children experience when they are abandoned by their mother*, or the unbearable feeling of nonbeing that they have when their fusional mother cannot let them individuate from them and become separate human beings (Mahler et al. 1975). The other meaning of "terror" is "acts of terror," violent, murderous acts designed to sow terror in our hearts. The first use of

the word “terror” was to describe state terror against the individual, as in the Terror of 1793–1794, during the French Revolution. In our own time, the word is usually used to denote individual terror against the state.

The word “terrorist” obviously comes from that second meaning of “terror,” but it also has an intimate connection to the first: at least two American psychoanalysts who were born in Muslim families—the Turkish-Cypriot-born Vamik Volkan (born 1932) and the Indian-born Salman Akhtar (born 1946)—have found that many terrorists were themselves terrorized, abused, abandoned, neglected, shamed, humiliated, victimized, or otherwise traumatized during their early life (Volkan 1997, p. 160; Akhtar 1999). Since one man’s “terrorist” is another’s “freedom fighter” (Vaknin 2003), we need to be careful when using this term. The British-born American author, journalist, and literary critic Christopher Eric Hitchens (born 1949), a former leftist turned right-wing “neoconservative,” had denounced the indiscriminate use of the word “terrorist” as a Medusa’s head, which, unveiled, would “turn all discussion into stone [...] Whisk, whisk [...] and there goes history, there goes inquiry, there goes proportion” (Hitchens 1968, p. 68). The anti-theist Hitchens has published a book reviling religion as mankind’s poison (Hitchens 2007).

Moreover, the word “terrorist” is ambiguous: it is used both to identify a person and to morally condemn that person. In 2004 Brian Hallett criticized the popular argument that terrorism was “the ‘weapon of the weak’ needed to wage an asymmetric war against the powerful” (Hallett 2004, p. 52). He claimed that a terrorist act can be distinguished from a common crime by two characteristics: his “theatrical aspect” of the act and his “delusional self-interest [...] masquerading as self-sacrifice” by which the terrorist justifies it (pp. 50–51). We shall examine the delusions of terrorists below. Hallett’s argument contrasted terrorist acts with the Indian leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’s *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) from the point of view of political strategy as well as substantive values. He argued, for example, that Gandhi was more practical than Machiavelli, and that one needs to think about the meaning of “terrorism.”

Political and religious terrorism, however, also have crucial psychological aspects. The American psychoanalyst Ana-Maria Rizzuto studied how we develop our image of an omnipotent Father God in our early life (Rizzuto 1979). Shortly after the September 1, 2001 tragedy in the United States, the Israeli-American-Jewish psychoanalyst Ruth Stein published a study of the leader of the terrorists, Mohamed Atta, which focused on his deep yearning for love from Father Allah (Stein 2002). We shall discuss this study, which throws a fascinating light on one of the worst scourges of our time, in detail below. The problem of terrorism involves both individual and collective psychodynamics. The Swiss-American-Jewish psychoanalyst Leon Wurmser believed that “one of the greatest contributions psychoanalysis can make in any debate is the idea of trying to understand the intra-individual, familial, and socio-cultural processes in terms of both conflict and complementarity—contending forces that clash, but also determine each other in circular ways and thus complement each other” (Wurmser 2004, p. 923).

The Psychology of Religion

Since the subject of this book is Islamic terrorism, Islam is one of the world's great religions, and Islamic terror is a case of religious terror, it is important for us to examine and understand religion from a psychological viewpoint. Religion is a fascinating and complex human phenomenon. While Sigmund Freud called it an "illusion," other psychoanalysts have thought that religion also has healthy aspects (Freud 1961; Volkan 2001a). All religions involve the belief in supernatural beings, whether they are gods, angels, ancestors' spirits, or other invisible creatures. Polytheistic religions like the ancient Greek and Roman ones, or the Hindu religion, involve the belief in many gods. Monotheistic religions involve the belief in one God, but they often incorporate or conceal the earlier polytheism.

The idea of many gods (or one God) in particular and religion in general have been the subject of psychological study long before Sigmund Freud called religion an "illusion," and for decades afterward (Starbuck 1897; James 1902; Coe 1916; Selbie 1924; Josey 1927; Dresser 1929; P.E. Johnson 1945; Fromm 1950; Grensted 1952; Zilboorg 1962; Bellah 1970; Oates 1973; Faber 1976; Byrnes 1984; Symington 1994; Black 2006). Freud's basic idea was that it was not God who created Man in his own image, as the Good Book says (Genesis 1:27), but rather the reverse: Man created God in his own image. Human beings, fearful of natural forces that they could not control, like the sun, the moon, the stars, oceans, mountain, and rivers, attributed human qualities to them and sought to appease them through worship and sacrifice. They also unconsciously projected upon them their own qualities, defects, wishes, and emotions.

Freud believed that religion was an illusion, a fantasy. In an unconscious process that Freud called *Übertragung* or transference, we transfer to our gods the infantile

feelings that we had for our parents. Gods and demons do not exist—except in our own imagination: they are fantasies, unconscious externalizations of our inner images of our fathers, mothers, and ourselves, symbolic projections of our good and bad feelings. In fact, Freud called religion, with its numerous compulsive-looking rituals, “a universal obsessional neurosis.” Freud had deep personal reasons for rejecting religion (Falk 1978; Yerushalmi 1991).

For at least two decades, Freud’s ideas about religion were interpreted as anti-theist. Psychoanalysis was perceived as hostile to religion, and also as religion’s rival for our hearts and minds. After World War II and the Nazi Holocaust, however, psychoanalytic scholars expanded and challenged Freud’s theory of religion. Most of them claimed that Freud’s ideas had been “reductionist” and that there was “much more” to religious belief than unconscious transferences, projections, and externalizations, such as the universal thirst for love and the quest for identity (Fromm 1950; Zilboorg 1962; Bellah 1970; Kristeva 1987; Jones 1993; Symington 1994; Blass 2004; Black 2006). Prominent psychoanalysts such as the Muslim-born Vamik Volkan have pointed out the psychological role of the idea of God in normal human development (Volkan 2001a).

James W. Jones, an American Christian theologian and psychotherapist, disputed Freud’s view of religion as unconscious transference. Using examples from his own clinical cases, as Freud had done, Jones argued that religious experiences, doctrines, and practices reflect the “internalized interpersonal patterns” that are “our sense of ourselves” (Jones 1993). Jones believed that religion had great transforming power for its believers, both for good and for evil, as well as the power to terrify them. He thought that modern psychoanalysts had “moved on” from Freud’s “rationalistic rejection of religion” and had prepared the ground for a richer and more nuanced understanding of the ways in which religion can be a two-edged sword, both to transform and to terrify us (Jones 2002).

Jones focused on the unconscious psychological process of idealization in religious belief. He believed that at the heart of every living religion was the idealization of people and objects. Such idealizations provide much of the transforming power of religious experience, which is one of the positive contributions of religion to psychological life. However, infantile idealization can also lead to religious fanaticism and terror. Drawing on the work of “relational” psychoanalysts, and combining it with his own “idealizational” theory, Jones developed a “psychoanalytically-informed” theory of the transforming and terrifying effects of religious experience—a subject that had been studied by his predecessor William James a century earlier (Jones 2002; James 1902).

During the 1980s many psychoanalysts, especially religious and Jewish ones, attempted to find “common ground” between religion and psychoanalysis (Smith and Handelman 1989). This quest for a “reconciliation” between psychoanalysis and religion has persisted. The Israeli Jewish psychologist Rachel Blass, however, examined critically this positive and conciliatory attitude toward religion that had become increasingly prevalent within psychoanalytic thinking and writing over the previous twenty years. She believed that this positive attitude had

come from a change in the way psychoanalysts view the nature of religion and from its reassignment to the realm of illusion, making the passionate quest for “truth”—an issue central to both psychoanalysis and religion—irrelevant (Blass 2004, p. 615).

Blass thought that “the concern with truth”—more specifically, the truth of religious belief—played a dual role in the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis. While it underlay the opposition between psychoanalysis and religion, it was also the common ground between them. Blass believed that as Freud had developed his ideas regarding the origin of religious belief, the nature of this common ground was expanded and the dialogue between psychoanalysis and religion became more meaningful. At the same time, she felt that a meaningful dialogue between psychoanalysis and religion could only emerge through the recognition of their fundamental differences, not through their artificial “harmonization within a realm of illusion.” She intended her study also as an attempt to recognize the fundamental differences that had been evolving within psychoanalysis itself concerning the nature of religion (Blass 2004, p. 615).

Two years later, the South African-born British psychoanalyst David Macleod Black edited a tome about religion in contemporary psychoanalysis. Black believed that since Freud had described religion as a universal obsessional neurosis and rejected it in favor of “science,” the common wisdom held that psychoanalysts were hostile to religion. In fact, Black thought, “from the beginning” psychoanalysts had questioned Freud’s rejection of religion. Black’s contributors, who came from many different psychoanalytic schools, examined such questions as how religious stories carry or distort psychological truth, how religions “work” psychologically, what was the nature of religious experience, and whether there were any parallels between psychoanalysis and particular religious traditions (Black 2006).

Due to the explosion of violent religious terrorism, non-psychoanalytic scholars have also addressed the psychology of religion, but unfortunately some of them have done so in a nonprofessional and amateurish manner. The “rationalist” British evolutionary biologist Clinton Richard Dawkins has decried “the God delusion” and religions in general as the causes of all human trouble, and the British-born American scholar Christopher Eric Hitchens has called religion “mankind’s poison” (Dawkins 2006; Hitchens 2007). Both Dawkins and Hitchens, however, have been criticized as shallow and infantile. The American theologian Eugene Brian McCarragher called Hitchens “an amateur in philosophy, an illiterate in theology, and a dishonest student of history,” while the British critic Christopher Hart called Dawkins’s ideas irrational and Hitchens’s book “high entertainment,” citing Dawkins’s exclamation “How stupid our forefathers were! Those gullible Christian know-nothings!” (McCarragher 2007; Hart 2007) Hart felt that Dawkins had engaged in an “immature oedipal triumphalism.” Hart’s colleague Terry Eagleton criticized Dawkins’s “rationalistic” and “obsessional” attitude to God, pointing out that Dawkins was just as obsessed with God as many crusaders against sexual freedom were obsessed with sexuality (Eagleton 2006).

Religious Terror and Academic Disciplines

The seemingly rational division of the human and social sciences in our universities and research institutes into single-discipline departments such as literature, psychology, sociology, history, political science, and anthropology may be seen as an unconscious defense known as “compartmentalization”: it seeks to deal with the immense complexity of human affairs by dividing it neatly into departments or compartments, each of which deals only with one of its aspects. Salvador Dalí’s famous paintings *City of Drawers* and *Giraffe on Fire*, with their drawers coming out of the body, purportedly try to expose the “hidden drawers” of the human heart. To me, they symbolize the compartmentalization of human affairs. We cannot understand human affairs from the viewpoint of a single discipline. To truly understand them, our human lives require an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary undertaking.

As an example, let us examine the treatment of religious terror by sociologists and political scientists. While religious belief may or may not involve “a universal obsessional neurosis,” as Freud believed, religious terrorist activity is considered by most experts to involve psychopathology. The complex and multifaceted phenomenon of religious terrorism has been studied by scholars from several different disciplines, including psychology and sociology. The American sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer pointed out that terrorist violence is only resorted to by *marginal groups* within the major human religions. He studied such groups within five religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, and Buddhism (Juergensmeyer 2000).

Within Christianity, Juergensmeyer studied reconstruction theology, the Christian identity movement, the abortion clinic attacks, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the violence in Northern Ireland; in Judaism, he studied Baruch Goldstein's massacre in Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs, Yigal Amir's assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, and Rabbi Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League and Israeli *Kach* party; in Islam, the World Trade Center bombing and the *Hamas* suicide bombings; in Sikhism, the assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Beant Singh; and in Buddhism, the *Aum Shinrikyo* group and its sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway. Juergensmeyer thought that in all those cases the fantasy of being part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil gave meaning to small groups of people who felt marginalized, deprived, or mistreated.

Religious terror, however, is not the only kind of terrorist illness to inflict our human species. Political terrorism is another variety, though the two are not always separate or distinguishable from one another. From September 1793 to July 1794, during the French Revolution, the left-wing Jacobin "Reign of Terror" killed numerous real and suspected noblemen, aristocrats, and "counter-revolutionaries." In July 1794 a right-wing *coup d'état* ousted the murderous *Comité de salut public* and replaced it with an equally murderous terror by royalist *chouans* and *Vendéens* in which real and suspected Jacobins alike were dragged into the streets and murdered.

Most historians agree that the first "white terror" occurred in France in early 1795. The Bourbons were the French royal family, and the name was derived from their white flag. The white terror was started by ultra-royalist and ultra-Catholic groups in southwest France calling themselves *les Compagnies de Jésus*, *les Compagnies de Jésus*, or *les Compagnies du Soleil*, who planned a counter-revolutionary uprising to coincide with invasions of France by the United Kingdom in the west and by Austria in the east. Their antirepublican movement, however, was crushed by the young republican general Louis-Lazare Hoche at Quiberon in July of that year, and the Revolution triumphed until Napoleon Bonaparte became First Consul in 1799 and Emperor in 1804 (Falk 2006).

The second "white terror" occurred in 1815, after Emperor Napoleon's exile to Saint Helena and the restoration of King Louis XVIII to power in France. Frenchmen suspected of ties with the former republican government, or that of Napoleon, suffered arbitrary arrest and execution. Marshall Brune was killed in Avignon and General Ramel in Toulouse. These assassinations struck panic in the French population, terrorizing the Jacobin and *bonapartiste* electors into voting for the Bourbon royalists. Nearly 90 percent of the members of the first (and highly unpopular) *Chambre des députés* of the Bourbon Restoration were ultra-royalists and ultra-reactionaries. The king himself called it *la Chambre introuvable* (the Inaccessible Chamber) and dissolved it the following year. The Chamber voted repressive laws, sentencing to death Marshall Ney and Colonel Labédoyère. Hundreds of people were given prolonged prison sentences and all the "regicides" (*conventionnels* who had voted for the death of Louis XVI in early 1793) were exiled from France.

Since then, the term “white terror” has referred to acts of political violence carried out by reactionary, monarchist, or conservative groups against their left-wing enemies as part of a counterrevolution. Often, such acts of terror were carried out in response to and followed by similar terror measures taken by the revolutionary side in a given conflict. In particular, during the twentieth century, in several countries, such as Germany, the term “white terror” was applied to acts of violence against real or suspected socialists and communists.

Like the sociologists, political scientists have also dealt with religious terror. Their efforts to explain it, however, were handicapped by their own ideology and by their neglect of the unconscious mind of the terrorists. The American political scientist James Kurth believed that there was a hidden connection between “American imperialism” and Islamic terrorism. As Kurth put it, “A dialectical and symbiotic connection, perhaps an escalating and vicious cycle, exists between the [growth of the American Empire and the growth of Islamic terrorism], and the world is about to witness a titanic and explosive struggle between them” (Kurth 2002).

While Kurth’s apocalyptic scenario may not come about, the tragic U.S. war in Iraq, which has split U.S. public opinion, has involved incredible death and destruction. By early 2006, according to a report by the Nobel Prize-winning American economist Joseph Stiglitz and his colleague Linda Bilmes, the U.S. war in Iraq had cost over two trillion U.S. dollars, or \$720 million per day of war, and the cost of the war *for one day* would have bought homes for 6,500 families or health care for 423,529 children (Bender 2006).

Another American political scientist, Monte Palmer, with his banker wife, Princess Palmer, have also tried to explain Islamic fanaticism and terrorism in Lebanon and the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories (Palmer and Palmer 2004, 2008). Noah Feldman, an American-Jewish law professor, thought that the Palmers had put forth a “sensible and productive set of proposals for understanding Muslim extremism,” and that they “analyze *jihadi* strategies with a nuanced common sense all too hard to come by in the sometimes sensationalist literature on the topic” (Feldman 2005). The Palmers, however, had a political agenda in their book: they wanted the U.S. government to “accept rule by Islamic parties dedicated to the establishment of an Islamic state” and to engage in political dialogue with them.

What Islamic parties did the Palmers have in mind? The Lebanese Shi’ite *Hezbollah* and the Palestinian Islamic *Hamās*, whom the Palmers called “radical-moderate” parties, and which, they said, unlike Iraq’s Shi’ites and Turkey’s Islamic Justice and Development Party, have pursued “simultaneous strategies of violence and political participation.” In fact, those “parties” are constantly engaged in murderous terror against Israelis. The Palmers wanted the United States to “engage” with these “parties,” because “efforts to eliminate them will only increase terrorism and push the United States into a war with Islam.” Feldman thought that “it may be possible to negotiate with the radical-moderates on the condition that they abandon any active involvement in terror.” The *Hezbollah* and *Hamās*, however, have shown no signs of abandoning terrorism: on the contrary, with Iran’s support, they keep planning more.

In short, the efforts of non-psychoanalytic sociologists and political scientists, focusing as they do on the rational and conscious mind, however sincere or academically competent they may be, cannot in themselves suffice to explain Islamic or other religious terror. We need an interdisciplinary study, and we need to look at the unconscious mind.

POLITICS AND PSYCHOLOGY

Some rationalistic scholars defensively separate the political from the psychological and reject the very need for a psychological understanding of terrorism. After the tragedy of 9/11 (September 11, 2001), the respected American political scientist Michael Walzer concluded his attack on “left-wing excuses for terrorism” with a backhanded dismissal of psychology: “Maybe *psychologists* have something to say on behalf of understanding. But the only *political* response to ideological fanatics and suicidal holy warriors is implacable opposition” (Walzer 2001, p. 17). The correct reply to this dangerous splitting or black-and-white thinking was made by the late American psychiatrist John Edward Mack (1929–2004): “The proper place to begin our effort to understand (not to excuse), it seems to me, is with the question of causation. For no matter how loathsome we may find the acts of ‘fanatics,’ *without understanding what breeds them and drives them to do what they do in a particular time and place, we have little chance of preventing further such actions, let alone of ‘eradicating terrorism’*” (Mack 2002, p. 174).

Mack distinguished three different levels of causation in the phenomenon of suicidal terrorism: the *immediate causes*, which include the “purposive actions of men who are willing to die as they destroy other lives”; the *proximate causes*, including the personal pain and the unhappy political, social, and economic conditions that breed such desperate acts; and the *deeper causes*, which derive from “the nature of mind, or consciousness itself.” The immediate causes are obvious enough. The narcissistic rage and implacable hatred of the Palestinian Arab suicide bombers for their Israeli Jewish oppressors—as they see them—matches the “implacable opposition” of the political scientist to “ideological fanatics and holy warriors.” Any journalist writing about the Middle East conflict will tell you about those immediate causes of suicidal terrorism: unemployment, despair, vengeance, and rage—all due to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Arab lands and the deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Mack’s “proximate” causes of suicidal terrorism are somewhat more complex. Here is how Mack described these historical, social, economic, and political causes of the conflict that have created the suicide bombers, citing the activist Indian writer Arundhati Roy:

Listening to the pronouncements of President Bush and other American leaders in the weeks after the events of September 11th, one could get the impression that the rage that leads to the planning and execution of terrorist acts arises from a kind

of void, unconnected with history, without causation other than pure evil fueled by jealousy. Yet it is not difficult to discover that the present conflict has complex historical and economic roots. It has grown out of *the affliction of countless millions of people in the Middle East and elsewhere who perceive themselves as victims of the policies of a superpower and its allies that have little concern for their lives, needs, or suffering* [italics added], and of the actions of multinational corporations that, in the words of an Indian writer, “are taking over the air we breathe, the ground we stand on, the water we drink, the thoughts we think” (Mack 2002, p. 175).

Mack underscored this point: “For these millions, a figure like Osama bin Laden, who[m] we see only as the mass murderer that he is, can become a hero for moving beyond helplessness to action against the seemingly indifferent and invincible oppressor.” But since the superpower that Mack had in mind above was obviously the United States, and since one of its allies was clearly Israel, was this wise psychiatrist, while seeking a psychological understanding of suicidal terrorism, identifying with—or taking the side of—what he saw as the millions of Palestinian Arab victims against their Israeli Jewish “oppressors”? Was the unconscious defensive process of *splitting* which this psychiatrist had detected in the political scientist operating in him as well?

Mack went on to explain why these “countless millions” of self-perceived Arab and Muslim victims of “American and Israeli oppression” adore terrorist masterminds like Osama bin Laden. Mack was writing *before* the U.S. invasion of Iraq:

It is inconceivable that terrorism can be checked, much less eradicated, if these [proximate] causes are not addressed. This would require at the very least a reexamination of United States government policies that one-sidedly favor Israel in relation to the Palestinians (not to mention United States support of Saddam Hussein against Iran, before he started a conflict a few years later that continues to take the lives of tens of thousands of innocent Iraqi men, women, and children). It would require further help with the growing refugee problem and a turning of our attention to the toll that poverty and disease are taking in the Middle East and other parts of the globe (Mack 2002, p. 175).

While the difference between Mack’s “immediate causes” and “proximate causes” of Islamic terror is not readily apparent, it would seem that by “proximate causes” he was referring to the “complex historical and economic roots” of this conflict.

The “deeper causes” of suicidal terrorism outlined by Mack comprise unconscious splitting, conflicting worldviews, dualistic thinking, and “augmenting dualistic thinking.” The word “worldview” is a rendering of the German *Weltanschauung*, which literally means “looking at the world.” Mack described a worldview as “a kind of mental template into which we try to fit events” (Mack 2002, p. 176). There are vast differences between the worldviews of the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs, who live in different psychological realities, and even more so between those of the far-right religious Jews and the

fanatical Islamic terrorists (Falk 2004). Upon closer examination, however, one view may be a mirror image of the other. Mack contrasted the splitting, black-and-white view of the world as divided into good and evil, us and them, for-us or against-us, with the idealistic worldview of universal love and oneness which, he admitted, “has its own rigidities.” Nationalism and religion augment dualistic thinking, the psychiatrist thought, although he did not use the psychoanalytic term of unconscious splitting (Mack 2002, p. 177).

To my mind, the trouble with the “deeper causes” proffered by Mack is that they are not deep enough. He repeatedly referred to “the nature of human consciousness” and to the need to change it if we are to “transcend the mind of enmity,” but this psychoanalyst mentioned the unconscious mind only once in his entire study: “Although nationalists tend to resist looking at the harmful actions in their nation’s history, they may, nevertheless, fear unconsciously that retribution for the crimes of the past lies just across the next border” (Mack 2002, p. 177). While this may be true, the unconscious mind of the nationalist in general and of the fanatical terrorist in particular harbors much more than this: murderous narcissistic rage against an engulfing mother and a punitive father, wishes for fusion with the early mother, the fear of this fusion, splitting, projection, externalization, and idealization. I shall examine all of these below.

Terrorists and Their Mothers

Some sociologists have boldly transcended the narrow boundaries of their discipline in studying religious terror. One of the perennial questions about terrorists is whether they have any particular and terrorist-specific family background. This question was addressed in a fascinating study by the German sociologist Klaus Theweleit (born 1942), who studied the “white terror” of the pre-Nazi *Freikorps* in early Weimar Germany, the precursor of Hitler’s Nazis (Theweleit 1977–1978, 1987–1989). Before reviewing this study, let us take a brief look at the history of the *Freikorps*.

Political terror, rather than the religious variety, characterized Europe in the twentieth century. One of its early eruptions was the “white terror” of the *Freikorps* (free corps), the right-wing ultranationalist paramilitary organizations that sprang up all over Germany in late 1918 as traumatized German soldiers returned in defeat from the Great War of 1914–1918 (later renamed World War I). In 1919–1920 the *Freikorps* were the key paramilitary group in the German “Weimar Republic” (1919–1933), and they murdered their left-wing enemies on the streets of German cities. In 1933 this “white terror” was followed by the “black-and-brown terror” of Hitler’s German Nazis, in which millions of Germans and tens of millions of non-Germans were murdered by 1945.

The *Freikorps* ranks swelled after Germany’s humiliating defeat in 1918, when many German veterans felt disconnected from civilian and political life. They joined the *Freikorps*, which had been created by the king of Prussia in the eighteenth century, in search of the stability that they felt only a military structure could provide. Right-wing Germans, angry at their sudden and “inexplicable” defeat, joined the *Freikorps* in an effort to defeat the German Communists or to

exact revenge from their enemies. They believed in the *Dolchstosslegende* (dagger-stab legend or stab-in-the-back myth), a popular conspiracy theory that attributed Germany's defeat in the Great War to domestic causes, denying the failure of its militarist policies.

The *Dolchstosslegende* proclaimed that the German public had failed to respond to its "patriotic calling" at the most crucial of times and that some treasonous Germans had even intentionally sabotaged the war effort and "stabbed their country in the back." From November 1918 to March 1919 there was great political upheaval in Germany. Some historians call this period the "German Revolution" and this term covers a series of events which led to the demise of the monarchy and the establishment of a democratic parliamentary republic called the "Weimar Republic," which lasted until Hitler took over Germany in 1933 and proclaimed the Third *Reich*.

The immediate cause of this German Revolution of 1918–1919 was the policy of the German Supreme Command and the tragic decision of the German Naval Command in the face of imminent defeat in 1918 to fight one last battle with the British Royal Navy. The German sailors mutinied in the German naval ports of Wilhelmshaven and Kiel. Within days their mutiny spread across Germany and led to the abdication of *Kaiser* Wilhelm II on November 9, 1918. The deeper and historical causes of this revolution of 1918 were the social and political tensions of the Second German *Reich*, created by the Prussian leader Otto von Bismarck in 1871, its undemocratic constitution, and the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to reform themselves and their institutions.

The far-reaching social and political goals of the German Marxist revolutionaries in 1918–1919 were foiled by the German Social Democratic Party (*SPD*) and by its leader Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925), the first president of Germany during the "Weimar" period. Like many other Germans, Ebert supported the monarchy and was furious when his colleague and rival Philipp Scheidemann (1865–1939), fearing a German workers' uprising, proclaimed the new republic from a *Reichstag* balcony upon the *Kaiser's* abdication. Scheidemann became the first chancellor of the Weimar Republic, later succeeded by Ebert.

Like the other German middle-class parties, fearing an all-out civil war, Ebert did not wish to strip the old German imperial elites of their power, preferring to reconcile them with the new German democratic institutions. In this endeavor, he sought an alliance with the German Supreme Command and had the army and the *Freikorps* crush the Marxists by force. The ultranationalist *Freikorps* received considerable support from Weimar Germany's first defense minister, Gustav Noske (1868–1946), who used the *Freikorps* to crush the Marxist *Spartakusbund* (tragically named after Spartacus, the leader of the failed slave rebellion in ancient Rome) on the streets of Berlin and to murder its leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, in early 1919.

The *Freikorps* were also used by Ebert and Noske to defeat and annex the Bavarian Soviet Republic in 1919. Several *Freikorps* units fought in the Baltic, Silesia, and Prussia after the end of World War I in 1918, sometimes with

significant success even against regular troops. They were officially disbanded in 1920, but some *Freikorps* members attempted to overthrow the German government in the Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch of March 1920, led by two disgruntled reactionaries. Ebert called a general strike to ensure that those who supported the putsch could not move around, and this doomed the putsch to failure. Kapp and Lüttwitz fled Berlin. In 1923 Adolf Hitler and the German war hero Erich Ludendorff staged the Beer-Hall putsch, which also failed. In 1933, however, Hitler became Germany's chancellor and *Führer* (leader), and the former *Freikorps* members became the first recruits to the Brown Shirts and Black Shirts, Hitler's Nazi army.

As we have seen, the German psychoanalytic sociologist Klaus Theweleit studied the psychology of the *Freikorps* members through their art and literature, through their letters, diaries, and autobiographies, focusing on their fear of women. Theweleit used the theories of the German-American psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) and those of the French “anti-psychiatrist” Pierre-Félix Guattari (1930–1992), as well as his wife's clinical-psychological experience. Theweleit examined the distorted images of women in the writings of *Freikorps* members, their letters, magazines, and novels. He found that the *Freikorps* members' images of women revealed a highly distorted view of personal and political reality (Theweleit 1977–1978, 1987–1989).

The common psychological process operating in these men was the unconscious defensive process of *splitting*, through which the infant defends itself against the anxiety produced by its irreconcilable good and bad feelings for its mother, and which is symbolically expressed in fairy tales like *Snow White*, where the heroine has an all-good mother who has died an all-bad adoptive narcissistic one who wants to kill her when she discovers that Snow White is more beautiful than she. The *Freikorps* men split their women into two types: the “white” mother, sister, or nurse, who was all-good but asexual, and the “red” one, who was highly sexual and all-bad. Due to their profound fear of their overwhelming mothers, Theweleit thought, many *Freikorps* members defensively reduced women to their vagina. In their Fascist approach to human life, the idealized “white” German Mother Nation was above the individual, while the “red” German Republic, symbolizing the bad, sexual mother, had to be destroyed.

Theweleit thought that the typical *Freikorps* male had experienced “ego dissolution” in his early infancy, due to his symbiotic infantile relation with his engulfing mother, that it had made him panic, and that as an unconscious defense against this overwhelming anxiety he had developed a “masculine body armor” in which he repressed his “feminine” traits and emotions, such as weakness, fear, softness, and guilt. The repetitive conditioning and brutal pedagogy in the *Freikorps* member's family had produced these negative self-perceptions, which were unconsciously projected onto the despised classes of society (such as Jews and Communists) and made to represent the chaotic forces of the collective cultural unconscious. Uncomfortably for us, Theweleit thought that this view was the core of a great deal of our own imagery and political self-perception. In his

review of Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, the American historian Paul Robinson offered the following summary of Theweleit's findings:

His central contention is that the Freikorps soldiers were afraid of women. Indeed, not just afraid, they were deeply hostile to them, and their ultimate goal was to murder them. Women, in their view, came in only two varieties: Red and White. The White woman was the nurse, the mother, the sister. She was distinguished above all else by her sexlessness. The Red woman, on the other hand, was a whore and a Communist. She was a kind of distillation of sexuality, threatening to engulf the male in a whirlpool of bodily and emotional ecstasy. This, of course, was the woman the Freikorps soldier wished to kill, because she endangered his identity, his sense of self as a fixed and bounded being. In this manner Mr. Theweleit links the Freikorps soldiers' fantasies of women to their practical life as illegal anti-Communist guerillas: the Republic had to be destroyed because it empowered the lascivious Red woman, while it failed to protect the White woman's sexual purity. Among the most interesting features of Mr. Theweleit's analysis is his examination of two distinctive elements in the fascist imagination: liquidity and dirt. He argues that aquatic and other liquid metaphors were associated in the minds of these soldiers with the loss of a firm sense of identity. Much of their literature speaks of Communism as a flood, a stream, or a kind of boiling or exploding of the earth—images [that] he shows to be associated traditionally with sexuality (Paul Robinson 1987; italics added).

The preoccupation with female bodily liquids such as the amniotic fluid and menstrual blood in the writings of the *Freikorps* members betrayed the overwhelming role played in the minds of terrorists by their engulfing, overwhelming mothers. I shall examine this role in this book, as it is crucial to our understanding of Islamic terror.

The Nature of Islamic Terror

The “white terror” used by the German *Freikorps* members against their left-wing “enemies” was an example of political terror. The Islamic terror of our own time is a special case of religious terror. Is religious terror essentially different from the political variety? Is Islamic terror essentially different from the “white terror” or Nazi terror?

Islam is a special religion and culture, little understood by the “Western” mind. The word *Islam* is derived from the Arabic verb *aslama*, which means to accept, surrender, or submit (to the will of Allah). Thus, Islam means acceptance of and submission to Allah, and believers must demonstrate this by worshiping Him, following His commands, and avoiding the worship of any other god. The word *Islam* is given a number of meanings in the Qur’an. In some verses, the quality of Islam as an internal conviction is stressed: “Whomsoever Allah desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islam.” Other Qur’anic verses connect the terms *islam* and *diin* (usually translated as religion): “Today, I have perfected your religion for you; I have completed My blessing upon you; I have approved Islam for your religion.” Still others describe Islam as an action of returning to Allah than just a verbal affirmation of faith. In any event, Allah is the core of Islam. Like the traditional Arabian family, it is an autocratic and paternalistic religion, where the will of Allah, as interpreted by his Prophet and messenger Muhammad, is paramount.

Muhammad did not invent the god Allah. He made him into the only god of the Arabs. In pre-Islamic Arabia, *Allah* was used by the Meccans as the name of a creator-god, possibly the supreme deity of the Arabs (Qur’an 13:16; 29:61–63; 31:25; 39:38). Allah was not the sole divinity and the term was vague in the