

# The Undiminished Threat of Political Islam

ESTHER WEBMAN

The viability of Islamism as a political force seemed to have reached a low point in early 2000. The three Islamist regimes — Sudan, Iran and Afghanistan — were widely perceived to be in deep trouble. Drawing on the lessons of the Sudanese situation, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan acknowledged in its annual political report that the Islamist movement was not “a unified force, despite its adopting the rhetoric of unity,” and was not immune to “the diseases of dictatorship and tyranny once [the Islamists] arrive to positions of power.” The political crisis in Sudan demonstrated the difficulty faced by Islamist movements in translating theory into practice, as well as the problem of more than one center of authority in a single country.<sup>1</sup> The Afghan people under the rule of Taliban were described by Tunisian journalist ‘Afif al-Akhdar as being hostage in their own country, while those who govern in the name of Islam in Iran might be ruining Islam, dissident Iranian Ayatollah Mahdi Yazdi warned.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, Islamists in Arab countries continued to suffer from their identification with violence and terrorism, and were pursued by an international effort aimed at striking at the infrastructure of Islamist movements everywhere.

On the threshold of the new century, Islamist intellectuals and commentators continued to be preoccupied with the failure of Islamists to attain their goals and the insurmountable problems they confronted while in power. All agreed that Islamism was in a transitional phase, reassessing its goals and modus operandi while struggling for survival.<sup>3</sup> Iraqi writer Salah al-Nasrawi, who praised the contribution of Islamism to the Islamic revival and to the exposure of the ailments of Muslim societies, urged that self-criticism and reform be accompanied by reconciliation and the reintegration of Islamists in their societies to prevent the recourse to violence.<sup>4</sup> Going a step further, Jordanian Islamist Yasir Za‘atra,<sup>5</sup> Jordanian researcher Hisham Ja‘far and Egyptian psychologist Ahmad ‘Abdallah<sup>6</sup> contested the very use of the term “political Islam” to define Islamic movements, viewing the term as misrepresenting the variety of Islamic movements. All the movements had been pushed into the political context, which became the only criterion of their success, while in reality each of them represented a different experience and many had long since favored cooptation in the extant political systems.

Discussing the Egyptian movement, al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya, Islamist lawyer Muntasir al-Zayyat posited four causes for its deterioration, which could be applicable to other Islamist movements not in power:

- (1) Some opinion in the movement favored a truce with the government;
- (2) The authorities had defeated the Islamists militarily;
- (3) Popular support had been lost;
- (4) Many of its leading members were in prison.

With this, Zayyat pointed out, an ongoing process of revision had occurred, leading to the formulation of a “new social covenant” redefining and deepening the relationship between the Islamic movements and society, and between society and government.<sup>7</sup>

Two events in the course of the year instilled new hope in the Islamists: the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May; and the outbreak of the Palestinian al-Aqsa intifada at the end of September. The Israeli withdrawal was generally interpreted by Arab Islamists as a victory for Hizballah and as proof that the Islamist way was the right solution to the Arab predicament of the past two centuries. The Hizballah experience was portrayed as a model for emulation, not only because of its successful struggle against the Zionist/Jewish enemy, but also because it exemplified the adaptability of the Islamist movement to changing circumstances. The intifada prompted a resurgence of pan-Islamic and pan-Arab feeling throughout the Arab countries and Muslim communities worldwide and legitimized radical anti-Israeli and anti-American slogans of Islamists. Moreover, the Islamists seemed to be regaining popular support throughout the region and dominated the discourse of the intifada.

With this, the threat of religious extremism and terrorism emanating from the Taliban control in Afghanistan and their guest and sponsor Usama Bin Ladin, did not recede and remained a focus of concern for the US.

## **FIGHTING ELUSIVE VILLAINS**

### **PATTERNS OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM**

Following the deadly bombings of the American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998 that killed 224 people (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 131–32), Usama Bin Ladin’s attempts to carry out terrorist acts aimed at the US, Jordan, Albania and other countries were foiled as a result of joint efforts by intelligence officials around the world. Dozens of terrorists allegedly trained in Afghanistan and linked to him were arrested in Britain, Germany, Canada, the US, Jordan and Pakistan during 1999 and 2000. The net result of the arrests, the increased surveillance, cooperation among intelligence services and infiltration was to weaken Bin Ladin’s terrorist infrastructure and limit his freedom of movement. Consequently, according to a senior US intelligence source, he changed some of his standard operating procedures.

The cumulative evidence from investigations of arrested suspects pointed to a loosely knit global network of terrorists bound by a common ideology. While these terrorists operated independently or were affiliated with various non-governmental organizations, they could, at times, join forces against their perceived common enemy. A series of new phenomena in this context were revealed during the investigations:

(1) Bin Ladin was using proxies who shared his jihad philosophy but were not members of al-Qa’ida (base) to carry out the attacks, such as members of the Algerian Groupe islamique armée (GIA) who were trained in camps in Afghanistan funded by him;

(2) His personal fortune was essential for continued terrorist activity. Similarly, terrorist groups relied on millions of dollars contributed annually by religious donors in the Arab world through a complex system of financing. A significant number of Islamist groups involved in terrorism used charitable organizations as fronts to conceal their activities and sources of funds;

(3) Freelance Muslim terrorists worked concurrently for several organizations and

charged high fees. Operating mainly from Lebanon, they were experts in passport counterfeiting, arms supplies and bomb assembly;

(4) Bin Ladin's organization, which was entirely his own creation, included cells in over fifty countries, many of them self-sufficient. Moreover, he strengthened links between extremist groups devoted to terrorism around the globe. He was believed to determine the worldwide objectives for all Islamic terrorist groups;

(5) While the broad agenda of religious extremism predated Bin Ladin, he tapped into a powerful and growing wave of religiously motivated hatred of the West during the late 1990s. These terrorists were driven not by a cult of personality but by a world view in which they were perceived as vanguard of a divinely ordained battle to liberate Muslim lands;

(6) The terrorists allied with Bin Ladin were not constrained by political concerns;

(7) They sought the acquisition of chemical and even nuclear weapons;

(8) Bin Ladin began focusing on "soft" targets for terrorist acts, such as hotels and tourist sites, rather than embassies or government buildings;

(9) Bin Ladin had been empowering second-tier leaders with more authority, although he continued to make the key decisions; and

(10) Britain was a site of growing Islamist activity, including funding, proselytizing and locating recruits.<sup>8</sup>

This new terrorism was typified by a combination of "religious motivation and a desire to inflict catastrophic damage," wrote Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, former directors of counter-terrorism in the US National Security Council.<sup>9</sup> US President Bill Clinton proposed allocating \$300m. in new federal spending to combat global terrorism, urging the US to cooperate extensively with other nations to detect and thwart potentially deadly plots by groups with access to increasingly sophisticated weapons. He warned that the miniaturization of weapons would enable small groups or "free agents" to pose serious threats that once were possible only from hostile nations. "The advent of globalization and the revolution in information technology have magnified both the creative and the destructive potential of every individual, tribe and nation," he said.<sup>10</sup>

## UNRAVELING THE STRANDS OF THE MILLENNIAL CONSPIRACIES

### Harsh Sentences for Plotters in Jordan

A major trial began in the State Security Court in Jordan in March 2000 of twenty-eight men, accused of plotting terrorist attacks in Jordan on the eve of the new millennium. Fifteen of the suspects (thirteen Jordanians, one Iraqi and one Algerian) had been in custody since December 1999 while thirteen others, including Jordanians, Palestinians and a Yemeni, were fugitives in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Britain, Lebanon and Syria, and were tried in absentia. The charges leveled against them included possessing explosives and unlicensed automatic weapons, plotting to carry out terrorist acts, belonging to an illegal organization linked to Usama bin Ladin, and counterfeiting and circulating bank notes. The defendants had allegedly planned to plant explosives in the Radisson SAS Hotel in Amman on 3 January, and to attack American and Israeli tourists at Mount Nebo and at a site on the Jordan River.<sup>11</sup>

On 18 September, the court handed down eight death sentences, six in absentia. Fourteen of the defendants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from seven and a

half years to fifteen years at hard labor. Six others were acquitted. The main defendant in the case, Khadhr Abu Hawshar, was condemned to death, as was Usama Husni Kamil Sammar, but the court immediately commuted their sentences to life at hard labor. Abu Hawshar, a veteran of the Afghan war who later joined the Jaysh Muhammad (Muhammad's Army — a radical Islamic group that perpetrated terrorist acts in Jordan in the late 1980s — see *MECS* 1991, p. 498), was identified as the ringleader. Following his release from a Jordanian prison in 1993, he moved to Yemen, where he joined the Egyptian Jihad. Defendants sentenced to death in absentia included: Munir al-Maqqah, a Palestinian Fath commander from the 'Ayn al-Hilwa refugee camp in Lebanon; Ra'id Muhammad Hasan Hijjazi, considered to be Hawshar's assistant, who was subsequently arrested in October by the Syrian security authorities and handed over to Jordan; and Muhammad Husayn Zayn al-'Abidin, also known as Abu Zubayda, a Palestinian living in Pakistan who was believed to be a key aide to Bin Ladin and coordinator of his "external operations." A Jordanian Islamist living in Britain, 'Umar Abu 'Umar Abu Qatada, was sentenced in absentia to fifteen years for his alleged role in financing the group.

Abu Hawshar's lawyer, Salah Badr, claiming that the defendants were being "persecuted because they only want to uphold Islam and fight the Jews," denied their links to Bin Ladin or to any militant activity.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Trial of the Millennial Conspirators in the US**

Several arrests were made in connection with the bomb plot discovered in the US on the eve of the millennium (see *MECS* 1999, p. 131). The plot appeared to have been centered in the Canadian cities of Montreal and Vancouver, although its targets were not discovered. The case turned into the biggest counter-terrorism inquiry since the embassy bombings in 1998.

In January, authorities in Senegal arrested Muhammad Walad Salahi, brother-in-law of one of Bin Ladin's key lieutenants, who was believed to be operating the Algerian group in Canada. Salahi had arrived in Canada in the fall of 1999, and, while in Montreal, worked closely with Mukhtar Hawari, an Algerian who was detained in mid-January in Montreal and charged with arranging the logistics of the plot. Another Algerian, 'Abd al-Ghani Maskini, was arrested in New York, for having been allegedly in contact with Ahmad Ressam (a.k.a. Abu Rida), also an Algerian. Ressam had been arrested on 14 December 1999 at the Canadian-US border, driving a carload of explosives.

Another Algerian suspected of involvement in the plot was Hamid 'Aysh, who had lived in Vancouver for three years, until May 1999. 'Aysh subsequently moved to Ireland and was associated with the Mercy International Relief Agency, a Kenya-based Islamic charity that American prosecutors linked to the embassy bombings and Bin Ladin. 'Aysh was briefly detained in Ireland in December 1999, but was released before the authorities learned that the evidence tied him to the American bomb plot.<sup>13</sup>

On 24 June, the French police arrested 'Abd al-Salim Boulanouar, a French citizen of Algerian origin, who had been deported from the Philippines, where he had served a six-month sentence for possession of explosives. Boulanouar was believed to have close ties with Ahmad Ressam. Both men were part of a group led by Fatih Kamil, an Algerian veteran of the Afghan war against the Soviet Union, who maintained homes in both France and Montreal.<sup>14</sup>

In October, 'Abd al-Majid Dahuman, indicted in absentia in Seattle in January on

charges of conspiring to bring explosives into the US as part of the millennium bomb plot, was reportedly arrested in Algeria. The American authorities had offered \$5m. for information leading to Dahuman's arrest. He and Ressay had shared a hotel room in Vancouver during the month before Ressay's attempt to cross the border into the US, and the two may have prepared the explosives together.

American officials suspected that Bin Ladin's group was involved in assisting Ressay and his alleged co-conspirators. However, evidence regarding Bin Ladin's possible involvement in the American plot remained inconclusive by the end of the year. The American investigators were reportedly frustrated in their efforts to find out what the Algerians intended to target in the US and when they planned to act. Ressay was scheduled to stand trial in Los Angeles in March 2001, while 'Abd al-Ghani Maskini and Mukhtar Hawari (see above) were to be tried in New York on charges of conspiring to support a terrorist group and to conceal their support for Ressay.<sup>15</sup>

### **PURSuing THE CASE OF THE EMBASSY BOMBINGS IN KENYA AND TANZANIA**

The trial of the defendants in the case of the 1998 American embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar as-Salam (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 133–34) was set for 5 September in the Manhattan District Court but postponed to 3 January 2001 to give the defense attorneys more time to prepare. Bin Ladin, along with sixteen other men, was accused in the indictment. Six defendants were being held in New York, three in other countries, and eight were fugitives. Extradition proceedings were underway for those jailed abroad, and a \$5m. reward was offered for the capture and conviction of each fugitive.<sup>16</sup>

Five more fugitives, indicted on 20 December, raised the total number of accused in the case to twenty-two. The indictment portrayed the five new defendants as key members of al-Qa'ida. Two of the five — identified as Sayf al-'Adil, an Egyptian, and Anas al-Libi, of Libya — were allegedly members of a consultation council for al-Qa'ida, which discussed and approved terrorist operations. The three others were Egyptian Islamists. The amended indictment also charged a defendant already in custody, Mamduh Mahmud Salim, with attempted murder and other counts for an attack on a guard at a federal jail in New York on 1 November 2000. The four men awaiting trial in New York included one US citizen, Wadi' al-Hajj, and three foreign nationals who had been arrested abroad: Khalfan Khamis Muhammad, Muhammad Siddiq 'Awda and Muhammad Rashid Da'ud al-'Awhali. They were charged by the federal government in a 319-count indictment with plotting to bomb the embassies and kill Americans in different parts of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Federal prosecutors painted a most detailed picture of Bin Ladin's worldwide terrorism conspiracy. They depicted an organization that used international companies and a relief organization as covers for its operations; obtained blank passports from the government of Sudan; recruited a network of operatives living in the US; and communicated by fax, satellite phone and coded letters, often in language that was only partially veiled.

Evidence emerged that Wadi' al-Hajj, known as Abu 'Abdallah al-Lubnani, aged thirty-nine, a Lebanese Maronite who had procured American citizenship, was one of Bin Ladin's most trusted and dangerous aides, and a personal courier. Hajj allegedly met with Bin Ladin in Afghanistan in 1997, and conveyed orders to his operatives in Kenya, which led to the 1998 embassy attacks. Hajj also served as a front man, creating fictitious companies to hide Bin Ladin's activities. Documentary evidence also showed that Bin Ladin used the Mercy International Relief Agency (see above) as a front for terrorist operations.<sup>18</sup>

The first direct link between Bin Ladin and the bombings was provided by a former sergeant in the US Army, 'Ali A. Muhammad, who on 20 October pleaded guilty to participating in a terrorist conspiracy against Americans. Muhammad, aged forty-eight, a naturalized American citizen born in Egypt, had worked for Bin Ladin for a ten-year period after his stint as a supply sergeant assigned to a Special Forces unit at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, during 1986–89. The prosecution described him as one of Bin Ladin's oldest and most trusted lieutenants. Muhammad revealed that Bin Ladin's organization used tactics inspired by the Shi'i Islamist suicide bombers who blew up the US Marines barracks in Beirut in 1983, killing 241 soldiers and leading to the evacuation of the American troops from Lebanon (see *MECS* 1983–84, p. 553), as well as by the 1985 hijacking to Beirut of a TWA flight by Shi'i Islamists (see *MECS* 1984–85, p. 544). His confession also linked Bin Ladin with 'Imad Mughniyya, a Hizballah security chief who was believed to have masterminded these acts and the bombing of Israeli and Jewish institutions in Argentina in 1992 and 1994. Mughniyya worked closely with Bin Ladin's top aides, including Wadi' al-Hajj (see above). A car business was set up to create income, and a fictitious charity organization was created to provide al-Qa'ida members with forged identity documents. Muhammad also implicated Saudi dissident Khalid al-Fawwaz, head of the Islamist Advice and Reform Committee office in London, who had been arrested in 1998 by British security forces and whose extradition was sought by the US.<sup>19</sup>

#### **THE PURSUIT OF ISLAMISTS IN THE WEST**

International cooperation in combating terrorism led to the stepped-up pursuit of Islamists in the West in 2000. The parents of an Israeli-American teenager who was killed in a 1996 Islamist terrorist attack in Jerusalem filed a \$600m. lawsuit in Chicago in May against several Islamic charities, non-profit organizations and individuals, contending that they raised money in the US for the Palestinian Hamas. This was the first attempt by individuals to use federal anti-terrorism laws against front organizations in the US that raise money in the name of Islamic causes. Among those named in the suit were Muhammad Salah, a naturalized US citizen accused of being a high-ranking fund-raiser for Hamas; the Qur'anic Institute; and the former head of Hamas' political bureau, Musa Abu Marzuq (see *MECS* 1995, pp. 120–21). The suit also named several other Islamic groups and individuals as members of the covert Hamas network in the US, including the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, a charity with branches in Texas and Illinois; the Islamic Association for Palestine, a non-profit group dedicated to disseminating information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the United Association for Studies and Research in Virginia.<sup>20</sup>

In July, eighteen people were arrested in the Charlotte, NC area and accused of immigration violations and illegally profiting from cigarette smuggling and money laundering as part of an organized plot to raise and funnel money and equipment to Hizballah. Eight were jailed without bond, eight others were released on bail, and two were put under 24-hour house arrest. The affidavit alleged that the leader of the group, Muhammad Yusuf Hammud, solicited contributions for Hizballah, received military training in Lebanon, and communicated with Hizballah via the Internet. One of those arrested, 'Ali Husayn Darwish, had allegedly transported over \$1m. to Lebanon. An additional \$360,000 in cashier checks was also traced to Lebanon.<sup>21</sup>

In August, Bulgaria expelled a Jordanian, Ahmad Musa, to Jordan for engaging in

unregulated religious activities that constituted a threat to national security. He was allegedly running a Muslim foundation used as an aegis for sending Bulgarian Muslims for religious and military training abroad.<sup>22</sup>

In October, the Italian authorities arrested eleven Muslims suspected of belonging to an Algerian branch of the Islamist organization al-Takfir wal-Hijra. Responsible for forging documents for Islamists in Italy, helping to smuggle arms into Algeria, and providing funds for Jihad, they were charged with criminal association for the purpose of carrying out acts of terrorism abroad. The Italian operation, code-named Crusade, reportedly led to the dismantling of a full-fledged terrorist network centered in Naples, which was part of a broader European network.<sup>23</sup>

A twenty-year-old Egyptian, Sabir Sulayman, suspected of being an associate of Bin Ladin, was declared *persona non grata* in October and deported to Egypt by the Albanian secret service, only minutes after he landed in Albania. His name had reportedly appeared on blacklists supplied by the CIA and the Egyptian information service.<sup>24</sup>

In November, British authorities accused two Bangladeshis, Munil 'Abidin and Mustafa 'Abidin, of setting up a network to carry out terrorist operations in Birmingham. Allegedly members of an Islamist group associated with Bin Ladin, they were arrested on the basis of their involvement in cases of international terrorism and after police seized quantities of explosives in their homes. The British police also investigated another group of Islamists based in a religious center in Birmingham, who had entered England on false passports in 1998 and recruited and trained supporters for Bin Ladin.<sup>25</sup>

German authorities arrested four suspected terrorists with ties to Bin Ladin and seized weapons and explosives in a search of two Frankfurt apartments in December. The four were charged with membership in a criminal organization, arms and explosives violations, and falsifying documents.<sup>26</sup>

### **BIN LADIN'S BURGEONING ACTIVITIES**

Threatened by the ongoing war in Chechnya (see *MECS* 1999, p. 129), Russia insistently charged that Islamist recruits were being sent to Chechnya and that many more were receiving training in camps in Afghanistan. Quoting an alleged military instructor of Bin Ladin's organization, ITAR-TASS reported that a unit of four hundred fighters was sent to Chechnya in May, and that hundreds of Arabs and Afghans had been dispatched there since the outbreak of fighting in 1998.<sup>27</sup> Russia believed that without massive support from international terrorists, the Chechen rebels would not have been able to carry on their resistance. Bin Ladin, Russia claimed, had sent Chechen warlord Ibn al-Khattab \$5.5m. to pay these "mercenaries," and in May, signed a protocol on cooperation with representatives of the Chechen separatist president Aslan Maskhadov, together with a representative of the Taliban government, at a meeting in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. The document reportedly dealt with assistance in personnel, arms and munitions.<sup>28</sup>

Taliban spokespersons and Chechen foreign minister Ilyas Akhmadov denied the existence of any official ties between them, or that Bin Ladin was sending fighters to Chechnya.<sup>29</sup> However, Afghan opposition leaders claimed that on 2 November, Bin Ladin met with Chechen emissaries in Qandahar, Afghanistan, gave them \$5m. and promised to reinforce them with well-trained recruits.<sup>30</sup> The leader of the London-based al-Muhajiroun Islamist organization, Shaykh Omar Bakri Muhammad, confirmed in December that some 600 to 700 volunteers were trained in Britain, ready to be sent to Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir and other areas to continue the "sacred war."<sup>31</sup>

Russia also accused the Saudi-based international Islamic organization, al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn, originally formed to support the Afghan fighters against Russia, of being a major source of funding for the Chechen rebels through its offices in Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, the Turkish Refah Party and the People's Movement nationalist party in Turkey were also said to be raising funds for ammunition and medicines for the rebels in Chechnya. The London-based Islamist Hizb al-Tahrir and Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement were reportedly the most prominent groups to expand their presence in the North Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>32</sup>

Bin Ladin was believed to have provided support to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which sought to replace President Islam Karimov's regime with an Islamic theocratic state. A high-ranking IMU leader, Tahir Yuldash, tried in absentia and condemned to death by the Uzbek Supreme Court, was reported to be hiding in Afghanistan. The IMU launched armed incursions into Uzbekistan and neighboring Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan during the summers of 1999 and 2000.<sup>33</sup>

Islamist groups in the Philippines also received support from Bin Ladin. An American intelligence report published in August confirmed that Bin Ladin subsidized the training camps used by both the Moro Front and its rival, the Abu Sayyaf group.<sup>34</sup> It also disclosed that the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), set up in 1992 by Bin Ladin and his brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, served as a front organization for funding terrorist activities in the Philippines. The IIRO, according to the report, was working under the aegis of the Muslim World League, an organization wholly financed by the Saudi Arabian government, and was used for the purchase of arms and other logistical requirements of the Abu Sayyaf. Only 10%–30% of the foreign funding of the IIRO was used for its stated relief and livelihood projects.<sup>35</sup>

In October, Kuwaiti security authorities arrested eleven people, including two police officers, and seized large quantities of powerful explosives earmarked for use in attacks in Kuwait and abroad. Although the political affiliation of the suspects was not specified, they were believed to be Islamists targeting US installations in and around Kuwait. The detainees included an Egyptian physician and a Yemeni carrying a Bosnian passport, who were immediately deported. The arrests were made less than a week after US forces in the Gulf were put on a high state of alert following the attack on the USS Cole (see below). The group's leader, Muhammad 'Abdallah, who was arrested on 31 October, was a Kuwaiti suspected of belonging to an Islamist group.<sup>36</sup> A London-based Islamist organization, the Islamic Observatory Center, claimed that a Moroccan aide of Bin Ladin's escaped from Kuwait to Iran with a forged Saudi passport hours before the arrests.<sup>37</sup> Kuwait did not comment on reports that the group was linked to Bin Ladin. The Kuwaiti daily *al-Ra'y al-'Amm* quoted Bin Ladin as denying links with the group that was arrested.<sup>38</sup>

### **HEIGHTENED ISLAMIST COOPERATION UNDER IRANIAN AUSPICES**

According to the US State Department report on terrorism in 1999, released in May 2000, Iran had "stepped up its encouragement of, and support" for such militant Palestinian groups as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, known for their rejection of the peace process.<sup>39</sup> Iran was also presumed to be behind the growing cooperation between these movements and Hizballah, reflected in various developments. An Iranian delegation headed by 'Ali Akbar Velayati, the former Iranian foreign minister and now adviser to

Supreme Leader Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i, visited Syria and Lebanon in July and met with rejectionist Palestinian groups, including Hamas leaders. They reportedly discussed the possibility of mounting a new intifada to foil the chances of a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, and apportioned about \$2.5m. from Iran among the various groups.<sup>40</sup> Velayati assured the three Hamas leaders deported from Jordan in November 1999 (see *MECS* 1999, p. 114), Khalid Mash'al, Musa Abu Marzuq and Ibrahim Ghawsha, who attended the meetings, along with representatives of Hamas in Damascus and Tehran, of Khamene'i's support in their struggle against the "Zionist regime." They agreed that the concurrent Camp David talks between Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Yasir 'Arafat and Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak under the auspices of the American president was dangerous for the Palestinian cause, for the status of Jerusalem, and for the Palestinian refugees' right of return.<sup>40</sup>

The London-based *al-Sharq al-Awsat* reported that Iran was also working on reorganizing the ranks of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement and settling differences between its leaders. Quoting Palestinian sources, the paper claimed that the Iranian intelligence agency had requested a \$200,000 increase in financial aid to the Islamic Jihad movement for this purpose. Khamene'i reportedly urged Hizballah to speed up the implementation of the first stage of a plan to organize the al-Jaysh al-Thawri al-Sirri al-Islami (Secret Islamic Revolutionary Army), which would consist of joint cells from the Islamic Jihad and Hizballah to carry out operations inside the Palestinian territories. The joint organization was to be commanded by Hizballah activist 'Imad Mughniyya, together with Islamic Jihad leaders. An Israeli report claimed that Iran set up an office to coordinate the activities of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hizballah, with Mughniyya as its head.<sup>41</sup>

Details of the investigations of the defendants in the millennium plot in Jordan (see above) revealed that the Palestinian Fath commander in Lebanon, Munir Maqdash, who was accused of being a conspirator, and other Fath activists in Lebanon were in close contact with Hizballah and the Islamic Jihad. Moreover, following the expulsion of Hamas leaders from Jordan, relations between Iran and Hamas improved continuously on both the operational and political levels.<sup>42</sup>

Israeli intelligence reports also indicated that both the Islamic Jihad and Hamas, especially the international political arm of Hamas, had infiltrated certain elements of the Islamic movement in Israel. According to one report, Israeli Muslim bodies intensified cooperation with Muslim elements in Egypt, and that young Israeli Muslims were sent to train with Hamas in Iran and to Bin Ladin's camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

## **FUTILE ATTEMPTS TO HUNT DOWN BIN LADIN**

### **NEGOTIATING WITH THE TALIBAN**

The Taliban authorities continued to shelter Bin Ladin despite international pressure. Even the US-sponsored sanctions imposed by the UN on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in November 1999 failed to deter them. A Taliban delegation that met with Karl Inderfurth, US assistant secretary of state for South Asia, in Islamabad in January ruled out handing over Bin Ladin. Instead, the Taliban demanded that the US provide evidence of his alleged involvement in terrorism to the Afghan Supreme Court, or agree to assign the issue to Islamic scholars to decide upon an acceptable solution. Another

proposal by the Taliban was to authorize the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) to monitor Bin Ladin's activities in Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> Taliban officials reiterated this position throughout the year, insisting that they had restricted Bin Ladin's movements and closed his training camps.<sup>45</sup> He had reportedly complained in private about the Taliban's restrictions on his freedom of movement, which had become harsher as external pressure mounted. Reports suggest that he approached Pakistani leaders, who were considered to be close to the Taliban leaders, to persuade them to relax the ban. In the wake of the intifada (see below), he reportedly sought the Taliban leaders' permission to issue a public statement denouncing the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians on two occasions, only to be refused.<sup>46</sup>

Pakistan remained actively involved in facilitating a dialogue between American officials and the Afghan government on the Bin Ladin issue. In May, an FBI team arrived in Islamabad to meet high-ranking Pakistani officials and share evidence supporting the allegation of Bin Ladin's terrorist activities. The evidence consisted mostly of court statements by Islamists arrested in Canada, Pakistan and Jordan. Ongoing diplomatic contacts culminated at the end of May in a futile meeting in Pakistan between US Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering and the Afghan deputy foreign minister, Mawlawi 'Abdul Rahman Zahid, who flew in from Qandahar.<sup>47</sup>

Afghanistan's rulers renewed an offer for dialogue with the US over Bin Ladin in July, possibly in response to comments by Inderfurth at a congressional committee hearing on "The Taliban: engagement or confrontation." The assistant secretary of state revealed at that time that Washington and Moscow were in agreement over the threat of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup>

In September, the Taliban sent a delegation to several Western and Muslim capitals and launched a campaign at the opening session of the UN General Assembly to solicit support for their bid to have Afghanistan seated in the UN. Taliban deputy foreign minister Zahid met with senior State Department officials, urging them to help the regime gain international recognition. Failing in this effort, the Taliban blamed the US for penalizing them because of their refusal to expel Bin Ladin and because of their religious policies.<sup>49</sup> The Six-Plus-Two Group (China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, plus Russia and the US; see *MECS* 1999, p. 132) met in New York in November to consider a fresh peace proposal by the UN. In a report to the group, the deposed Afghani president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, said Bin Ladin's supporters were fighting alongside the Taliban against the small opposition-controlled region in northern Afghanistan.<sup>50</sup>

Following mounting fears in Afghanistan of a US military strike, a meeting took place on 2 November between US Ambassador to Pakistan William Milam and the Taliban ambassador in Islamabad, 'Abd al-Salam Zayf. Milam informed the Taliban that the US had "concrete evidence" of Bin Ladin's involvement in the embassy bombings in 1998, and that it would be prepared to hold Bin Ladin's trial in a third country.<sup>51</sup>

Although the discussions between the Taliban and the US were not productive, they continued at intervals throughout the year, at the request of both the Taliban and the US. In a report released on 30 November, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan deplored the failure of the Taliban to deliver Bin Ladin for trial, as called for by several Security Council resolutions.<sup>52</sup>

### CONTEMPLATING MILITARY ACTION

Tension grew in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region at the end of March, whether due to reports that Bin Ladin had issued a new call for jihad, or of American preparations to deliver a blow to Bin Ladin. Jihad poster messages were said to be circulating in the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan, evoking a prompt denial by Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, who questioned their authenticity. He claimed that the Taliban controlled Bin Ladin's activities and access to him and viewed the circulation of such reports as part of a plan by the US or its allies to malign the Taliban and harm Afghanistan.<sup>53</sup>

American diplomats in Pakistan were said to have sent their families back home and reduced staff in the American missions in advance of a US strike.<sup>54</sup> Fazlur Rahman, leader of Pakistan's Islamist party, Jami'at-i 'Ulama-i-Islam (JUI), warned that agents of American agencies were moving about in Pakistani tribal areas without any restriction and were planning to co-opt tribal leaders in an operation against Bin Ladin.<sup>55</sup> Such information on possible American moves prompted rumors that Bin Ladin had relocated to the Philippines but these were denied by his spokespersons.<sup>56</sup>

Reports originating from Pakistan in July again alluded to a possible US attack on Bin Ladin, citing the establishment of CIA camps in Pakistani territory across the Afghanistan border.<sup>57</sup> The Taliban Foreign Ministry reiterated assurances that Afghan soil would never be used as a base for attacks against other nations.<sup>58</sup> An unconfirmed report in September said that Bin Ladin had escaped unharmed from a rocket attack by an unknown source on his convoy near Taliban headquarters in Qandahar. The rockets destroyed several cars belonging to his bodyguards.<sup>59</sup>

The bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen in October (see below) evoked conjecture that the US was preparing an attack on positions in Afghanistan. Reports in mid-November indicated that the US had positioned its naval ships off the Pakistani coast in readiness for a strike, and pointed to mounting pressure on Clinton to act before the presidential elections in November.<sup>60</sup> Afghanistan threatened to retaliate with full force if the US ever tried to attack it. Afghan foreign minister Mawlawi 'Abdul Wakil Mutawakil stated that the presence of American forces in the Gulf was unjustified, and demanded that the US and Russia be expelled from the Six-Plus-Two Group. He also accused the UN of playing a provocative role in relation to Afghanistan.<sup>61</sup> Pakistan declared that it would not allow the US to cross its airspace to attack Afghanistan,<sup>62</sup> while Turkey announced that it would not grant permission to the US to launch an air attack against Afghanistan from its territory.<sup>63</sup> Countries in Central Asia distanced themselves from the US plans as well, stating that they were not willing to provide land facilities for the US forces. By mid-December, the Clinton administration appeared to be backing off. According to Pakistani sources, the reason for the delay in carrying out the strike was lack of evidence against Bin Ladin combined with US fear of violent reactions by Islamist groups.<sup>64</sup>

An Afghan source reported in November that due to the imminent threat of a US missile strike in response to the Cole attack, Bin Ladin had left his main camp in Qandahar and moved to a secret base in the Hindu Kush mountains.<sup>65</sup>

### CRACKDOWN ON "ARAB AFGHANS" IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan, concerned about its own stability and/or American retaliation, tightened the noose around Bin Ladin's associates in Pakistan and reportedly decided to hand over individuals wanted by various countries — especially Muslim states — for involvement

in terrorist acts. The decision was also aimed at countering allegations that Pakistan sponsored terrorism, and at improving ties with countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt which accused both Afghanistan and Pakistan of harboring persons sought by them.<sup>66</sup>

Pakistani security forces reportedly launched a countrywide crackdown on Arab Afghan militants in Peshawar, deporting eighteen people in May and June, including nationals of Libya, Yemen and Turkey.<sup>67</sup> A Palestinian, Samir Mustafa, was arrested at the Karachi airport for attempting to travel to Italy on forged documents,<sup>68</sup> and a Yemeni citizen, Ahmad 'Abdallah, was arrested when attempting to cross the border into Afghanistan, along with two Pakistanis without visas who were carrying a large amount of money. Mustafa was suspected of having ties with Bin Ladin.<sup>69</sup> Four more Arabs — two Kuwaitis, one Egyptian and one Algerian, all suspected of ties with Bin Ladin's organization — were also arrested during this same period. The Egyptian detainee, Muhammad Sha'ban, was extradited in May to Egypt.<sup>70</sup>

An indirect result of this crackdown was the arrest by the Taliban in Kabul of a Syrian soldier, Rahim Janco, and a Kurd, Arkun Ilyas, who were allegedly trained by a joint Israeli-American intelligence network and tasked with collecting information about routes used by Usama bin Ladin and Muslim mujahidin to enter Chechnya. The Syrian reportedly confessed that he had been blackmailed by money and sex while visiting the UAE. Bin Ladin consequently replaced his Arab bodyguards with Bengals and Pakistanis, and moved his headquarters from Qandahar.<sup>71</sup>

Some twenty-five to thirty Arab nationals left Pakistan for Afghanistan during the first half of 2000 to avoid arrest and deportation, according to a report published in July.<sup>72</sup> An Iraqi national, Salih Sulayman (also known as Abu Dajana), believed to be a close associate of Bin Ladin, was arrested in Peshawar in October.<sup>73</sup>

### **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO THWART THE TALIBAN AND CURTAIL BIN LADIN'S ACTIVITIES**

The war in Chechnya and growing unrest in the other Muslim Central Asian republics led Russia to join international efforts to combat terrorism. This was reflected in a summit held in Dushanbe, Kazakhstan in July by the Shanghai Five Forum, comprising Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The forum, originally set up in mid-1990s to resolve border disputes between China and the constituent republics of the former Soviet Union, now expanded its agenda to include the growing threat posed by terrorists and separatists trained and armed by the Taliban. They discussed measures to counter this threat. In a declaration issued at its close, the forum singled out Afghanistan as the chief source of instability in the region and called for coordinated efforts to combat international terrorism.<sup>74</sup> India, Iran and Uzbekistan displayed interest in joining the group.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time, a dialogue initiated in May between Russia and the US regarding closer cooperation in combating the threat of terrorism led to an agreement in July to form a bilateral working group on Afghanistan. Russia threatened to carry out preemptive strikes against the Taliban, whom it accused of helping train Islamic militants to fight in Chechnya and Central Asia, while the CIA and FBI established intelligence stations in Dushanbe, Tashkent and Bishkek. Russian soldiers were reportedly stationed along Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan.<sup>76</sup>

Incursions by the Taliban during August and September into areas controlled by the Afghani opposition — the Northern Alliance (see *MECS* 1996, pp. 107–109) — raised concern in Russia, the Central Asian republics bordering on Afghanistan, India and Iran, all of which supported the opposition government under Burhanuddin Rabbani. Both Russia and the West believed that the Taliban success was sending a powerful signal to other militant groups about the use of Islam as a rallying point for political and military forces in the region. The Taliban, they feared, might adopt even more aggressive measures than Iran to export their ideology by helping Islamic movements which were already challenging the successor regimes to the Soviet Union in Central Asia. Additionally, it was feared, the completion of the Taliban triumph in Afghanistan would encourage Islamist groups in Pakistan to intensify their efforts to establish a more rigidly Islamic state. The combination of a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, a fundamentalist government in Pakistan and Islamic Iran would be a nightmare for both the West and Russia.<sup>77</sup>

In the belief that Islamic extremists were trying to redraw the map of Central Asia, Russian defense minister Igor Sergeev met with leaders of the anti-Taliban alliance attending a session of the Russian and CIS Defense Ministers Council on 26 October in Dushanbe. The discussions concerned military support for Gen. Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, who was considered the only effective opponent to the Taliban.<sup>78</sup>

The Russian-American working group on Afghanistan, meeting for a second time in October in Moscow, contended that “the situation in and around Afghanistan continues to pose a threat to regional and international security.” It resolved to pursue efforts to induce the Taliban to stop supporting terrorism, close terrorist training camps and hand Bin Ladin over to justice.<sup>79</sup> Russian-American cooperation on this issue culminated in their co-sponsorship of a UN Security Council resolution on 19 December imposing additional sanctions on Afghanistan.

#### **IMPOSITION OF NEW SANCTIONS ON AFGHANISTAN**

The Security Council resolution demanded that the Taliban surrender Bin Ladin and close terrorist training camps within a month or face new sanctions. (Previously imposed sanctions banned flights to and from Afghanistan; see *MECS* 1999, pp. 132–33). The Security Council called on foreign backers of the Taliban — an apparent reference to Pakistan — to withdraw any “officials, agents, advisers and military personnel” engaged in supporting the Taliban war effort. In addition, the Security Council called for a freeze on Bin Ladin’s assets and those of members of his alleged terrorist network; barred international aircraft from landing in Afghanistan without the council’s approval; urged countries to reduce diplomatic representation by the Taliban abroad; and placed restrictions on travel by senior Taliban officials. The sanctions also placed an arms embargo on the Taliban and a ban on exports of acetic anhydride, used in the manufacture of heroin — a bid to deprive the militia of opium revenue.

Several council members, including France, the Netherlands and Canada, expressed concern over the implications of the new sanctions for the impoverished Afghanistan people, but none were willing to block the resolution, since opposition would have amounted to support for the Taliban. Responding to the resolution, the Taliban information minister, Qadratullah Jamal, accused the US and Russia of using the issue of Bin Ladin and terrorism as a pretext for destroying the Islamic system of Afghanistan. The Taliban announced that it would protect Bin Ladin, called for a boycott of American and Russian products, and urged other Muslim states to join them in this campaign. It also threatened

to absent itself from the UN-sponsored talks for a negotiated solution to the Afghan issue, which were ongoing throughout the year.<sup>80</sup>

In a press release issued following the imposition of the sanctions, al-Muhajiroun, the London-based Islamist group associated with Bin Ladin's World Islamic Front umbrella network (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 129–30 and below), accused the international body and its “pro-Israel leader Kofi Annan” of exposing “its ugly face of Islamophobia.” Al-Muhajiroun also organized a demonstration against the sanctions outside the UN Information Center in London.<sup>81</sup>

Despite cumulative evidence in the hands of the US about Bin Ladin's network activities, some critics argued that the US, by portraying him as the mastermind behind Islamist terrorist activities worldwide, was responsible for aggrandizing him and his cause. Harvey Kushner, an expert on terrorism at Long Island University, contended that viewing Islamic fundamentalism as a global monolith was erroneous. Rather, Bin Ladin's operation was a loose network, not an organization that could sustain an orderly succession of leaders. “The danger of Bin Ladin is not the structure but the randomness of this configuration,” he said. Fawaz Gerges, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at Sarah Lawrence College who studied Middle East Islamic movements, called the American insistence on describing Bin Ladin as the top terrorist unrealistic. Bin Ladin, he believed, was “a spent force” with little support outside Afghanistan. Not only was he under siege by the American and other intelligence organizations, his organization itself was splintered. Reportedly, some sixty Arab veterans of the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s had defected from Bin Ladin's movement after the 1989 Soviet withdrawal to form a breakaway pro-Taliban faction led by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Hakim Abu Mus‘ab Suri, one of Bin Ladin's oldest associates. Suri and Bin Ladin were reunited in 1996, when Bin Ladin put him in charge of indoctrination at his training camps in Khost. They soon became estranged, however, over ideological differences, with Suri becoming more of a religious radical than his former boss.<sup>82</sup>

## ISLAMIST DISCORD AND DISCONTENT

Differences within some of the Islamist organizations, especially the Egyptian Jihad and the Jama‘a al-Islamiyya, the Palestinian Hamas and the Algerian Front islamique du salut (FIS), weakened their popularity. The major issues of contention, common to all the groups, were the use of violence and participation in existing political systems. According to Egyptian security sources, the rivalry between the leaders of the two Egyptian organizations enabled the authorities to contain the armed activity of these groups and cut off their fighting cadres in Egypt from sources of finance and weapons abroad. The military containment of Hamas and of Algerian Islamists also weakened their standing.

## COORDINATION BY ARAB STATES TO COMBAT TERRORISM

Twenty Arab ministers of interior, meeting in Algiers in late January to coordinate measures to combat terrorism, adopted a revised version of the “Arab strategy for combating terrorism” that provided for “strengthened cooperation between Arab security agencies in combating cross-border crime,” which had been adopted in 1999 (see *MECS* 1999, p. 122). Until then, only twelve Arab countries had approved the agreement. President ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Bouteflika of Algeria urged the remainder to do likewise in his

opening remarks to the conference. The ministers also endorsed what was described as an Egyptian initiative to convene a UN-sponsored international conference on combating terrorism, while adding the usual proviso that a distinction had to be made between terrorism and the right of peoples to struggle against foreign occupation.

While the Saudi-owned daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat* portrayed the conference results as a step toward building a worldwide “front” to combat international terrorism and organized crime, other Arab commentators considered them a “smokescreen” for a joint endeavor to suppress all forms of political opposition. Inter-Arab cooperation against terrorism “is a byword for Arab regimes scratching each other’s backs by helping each other suppress political dissent or criticism, the only field in which they ever really cooperate,” argued ‘Abd al-Bari Atwan, the Palestinian editor of the London-based *al-Quds al-‘Arabi*.<sup>83</sup>

Cooperation in confronting terrorist groups again topped the agenda of another conference of Arab ministers of interior which took place in Tunis in May. Habib al-‘Adli, the Egyptian representative, commended his country’s close cooperation with the European countries — a policy which resulted in the handover to Egypt during 1998-2000 of some of the most wanted militants living abroad, who for years had plotted anti-government attacks and collected funds to finance terrorist activities back home.<sup>84</sup>

#### FRICION BETWEEN EGYPTIAN ISLAMIST LEADERS

In a startling move in February, the Egyptian Jihad movement announced the dismissal of Ayman al-Zawahiri as its leader. Zawahiri, who was viewed as Bin Ladin’s right-hand man, had been sentenced in absentia in Egypt to death for his role in several terrorist acts (see above) and was living in Afghanistan. Commentators linked his departure to personal rivalries in the movement coinciding with the ongoing debate over the issue of a truce with the authorities and the end of violence inside Egypt, announced in 1997 (see *MECS* 1997, p. 144). Friction reportedly arose between Zawahiri and Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, alias Dr. Fadl, spokesperson of the organization, and between Zawahiri and his deputy, Muhammad Makkawi.<sup>85</sup>

Reports of Zawahiri’s dismissal were followed by a statement issued by one of the Egyptian Jihad leaders, living in exile in Germany, Usama Siddiq Ayyub, openly calling for an end to violent acts both inside and outside Egypt and for focusing all efforts on the liberation of the al-Aqsa Mosque by force. Ayyub’s lawyer, Sa’d Hasaballah, confirmed that the initiative represented an extraordinary strategic change in the Jihad group’s thinking, and that a number of leaders inside and outside Egypt supported it. Islamist writer Kamal Habib noted that the appeal reflected a new stage of maturity reached by the Islamist movement after long and bitter experience. Zawahiri, he pointed out, was unable to accept this initiative because of his ongoing strategic alliance with Bin Ladin.<sup>86</sup> Zawahiri’s brother, Muhammad, also a leader in the organization, was turned over to the Egyptian authorities in June by the UAE.<sup>87</sup>

In August, eleven Jihad members jailed in the Wadi al-Natrun prison in Egypt issued an appeal to the movement leaders inside and outside Egypt to accept the initiative proposed by Usama Ayyub and unify all efforts toward the goal of the liberation of Jerusalem.<sup>88</sup>

Similar divisions emerged in the positions of al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya. The Jama‘a’s spiritual leader, Shaykh ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Rahman, imprisoned in the US since 1995 for his role in the bombing of the World Trade Center (see *MECS* 1995, pp. 116–17),

announced that he was revoking his support for the cease-fire with the Egyptian authorities declared unilaterally by the movement in 1997. The truce had been opposed all along by the exiled military commander of the Jama'a, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, who also operated closely with Bin Ladin. Both leaders charged that "the unilateral truce has not achieved anything, that the state has not reciprocated, and that it will never allow Islamist groups to engage meaningfully in peaceful politics." 'Abd al-Rahman's announcement created confusion among the movement's followers. Taha relinquished his role as leader of the Shura Council of the organization abroad, while adamantly denying that he had been the victim of an internal coup to depose him. The Shura Council of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya consisted of two parts, explained Islamist lawyer Muntasir al-Zayyat in an interview to *al-Sharq al-Awsat*. One part was the original council established by the founding leaders, now jailed in the Tarra prison in Egypt. They included Shaykh Karam Zuhdi, Shaykh Najih Ibrahim, Shaykh 'Isam Dirballah, Shaykh 'Asim 'Abd al-Majid, Shaykh Usama Hafiz, Shaykh Hamdi 'Abd al-Rahman, Shaykh Fu'ad al-Dawalibi, Shaykh 'Ali al-Sharif and 'Abbud al-Zummar. It was they who had unanimously launched the truce initiative. The second part was the Shura Council of the Jama'a abroad, headed by Mustafa Hamza, who announced that the decision made by the movement to cease armed operations was still in force. Rifa'i Taha, however, declared from Afghanistan that he opposed the continuation of the initiative.<sup>89</sup>

'Abd al-Rahman's U-turn exacerbated an existing split within the Jama'a between two camps: a majority camp led by Mustafa Hamza, which supported the decision to cease all military operations inside and outside Egypt, and a hard-line faction led by Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, which opposed the move.<sup>90</sup> In the wake of the war of statements prompted by 'Abd al-Rahman's announcement, he issued an appeal to all parties to refrain from further declarations. 'Abdallah 'Abd al-Rahman, 'Umar's son, explained that his father "did not mean to annul the initiative to halt violence, did not incite violence, but only voiced his opinion of its futility by withdrawing his backing for it."<sup>91</sup> Islamist lawyer Zayyat, thought to have engineered the move in 1997 to renounce violence, viewed 'Abd al-Rahman's declaration as a "reminder" that the Jama'a could still cause trouble for the government if it did not continue releasing the movement's jailed activists, as the Jama'a demanded. The declaration may have also sought to draw attention to the conditions in which 'Abd al-Rahman was being held in the US — in solitary confinement and denied visits.<sup>92</sup> A meeting of Islamists in Afghanistan in September, attended by Bin Ladin, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha and Ayman al-Zawahiri, reaffirmed their determination to work for the release of 'Abd al-Rahman. Video footage of the meeting, produced by a company called the Jihad Media Center in Afghanistan, was broadcast by Qatar's al-Jazira satellite TV on 21 September.<sup>93</sup>

Friction resurfaced with the bombing of the American destroyer USS Cole in October (see below). Ahmad Rifa'i Taha issued a statement praising the attack as a retaliation for the acts of the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people. Other Jama'a leaders, however, fearing that such statements could embroil the organization in a new cycle of violence, disassociated the movement from it.<sup>94</sup>

### **THE DIMINISHING EFFECTIVENESS OF HAMAS**

The deportation from Jordan in 1999 of the head of the Hamas political bureau and three prominent bureau members, to Qatar, and the resumption of the Syrian-Israeli talks at the end of that year, had a negative impact on the viability of Hamas. On the one hand,

Hamas was less able to fight the Israelis than in the past, as its military wing had been dealt a number of successive blows. On the other hand, the political situation in the PA had changed dramatically. Aware of the decline in its popularity, Hamas showed signs of flexibility in its stance, observed Prof. Nasir al-Sha'ir of al-Najah University, noting two important developments. Firstly, the movement proposed a temporary truce as an alternative to the process of attaining a permanent peace with Israel. Secondly, Hamas accepted in principle the Palestinian people's stand regarding the proposed political settlement. This meant, Sha'ir said, that the issue was not religious, and that Hamas, although committed to a certain perception of the Palestinian issue, would not impose its view on the people.<sup>95</sup>

The four deported Hamas leaders — Khalid Mash'al, Ibrahim Ghawsha, Sami Khatir and 'Izzat Rishq — made sustained judicial and political efforts throughout the year to return to Jordan. Assisted by members of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front (IAF), they filed an appeal in January to the Jordanian Higher Court of Justice against the prime minister, the cabinet and the interior minister, contesting their expulsion, arguing that it was unconstitutional.<sup>96</sup> A ruling by the court rejected their appeal.

In July, they attempted to make contact with the newly formed government of 'Ali Abu al-Raghib through various mediators in a bid to be allowed to return to Jordan.<sup>97</sup> The new government, however, was not interested in overturning the decision, contending that it was a sovereign decision and that no non-Jordanian political party was allowed to operate in Jordan. Hence the deportees could be allowed to return to Jordan only as Jordanian citizens.<sup>98</sup> A mediation initiative between the Jordanian prime minister and the deportees took place at the Doha ICO summit in November (see below), when Abu al-Raghib met with Khalid Mash'al in the presence of the Qatari foreign minister.<sup>99</sup> None of the deportees, however, were allowed to return during 2000 (see also chapter on Jordan).

### **AMNESTY FOR ALGERIAN ISLAMISTS**

Despite the National Reconciliation Law proposed by President 'Abd al-'Aziz Bouteflika of Algeria in July 1999 (see *MECS* 1999, p. 127), offering Islamists an opportunity to surrender to the authorities without penalty, the situation of Islamists in Algeria did not improve (see chapter on Algeria). The amnesty offer, due to expire on 13 January, was extended informally to allow more militants to surrender. In January, the Armée islamique du salut (AIS), the armed wing of the FIS led by Madani Mizraq, officially dissolved itself, and its members were granted amnesty by the state. Saudi Arabia reportedly granted Algeria \$800m. to help it rehabilitate Islamist rebels who returned to civilian life, and also offered asylum to Mizraq. Algerian newspapers reported that by January 2000, 4,200 people had taken advantage of the National Reconciliation Law since it was first announced. Of them, 2,400 belonged to the AIS while the rest belonged to the GIA and other militant groups. A statement issued by the FIS welcomed the amnesty granted to the AIS while stressing that it needed to be followed up by moves to effect political reconciliation in the country, including releasing its jailed members and lifting the ban on its activities.

Still, the government amnesty offer seemed to sow even further dissension within the Islamist groups. Leading FIS figures opposed to the agreement between Mizraq and the authorities were presumed to be behind unconfirmed reports that one of Mizraq's aides

tried to assassinate him. An FIS leader in exile, Rabah Kabir, while announcing his support of the truce reached between the AIS and the army, did not deny that there were differences within the group over how much had been gained by it. A member of another Islamist faction, the Salafi Group for Call and Combat, headed by Hasan Hattab, who was reportedly negotiating with government security forces on terms of surrender and amnesty when the deadline passed, was assassinated by dissenters in the faction in January. The GIA, together with two other small groups, announced their rejection of the reconciliation law and vowed to continue their anti-government attacks.<sup>100</sup>

Egyptian pro-Islamist writer Fahmi Huwaydi believed that disbanding the AIS and pardoning its fighters was aimed primarily at weakening the FIS. FIS leaders, ‘Abbasi Madani and ‘Abd al-Qadir Boukhamkham supported Bouteflika’s initiative, while others — ‘Ali Belhadj and ‘Ali Djeddi — had reservations. FIS leaders in exile, such as Kabir and Anwar Haddam, also adopted conflicting positions. The effects of these differences could be seen in a statement issued by the spokesperson for the FIS coordination council, which disassociated the FIS from the “naive political positions adopted by some of its members inside Algeria and abroad.” Referring to reports that the presidential pardon included Kabir, Huwaydi asserted that by excluding mention of other FIS leaders, the reports, if true, showed that the FIS was still being subjected to government pressure, and that the authorities were exploiting the front’s weakness in an attempt to dismantle it completely.<sup>101</sup> The controversy over the National Reconciliation Law among FIS members resurfaced in a statement issued in October by Dja‘far Houari, a member of the FIS overseas executive committee headed by Kabir, in which he reneged on his former support of Bouteflika’s reconciliation policy.<sup>102</sup>

Anwar Haddam, who had been jailed in the US since 1995 (see *MECS* 1995, p. 119) on charges of belonging to a terrorist organization, won a case contesting his deportation before the Board of Immigration Appeals in November. He was granted political asylum and released from prison after an immigration tribunal found that the classified evidence against him did not support the accusation that he was a terrorist.<sup>103</sup>

## **THE CHANGING FORTUNES OF THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS**

### **THE EFFECT OF THE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTHERN LEBANON**

The Islamist movements registered a historic achievement in their otherwise gloomy situation during 2000 with the unconditional, non-negotiated Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May. The Israeli withdrawal was interpreted as a victory for Hizballah, its philosophy and its strategy. It was perceived as proof that the Islamist option was the right solution to the 200-year-old Arab predicament. The Muslim nation (*umma*) was encouraged to follow the example of Hizballah in its struggle against the Zionist/Jewish enemy, who was revealed as either meek and cowardly, or as a “spider web” when confronted by death and destruction.<sup>104</sup>

Statements by the Iranian-based Islamic Revolution Guards Corps and the Martyr Foundation viewed the pullout as a victory “of right over evil” and as “a heavy blow to the weak body of...Zionism and...global arrogance” by an unflinching resistance.<sup>105</sup> In a message of congratulations to the Lebanese nation and the Islamic resistance movement,

Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i of Iran lauded Hizballah's victory over "the usurper Israeli enemy," emphasizing that it revealed that the solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict lay solely "in the logic of resistance, Jihad and devotion."<sup>106</sup>

In light of Hizballah's experience, Hamas openly called for the "Lebanonization" of the Palestinian territories, praising the Lebanese model of resistance and asserting that "the language of resistance" was the only language understood by the Israelis. Hamas confirmed Israeli press reports that the Hamas external command was working toward establishing a military wing in the territories by recruiting Palestinian students abroad. These students were reportedly sent to an Iranian military college, trained in various fighting techniques, and sent back to the Palestinian territories.<sup>107</sup> Hamas spokesperson Isma'il Abu Shanab said in an interview that Hamas hoped to replicate the Lebanese experience of Hizballah in the Palestinian territories.<sup>108</sup>

With this, the withdrawal posed new challenges to Hizballah. Having achieved its main objective and reaching a zenith of popular adulation, Hizballah faced an unclear future. It needed to define how to maintain its constituency and translate the popularity it had gained from resistance into formal representation and political power.<sup>109</sup> In an apparent shift of focus away from armed resistance to domestic concerns,<sup>110</sup> Hizballah Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah portrayed the victory of his organization as the victory of all Lebanese.<sup>111</sup> However, Hizballah was unprepared to lay down its arms and turn into a purely political party.<sup>112</sup>

Sudanese Islamist commentator 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Effendi contended that the price Hizballah now had to pay for its victory and for its recognition as a legitimate party "almost without enemies inside Lebanon" was altering its identity as an Islamic party. It had to concede its ultimate objective of creating an Islamic state in Lebanon and acquiesce to coexistence with other political parties in a secular framework. The newly sanitized message of Hizballah, its newly adopted conciliatory approach vis-à-vis other Lebanese political forces, and its emphasis on the non-violence of its Islamist philosophy reflected considerable maturity along with a degree of shrewdness rarely found in Islamist movements. Effendi pointed out, however, that not much remained of its original Islamic message. Could this indicate the future direction of other Islamic movements, especially since many of them were moving toward adaptation to international circumstances and domination by local secular forces, Effendi wondered.<sup>113</sup>

The response of Hizballah to the Palestinian intifada reflected its predicament. Hizballah vociferously supported the intifada and urged the Palestinians to keep up its momentum. It also called on Arab countries on the eve of the Arab emergency summit convened in October (see below) to open their borders with Israel to those wishing to carry out resistance acts and jihad, to supply weapons to the Palestinian people for self-defense, and to sever relations with Israel.<sup>114</sup> Yet, Hizballah ruled out launching cross-border operations against Israel from Lebanese territory. Even the kidnapping of three Israeli soldiers on 7 October along the Lebanese border at the disputed Shab'a Farms area, and the abduction of an Israeli civilian a few days later were tangential to the uprising. They were meant primarily to serve as bargaining chips for the release of Hizballah and Lebanese detainees in Israel (see chapter on Lebanon).<sup>115</sup> While they demonstrated Hizballah's propensity for violent struggle, they also reflected its pressing need to remain in the political limelight, observed the Lebanese daily *al-Mustaqbal*. According to Hizballah deputy secretary-general, Shaykh Na'im Qasim, the need for cooperation between Hizballah and the Palestinian intifada in order "to confuse the enemy" was

only one of three messages that Hizballah wanted to deliver by means of the abductions. The others were the release of Lebanese and other Arab prisoners still in Israeli jails, and the right of the organization to carry out operations in the Shab'a Farms region, which it viewed as occupied Lebanese territory.<sup>116</sup>

### **IMPROVED POSITION OF THE ISLAMISTS IN LIGHT OF THE AL-AQSA INTIFADA**

The al-Aqsa intifada, which broke out at the end of September following a visit by Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount (al-Haram al-Sharif — the area of the holy mosques; see chapter on the Palestinian Authority), evoked an unprecedented demonstration of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic rage. This was accompanied by incitement and antisemitic manifestations throughout the Arab world and in Arab and Muslim communities globally. The intifada highlighted the religious dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is a basic tenet of Islamic fundamentalist ideology, blurring the lines between nationalist and Islamist discourse. This led to the radicalization of the discourse against Israel, Zionists and Jews, as well as against the US; elevated the status of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian street; and enhanced cooperation between them and Hizballah. “Although Islamist political movements have taken a battering at the hands of Arab governments,” wrote *The Economist*, “the rousing language of Islamic revival” continued to make inroads.<sup>117</sup>

### **Popular Expression of Support and Solidarity**

Tens of thousands of people from all walks of life in the Arab and Muslim worlds took part in demonstrations to vent their fury at Israel and the US. They carried banners equating the swastika and the Star of David, chanted “Death to Israel” and, calling for jihad, burned Israeli and American flags.<sup>118</sup> Demonstrations were also held in Saudi Arabia where they are generally prohibited. Some of the demonstrations were dispersed by police when they threatened public order. In Jordan, the police dispersed protesters who tried to march on the Israeli embassy. Syrian police used tear gas to disperse angry demonstrators who tried to reach the US embassy in Damascus. Clashes between security forces and university students occurred in Cairo and Alexandria.<sup>119</sup> During a demonstration led by the Muslim Brotherhood at Cairo University on 16 October, a mobile phone was used to call Shaykh Ahmad Yasin, leader of Hamas in Gaza. Yasin’s response was broadcast to the students over a loudspeaker.<sup>120</sup> Addressing a rally in Tehran, Hamas leader Khalid Mash’al declared that the State of Israel should be destroyed and praised the Iranian supreme leader Khamene’i for calling on the Islamic world to wage jihad against the Jewish state.<sup>121</sup>

This “demonstration of rage,” wrote London-based Islamist scholar Azzam Tamimi, was “an expression of hostility and hatred for a project that is seen by Arabs and Muslims alike as an imperialist invasion aimed at sustaining the weakness and even paralysis of the Muslim umma.”<sup>122</sup> The strong Arab and Muslim reactions elicited by the intifada were further proof of the capacity of the religious dimension to mobilize Muslims worldwide. Palestinian anthropologist Rema Hamami and sociologist Salim Tamari of Bir Zeit University claimed that “the idea of shared sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif proposed by Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David in July exposed the sensitive religious dimension of the conflict — control over a sacred site deeply contested by Arabs and Israelis. That “the

protests would take on a religious character” was inevitable. Strong media emphasis on the religious dimension of the uprising, Hamami and Tamari asserted, also reinforced popular notions in Israel, in the Arab world and in Muslim communities in the West that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was “a Jewish-Muslim conflict: eternal and insoluble.”<sup>123</sup>

The demonstrations were also directed against the US, not only for its allegedly biased role as peace process mediator but as a reflection of anti-Western sentiment. The US was perceived as leading an anti-Islamic and anti-Arab struggle in collaboration with Israel and Zionism. In Egypt, acts of vandalism were carried out against American targets. An act that seemed to symbolize opposition to American support of Israel was the destruction of a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet.<sup>124</sup> Egyptian students in Cairo also vented their anger on the British-based supermarket chain, Sainsbury, erroneously thought to be owned by Jews; stores were damaged and some of the firm’s three thousand employees were injured.<sup>125</sup> Cars and property were also destroyed by demonstrators in Amman.<sup>126</sup> Hamas sympathizers in Gaza and Nablus attacked several cafes and stores, reportedly owned by PA officials, which sold alcoholic beverages.<sup>127</sup>

Two attempts on the lives of Israeli embassy staff members occurred in Amman on 19 November and 6 December, amidst heightened public pressure on the Jordanian authorities to close down the embassy altogether. Two previously unknown groups claimed responsibility for the first attack: the Jordan Islamic Resistance Movement, and “The Group of the Warrior Ahmad Daqamsa” (Daqamsa was the Jordanian soldier who shot dead seven Israeli schoolgirls and injured several others in the Baqura area in northern Jordan in March 1997; see *MECS* 1997, pp. 477–78).<sup>128</sup> Two other groups claimed responsibility for the second shooting, vowing that more would follow until Jordan severed diplomatic relations with Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood — the largest opposition political movement — warned after the second incident that so long as Israeli diplomats were present in Jordan, they were bound to be vulnerable to attacks by Jordanians retaliating against Israel’s brutal attempt to suppress the Palestinian uprising.<sup>129</sup>

### **Enhanced PLO Cooperation with the Islamists**

Religion played a major role in the first weeks of the uprising, as a rallying and symbolic force. Ironically, however, the participation of Hamas and other Islamic forces was minimal at first, confined essentially to raising the Hamas flag at funeral processions, observed Hamami and Tamari. With the PA driving the intifada, Hamas the main opponent of the PA regime, was initially reluctant to assume a central role.<sup>130</sup>

Operating in the context of the National and Islamic Higher Committee for the Follow-up of the Intifada, a united front of national and Islamist forces (composed of all the Palestinian Liberation Organization [PLO] political factions and the Palestinian Islamic movements — Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Hamas-affiliated political party, Hizb al-Khalas), Hamas and Fath (the main PLO faction) agreed to coordinate activities relating to the continuation of the intifada and to issue all statements and leaflets under the umbrella of the unified intifada leadership.<sup>131</sup> About one hundred Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists were released, or escaped, from PA jails in Gaza and the West Bank after the first week of the uprising, removing a crucial divisive issue with the PA and enabling them to organize for a more active role.<sup>132</sup> Hamas leaders outside the PA became active during the intifada in heightening support for the Palestinian cause by meeting with Arab leaders. Khalid Mash‘al, for example, visited Iran and Syria in October,<sup>133</sup> and Yemen in November.<sup>134</sup>

The intifada also highlighted and enhanced the influence of Hizballah in the PA and indirectly that of Iran. Yellow Hizballah flags were ubiquitous in Palestinian demonstrations and funerals at this time, even more numerous than the green flags of Hamas.<sup>135</sup>

### **Worldwide Islamist Support for the Intifada**

Al-Muhajiroun, the Islamist group associated with the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Crusaders and the Jews founded in 1998 by Bin Ladin (see *MECS* 1998, pp. 129–30) and headed by Shaykh Omar Bakri Muhammad, together with the Islamic Observation Center, led by Egyptian Islamist Yasir al-Sirri, organized a mass demonstration in London in support of the intifada after Friday prayers on 13 October. Al-Muhajiroun also distributed a leaflet threatening to kill Jews and wage war against Israel and against American targets. Demonstrations were also organized by the Islamist London-based organization Hizb al-Tahrir, and by a hitherto unknown group, the Islamic League in Britain.<sup>136</sup>

In the US, the jailed leader of the Egyptian al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya, Shaykh ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Rahman, called on Muslim clerics to issue a fatwa sanctifying the indiscriminate killing of Jews. “Jihad is now a duty for the entire [Islamic] nation until Palestine and the Aqsa mosque are liberated and Jews are either pushed into their graves or back where they came from,” the shaykh declared.<sup>137</sup> A similar call was issued by the Pakistani Islamist movement, Hizb al-Mujahidin, which also announced that a contingent of mujahidin was ready to leave for Palestine.<sup>138</sup>

In a telephone interview with the Italian daily, *Il Giornale*, al-Muhajiroun leader Bakri stated that the World Islamic Front was recruiting Muslim volunteers from Italy, France and Spain to fight for the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation. Thirty-four mujahidin had already been sent to the Middle East to provide support for the uprising, he said, but the real objective was to prepare 300 to 400 combatants ready to die for the cause. Bakri added that his and similar organizations helped Hamas, the Palestinian Jihad and any Islamic force by collecting funds, recruiting fighters and sometimes carrying out propaganda for these groups in Europe.<sup>139</sup>

Emir Shamil Basayev, leader of the Chechen rebels, declared that a group of 153 Chechen fighters was prepared to be sent to the Middle East, and that Jerusalem was the concern of all Muslims.<sup>140</sup> Shortly after the ICO conference in November, the Chechen fighting forces issued a “second Aqsa declaration,” in which they renewed the pledge to fight the Jews, who were “defiling the Holy Land.” More basically, however, the declaration reflected disappointment at the ICO failure to support their cause. It criticized the “so-called ‘Islamic’ organization which had conveniently removed the word ‘jihad’ from its dictionary,” and “blessed the brutal disbeliever invasion of Chechnya, by conveniently declaring it a Russian internal affair.”<sup>141</sup>

Bin Ladin, too, was dissatisfied by the overall Islamic response to the uprising; during a meeting with his followers in Afghanistan he reportedly expressed consternation over the impotence of the leaders of Islamist movements, who did not take advantage of the agitation by the Arab peoples to support the intifada more vigorously.<sup>142</sup>

### **Islamist Encouragement of Jihad and Sanctification of Martyrdom**

Friday sermons at mosques throughout the Arab world were dominated by angry denunciations of what was termed Israeli brutality, and calls for jihad. Jihad was presented

as a religious duty incumbent on all Muslims and the conflict was portrayed as a conflict between truth and falsehood.<sup>143</sup>

Shaykh Muhammad bin ‘Abdallah Al Subayl, imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, called on Muslims worldwide to take up jihad against “the enemies of God and Islam and humanity” and stop “Zionist oppression and carnage against the Palestinians.”<sup>144</sup> Similarly, Egyptian al-Azhar Grand Imam Shaykh Muhammad Sayyid al-Tantawi called for jihad against Israel: “As long as the Jews attack us, violate our rights and shed our blood, it is our duty to fight them.” He justified the abduction in October of the three Israeli soldiers by Hizballah in this context.<sup>145</sup> Iraqi clerics, too, issued a fatwa calling for jihad.<sup>146</sup>

Hamas urged the Palestinian people to pursue the intifada and called on Arabs and Muslims worldwide to support it financially and morally out of a conviction that Israel and Jews should be destroyed.<sup>147</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Yasin, the spiritual leader of the movement, reiterated the notion that Israel was “a foreign body, imposed by force and will be eliminated by force.”<sup>148</sup> Preaching from his mosque in Gaza, PA appointee Shaykh ‘Abd al-Fattah called war inevitable, “part of a final, apocalyptic battle that will drive the Jews off Islamic soil.” The intifada, he believed, would spread to the entire Arab world, and would unite all the Muslims behind the Palestinian struggle, driving all the Jews out of Palestine.<sup>149</sup>

Generally, these appeals remained unheeded. Jordanian commentator Ibrahim Alloush, present at a Friday sermon in the Central Mosque in Amman, argued that such sermons were “hypocritical rhetoric” typical of “the Islam of the sultans.” He pointed out that “the preacher spoke up at length against Zionists, Arab regimes, and oppression” but in the end urged his listeners to disperse quietly and avoid demonstrations.<sup>150</sup>

### **Boycott as a Religious Duty**

Muslim scholars also urged Arabs and Muslims around the world to boycott American and Israeli products. Grand Imam Tantawi asked the faithful to “boycott Israel and all who support it in aggression and injustice” and urged that a blacklist of goods be drawn up. The mufti of Egypt, Nasir Farid Wasil, issued a religious edict prohibiting Muslims from buying Israeli and American products. Boycotting Israeli and American products was a “religious Muslim duty” and “a form of jihad against oppression,” the mufti said, and Muslims who buy or consume American and Israeli products must be considered “sinful” and “criminal.”<sup>151</sup> Another Muslim scholar, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi of Qatar, issued a fatwa during an interview on 8 October with the al-Jazira TV, ruling that the boycott was a duty (*farida*) for Muslims. “Every dollar paid for these products is translated into a bullet fired at the heads and hearts of Palestinian children,” Qaradawi said.<sup>152</sup>

In Beirut, spiritual leader Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah also advocated a boycott of American and Israeli products. “This is the simplest expression of support for the Palestinians,” he stated. To continue to use American products while the US government was “helping the Zionists murder our brothers and sisters in Palestine” was morally unacceptable. The US, Fadlallah charged, was the “most sinister enemy of Islam and Muslims.” Boycotting American goods and products was not only an Islamic duty but “a form of self-defense.”<sup>153</sup>

These appeals, however, remained on the declarative level only, wrote journalist Fu’ad Matar. When Arab governments failed to take steps to support the intifada, he argued, it was natural for people to turn to religious figures for guidance as to how to channel that

anger into action. To what extent these clerical messages, issued in the form of statements or sermons, were made out of conviction, and to what extent they were merely designed to assuage public anger, was unclear. They might have been well-intentioned appeals, said Matar, but they were not binding fatwas. An effective fatwa would have to be issued by a conference of muftis from Arab and Islamic countries convened specifically to discuss the boycott issue and taking into account official dealings between the Arab countries and the US, he pointed out. "Such a flood of fatwas is liable to cause confusion."<sup>154</sup>

### **ATTACK ON THE USS COLE IN YEMEN**

Suicide bombers attacked the US destroyer Cole on 12 October during a refueling stop in the Yemeni port of Aden. Two men in a small boat edged up to the ship at a fueling dock in the harbor and detonated a package of explosives. The explosion killed seventeen crew members and injured thirty-nine, opening a hole at the midsection of the ship.<sup>155</sup> A day later, another explosion occurred at the British embassy in San'a, causing only minor damage.<sup>156</sup> A man thought to belong to the militant Yemen-based Islamic Jihad was arrested a week later on suspicion of carrying out the second attack.<sup>157</sup>

The perpetrators of the first attack, however, proved to be more elusive. The US deployed over one hundred investigators in the Middle East to track down those responsible for the bombing. Relations between the US and Yemen were strained when the Americans were excluded from the direct interrogation of detainees, and friction arose over a number of related issues. This culminated in the denial by Yemen of landing rights to several small American ships and a helicopter, all ferrying FBI agents. In early December, however, an agreement was reached allowing FBI agents to observe the interrogation of suspects and witnesses.<sup>158</sup>

The investigation revolved around two Yemen-based groups, the Islamic Jihad and the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army. Early in the investigation, the plot against the Cole was revealed as having involved a network of cells, each with one to three operatives. Some seventy persons were immediately detained and questioned in connection with the incident. They included police and government officials at a regional government office in Lahij, north of Aden, where Islamists returning from the Afghan war had settled in the early 1990s. A false driver's license and other documents had been issued at that office to a man named 'Abdallah Ahmad Khalid al-Musawa, identified as the operational leader of the bombing and as one of the two men aboard the explosive-laden boat that rammed the Cole. The two men were natives of Yemen, both veterans of the Afghan war.<sup>159</sup>

Six men believed to be key accomplices were also detained. Yemeni president 'Ali 'Aballah Salih confirmed their detention in an interview on 25 October, identifying the detainees as leaders of the Islamic Jihad organization in Yemen. They were, he said, of Yemeni, Egyptian, Algerian and other nationalities. He refrained from providing any details on their ties with Bin Ladin, emphatically refuting suggestions that high-ranking Yemeni officials with known links to Bin Ladin dating back to the mid-1980s may have played a role in the bombing. According to Yemeni prime minister 'Abd al-Karim al-'Iryani, non-Yemenis organized the attack, namely "international terrorist elements," whom he identified as "Arab Afghans." They view Islam solely as a source of jihad against non-Muslims, with the US as a primary target, 'Iryani said.

Salih sharply criticized the US for failing to take better security measures to protect the Cole, while refuting a State Department report describing Yemen as "a safe haven

for terrorists.” The main conspirator behind the attack, he disclosed, was Muhammad ‘Umar al-Harazi, born in Mecca of Saudi and Yemeni parentage, who had fought in Afghanistan. Harazi, who was still at large, had been sought by the FBI in connection with the 1998 American embassy bombings in East Africa. Allegedly operating from a base in the UAE, he had provided money, equipment and training for the Cole bombers. He was said to be the cousin of a man identified in a US federal indictment as the driver of the suicide truck bomb that had devastated the American embassy in Nairobi. At least two other individuals who allegedly played a major role in the planning and execution of the attack on the Cole were also still at large.<sup>160</sup>

The Cole attack had several parallels with the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, including the use of TNT, outside explosive specialists, sophisticated electrical detonation devices, and the activation of longstanding local terrorist cells. However, no explicit evidence tying Bin Ladin to the blast emerged. The strongest clue that Bin Ladin might have been the ultimate mastermind of the Cole attack was the relationship between Harazi and the suicide truck bomber in the Nairobi attack.<sup>161</sup>

By the end of November, the Yemeni investigators concluded the interrogation of the six Yemeni suspects and turned them over to the state prosecutor. The suspects, who were not publicly identified at that stage, were to be charged with carrying out the bombing, threatening state security, forming an armed band and possessing explosives.<sup>162</sup> Ignoring American appeals to delay the trial, since many investigation leads remained to be followed up, Yemen scheduled the trial of the six for January 2001. Included among the suspects were “Arab Afghans,” who were said to have provided false documents, the skiff used in the attack, equipment and several hundred pounds of explosive.<sup>163</sup>

Although there was no solid indication that Bin Ladin was involved with the Cole attack, he was considered a potential suspect, and several American investigation agents focused exclusively on him.

According to Omar Bakri Muhammad, a group calling itself Muhammad’s Army (Jaysh Muhammad, see above) claimed responsibility for the attacks on the American ship and on the explosion in the British embassy. Linking the two terrorist actions to the intifada, Bakri Muhammad vowed to continue the battle until Palestine was free of Jews and until US troops left the holy places in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>164</sup> Arab commentators generally tended to think that since the attack coincided with the intifada, it was carried out in retaliation for American support of Israel.<sup>165</sup>

In a statement published in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Rifa’i Ahmad Taha, leader of the Egyptian al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya, and Bin Ladin’s close associate, lauded the attack on the destroyer as adding a new dimension in the struggle against the West. Although he denied responsibility for the attack, he claimed that it could not be condemned because the target was military, “belonging to a hostile country that supports the Zionist entity.”<sup>166</sup>

As the investigation continued, US forces in Bahrain, Qatar and Turkey were placed on the highest state of alert because of specific and credible threats of terrorism.<sup>167</sup> Unsubstantiated reports of a planned American retaliatory military action against Bin Ladin circulated until the end of the year, but none materialized.<sup>168</sup> Reacting to these reports, Bin Ladin and the Taliban promptly denied any involvement in the Cole attack. The Taliban, fearing that the world might blame Afghanistan for the attack and impose additional sanctions on it, insisted that “nobody living in Afghanistan had anything to do with the attack on the US warship.” The Taliban information minister, Qudratullah

Jamal, insisted that Bin Ladin was under constant surveillance and could not have conducted such an operation from such a distance.<sup>169</sup> Several Pakistani newspapers published a brief statement by Bin Ladin on 17 October denying his involvement and warning the US against making any attempt on his life. Taliban officials, in simultaneous denials from Kabul, Islamabad and the office of their representative in New York, claimed that Bin Ladin's statement was fabricated by those who "want to malign Afghanistan and Bin Ladin and drag them into crimes they had not committed."<sup>170</sup>

In November, the Kuwaiti daily *al-Ra'y al-'Am* published a telephone conversation with Bin Ladin from his base in Afghanistan in which he denied any links with the perpetrators of the attack or with the suspects apprehended in Kuwait for planning suicide attacks on US military convoys (see above). The paper also quoted Bin Ladin as saying that neither he nor his followers had any intention of attacking US civil or military installations in any Arab country. A few days later, however, an Afghan, identified only as Muhammad, told a newspaper in Pakistan that he was instructed by Bin Ladin to deny these remarks and to reiterate Bin Ladin's adherence to his fatwa issued in 1998, declaring jihad against the US and Israel.<sup>171</sup> A similar denial was published a month later in a Saudi paper.<sup>172</sup> Other newspapers quoted Bin Ladin as expressing satisfaction with the attack.<sup>173</sup>

Former deputy director of the FBI Buck Revell explained in an interview that Bin Ladin was not involved in the specific day-to-day operations of his network, but that he was both the spiritual and the de facto leader of an international organization with infrastructures in many countries, including the US. Although the evidence did not lead to him conclusively, the modus operandi and the motive for the Cole incident fell within the confines of his agenda.<sup>174</sup> Another expert on terrorism, Harvey Kushner, stated that there was reason to believe that Bin Ladin had been investigating methods of launching attacks by sea, as he had tried to acquire small, personal submarines. The Cole attack was seen by American experts on terrorism as a significant technical advance over earlier terrorist attacks, such as the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>175</sup>

By the end of the year, it became evident from the investigations in Yemen, as well as the investigations of the millennial conspiracy cases, that the bombing of the Cole had originally been part of Bin Ladin's broad plan to hit American targets worldwide during the first days of the millennium. An earlier plot to attack another American destroyer, USS *The Sullivans*, also during a refueling stop in Aden on 3 January, had gone awry when the attack boat with the explosives sank on its way to carry out its mission.<sup>176</sup>

The Cole incident spotlighted Yemen as a crossroads of international terrorism, its hinterland serving as a stronghold for Islamic terrorist groups with links to Bin Ladin. Yemen had been in the limelight in this context since the kidnapping of sixteen Westerners in December 1998, resulting in the killing of tourists, and the trial of leaders of the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army in 1999 (see *MECS* 1999, pp 124–26). The timing of the Cole attack two weeks after the outbreak of the intifada, and amidst strong anti-American manifestations in Arab countries, magnified its significance along with confusion and fear regarding the prospect of additional terrorist attacks.

## **CHANGING OF THE GUARD IN THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION**

Iran concluded its three-year presidential term of the ICO in 2000. The presidency won by Iran in 1997 (see *MECS* 1997, pp. 161–63) held significance for it as it symbolized the end of Iran's isolation in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Iran pinned many hopes in the ICO, aiming to turn it into a more vigorous and influential international organization and thereby enhance her own standing. As the end of the term approached, Iranian officials attempted to highlight the organization's achievements. Shortly before the ICO foreign ministers meeting in June (see below), the Iranian deputy foreign minister for international affairs, Mohammad Javad Zarif, cited the accomplishments of the organization with international crises, especially issues concerning Muslims since 1998. The ICO, he said, was active in Chechnya as an international intermediary organization; had put forward a peace initiative for Afghanistan, welcomed by all the belligerent parties; had held two meetings, in Jidda and Tehran, to review plans for implementing the Dialogue of Civilizations, the brainchild of President Khatami; expanded international cooperation with the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Organization of African Unity, and had gained recognition as an active international organization.<sup>177</sup> Qatar took over the presidency of the ICO from Iran.

### **FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING IN JUNE**

The twenty-seventh annual meeting of ICO foreign ministers, held in Kuala Lumpur on 26–29 June, was attended by one thousand delegates from fifty-six member states. Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Muhammad, who delivered the keynote address on the conference theme, "Islam and Globalization," warned that the Muslim world was unprepared to face globalization and the information age because it was technologically "backward and poor." The Muslim world, he said, faced a series of threats: "petty rivalries"; information technology, which threatened Islamic values; e-commerce, which threatened to wipe out importers, distributors, retailers and government revenues, reducing Muslim states to the level of "banana republics"; the liberalization of trade by the Western world's banks, industries and services, which threatened to control the Muslim world economically and politically; and "punishment" for acts of frustration which the Western nations judged as "terrorism."

In a joint communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, the ministers pledged to enhance solidarity and economic ties, and to defend the rights of Muslims worldwide. The ministers condemned "international terrorism," such as air hijackings; expressed "deep concern" over the linkage of Islam and human rights violations in the international media; and reiterated support of the Islamic world for an independent Palestinian homeland with Jerusalem as its capital. They affirmed support for the Middle East peace process and called on the international community to exert pressure on Israel to halt its settlements in the occupied Arab territories. They also called on Muslim states that had taken steps toward establishing relations with Israel within the framework of the peace process to reconsider such moves and close offices until Israel complied with UN resolutions.

Regarding Chechnya, the ICO offered to play a role in facilitating contacts with Russia to bring about a peaceful settlement of the conflict. It also decided to send a fact-finding mission to investigate the plight of Filipino Muslims in the southern Philippines, and

agreed to a proposal to include Malaysia and Brunei in its six-member committee monitoring the situation in the southern Philippines.

On economic issues, which were given prominence at the meeting for the first time, the ICO agreed to take prompt steps to upgrade economic cooperation between Muslim nations with the ultimate aim of creating a common Islamic market.

Some one hundred resolutions and documents on various political, economic, social and cultural issues were ratified by the foreign ministers. Turkey was unusually active in the meeting. It proposed the candidacy of one of its veteran diplomats and an adviser at the foreign ministry, Yasar Yakis, for the position of ICO secretary-general. But Moroccan statesman 'Abd al-Wahid Belqaziz was selected as the new secretary-general, replacing 'Izz al-Din Laraki, whose term was due to end in 2000.<sup>178</sup>

### **THE NOVEMBER ICO SUMMIT IN DOHA: FOCUS ON THE INTIFADA**

Three issues of contention nearly caused the Iranian, Saudi and Bahraini leaders to stay away from the summit: Qatar's retention of its low-level ties with Israel; Bahrain's longstanding maritime border dispute with Qatar; and Egypt's anger over the critical reportage of the Qatar-based al-Jazira TV satellite channel. Ultimately, however, the summit was held as scheduled on 12-14 November in Doha, after Qatar submitted to pressure to sever its relations with Israel (see chapter on inter-Arab relations).

The continuing Palestinian intifada gave rise to expectations among Arabs and Muslims alike that the summit would constitute an important milestone in the history of the organization and the Muslim world. "With no public forums through which to make their voices heard, Muslims have nowhere else to pin their hopes other than on their leaders," wrote *al-Quds al-'Arabi* on the eve of the summit.<sup>179</sup> As expected, the Palestinian issue headed the conference agenda. Although only six of a total of eighty-seven items on the agenda related to the conflict — namely, Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, Lebanese territory still under Israeli occupation, Lebanese citizens held in Israeli jails, the ICO Jerusalem Fund, and the Middle East peace process — they dominated the summit.

Along with the expectations, however, was the sober realization that the three-day summit was unlikely to produce any practical resolutions on Palestine.<sup>180</sup> Talal Salman, publisher of the Beirut-based *al-Safir*, attributed the weakness of the Muslim states to the fact that Islam, as Arabism before it, had weakened as an ideological force for unity. "In many cases, it, too, has turned into a burden — especially since political Islam has been abused to...a degree that repelled most Muslims, and turned into a weapon in the hands of the enemies of Islam." However, Egyptian Islamist columnist Fahmi Huwaydi asserted in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* that even if the summit achieved nothing more than forcing Qatar to close down the Israeli mission, it was worth convening. In his view, summits — whether Arab or Islamic — were never devoid of value, even if their achievements were modest and fell far short of the nation's aspirations. Assuming that the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation was a goal on which the Muslim nation was agreed, he argued, any measure to support Palestinian rights and condemn Israeli aggression was a step in the right direction. Any form of resistance became a jihad serving the ultimate goal. Stone-throwing, political and diplomatic condemnation, cutting off all relations with Israel — all were legitimate steps, Huwaydi concluded.<sup>181</sup>

Appeals to the conference included one by the secretary-general of the Jordanian-based al-Quds Committee, who called on participants to take practical steps toward the

liberation of Jerusalem and Palestine, such as severing political and economic ties with Israel and contributing financial aid to the al-Quds Fund.<sup>182</sup> Another appeal came from Hamas spiritual leader Shaykh Yasin, who urged Muslim states to “wake up from their long dormancy” and demanded action rather than the verbage of denunciation and condemnation; financial support; and Muslim volunteers to carry out jihad in Palestine.<sup>183</sup> Palestinian civic leaders and political activists also sent an appeal in the same vein.<sup>184</sup>

In his address to the summit, Iranian President Khatami, defined Israel as a “terrorist, racist Zionist regime” and proposed deciding upon the following measures:

- (1) Unequivocal condemnation of the systematic crimes of the Zionist regime against Palestinians;
- (2) Comprehensive sanctions on Israel by Islamic countries;
- (3) Creation of a comprehensive mechanism to support the intifada;
- (4) Attempt at formation of an international war crimes tribunal for occupied Palestine under the auspices of the UN;
- (5) Diplomatic coordination for the establishment of an impartial fact-finding mission for the tragic events in occupied Palestine;
- (6) Prevention of the economic blockade against the Palestinian people;
- (7) Support for the establishment of the state of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital.<sup>185</sup>

Crown Prince ‘Abdallah of Saudi Arabia urged Muslim countries to freeze or drastically curtail their relations with Israel. In a warning to the US, he also called on Muslim leaders to break off relations with any country that opens an embassy in Jerusalem. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan counseled restraint, urging participants not to promote violence and hatred.

Despite the show of support for the Palestinian cause, the delegates were split on how to show their displeasure with Israel. Some of the more traditionally hostile states, such as Iran, Syria and Sudan, called for a full boycott of Israel. However, twenty of the ICO members — most of them African and Central Asian nations, and led by Egypt, Turkey and Jordan — openly rejected the more radical calls for a complete severing of relations with Israel.

The final communiqué “invited” the member states to reduce their contacts with Israel and stop all forms of normalization, and urged the US administration to “revise its biased stance” toward Israel. The statement also supported Palestinian and Arab appeals for the formation of a UN peacekeeping force to protect Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>186</sup>

While the Palestine question may have dominated the public declarations, it was in its approach to Iraq that the ICO made a qualitative breakthrough. The Iraqi issue, namely, relations with Kuwait and the need to implement relevant UN resolutions, was among the vast array of items on the original conference agenda.<sup>187</sup> The summit called on Iraq to implement the commitments contained in the resolutions and to enter into a comprehensive dialogue with the Security Council in order to bring about the lifting of the sanctions. It also mandated the emir of Qatar, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, in his capacity as the newly elected chair of the ICO, to establish the appropriate groundwork for resolving the existing disputes between Iraq and Kuwait.

An appeal sent to the conference by the Taliban demanding once again the Afghanistan seat in the ICO — another bid to expand international recognition — was apparently not discussed.<sup>188</sup>

Meeting on the sidelines of the conference, Arab foreign ministers held their first

follow-up meeting since the Arab summit of 21–22 October (see chapter on inter-Arab relations). A committee comprising Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Palestine discussed methods of collecting and distributing the \$1bn. al-Aqsa Fund and the Jerusalem Intifada Fund approved by the summit.<sup>189</sup>

Summing up, the pan-Arab *al-Quds al-'Arabi* saw little cause for satisfaction over the contribution made by the Islamic summit, claiming that the “poetic” statements it issued in support of the intifada were never intended to be put into practice. However, the paper said, the softened attitude toward Iraq, and the decision to establish an Islamic Court of Justice to settle disputes among member states, were two aspects that differentiated it from previous summits.<sup>190</sup>

According to the UAE daily *al-Khalij*, the Islamic summit emulated the earlier Arab summit in Cairo in failing to take serious steps to counter Israeli aggression and American support for it. The Arab summit, it claimed gave priority to narrow interests over collective Arab interests, thereby squandering an opportunity to take effective action, which it concealed by a carefully worded communiqué. “The Islamic summit followed suit, labeling itself ‘the al-Aqsa summit,’ upping the rhetoric a little, but committing the member states to nothing.”<sup>191</sup>

Palestinian journalist Khalid Amayreh defined the outcome of the two summits as “virtually a big, fat zero,” writing that “in both cases, the member states, whether individually or collectively, demonstrated a startling degree of impotence, incompetence and powerlessness.”<sup>192</sup> The Palestinian Islamist weekly *al-Manar* reproached Arab leaders for delays in turning over funding. All the declarations about donations to the Palestinians, it contended, were aimed at assuaging the rage of the Arab public. The paper accused Arab leaders of weakening the PA, suffocating the intifada and increasing the pressure on the Palestinian people by withholding the donations.<sup>193</sup>

Complying with the summit decision to demand the creation of a war crimes tribunal to probe “Israeli crimes,” an ICO delegation led by Qatari foreign minister, Shaykh Hamad bin Jasim bin Jabir Al Thani, arrived in New York on 27 November to discuss the issue with Kofi Annan and member states of the Security Council.<sup>194</sup>

### **RALLYING AROUND JERUSALEM**

Prior to the outbreak of the intifada, opposition to the Camp David negotiations and to the proposal reiterated by the US to transfer its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem evoked angry reactions from most Islamist movements in 2000. The national popular assembly for the support of Jerusalem and Palestine in Jordan, composed of various political groups, declared its a priori rejection of any concessions that the Palestinian delegation might make during the negotiations. Supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in Zarqa staged a rally on 12 August to protest the American intention to transfer its embassy to Jerusalem. Following Friday prayers that day, hundreds of protesters shouted anti-Israeli and anti-US slogans calling for jihad to liberate Jerusalem from Israeli occupation. Hamas leader Isma‘il Abu Shanab called the American decision a declaration of war against the Palestinians and their “most cherished holy place,” in that the Americans would be seizing Palestinian land to build their embassy. ‘Abdallah Shallah, secretary-general of Islamic Jihad, also announced that the relocation of the embassy would amount to a declaration of war on the Palestinian people, and, in line with Hizballah’s stance, threatened to retaliate.<sup>195</sup>

Iran launched a diplomatic campaign within the Muslim world on the Jerusalem issue

immediately after the failure of the Camp David-2 negotiations. Khatami, in his capacity as ICO president, sent several envoys to member states in early August, urging them to adopt a firm stance on the issue.<sup>196</sup> The eighteenth meeting of the ICO Jerusalem Committee, held in Agadir, Morocco on 28 August, confirmed its support for a Palestinian state with sovereignty over Arab Jerusalem and all the holy Islamic and Christian shrines.<sup>197</sup>

Jerusalem Day, observed in the Muslim world since 1979 on the last Friday of the month of Ramadan to express support for the Palestinian cause, was marked on 22 December by demonstrations in Iran, Syria and Lebanon denouncing Israel and the US and encouraging the continuation of the intifada.<sup>198</sup> The Iranian embassy in Damascus organized a two-day meeting named “Resistance, a symbol of freedom.” It was attended by a delegation from the Iranian Islamic Consultative Assembly, leaders of Palestinian rejectionist organizations, ambassadors from the Muslim countries, and Palestinians living in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>199</sup>

Islam remained “a powerful political symbol and ideology throughout much of the Muslim world,” argued Middle East researcher John Esposito.<sup>200</sup> The reaction of the Muslim world to the intifada validated this assertion to a great extent. However, it also showed its limitations. While Islamism as an ideology and Islamist movements generally had lost much of their momentum, they remained forces to be reckoned with. This dichotomy was perhaps best reflected by the experience of Hizballah and the Islamic regime in Iran. The vibrant internal contest within Iran between conservatives and reformers, which culminated in the reformers’ victory in the February parliamentary elections led pro-Islamist writer Fahmi Huwaydi to write: “The issue of Islam and democracy started to be seen in a new light.... The old hostility was gone, and the issue was being looked at more neutrally, with some observers genuinely asking whether the two can actually coexist.”<sup>201</sup>

Even *al-Hayat*’s liberal editor, Hazim Saghia, hoped that Khatami would show the boldness needed to establish an “Islamic democracy” along the lines of Europe’s “Christian democracy” and possibly chart a “third Shi’ite way” that was neither subservient to the US nor blindly hostile to it.<sup>202</sup>

As much as Huwaydi’s assertions and Saghia’s hope might be viable over the longer term, their immediate relevance paled in view of the impending threat of radical Islamic forces.

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