

9/11: Provoked by the United States

Humanities 11
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Radical Islamists have held a grudge against anyone who does not practice their interpretation of Islam. Muslim knowledge of the Crusades caused this hostility to continue well into the 20th century. When the United States got involved in the first Persian Gulf War, an agreement was made that they would leave from the Middle East as soon as Kuwait was liberated, but as Iraqi troops withdrew from Kuwait, there was fear that Saudi Arabia would later be invaded. Osama bin Laden volunteered to protect his country with his army, but his help was rejected and the United States was invited to stay and protect Saudi Arabia instead. The United States then decided to break their previous agreement and chose to stay in the Middle East, which triggered additional resentment towards Americans from radical Islamists, because of what they believed true Islamic faith was. Ultimately, American involvement and presence in the Middle East aggravated existing hatred and jealousy amongst certain radical Muslim groups, which resulted in the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

Different beliefs within distinct religions made certain religious groups look at each other like enemies throughout the early years. In about 550 CE, Christian and Jewish settlements “engaged in attempting to convert the Arabian population to their religious and political views, often with some success” (Newby). Years later, the Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam, spread Islamic faith throughout Saudi Arabia. After Muhammad’s death, his successors helped spread Islamic faith into new lands, where the current religion was Christianity. Islam continued to grow and spread into Europe, which caused religious figures—like the Pope—to see the Islamic faith as their competition. Muslim and Christian clashes then turned into violent wars known as the Crusades, which were a “series of religious and political wars fought between 1096 and 1291 for control of the Holy Land”, Jerusalem (Rooney and Miller). This city was caught

in-between the hate of different religions because of their own distinct connections to the “holy land” (Nemeroff). Religious groups fought in order to thrive in the holy land Jerusalem, given that it had become “a symbol of power amidst a faith-based struggle that has raged from biblical times through today” (Nemeroff). During the Crusades, Muslims and Christians fought in order to determine which religion is superior which essentially “left an imprint on the world as a whole” as its effects “seem to be still unfolding” (Throop). The Crusades initiated the violence between different religions, which has ultimately continued throughout the centuries to modern times but are now considered acts of terrorism.

Religious struggles between the Muslims and Christians continued over the years given that their different beliefs cause conflicts between other new religions. In the nineteenth century, Palestinian land was mainly occupied by Muslims while a finite amount of the population was either Christian or Jewish. However, in the late 1800s, European Jews decided to turn Palestine into a home for the Jewish population (“A Synopsis of the Israel/Palestine Conflict”). Years later, “European Jewish immigration to Palestine increased dramatically after Hitler’s rise to power in Germany in 1933, leading to new land purchases and Jewish settlements” which initiated a new conflict within the two distinct religious groups (“Primer on Palestine”). In the mid-twentieth century, the United Nations decided to get involved in this clash between the two societies as they “chose to revert to the medieval strategy whereby an outside power divides up other people’s land” and essentially gave away more than half of the Palestinian land for Jewish occupation (“A Synopsis of the Israel/Palestine Conflict”). Palestinians and Israelis went to war against each other, and in the end, Israel took over more than half of the land that once belonged to the Palestinians. Given that the United States helped Israel take over Palestinian-Arab land,

“Jews were seen as both foreign and instruments of Western colonial designs” (Newby). Given that the United States helped the Israelis take over Palestine, Arab countries began to see the United States as less of an ally and held them partly responsible for the loss of their holy land. During these times, many religious figures argued over which religion was supreme and the question carried over the centuries to modern times with radical Islamists claiming that the modern terrorist action is nothing more than a continuation of the on-going struggle between the two faiths.

Osama bin Laden, who was strongly opposed to U.S. presence in Arab countries, spread his ideologies of Muslim rule, which resulted in the making of the radical Islamist group Al-Qaeda. Around 1988, Bin Laden formed, financed, and recruited the group al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to fight, defeat, and drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan (“Al-Qaida”). With this success, Bin Laden was able to “attract, train, and use recruits for ever more ambitious attacks” (Kean and Hamilton 55) given that he had the ability to “use Afghanistan as a base from which to revive his ambitious enterprise for war against the United States” (Kean and Hamilton 63). Bin Laden was able to recruit many willing young Muslim men to become mujahideen (Islamist warriors) “to continue the ‘holy war’ beyond Afghanistan” (Bajoria and Bruno). Bin Laden and al-Qaeda opposed the United States as they “regarded [the U.S.] as an ‘infidel’ because it was not governed in a manner consistent with the group's extremist interpretation of Islam... [and] was viewed as providing essential support for other ‘infidel’ governments and institutions” (“background: al qaeda”). American involvement in Middle Eastern affairs, beginning with the first Persian Gulf War, further aggravated an already tense situation between the United States and segments of the Muslim population.

As the United States got involved in the Persian Gulf War, they hoped to somehow gain control over Arab segments in the Middle East. On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded its southern neighbor Kuwait, a small oil-flushed country. Saddam Hussein, Iraq's leader, hoped to seize control over Kuwait's oil industry. In the United States, "despite being somewhat caught off guard, the Bush administration went to work immediately trying to assemble a coalition to oppose Iraq" ("George H. W. Bush: Foreign Affairs"). President Bush, who during his long and steady career had been a director of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and an ambassador to the United Nations, used his many contacts that he had acquired over the years. He called many foreign leaders and assembled an international coalition through the United Nations as he "convinced Turkey and Syria to close Iraqi oil pipelines, won Soviet support for an arms embargo, and established a multi-national army to protect Saudi Arabia" ("The Persian Gulf War"). Given that the United States got involved quickly, they also managed to "freeze Kuwaiti and Iraqi assets" and "imposed economic sanctions on Iraq designed to try to convince Iraq to withdraw" ("George H. W. Bush: Foreign Affairs"). Bush, as his previous foreign policies show, was a man who wanted to maintain world order now that the Soviet Union was disintegrating and so his administration "succeeded in persuading the Security Council to adopt a series of resolutions condemning the Iraqi invasion, demanding restoration of the Kuwaiti government, and imposing an economic blockade" ("The Persian Gulf War"). The Gulf War lasted approximately a year, and after severe bombardments by the United States and its international coalition of Iraqi forces, Iraq withdrew from Kuwait. However, their leader Saddam Hussein still remained in power, which was still a threat to the surrounding Arab countries. As Iraq was still under the same leadership, surrounding countries became susceptible to being invaded.

When the United States got involved in the Persian Gulf War, they did not leave the Middle East, which provoked anger amongst certain Arab communities that were against American presence in their land. The Persian Gulf War essentially “restored American confidence in its position as the world's sole superpower”, which caused envy amongst radical Islamic groups that were against U.S. involvement in Muslim countries (“The Persian Gulf War”). Osama bin Laden, a religious, intelligent, and wealthy man, was the main leader of al-Qaeda—a powerful radical Islamist group that was against U.S. presence in Arab countries, especially in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was the country in which Islam was founded, which was an important factor in the protection of their holy land and religion. Bin Laden, as the powerful and outspoken man that he was, declared war on the United States in August 1996 as the “stated cause was the continued presence of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia five years after the first Gulf War” (Wright 4). Given that Bin Laden was against anything that had to do with Western countries, mainly the United States, he “wanted to create a new world order, one that was ruled by Muslims, not dictated by America and enforced by the [United Nations]” (Wright 183). Radical Islamist groups believed that America's involvement in the Persian Gulf was “part of a larger Western design to dominate the whole Arab and Muslim world,” which is why the United States was seen as the enemy (Bergen 78). Given that the United States restored their power by having some control over Middle Eastern countries, Islamic extremists held anger and jealousy against their success as a nation. As the United States continued to settle in Arab countries, more anger rose from radical Islamist groups, specifically al-Qaeda.

American settlements in Saudi Arabia made powerful radical Islamist groups, like al-Qaeda, revolt against America because of their different religious and ideological beliefs. Bin

Laden had previously offered his army al-Qaeda to defend their holy country of Saudi Arabia because he did not want Americans, who had different religious beliefs and customs, to protect the country of Islam given that it went against their teachings left by their Prophet Muhammad. Bin Laden believed in the power of his creation of al-Qaeda as he told Prince Sultan, the minister of defense, “You don’t need Americans. You don’t need any other non-Muslim troops. We will be enough” but “the prince laughed in disbelief” (Wright 179). Prince Sultan did not believe that Bin Laden and his army would be able to protect Saudi Arabia as much as the United States because of their advanced resources. Bin Laden was fraught with embarrassment as the minister of defense of Saudi Arabia did not believe in the capabilities of al-Qaeda to successfully protect their country. As Osama bin Laden was rejected from his own country, he became even more “violently opposed to the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia,’ troops who had arrived there in response to Saddam Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait” (Bergen 3). After the United States got involved in the Persian Gulf War and started to settle into Saudi Arabia, many “Saudis feared [what] would be a permanent occupation” (Wright 180). Many Saudis were “mortified by the need to turn to Christians and Jews to defend the holy land of Islam” because they were such “private and intensely religious people” (Wright 180, 181). Given that Muslims had to accept support from whom they considered an enemy, many radical Islamists decided to form groups and revolt against American support in their country. Many Saudis felt anger and jealousy towards the United States given that Americans had to settle in their land and essentially protect their holy land from a possible Iraqi invasion.

Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda’s anger towards the United States got stronger as years passed. Bin Laden viewed the United States as the enemy given that “after all the plans al-Qaeda

had nurtured to spread an Islamist revolution, it was America that appeared to be developing in influence across the region, seizing control of the pressure points of the Arab world and pushing into al-Qaeda's arena" (Wright 193). Bin Laden was against American presence in Arab countries because as America got more involved in Middle Eastern affairs, the harder it was for him to promote his ideology of Muslim rule. The United States sought power over Arab territories, just like radical Islamist groups, which set up another conflict between the two nations. Bin Laden believed that the "main problem is the U.S. government... By being loyal to the U.S. regime, the Saudi regime has committed an act against Islam" (Bergen 19). The extreme Islamic religion that Bin Laden and his supporters followed went against their beliefs given that "infidels' of both sexes were trespassing on the holy land of the Arabian Peninsula" (Bergen 77). Not only were radical Islamists against American presence in Saudi Arabia because of their power but also because of their differences in religious beliefs. Bin Laden believed that "the greatest insult to Muslims remains the continued presence of Americans in the holy land of Arabia" (Bergen 26). As the United States settled in Saudi Arabia to protect their land from Iraqi troops, the United States also broke their Islamic custom—that two religions should not be in the holy land of Saudi Arabia. Given that Saudi Arabia was the country in which Islam was born, American presence and occupation in their holy land insulted their Islamic religion and power over their country..

As American presence aggravated existing anger within radical Islamist groups, their ideologies on the Crusades and the teachings left behind from their Prophet Muhammad also took a major part in their views towards western nations. The Prophet Muhammad "had banned the permanent presence of infidels in Arabia; hence bin Laden's opposition to the thousands of

American troops based there” (Bergen 3). Muhammad left his beliefs and creation of Islam for the Muslims to follow, which lead radical Islamists to strongly defend and follow the customs that Muhammad left behind. Bin Laden looked up to Muhammad and essentially “saw himself as called ‘to follow in the footsteps of the Messenger and to communicate his message to all nations,’ and to serve as the rallying point and organizer of a new kind of war to destroy America and bring the world to Islam” (Kean and Hamilton 48). Given that Bin Laden believed that he should continue spreading Islam, under Muhammad’s footsteps, he did not see the world around him change from the seventh century to the modernized times. Bin Laden was still stuck in the mentality of the past, which lead him to identify “the U.S.-led West as ‘the Crusaders,’ and as the primary and most vicious, aggressive, and rapacious enemy of the Islamic world” and as “an inhuman and evil entity with a half-century record of humiliating Islam and devastating Muslims” (Scheuer 46). Some segments of the Arab society wished to live as the Prophet Muhammad had, in the early centuries, and were afraid that American presence would make the western advancements and lifestyle take over their traditional values. Given that Osama bin Laden’s mentality and ideologies were stuck in past centuries, his views on American presence in Arab territories essentially insulted their religious beliefs, which kept his anger towards the United States alive.

Osama bin Laden hated America, and the West as a whole, because of their ignorance to respect Islamic customs and beliefs. Ever since the United States got involved in Middle Eastern affairs, “Bin Laden had given priority to attacks on the United States and argues that ‘there must be concentration on hitting the main enemy who has thrust the [Islamic] nation into whirlpools and labyrinths for decades since dividing it into states and statelets’” (Scheuer 49). Given that the

western countries had previously created the borders within Arab territories, Bin Laden viewed the United States as a country that saw themselves as being superior to other nations. Bin Laden had many violent thoughts towards the United States, which meant that he was already planning to hurt the United States in order to make them realize that Islam could not be manipulated by others. Bin Laden was completely focused on getting revenge on the United States for interfering with Middle Eastern countries that “it was as if the Crusades were still going on in bin Laden’s universe” (Wright 5). Bin Laden was so fixated on the hate that was born from the Crusades that he never got out of those religious, violent times. Bin Laden describes the mentality behind his ideas and the capabilities of his religion:

Bin Ladin’s grievance with the United States may have started a reaction to specific U.S. policies but it quickly became far deeper. To the second question, what America could do, al Qaeda’s answer was that America should abandon the Middle East, convert to Islam, and end the immorality and godlessness of its society and culture: “it is saddening to tell you that you are the worst civilization witnessed by the history of mankind.” If the United States did not comply, it would be at war with the Islamic nation, a nation that al Qaeda’s leaders said “desires death more than you desire life.” (Kean and Hamilton 51-52)

Osama bin Laden essentially wanted to force America to change given that he “portrays Americans as their allies as inhuman creatures that thirst for Muslim blood, delight in gore, and aim to annihilate the Islamic world” (Scheuer 47). Bin Laden attacked America in order to somehow “win” the battle of the Crusades, which ended centuries ago.

As anger from al-Qaeda grew, they decided to actually attack an area in the United States in hopes of making America experience what Islamic extremists felt. Ramzi Yousef, the operational leader of the World Trade Center attack in New York City on February 26, 1993 “intended to topple one tower onto the other, bringing the entire complex down and killing what he hoped would be 250,000 people—a toll he thought equaled the pain the Palestinians had experienced because of America’s support of Israel” (Wright 202). The bomb used in the attack was placed in the basement parking lots of the World Trade Center. The explosion left a crater, which destroyed many parking levels and was so powerful that people claimed to have felt the shockwave of the explosion in other boroughs. While Yousef’s bomb killed only six people, “1,042 were injured, generating the greatest number of hospital casualties of any event in American history since the Civil War” (Wright 202, 203). Yousef “was motivated mainly by his devotion to the Palestinian cause and his hatred of Jews” (Wright 202). Apart from Yousef’s responsibility in the first trade center bombing, familial ties bound his connection to al-Qaeda as he was the nephew of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, one of the top three members of the al-Qaeda network, with Bin Laden above him (Kean and Hamilton 73). Bin Laden believed in al-Qaeda and their motives against the United States as he said that “Yousef was ‘a Muslim who defended Islam from American aggression’” (Scheuer 139). Islamic extremists wanted to somehow get revenge on the United States ever since the West had first invaded Arab territories. This attack, on one of America’s most populated cities, brought attention that terrorism was an actual possibility, coming from Middle Eastern radical Islamist groups.

After the 1993 World Trade Center bombings in New York City, Bin Laden and his cohort, al-Qaeda, began to expand in areas of the world that were more susceptible to attack. In

1992, Bin Laden moved to the country of Sudan, which was ruled by the National Islamic Front whose members had ties to Bin Laden from the Afghan campaign against the Soviet Union (Scheuer 119). Since the mid-1990s, East Africa—mainly Kenya—had “been a central theatre of al-Qaeda operations” given that third world countries lacked the resources to monitor and fight terrorist activities (Rabasa). Many terrorist groups settled in third world countries because it was easier for groups to move around without being discovered with fatal weapons. As Bin Laden “bolstered his links to extremists” and “maintained... many of his links with terrorists everywhere in the world,” he strengthened the power of al-Qaeda’s capabilities (Kean and Hamilton 67). Bin Laden planned out the bombings of American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, which were eventually carried out in August 1998 “because of the American military presence in Arabia” as “he was calling for the deaths of all Americans” (Bergen 105).

Throughout his years of leading al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and other radical Islamists planned several attacks to hurt the United States. Making the United States feel and experience the same emotions that they did in the past was one of their ultimate goals when planning fatal terrorist attacks.

Apart from the bombings on American buildings, Bin Laden sought to further humiliate the United States as he continuously attacked symbols of American power and prestige. On October 13, 2000, a terrorist cell located in the country of Yemen attacked and blew a hole in the battleship USS Cole. The Cole bombing “ripped a 40-foot-wide hole near the waterline of the Cole, killing 17 American sailors and injuring many more” (“USS Cole Bombing”). The bombing of the USS Cole made the United States realize “the reality of terrorism, though, even when the connection to al-Qaeda was established, the threat represented by the al-Qaeda network

remained generally underestimated” (“USS Cole Bombing”). Even though al-Qaeda had previously attacked the United States, America did not take in the messages that al-Qaeda had in mind. The United States was still occupying Middle Eastern lands, which made them more susceptible to terrorist attacks. Al-Qaeda wanted to hurt the United States in order to make themselves feel like they were defending Islam and forcing American troops to withdraw from their territories. These attacks carried out by al-Qaeda “sought the capability to kill on a mass scale” and showed their willingness to attack any target of American power no matter how significant or well defended the target was (Kean and Hamilton 60). As the USS Cole bombing showed, Bin Laden and his operatives didn’t need billions of dollars to inflict damage on America. “The bravery of the Arabs who had fought under bin Laden’s command was lunatic, but impressive” given that the cost of a few thousand dollars, they inflicted heavy damage and killed people to impose their worldview (Bergen 12). Previous al-Qaeda terrorist attacks paved the way for recent attacks to be on a much larger scale, which Bin Laden hoped would bring about larger numbers of casualties.

America’s continuous involvement in the Middle East made powerful radical Islamist groups resent their power, which ultimately resulted in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. As the United States got involved Middle Eastern affairs, Islamic extremists held a grudge against Americans for centuries. Given that the West had advanced over the past centuries, American presence in Arab territories risked unwanted Western influences. The United States supported many ideas that Islam did not, which raised a clash between their religions and resulted in the Crusades. As America settled into Saudi Arabia, after their involvement the Persian Gulf War, they were viewed as being superior to Islam, which made Osama bin Laden and his army al-Qaeda revolt

against American support. Al-Qaeda ultimately attacked the United States to make them go through similar experiences, that America made them go through, in order to strictly follow their interpretation of Islamic beliefs.

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