

## Letter to the Islamic Terrorists

[The following letter is a copy of an email I received from an anonymous source in the fall of 2002. It is offered here as a contribution to the ongoing dialogue concerning the problem of Islamic terrorism.]

## **To the Islamic Terrorists:**

### **My Purpose in Writing This Letter**

Your destruction of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, and subsequent news reports, magazine articles, and television programs about your organizations and your planned continued terrorism against the West, compel me to write this letter. Please be assured that I have no interest in trying to get you not to hate Americans or to give up Islam. My only purpose is to try to get you to realize there are other means by which you can achieve at least some of your goals.

### **Difficulties I Face in Writing This Letter**

At the outset, I must tell you that one of the major difficulties I face is that of writing to a group of men who, according to all reports, have little or no knowledge of history. I mean history as written by scholars who attempt to describe the past as honestly and objectively as they can, not history as written by people who believe that their primary purpose is to make history conform to the doctrines of a particular religion or political movement.

Another difficulty I face — or I should say, originally faced — was that I couldn't conceive what possible arguments I could present to a group of fanatics for whom what we in the West call rational discussion, rational argument, means nothing. But then, on further thought, I realized that I didn't really need to argue with you because virtually everything you do contradicts what you say!

Let me give you some examples.

## **Ways In Which Your Actions Contradict Your Words**

### **You Say You Hate the West, Yet You Want At Least Some of the Material Advantages the West Enjoys**

You say you hate the West, and yet one of the reasons you give for that hatred is that we support corrupt regimes that fail to provide their people with jobs and other benefits that we in the West enjoy. Time and again we hear about poverty driving the young in Islamic countries into becoming terrorists. At least one of the hijackers who destroyed the World Trade Center was driven into joining your cause because he had such poor job prospects in his native country. So, you want to destroy us despite the fact that we have proved to be far more capable at providing most of our people with a decent standard of living than Islam has.

You say that you hate the West because the West is destroying your ancient culture of Islam. And yet, the tiny minority surrounding the ruling elite in Arab countries — a ruling elite that has become rich beyond imagining by selling fuel to power Western technology — this tiny minority seems to have no trouble enjoying the latest in Western technology, not to mention the luxuries, e.g., the best hotels in Europe, that the West has in such abundance. Any tourist can observe, in those hotels, the Middle Eastern men dressed in shorts and T-shirts and running shoes, just like us

in the West (the women, of course, must wear traditional dress — scarves and long dresses if not burkhas. You hate us, but you don't hate our money, or our cities, or our luxuries, or even our style of clothes!

Nowadays, jobs mean, sooner or later, adopting at least some of Western culture. So which shall it be? (As I said, I don't need to argue against your beliefs. Your actions do that far better than I could.)

### **You Say You Hate the West, Yet You Rely on Western Technology to Carry Out Your Terrorism**

From all reports, you have essentially no knowledge of Western science or philosophy or literature. In short, you are a group of men who have no understanding of why Western thinking, Western culture, has made it the most powerful culture in the world.

You will reply that you do not need to know about these things because you have the Koran, and that is all that anyone needs. And yet in order to supply your suicide bombers with explosives, and in order to fly jet aircraft into buildings, in order to communicate via the Internet, the Koran is useless: you have to acquire a certain amount of Western knowledge to do these things. You pride yourself on what you perceive to be the brilliance of using your enemy's own weapons to defeat him, but many of us in the West consider this not a sign of your brilliance but only further proof of your backwardness. We wonder if you have ever asked yourselves why Allah, the All-Powerful, seems to be unable to give his people the intelligence and knowledge and discipline to develop weapons on their own, and why he forces his people to humiliate themselves by having always to go to their enemy for the weapons they need.

You despise the Western idea of truth and yet every time you make a bomb you are forced to accept this idea of truth — namely, that what is said about the world must conform to reality, must be capable of being tested against reality. No matter how much you pray to Allah, the bomb will not function if you fail to follow the laws of chemistry that govern the making of explosives.

### **You Say You Want an Islamic State, Yet the Best Chance You Had to Create One, You Lost**

You say that you want to establish a fundamentalist Islamic state — in fact, that you want to turn the entire world into such an Islamic state. But the best chance you had to establish such a state — namely, in Afghanistan — you soon lost through your appalling ignorance of our history. You based your decision to attack the World Trade Center on our anemic responses to your bombings of our embassies and to your attack on the U.S.S. Cole. You apparently didn't even take the trouble to inform yourselves what we did in retaliation to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 — an attack which killed fewer of our people than your attack on the World Trade Center. The Taliban were in control in Afghanistan. They could do as they liked. They could have shown the world what a fundamentalist Islamic state is like. We in the West would not have attempted to stop them, although, naturally, we would have regretted the appalling oppression that the regime would have inflicted on the Afghani people, particularly on the women. Yet you threw away this opportunity.

### **You Say You Want the Whole World to Become an Islamic State, Yet You Are Disgracing Islam**

I can tell you truthfully, that until Sept. 11, the average American had no interest in Islam. In fact, it wasn't until after the attack that we learned, from the news, that there are hundreds of

mosques in the U.S. (If we now decided to close these mosques, you would immediately launch a world-wide propaganda tirade about our aggression and prejudice against Middle Easterners, you who tolerate no dissent, no other religions in the countries where you gain power — just as, after one of the Palestinian suicide bombers kills ten or twenty Israelis, and the Israelis retaliate (as the Palestinians certainly would do, if the situation were reversed), Chairman Arafat immediately appears on international TV wringing his hands and demanding the world stop this “Israeli aggression”. (What does he imagine the Israelis should do in response to being attacked?)) I am surprised the Israelis do not paint on the sides of their tanks, “With your terrorist attacks, you are only killing yourselves!”

But now we discuss Islam a great deal — not to express our fear and awe of your religion, or to express grudging admiration for what you no doubt consider the bravery of those who commit suicide by blowing themselves up in Israeli cities, or by flying jet airliners into our buildings. No, we discuss the backwardness of this religion of yours which keeps 1.1 billion people in abject poverty, and which offers no other solution than for the young to make human bombs of themselves. American mothers do not express admiration for the Palestinian mothers who are willing to sacrifice their sons and occasionally their daughters to suicide bombing. They instead lament these poor uneducated women who are so easily brainwashed by the likes of you. And Tom Friedman, the New York Times columnist who knows far more about you and your culture than you know about ours (or yours!), has rightfully urged us to imagine the desperate hopelessness of people whose highest aspiration for their children is that they commit suicide. We do not say, “How brave these Palestinian young people are!” Do not imagine for a moment that you are winning our admiration through these suicides. All you are winning is our contempt.

We who once hadn't the slightest interest in Islam, now regard it as a plague upon the human race. I have heard ordinary, middle-class Americans say things like, “For the sake of mankind, Islam must be eradicated from the face of the earth!” If Islam was once one of the world's great religions, you have now disgraced it in the eyes of the West. In Europe, Muslims are regarded as intruders, as a burden that each country must somehow deal with, because they are uneducated, backward, and determined not to learn how to become citizens of the countries they emigrate to. We can't help wondering just what reward the Prophet has arranged in the next life for those who profess to be believers in the religion he founded, but yet who have made that religion an object not of fear, but of scorn among all the peoples he once hoped to conquer.

At least one political leader of the Muslim world has had the courage to say these things to his own people. Prior to leaving office, the prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohammad said, in a speech on Oct. 16, 2003:

“Today we, the whole Muslim [community], are treated with contempt and dishonor.... There is a feeling of hopelessness among the Muslim countries and people. They feel that they can do nothing right.... Our only reaction is to become more and more angry. Angry people cannot think properly.... We sacrifice lives unnecessarily, achieving nothing other than to attract more massive retaliation and humiliation. [But] we are up against a people who think. [The Jews] survived 2,000 years of pogroms not by hitting back, but by thinking....” — quoted in a column by Friedman, Thomas L., “The Humiliation Factor”, in *The New York Times*, Sunday, Nov. 9, 2003, p. 11.

And you surely must know that you go against the teachings of your own religion every time you send another suicide bomber to attack us: surely you know the story of the Islamic warrior who, dying on the battlefield, wanted to commit suicide, but who was reminded that even under those circumstances suicide is not allowed, because only Allah decides when a man is to die. So in your rage, you defy Allah, and we in the West can't help wondering if suicide bombers should

really be so certain of the reward in the next life that you promise them.

But your hatred of us may still enable you to believe that someday you will be able to turn the world, or at least the Western world, into a vast Islamic state. Let me try to show you why you are wrong.

## **Why You Will Fail**

### **Your Religion Has Not Adapted to the Modern World**

Your religion, which was formulated some 1400 years ago, in a culture utterly remote from ours, is not fit as a sole and universal guide for the modern world because it tolerates no change. Despite what the Ayotollah Khomeini said: — “If laws are needed, Islam has established them all. There is no need... after establishing a government, to sit down and draw up laws.”<sup>1</sup>— you *do* in fact have to draw up new laws if only to state what is prohibited in the new technology! True, for a few centuries after the death of the Prophet, Islam gained control of much of the then-known world, and, ironically, in the process transmitted much of our own ancient culture back to us through Arab translations of the ancient Greek and Roman classics. *There is no question but that you saved our culture.* But this culture made no impression on you. You made no attempt, as the West did, to try to find what this culture could teach you, how it might help you, for example, to solve the problem of establishing long-lasting governments.

“How much ... the potentially divisive and stimulating effect of ideas drawn from other cultures was felt below the level of the leading Islamic thinkers and scientists is hard to say, but potentially many seeds of a questioning and self-critical culture were there from the eighth century onwards. They seem not to have ripened.” — Roberts, J. M., *The Penguin History of the World*, Penguin Books, London, 1997, p. 327.

Instead, since then you have been fighting an utterly futile battle against the legacy of that ancient Greek and Roman culture.

You may argue that Christianity doesn't tolerate change either. But the difference with Christianity and Judaism is that over the centuries, they have managed to find a *modus vivendi* with the secular world. We in the West spent centuries, beginning in the early Middle Ages, trying to find out the proper spheres of religion and politics — a huge effort, a monumental struggle, often resulting in a great deal of bloodshed. The United States *began* with the belief that dissent would always be present in a country, and so, in our Constitution, we attempted to deal with it, to keep it under control. History seems to show again and again that countries that tolerate dissent are infinitely more successful in the long run than countries that do not.

You still believe that there is nothing to find out: the state and Islam must be one. Period. As a result, you have no means for dealing with disagreements except punishment and execution. You stifle dissent and in the process deprive yourselves of the means to benefit from dissent.

### **Your Own People Do Not Want an Islamic State**

When we defeated the Taliban, there was rejoicing in the streets of Afghanistan. Within days, men were shaving their beards and resuming the businesses they had had to abandon; people were dancing and watching Western films, getting the news from the BBC on their transistor radios and on whatever TV sets they could find. Very few people were lamenting the loss of the oppressive

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1. “Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini” (1981) in *Islamic Government*

Taliban regime. A similar situation has prevailed in Iran with the increasing opposition to the mullahs. V. S. Naipaul, one of the most penetrating observers of the Third World, and of Islam, has said:

“The cruelty of Islamic fundamentalism is that it allows only to one people — the Arabs, the original people of the Prophet — a past, and sacred places, and pilgrimages, and earth reverences. These sacred Arab places have to be the sacred places of all the converted peoples. Converted peoples have to strip themselves of their past; of converted peoples nothing is required but the purest faith (if such a thing can be arrived at), Islam, submission. It is the most uncompromising kind of imperialism.” — Naipaul, V. S., *Beyond Belief*, Vintage Books, N.Y., 1998, p. 64.

The Taliban’s blowing up of the Buddhist statues is only one proof of Naipaul’s assertion.

Whether you like it or not, people do not want to live under the kind of government you want to make them live under. Especially the women! One of the Palestinian terrorist leaders has said that “the way to victory lies through the womb of the Arab woman”. And yet, what is abundantly clear in Iran, in Afghanistan, and in Morocco, to name just three countries, is that the Arab woman, given any kind of freedom, wants much more out of life than giving birth to the terrorists of the future. She above all wants to go to school, and that does not mean a madrassah. She wants to learn about the real world, she wants to learn skills so that she can become a doctor or an engineer — so that she can be of some use to her people. The Palestinian terrorist would have been much closer to the truth if he had said, “The way to victory lies through the *brain* of the Arab woman.”

### **We in the West *Certainly* Do Not Want an Islamic State**

You may remember that in Sept. 2002, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, gave a speech before Parliament on the subject of the white paper he had just released setting forth the reasons for attacking Iraq. Parts of his speech, and of the ensuing discussion in Parliament, were broadcast on TV news programs throughout the world. You may remember that there was no hesitation among the members of Parliament seated before him, to criticise points he had made, and to ask questions, and to shout approval or disapproval for arguments presented by various members, and by him. And I must tell you that I and I am sure many others throughout the West couldn’t help thinking: the Islamic countries are *light years* from having anything remotely resembling the British Parliament (which, as I hope you know, is sometimes referred to as “the Mother of Parliaments”). The Islamic countries — and especially the radicals, the religious fanatics, the fundamentalists — don’t even understand *why* it is a good thing for a political leader to be able to be challenged openly as the Prime Minister was. You think this is nothing but weakness, a kind of immorality. And I thought, as I watched the televised segments of the Prime Minister’s appearance, Never in a million years are we going to give up the freedom that that represents. There isn’t a chance in hell that we are going to decide that allowing a bunch of ignorant, fanatical tyrants to run virtually every facet of our daily lives, is preferable to what we have now. Watching that session of Parliament, I was enormously *proud* of our culture, of our civilization, of what we have accomplished through so many centuries of struggle and debate and at times bloodshed in our attempt to find a way to govern ourselves while at the same time allowing each of us to flourish, to have our say, yes, to disagree with what our government decrees. If you don’t understand why we think our system is so much preferable to yours, then your cause is even more hopeless than we have imagined.

## **You Consistently Underestimate Us**

Another reason you will fail is that you consistently underestimate us. Saddam Hussein said that we would be defeated if we attacked him because we “can’t take the blood”. When I first heard that, I was reminded of a scene from the film, *Patton*, which is about one of our greatest World War II generals. The film opens with Patton standing in front of a huge American flag giving a lecture to his young recruits. He concludes with the following words. “Remember: it is not your job to die for your country. It is your job to make the *other* son-of-a-bitch die for *his* country.” Unlike you, we value our lives, and even the military takes every step to reduce the number of casualties. You have seen twice how good we are at this, first in the Gulf War and second in our attack on Afghanistan. We were more than happy to give Saddam an opportunity to prove how he (or rather, his men) could “take the blood”. The idea that one should be eager to die in battle is a relic of a primitive culture — of a primitive people who have not much to look forward to in this life.

I plead with you: do not underestimate us again, as you did in attacking the World Trade Center, because I assure you that *if* we ever feel that you are about to take over our civilization, *if* we ever come to feel that we are faced with a choice between you and us and that is the only choice remaining to us (and I can’t believe it will ever come to this), we will tear the head off every Arab we see on our streets, and then we will tear off the arms and legs and throw the pieces into the roadway. Don’t doubt it for a minute. If necessary, we will turn the Middle East into glass with our nuclear weapons (all excepting Israel of course). We will turn your Islamic hordes into vapor. We will send them to Paradise by the millions. Don’t doubt it for a minute.

You believe that any group that is willing to commit suicide for the sake of victory cannot fail to win. But once again your ignorance of history betrays you. For during the final days of the Second World War, the Japanese, in their desperation, sent some of their finest young men — more than 3,000, far more than you have so far sacrificed in Palestine and in your attack on us in this country — to their deaths in Kamikaze attacks on our ships. They did a lot of damage and killed a lot of our sailors, but, as you know (as I hope you know!) we won the war. So the willingness to commit suicide is no guarantee whatsoever of victory.

And I must remind you that we also defeated the Germans.

We also won the Gulf War, and we also made short work of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. And we continue to capture leaders of Al Qaeda.

We are perfectly prepared, as the Israelis are, and as the English were throughout the 20th century in regard to the Irish Republican Army, to consider the few of us you kill each year as, well, as part of the cost of doing business, part of the cost of living in a free society that others, the jealous losers of the world, will inevitably try to destroy. How many of us non-Israelis have you killed so far in the last fifty years? 4,000? 5,000? How many of you have we killed? Of course, we know only too well that you are determined to increase the number of us you have killed, perhaps with a nuclear or biological or chemical attack on New York City. I must tell you honestly that there are Americans, and I am sure some of them are in the highest reaches of government, who believe that if you used such a weapon on us, we should retaliate by wiping out all the Islamic holy places except those in Jerusalem. Certainly destroy the cities of Mecca and Medina. But many of us disagree with these Americans, not out of any respect for you or for Islam, but because we know it would only make you determined to destroy our holy places, in particular, in Rome. But you can be sure that we will exact a terrible price on you and your people if you attack us with these weapons, and I hope that when that happens, that every moment of every day the message will be sent to every Muslim throughout the world, that it was *you*, not us, who

unleashed that death and destruction. I am confident that the Muslim people are intelligent enough to understand precisely what that message means.

Not only do we have our high technology — everything from the entire international intelligence network, with all its experts and computers, to satellites that are capable of distinguishing objects the size of a car or truck, to drones with TV cameras and missiles that are able to spy on you, and attack you, no matter where you try to hide (one of these drones, as you know only too well, an RQ-1 Predator, killed one of your most senior figures, Qaed Salim Sinan Harethi (Abu Ali), plus five other al Qaeda operatives, in Yemen in early Nov., 2002 ), and soon we will have robot spy devices the size of an *insect* that will be able to track you right into your caves. And we also have money. We can continue to offer rewards beyond the imagining of the average poor person in your backward countries, for information as to your whereabouts. You will reply that no devout believer in Islam would even *think* of accepting such money. I reply that even if you are right about 99.9% of your people, those one or two or three persons (and there will certainly be that many, because your populations are large!) — those one or two or three persons may be able to tell us all we need to know to wipe out your leadership or stop a major attack on us. The very poverty you are relying on to furnish you with an endless supply of suicide bombers, will also be a continuing motivation for some — we only need a few — of your people to accept our bribes and blood money in return for information as to your whereabouts. Furthermore, we can continue to do what I am sure we are already doing, at least unofficially, namely, telling the governments of your poverty-stricken countries that if they harbor terrorists, if they fail to do their utmost to track down terrorists within their borders, then at the very least, they can depend on no more foreign aid from us —and that in the long run (or the short run!) will mean the end of those governments.

### **History Is Not On Your Side**

I say again: your ignorance of history is your worst enemy, because if you knew any history at all, you would know that you have been hurling yourself at the West since the death of the Prophet in 632 a.d. Putting it as briefly as I can, you got as far as Spain and Eastern Europe, and then you were driven back.

*No one who has attempted to overthrow the West has succeeded.*

### **Your Bombings Are Arousing Other Countries to Unite Against You**

In your rage, you apparently do not even realize the consequences of your bombs killing citizens and destroying the property of other countries. You sent a suicide boat against a French oil tanker in Sept. 2002, you set off a bomb in a nightclub in Bali in Oct. 2002 that killed numerous Australians, your suicide squad caused the deaths of over 100 people in a Moscow theater in Oct. 2002. What other effect do you think these atrocities have on the countries whose citizens are killed except to arouse these countries against you? After the Chechen terrorists who took over the theater were killed, Vasilyev, the deputy interior minister, said, “We will clean not only Moscow but all Russia of this scum.”<sup>1</sup> A few days later, President Putin said, “Russia will respond with measures that are adequate to the threat to the Russian Federation, striking on all the places where the terrorists themselves, the organizers of these crimes and their ideological and financial supporters are. I stress,” he added, “wherever they may be located.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. — Wines, Michael, “At Least 67 Captives and 50 Chechens Die in Siege,” *The New York Times*, Sunday, Oct. 27, 2002, p. 14.



It only takes the killing of a few civilians of any country for the people of that country to begin to realize, “*The terrorists are our enemy, too!*” ]

Finally, as you should know, but apparently do not, because of your ignorance of history: *no group of terrorists has ever taken over a country!*

Meantime, your bombings and your determination to prevent any Arab nation in the Middle East from becoming an economically viable democracy, is producing, in the West, an ever increasing contempt — not respect, or fear, or awe, but contempt — for Islamic culture. Verses such as the one in the Appendix of this letter have begun to appear on the Internet. Can you possibly consider this a good thing for the cause of Islam?

### **Even If the U.S. and Israel Were to Disappear from the Face of the Earth Tomorrow, You Would Still Fail**

Even if the U.S. and Israel were to disappear from the face of the earth tomorrow, you would still be living in a world in which global capitalism is the economic model. You would still have to conquer Europe and Russia and India and China and Japan and Australia and numerous other countries. The remaining countries would still want Middle Eastern oil. Do you seriously believe that they would not fight you to the death for it, and for their freedom?

I say again: *the modern world does not want, and will never accept, an Islamic state.*

### **In the End, Determination, Intelligence and Knowledge Will Always Beat Determination and Ignorance**

You believe that your hatred and your religion are enough to bring you victory. But once again, if you had any knowledge of history, you would know that history proves you wrong. You would know that yours is a belief typical of desperate people. To put it bluntly, it is a belief of losers. It is a belief of people who, with their backs against the wall, and having no resources — well, it is not true that you have no resources, what *is* true is that you don’t know how to use them — it is the belief of a people who try to convince themselves that their ignorance is a source of power. To imagine that the heroism of a few can bring down a mighty civilization — several of them in fact — to imagine that violence is the only way to victory, is the belief of an ignorant, desperate people. It seems to be a fact repeated throughout history, that the less power that people have, the more power they try to *convince* themselves that they have. In your belief that violence will bring you victory, you betray your nomadic, warrior origins, and you fail to stare in the face the fact that this nomadic, warrior culture has brought you, over a period of some fourteen centuries, not victory, but your present state of universal poverty and misery.

You scorn our democratic governments and believe that tyranny is better. This too is the thinking of a primitive people who have no confidence in their own resources, but instead believe it is necessary to have someone tell them what to do. If you knew anything about the history of the world, you would know this. Tyranny is what people believe in who do not know any better. But *our* culture — this Western culture you so despise — had already advanced beyond the belief in tyranny in 500 b.c., more than a thousand years before the Prophet’s birth! (Although God knows we have not been able to get rid of it throughout the Western world, as the history of the 20th century shows. ) Tyranny is what powerful civilizations advance *beyond*. Tyranny is the beginning of man’s advance, not the end. You still haven’t gone through what we have in the West

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2. — *San Francisco Chronicle*, Tuesday, Oct. 29, 2002, p. A8.

to figure out how to overcome all the bad characteristics things that tyranny brings with it.

Let me once again speak bluntly. We are smarter than you and we know more. Several Americans I have spoken to have said that they *hope* that you continue to force more and more Islamic children to attend only your madrassahs, because the backwardness of these schools virtually guarantees that these children will grow up with no capability of surviving in the modern world, and hence will make our job of defeating you all the easier.

In the end, determination, intelligence and knowledge always defeats determination and ignorance. Stupidity, no matter how violent, is doom.

## **Why Are You Doing What You Are Doing?**

We in the West spend a lot of time trying to figure out why you have resorted to terrorism on the scale of Sept. 11, and possibly on the scale of weapons of mass destruction in the future. Of course, you tell us that it is your hatred of the West, and especially of the U.S.'s support for Israel, and of the U.S.'s desecration, with our military bases and our oil wells, of holy places in Saudi Arabia. But in the West, unlike in Islamic culture, we have developed not only the habit of asking people why they do what they do, but of not always taking them at their word, and instead trying to figure out for ourselves what might be some of the underlying reasons why they do it.

## **Regarding Your Desire to Establish an Islamic State:**

It is natural to want to retreat from a world you hate, a world in which you are losers, and return to an imagined glorious past.

And here I must say something that you will probably find difficult to believe, but which nevertheless is true: *many of us in the West also hate much of modern life*. In fact, in the 20th century, there was a whole school of philosophy — usually called “Existentialist” — which was fundamentally dedicated to bringing to the fore, and dealing with, the emptiness of life experienced by so many in the West. The entire work of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger was, for example, an attempt to make the case for a return to the ancient Greek view of life, or at least the view of life of a small rural village in Germany.

Most American intellectuals — meaning here, liberal arts intellectuals — are against what has been called “the Americanization (or ‘Disneyfication’) of the world.” Most American intellectuals are by no means enthusiastic about the advancement of science and, in particular, of technology (except as these advancements help cure their diseases). At least some American intellectuals deplore the loss of the old poetic view of love and sex — deplore modern sexuality, which, as a friend of mine has said, is “at one and the same time lewd, pervasive, litigious, and boring”. They even deplore the assertion, or at least the implication, that the relationship between Man and Woman is fundamentally about power, and that love is a delusion. These intellectuals are all too aware that as Western secularism advances, in the words of my friend, “we can look forward to the further dissolution of family ties, rising divorce rates, and alienation of the young from their traditional culture as they besot themselves with MTV, video games, Hollywood action flicks, ...” “Interpersonal attachments (e.g., between husband and wife, parents and children) will wither and Muslims can look forward to finding meaning in their lives as so many Americans do, in the workplace. It’s no wonder that we’re prodigies of productivity.”

So great is the revulsion of some of our own people against the modern world — the modern American world — that some have become terrorists like you. I need only mention the so-called Unabomber, who was obsessed with doing whatever he could to help destroy modern technology-

based society. (He is now in jail, by the way.)

So you are by no means the only people in the modern world who hate the modern world, or at least, who hate many aspects of it. Nor are you the only people who have attempted to construct societies that are designed to eliminate as much of the modern world as possible. In the U.S., for example, the small farmers in Vermont who have been hard-hit by the changes in dairy farming brought about by the large corporate farms, have started a movement with the slogan, “Take Back Vermont”, whose purpose is to return to the 19th century way of farming. Furthermore, there have been several religious sects which did not want to have anything to do with the modern world, for example, the Amish, who live in Pennsylvania and elsewhere in North America. They still limit themselves to the technology of two centuries ago, they still travel solely in horse-drawn vehicles. But they have learned to become very good farmers using that old technology. In any case, they do not believe that in order to turn their backs on the modern world, they need to destroy it! And, of course, in the U.S., unlike in the countries of the Islamic world, they enjoy the freedom to live as they wish.

But then why do we cling to our culture? Because we would rather live than die. Because we would rather be cured of the diseases that afflict us than to die of them. Because we enjoy cars, and air travel, and movies, and TV, and full bellies, and a comfortable bed at night. Call us weak, but it seems that whenever someone in your countries comes into wealth, they seem to want much the same things as we do. Especially the tyrants and their families.

### **Regarding Your Conviction That Your Problems Are Due to the U.S. and to Western Technology:**

It is always easier to blame others than to begin the hard, often dull, work of doing what you can with what you have, and with what you can develop for yourselves. Many blacks in the U.S. continue to live in poverty because they believe that until white people can guarantee them a “level playing field”, there is no use in their trying to do anything on their own: their future lies entirely in the hands of white people, they believe.

Have you thought through what will happen to your countries once the oil runs out, or once the Western countries develop alternative energy sources, e.g., fuel cells, that enable them to run their economies without any need for Middle Eastern oil? If your people are living in poverty now — because the corrupt governments in Arab countries give next to nothing to their people — why do you imagine you will be better off when the corrupt governments no longer have an income from oil? We in the West strongly suspect that, when that happens, you will be at our throats again, this time for abandoning you, for taking our money elsewhere.

I would remind you that throughout their many years of oppression — which were far worse than anything you have experienced — the Jews did *not* attempt to overthrow their oppressors, they did *not* delude themselves with fantasies of one day conquering the entire world and turning it into a Jewish state. Instead, they made the most of what they had. When the professions were closed to them, they took on the work, forbidden to Christians, of loaning money. From their centuries of effort in this despised activity, they developed the extraordinary financial and business skills that have made them one of the wealthiest minorities in the world. And throughout their long history, they considered learning — study, thought — and family to be, along with their religion, the highest goods. While you were hurling yourselves against the ramparts of Europe, developing nothing but your ability to carry on war and to die in battle, they were developing their minds and their communities. And now you hate them because they are so far ahead of you.

### **Regarding Your Unyielding Faith in Terrorism:**

Violence is the loser's way of trying to become strong and powerful in the world. In the black ghettos, ignorant, uneducated young males look at their poverty, their lack of any prospects of a decent life, and ... grab a gun. "Yesterday I was without power," they say to themselves, "but today I have power!" They kill anyone who crosses them (typically, another black). "Look at me!" they say. "Yesterday I had no power, but today I have power!"

But this is self-delusion at its worst. Because the truth is that nothing of importance has changed for the better in their lives. They are still ignorant, uneducated, despised by successful people, living in poverty, and now, in addition, they are fugitives before the law. Their future consists of prison or death.

You likewise tell yourselves, "Yesterday we were poor and without power. Now that we have become terrorists, we have power!" Again, a pathetic delusion. Your people are as desperately poor as they were, and now your religion has become an object of contempt around the world, and the combined police and military forces of the world are out to destroy you. That is not power!

The truth is — and this is the most important thing in this letter: you can ignore everything else, but I plead with you not to ignore this — *there are no short-cuts to power*. Losers believe there are, winners know there are not. Real power comes from education, struggle, learning from experience, learning to face the facts of one's situation, and then making the most of that situation. Real power comes from years of steady effort, not at trying to destroy the enemies you blame for your own backwardness, but at trying to improve your knowledge, your ability to flourish in the modern world. There are no short-cuts to power.

Of course, several observers have said that the real reason for your terrorism is that your hatred of yourselves for being so far behind the West is so great that you are hoping that you will be able to drive us to finishing you off, once and for all. You want to believe that the explosion of one of your bombs says, "Look at us! Fear us! We are going to take over your world!" But in fact what it says is, "Look at us! We are worthless! We can't do any better in the world than this! While you learn how to build lives for yourselves in the modern world, the best we can do is make bombs and then blow up ourselves, and a few of you, in public places. No wonder you have nothing but contempt for us. Please hunt us down and kill us!" Is that what you are secretly hoping for? Having us send you to Paradise, where you can tell the Prophet that you did your best to kill the hated infidel, but that unfortunately the infidel had weapons that were too much for you, while meantime you are regarded as heroes by your own people, without, in fact, having done anything to enable themselves to better their lot now, today? "Perhaps [suicide bombing] wasn't really meant to [stave off Japanese defeat]. It was more like a deadly theatrical gesture, a horrendous face-saving device aimed at the Japanese themselves more than their enemies." — Buruma, Ian, "Suicide for the Empire", *The New York Review of Books*, Nov. 21, 2002, p. 24.

Your attacks in Sept. and Oct. 2002 have aroused the fury of at least two more nations against you. It is hard to account for such monumentally stupid actions except by assuming that either you subconsciously want us to put you out of your misery, or that there are *agent provocateurs* at the highest levels of your leadership. (Are you sure there are none?)

### **Regarding the Palestinians' Claim That Israeli Oppression is Preventing Them from Building a Decent Life for Themselves:**

Once again, we observe the self-destructive faith: *if things are bad, it must be someone else's fault*. Some of us don't blame the Palestinians at all for their endless howls of protest over the Israeli settlements on the West Bank, and for their endlessly putting up obstacles in the way of a

peace agreement, but our reasons for not blaming them are not the reasons you think: because we ask, “Who would want to live next to Israel *and have no excuses?* What backward people would want to wake up and find themselves living next-door to this extraordinary people who after surviving centuries of persecution infinitely worse than the “oppression” that the Palestinians are always complaining about, have in the space of a few decades made the desert bloom — the same desert in which the Palestians have lived for centuries without being able to lift themselves above a subsistence-level standard of living?” While the Palestinians and the other Arab states have been doing their best to throw Israel into the sea, it has become a modern civilization, a world-class competitor in high technology, with a standard of living equal to any in the West.

The Palestinians will never be satisfied with a peace treaty, not even if the Israelis agree to give up all the settlements on the West Bank, because the Palestinians know full well that once they sign a peace treaty with Israel, the world will say, “All right, now that you have your freedom, now that you have a Palestinian state, now that the Israelis have left, let’s see what you can do.” The Palestinians are terrified of that prospect. Far better to live like dogs in the rubble and have the world believe that it is someone else’s fault, than to stand naked before the world and reveal that, *at present*, the Palestinians have neither the skills nor the knowledge nor the money (thanks to the refusal of the wealthy Arab states to help them) to build a decent life for themselves. Far better the imagined heroism of sending their children to their deaths fighting the oppressor, than the shame of having to admit that the main reason they are living in poverty is not the Israelis but their own ignorance and backwardness and lack of discipline.

### **Is the Real Reason for Your Terrorism, That You Have Forgotten the History of Islam —Indeed, of Your Part of the World?**

To us it seems your terrorism is the rage of a group that believes it is fundamentally inferior to those who rule the world. But if you knew your own history, you would know that, first of all, your part of the world was the cradle of our civilization — “History begins in the Near East”<sup>1</sup> — , as every school child in our schools (unfortunately not in yours) learns, and that later, between 700 and 1100 a.d. or so, you saved our civilization for us! Did you know that? Here again, every history of the Western world taught in *our* schools makes this clear. Let me quote to you from two of these histories:

“The archeological evidence, as well as the distribution of wild species of the earliest known domesticated plants and animals, points to the region from Iran to Palestine as the laboratory of the incipient agriculture and, thus, the birthplace of stable society and historical memory.”<sup>2</sup>The following table<sup>3</sup> lists some of the early accomplishments of your part of the world:

**Table 1: Accomplishments of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures**

<b>Time (B.C.)</b>	<b>Accomplishment</b>
10,000	Wooden reaping knives set with flint blades used in Palestine

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1. *The Columbia History of the World*, ed. Garraty, John A., and Gay, Peter, Harper & Row, Publishers, N.Y., 1972, p. 49.

2. — *ibid.*, p. 52.

3. — *ibid.*, a merging of certain passages from the text and selections from the table on p. 50

**Table 1: Accomplishments of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures**

<b>Time (B.C.)</b>	<b>Accomplishment</b>
9,000	Domesticated sheep in the North Tigris valley
7700-5700	In Turkey, obsidian mined for tools; fertility cult indicates use of domesticated cattle
7500	Extensive settlement at Jericho, weaving, fortification, cultivated cereals, including barley; modern bread wheat is attested somewhat later in Asia Minor; goats and, probably, pigs were soon added to farm animals bred by man
7000	Pottery begins; potter's clay — a combination of earth, water, and some ingredient (grit, straw) to prevent cracking — was the first artificial material manufactured by man.
6500	Copper used in Turkey for trinkets
6000	Farming in Macedonia; pottery plentiful
5000	Use of copper in Mesopotamia begins
3300	Writing begins in Sumer; wheeled vehicles and wheel-made pottery, sailboats, and animal-drawn plows in Sumer
3100	Invention of hieroglyphic writing in Egypt
2500	Keeping of daily accounts in Sumer; the pyramids completed
1750	Financial transactions in Sumer and Addad now commonly in silver

Then, later, we read:

“Judged by its greatest men, Arab culture was at its height in the East in the ninth and tenth centuries and in Spain in the eleventh and twelfth. Although Arab history and geography are both very impressive, its greatest triumphs were scientific and mathematical; we still employ the ‘arabic’ numerals which made possible written calculations with far greater simplicity than did Roman numeration and which were set out by an Arab arithmetician (although in origin they were Indian). This transmission function of Arabic culture was always important and characteristic but must not obscure its originality. The name of the greatest of Arabic astronomers, Al-Khwarizmi [d. 835], indicates Persian Zoroastrian origins; it expresses the way in which Arabic culture was a confluence of sources. His astronomical tables, none the less, were an Arabic achievement, an expression of the synthesis made possible by Arab empire.

“The translation of Arabic works into Latin in the later Middle Ages, and the huge repute enjoyed by Arab thinkers in Europe, testify to the quality of this culture. Of the works of Al-Kindi [d. c. 870], one of the greatest Arab philosophers, more survive in Latin than in Arabic, while Dante paid Ibn-Sina (Avicenna in Europe)[979-1037] and Averroes [1176-98] the compliment of placing them in limbo (along with Saladin [1138-93], the Arab hero of the crusading epoch) when he allocated great men to their fate after death in his poem, and they were the only men of the Christian era whom he treated thus. The Persian practitioners who dominated Arabic

medical studies wrote works which remained for centuries the standard textbooks of western training. European languages are still marked by words which indicate the special importance of Arabic study in certain areas: ‘zero’, ‘cipher’, ‘almanac’, ‘algebra’, and ‘alchemy’ are among them. The survival of a technical vocabulary of commerce, too — tariff, *douane*, magazine — is a reminder of the superiority of Arab commercial technique; the Arab merchants taught Christians how to keep accounts.”<sup>1</sup>

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, “Spain’s Islamic civilization reached its greatest beauty and maturity in a golden age of creativity which rivalled that of Abassid Baghdad. This left behind great monuments as well as producing great learning and philosophy. The seven hundred mosques of tenth century Córdoba numbered among them one which can still be thought the most beautiful building in the world. Arab Spain was of enormous importance to Europe, a door to the learning and science of the East, but one through which were also to pass more material goods as well: through it Christendom received knowledge of agricultural and irrigation techniques, oranges and lemons, sugar. As for Spain itself, the Arab stamp went very deep, as many students of the later, Christian, Spain have pointed out, and can still be observed in language, manners and art.” — Roberts, J. M., *The Penguin History of the World*, Penguin Books, London, 1997, p. 330.

And the best you can do to carry on from this great past is to become *terrorists*?

## **The Victory That *Could* Be Yours**

I said at the start that this was not merely going to be a letter of criticism, but also an attempt to convince you that there are other ways for you to get at least something of what you want without having to give up your hatred of the West, and without having to give up Islam.

Let me begin by reminding you of what you already have: you have individuals around the world who are well able to supply you with millions — in fact hundreds of millions — of dollars. Osama bin Laden’s family itself were multimillionaires, and I have never heard a figure below \$45 million as to his own net worth in the late nineties. There are many other sources of money, as you know all too well.

With these millions, you can start to alleviate one of the problems that you claim drives you to your extremism, namely, the poverty in which your people live. I do not imagine, of course, that by merely handing out cash, you will be able to do this. What I am thinking of is the kind of thing you can see almost any night on BBC TV in your part of the world: the efforts of small groups of people — villagers — to slowly obtain the bare necessities that they need: wells, sewer systems, small banks to enable villagers to start little businesses. You have a TV station — al Jazeera — that is perfectly capable of transmitting reports of these successes, and they in turn will encourage others to start doing the same for themselves.

You can still have your hatred of us and you can still build an Islamic state! All you have to do is stop the terrorism and get down to the hard work — the often tedious, boring work — of alleviating the poverty of your own people. The Western world is ready to help you. We will not bother you if you leave us alone.

Do you seriously believe that your people would scorn you for giving up terrorism and instead embarking on the great task of helping them out of their poverty? And maybe, as you confront the problems your people face, you may come to the conclusion that one answer to your poverty is not having more and more babies, but having *fewer* babies, because then the chances that your

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1. Roberts, J. M., *The Penguin History of the World*, Penguin Books, London, 1997, pp. 327-28.

young people will be able to find jobs will increase. (How can you possibly have any respect for one of your leaders who, in the face of the overwhelming lack of employment for the masses in Arab countries, tells his people that they should have *more* children? What kind of madness is this?)

One reason the West is so much better off than you is that we only have one or two children, so that we can afford to give them a much better education than if we had five or ten. If you look at the poorest segments of our population — the blacks and the Latinos — you find that they also have the largest families. There is no money to send any of their children to college.

If you are smart enough to make bombs and fly jet planes into buildings and to run a worldwide terrorist organization like Al Qaeda, you are smart enough to master *sufficient* Western technology to build a life for yourselves.

So this is my challenge to you. Look at yourselves honestly, for the first time. Recognize your weakness, your backwardness. Recognize that, to put it in Western terms, you have no identity in the modern world. Then decide what you can do to overcome it. Give up your naive — your losers' — conviction that all your troubles are someone else's fault. Give up your naive conviction that the attention the world gives you every time you kill some of our people, is somehow proof that you are making progress. Stop taking the easy way out — which is what your terrorist attacks really are. Ask yourselves, "How much could we accomplish *without* terrorism?" *You don't have to give up your hatred of us! You don't have to give up Islam!* All you have to do is swallow your pride, give up this faith (a typical *losers'* faith) that hatred and violence will bring you victory, and settle down to the hard, often boring, but in the long run infinitely more rewarding work of building an Islamic civilization that is capable of providing meaningful lives, free of poverty, for its people. I close with the words of a man who understands the Islamic world better than it understands itself.

"Identity depends in the end on achievement." — Naipaul, V. S., "Power?" in *The Writer and the World*, Alfred A. Knopf, N.Y., 2002, p. 138.



## **Appendix — “The Muslim Song”**

### *The Muslim Song*<sup>1</sup>

Hey! We are Muslims and we're  
Dumber'n shit.  
Give us anything to do  
And we can't do it.

When we confront a problem  
We never think it through.  
We just build a bomb  
And try to kill you.

Our world is black and white  
With no room for maybe's.  
All that we are good at  
Is making bombs and babies.

We cannot rule ourselves  
We hate constitutions;  
We need a bloody tyrant and  
Daily executions.

Don't talk to us of peace,  
Of a better life for man,  
We're out to destroy ourselves  
As fast as we can.

And we're taking you with us  
Because we hate that you are free  
To be so much better  
Than we can ever be.

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1. Copied from an anonymous email received in June, 2004, and reprinted here as an example of the reaction in the West to ongoing Islamic terrorism.

*Letter to the Islamic Terrorists*