



Conflict Research Group/Department of Government public lecture

Talking to the Enemy: Violent Extremism, Sacred Values, and What it Means to Be Human

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TALKING TO THE ENEMY
VIOLENT EXTREMISM, SACRED
VALUES &
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE
HUMAN

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“In the fullness of spring, in the presence of those who never really leave us, it is the life that we honor. Lives of courage, lives of sacrifice, and the ultimate measure of selflessness -- lives that were given to save others.”

Barack Obama, Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, Elwood, IL May 30, 2005

“I and thousands like me have forsaken everything for what we believe.”

Mohammad Sidique Khan,
July 2005 London Underground suicide bomber

“People... want to serve a cause greater than their self interest.”

U.S. Senator John McCain,
Villanova University, Pennsylvania, April 15, 2008

For Group, God and Glory

“ Human social organization is something necessary. . . . It is absolutely necessary for man to have the cooperation of his fellow men. As long as there is no such cooperation, he cannot obtain any food or nourishment, and life cannot materialize for him. . . . Nor, lacking weapons can he defend himself. Thus he falls prey to animals and dies much before his time. Under such circumstances, the human species would vanish.”

—Ibn Khaldûn, *Muqaddimah* (An Introduction to History), 1375–1378

Sheikh Ibn Taymiah—may Allah have mercy on him—said, The interests of all Adam’s children would not be realized in the present life, nor in the next, except through assembly, cooperation, and mutual assistance. Cooperation is for achieving their interests and mutual assistance is for overcoming their adversities. That is why it has been said, ‘man is civilized by nature.’”

—Al Qaeda training manual

The Origins of Moral Virtue

In *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin expressed a simple truth:

“At all times throughout the world tribes have supplanted other tribes; and as morality is the important element of their success, the standard of morality and the number of well-endowed men will thus everywhere tend to rise and increase....

There can be no doubt that a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over other tribes.”

My aim here is not to relativize morality, or to argue that the patriot, “the rudest savage” and the jihadi are just the same, but to suggest that sacrificing life for God and group is not an exception in human history and cultural life, but a general canon by which groups form, vie for survival, and thrive.

People sacrifice self-interest to gods to make groups of common interest that can compete against others. That’s what got us out of the caves, created competitive cultures and civilizations, and conducted ever widening spheres of commerce and war across the world.

Sacred Values vs. Material Calculus

- *Much more is known about economic decision making than about morally-motivated behavior. But here are some empirical features of SVs:*
- Privileged link to emotions
- Bound to notions of personal and collective identity, of “**Who you are & whom you trust.**”
- Often have a strong inter-personal component
- Insensitive to quantity
- Immunes to material tradeoffs
- Generate actions independent of prospects for success

“Mr. Netanyahu says [to us as well as the Palestinians]: ‘Let’s concentrate on economic relations but not on who has sovereignty over the land.’ But sovereignty over land is the key to this region because it is for Arabs, including us, a question of honor and dignity, *‘Ard wal ard* (‘Land is honor’).”

“You know, here in the East, in our region, we have a different set of values than in the West, than in America and Europe. If you show me with a big stick to threaten me with, then I will break apart this (wooden arm) chair and show you a bigger stick to threaten with [note: it’s not clear who gets the bigger stick]. This is even more the case for Iran. It is also a matter of honor, of respect. We are ancient nations and we will be here long after others are gone.”

- Walid Muallem, Syrian Foreign Minister, Damascus, Dec 16, 2009 (Discussion with author)

Suicide Bombing: Mundane or Moral Logic?

- Current analyses stress the “strategic logic,” organization, and risk assessments involved.

Sheikh Hamed al-Betawi

(Spiritual guide of *Hamas*, S. Atran interview, Sept. 2004, Nablus, West Bank)

“Our people don’t own airplanes and tanks, only human bombs. Those who carry out martyrdom operations are not retarded, not hopeless, not poor, but are the best of our people. They do not flee from life. They are educated, not illiterate, successful in their lives.” (Note: demographic profiling supports these claims)

- Instrumental reasons are important but not sufficient to explain exponential growth in suicide attacks.

Abu Bakr Ba’asyir

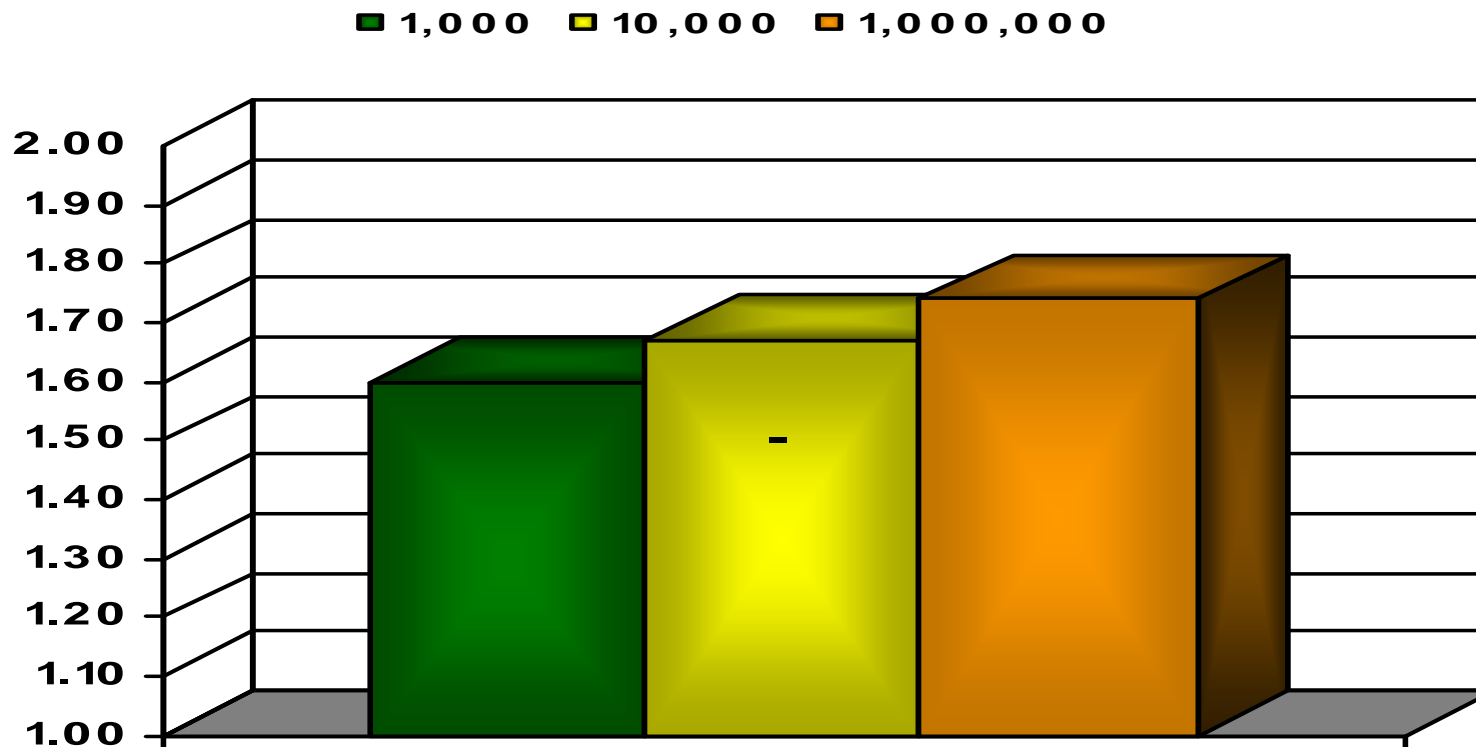
(Emir of *Jemaah Islamiyah*, S. Atran interview, Aug. 2005, Cipinang Prison, Jakarta)

“There is no nobler life than to die as a martyr for Jihad. None. The highest deed in Islam is Jihad. If we commit to Jihad, we can neglect other deeds, even fasting and prayer.” (Note: this is a radically new view of Islam that trumps all pillars of Islam except profession of faith)

**Between-subjects design (excluding subjects who reject bombings)
shows *inverse* instrumentality**

Palestinian judgments of acceptability for a family to request
compensation for a son's martyrdom operation
(Jordanian Dinars 1,000; 10,000; 1,000,000)

Y-axis: 1 = acceptable, 2 = unacceptable (monotonic trend, $p = .01$).



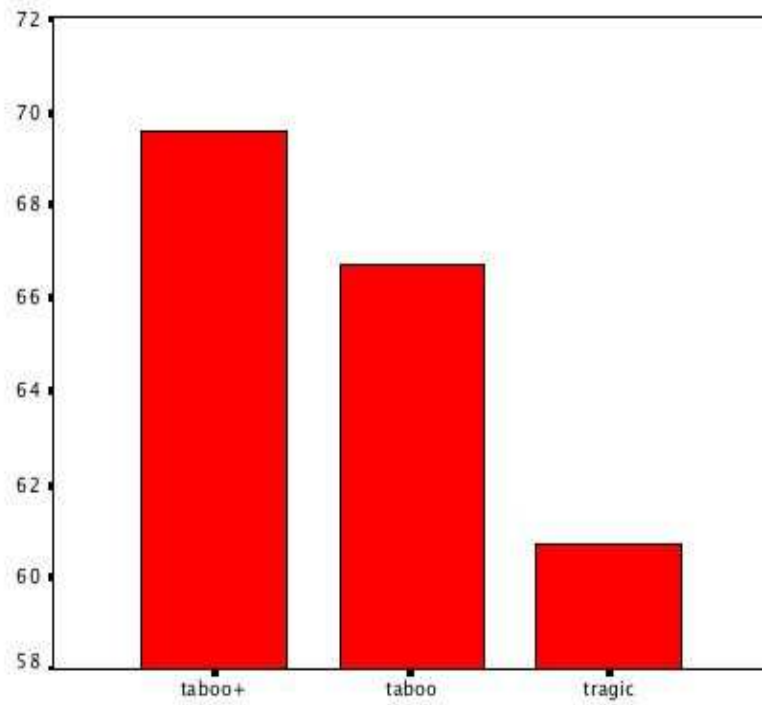
**So, how can knowledge of SVs help close the gap
in seemingly intractable conflicts?**
(Erez Crossing from Israel to Gaza)



- **Taboo** - suppose the United Nations organized a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians. Under this treaty:
 - Palestinians would be required to give up their *right to return* to their ancestral homes in Israel.
 - There would be two states – a Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.
- **Taboo+** - Additional clause:
 - In return, the USA and the European Union would give Palestine 10 billion dollars a year for 100 years.
- **Tragic** - Additional clause:
 - On their part, Israel would apologize for their role in the dispossession and dislocation of Palestinians in 1947-8.

Refugee predictions of % of population ready to use violence to oppose: a peace deal perceived to violate a collective moral value (“taboo” condition), the taboo deal plus an instrumental incentive (“taboo+”), or the taboo deal plus a collective moral concession without instrumental value from the adversary (“tragic”)

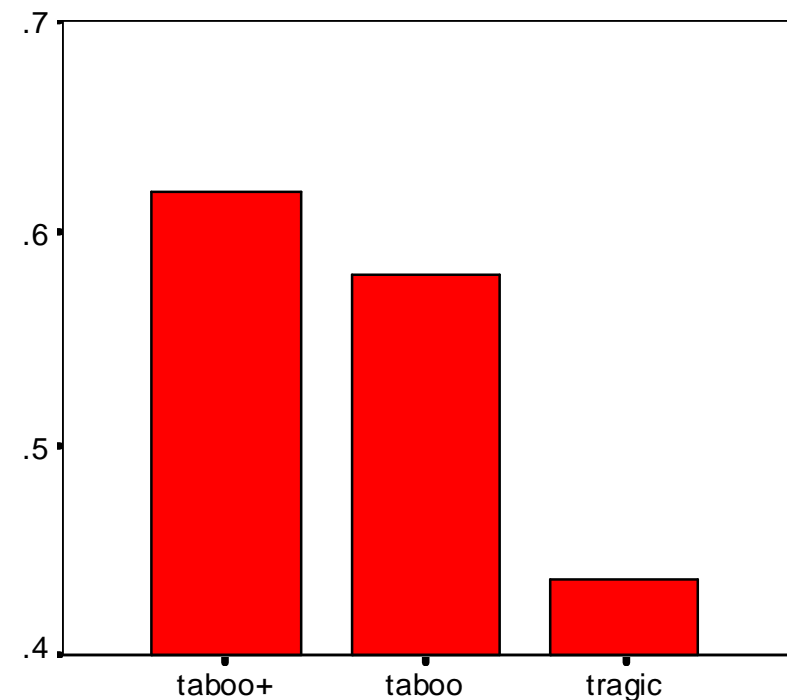
(linear trend: $F [1, 195] = 5.698, P = .018$)



Refugees reporting ‘joy’ at hearing of suicide bombing

(relative to overall mean estimate)

(linear trend, $F [1, 418] = 7.48, P = .007$)



S. Atran, R. Axelrod, R. Davis, “Sacred barriers to Conflict Resolution, *Science*, August 2007

- Responses from 14 leaders in Syria, Palestine and Israel were consistent with previous findings, with one important difference. In our original surveys people with sacred values responded
- "No," to the proposed tradeoff,
- "No" accompanied by emotional outrage and increased support for violence to the same tradeoff coupled with a substantial and credible material incentive, and
- "Yes perhaps" to tradeoffs that also involve symbolic concessions (of no material benefit) from the other side.
- Leaders responded in the same way except that the symbolic gesture wasn't enough in itself but only a necessary condition to opening serious negotiations involving material issues as well.

- We got a similar reaction from Benjamin Netanyahu, the hard-line Israeli prime minister. We asked him whether he would seriously consider accepting a two-state solution following the 1967 borders if all major Palestinian factions, including Hamas, were to recognize the right of the Jewish people to an independent state in the region.
- He answered, “O.K., but the Palestinians would have to show they sincerely mean it, change their anti-Semitic text books and then allow some border adjustments so that Ben Gurion [Airport] would be out of range of shoulder-fired missiles.”

Follow Up at NSC, White House,

- At a briefing at the White House on March 28, 2007 to the staff of the National Security Council (NSC) and terrorist experts from other agencies, Elliot Abrams, the senior adviser for Middle East affairs, responded to our description of framing with a story that Ariel Sharon told him.

“When he was Prime Minister, he (Sharon) realized too late that Israeli disengagement from Gaza would have proceeded much more smoothly had he framed the disengagement differently. He realized too late that he should have framed the reluctance of the settlers to leave Gaza as a matter of “Zionist heroes making yet another sacrifice” rather than the frame he did use which berated them in terms of “wasting Israel’s money and endangering soldier’s lives.
- Ahmed Yusef, spokesman for Hamas, told a delegation of the World Federation of Scientists in March that he passed on a letter to Obama through Sen. John Carey proposing mutual “symbolic gestures” based on our work.

Words are Like Eggs When they Hatch, they Soar

Making these sorts of wholly intangible “symbolic” concessions, like an apology or recognition of a right to exist or a simple but sincere show of respect, simply doesn’t compute on any utilitarian calculus.

Words – of an apology, recognition or respect – aren’t enough on their own, but they are the beginning; they just might make the other side willing to listen and calm the heat in their anger.

“We had the idea that Obama came with hope.... There is a difference between Obama’s words and actions....

It makes us desperate. Words now can have real effect only if followed by practical actions.”

~ Khaled Meshaal, Chairman, Hamas
Political Bureau, Damascus, December 16,
2009 (discussion with S. Atran)

In an internet experiment, our research team asked Iranians living both inside and outside of Iran to imagine these hypothetical situations:

Iran will give up its nuclear program; Israel in return will give up their nuclear program and destroy any existing nuclear weapons.

(Iran will give up its nuclear program; Israel in return will give up their nuclear program and destroy any existing nuclear weapons. In addition, the EU will pay \$40 billion to Iran.

There was a clear difference between the first hypothesis (taboo) and the second (taboo+): Iranian subjects were generally approving of added material incentives, whereas indifferent minority (11 percent) were strongly disapproving.

For at least some Iranians, acquiring a nuclear weapon had perhaps become something of a “sacred value” that cannot simply be bought off with material incentives. One significant result (unreported in our original article) was that the more strongly religious people were, the greater their anger towards material offers

It appears, then, that sacred values can emerge for issues with relatively little historical background and significance when they become bound up with conflicts over collective identity. Specifically, achieving nuclear capability seems to have the capacity for assuming sacredness among at least some Iranians.

One political analyst cautioned the U.S. administration that “You don’t bring down a quasi-holy symbol — nuclear power — by cutting off gasoline sales.” Indeed, Iranian officials claim that “we cannot have any compromise with respect to the Iranian nation’s inalienable right” to acquire a nuclear capability. In fact, our results suggest that a “carrots (or sticks) approach,” which is favored by the U.S., E.U. and U.N., may actually backfire for those who identify most closely with the Iranian regime.

Sacred Values that defy the cost-benefit logic of *realpolitik* and the marketplace

Sacred values get in the way of making the tradeoffs that inevitably must occur and should be left for last (when other “real” matters are dealt with, they may vanish altogether)

Sacred values may be associated with “posturing” and may be only “pseudo-sacred.”

Our Response:

Dealing with SVs first may be unavoidable in seemingly intractable cultural conflicts

The reality of such conflicts and behaviors such as suicide bombing cannot be “posturing”

Sacred Values: Theoretical Challenges

Much more is known about economic decision making than about morally-motivated behavior.

With respect to the latter we need to know more about the link between **SVs and action.**

For example, Amish and Evangelicals in U.S. share SVs, but only evangelicals take political action on them.

PEW surveys indicate tens of millions of Muslims share sacred values with jihadis but only a few thousands violently act on them. **WHY?**

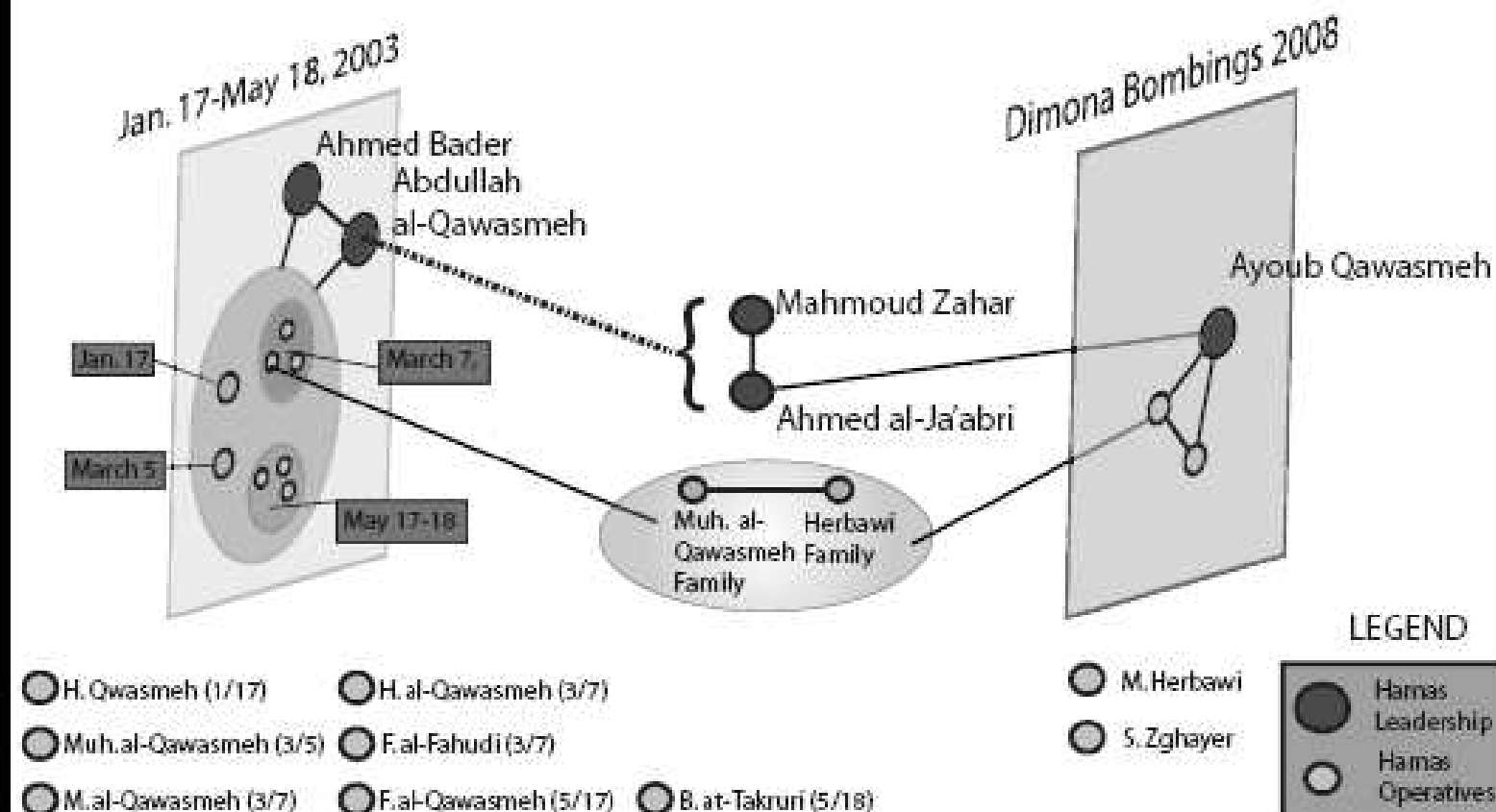
Understanding Seemingly Intractable Conflicts

The Jihad fights with **the** most primitive and elementary forms of human cooperation, tribal kinship and friendship, in the cause of the most advanced and sophisticated form of cultural cooperation ever created: the moral salvation of humanity. To understand the path to violent jihad is to understand how universal and elementary processes of human group formation have played out in history and have come to this point.

**Hamas poster of Dimona (Feb. 08) suicide bombers:
“Martyrs” Mohammed Herbawi (left) and Shadi Zgyaer (and “the
enemy,” Russian immigrant Lyubov Razdolskaya**



The Hamas al-Jihad Soccer Team Attacks: Out of Hebron, West Bank



Bonding in an action group with a Sacred Cause that can find media coverage through spectacular displays has been key to violent extremism

But now we are also witnessing the rise of the internet chat rooms as a glue that binds youth in transitional stages in their lives (students, immigrants; between homes, jobs, girlfriends; etc.), who want something more than just the sorrow of here today, gone tomorrow

On the worldwide web today “Happiness is martyrdom” and “yes, we can” vie for these searching souls. And that is a stunning development that we have not yet begun to master or steer.

Decentralized Jihad

- Under a decentralized model, small groups engage in resistance or violent activity independently without central coordination. Leadership figures provide inspiration to members and affiliated organizations - however, jihadis enlist and engage in terrorist activity without necessarily consulting leadership.
- International success at stopping large transfers of money to terrorist organizations have compelled the new wave of terrorists to seek financing where they can, and so many operations nowadays ride piggy-back on available petty criminal networks. (9/11 cost > 400,000, followed by Bali and Madrid bombings at about \$50,000 a piece; all others less).

Top-Down Networks (Hierarchies) vs. Bottom-Up Networks

- **Top-down networks** – including hierarchies as in most government, military and law enforcement organizations - are more efficient in targeted planning and execution of particular tasks.
- They are also more amenable to legal and moral control in terms of accountability and responsibility.
- **Bottom-up networks** are more efficient at rapid adaptation to ever changing conditions.
- They are more able to innovate, but also more susceptible to infiltration and disruption.
- Criminal networks (like Mafia or some drug “cartels”) overcome this limitation by establishing reliable relations of trust mostly through kinship, friendship, apprenticeship.

Terrorist Networks

- Some Terrorist Networks have the added incentive of commitment to a moral cause, which allows for greater sacrifice than is usually possible with typical reward structures based on material incentives (regular police, army).
- Devotion to a moral cause is not a network property, but in Terrorist Networks, as with revolutionary movements generally, this allows resource-deficient movements to survive, and eventually triumph, against much stronger material forces.

A New Wave of *Takfiri* Terrorism & ‘Jihadi Cool’

- After 9/11, a newer wave of *Takfiri* terrorism has emerged (for the most part *opposed* by strict Salafi schools)
- Proponents are generally less educated, economically and socially more marginal, and even younger than those of the earlier wave.
- They became sensitized - through videos, cable television, internet - to belonging to a world underclass of true Muslims, oppressed by a godless or immoral ruling class.
- They have begun trying their own hand at emulating their media heroes who had « brought down » the Soviets and « inflicted pain » on America.
- You don't influence youth culture by asking elders to spout messages about the Koran (negative messages by adults have a negative impact on youth attitudes – for example, cigarette consumption among youth increases in anti-tobacco campaigns that emphasize bad things)

The New Wave of Terrorism is about “Youth Culture,” *JIHADI COOL*, not the Koran

- You don't influence youth culture by asking community elders to spout off messages about the Koran (negative messages by adults have a negative impact on youth attitudes – for example, cigarette consumption among youth increases in anti-tobacco campaigns that emphasize bad things)
- The Koran is almost irrelevant (though it's cool if someone in the peer group or an elder brother can read Arabic and spout of about it).
- How you change youth culture is a difficult and fickle affair. But role models or small changes often have big effects on attitudes and fashions (gangsta culture, skateboarding, post-Madonna belly-button exposure, hush puppies fad).

It's not about
Hierarchical Organization,
Command and Control,
Recruitment or Brainwashing

- **It's about fairly flat, fluid and informal networks,**
- **of friends, families, neighbors, schoolmates, workmates and... soccer buddies, camp buddies, body-building buddies, pin-ball buddies, etc.**
- **who self-radicalize in groups (though sometimes triggered by encounters with people who have been to Afghanistan / Pakistan),**
- **and go looking for Qaeda (now often in cyberspace)**
- **Radicalization is mostly about a social process, a path to violence involving comrades helping one another in a cause, never just individuals or ideology alone.**

Bureaucratic Mirroring

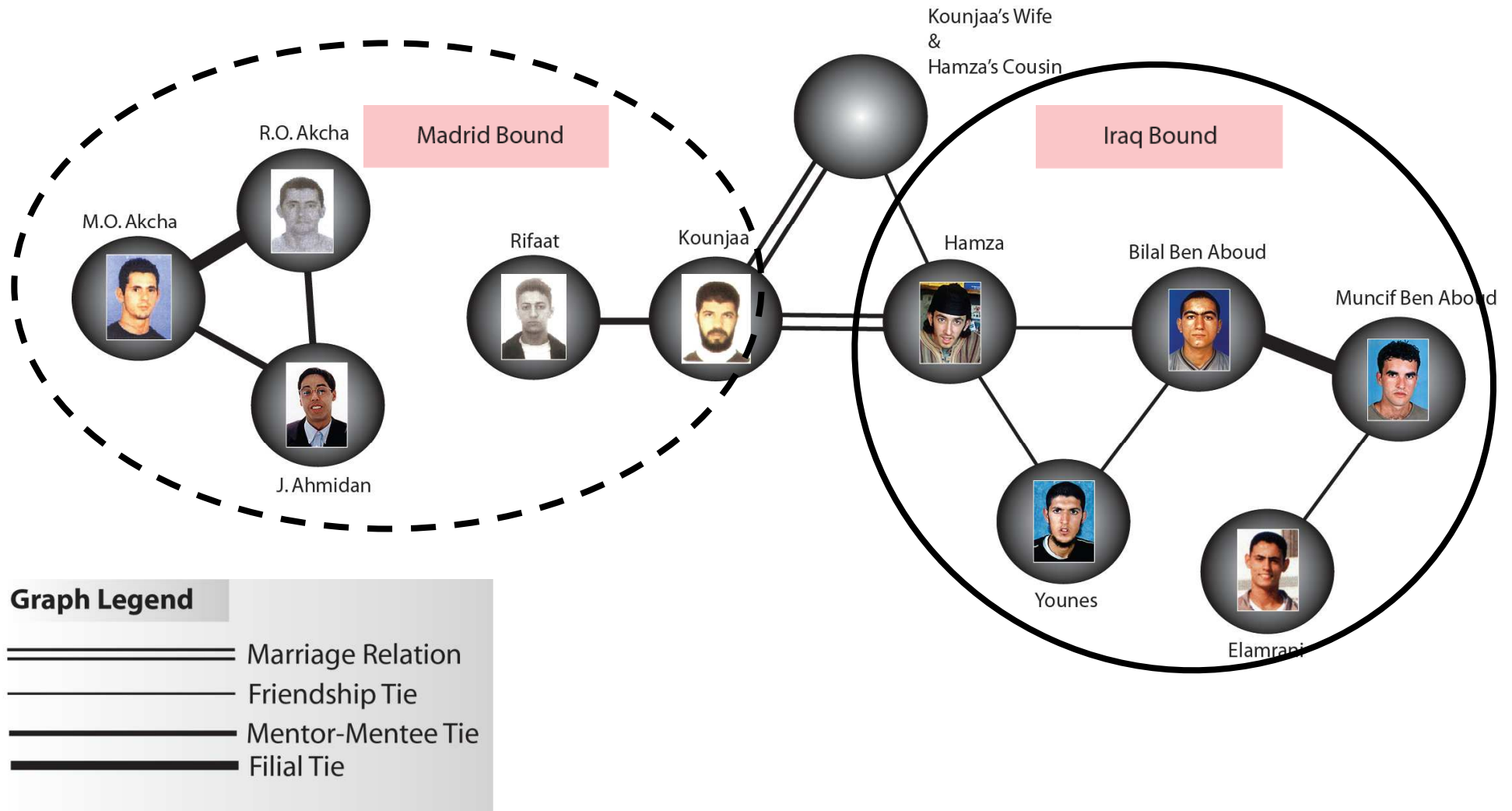
- **Notions of “cells,” “recruiters,” “hierarchy,” and “indoctrination,”**
- **thus reflect more the psychology and organization of people analyzing terrorist groups than terrorist groups themselves.**

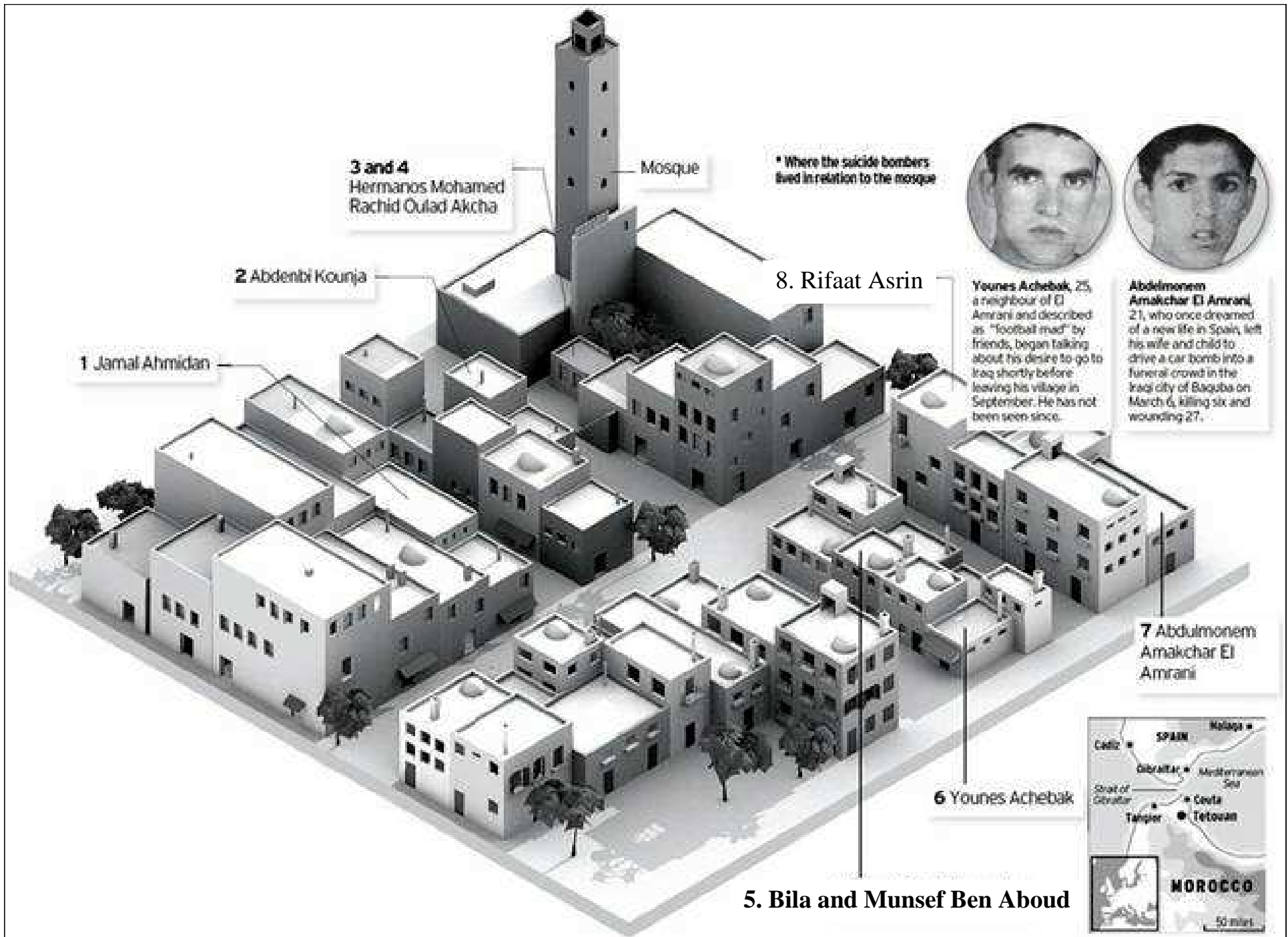
Jamma Mezuak Neighborhood of Tetuan, Morocco

- 5 of the Madrid bombers who blew themselves up when cornered by Spanish police in Leganes, in April 2004, grew up in the Jamma Mezuak neighborhood of Tetuan, Morocco, just across the border from the Spanish enclave of Ceuta; Jamal Ahmidan, brothers Moh & Rachid Oulad Akcha, Abdennabi Kounjaa, Rifaat Asrin.
- With charity money (*zaqat*), local businessmen sponsored the first group of 5 suicide bombers that made their way to Iraq in 2006: soccer buddies Abdelmonim Al-Amrani, Younes Achebak, Hamza Aklifa, and the brothers Bilal and Munsef Ben Aboud.
- Aklifa was related to Kounjaa through marriage.

The Jamaa Mezuak Connection:

After the Madrid plotters from Mezuak blew themselves up (April 3, 2004), friends in the neighborhood began contemplating their own “matyrdom actions” in Iraq (beginning in summer 2006)





All attended the Abdelkrim Khattabi Primary School, all but one attended the College Kadi Ayadi (High School)

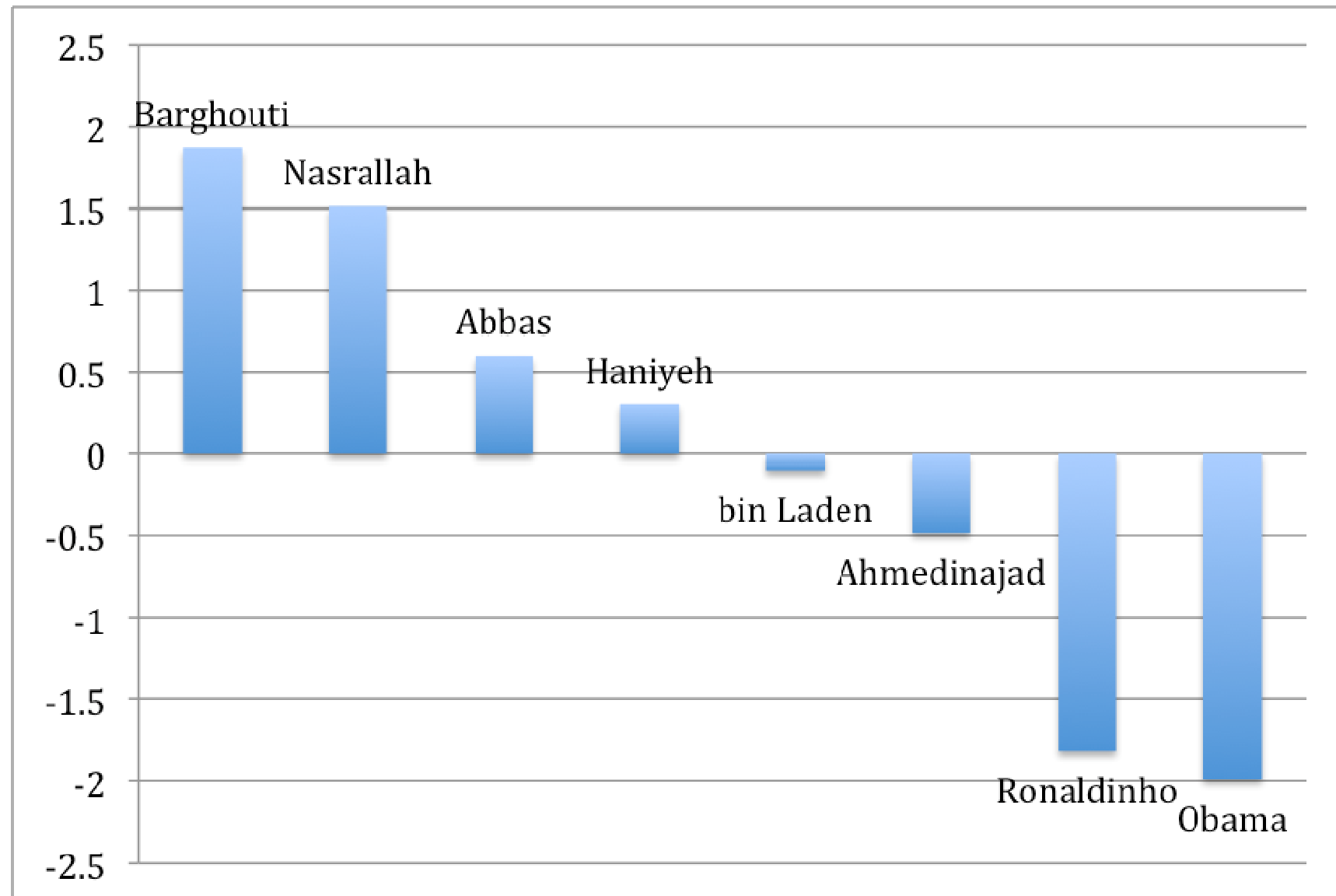


Scene below Dawa Tabligh Mosque where kids play soccer and « Jihad » (the way we used to play « war » with sticks and stones)



Who is your Hero?

1. Ronalدينho
2. The TERMINATOR (no knowledge off relation to the present Governor of California)
3. Osama Bin Laden (summer 2007)
3. Barack Obama (fall 2009)



How to Win the Next Generation

- Provide for alternate DREAMS and HEROES that youth can connect into

For Dreams and Heroes

mobilized in the

Fight for Faith and Friends,

Causes and Comraderie

**perhaps more than industry and power,
give impetus to lives and civilizations.**



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Kuwait	1 KD
K.S.A.	10 SR
U.A.E.	10 Dh
Bahrain	1 BD
Oman	1 RO
Qatar	10 QR
Jordan	JD 1.5
Lebanon	4,000 L.L.
Egypt	7 EE
Tunisia	3 TD
Morocco	20 DH
Algeria	200 DA

**FIRST
ISSUE 1**



Wrong-Headed Cost-benefit Approaches. Cold War Mentality

- Classic Military and Counterterrorism strategies. For example:
 - Quadrennial Defense Review: “Minimize” U.S. costs in lives & treasure, while imposing unsustainable costs on the enemy”
- **To a significant degree, Jihadis do not respond to a utilitarian cost-benefit analysis (Summer 2006 airport plotters knowingly chose the targets most watched; 2007 Ulm plotters in Germany knew they were being watched and flaunted this knowledge).**
- **They respond to moral values, and are more than willing to die for the cause.**
- **Each death inspires many more young Muslims to join the cause.**
- **Utilitarian perspective plays into the hands of terrorists: U.S. and allies try reduce peoples to material matter rather than moral beings.**
- Tsunami relief a good example of what works (but intermittent, not sustained). USAID programs too spotty, short-term for “Long War.”

No Clash of Resurgent Civilizations, But a Crisis of Collapsing Cultures

- *There is a massive, media-driven transnational political awakening, representing a collapse of cultures, not their a resurgence in a clash of civilizations.*
- **This new wave of violence cannot be fought mainly with bombs, traditional law enforcement or military means (although such means can help thwart attacks).**
- **It must be fought with ideas and proposals for action that appeal to this rising sense of injustice and moral outrage among increasing numbers of youth.**
- *In the long run, this is a public health issue rather than a strictly criminal or military issue.*

Reframing the Problem:
Wars are Not Won
Until Enemies Become Friends

During the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln made a speech in which he referred sympathetically to the Southern rebels.

An elderly lady, a staunch Unionist, upbraided him for speaking kindly of his enemies when he ought to be thinking of destroying them.

His response was classic: "Why, madam," Lincoln answered, "do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"

And Thanks to the Participants





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