

economic colonialism as an objectionable aspect of American influence in the region; hence the movement acted swiftly to control of the oilfields and refinery capabilities in Iraq, not only because they were economically valuable to the Islamic State regime but also because they were symbolically useful in showing that a local Muslim organization could regain control over the region's most prized economic resource. Although most corporations that trade internationally are multinational, with personnel and legal ties to more than one country, many are based in the United States or have American associations. Even those that were identifiably European or Japanese are thought to be American-like and implicitly American in attitude and style. When Ayatollah Khomeini identified the "satanic" forces that were out to destroy Islam, he included not only Jews but also the even "more satanic" westerners—especially corporate leaders with "no religious belief" who saw Islam as "the major obstacle in the path of their materialistic ambitions and the chief threat to their political power."⁶² The ayatollah went on to claim that "all the problems of Iran" were due to the treachery of "foreign colonialists."⁶³ On another occasion, the ayatollah blended political, personal, and spiritual issues in generalizing about the cosmic foe—western colonialism—and about "the black and dreadful future" that "the agents of colonialism, may God Almighty abandon them all," have in mind for Islam and the Muslim people.⁶⁴

What the ayatollah was thinking of when he prophesied a "black and dreadful future" for Islam was the global domination of American economy and culture. This fear of globalization is the fourth reason that America is often targeted as an enemy. The apprehensions of Ayatollah Khomeini were shared by many not only in the Muslim world but elsewhere, including the United States. There the right-wing militias were convinced that the "new world order" proclaimed by President George W. Bush was more than a mood of global cooperation: it was a conspiratorial plot to control the world. Accepting this paranoid vision of American leaders' global designs, *Dabiq*, the glossy online magazine sponsored by ISIS, has portrayed the worldwide presence of American military troops as proof that they are a global conspiratorial band bent on establishing planetary control.

Like most stereotypes, each of these characterizations holds a certain amount of truth. America's culture and economy have dominated societies around the world in ways that have caused concern to protectors of local societies. The vast financial and media networks of American-backed corporations and information systems have affected the whole

of the globe. There has indeed been a great conflict between secular and religious life throughout the world, and America does ordinarily support the secular side of the fight. Financial aid provided to leaders in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel has shored up the political power of politicians opposed to religious militancy. Moreover, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States has been virtually the only coherent military power in the world. Hence it has been an easy target for blame when people have felt that their lives were going askew or were being controlled by forces they could not readily see. Yet to dislike America is one thing; to regard it as a cosmic enemy is quite another.

When the United States has been branded as an enemy in a cosmic war, it has been endowed with superhuman—or perhaps subhuman—qualities, ones that have had little to do with the people who actually live in America. It is the image of the country that has been despised—a reified notion of Americanism, not its people. Individual Americans have often been warmly accepted by those who hate the collective image that they hold as cosmic enemy. This was brought home to me in Gaza when I talked with the Hamas leader, Dr. Abdul Aziz Rantisi, about his movement's attitude toward America and its pro-Israeli stance. As Dr. Rantisi offered me coffee in the comfortable living room of his home, he acknowledged that the United States was a secondary foe because of its complicity in Israel's existence and its oppression of Palestinian Arabs. From his point of view, it deserved to be treated as an enemy. What about individual Americans, I cautiously asked him, raising the example of American professors. Would such people be targeted?

"You?" Rantisi responded, somewhat surprised. "You don't count. You're our guest."⁶⁵

SATANIZATION AND THE STAGES OF EMPOWERMENT

Everyone has enemies in the sense of opponents, but to become objects of religious terrorism such enemies must become extraordinary: cosmic foes. When the ISIS magazine, *Dabiq*, described America as embodying the "forces of evil," it was not just identifying a problem to which the faithful needed to respond, but a mythic monster with which they had to battle—one that ultimately only divine power could subdue. The question is how this happened—how a view of an opponent could cross the line into a deep and enduring hatred for a satanic entity.

I call this process satanization. The process of creating satanic enemies is part of the construction of an image of cosmic war, and some of

the same criteria listed at the end of the previous chapter that make sacred warfare possible also make possible a satanic opponent. When the opponent rejects one's moral or spiritual position; when the enemy appears to hold the power to completely annihilate one's community, one's culture, and oneself; when the opponent's victory would be unthinkable; and when there seems no way to defeat the enemy in human terms—all of these conditions increase the likelihood that one will envision one's opponent as a superhuman foe, a cosmic enemy. The process of satanization is aimed at reducing the power of one's opponents and discrediting them. By belittling and humiliating them—by making them subhuman—one is asserting one's own superior moral power.

Satanization is to some extent a process of "delegitimization," as Sprinzak has described it. He has identified a three-stage series of progressive steps aimed at discrediting one's opponents, humbling them, and reducing their power.⁶⁶ The first stage involves a *crisis of confidence* over the authority of a regime or its policies. The second stage is a *conflict of legitimacy*, in which a challenge group is "ready to question the very legitimacy of the whole system."⁶⁷ The third stage is a full *crisis of legitimacy*. At this stage the challenge group extends its hostility to everyone in society associated with a regime it regards as illegitimate, and both the regime and ordinary citizens are satanized—or as Sprinzak puts it, they are "derogated into the ranks of the worst enemies or subhuman species."⁶⁸ It is this dehumanization that allows a group to "commit atrocities without a second thought."⁶⁹ It is in this stage, according to Sprinzak, that acts of terrorism can be justified.

In general, I agree with Sprinzak that the effect of satanization is to delegitimize an opponent. When ISIS volunteers called the Shi'a militia and the Iraq government troops "rats" and "vermin," their aim was to reduce the credibility of Iraq's leadership and to undermine its authority. Sometimes the process has worked. Not just name calling, but acts of terrorism over which an opponent seems to have no control can be a powerful way of undermining the opponent's legitimacy, as Prime Minister Shimon Peres discovered in the 1997 Israeli elections. Terrorism in this case was an agent of delegitimization.

But that has not always been the case. Sometimes governmental authority has been strengthened in the eyes of its supporters by the way it has responded to terrorism. British and French responses to terrorism are cases in point. In other cases, terrorism—especially religious terrorism—has not been undertaken with the intention to delegitimize, even in cases where that has been the outcome. It is a question of motive: did

the people who perpetrated terrorist acts do so for the purpose of destroying their opponents' credibility? When this question was put directly to those involved in incidents of terrorism—such as Dr. Rantisi and the operatives behind the Hamas suicide bombings and Mahmud Abouhalima and his colleagues in the World Trade Center bombing—their answers were obscure. They said that they were involved in great conflicts in which such acts were understandable and inevitable.

Based on what these activists have said, it would appear that the delegitimization of the opponent was not the primary objective in their minds. Most religious activists do not appear to think tactically. Rather than trying to deal strategically with their opponents, craft tactics, and conceive ways to discredit them, the activists see themselves as engaged in a great struggle, in which the discrediting of opponents comes naturally and perhaps even secondarily. Prior to delegitimization and satanization is the sense of being involved in a cosmic war.

As we have seen, the idea of cosmic war is compelling to religious activists because it ennobles and exalts those who consider themselves a part of it—especially those who have been desperate about their situations and defiant in resisting them. In that sense the concept is not just an effort at delegitimization but at dehumiliation: it provides escape from humiliating and impossible predicaments for those who otherwise would feel immobilized by them. They become involved in terrorism, not only to belittle their enemies, but to provide themselves with a sense of power.

In Israel, Meir Ettinger echoed the words of his grandfather Rabbi Meir Kahane in seeing the cosmic struggle as a series of humiliations. The Jews throughout history have been humbled by their opponents, whom God, in turn, has humbled. Kahane spoke of God's vengeance against the Gentiles. It began with the humiliation of the pharaoh in the exodus from Egypt over three thousand years ago and continued in the modern era with the humiliation of the Gentiles in the creation of Israel.⁷⁰ "When the Jews are at war," Kahane added, "God's name is great." Yoel Lerner echoed Kahane's words, telling me that "God always fights against His enemies." He added that activists such as himself "are the instruments of this fight."⁷¹

One can view the process of satanization and the construction of ideas of cosmic war as part of an effort at ennoblement, empowerment, and dehumiliation. It is an incremental process in which acts of terrorism appear only in the later stages of a pattern that begins with a feeling of helplessness. The stages are as follows.

STAGES OF SYMBOLIC EMPOWERMENT

1. *A world gone awry.* The process begins with real problems: the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the corruption of secular governments in Egypt and India, the U.S. military presence in the Middle East and its support for the Saudi regime, the alienation of Arab Sunni Muslims in Syria and Iraq, the dehumanization and rapid social change in the modern societies of Japan, Europe, and the United States, and the discrediting of traditional values around the world in an era of globalization. Most people are able to cope with such situations. Others rebel against them politically and culturally. A few take these situations with ultimate gravity and perceive them as symptoms of a world gone badly awry. These few are part of emerging cultures of violence.
2. *The foreclosure of ordinary options.* Most people who feel so strongly about such desperate conditions as to want to change them join in political or social campaigns that sometimes are successful, sometimes not. But they persist with the expectation that eventually changes can be made through ordinary means: electing new leaders, advocating changes in public policy, and rallying public support. The few who are part of cultures of violence, however, see no possibility of improvement through normal channels. Their sense of frustration about the world around them is experienced as the potential for personal failure and a meaningless existence.
3. *Satanization and cosmic war.* For those in cultures of violence who experience both despair and defiance over what they perceive to be hopeless situations, religion provides a solution: cosmic war. As opponents become satanized and regarded as "rats" and "vermin," or "forces of evil," the world begins to make sense. Those who felt oppressed now understand why they have been humiliated and who is behind their dismal situation. Perhaps most important, they feel the exhilaration of hope, that in a struggle with divine dimensions God will be with them and, despite all evidence to the contrary, somehow they can win.
4. *Symbolic acts of power.* The final stage is the performance of acts that display symbolically the depth of the struggle and the power that those in cultures of violence feel they possess. These performances include holding private rallies and public demonstrations, publishing newsletters and books, blanketing the internet with messages on social media, and staging events that humiliate the

cosmic foe, flaunting weapons in an effort to show military might, developing communications systems and organizations, and creating alternative governments with militia and courts and cabinet ministers and social services. In moments of dramatic intensity those within cultures of violence who want to express power symbolically may also choose an explosive act—terrorism—as an isolated incident, as a part of a protracted state of guerrilla war, or as a means of territorial control.

Satanization is thus part of a larger pattern of behavior in which people desperately try to make sense of the world and maintain some control over it. Perpetrating acts of terrorism is one of several ways to symbolically express power over oppressive forces and regain some nobility in the perpetrator's personal life. Those who have been part of cultures of violence and who have participated in acts of empowerment—even vicariously—have experienced the exuberance of the hope that the tide of history will eventually turn their way. Such performances of power have provided the anticipation that victory is at hand. Alas, the experience has often been fleeting. Sadder still, it has been purchased at an awful cost.