

God, nations and Deterrence: The Impact of Religion on Deterrence

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Preface

Deterrence theory traditionally relates to the interaction between “rational actors” who represent national entities, who aim to achieve tangible benefits (territory, spheres of influence etc.) for themselves or their communities. In doing this, they balance the value of such benefits, if achieved, against the penalty of failure or punishment, which may render the achievement of the goals a pyrrhic victory. These actors, we assume, value the survival and wellbeing of the entities they head – either because of their sense of identity with the nation or because its survival is a necessary condition for their own survival.

Ultimately, however, the reception, interpretation and response to signals of deterrence transcend purely rational calculus. They derive from mutual perceptions, laden with cultural and psychological overtones and passed through overlapping prisms of history, culture, language, ideological axioms, and modes of transmission and reception of information on the “other”. Among all these, the role of religion has been neglected. This is despite the pivotal role that religious motivation has played in most conflicts. The “religiously motivated actor” may be an organization, which sees itself as representing a religious ideal, and not bound to any one territorial entity. It may however also be a regime of a state which incorporates into its ideology mainly religious motivation and worldviews. The influence of religion on leaders may be the result of the religious beliefs of the leadership, however, it can exist as well in an ostensibly “secular” society.¹

In addition, individual leaders may maintain religious beliefs that are not necessarily held by other parts of the government, elites, or society and residual religious beliefs may have an effect on the political behavior of ostensibly “secular” leaders. This can be seen in the continued influence of the Puritan ethic in New England culture even after the old establishment had lost it hold. Hence, the role of religion in deterrence is not restricted to theocracies and declared religious regimes. It has a bearing on the dynamics of public opinion and decision making in secular regimes which either foster a religious motivation for their own needs (Sadam Hussein) or are susceptible to pressures from religious constituencies which are critical for regime survival. Therefore, a study of the role of religion in deterrence should apply to a wide spectrum of regimes and not only to those that are outwardly oriented towards religion.

Religion can affect deterrence in a multitude of ways both in its influence on the religiously motivated party and on its adversary:

- a. To reduce the religiously motivated party's susceptibility to enemy signals of deterrence by inspiring the forces with a sense of divine immunity and guaranteed victory or by embracing a wider (religious-based) identity ("Christendom", "the Islamic Ummah")².
- b. To install a sense of deterrence in the enemy by projecting an image that "people who believe in martyrdom cannot be deterred".
- c. To restrict the independence of more pragmatic commanders who may be influenced by conventional deterrent signals by constraining them to act according to the dictates of religious authorities³.
- d. To create a sense of deterrence in the religiously motivated adversary through manipulating personal religious beliefs⁴.

We tend to look at the "religiously motivated actor" today almost exclusively through the lens of Islamic terrorism. However, religious motivation was ubiquitous in human history. Hence, in this paper, we will look at the following:

- a. Ancient Israel – the example of a founding prophet (Moses); divine intervention in battle (David and Goliath), rebellion against a superior power in the Maccabean rebellion against the Greeks and finally Messianic motivation in the Bar Kochva Rebellion.
- b. Medieval Christianity – the Crusades.
- c. Medieval Islam – the sect of the Assassins.
- d. Native Americans – the Sioux Indians and the Battle of Wounded Knee. Africa – the "Lord's Army" in Uganda.
- e. Finally, the specific case of contemporary Islam.

The "Religiously Motivated Actor"

While there may be various shades and mixtures of religious or nationalist motivation, there is no "model" of a purely religiously motivated actor as there are few models of an actor who is entirely void of non-tangible "religious" considerations. By "religion", we are referring here to **a set of beliefs or worldview, concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe**, in which:

1. **A transcendental omnipotent and omniscient deity** or force - anthropomorphized (such as in the Muslim and Judeo-Christian traditions) or not (as in some East Asian traditions) plays a pivotal intervening role in human and natural affairs, through creating natural circumstances or by **suspension of natural law or cause-effect sequences** and direct intervention by itself or by its supernatural messengers.
2. This force or entity may intervene in favor of a certain group of mortals and can be induced to do so through human behavior such as **demonstration of faith, moral behavior, ritual or devotional observances** (such as prayer or sacrifice; willingness to fight and become martyred).
3. **Only the elect have the capacity to interpret the will of the deity** or to evoke its support and good will. The will of the deity may be expressed in sacred texts; the hermeneutics of these is

comprehensible only to the few initiated scholars or priests. Otherwise they may be manifested in natural events that only those initiated have the capability to interpret.

4. **Legitimate leadership is endowed by divine grace⁵. Usurping such leadership, therefore, is an infringement on divine will.** Therefore, obedience to the Leader is a religious obligation towards God.
5. **The interpretation for cause and effect of events always incorporates the divine force.** Hence certain circumstances may bring the believer to act in a manner incompatible with what would be otherwise considered as “logical”, “reasonable” or “rational” assessment of the situation.

In the light of this definition, the “religiously motivated actor” may be characterized according to the following traits:

1. His prime motivation is **unconditional acceptance of God’s will**. Hence, he may “disable” his individual discretion in deference to unfathomable divine dictates.⁶ In a “zero-sum” dichotomist struggle between “Good” and “Evil” the room for tactical maneuver is limited. Even when evident that a course of action contradicts his temporal interests, he will balance worldly consequences against the transcendental consequences of rewards (for obedience) and punishment (for disobedience) to divine will.
2. **Reality** as he perceives it may include elements of which his adversary is unaware, such as occult beliefs, portents and prophecies of victory which may eclipse signals of deterrence.
3. The **collective frame of reference** of the religiously motivated actor may be trans-national and trans-territorial. Hence, threats to a specific territorial or political entity within the trans-national religious collective will not necessarily have the same effect as threats towards a national collective which has no such extra-national identity⁷.
4. **Apocalyptic worldviews** and an anticipation of an impending “end of days” create an event horizon at which pragmatic perceptions of balance of power and Realpolitik may collapse. In such a case, threats of punishment for actions become irrelevant since the world in which such threats exist will cease to exist.
5. **Non-political interpreters or guardians of the religion** (clergy, scholars) may impose on the political leadership non-rational choices, even though it may be well aware of the risks of those actions.

A Taxonomy of Religiously Motivated Leaders

The relationship between political decision-making and religion and the role of religion in deterrence is intimately linked to the perception by the leader himself and his followers of his **direct communication with the deity**. According to such a categorization, the religiously motivated leader may be:

1. **Leaders who see themselves as in direct communication with the deity**. This is typical of religions in their nascent stage (Moses for the ancient Hebrews, Muhammad for early Islam). This was also the case in revolutionary Iran during the life of Ayatollah Khomeini.
2. **First generation followers** of a religion who remain under the influence of the founding prophet.
3. **Institutional religious leaderships** (Popes, Caliphs).

Leaders with direct communication with the deity

Examples of these may be early “prophets” or other religiously motivated figures that experience direct communication with the deity or his angels. These experiences may be so vivid as to remove all doubt regarding their authenticity as coming from God. Such “prophets” may be:

- a. Those who “walked with God” or “spoke with God face to face” such as Abraham, Moses or Muhammad (or St. Paul’s direct intercourse with Jesus). These are frequently founders of religions who succeed in convincing a large enough following that they are indeed in direct intercourse with a divinity.
- b. Leaders who do not claim to found new religions but “hear”, on a regular basis, commands and advice, which is deemed to come from some higher authority. In this category we may include Jean d’Arc and, mutatis mutandis, Hitler’s “inner voice” or “providence” (Vorsehung) guiding his military strategy and Ahmadinejad’s “*Halavat*” (sessions of solitude) with the “Hidden Imam”. The common denominator of all of these is that they integrate a personal revelation with temporal power to act on those revelations. Such individuals have great confidence in the reality of their “providence”; the “voice” they hear is a “real” one - far more palpable than the faith of a religious individual who does not communicate directly with divinity.

Naturally, it is difficult to distinguish between “real” prophets and “self-styled” prophets who project themselves as having direct inspiration regarding divine will but do not “really” experience a metaphysical vision. The tendency of secular political analysts will be to discount all claims that an individual really believes that he has discourse with a deity as political ploys for domestic leverage. However, the position of a prophet of a new religion or branch of a religion is not a bed of roses and certainly does not confer immediate political benefits. In many of these cases the “prophet” suffers initial ignominy, persecution, incarceration and even threats of death. In all these cases, the prophet’s claim to divine communication is reviled and is not acceptable in his wider community. The working assumption therefore should be that a person who is willing to suffer for his mission indeed is confident that it is worth it as he is performing the will of God⁸.

The religiously motivated actor who is a founder-prophet may not necessarily be part of an established religion and the religious nature of his worldview may not be immediately apparent. Adolf Hitler, for example, did not present his creed as a “religion” but there is no doubt that both the Nazi ideology and Hitler’s own self-image fits the definition of a founding prophet of a religion. Hitler testified about himself that when in the hospital after having been wounded in World War I he had a “vision” which drove him since. He experienced an “inner voice” (his “providence”), which directed his steps and even overruled his advisors proposals. While initially Hitler’s “providence” seemed to lead him to victory, ultimately, it brought disaster. However, up to the end, Hitler attributed Germany’s defeat to the delinquency of the German people in living up to their Fuehrer and not to the strategy that he (or his “inner voice”) had dictated.

First Generation followers of a religion

The confidence that the individual has in his acting according to divine will seems to be relative to his immediate experience with the “prophet” or founder who was perceived as having received the message. The first generation of a religion – the Hebrews who followed Moses out of Egypt and experienced what they perceived as “miracles”, the apostles of Jesus who knew him first-hand, the companions (*sahaba*) of Muhammad who were the initial recipients of the prophecies he had issued after receiving them from the angel Gabriel – all of these, we may assume, were more confident that their actions were in line with divine will than later generations and hence were more willing to risk their lives or even pursue “martyrdom” in the face of threats.

Even then, a portion of each of these groups apparently had doubts. The Hebrews leaving Egypt complained to Moses that he had brought them out of the “fleshpots” of Egypt to die in the wilderness and an absence of the prophet for only forty days sufficed for them to build an alternative golden calf, Judas was tempted by the Romans’ offers of earthly reward more than he feared divine retribution, though he had no less access to Jesus than the other apostles, and Muhammad had issues with the “hypocrites” who turned their back on him and “shirked” battle when they were needed. As the proof (personal experience) of the authenticity of the divine message becomes less immediate and intimate, one may assume that the level of confidence wanes or at least the confidence becomes more fragile.

Institutional Successors

An institutional successor of the founder of the religion may be a High Priest, Pope or Caliph. It would be presumptuous for political analysts or intelligence officers to attempt to assess the degree of faith of an individual who has been elected or appointed by the institutional religion to lead it. In contrast to the founders of the religions who “knew” that they were elected by God, a “High Priest” of the early Hebrews, a Pope or a Caliph is chosen by peers (a High Priest or Pope) or by succession (the Hebrew High Priest also in certain cases and the Islamic Caliph).

In all these cases the choice of the office holder is not openly divine, but assumes that the human choice of the successor is directed by implicit divine guidance of the select group of electors. When a Pope is elected by a conclave of cardinals, the very act of reiteration of the election process until consensus is reached implies the non-divine nature of the process⁹. Nevertheless, the Pope, once chosen is expected to believe that his discretion is protected from error in matters of religious doctrine at least, by the doctrine of papal infallibility (for a discussion of the implications of doctrines of infallibility, see below) and to no longer feel the doubts that surely accompanied him throughout his life regarding the correctness of his actions.

The Caliph in Sunni Islam is the “*khalifat rusul Allah*” – the substitute of the Messenger of God – not unlike the papal title of the successor of St. Peter. He is also the “*wali al-amr*” (he who must be obeyed) to whom total allegiance is due. However, he is not perceived (and is not expected to perceive himself) as infallible as this trait in Sunni Islam is reserved for the Prophet Muhammad, and in Shiite Islam to the dynasty of the twelve Imams descending from the Imam Ali.

In many cases there exist **separate religious and temporal leaderships**¹⁰ in which the religious leadership provides legitimacy to the temporal. This model existed in the era of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judaea in Biblical times (with successive Kings and Prophets guiding them), in the Sunni Caliphates and Sultanates after the death of the Prophet and up to the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate, and in medieval European kingdoms. While religious legitimacy was accorded by the religious establishment (anointment by prophets in ancient Israel, the *ba’ya* or pact of allegiance in Islam and the papal agreement in Christian Europe). This is the case in modern Saudi Arabia, and is becoming more the case in modern Iran. In these cases, the religious leaders are the recognized interpreters of the will of the deity either by dint of their direct communication with the deity (prophets), their status as “infallible” (Popes), their assumed wisdom (Rabbis and Muslim Ulema) or their magical capabilities (oracles, shamans). Therefore, the temporal leaders dare not ignore their directives though they can impose pressure on their representatives.¹¹ However, not always do the clerical and temporal leaderships co-exist in harmony. In some cases, we may find **separate and competitive secular and religious leaderships** (such as in modern secular states with strong religious establishments like modern Egypt) or **pluralistic clerical or scholarly establishments**, which compete among themselves and contradict each other.

In any case, the clout that the clerical establishment wields over the political leadership derives from its status as the guardians and interpreters of God’s will. The fact that the criterion for an action being right or wrong is its correspondence to a divine imperative and not “the public good” can effectively

disable classic cost-benefit calculations. The ability of the clergy to threaten the leadership and its constituency with divine retribution for disobedience in the next world may limit the authority of the political leadership, even if it prefers rational calculations which run counter to the clergy's directives. Finally, the smaller the "supermarket" of legitimate ideas and authorities, the less room for manoeuvre the political leadership will have.

A salient distinction is the attitude towards the **divinity** and **infallibility** of the religious leader. Ancient Egypt and many other ancient civilizations saw their ruler (Pharaoh) as a God, and hence, omniscient and infallible. These traits are hard to reconcile with pragmatic acceptance of superior strength and willingness to be deterred. Similarly, religions with hierarchies and supreme authorities – the most extreme case of this type is the Catholic Church and the doctrine of Papal infallibility – may be constrained in backing down from critical decisions. In modern times, however, papal infallibility is restricted to assertions of general religious dogma and not to political statements and since the Crusades, no Pope has promised Christian soldiers invincibility, physical immunity or Paradise as reward for their fighting for "Christendom". Today no other large established religions enjoys such a hierarchy; however small religious groups frequently follow leaders who are perceived as virtually infallible.

The greater the authority of the religious leadership, the more important it becomes as a target of deterrence both directly (in their capacity as decision makers) and indirectly as those who can legitimize rational ceding to deterrent signals by the political decision makers.

The common denominator between these and other models of institutional successors is a potential dissonance between what the individual's "real" confidence of his direct knowledge of God's will and that which he must project to his flock. Thus, the religious leader who is expected to express the will of God, but does not personally experience a revelation may be constrained to act in a more risk-prone (and less deterrent-susceptible) than he really feels.

Religious Motivation – Sources and Consequences

We may distinguish between a number of key elements of religious cultures which may affect deterrence.

1. The anticipation and boundaries of divine intervention (miracles) in human affairs in general, and in human conflicts in particular.
2. The role of prophecies as "antidotes" to deterrent signals of the adversary.
3. The attitude towards reward and punishment in the "afterlife" and the existence of a "this-world" like existence in it.
4. The belief in free will as opposed to predestination.
5. The diversity of the religious "toolbox" of the mainstream of the established religion.
6. Leadership and the position and influence of the clerical establishment.
7. Collectivism vs. Individualism in the religion.
8. Willingness to use means that would otherwise be unacceptable.

The Anticipation of divine intervention

Religions in which the divinity is all pervasive and involved in all human matters – large and small – may be more prone to believe in divine intervention. This is the traditional Judaeo-Christian tradition, also shared by Islam. This is particularly evident in Islam and in early Judaism and in medieval Catholic Christianity. Key elements of this belief which relate to conflict between “believers” and “infidels” include:

- a. Divine intervention by overruling of the laws and nature in order to facilitate the victory of the faithful.¹²
- b. Delegation of divine power from God to his believers in battle if they have faith.¹³
- c. Belief in a direct correlation between the level of faith and the level of protection and intervention accorded by the divinity.¹⁴
- d. Shielding or protection of the believers by God when they are attacked.
- e. Actual participation of God or angels in the battle.
- f. Promise of paradise and absence of pain in death in case a believer is killed.¹⁵
- g. Divine condemnation (to Hell) for those who flee from the enemy in battle or lose faith.

Belief in miracles (supernatural divine intervention) is inherent in all three monotheistic religions insofar as it relates to the capacity of faith to induce healing and to avert catastrophe. However, the application of this principle to divine intervention in conflict between “believers” and “infidels” has been relatively subdued in modern Judaism and Christianity. While neither of them has ever formally abandoned such belief, they have effectively disabled its practical implications; Talmudic Judaism and modern Christianity (both Protestantism and Catholicism), have relegated the belief in imminent divine intervention to a mythical past or to an apocalyptic future. While the belief in God’s power to intervene could not be totally abrogated without ceding the belief in God’s omnipotence, it lost its “operationality”¹⁶. Nevertheless, certain Christian sects and Messianic Jewish groups hold on to the belief that God rewards his faithful by divine intervention outside of the natural course of affairs.

A central issue in this regard is the identification of the necessary and sufficient conditions for divine intervention. In many cases unconditional blind dedication against all odds may be seen as the very conditions necessary to produce divine intervention. Hence, the greater the cause to be deterred, the greater the religious motivation to challenge the deterrence since such a challenge is thought to be a sign of faith which ultimately brings about divine intervention.

Religions in which divinity is less personal and imminent (Buddhism, Shintoism) are not prone to expect miracles in the Judaeo-Christian or Islamic sense. These religions also envisage a less personalized and corporal afterlife. The anticipation of divine intervention in these religious cultures is much less than in religious cultures which assume a personalized deity. In such cultures, “insulation” against deterrent signals will most probably derive from tenets relating to the individuals identification with a larger entity, thus reducing the sense of risk resulting from harm incurred by the individual.

The Role of Prophecy

Prophecy plays a central role in conveying divine promises and guarantees for victory, and hence as an “antidote” against the deterrent signals of the enemy. The Bible and Koran are replete with cases in which prophets encouraged Kings and Nations to take positions which would otherwise seem imprudent, based on the guarantees of God that he would intervene. This element is, of course, predominant in early stages of religions (or modern cults) in which the founding father of the religion (the Prophet) is alive and can credibly convey the message of God to his flock. Ancient Hebrew prophets also frequently played a counter-agitation role by calling for a more prudent course of non-

confrontation of enemies who were presented as instruments of God to punish his people, and hence, the only way to avert the danger was not confrontation but repentance and appeasement of God. Once that was achieved, God himself would turn the enemy away.¹⁷

Despite the obvious advantage of living prophets to convey the will of God to his believers and to steel their hearts against enemy threats, all three monotheistic religions preclude the appearance of prophets in the future. Thus:

- a. **Judaism** - after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans (76 AD), in which religious fervour and the belief in an anointed leader (Shimeon Bar Kochva) played a pivotal role - rules that "Prophecy has been taken away from the Prophets and given to fools and babies". The revered medieval Rabbi Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon) decreed that "the stars have no power over the people of Israel" (to counter claims of sorcerers and astrologists) and rabbinical Judaism has successfully exorcised all Messianic pretenders that arose. While Jewish Messianic ideologies exist in modern Israel, they are not based on personal revelation of the leaders but on rabbinical exegesis of religious canons.
- b. In **Christianity**, self-styled Prophets are usually perceived as outside of the mainstream of the religion. Most Christians commonly perceive suicidal cults such as the Waco group, fin de siècle Millennialism groups and their likes, as outside the mainstream.
- c. **Islam** defines itself as being the last message by God to Mankind through the "Seal of the Prophets" – Muhammad. The Baha'i sect, which was not accepted by Islam, was declared an apostasy and its followers are persecuted and even executed in Iran.

Nevertheless, interpretations of legacies of prophecies may play a role in counter-deterrence. Religious leaders scour sacred texts for esoteric utterances, which can be construed as foreseeing modern situations. This phenomenon has been particularly prominent in the last decade with the revival in both Sunni and Shiite Islam of apocalyptic tendencies.¹⁸

Prophecies regarding the imminence of the apocalypse are particularly relevant in this context. The apocalyptic or eschatological phase of the world is perceived in all three monotheistic religions as a sort of "singularity" in which the laws of nature break down, the dead rise and angels and/or the Messiah/Mahdi/Christ descend to earth to fight the forces of evil. Arguably, these prophecies are usually eschewed by the mainstream of the established religions, as they carry a risk of encouragement of internal chaos. However, a leadership that is convinced that the world is on the threshold of the apocalypse will have far less constraints and be far less deterred by conventional threats.

Reward and Punishment

The perception of reward and punishment in this and the next world is a key differentiator in the attitude of religions to deterrence. The early Hebrew religion "expected" punishment to be meted out to a King who "did evil in the eyes of God". He would be deposed and his last male progeny be killed. This threat of this-world punishment may have had a deterrent effect on those Kings who gave higher priority to their well being in this world or to the perpetuation of their dynasty, or whose faith in the next life was weak. However, the longer the King behaved with impunity and divine punishment was slow in arriving, the less potent was the deterrence.

Some religious cultures though prescribe not only punishment for disobedience, but also short-range reward for tenacity and rejection of enemy deterrence. The Christian Crusaders and Muslim mujahidin also expected reward in this world in the form of victory in battle and spoils of war. However, unlike divine punishment, which may be slow to arrive, achievement of victory in battle is tangible proof of the side that providence has taken. If God ordered the faithful into battle (albeit indirectly through his spokesmen) and his believers are defeated, faith wavers and deterrence is potentially reinstated. This may have been one of the causes of the waning of the support of the Crusades and the eventual

erosion of Papal authority in Europe. On the other hand, religions, which emphasise reward and punishment in the next world and minimize the anticipation of divine intervention in temporal events, suffer less from the absence of divine intervention. Religions, which embrace belief in reincarnation, may potentially confer favourable reincarnation on those who are killed in battle. One may postulate that such “impersonal” reward may be less potent than the personal and sensual reward offered in other religions.

“Free will” vs. Predestination and Submission to Authority

Religious doctrine regarding the question of “free will” is also salient to the question of deterrence. Religious traditions which impute to human beings a capacity for free will provide him or her with the religious legitimacy for personal choice, and hence with greater leeway to be deterred by a cost-benefit calculus. Conversely, religions which incorporate a rigid belief in predestination or which emphasise the role of blind obedience may tend to be more willing to confront risks as facts dictated by God and therefore, not to be avoided by human choice and they do not endeavour to comprehend the situation that God has dictated to them.

Even the most religiously motivated actor belonging to a religious culture which subscribes to individual interpretation and individual relationship with God will have the religious sanction to analyse the situation on his own and to make an independent decision, whereas his counterpart who belongs to a religion in which the relationship with God is based on a collective affiliation and which eschews individual decision will find it more difficult to make an independent decision.

Religious diversity

A religion with a broad and diversified religious “tool box” may provide the believer with legitimization to be deterred when rational considerations dictate such behaviour, whereas in a religious culture which eschews such diversity, the susceptibility may be lower¹⁹. Diversity of religious streams within the mainstream religion allows the believer to choose a religious justification for his strategic choices while remaining within the borders of religious legitimacy. Such diversity exists within the boundaries of Sunni Islam through the legitimacy of five “schools of jurisprudence” and the legitimacy of a scholar to use conclusions deriving from any of them. Shiite Islam (excluding the Khomeinist doctrine in control in Iran) is far more pluralist, insofar as it allows for a great number of “models of emulation” (*marja’ taqlid*) that a Shiite Muslim may legitimately follow. Judaism allows the believer to take advice from any learned Rabbi or to search for the answer on his own. The different sects of Protestant Christianity do not deny the legitimacy of other sects. Probably, among the three western monotheistic religions, it is only the Catholic Church, which maintains total centralism of religious authority to this day.

Justification of Means

Religious motivation – and particularly direct divine orders - has frequently manifested itself in a willingness to use measures against the enemy that would otherwise be perceived as unacceptable – either due to general social and cultural taboos or due to expectation that similar measures would be implemented in retaliation. One early case of this is the case of Amalek²⁰

In more modern times, the excesses of the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution are examples of willingness to cross lines out of out of something akin to religious fervour. Ironically, having substituted the human ratio for God, the potential for excesses in the name of the new divinity was not diminished. A similar lesson can be drawn from the Mormon involvement in the Mountain Meadows massacre (September 11, 1857) instigated by the leader of the Mormons, Brigham Young as divine revenge against the immigrants from Arkansas, who allegedly killed Mormon prophets. One may propose that without the religious sanction of mass murder of 120 unarmed men, women and

children, it would have been difficult to lead such a group to such excesses. To the extent that a key inhibition of human beings and leaders against extreme excesses in conflict derives from the fear of instigating a cycle of retaliation in the same coin, the religious motivation may block this inhibition.

The enormity of damage that nuclear weapons can cause has evoked an almost religious “taboo” against their use and the knowledge that a nuclear victory is a Pyrrhic one.²¹ This logic however may run into obstacles in a religious calculus if the possession of nuclear weapons or their use is perceived as a religious duty. In such a case, the very duty to possess all the weapons that the enemy possesses may override such pragmatic consideration.

The other side of the coin is epitomized in the campaign of the Church of England against a British policy of nuclear deterrence. The Church of England published a report in 1982 entitled “The Church and the Bomb”. A significant portion of the report was dedicated to the religious legitimacy of nuclear deterrence. The report and the ensuing General Synod did not debate the question whether or not the use of nuclear weapons was to be considered immoral – this was a forgone conclusion. The real issue was the **morality of nuclear deterrence**; does the prevention of the ultimate immorality of **the actual use of nuclear weapons** justify the lesser immorality of the **threat of using them** in order to deter their use. The report determined that **first use** of nuclear weapons was, by definition, morally unacceptable, and that a **strategy of deterrence based on the possession of nuclear weapons** is totally immoral. However, the report avoided the question whether, if nuclear conflict and mass destruction of human lives were to be the probable alternative to a strategy of deterrence based on the possession of nuclear weapons, the latter may not be the lesser evil.²²

Religions that rely on jurisprudence and analogy (Islam and Judaism) to determine the legality of a given measure or weapon may justify extreme measures (or extreme weapons such as weapons of mass destruction) without regard to potential fallout of those measures. In these cases the enormity of these means is downgraded by analogizing them to measures, which existed in an era in which total destruction was a limited option. In the case of contemporary Islam, this aspect is particularly relevant, since orthodox Islam (and *a fortiori* radical Salafi Islam) finds it unacceptable to view a human invention as utterly unrelated to something that existed in the times of the Prophet as that would put it into the category of “*bid’a*” (a prohibited innovation). Hence the tendency in Islamist thinking is to “analogize” modern weapons to some weapon type, which existed in the time of the Prophet, and then to judge whether the use of that weapon was legitimate, and by analogy whether the use of those contemporary weapons would be.

Case Studies

Ancient Israel

Biblical and post biblical Israeli history is replete with examples of the influence of religious fervour and motivation on strategic calculations. One may cite the foundation myth of Israeli history – the exodus from Egypt – as a archetypal example of a leader, relying on direct communication with God, leads his people, undeterred, into a strategically untenable situation and to what may rationally be seen as certain annihilation at the shores of the Red Sea.

Further examples can be found in the Biblical narrative of the conquest of the land of Canaan. The Bible criticizes the lack of faith of the spies that Moses sends to Canaan who, deterred by the strength of the enemy, advises against the invasion. The Biblical punishment for such faithless susceptibility to deterrence is banishment back to the wilderness for forty years. Conversely, the Bible commends the bravery of David (the future King of Israel), who asks upon hearing about Goliath: “Who is this

uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of God?" and then reiterates the belief that God is fighting for him by telling Goliath: "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied ... it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands." ²³

The historic veracity of these and other Biblical narratives is not the question here. The religious moral from these and other stories in the Bible is clear: the true believer should not be deterred by a stronger enemy, as God will give him victory and hence in such situations, deterrence is not a viable option. This principle remained part of the Judean narrative throughout the era of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judaea and ultimately brought about the destruction and exile of both. The Bible is replete with "lessons" of leaders who lost faith and were defeated in contrast to those who challenged superior powers, relied on divine intervention and were rewarded. The Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Hellenic Empire only served to enhance the unacceptability of compromise with a superior power. Jews evoked this historic narrative as late as the 20th century in resistance to the Nazis in World War II and in the Israeli War of Independence (1948). In these cases, however, the reference did not represent a preference of action against superior force over compromise, as in both cases, it was clear that the choice was between the former and utter annihilation.

The Jewish attitude towards divine intervention however took a turn towards the end of the 2nd century. The rebellion led by Shimeon Bar Kochva and Rabbi Akiva against the Roman Empire (132-136 AD) may be seen as the epitome of a religiously motivated leader whose disregard for superior deterrent force led the nation to near total annihilation. Bar Kochva saw himself as a Messiah, anointed to bring salvation to Israel. This status was reinforced by Rabbi Akiva who saw Bar Kochva (lit: "The Son of the Star") as the fulfilment of a messianic prophecy²⁴ and harbinger of the eschatological era in which the Romans would be evicted and the Temple rebuilt. The catastrophic end of the revolt (a reported 580,000 killed and the utter devastation of the country) caused a shift in Jewish attitudes against Messianism and apocalyptic beliefs.

Medieval Christianity - the Crusades

The crusades are a salient example of religiously motivated conflict. The "Sermon to the Knights" admonishes the fighters: "...do not fear to die in Gods battle. Surely, if you are killed in it, you will be holy martyrs. And learn truly that no man will die until the term foreknown by God. Among all swords no man can be slain, if it is not his own end. For it is written: Thou hast set up limits, which cannot be crossed [Job 14. 5]. And so, go safe into the Lord Gods battle; and when you enter into Gods battle, all cry out with a great voice, Christ conquers, Christ rules, Christ reigns. And at that moment the Devil, the leader of the heathens, will flee upon hearing such a terrifying shout from the Christians, and then those heathens will flee after their leader the Devil."²⁵

Notwithstanding, analysis of the actual battles of the Crusades does not provide many instances of irrational strategic decisions, based clearly on religious fervour. The Crusaders and their Muslim adversaries concluded truces and refrained from confrontations when necessary. Even the politics surrounding the siege of Jerusalem and the final capitulation of Balian of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem to Saladin reflected primarily strategic considerations and not religious fervour.

Apocalyptic expectations around the years 1000 and 1033 (the millennium of the birth and Passion of Jesus, respectively) that continued into 11th century and beyond also played a role. In certain late 11th-century portrayals of the end of all things, the "last emperor," now popularly identified with the "King of the Franks," the final successor of Charlemagne was to lead the faithful to Jerusalem to await the Second Coming of Christ. Jerusalem, as the earthly symbol of the heavenly city, figured prominently in Western consciousness, and, as the number of pilgrimages to Jerusalem increased in

the 11th century, it became clear that any interruption of access to the city would have serious repercussions.

Medieval Islam - the "Assassins" Sect

The "Assassins"²⁶ were an 11th century Nizari sect of Shiite Islam (followers of the Fatimid Caliph Nizar who was deposed and killed by his brother) led by Sheikh Hasan ibn Sab'a, who was considered the "da'i" or "preacher" of the sect. The Nizaris formed a number of fortified strongholds associated in a "Federation of the Assassins". The Nizaris developed a strategy of asymmetric warfare based on contingents of "fidayin" ("sacrificers of their lives") who retaliated against acts against Nizari supporters. Their key tactic was assassination of key figures by use of short daggers with the aim of proving their lack of fear and willingness to die in the course of the attack. Marco Polo, who visited the capital of the Assassins a century after their downfall claimed that assassins went through a rite in which they were drugged to simulate "dying," and later awakened in a garden flowing with wine and served a sumptuous feast by beautiful virgins. The candidate was then "sent" back to earth to perform the assassination, knowing that upon being killed he would be rewarded by the experience he had already gone through.

The popular legend that the "Assassins" performed their acts of violence under the influence of Hashish is unsubstantiated. Hasan al-Sab'a opposed the use of drugs and the legends of the use of drugs to induce courage can be dated only to about a century after the fall of the Federation of the Assassins. It seems more likely that the fierce audacity of the assassins derived from a firm religious belief in a reward in the afterlife for their devotion.

Native Americans - The Sioux Indians

The case of the Lakota Sioux Indians' cult of "ghost shirts" and the "ghost dance" (1890) which were believed to provide protection against the bullets of the American army is a classic case of divine protection by magic which counteracts natural senses of deterrence at the personal level. The Sioux Shaman Wovoka prophesied an end to the world in which an earthquake would bring a wave of new soil would cover the earth, bury the whites, and restore the prairie to its status before the arrival of the whites. To hasten the event, the Indians were to dance the Ghost Dance; wearing shirts emblazoned with images of animals, which were believed, would protect them from bullets. The cult spread among the Lakota villages and was seen as a threat by the government officials in charge of the reservation. Interestingly, Wovoka himself preached a doctrine of pacifism, rejecting conflict with the whites or with other Indian tribes on the grounds that the prophecy itself would bring salvation to the Sioux Indians.

The massacre of Wounded Knee may have been precipitated by the encouragement of a Lakota Shaman that the "ghost shirts" would make their wearers impervious to bullets and the fear of the government forces that the "ghost dance" was a prelude to attack. However, the events at Wounded Knee were more in line with an escalation, which neither side desired. It may be assumed that some of the Sioux warriors were encouraged by the belief that the shirts would protect them. However, this did not amount to a sense of impunity in the face of strategic deterrence.

Africa - the Ugandan "Lord's Army"

A similar recorded case is that of the Ugandan "Lord's Resistance Army". The LRA was founded in 1986 as a syncretic Christian-pagan resistance movement against the Museveni regime by Alice Lakwena who claimed to be the recipient of messages from the Holy Spirit of God. The goal of the movement was to establish a theocratic regime based on the Bible and the Ten Commandments. She promulgated a belief that the followers of the LRA would become impervious to bullets and virtually indestructible if

they by covering their bodies with shea nut oil, refraining from taking cover in battle and abstaining from killing snakes or bees. This form of protection was later simplified into the drawing of crosses with oil on the bodies of the combatants by the spin-off of the original movement lead by Joseph Kony (the “Spokesman” of the “Holy spirit”). The movement was particularly adept in recruiting small children (as young as five years old); drawing crosses on their chests and sending them into battle.

Islam and Deterrence

A central question is: to what extent radical Islamic movements and regimes are susceptible to deterrence. Despite ecumenical efforts to equate the three monotheistic religions, the essence of Islam as a nomocratic (rule of law without reference to goals) regime, based on unfathomable divine law, the emphasis on legalistic authority and the absence of individual moral choice (the knowledge of good and evil) all have an effect on the role of Islam in deterrence which may set it aside from other religions.

The religious factor is predominant in Islamist strategic writings. Islamist movements and regimes have in common the unambiguous narrative that all issues – religious, political or military – must be directly derived from the sources of the Koran, Hadith and *Shari’a* rulings. The underlying assumption of all Islamist movements is that there is nothing in modern situations that cannot be judged by analogy to the rulings and behaviour of the Prophet.

This factor is compounded by a growing attraction of Islamists to apocalyptic beliefs. The “glorious raids” of 11 September and the American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq were subsequently viewed as “signs” that have been foreseen of the imminent apocalypse (*ashrat al-sa’a*). In this context, the Jihadi movement identifies itself with the elected community that merits the grace of God (*al-ta’ifa al-mansura*). This community is designated by God to achieve military victory over its enemies and fill the central role of fulfilling the ideal of Islam on earth. Statements and actions by the incumbent President of Iran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad seem to indicate that at least he and his close affiliates are motivated by a Mahdivist vision of the world being on the threshold of the End of Days, with their role being to expedite the re-appearance of the Hidden Imam. The implication of these motivations that may be inferred is that people with such a faith may not be deterred from actions that may even precipitate a nuclear war.

Another key feature of Islamist religious-military thinking is the glorification of martyrdom (*shahada*), not as a necessary evil but as “a consummation devoutly to be wished”. This belief is a key element in the development of Islamist attitudes to deterrence as the classic military obligation of a commander to restrict his own casualties is not paramount. Shiite ideological texts also stress the essence of Jihad as a “doctrine and a program of action”, through which a Muslim may “sacrifice his life for the sake of Allah and attain paradise”. “Martyrdom for Allah’s sake” is the greatest reward that is accorded to a *mujahid*. The role models of Hizballah are the Imams ‘Ali and Hussein, who went into battle knowing they were heavily outnumbered and that they were going to become martyred.

The leadership paradigm of the Islamic-motivated leader determines to a great extent the influence of religious tenets on his decision-making and his susceptibility to deterrence. At first glance, the primary existing sources, modes and structures of authority in the Muslim world include: **Prophetic authority**, based on the model of the Prophet Muhammad, the Shiite *Imamiya* doctrine, or of Sunni Mahdism; **Scholarly authority**, such as the Khomeinist doctrine of *velayat-i-faqih*, or paradigms based on oversight of Parliament by an ‘Ulama council; **Authority of an appointed ruler (Caliph or Amir)**, based on traditions of appointment of a leader (the Caliph) by the “group that unbinds and binds” (*ahl al-hal wa al-’aqd*); **Military authority**, based on the declaration of a state of jihad and the delegation of

authority to the military commander (*amir*) of the *mujahidin*; ‘**Leaderless jihad**’ as espoused by the jihadist theorist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, and analyzed from an outside perspective by Marc Sageman in his book *Leaderless Jihad*; and ‘**franchised leadership**’ as expressed in Abu Baker Naji’s treatise, “The ‘management of savagery”, which proposes a movement based on decentralized networks in the service of a unifying vision articulated by strong leaders.

The key elements in these paradigms which impact on deterrence are: the autonomy of the leader in making decisions; his susceptibility (or immunity) to pressure; the level of total obedience he can command; and his image as infallible. These elements manifest themselves in different ways in the different leadership paradigms. For example:

The individual autocratic paradigms mentioned above are more autonomous in decision-making. The divine aura imputed to their decisions allows them to reverse previous decisions with legitimacy. There are reasons to believe that such leaders may be more susceptible to deterrent signals and pressures once they have received and integrated the messages as they enjoy wide freedom in justifying bowing to those pressures and can rely on acceptance of their Islamic justification of their acts. The most “independent” type of leader in this context is – paradoxically – the “Prophet”. The leader who sees himself (and whose followers see him) as inspired directly by God almost enjoys the legitimacy, infallibility and autonomy of God himself.

“Consultation” models, on the other hand are less autonomous in their decision-making. The final output of the decision is frequently either an impractical lowest common denominator or a reflection of the tendency in these movements for “one-upmanship” between representatives of different levels of radicalism in the leadership. In the latter case, each member takes more radical positions in order to prove himself more true to the cause while others – who may be initially more amenable to compromise - not able to allow themselves to fall behind. When the decisions do tend to factor in a deterrent signal and compromise, the multi-polar nature of these leaderships allows for more challenge from the radical branches of the leadership and even from non-institutional religious authorities outside the leadership. Hence these types are more susceptible to internal pressures and less capable of imposing compromises, which may seem a reversal of policy (or even worse – of divine will).

Eight prominent characteristic of the Islamic *Weltanschäung* impact on the effectiveness of classic deterrence towards those who maintain such a view:

1. The nature of *jihad* as an “individual duty.
2. The approval of acting against superior odds and of martyrdom.
3. The duty to “strike terror in the hearts of the enemy”.
4. Total obedience to Allah and the Leader.
5. Judgement of decision on their intention and not their consequences.
6. Apocalyptic expectations.
7. The “global” nature of the Islamic identification.
8. The role and weight of “public interest” in Sunni and Shiite jurisprudence.

Jihad as an “individual duty”

Islam prohibits suspension of duties, which have been prescribed by God. The duties such as the declaration of faith (*shahada*) prayer, fasting during the Ramadan, pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca and charity (*zakat*) are defined as “individual duties” (*fard ‘Eyn*) incumbent on every Muslim as opposed to “collective duties” such as military service in an offensive jihad (for spreading Islam) which the ruler

(*wali al-amr*) decides who will perform them and the entire community is considered as having fulfilled them. Sins of omission of individual duties are as grave as sins of commission (eating pork).

In this context, Islamic jurisprudence defines the “defensive jihad” (*jihad al-dafa*) as an individual duty. It is, therefore, incumbent on all Muslims to defend Muslim lands when the infidels prepare to attack or attack and occupy them, or when Muslims come into proximity of “infidels” on the battlefield. As such, it is no less a religious imperative than the other five “pillars” of Islam. It becomes a de facto (and in the eyes of some a de jure) “sixth pillar”; a Muslim who does not perform it will not inherit Paradise.

The penalty for not engaging in Jihad is forfeit of Paradise. By determining such grave consequences for “shirking Jihad” (*taqa’ed ‘an al-jihad*), Islam poses a formidable counter-balance to deterrent messaging of the adversary. This principle is applied not only to the individual but to the leader. Islamic thought places a heavier burden on the leader to obey the commands of God.

Commendation of acting against superior odds

Falstaff is quoted by Shakespeare (Henry IV, Part One) as declaring that “The better part of valour is discretion; in the which better part I have saved my life.” Islamic traditions of Jihad, on the other hand, view the willingness to challenge superior force as a commendable act. This is grounded in “experience” of the early Muslim armies during the era of the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur’an recalls the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq (the Trench), Tabuk and Hudaibiya as examples in which the Muslim armies took on highly superior forces and prevailed by virtue of divine intervention due to the very fact that they were willing to “place their souls in the hands of Allah”²⁷

The Qur’an itself is ambivalent on the issue of retreat in the face of superior enemy force; at first it forbids retreat entirely, except for tactical retreat, and then later sets the balance, which a Muslim may expect, Allah to give victory to his believers at ten to one (superiority of the enemy).²⁸ The reasoning is that the act of jihad is, by definition, an act of faith in Allah; by fighting an weaker or equal enemy, the Muslim is relying on his own strength and not on Allah, whereas, by entering the fray against all odds, the “*mujahed*” is proving his utter faith in Allah and will be rewarded accordingly. Radical Islamic tracts are replete with narratives of companions of the Prophet (whose behaviour should be emulated) who “plunged” themselves into entire armies, knowing that they are totally outnumbered, but proving in such acts their complete “submission” to God and reliance upon Him and Him alone. This model of behaviour is related to a collateral “reward” that God is assumed to bestow upon the *mujahid* who acts undeterred, both by according him victory in this world, and Paradise in the next.

In Shiite Islam, the commemoration of suffering and martyrdom – first of the Imam ‘Ali (the fourth Caliph) and then of his son Hussein, the “Prince of Martyrs” is a pivotal element and a guiding light for Shiites in general and for the Iranian regime in particular. The emulation of martyrdom is even portrayed on the flag of the Islamic republic of Iran: the central emblem is a tulip, the traditional symbol of the flower that grows on the grave of a young person who gives up his life for the defense of the homeland or of the faith.²⁹

Whether or not the leaders of the radical movements personally subscribe to this belief is of course a question. If the leader truly believes that by challenging superior force, he will provoke divine intervention, he will surely be less susceptible to deterrent. However, even in case the leader himself does not expect divine intervention, the very indoctrination of the military leaders and the rank and file, may make it difficult to make decisions which drastically contradict such an expectation. The principle that increases the motivation to fight when the odds are against the Muslim side makes discretion (i.e. the legitimacy of being deterred) into a break of faith and not “the better part of valour”. The benefits of a pragmatic decision to refrain from combat then are counterbalanced by the erosion of the leader’s religious standing since, by the very fact that he was deterred; he reveals his lack of faith.

The duty to “strike fear in the hearts of the enemy”

A Leitmotif of contemporary radical Islamic strategic writing is the reference to the Qur’anic injunction to “strike fear in the hearts of the enemy”. This duty begins at the “preparation” stage of Jihad and extends into the military campaign itself. One authoritative exegesis of this injunction stipulates that

“Terror struck into the hearts of the enemies is not only a means; it is the end in itself... Terror is not a means of imposing decision on the enemy, it is the decision we wish to impose upon him... an army that practices the Qur’anic philosophy of war in its totality is immune to psychological pressures... an invincible faith is immune to terror. The faith conferred upon us by the Holy Qur’an has the inherent strength to ward off terror and to enable us to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. This rule is fully applicable to nuclear as well as conventional wars. It is equally true of the strategy of nuclear deterrence in fashion today. To be credible and effective, the strategy of deterrence must be capable of striking terror into the hearts of the enemy”.³⁰

This view serves to delegitimize a balance of deterrence between adversaries.

Total Obedience to Allah and the Leader

The Qur’an command the Muslim to “Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and he who is in authority among you”.³¹ This duty of obedience restricts individual discretion and the capacity of the lower echelon of a hierarchy to be deterred by threats. This duty has been formalized in the custom of the “bay’a” or oath of allegiance to the leader³² and in the sanctity of “loyalty” (*wilaya*) to the leader as expressed in the verse mentioned above. Obedience to a leader to whom the bay’a has been given is tantamount to obedience to the Prophet, and by extension – obedience to Allah.³³ Therefore, breaking such an oath incurs the same punishment as breaking divine commandments.

The *bay’a* actually appears in the Qur’an as a counter-measure to the deterrence of a superior enemy. This is particularly exemplified in the battle of Hudaibiya (628 AD) in which the Muslims give their bay’a to the Prophet not to flee in battle and are promised Paradise in return. In the Hadith and in later Sunni traditions, the bay’a became more and more an expression of total obedience to the ruler, exclusive loyalty and willingness to forego one’s individual discretion and to accept the leader’s orders without question.

Judgement of decision on intentions

A leader in western culture is judged by his followers according to the consequences of his actions, no matter what his intentions. On the political level, there is no doubt that even a devout Islamist leader will weight the consequences of his actions in relation to his political future. In this respect, classic deterrence considerations are in force.

However, on the religious level, Islam is exceptionally tolerant of honest mistakes in understanding the will of Allah. Islamic religious motivation extols the very “effort” to perform an act dictated by Allah without making the continuation of the effort contingent on its success. Allah rewards the Muslims for their persistence despite the hardships and failures. The reward in this world is by sending angels to fight alongside them. However, if they are martyred in battle, the reward is a very sensual paradise.

A leader or scholar who errs “with good intention” therefore enjoys his reward for having made an effort to comprehend the will of God. Likewise, God will be lenient with a Muslim who has followed such a ruling in good faith since God “knows his intention”. This attitude leaves both spiritual leader and follower without blame even in case of a decision, which was patently incorrect and resulted in catastrophe.

It may be argued that this tolerance for mistakes in judgment and placing of a higher premium on intentions has also affected the non-Islamist leadership styles in the Muslim world. Leaders who lead their nations to catastrophic wars (Nasser in 1956 and 1967, Saddam Hussein in 1990, Arafat in 1982 and the second Intifada in 2001) were not deposed by either their surrounding elites or by the masses. Naturally, in some cases (particularly that of Saddam Hussein), this should be linked to the repressive nature of the regime and the knowledge of potential opposition forces that they cannot expect external intervention. Another aspect is the fact that the leader is so identified with the country that the goal of the enemy is perceived as to topple the leader; if that was not achieved, that leader actually was triumphant.

The “honor” ascribed to physical defeat while striving against the enemy is particularly evident in Shiite Islam. Shiite Islam – even more than its Sunni counterpart – is oriented towards adulation of martyrs who strove “for the sake of Allah” and did not achieve victory. The epitome of this model of a leader is non other than the founder of Shiite Islam – the Imam ‘Ali bin Abi Muttalib and his son Hussein. The martyrdom of ‘Ali and particularly of his sons Hussein and Hassan is perceived as a moral victory for them which will be rewarded ultimately by Allah.³⁴

Apocalyptic Tendencies

Radical Islamic doctrines have a tendency towards the “Messianic”, the eschatological and apocalyptic, which restricts the responsiveness of its believers to considerations of pragmatic politics on the strategic level. Jihadi preaching contains many apocalyptical allusions and citations of signs related by the Prophet regarding the coming of the Last Day (*al-Yawm al-Akhir*” or “*Yawm al-Qiyama*”), linking them to contemporary events. The West, the United States, and Israel are all likened to the ancient tribes of ‘Ad and Thamud (the Islamic “Sodom and Gomorrah), which according to the Qur’an rejected the message of Mohammad and were therefore annihilated, or to the generation of Noah, which Allah decreed to be drowned. According to this view, the clash between Islam and the West is imminent, inevitable and existential, and can end only in the victory of Islam and the decline of the “infidel” civilization. The September 11 attacks encouraged such similes; the U.S. was likened to ancient Egypt, to which Allah sent a series of plagues, finally drowning Pharaoh’s troops in the sea. If the “end is nigh” no mortal threat can be effective.

Once the current situation is couched in eschatological terms, the terms of reference for deterrence change. Certainly, the relevance of “public interest” (*maslahah*) is reduced as such interest refers to the future of the community in the temporal world and that world is on the verge of its demise. In one of the apocalyptic accounts of Sunni Islam, it is related that the Dajjāl (the Islamic “Anti-Christ) is coming, and the few Muslims who survive are besieged on top of a mountain and encourage themselves by reminding that they are “between the two good outcomes” (*bayna al-husnayayni*): victory or martyrdom (this is not uniquely Islamic and is reminiscent of the Spartan admonition to return “with your shields or upon them”).³⁵

Apocalyptic tendencies are particularly evident in the declared beliefs of the incumbent Iranian President Ahmadinejad. A major element in Ahmadinejad’s Weltanschauung is his “intimacy” with the “Hidden Imam”³⁶ and his belief in his imminent reappearance. Belief in the eventual reappearance of the “Hidden Imam” is one of the core tenets of Shiite Islam. According to Shiite eschatological thought, this “last day” will be preceded by cataclysms and great sacrifice of the Muslims. However, at the end, the Imam will appear, punish the oppressors and reward the believers. However, to most Shiites the hidden Imam is no more than an eschatological idea with little immediate relevance to the actual life of society. Traditional “quietist” Shiite scholars have usually embraced pragmatic positions towards external forces, based on their understanding that until the Imam appears, the Shiites are in the minority and “the oppressed upon earth” by definition. They must bide their time and maintain their beliefs. A leader who subscribes to the former belief would naturally be less perturbed or deterred by the prospects of a nuclear war or any other wide-scale use of force against his country.

Ahmadinejad and the IRGC elite which supports him have elevated the eschatological expectation of the reappearance of the Hidden Imam to the level of a central principle of the regime's political, cultural, economic and social life. More significant is the fact that Ahmadinejad has a "timeline" for the reappearance of the Imam. He has expressed his confidence (alluding that this is based on his direct communication with the Imam) that the Imam will emerge within two years to bring about the "last day" and claims to engage in regular "*Halvat*" (audiences) with Him. The fact that the Imam hasn't appeared within that time frame has not dampened the enthusiasm of Ahmadinejad and his followers; there are ample ways to explain why the Imam has rescheduled his arrival – some of them which may even be attributed to the delinquency of his believers in preparing for him. The president's supporters have spread the claim that he himself is one of the 36 nails (*owtad*) which hold the world together pending the return of the Imam. Ahmadinejad attributes his running and winning the presidency to this personal link with the Imam and hence sees himself as the agent of the Imam, bound to perform his mission, more than the representative of his constituency. Accordingly, he has taken concrete steps to prepare for the Imam: rebuilding the shrine at Jamkaran where the Imam is expected to appear and "depositing" his government's platform in the well at the shrine where Shiites place messages for the Imam (the well is where the Imam is believed to have disappeared).

There is no doubt that anticipation of apocalypse impacts susceptibility to deterrence. Direct communication of a leader with the anticipated Messiah who informs him of the time of the apocalypse may effectively "immunize" a leadership against deterrent signals.

"Global" Identity

Another trait of radical Islamic doctrine, which affects its susceptibility to deterrence, is its self-image as a "global" entity. In classic deterrence theory, an entity's willingness to cause damage to the other side is tempered by its expectation of reprisal. Radical Islamic doctrines stress the trans-national nature of the movement; each Muslim country or theatre of *jihad* is perceived as no more than one battlefield among others. Reprisals of the enemy towards that theatre – even if they are devastating – are "local" defeats and do not justify capitulation. Moreover, this doctrinal "trans-nationalism" is mirrored in the composition of the jihadist organizations. Most are "foreign legions", comprised of members from a variety of national backgrounds, who more often than not operate in a theatre which is not their home country. This make-up reduces their sensitivity to retaliation, which mainly affects the population of the theatres of *jihad*.

The role of public interest

Islamic jurisprudence recognizes the role of "(public) interest" (*maslahah*) in determining making decisions which have a bearing on the community.³⁷ The authority for determining what this interest is may be the "consensus" of scholars or the leader in his capacity as "*wali al-'amr*" (he who must be obeyed) or "*Amir al-Muminin*" (Commander of the Believers). The role of interest however is subordinate to the explicit directives of the Prophet in the Qur'an and the Hadith, legal analogies and traditions. Nevertheless, the leader can invoke "interest" when necessary to justify a decision which contradicts other precepts of Islam. In Sunni jurisprudence though, "interest" is the last tool that one may use to rule after having looked for the answer in the Qur'an, the Hadith and in previous rulings. This tradition makes invoking public interest for justification of being deterred more difficult.

Shiite doctrine is more flexible than Sunni tradition in this regard and is more willing to integrate "necessities" and "public interest" into their calculus). The right of Shiite scholars to use *ijtihad* – to make innovative strategic religious decisions based on their own interpretation of the Koran, and not on legal precedent alone (as in Sunnite Islam) - is in essence the mechanism by which leading Shiite religious leaders may implement a "cost-benefit calculus" in situations considered as posing a grave danger to the community, and in order not to be hamstrung by fossilized legal rulings. In Shiite legal

thought, the basis for such a calculus is the acceptance of *maslahah* (public interest) or *darurat* (necessities) as one of the sources of law (along with the traditional sources of Koran, *Sunna*, analogy and consensus). The use of *maslahah* allows for decision-making based on assessment of the severe damage that would otherwise be incurred by the community.³⁸ The very existence of a body to determine the interest of the regime the “Council for determining the interest of the regime”) underlines the importance of this concept.

The doctrine which accords priority to *maslahah* is “operationalized” by Khomeini’s ruling that the existence of the “Islamic regime” is a divine ordinance which has priority over all other divine ordinances. Therefore, since there is only one Islamic regime that is able to defend and propagate Islam, its survival becomes paramount to the survival of Islam as a civilization. This ruling offers an “escape valve” from other Islamic constraints to allow for acquiescence to deterrent threats.

The role of “interest” as a counter-measure against blind following of divine decrees is an important element in Rabbinical Judaism as well and is inherent in most Christian sects. It is possible that religions which evolved through a period of persecution (such as Judaism, Shiite Islam and some Christian sects) developed religious justification to permit acquiescence to superior power.

Attitude to Weapons of Mass Destruction

According to Islamic jurisprudence of Jihad, it is **the duty of the Muslims to achieve military superiority over the enemy, or at least to parity in types of weapons to “cause terror to enter the hearts of the enemies of the Ummah or the enemies of Allah (*Qur’an* 3:151; 8:60 and more).** This leads not only to permissibility of any weapon which is found in the hands of the enemy. This is the basis of a fatwa by the *al-Azhar* Fatwas Committee which determines that since nuclear weapons are held by the “enemies” of the Muslims or any other nation at all, it is the Islamic duty of all Muslim countries to acquire such weapons. A Muslim regime, which does not fulfill this duty, is a sinner and may be guilty of “corruption (*fassad*) on earth”. The prominent Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, who is viewed as an authority for the Muslim Brotherhood for example, went on record in favor of the duty of Muslims to acquire nuclear weapons but ruled that they should be used as a deterrent.

A possible conclusion from the above may be that the more “Islamic” a regime which acquires WMD is; the less prone it will be to integrate the western sense of the “taboo” on use of nuclear weapons. The decision regarding use or restraint in use of nuclear weapons may take into account a number of religious-related considerations:

The fact that Islamic law of Jihad does not prohibit indiscriminate killing of the population of the enemy (it cannot since the Prophet Muhammad himself engaged in such practices)³⁹. In the effort to find a 7th century analogy to nuclear weapons, Islamic scholars have likened them to “catapults” (*manjanik*) on the grounds that these, like nuclear weapons, kill people without the operator of the weapon knowing in advance who was killed. Since the Prophet Muhammad uses such weapons (during the siege of the Arabian city of Taif), it is assumed that he would have used nuclear weapons, were he to have them.

The principle of reciprocity of damages and punishment or “punishment in kind” (*qisas mu’amila bilmithl*) as expressed in the Islamic rule of torts. According to this principle, the compensation for the death of a Muslim is ten times that for the death of a non-Muslim. Hence the number of “infidels” who should be killed as revenge for the deaths of Muslims is ten times. Given the number of Muslims, who have been killed according to the radical Islamic narrative, there is no other way to balance the account without use of WMD. Since in the case of WMD, there is no doubt that the innocent will be taken with the guilty, it opens the door for an endless cycle of legally justified revenge.⁴⁰

In Shiite Iran Khomeini ordered the suspension of the Shah’s nuclear program and issued a *fatwa* that nuclear weapons are “from the Satan”. This position was temporary, however, and the nuclear program

was revived while Khomeini was still alive. Nevertheless, this position remains in force among many of the traditional “quietist” clerics. For example, **Ayatollah Ozma Yousef Saanei** claims that “a consensus exists among the senior *‘ulama* in Qom” that the prohibition on nuclear weapons (as well as chemical and biological weapons) is “self-evident in Islam” and an “eternal law” that cannot be reversed, since “the basic function” of these weapons is to kill innocent people. According to Saanei, this was the position behind the Iranian decision not to make use of chemical weapons against Iraq during the war. In September 2003 an additional *fatwa* was issued by the scholars of Qom stating that “Nuclear weapons are un-Islamic because they are inhumane.” On the other hand, there has been increasing support for acquisition of nuclear weapons and even justification of their use by radical *‘ulama*.

Key Conclusions

Religion may affect susceptibility to deterrence both directly and indirectly. Directly, religious beliefs may reduce susceptibility of an individual or a leadership to deterrent signals by presenting a picture of reality which is fundamentally different to that which is known to the other side, by reliance on belief in divine intervention that, in essence, nullifies the strategic dominance of the enemy and by a cost-benefit calculus in which the reward for obedience to divine will and the punishment for disobedience – both in the hereafter - transcend any earthly punishment that the enemy can inflict. Indirectly, religion influences risk propensity and tendency to be deterred by superior strength through its influence on leadership paradigms, traditions of obedience and attitude towards the value of human casualties.

Deterrence on the strategic level deals with collective cost-benefit calculus and not personal risk propensity. Therefore, the influence of religion on deterrence should be examined, first and foremost, in relation to its influence on leaderships. It would seem that the founder generation of a religion – the leader who “walks with God” – would most likely be more “risk-immune” than its successors. On the other hand, such a leadership wields more authority to justify succumbing to external pressures.

Restraint in use of extreme measures out of fear of retaliation by use of the same measures is a central element in inducing deterrence. After the use of chemical weapons in World War I, all parties in World War II refrained from their use. This was not due to a sense of enhanced humanity (we may say with confidence that such was not a hallmark of World War II) but out of fear of retaliation. Religious dictates for use of certain measures may ignore this aspect or subordinate the fear of retaliation to “higher” considerations of imitation of the behaviour of a prophet or fulfilment, through those measures, of a divine prophecy.

Religions which impute infallibility to their leaders are particularly immune to deterrence. This is particularly true when the leader is a founder of a religion and therefore is not only infallible *ex officio* but privy to divine knowledge. Disobedience to the leader in such cases (i.e. willingness to be deterred in contradiction to his orders) is tantamount to disobedience to God.

Religious motivation can, however, be turned around and exploited to enhance deterrence. Superstitions can induce courage and self sacrifice on the personal level but may also induce fear and mass hysteria on the collective level. Beliefs in divine intervention are limited in time; when the time for the anticipated intervention has passed, an explanation has to be provided for it not having materialized. Prophecies too are a two-edged sword; they can be interpreted in more than one way. Human influence operations geared at such beliefs may be able to take advantage of them to the benefit of creating a renewed sense of deterrence.

¹ Some emblematic examples of such influence in “secular” societies can be seen in the attempt by the Soviet State to harness religion to motivate the defense against Nazi Germany in World War II, in the slogan “Gott mit uns” inscribed by German soldiers on their helmets and belt buckles in World War I, and even World War II, and in the use by the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, of Islamic motivation and references, including the change of the Iraqi flag to include the slogan “Allah is Great”. In all these examples, the “secular” leadership takes into account the religiosity of the populace and attempts to harness it to his goals. However, by doing so, he accepts the constraints of religion.

² Al-Qaeda is a case in point; al-Qaeda was willing to sacrifice Afghanistan for the wider entity of the Muslim Ummah, which was expected to gain from the US invasion of Afghanistan. Similarly (though not in a religious context), Fidel Castro expressed his willingness to sacrifice Cuba for the victory of Socialism.

³ The Pope in the Middle Ages played a pivotal role in seemingly irrational decisions in the Crusades; the religious principle of unrelenting war against the infidel Saddam Hussein dictated decisions by Khomeini in the war with Iraq.

⁴ For example: the British in Sudan proposed to wrap suicide attackers in pig skins and to spread religious opinions (fatwas) that such contact prevents the soul from rising to Paradise. In ancient times, shrines were attacked to indicate that the Deity could not even protect itself).

⁵ The motto of the British royalty “Dieu et mon droit” implies two inseparable sources of legitimacy.

⁶ The Children of Israel are said to have declared at Mt. Sinai “We will do and we will listen” - a commitment to act on the divine orders even before hearing them. Muhammad pointed out the inadequacy of human conscience in regards to matters of jihad and the danger of leaving the question of participation in the jihad to the discretion of the individual, abstract morality or politics. See: "Fighting is ordered for you even though you dislike it and it may be that you dislike a thing that is good for you and like a thing that is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know." Qur'an 2:216

⁷ This is particularly true in regards to Islam as a religion of a wider trans-national “Ummah” and, conversely, does not apply to Judaism, which is a non-proselytizing religion in which there is a high correspondence between the adherents of the religion and a territorial and social collective.

⁸ Compare cases like the early martyrs of Christianity whose level of confidence in the guarantee of Paradise brought them to give up their lives and the famous case of the Jewish Messianic pretender, Shabtai Zvi, who swept the Jewish world of the Middle Ages and ultimately accepted conversion to Islam when confronted with a threat of execution.

⁹ Catholic doctrine regarding divine guidance of the election, notwithstanding – the fact is that God could – had He so desired to guide them from the beginning to a consensus and prevent the days of negotiation and bargaining.

¹⁰ “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God that which is God’s”

¹¹ The motto of the British Royalty – “Dieu et mon droit” epitomizes the two sources of legitimacy – God and my right (sword) hand....

¹² The most famous example of such a belief is the story of Joshua in the Valley of Ayalon:” Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ayalon.” Joshua 10:12

¹³ See for example: "No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn...says the Lord". (Isaiah 54:17;) "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Luke 10:19).

¹⁴ This is exemplified in Islamic discussions of justification for retreat in battle in the face of a superior enemy force; the Qur’an initially prohibited any retreat, except for tactical retreat, and then later allowed retreat in the face of a tenfold superiority of the enemy and finally two to one. The traditional reasoning is that the act of jihad is, by definition, an act of faith in Allah; by fighting an weaker or equal enemy, the Muslim is relying on his own strength and not on Allah, whereas, by entering the fray against all odds, the “mujahed” is proving his utter faith in Allah and will be rewarded accordingly.

¹⁵ "And so Urban, Pope of the Roman see, with his archbishops, bishops, abbots, and priests, set out as quickly as possible beyond the mountains and began to deliver sermons and to preach eloquently, saying: "Whoever wishes to save his soul should not hesitate humbly to take up the way of the Lord, and if he lacks sufficient money, divine mercy will give him enough." Then the apostolic lord continued, "Brethren, we ought to endure much suffering for the name of Christ - misery, poverty, nakedness, persecution, want, illness, hunger, thirst, and other (ills) of this kind, just as the Lord saith to His disciples: 'Ye must suffer much in My name,' and 'Be not ashamed to confess Me before the faces of men; verily I will give you mouth and wisdom,' and finally, 'Great is your reward in Heaven.'" And when this speech had already begun to be noised abroad, little by little, through all the regions and countries of Gaul, the Franks, upon hearing such reports, forthwith caused crosses to be sewed on their right shoulders, saying that they followed with one accord the footsteps of Christ, by which they had been redeemed from the hand of hell." From Pope Urban's Call to Crusade (quoted by an anonymous writer connected with Bohemund of Antioch):

¹⁶ This was encapsulated in the saying of Maimonides “One may not rely on a miracle” and the Thomas Aquinas’ definition of miracles as occurrences which may seem natural but are the result of divine intervention to do something “which nature can do, but not in that order” or “without the operation of the principles of nature”.

¹⁷ See the incident of the campaign of Sancherib, King of Assyria against King Hezkiya of Judaea (Kings II, 19:1-30)

¹⁸ See David Cook, Contemporary Islamic Apocalyptic Literature, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2005.

¹⁹ This was demonstrated in the Jewish leadership during the revolt against Rome (67-73 AD), which was pluralistic enough for respected Rabbis to chose compromise and thus to save their followers. Even then, the level of internal religious coercion

(the Zealots who assassinated those who seemed to them to be faint hearted) made it difficult for moderate and risk-averse leaders to be heard.

20 "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."; "The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:1-16).; "blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" (Deuteronomy 25:17). Consequently, King Saul was ordered by the Prophet Samuel to kill all of the people of Amalek– including men women and children – and loses his kingdom, according to the Biblical narrative, for not fulfilling such an extreme order. It stands to reason that one of Saul's considerations was the need to defuse future conflicts and the fear of a cycle of retaliation (second strike in modern deterrence parlance). However, the divine commandment to destroy all of Amalek overruled this rational strategic consideration.

21 My thanks to Prof. Thomas Schelling for the discussion on the nuclear taboo.

22 David Martin and Peter Mullen (ed.), *Unholy Warfare – The Church and the Bomb*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 181-182, 173-177, 214.

23 1 Samuel 17: 1-52

24 Numbers 24:17: "There shall come a star out of Jacob"

25 Sermon to the Knights (Sermo Lupi ad Anglos)

26 The name apparently comes from the name Hasan (the leader of the sect).

27 The adjuration of a Muslim who is about to perform an act of Jihad in which he may be killed is: "tawakalt nafsi billah" – I submit my soul to Allah.

28 Surat al-Anfal, verse 65: "O Prophet! Rouse the believers, to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred; if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding."

29 The symbol consists of four crescents and a sword. The four crescents are meant to stand for the word Allah. The five parts of the emblem symbolize the five principles of Islam. Above the sword (central part) is a tashdid (looks a bit like a W). In Arabic writing this is used to double a letter, here it doubles the strength of the sword and resembles the name of Allah. Taken together it looks like a tulip, the symbol of martyrdom.

30 Gen. S.K. Malik, *The Qur'anic Concept of War*, in Jim Lacey, *The Canons of Jihad, Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America*, Annapolis, 2008, pp. 112-116.

31 Qur'an 4:59

32 The term derives from the Arabic root bayع, which denotes both buying and selling. A bayعa, therefore, is originally a transaction. From the very beginning of Islam, bayعa was a token of the relationship and mutual obligations between leaders and those led by them, between rulers and ruled. The bayعa is mentioned in the Qur'an in verse 9:111: "Allah has bought from the believers their lives and property; if they fight, kill and are killed in the path of Allah, in jihad, they earn Paradise, "so rejoice in the bargain you have concluded".

33 Qur'an 48:10

34 An interesting anecdote which emphasizes this ideal is that of Mossadeq, who, defeated and dying, heard a colleague say "how terrible it all turned out," and answered him, "Yes, but at the same time, how marvellous it all turned out." It is said that Mossadeq saw himself playing out the roles of the Iranian paradigms of javanmardi: the battling hero Rostam, the son of Zaal, the noble general Ali, the Lion of Allah and, at the same time, the Imam Hussein, Prince of Martyrs. Mottahadeh, Roy. *The Mantle of the Prophet – Religion and Politics in Iran*, New York: Pantheon Books. 1985, p. 133.

35 Suyūti, *Al-Durr* 2/738. Quoted by Ella Landau Tasseron, *The Bayعa in Islam*, unpublished paper.

36 The Twelfth Imam in the line of the founder of the Shiah, the Imam Ali, who is believed to have disappeared, remains in the world in "occultation" (ghayba) and will eventually reappear to meet out justice, to reward his believers (the Shiites) and to punish the oppressors.

37 Maslahah literally means utility or welfare. The jurists use it to denote public interest or general human good. The medieval jurist Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 A.H./1111 A.D.) developed it by ruling that the ultimate purpose of the Shari'ah is to further the maslahah of the Ummah. The masalih (plural of maslahah) are divided into the following three categories: daruriyah (essential), which protect din (religion), nafs (life), najl (offspring), 'aql (reason), and mal (property); hajiyah (complementary); and tahsinayah (desirable). The government's primary duty is to safeguard these at any cost. The complementary and desirable masalih tend to vary according to social and economic conditions. The government protects them only when it has fulfilled its primary duty of protecting the essential interests.

38 In January 1983 Khomeini ruled that the Majles may pass laws that contradict the Shari'ah based on the principle of darurat. Towards the end of his life (January 1988), he went a step further by ruling that "the State (government) is an absolute trusteeship which God conferred upon the Prophet (and from him to the Imams and the Jurists). It is the most important of God's ordinances and has precedence over all other of God's derived ordinances." In other words, the ruler has absolute authority, which cannot be restricted by the existing laws of the Shari'ah or agreements with the people (i.e., constitutions and democratic elections). The preservation of the regime has therefore such a priority that the State may even suspend in the favour of this goal primary religious duties (such as prayer, fasting during the Ramadan or Haj to Mecca), or order the destruction of a mosque. See Schirazi, 230-231; Meir Litvak, "The Rule of the Jurist (Velayat-e Faqih) in Iran: Ideal and Implementation," *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash* (Hebrew) 42 2001: 171.

39 Islamic law of war (Jihad) does not recognize the western concept of “non-combatants” who are inviolable in time of conflict and should not be targeted. Islamic law of war recognizes only the categories of those whose “blood Allah has forbidden” and those whom the leader (wali al-‘amr, Amir) has discretion whether or not to kill. The legitimacy of indiscriminate killing of “dwellers of the house” when attacking an enemy of “that house” (tabiyt in Islamic jurisprudence of Jihad) may also influence the view of nuclear weapons. See Ella Landau Tasserou, Non-Combatants in Islamic Legal Thought, Hudson Institute, Research Monographs on the Muslim World, Series No 1, Paper No 3, December 2006.

40 This is based on Qur’an (16:126): “If you punish, then punish with the like of that by which you were afflicted.” Sheikh al-Azhar Muhammad Tantawi, draws an analogy from the ruling of the Caliph Abu Bakr “to fight the enemy with a sword if he fights with a sword and ... with a spear if he fights with a spear”. Therefore, if the enemy uses a nuclear bomb, it is the duty of the Muslims to use it. An unusually long (25 pages) fatwas by the Saudi Sheikh Nasser bin Hamid al Fahd in May 2003 reaches the conclusion that use of nuclear weapons against the United States is obligatory based on reciprocity. Even a moderate and western-oriented Islamic scholar like Sheikh Taher Jaber Alwani, rules the use of weapons of mass destruction “not permissible” (“gheir ja’iz”) but not “haram” or forbidden.