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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
Monterey, California



THESIS

**THE SHADOW OF MUHAMMAD:
DEVELOPING A CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP MODEL
FOR THE ISLAMIC WORLD**

by

Edward W. Kostrzebski

June 2002

Thesis Advisor:
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James Russell

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**THE SHADOW OF MUHAMMAD:
DEVELOPING A CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP MODEL
FOR THE ISLAMIC WORLD**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the question of whether the type of leadership exhibited by Osama bin Laden which led to the devastating attacks of September 11 was a singular phenomenon or an example of a recurring type in the Islamic world. This thesis proposes that a specific, recurring type of charismatic religio-political leadership - first exhibited by Muhammad, the prophet and founder of Islam - has proven to be spectacularly successful throughout Islamic history. This leadership type, firmly rooted in the history and ecology of the 7th century Arabian peninsula, the birthplace of Islam, centers on the successful collapsing together of religious and political leadership in the person of a single charismatic individual. Historical manifestations are examined using the writings of Ibn Khaldun and the individual case studies of the Mahdi of the Sudan, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and Osama bin Laden. The policy implications - for both cooperation and confrontation with a leader of this type - that flow from the model are also discussed. Demographic and technological trends in the Middle East are examined in order to determine whether the relative frequency with which this type leader will appear in the near future is likely to increase or decrease. The leadership model developed in this thesis, which I use to explain the popular success of Osama bin Laden in the wider Muslim world, provides U.S. policy makers with an additional tool with which to prosecute the ongoing war on terror.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, thousands of American citizens were killed in attacks conducted by followers of Osama bin Laden. Americans were shocked and stunned by these assaults; never before had a foreign enemy killed so many U.S. citizens in the continental United States. Most Americans were also mystified about why these attacks were carried out. Why would nineteen Muslims, followers of Osama bin Laden, willingly sacrifice their lives in order to kill Americans they did not even know?

Americans were similarly shocked and puzzled in 1979, when the Ayatollah Khomeini successfully led a revolution in Iran that toppled the Shah. As one commentator noted, "Khomeini was beyond the experience, if not the imagination, of anyone in the United States government. We made the mistake repeatedly of trying to deal with Khomeini as if he were a government... In every day of the early crisis, and right through until this day, there's been this American inability to understand Khomeini."¹

This study will suggest that the key to understanding the success of both Osama bin Laden and the Ayatollah Khomeini is their leadership style, a type of charismatic leadership that successfully combines religious and secular power in one person. This leadership model, moreover, is rooted deeply within Islam as a social construct, with the prophet Muhammad standing as both the archetype and the ideal. It will be shown that this charismatic Islamic

¹ Theodore H. White, *America in Search of Itself: The Making of the President 1956-1980* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982) p.16.

leadership model has been spectacularly successful in the Muslim world since the time of Muhammad.

Westerners have always been puzzled by Islamic leaders such as bin Laden and Khomeini, in large part because this folding together of secular and religious power into one person is antithetical to the Western tradition, thus

As modern Westerners we find it hard to judge equably the ambitions of Muhammad, because we cannot avoid making the assumption that the political and religious realms are separate. The Western order of things that has come down into existence since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment has made an essential distinction between church and state... A polity in which religion and politics are irretrievably identified together is felt, even if obscurely, to threaten the basic principles that govern most Western societies.²

Another element of Islam that is difficult for the West to comprehend is that Islam is not just a religion for Muslims. Professor Mamoun Fandy, a native Saudi Arabian currently teaching at Georgetown, goes so far in his writing as to

Not capitalize the word "islam" because islam as a social text is drastically different from Islam as religion... Muslims follow certain "islamic" ideas that guide their lives and provide them with a stable world outlook. Islam as a social text is a language which has its own system of symbols.³

As I will demonstrate in this study, one of the key symbols within islam as a social text is that of the charismatic religio-political leader. Fandy's definition of

² Peter Partner, *God of Battles: Holy Wars of Christianity and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) p.39.

³ Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) p.22.

islam with a little 'i,' that is, as a social text and way of ordering one's world through the use of specific language and symbols, will be the islam addressed in this thesis.

Of course, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, as Salmon Rushdie pointed out, the formal position of the Western governments has been that "This isn't about Islam." Writing in the present tense he adds "The world's leaders have been repeating this mantra for weeks, partly in the virtuous hope of deterring reprisal attacks on innocent Muslims in the West, partly because if the United States is to maintain its coalition against terror it can't afford to suggest that Islam and terrorism are in any way related." Evidence of this linkage was the visit made to a Washington mosque by President Bush in the days immediately following the attack. Rushdie points out the incongruities of this stance when he asks "If this isn't about Islam, why the worldwide demonstrations in support of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda? Why did those 10,000 men armed with swords and axes mass on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, armed with swords and axes?" To this, he answers unequivocally "Yes, this is about Islam."⁴ Or, as Francis Fukuyama points out when comparing Islam to other world cultures, "Islam, by contrast, is the only cultural system that seems to regularly produce people like Osama bin Laden, the Taliban in Afghanistan, or the Ayatollah Khomeini."⁵

Not only is there something unique about the charismatic Islamic religio-political leadership type, but

⁴ Salmon Rushdie, "Yes, This Is About Islam", New York Times on the Web, 2 Nov 2001 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/02/opinion/02RUSH.html>>

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "It's still the end of History", The Daily Yomiuri (Tokyo), 29 Oct 2001.

as this thesis will argue, Osama bin Laden exemplifies a recurring type of charismatic religious leader specific to the Islamic world, a type which some indicators seem to suggest will be seen again and with greater frequency in the near future. The primary purpose of this study is to provide U.S. policy makers and the general public with a working model of this type of leader, so that the U.S. will be better prepared to both deal with bin Laden in the present and his successors in the future.

Samuel Huntington captured the essence of the general function that theory should play when he wrote that

Understanding requires theory; theory requires abstraction; and abstraction requires the simplification and ordering of reality... Obviously, the real world is one of blends, irrationalities, and incongruities: actual personalities, institutions, and beliefs do not fit into neat logical categories. Yet neat logical categories are necessary if man is to think profitably about the real world in which he lives and to derive from it lessons for broad application and use.⁶

The charismatic religious leadership model developed for the Islamic world in this study is one such logical category; it is my sincere hope that it will aid U.S. policy makers to think profitably about the Muslim world, and help them to develop lessons for broad application and use in the current War on Terror.

The simplification required in order to develop theory presents a particular challenge when dealing with the Islamic world given the frequency with which charges of Orientalism are made. This term, originally applied to the

⁶ Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) p.vii.

scholarship of individuals in the West who studied the Middle East (or Orient) "has become a negative term in many circles."⁷ Edward Said, the leading critic of Orientalism, wrote in his book of the same name that "Western understanding of Islam has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world."⁸ "Orientalists, their books, and the very way they wrote and spoke about Islam was, in Said's view, a discourse meant to control the subject matter, namely, Muslims and Islam."⁹ Said further

Argued that any western representation of the Middle East as a culturally specific entity must be seen as an expression of hegemonic authority, applied to dominate the disenfranchised, dehumanized and voiceless "Others" by turning them into objects and "types" who can be manipulated and exploited.¹⁰

Clearly this study identifies a specific form of leadership and specific "type" of leader in the Islamic world. It is a work of synthesis in which a theory about one form of successful Islamic leadership is constructed by a Westerner (myself) from primarily secondary sources. According to Said, this study, then, should be dismissed out of hand as a simple expression of Western hegemonic power. Charles Lindholm, one astute critic of Said, would disagree, however. As he puts it

Realization of the power and cultural hegemony of the West does not require as a correlate the rejection of the possibility of constructing general comparative arguments about the Middle

⁷ Richard C. Martin, *Islamic Studies: A History of Religions Approach* 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996) p.243.

⁸ Charles Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East: An Historical Anthropology* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) p.6.

⁹ Martin, p.245.

¹⁰ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.6.

Eastern culture, nor does it require negating the real historical and cultural patterns of Middle Eastern society simply because that society has been viewed through Western eyes.¹¹

As will be shown in Chapter II, this form of leadership is the outgrowth of the confluence of several distinct historical and cultural patterns that converged on the Arabian Peninsula in the 8th century. The time period covered by this study centers on the historical period of Islam, from the time of Muhammad to the present day. Necessary antecedents, along with future trend analysis are also briefly discussed, but only to more fully develop the model. The target audience for this thesis is non-Middle Eastern specialists, policy makers, and the general public, with the hope that it will offer a coherent way to think about charismatic religious leadership in the Islamic social context.

There is a tremendous gulf of understanding between average U.S. citizens and members of the Islamic world. There is a similar gap in knowledge flow between academic Middle Eastern specialists and American citizens. The best evidence for this is the complete shock and horror evoked by the attacks of September 11, and the immediate focus by the American public on the question *why?* This study will firmly occupy the strategic middle ground in an attempt to bridge both the gap in understanding between the West and Islam, and the gap in knowledge between the U.S. policy maker and academic. By providing a model for one form of leadership that has proven to be spectacularly successful in the Islamic world, this study will satisfy Samuel Huntington's primary criteria for successful theory: it

¹¹ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.6.

will explain and encompass the relevant facts better than any other theory, it will provide a more useful and relevant framework than currently exists, and ultimately, "its most important purpose will be served if it stimulates further thinking."¹²

¹² Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p.viii.

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II. ORIGINS OF LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A. HUMAN BIOLOGICAL ORIGINS

Leadership in the Middle East, as in all human societies, begins at the biological level. The human species is not a species of lone individuals; indeed, "we are none of us truly isolated; we are connected to one another by a web of regularities and by a host of shared, deep-seated certainties."¹³ This web of regularities and these shared certainties are what define humans as social creatures.

As a social creature, the human organism is biologically set up, or "'wired' in a certain way so that it can process and emit information about certain facts of social life."¹⁴ This includes things such as language and rules about sex as well as leadership. All of these aspects of social interaction can be loosely defined as culture. Thus, "we behave culturally because it is in our nature to behave culturally, because natural selection has produced an animal that has to behave culturally, that has to invent rules, make myths, and speak languages."¹⁵

Human brains produced human culture as a direct result of humans living in small hunting groups or bands of fifty or so individuals for ninety-nine percent of human history. This remains our basic makeup, and since then "agricultural and industrial civilizations have put nothing into the basic wiring of the human animal."¹⁶ As members of the human

¹³ Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox, *The Imperial Animal* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998) p.1.

¹⁴ Tiger and Fox, p.16.

¹⁵ Tiger and Fox, p.20.

¹⁶ Tiger and Fox, p.22.

species, this wiring is also common to members of the Islamic world.

Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox have described humans social system as primarily hierachical and competitive. Viewing man as a gregarious terrestrial primate, they point out that a group as described above "has to be disciplined in order to survive, and this discipline is maintained by the ranking system."¹⁷ They delineate several underlying processes common to all terrestrial primates that move in small bands:

- The system is based on hierarchy and competition for status, which determine access to resources and the privelege of breeding.
- The whole structure is held together by the attractiveness of the dominants and the attention that is paid to them.
- Because of this, charismatic individuals can upset the hierarchical structure, and by the same token, retain power.¹⁸

Thus, a model which focuses on charismatic religious leadership in the Islamic world is consistent with, and ultimately rooted in, the basic biological origins of human social interaction. As Tiger and Fox elaborate when they describe the charismatic individual:

What is involved is one of the most basic of all biosocial processes, one that is rooted in the evolutionary struggle for dominance within a population. The paying of attention to a dominant animal is both the basis of political society and the major mode of its dynamics. Millions of years of biopolitical evolution have programmed the primate to be ready to pay attention to dominant animals, provided the right cues are given; the natural variety within their populations has

¹⁷ Tiger and Fox, p.29.

¹⁸ Tiger and Fox, p.32.

ensured that individuals with superdominance potential will be thrown up in each generation.¹⁹

Thus, a leader who is able to establish himself at the top of a political hierarchy and obtain absolute power through the mechanism of charisma is not something unique to the Middle East or Islam. It is actually a phenomenon that is as old as the human species itself, and is something we are wired to accept, if not actually seek. The prophet Muhammad tapped into this wiring on the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century and founded a religion for which he then became the archetypical charismatic leader. It is to the specifics of Middle Eastern geography and local ecology to which we must turn to discover why Islam and why him.

B. ECOLOGY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

A working definition of the Middle East must first be established. For the purposes of this study, the Middle East will be defined as the area bounded geographically on an east-west axis by the modern states of Morocco in the west and Pakistan in the east. On the north-south axis, Turkey in the north and the Sudan in the south will define these boundaries. Within this region, the overwhelming ecological determinant in the 7th century was, as it is now the lack of water. Thus, "the Middle East is characterized by arid near-desert or desert conditions for most of its territory... Everywhere the amount of rainfall, even in the rainy winter season, is unreliable, and winter crops grown without irrigation often fail."²⁰

¹⁹ Tiger and Fox, p.47.

²⁰ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.17.

Successful cultivation can and does take place in the Middle East. It is important to note, however, that if one were to generalize about the Middle East of the 7th century such cultivation would be the exception rather than the rule, for

Only about 14% of the vast land mass of the Middle East is suited for cultivation, almost all of it to be found within the oasis, high mountain vales, and especially in the plains and deltas of the great rivers where water supply is sufficient and relatively reliable: the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates, the Karun, and the Helmand.²¹

Within the remaining austere 86% of this territory, where sedentary agriculture was not an option for survival, the history of the Middle East was changed forever with the introduction of the camel. While the exact date of domestication is unknown, camels were plentiful in the region by 1000 B.C. The camel, with its ability to travel long distances in arid regions due to its high tolerance for heat and thirst, allowed humans to populate the deep desert regions successfully. This allowed nomadic camel herders to "gather at fertile oases deep in the deep desert in the dry summer, scatter to search for water in the winter, and find enough grazing to raise large herds of camels for use as reliable transport in trade."²²

The invention of the camel saddle between 500 and 100 B.C. allowed pastoral nomads to ride their camels. This was the final material culture element required for the creation of the Bedouin, the fabled warriors of the desert. While their absolute numbers remained small, Charles Lindholm has observed that camel nomadism, and along with

²¹ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.18.

it, the Bedouin ideal, ultimately became a "remarkable adaption to the conditions found in the hinterlands, which has been culturally influential far beyond the number of its practitioners."²³

The Bedouin way of life attained a sort of moral superiority throughout the Middle East. Evidence of this is still with us. For example:

- unique among world cultures, the tribal periphery of the Middle East has maintained a generally positive image in literature of the region.
- the term 'Arab,' now a loose linguistic and ethnic designation for generally all inhabitants of the Middle East, was originally and still is the term the Bedouin used to refer to themselves only.²⁴

The significance of the Bedouin ideal for charismatic Islamic leadership, however, lies not only in its dominance throughout the Middle East, but in its basic characteristics. These can best be summed up as an egalitarian ethos and strong emphasis on individuality and independence which spring directly from the austere limitations of the local ecology, and the pastoral nomad solution to coping with the Middle East's environmental constraints. In other words, the "conditions of the desert correlate with the deep-seated resistance of camel nomads to hierarchy and stratification."²⁵ Simply put, if desert pastoral nomads did not like the local power structure, they could load their camels and leave, either individually, as a family, or as a clan.

²² Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.19.

²³ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.19.

²⁴ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.22.

²⁵ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.20.

This resulted in a resistance to all forms of formal or ritualized authority, and an emphasis on leadership by acclamation rather than proclamation. As Ira Lapidus writes:

The Bedouin clan regarded itself as a complete polity and recognized no external authority. The clans were led by a shaykh (chief) who was usually selected by one of the clan elders from one of the prominent families and who always acted in accordance with their counsel. He settled internal disputes according to the group's traditions, but he could not legislate or command.²⁶

In the absence of a formal power hierarchy giving leaders discrete powers to go along with their title, and with no ability to legislate and command by decree, effective Bedouin headmen of necessity resorted to an informal sort of authority, one rooted in personal charisma. Thus, the dominant leadership ethos in the Middle East at the time of Muhammad's birth (570 A.D.), can be viewed as a reflection of both mankind's biological imperative for a hierarchical social structure centered around charismatic individuals, as well as that of the dominant Bedouin ideal, an ideal that developed as a direct outgrowth of camel pastoral nomadism, itself a response to the arid ecological conditions in the Middle East.

C. POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

The political geography of the Middle East at the time of Muhammad's birth is also critical to understanding Muhammad's success. The area was dominated politically by two great empires: the Byzantine, comprising most of the eastern Mediterranean and centered on Constantinople and

²⁶ Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p.14.

the Sasanid, comprising most of modern-day Iran and Afghanistan, with its capital in Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia. Between the two empires lay two buffer states, the Ghassanid (affiliated with the Byzantines) and the Lakhmids (affiliated with the Sasanids). Under varying degrees of control and political organization, these acted as proxy powers for each respective empire in the northern reaches of the Arabian peninsula, on the ecological boundary where settled agriculture gave way to the desert of the pastoral nomads. In this region, the Byzantines and Sasanids either could not or would not exercise direct rule.

South of the Ghassanids and Lakhmids the only centralized political authorities lay in Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia and Eritrea) and Yemen. At the time of Muhammad's birth, the heartland of Islam (Mecca, Medina, and the Hijaz, or western Arabian Peninsula) was not under any direct or even indirect influence from a political center. Thus, local manifestations of leadership, whatever the source and however expressed, were never in danger of being challenged from the center since there was no center interested in this periphery. The only threat a local leader would face while gathering a following would likewise be local in origin, and indigenous to the Hijaz.

It was into this milieu that Muhammad was born, "in Mecca, a town in Western Arabia, perhaps in or near the year 570 A.D."²⁷ He received his first vision and began preaching his new religion of Islam in Mecca in 610 A.D., when he was 40. When he died in 632 A.D., Islam had not only been successfully established on the peninsula, but was literally exploding beyond it. The Arab expansion

²⁷ Lapidus, p.15.

became "one of the most astonishing and dramatic incidents in world history."²⁸ When the Arab Empire reached its greatest territorial extent in 732 A.D., exactly one hundred years after Muhammad's death, Muslim rule ranged from modern day Spain in the West to Pakistan and Afghanistan in the East. This phenomenal expansion out of the desert stands as the definitive proof that Muhammad's leadership genius had created something unique on the Arabian peninsula; Muhammad had not only founded and created a religion, but a leadership model that would resonate in the Muslim world for the next thirteen centuries.

Thus, the biological, ecological, political, and geographical conditions of the 7th century Arabian peninsula were conducive to the rise of a charismatic leader who could successfully combine both secular and spiritual leadership in his person. This leader's message, however, would have to be consistent with, and build upon, the egalitarian tribal ethos prevalent among the tribes of the peninsula. The operative mechanism which allowed Muhammad to overcome this egalitarianism and concentrate both secular and religious power in his person was personal charisma. The following chapter, using charisma as a departure point, will fully develop the model of charismatic religious leadership in the Islamic world as personified by Muhammad.

²⁸ Sir John Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad* (Oxford: Madison

III. THE MODEL

Max Weber, when discussing charisma, emphasizes that the litmus test for a charismatic leader is the relative success of his followers, for "above all, his divine mission must 'prove' itself in that those who faithfully surrender to him must fare well. If they do not fare well, he is obviously not the master sent by the gods."²⁹ By this test, and in view of the success of his followers, Muhammad successfully epitomized the Weberian definition of charismatic authority.

Charles Lindholm elaborates on this Weberian definition in his book on the subject, *Charisma*. Lindholm's working definition of charisma provides the departure point for this study. His fundamental finding is that "charisma is one way to meet a deep human impulse to transcend the boundaries of the ego in communion with others."³⁰ Thus, he echoes the biological origins for personal charisma: the basic human need for group belonging. And he regards charisma as one mechanism that sets individuals apart in this competitive, hierarchical setting.

Charisma is nearly impossible to quantify, however. Lindholm's definition is particularly useful because it focuses on charisma as a social interaction or process. He describes it as the "compulsive, inexplicable emotional tie linking a group of followers together in adulation of their leader."³¹ As a social process or emotional tie, charisma is

Books, 1998) p.371.

²⁹ Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, ed. & trans. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946) p.249.

³⁰ Lindholm, *Charisma*, p.6.

³¹ Lindholm, *Charisma*, p.4.

not like a physical characteristic (brown hair, long nose) that is either present or absent. Charisma can *only* be identified in terms of a social relationship. It exists in the ephemeral space of human interaction. Thus, for charisma to exist, the leader must have a group that responds to him; without a followership there is no charismatic leadership.

Before discussing the life of Muhammad, however, it is important to caveat the source material. Most of what we know about Muhammad's life is derived from three sources:

1. The Koran, written down some twenty years after Muhammad's death.
2. The early histories and biographies, the oldest of which were written one hundred and twenty years after the death of the Prophet.
3. The Traditions, the most reliable version of which, by Bukhari, was compiled some two hundred and twenty years after the death of Muhammad.³²

Thus, there exists a significant time and space gap between Muhammad the man and Muhammad the ideal, as he is described in the written record. This is problematic for historians of Muhammad the man. It is not problematic, however, when we view Muhammad as an ideal, and when others view him thus. Instead, the ideology of the charismatic leadership model personified by Muhammad was simply reaffirmed by every victory and success of the Islamic expansion. The success of the Islamic armies was not only proof of the Prophet's message; it also sanctified and idealized the Prophet's leadership style.

³² Glubb, p.18.

The key elements of this leadership model not only define Muhammad's success, they are also characteristics shared by the most successful leaders in the Islamic world from the Prophet's day through the present. They can be summarized as follows:

1. *Personal* charisma
2. The conscious combination of religious and secular roles
3. The ability to successfully change the rules/institutions that initially brought the individual to power
4. The system put in place endures beyond the life of the individual

Muhammad's personal charisma is evident in the centrality of his spoken word, for

Whatever a prophet says must be believed, because he has said it, since it is an emotional compulsion exercised by him as a *person* that *defines* the religious experience for the faithful. This was the case with Muhammad, who was loved first, then obeyed; for his early followers, the content of his annunciation was secondary to the inspiring emotional impact of his personal message.³³

Although charismatic individuals have existed in all centuries and among all peoples, there were two specific causal factors that made Muhammad unique and enabled his stunning success. The first was that he had a receptive audience. As discussed in Chapter II, a strong egalitarian tribal ethic was prevalent on the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century, and

The pressures of this competitive ethic inculcated a wish amongst the anxious public for an ordering voice that would harmonize the

³³ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.149.

warring self-interested co-equal rivals into a higher unity. For Muslims, the Prophet provided that voice, giving shape and moral cohesion to an inchoate and threatening environment by drawing all his followers into a single moral community, united through shared devotion to the beloved exemplary figure.³⁴

Muhammad's personal charisma was certainly the key in this egalitarian environment, for "There can be no doubt that Muhammad's ultimate triumph was not due to his military success but due to his personality. Muhammad was not naturally a strong man, but he had the rare gift of inspiring intense devotion."³⁵

The second element crucial to Muhammad's success was the specific nature of his appeal. Muhammad preached a form of monotheistic emissary prophecy: Muhammad spoke for God, yet claimed no holiness for himself personally. In effect, Muhammad was founding a new tribe, a tribe of Islam, with God assigned the role of tribal leader, and Muhammad as his spokesman. Thus, "it was a basic feature of the Apostle's policy to destroy tribal loyalties, and to replace them with devotion to the Muslim community, and many dedicated young Muslims had adopted the new outlook with enthusiasm."³⁶ To become a Muslim, one had only to recite the *shahadah*, or Profession of Faith: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet." Membership in this new "tribe" allowed individuals to actually change something that had been previously accepted as immutable: the significance of lineage. Thus, a key part of the genius of Muhammad's message was his successful switching of people's

³⁴ Lindholm, *The Islamic Middle East*, p.149.

³⁵ Glubb, p.312.

³⁶ Glubb, p.183.

allegiances from previously dominant genetic ties to Allah and, by inference, to him.

While prior to Islam it was possible to change tribal affiliation on the Peninsula, it was at best a long and cumbersome process, often taking years before one was accepted as a member of one's new adopted group; even after acceptance, an individual's biological background was never fully cleansed from the collective memory, and the individual was always potentially suspect as an outsider. Islam actively welcomed new members through recitation of the *shahadah*, and loyalty to the *umma* was meant to overrule traditional lineage allegiances, thus discouraging any remnants of old geneological ties.

Though Islam was much more inclusive than any kin-based tribe, it was also more difficult to leave. In fact, the penalty for renouncing Islam was death. Apostates were executed. More than the threat of death, however, it was the personal charisma of Muhammad that both initially attracted adherents to the faith, and retained them in the early Islamic community.

Muhammad also consciously combined secular and religious leadership in his person. He was obviously the temporal leader of the early Muslims, and while claiming no divinity for himself, he was the mouthpiece for the literal words of Allah. As Sir John Glubb has noted, "A man who claimed to receive direct instructions from God on the subject of day to day events must inevitably himself become the ruler of the state."³⁷ The controversy that has surrounded the so-called Satanic Verses provides a stunning

³⁷ Glubb, p.231.

example of just how crucial this element was in defining Muhammad's success.

The Satanic Verses refer to a compromise made by Muhammad when he first began preaching in Mecca. Professing a strict monotheism, Muhammad was under almost continuous pressure to reconcile his preachings with the polytheism and idolatry practiced in Mecca up to that time. The Meccans had no difficulty incorporating Allah into the pantheon of Meccan deities, or even acknowledging a dominance of one particular deity such as Allah. Muhammad initially resisted this compromise, allowing for the worship of no other deity but Allah. In his biography of Muhammad, Sir John Glubb recounts how members of the dominant Quraish tribe in Mecca asked Muhammad

'Have you then considered Al Lat and Al Uzza and Manat, the third, the other?' At this point, Satan put into the Prophet's mind to insert the words, 'These are exalted females, whose intercession is to be hoped for.' When his recitation was completed, Muhammad prostrated himself, as did also the Muslims who were present. The idolaters, delighted at the mention of their three goddesses as intercessors, prostrated themselves also, so that everyone in the square of the Kaaba, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, bowed down in worship together.³⁸

These words, which acknowledged the divinity of something other than Allah, were accepted as the word of God as passed through Muhammad to the Islamic community. However, "At length Gabriel appeared to him and told him that it was not he but Satan who had put the offending verse into his mouth, as had indeed been his custom with

³⁸ Glubb, p.127.

all former prophets. The Satanic words were expunged from the chapter."³⁹

The controversy surrounding the Satanic Verses has reverberated in Islam ever since. For, if Muhammad's claim for spiritual divinity was not his physical person, but the words he spoke as given him by Allah, and if Satan could insert words in Allah's stead, any of Muhammad's utterances could potentially now be suspect as the words not of God, but of Satan. This notion has proven so controversial that in the early histories "many Muslim writers, including Ibn Ishaq, omit this passage altogether. Modern Islamic commentators have at times denounced Christian authors for referring to it and accuse them of deliberately trying to discredit the apostle."⁴⁰ Whether historically grounded in fact or not, the centuries old debate over the Satanic Verses is indicative of the key role of Muhammad's spoken word. It is *only* his spoken word that represents the divine and spiritual dimensions of his prophecy, and any challenge to the holiness and infallibility of that spoken word challenges the very core of Islam. The fact that there continues to be debate about the Satanic Verses is a testament to how heavily Muhammad relied on his spoken word to consciously combine his roles as secular and religious leader.

The third element that defines the charismatic Islamic religio-political leader - the ability to successfully change the institutions and rules that brought him to power - is also exemplified by Muhammad. As discussed earlier in the chapter, on a macro level the root of Muhammad's

³⁹ Glubb, p.128.

⁴⁰ Glubb, p.127.

success was his ability to replace existing kin-based tribal affiliations with his own spirituality-based Islamic affiliation. Utilizing the language of, and building on, existing tribal structure, Muhammad convinced his followers that the precepts of Islam were supreme. Muhammad was also initially treated as a tribal leader by leaders from other tribes. Once powerful enough, however, he rejected any sense of equality with the other leaders, and vehemently maintained his uniqueness as well as the uniqueness of his God.

In more mundane terms, the Prophet was also able to successfully establish, then change, marriage rules within the early Islamic community, at least for himself. This became evident when Muhammad wed his fifth wife, Zainab. Thus,

Chapter IV of the Koran had limited the number of wives of a believer to four. The Apostle (Muhammad), however, had now exceeded this number, but Chapter XXXIII of the Koran specifically authorized him to do so. Verse 50 reads as follows: "O Prophet! We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have given their dowries and those whom your right hand possesses - this is a privilege for you alone, not for the other believers."⁴¹

When the revelation came down, ordering Muhammad to marry Zainab, Aisha (the third wife), who alone ventured to speak to him in a frivolous tone, is alleged to have remarked, "Your Lord certainly seems anxious to gratify your desires."⁴²

These passages from the Koran and from the Traditions of Muhammad foreshadow Charles Lindholm's analysis of

⁴¹ Glubb, p.237.

⁴² Glubb, p.237.

Weberian charismatic leadership when he writes of Jesus that "Jesus's words: 'It is written... but I say unto you' are the core of the charismatic relation for Weber. Whatever the leader says, whatever he asks, is right, even if it is self-contradictory. It is right because the leader has said it."⁴³ Muhammad ultimately wed thirteen times. All other Muslim males are restricted to four wives.

The final element which defines charismatic Islamic religious leadership - the system enduring beyond the life of the charismatic leader - is also exemplified by Muhammad. The proof lies in simple historical fact: Muhammad received his first revelation in 610 A.D. At that time, he was the only living Muslim in the world. By 1985, there were at least 162 million Muslims in the Middle East alone, with more than three times that number spread throughout the rest of the world.⁴⁴ Islam, the system put in place by Muhammad, has not only survived but flourished well past his reign.

⁴³ Lindholm, *Charisma*, Ch. 3, p.4.

⁴⁴ Dale Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia: an Anthropological Approach* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1982) p.13.

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IV. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND MANIFESTATIONS

Now that we have rooted a charismatic Islamic religious leadership model firmly in the ecology and history of the Middle East of the 7th century, and demonstrated how this model was both developed and personified by Muhammad, a connection must be made to the present day. This chapter will trace some of the historical threads of charismatic religious leadership in the Islamic world. Through the use of key examples, it will be evident that charismatic individuals in the Islamic world who have echoed the Prophet in words and deeds have not only been able to concentrate religious and secular power in their person, but have been spectacularly successful.

A. IBN KHALDUN

All historical accounts of the Islamic world must begin with Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). He has been characterized as "the subtlest and most significant pre-modern Islamic social thinker."⁴⁵ Ibn Khaldun's magnum opus, *The Muqaddimah* (The Introduction), "can be regarded as the earliest attempt made by any historian to discover a pattern in the changes that occur in man's political and social organization."⁴⁶ Intended as an introduction to his history of the world, he finished writing *The Muqaddimah* in 1377. Ibn Khaldun's goal for the finished work was no less than to define the human condition. *The Muqaddimah* remains the benchmark for modern historiography of the Middle East;

⁴⁵ Roy P. Mottahedeh, "Foreward" in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (ed.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.ix.

⁴⁶ N. J. Dawood, ed., "Introduction" in, *The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) p.ix.

as Ira Lapidus has written, "for many of us, the nature of tribal solidarity, the character of tribal leadership, and the ideological basis of tribal unification have been defined by Ibn Khaldun."⁴⁷ More significant for this work, however, is the fact that Khaldun's organizing principle is social relations. As he states in the opening lines of Book 1, "It should be known that history, in matter of fact, is information about human social organization."⁴⁸

While his organizing principle may be social relations, Ibn Khaldun roots these relations firmly in local ecology, thus "it should be known that differences of condition among people are the result of the different ways in which they make their living."⁴⁹ One of those ways of making a living is nomadic pastoralism as practiced by the Bedouin. Ibn Khaldun also considers the individual charismatic leader and the institution of Islam as key elements in Middle Eastern social organization, thus

Bedouins can acquire royal authority only by making use of some religious coloring, such as prophethood, or sainthood, or some great religious event in general. The reason for this is that because of their savagery, the Bedouins are the least willing of nations to subordinate themselves to each other, as they are rude, proud, ambitious, and eager to be the leaders. Their individual aspirations rarely coincide. But when there is religion (among them) through prophethood or sainthood, then they have some restraining influence in themselves. The

⁴⁷ Ira Lapidus, "Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History", in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (ed.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.28.

⁴⁸ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Trans. by Franz Rosenthal, edited by N.J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) p.35.

⁴⁹ Khaldun, p.91.

qualities of haughtiness and jealousy leave them. It is, then, easy for them to subordinate themselves and unite (as a social organization). This is achieved by the common religion they now have.⁵⁰

Thus, Ibn Khaldun, surveying almost seven centuries of Islamic history, and writing when the Islamic world was still at the apogee of its power, distills the key elements required for successful leadership given the Bedouin egalitarian ideal: prophethood, or a specifically religious experience, overlaid on Islam, the common religion all Bedouin now shared.

Ibn Khaldun defines prophets as "The various types of human beings who have supernatural perception either through natural disposition or through exercise."⁵¹ Khaldun further elaborates that "It should be known that God has chosen certain individuals" and that "the information they give is intrinsically and necessarily true."⁵² When describing the concrete signs that indicate someone is a prophet, Ibn Khaldun focuses on two defining characteristics, a person's actions: "they seek to propagate religion and divine worship," and their charismatic nature: "the prestige they have among their people."⁵³ In other words, leaders who consciously espouse a religious message, and have the requisite amount of personal charisma, or prestige, in the Muslim world, are successfully able to rise to leadership positions. He alludes to the basic human biological imperative of

⁵⁰ Khaldun, p.120.

⁵¹ Khaldun, p.70.

⁵² Khaldun, p.70.

⁵³ Khaldun, p.71.

hierarchy and competition within a group setting when, as he says, "by dint of their nature, human beings need someone to act as a restraining influence and mediator in every social organization, in order to keep its members from fighting with each other. That person must, by necessity, have superiority over the others."⁵⁴

This leadership model is a stepping stone to routinized, formal authority, which Ibn Khaldun terms royal authority. Analyzing the nature of this royal authority, and how it related to the ebb and flow of the various early Islamic dynasties, is actually his aim; his primary explanatory interest lay in the formation, success, and downfall of empires. However, for the purposes of this study, what is most important is his observation that a charismatic Islamic leader was absolutely essential for the successful mobilization of any Islamic society that wished to obtain temporal power. He recognized that this model was firmly rooted in the Bedouin egalitarian ideal, which itself was an outgrowth of local ecology. Although his insights on effective leadership were drawn from the first seven centuries of Islam, a period "characterized by the gradual evolution and stabilization of Islamic religious, political, and cultural systems,"⁵⁵ they are equally descriptive of these systems in the succeeding seven centuries.

Ibn Khaldun's analysis, written from within the dominant Sunni tradition, treated Islam as a single monolithic religion. Islam, however, is not monolithic, and except for a brief 29 year period known as the rule of the

⁵⁴ Khaldun, p.107.

⁵⁵ Martin, p.30.

Rightly Guided Caliphs immediately following Muhammad's death, Islam has become as theologically fractured and splintered as any other world religion. The primary schism in Islam is between Sunni and Shi'i; it is important to note, however, that Shi'i Muslims "differ little from Sunnis in belief and practice."⁵⁶ It is Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, which provides both a significant difference in praxis, as well as the third element in what has been termed the three "main expressions of Islam."⁵⁷ Thus, to demonstrate the validity of my model of religio-political Islamic leadership in the modern era, I will briefly examine leaders drawn from the Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi traditions.

B. THE MAHDI

It was from the Sufi tradition that Muhammad Ahmad, known as the Mahdi, arose in the 19th century. He led a revolt in the Sudan that successfully overthrew a despotic and imperial Egyptian administration of the area in the 1880s. His leadership in this revolt has been characterized as the "most striking example of the political power of a religious leader"⁵⁸ in the 19th century. The Islamic state he created then ruled the Sudan from 1881 to 1898. The revolt itself

Drew some of its strength from opposition to the foreign governors, but had far deeper roots. Muhammad Ahmad, who founded it, drew his inspiration from his Sufi training, and was regarded by his followers as the mahdi, the one guided by God to restore the reign of justice in

⁵⁶ Martin, p.12.

⁵⁷ Martin, p.20.

⁵⁸ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) p.313.

the world. His movement spread quickly.. After ending Egyptian rule he was able to create a state based upon the teachings of Islam, as interpreted by him, and consciously modeled upon the ideal community of the Prophet and his Companions. This state was carried on by his khalifa after his death, but was ended by the Anglo-Egyptian occupation at the end of the century.⁵⁹

Many aspects of the Mahdi's rise to power reflect both Ibn Khaldun's observations and the leadership model described in this study. He and his followers have been characterized by Ira Lapidus as comprising a "charismatic revolutionary movement."⁶⁰ His personal charisma was apparent even as he made his first claim to the Mahdship, and when "the common people thronged about him, he would speak to them with great emotion, urging them to abandon this world and turn to the world to come. To them he also confided the secret that the Mahdship had been conferred upon him by the Prophet."⁶¹ He also claimed descent from Muhammad. Thus, he consciously established a direct spiritual and biological link with Muhammad, the charismatic Islamic leadership archetype.

The individuals who responded to the Mahdi's call to arms also provide evidence that he was appealing to Muslims as a charismatic leader working within the Bedouin egalitarian ideal. In fact, "Baqgara nomads made up the bulk of his army."⁶² While the majority of the Mahdi's immediate followers were nomads, he also appealed to

⁵⁹ Hourani, p.313.

⁶⁰ Lapidus, p.854.

⁶¹ P.N. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan: 1881-1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958) p.45.

⁶² Lapidus, p.854.

Muslims elsewhere, for "during the Mahdi's lifetime, his rebellion attracted considerable attention throughout the Islamic world. His stunning success in routing the Anglo-Egyptian army and establishing an indigenous Islamic state offered hope to Muslims everywhere."⁶³ Just as the stunning military success of early Islam provided the ultimate proof of Muhammad's message, the Mahdi's secular and military success validated both his personal claim to prophethood and the charismatic leadership model he had successfully tapped into among Muslims worldwide.

The Mahdi died in 1885. The success of the state after his death - which fell only after the British sent a punitive military expedition to the Sudan in 1898 - establishes the last element of the leadership model described in this study: it survived the leader's demise.

C. AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

If the Sudanese Mahdi represents the most striking example of the political power of a religious leader in the 19th century, the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran must be considered the 20th century's exemplar. The impact on the Muslim world of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, a revolution that ultimately brought Khomeini to power, cannot be overstated. It has been described as "one of the greatest populist explosions in human history."⁶⁴ Khomeini is not only the most successful 20th century example of a charismatic Islamic leader, he is arguably the most profound Shi'i example in all of Islamic history.

On a personal level, Khomeini was clearly different from other Shi'i religious leaders: "The charismatic

⁶³ Cleveland, p.122.

⁶⁴ Cleveland, p.433.

dimensions of his leadership rest on the dialectical growth of a unique relationship between Khomeini and his followers, whose texture and tone go far beyond the ordinary authority assumed by a high-ranking Shi'i cleric."⁶⁵ In addition, Khomeini had the ability to evoke followership without directly asking, thus "with unspoken words, unwritten declarations, merely by the assumption of an authorial voice for 'what Islam truly is' Khomeini generates in his audience a compelling obedience, a feeling ever so tacit that he is in charge, and that he is to be listened to."⁶⁶ His mere voice was sufficient; Khomeini's personal presence was not required. The Iranian Revolution has been termed the "cassette revolution," for "Khomeini was the first charismatic orator who sent his oratory from abroad to millions of his compatriots at home on cassettes."⁶⁷ Khomeini was, simply, "the undisputed charismatic leader of the revolution."⁶⁸ The Ayatollah Khomeini clearly held, then, those "specific gifts of mind and body" that are religious or supernatural in origin that Max Weber defined as characteristic of charismatic leadership, gifts that are "not accessible to everybody."⁶⁹

Not only did Khomeini have charismatic appeal, he consciously combined his role as a religious leader with that of political leader. In 1970, while in political exile from Pahlavi Iran, he gave a series of nineteen lectures in

⁶⁵ Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1992) p.417.

⁶⁶ Dabashi, p.419.

⁶⁷ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) p.378.

⁶⁸ Dariush Zahedi, *The Iranian Revolution Then and Now: Indicators of Regime Stability* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000) p.157.

Najaf, Iraq on the topic of *velayat-e faqih*, or secular rule by the Islamic jurist (religious leader). In these lectures, published later that year as *Islamic Government*, he stated unequivocally that it was not only the right, but the duty of the Shi'i religious leadership, or *ulama*, to exercise political power in the temporal world over the Islamic community, or *umma*. This was an innovative re-interpretation of the Shi'i concept of *velayat-e faqih*, which traditionally had "meant no more than the legal guardianship of the senior clerics over those deemed incapable of looking after their own interest - minors, widows, and the insane."⁷⁰ To enlarge this concept to encompass senior clergy having authority over the state, with himself appointed the religious "supreme guide" and supreme political authority, was a complete Khomeini invention. Khomeini was able to enact a "radical transformation in Shia political thought and practice"⁷¹ thus meeting the first criterion in our charismatic Islamic leadership model

Khomeini also consciously modeled himself on Muhammad to include this folding together of religious and temporal power. As Khomeini wrote, "Were religion and politics separate in the time of the prophet?" He answered, "Now the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was also a political person."⁷² Khomeini's followers also viewed Khomeini as just such an Islamic ideal-type leader: the Ayatollah Khamenei, who both personally knew Khomeini and

⁶⁹ Weber, p.16.

⁷⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) p.18.

⁷¹ Zahedi, p.71.

⁷² Ayatollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government* (1970) p.39.

would become his successor as leader of the Islamic Republic, evokes this sense about Khomeini when he writes that "Like prophets in his being, Khomeini presents to the perspicacious observant religion, politics, revolution, God, and the people, all at the same time. His revolt brings to mind the revolt of the divine Prophets."⁷³

The Ayatollah Khomeini clearly epitomized charismatic Islamic religious leadership. Not only was his personal charisma obvious even to those who only heard him on tape, but he, as well as his followers, consciously collapsed together the political and secular leadership roles in his person. Once in power, he was able to successfully redefine a key concept in Shi'i Islam, velayat-e faqih, and have the majority of Iranian Muslims accept his redefinition, a rendering that invented an Islamic theological basis for his one man rule. Finally, the Ayatollah Khomeini meets our last criterion, since the Islamic republic, along with the velayat-e faqih system, have endured beyond the life of the founder: Khomeini died in 1989, while the Islamic Republic of Iran was still with us on September 11, 2001.

D. OSAMA BIN LADEN

September 11, 2001 was the date that another charismatic Islamic leader - Osama bin Laden - came to the forefront of public attention in the West. Bin Laden is not only the Sunni example for this study, but also the 21st century example. His roots are firmly in the 20th century, however, beginning in the Afghanistan of the 1980's, for

Bin Laden's leadership experience during the struggle in Afghanistan against the Soviet invasion was assuredly a transformational

⁷³ Dabashi, p.418

experience. Ascetic in lifestyle, often living in caves, Bin Laden gave generously of his fortune, building hospitals and clinics, purchasing weapons and ammunition. Inspirational in his rhetoric, he won the adulation of his Afghan freedom fighters. The defeat of the Soviet Union, a superpower, was confirmation that Allah was on their side... A series of bin Laden triumphs - the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Khobar towers in 1996, the 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, last year's attacks on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen and the most spectacular terrorist attack in history, the events of Sept. 11 - further confirmed for bin Laden and his followers the righteousness of their holy cause, for surely their small group of committed Muslims could not possibly have struck these blows against the one remaining superpower unless God was on their side... Bin Laden has laid claim to the title of commander in chief of the Islamic world... During this dizzying series of triumphs, Bin Laden's messianic sense of mission has expanded, and his charismatic attractiveness has increased.⁷⁴

Obviously Osama bin Laden epitomizes the first two elements of the charismatic Islamic leadership model: his personal charisma and the fact that he has consciously attempted to emulate the prophet Muhammad and combine the religious and secular leadership roles in his person. Indeed, "Jamal Ahmed al-Fadl, an Al Qaeda insider who defected to the United States, testified this year that Mr. Bin Laden *began* with a loftier goal: the creation of an empire of all the world's one billion Muslims ruled by a single leader."⁷⁵ Whether or not Bin Laden is ultimately successful is in large part dependant on how he can complete the last two elements that define charismatic

⁷⁴ Jerrold M. Post, "Does Al Qaeda Need Osama Bin Laden?," *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 2001, p. M2.

⁷⁵ Risen, p.3.

Islamic leaders: change the rules and institutions that brought him to power, and have the system thus put in place endure beyond his lifetime. There are hints that Osama bin Laden's lack of formal religious training has caused him some difficulty with the second to last element; some of his fatwas, or legal opinions (such as his "Declaration of War") had doubt cast on them by some Muslims. Indeed, some Islamic scholars have issued fatwas of their own condemning the attacks of September 11. Thus, Osama bin Laden's ultimate success is not yet fully determined. His success, and success of charismatic Islamic leaders of his ilk that follow, will largely be determined by how the world community, led by the U.S., responds consequently. It is implications for policy that I will discuss in the following chapter.

V. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Given the model of charismatic religio-political leadership that has been so historically effective in the Middle East, the concomitant policy implications for the United States vis a vis the Islamic world are profound. When discussing foreign policy implications, however, the distinction must be made between strategies of cooperation vs. confrontation; while the basic model remains the same in both cases, different aspects become more compelling depending on whether the charismatic Islamic leader is regarded as a friend or foe of the U.S. government.

A. CONFRONTATION

The departure point of this study was the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, and more specifically the question of whether or not Osama bin Laden's leadership could be considered a recurring type or a unique event. Having established in this study that there exists a distinct model for this form of leadership, it can also be stated that Osama bin Laden, as a charismatic Islamic leader, can be considered to be in a confrontational state with the U.S. government. Indeed, Osama bin Laden is personally on the F.B.I.'s infamous Ten Most Wanted List, he has issued a fatwa, or legal ruling, declaring war on the United States, and the United States government has termed the conflict with Osama bin Laden's followers since September 11 specifically as a war, a "War on Terror." With Osama bin Laden and the United States government confronting one another, we can now examine the policy implications that flow directly from the challenges posed by someone who fits our charismatic leadership model.

B. SOURCE OF POWER

The initial source of power for a charismatic leader is basic personal charisma, as discussed earlier. Hard to define, but recognizable when seen, it can be considered a necessary but not sufficient element in the consolidation of the charismatic leader's power. The real key lies in the combination of religious and secular leadership which occurs in a two step process: first, the charismatic leader taps into the Islamic historical memory, utilizing religious imagery, words, and actions, and consciously emulates the prophet Muhammad. And second, Muslims, 'soft-wired' through the very basic tenets of the religion to be receptive to this type of leadership, accept him and his message. We have to remember secular and religious leadership are successfully folded together in the person of the charismatic leader. This melding of roles stands as both the leader's primary source of power and a key element whenever there is active confrontation. It is important to note that by manipulating the proper cultural symbols and using the right language the leader can maintain a strong sense of empathy and passive followership from all Muslims beyond the circle of his immediate followers. In Osama bin Laden's case, commentator Mamoun Fandy has termed this the "bin Lakin group." He writes that

As someone who has lived and traveled widely throughout Arab countries, I see public opinion in the region divided roughly into three categories. About 40 percent are with the United States and against the terrorists. Another 10 percent support bin Laden. The remaining 50 percent are what I call the "bin Lakin group". Lakin means "but" in Arabic. The bin Lakin group condemns terrorism, yet sees lots of "buts" and "ifs" about the U.S. approach to Arab issues. Its

members are never unequivocal in their condemnation of terrorism.⁷⁶

While they may abhor violence and terror on a personal level, this 50 percent of Arabs still find Osama bin Laden's Islamic message and leadership style more compelling than the western message, which is largely distilled from U.S. policies in the region. Therein lies the power of successfully folding together secular and religious power in the Islamic world; Osama bin Laden, rather than being limited to the active support of only 10 percent of Muslims, has, through dint of his dual role as an Islamic religio-political leader, at least the passive support of another 50 percent.

It follows, then, that any U.S. confrontational policy that treats Osama bin Laden as both a political and religious leader, or encourages this melding of roles, and that focuses on him as a pivotal individual, actually reinforces the very source of his power. This would include policy actions such as putting Osama bin Laden on the FBI Top Ten Most Wanted list, having the President of the United States specifically name him as the person responsible for the attacks, and focusing the military/legal hunt on Osama bin Laden's person in the ongoing war on terror so prominently. Actions like these which put a face on the enemy, or personalize an individual as public enemy number one, while inherent to the American way of war and an essential element of the standard U.S. policy response to crisis, have the effect of increasing indigenous Islamic support for the very leader we are

⁷⁶ Mamoun Fandy, "To Reach Arabs, Try Changing the Channel", The Washington Post, 2 Dec 2001, p.B02.

trying to oppose. By focusing on, and discussing Osama bin Laden as if he is Al Qaeda's charismatic Islamic leader, we are reinforcing and solidifying the very key to his power, which is the successful collapsing of all societal leadership roles into his singular person. By demonizing him we inadvertently reaffirm and reify him. This is the opposite of what we should be doing.

In fact, if the source of the charismatic Islamic leader's power lies in the successful combination of leadership roles, this suggests that a U.S. policy that *splits* the roles would be more successful.

One policy action suggested by the model presented in this thesis is the creation of dissent, or the appearance of dissent, within the leader's inner circle. This could be done overtly, by, for instance, emphasizing the key role of one aide over another in the American media. Or it could be accomplished through covert means. Islamic organizations such as Al Qaeda are notoriously faction and fissure-ridden. This is largely an outgrowth of the same egalitarian Bedouin Arab ideal discussed earlier in this thesis, reinforced by the proven efficacy of organizationally being split into cells for conducting terrorism, or asymmetric warfare. This egalitarian ideal is captured in contemporary terms by a joke circulated in the Arab media following the attacks of September 11; the punch line stated that Arabs could not have been responsible for flying airplanes into the Twin Towers because they would never agree on who would get to be the pilot. Given that popular acclamation of the people, or *umma*, for the just ruler's authority is a key element in the mythology of the charismatic Islamic leader, anything that suggests the

leader has less than this complete support and authority among his immediate followers weakens his claims to authority in the Islamic world as a whole.

In addition, anything that challenges the combined secular and religious authority of the charismatic individual dilutes not only his power, but the relative power of the group as a whole. A specific action that falls into this category regarding Osama bin Laden could include emphasizing the "mastermind" role of his top aides. After all, "American officials continue to believe that the September 11 attacks were ultimately coordinated by Mr. Bin Laden's three top lieutenants, Dr. Zawahiri, Muhammad Atef, and Abu Zubaydah."⁷⁷ By emphasizing the key roles of these top aides, and consciously omitting mention of the charismatic religio-political leader himself, U.S. policy makers would avoid strengthening Osama bin Laden's standing within the Islamic world. One additional policy recommendation that flows from this model, then, is simply to cease public acknowledgement of Osama bin Laden (or any future charismatic Islamic leader), substituting a coterie of aides or top lieutenants' names for his name - if a name, face, and individual are necessary to sate the American public's need to put a face on the enemy. This list, by definition, must be a revolving one, or the effort will run the risk of focusing attention on a new leader who may also consciously fill the role of the charismatic leader.

Once the focus of attention has been moved away from the charismatic leader, the model suggests that the

⁷⁷ James Risen with Stephen Engelberg, "Failure to Heed Signs of Change in Terror Goals," *The New York Times on the Web*, 14 Oct 2001, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/14/international/14INQU.html>>

religious and secular leadership roles themselves be split. In the case of Osama bin Laden, the obvious starting point is to attack his credibility as a religious scholar. As we have seen in the various case studies, charismatic Islamic leaders who have been able to utilize this leadership model successfully have had at least a basic education in Islam. This familiarity with the cultural symbols and terminology of Islam enabled them to more successfully manipulate and integrate these into their own program, ultimately garnering enough respect and authority so that they could actually change some of Islam's basic tenets. Osama bin Laden lacks even a basic level of formal training in Islam. As one commentator has noted, "he may look like a traditional Islamic warrior, but his sense of the past is an invented one."⁷⁸

Not only is Osama bin Laden "no religious scholar", but he "is contemptuous of most traditionally-trained seminary scholars - the 'ruler's ulama' he calls them."⁷⁹ The policy initiative that flows from this, then, is to attack Osama bin Laden's credibility as a knowledgeable Muslim. Ideally, such a move would have to come from within the Islamic community itself. The elaborate casting of bin Laden as a political-religious leader of the entire Islamic community in the mold of Muhammad would most effectively be contested by having the inconsistencies in his message and lack of formal training pointed out by Islamic religious leaders of stature, commenting from within.

⁷⁸ Risen, p.2.

⁷⁹ Charle Kurzman, "Muslim world in ferment," The News and Observer, 1 Dec 2001, <<http://www.newsobserver.com/Sunday/news/editorials/Story/842093p-828760c.html>>

Likewise, Osama bin Laden's credibility as a secular leader has to be addressed. His rise to power has been closely associated with his alleged military and political successes; he first arrived in Afghanistan "in the mid-1980s and took up residence in one of the many guest houses set up to receive volunteers. His multi-million dollar fortune made him immediately popular... by 1989, Mr. Bin Laden had founded his own network of training camps, which he called Al Qaeda."⁸⁰ With his rise to power so closely tied to his political and military success in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden's leadership is best attacked obliquely; in this instance, one method would be to ascribe all of his secular success to the organizational talents of one or more individuals of the Al Qaeda inner circle. Another method would be to emphasize the role that his money played, and ascribe his leadership solely to buying his way to the top. Thus, by dismissing bin Laden's secular abilities, and making him appear to be a figurehead political-military leader, with the real decision makers and organizers behind the scenes, his secular role would be diminished and his impact on the Islamic community as a whole weakened.

C. COOPERATION

In addition to suggesting ways to undermine religio-political leaders when our relations with them are conflictual, likewise this model suggests ways to treat leaders with whom we would like to cooperate.

Given the secular, authoritarian regimes currently in place in the Middle East, few heads of state can be considered charismatic Islamic leaders as described by my

⁸⁰ Risen , p.2.

model. Most lack the sense of religious legitimacy that is conferred upon a Muslim who can tap successfully into thirteen centuries of historical memory. Indeed, few of the current state structures of the Middle East are even a full century old yet, most having been formed by France and Great Britain from the territory of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. By fully understanding that no leader's power and authority in these countries flows from deep-seated cultural or historical imperatives, we gain a new insight into their regimes. The infamous "Arab street" is not with them or with their regimes. Instead, their authority is derived strictly from the state apparatus and associated security structures, equipped with weapons manufactured in the West.

Ironically, the origins of many of the reactionary movements in the Islamic world which have formed in response to a perceived sense of falling behind the West have actually originated in the West. The single best example is that of Arab nationalism. The seeds of the Arab Nationalist movement were planted by American Protestant missionaries in the Levant region of the Ottoman Empire. Originally confined to Arab Christians, and primarily a reaction to Turkish dominance within the empire, by the post-World War II period Arab nationalism was being expressed by Gamal Nasser of Egypt, arguably the most influential Arab leader of the 20th century. Nasser's personal charisma is legendary; the salient point for this study, however, is the fact that during his lifetime, Nasser, through the sheer force of his personal charisma, successfully grafted an imported Western notion

(nationalism) onto the rule of a Middle Eastern state. Nasser truly had the Arab street behind him.

Tellingly, however, Nasser's regime did not survive him. His successor in Egypt, Anwar Sadat, began to immediately dismantle many of Nasser's policies. Significantly, Nasser had never attempted to appeal to Islam. Indeed, he persecuted Islamists in Egypt until his death.

Dr. Ali Shariati represents another example of a charismatic individual attempting to graft a Western ideology onto a Middle Eastern one, in this case Marxism with Shi'i Islam. Along with the Ayatollah Khomeini, Shariati was one of the two main ideologues in Iran prior to the revolution. His message was that only an indigenous Islamic movement (he dubbed his Marxist Shi'ism) would provide an effective method by which the Islamic world could deal with the West. A Sorbonne-educated sociologist, his reactionary message was complicated, difficult to understand, and ultimately limited by the inherent contradictions between Marxism and Islam. Because of this, his following remained limited largely to the pre-Revolution Iranian student population. Nonetheless, among those students who heard him speak, the charismatic Shariati offered what he termed an Islamic, indigenous solution to dealing with the West that ultimately had its origin in a Western -ism, in this case not Nationalism but Marxism.

What is notable about both these leaders is that Nasser ultimately failed because he consciously cut himself off from the Islam of the Arab street, while Shariati failed because his vision, though it did incorporate an

indigenous Islam, was ultimately too complicated and self-contradicting. Both men's failures, coupled with the charismatic leadership model described in this study, hint at what is really required for the West and the Islamic world to successfully coexist in the world community. If one accepts Francis Fukayama's thesis regarding the "end of history", there is no longer a dialectic between competing systems of social organization: there exists now one world system, based on free-market capitalism. What is required for the successful transition of the Muslim world into this world system is a charismatic Islamic leader, one who by definition is both a product of, and wildly successful, in the Islamic world. This leader, once he has consolidated his authority, will then, with his words alone, be able to change the very tenets of Islam that enabled his rise, much as Khomeini did. If he could, with his words alone, change Islam and bring people along with him, it is not inconceivable that he could, for example, introduce a new democratic system of governance, or initiate an era of cooperation with the United States. It is with a leader such as this, as he is consolidating his authority, that the United States has the potential to attain the greatest policy influence. This is the only way that U.S. policy will ever effectively influence the Arab street: with the cooperation of a charismatic Islamic leader.

VI. WHITHER THE CHARISMATIC LEADER IN ISLAM?

A. FUTURE TRENDS

Having examined the origins and policy implications of this charismatic religious leadership model, it is imperative to consider future trends in order to answer the question "whither the model?" A true static model for anything that involves human social relations does not exist; any descriptive model is at best a snapshot of how things work at a specific time in history explained by the confluence of a set of defined, unique factors. It thus becomes important to attempt to identify changes and potential changes that may influence or alter these factors. It is only then that we may begin to discern what the implications may be for the future

The most likely shift to affect this leadership model is demographic. If one accepts that personal charisma is an indefinable something that occurs only in a small number of human beings, and then only in the process of interaction with a larger social group, it follows that in any given population there is only a finite number of potential charismatic leaders. It also follows that this absolute number of potential charismatic leaders increases as the absolute numbers of the population increase. Simply put, with more babies come more potential Khomeinis.

One need not calculate precise mathematical ratios: the general trend is the key. By all markers, the population in the Islamic world is increasing dramatically, both absolutely and in proportion to the rest of the world. As Samuel Huntington notes:

Population expansion in Islamic countries, particularly in the Balkans, North Africa, and Central Asia, has been significantly greater than that in the neighboring countries and in the world generally. Between 1965 and 1990 the total number of people on earth rose from 3.3 billion to 5.3 billion, an annual growth rate of 1.85 percent. In Muslim societies growth rates were almost always over 2.0 percent, often exceeded 2.5 percent, and at times were over 3.0 percent... Overall Muslims constituted perhaps 18 percent of the world's population in 1980, and are likely to be over 20 percent in 2000 and 30 percent in 2025.⁸¹

The numbers speak for themselves. From within an early population of Arabs in the vicinity of Mecca that numbered in the hundreds, or at most thousands, Muhammad appeared. The potential for a charismatic Islamic religious leader arising today from "among the world's nearly one billion Muslims"⁸² can only be higher. If personal charisma is a biological trait that occurs with a certain frequency given the population, with a population of almost one billion it would be irresponsible to suggest other than this: there are simply more Muslims than at any time in the history of the religion who possess, or will be born with, personal charisma, which is the critical first element necessary in becoming a successful charismatic Islamic religious leader as described in this study.

This demographic trend will continue, for:

Growth in absolute numbers will continue to be large, and the impact of that growth will be felt throughout the first part of the twenty-first century. For years to come Muslim populations

⁸¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) p.117.

⁸² Dale Eickelman, "Inside the Islamic Reformation," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Winter 1998, p.82.

will be disproportionately young populations, with a notable demographic bulge of teenagers and people in their twenties. In addition, the people in this age cohort will be overwhelmingly urban.⁸³

Meanwhile, increasing access to education, coupled with the expansion of mass communication, is transforming the Islamic world, in what Dale Eickelman has termed the Islamic Reformation, "a time of change as profound as the Protestant Reformation was for Christendom."⁸⁴ In his view, individual Muslims "in unprecedentedly large numbers - whether in the vast cosmopolitan city of Istanbul or in Oman's tiny, remote, al-Hamra oasis - are examining and debating the fundamentals of Muslim belief and practice in ways that their less self-conscious predecessors would have never imagined. This highly deliberate examination of faith is what constitutes the Islamic Reformation."⁸⁵

The mechanisms Eickelman describes at work in this Reformation, namely mass education and mass communication, hold serious implications for the future of Islamic leadership. For, if personal charisma is the essential first requirement as described by my model, developing a working knowledge of the cultural symbols and terminology of Islam is the next critical step; it is only with such basic knowledge that a leader can consciously and successfully tap into the Muhammadan leadership role. This knowledge, formerly restricted to the *ulama* and those enlisting in some type of formal religious training, is now accessible to all. As Eickelman notes, or:

Quite simply, in country after country,

⁸³ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p.117.

⁸⁴ Eickelman, "Inside the Islamic Reformation," p.80.

⁸⁵ Eickelman, "Inside the Islamic Reformation," p.82.

government officials, traditional religious scholars, and officially sanctioned preachers are finding it very hard to monopolize the tools of literate culture.⁸⁶

In other words, a working knowledge of Islamic theology, previously limited to a select few within the Muslim world, has now, through the dual processes of mass education and mass communication, become accessible to a higher percentage of Muslims than at any time in the history of Islam. This, coupled with the increasing absolute population of the Islamic world, suggests that a much higher percentage of potential charismatic leaders will now be exposed to enough Islamic theology to incorporate the basic tenets of Islam successfully into their messages.

Evidence for this shift lies in the language used to describe knowledge of Islam. The Arab word *jahiliyya* is traditionally "the Muslim designation for the cultural and religious state of affairs in Arabia prior to the rise of Islam. *Jahiliyya* is often translated as 'time of ignorance' or 'time of paganism'."⁸⁷ Given a radical reinterpretation by the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb, *jahiliyya* has been recast. Stripped of its chronological meaning, it now refers to contemporary ignorance of Islam, which is something that good Muslims must actively oppose. According to Sayyid Qutb, Islam "should take the form of a movement struggling against the *jahili* environment, while also trying to remove the influences of *jahili* society in its followers."⁸⁸ Here we see that, due to the influence of mass

⁸⁶ Eickelman, "Inside the Islamic Reformation," p.82.

⁸⁷ Martin, p.251.

⁸⁸ Sayiid Qutb, *Milestones* (Cedar Rapids:The Mother Mosque

education, the very word for 'ignorance of Islam' has itself been shorn of its historical, chronological interpretation, and given a contemporary, political one.

Upon examining demographic and technological trends in the contemporary political Muslim world, it is apparent that the preconditions required for a charismatic Islamic leader to emerge as described by my model are stronger than they have ever been, and are likely to continue to strengthen in the near future.

This is significant for the United States because while the frequency of appearance of charismatic Islamic leaders will increase, the relative virulence of their movements most definitely has. Thanks to some of the same technological advances that have democratized formal Islamic learning, modes of violent expression have become increasingly deadly vis a vis the West. In the 19th century the Mahdi in the Sudan killed and wounded British soldiers, Foreign Office professionals, and Egyptian colonial troops in British service, all of whom were physically in the Sudan to oppose him. In the 20th century, the Iranian Revolution claimed many non-professional Westerners as casualties and hostages, but again loss of life was confined to the geographic limits of Iran. It has only been in pursuit of perceived Iranian apostates that the Islamic Republic has gone outside of its borders to kill: former CIA director John Deutch estimated that for the period from 1989-1996 the Islamic Republic had murdered "at least" 48 Iranians overseas.⁸⁹ In the 21st century, Osama bin Laden and his followers have killed thousands of American

Foundation, 1988) p.39.

⁸⁹ Zahedi, p.6.

citizens on U.S., Saudi, Yemenese, Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Afghan soil.

Another implication of this model for the future involves technology as it applies to the charismatic leader's primary mode of connection with his followers. Technology has also evolved considerably. Muhammad and the Mahdi communicated with their followers through the sound of their voices in direct, person-to-person contact. The Ayatollah Khomeini made extensive use of cassette tapes, especially while he was in exile outside of Iran; most of his followers became followers after listening to his voice being played by a machine, while Khomeini himself was thousands of miles away. Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda have made extensive use of the visual medium. Recruiting videotapes produced by Al Qaeda are prolific in the Middle East, and one need only take note of the tremendous controversy surrounding the Al Jazeera network to see that video has become the primary mode of expression that Osama bin Laden has used to connect with the wider Islamic world.

The implications of this trend are both fascinating and disturbing. Muhammad and the Mahdi were real people who interacted with real people. Khomeini was a real person whose voice was on tape. Osama bin Laden is a real person (or was, he may be deceased at the time of this writing), but through the techniques of modern video, there are always questions when an image of him appears: Where is he? Is he still alive? Is that really him? When was the film made? For the first time, the very real possibility of a made-for-mass-consumption charismatic Islamic leader arises. Ironically, this only underlines the salience of the model offered here. If this is indeed the ideal-type

charismatic Islamic leadership model that can most successfully be used to rally the wider Muslim world, what better way to attain power than to consciously use key elements of the model?

Also, technology and the means of communication continue to advance. Given that Osama bin Laden has primarily used remote visual means to reach the average Muslim, this suggests that in the future a different charismatic leader could use even more sophisticated communications technology. The logical next step is digital: the world of web-sites, e-mail, and instant messaging. Small businesses in the United States have discovered that, through technology, it is possible to give the appearance of being large established businesses; it would be ethnocentric to assume that Muslims will not likewise utilize technology in creative, innovative ways to create potential "virtual leaders" or even "virtual movements" that can resonate throughout the Islamic world.

B. CONCLUSION

In the end, however, we must return to Muhammad and to Samuel Huntington. If, as Huntington states, "neat logical categories are necessary if man is to think profitably about the real world in which he lives"⁹⁰, then the charismatic religious leadership model described in this study, with Muhammad as the archetype, represents one such logical category that U.S. policy makers should be aware of when they think about the Islamic world. We have established that this specific model of charismatic religious-political leadership was developed and exploited on the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century by Muhammad. Due

⁹⁰ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p.vii.

to various ecological and social factors, the Arabs living in the region at the time were especially receptive to this form of leadership. Muhammad successfully folded the existing social structures into his new religion to form Islam, thus institutionalizing the religion with himself as the archetypical leader. The stunning military and political success that Muhammad and his followers achieved in the expansion of Islam stands as the ultimate proof of his, and and their, efficacy. Because the model-that-is-Muhammad is intertwined so deeply with Islam, Muslim leaders throughout the centuries who have been able to tap into it have found that their message resonates strongly with all Muslims. The Muslim world, soft-wired to accept this type of leader, has produced many examples throughout history - like the Mahdi, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and Osama bin Laden. Osama bin Laden, then, stands as only the most current representative of a recurring type.

Existing trends and conditions suggest that the frequency with which we will see this type of leader will increase in the near future. This is significant because the trend has also been for this type of leader to be increasingly virulent and anti-American in his messages, as well as increasingly deadly to U.S. citizens. It is my hope that by identifying this pattern and this model of charismatic religious leadership, we can more fully understand *why* Osama bin Laden's message resonates so effectively in the Islamic world. Only with a more nuanced understanding are we likely to successfully prosecute the ongoing war on terror - and prevent the deaths of any more American citizens at home or abroad.

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