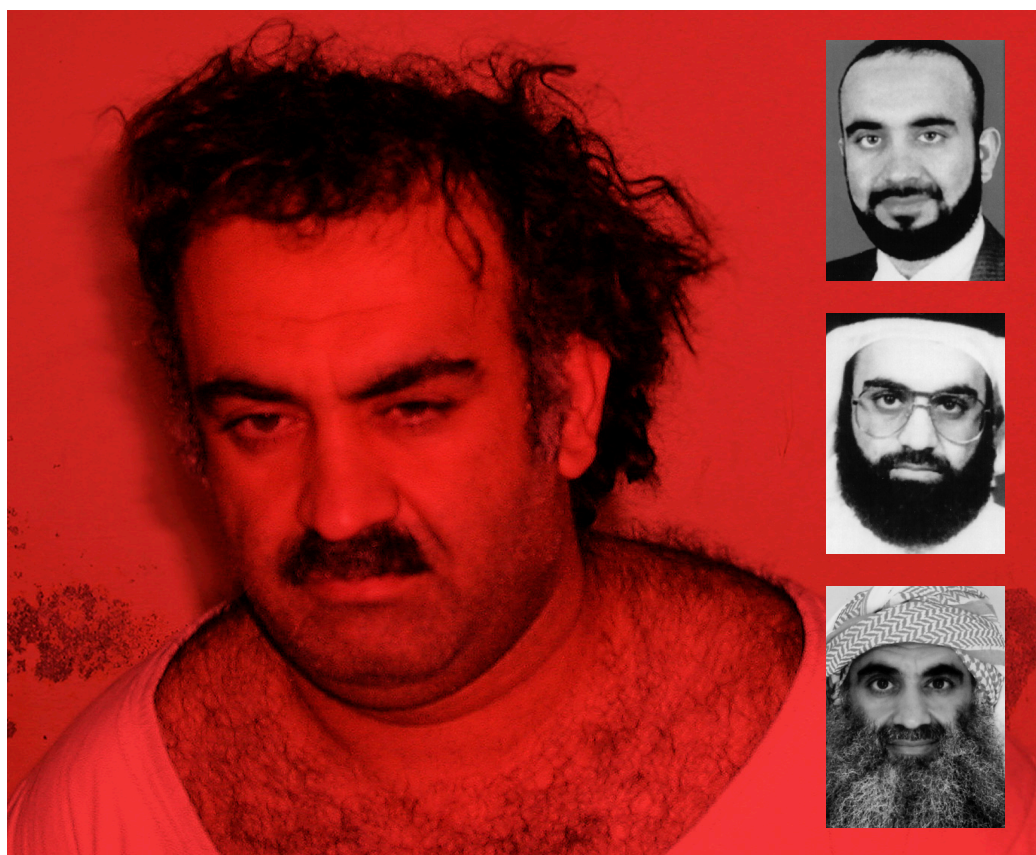

MASTERMIND

THE MANY FACES OF THE 9/11 ARCHITECT,
KHALID SHAIKH MOHAMMED



RICHARD MINITER

Author of the *New York Times* bestsellers
Losing Bin Laden and *Shadow War*

W I N D

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T E R M I N I

SENTINEL

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Introduction

From a cage in Guantánamo Bay, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed is on the verge of satisfying his life's biggest ambitions: to be a world-famous performer and to die a martyr. The man that prosecutors and the press call "the 9/11 mastermind" couldn't be happier. He plainly relishes the CIA's description of him as "one of history's most famous terrorists."¹

That America, the enemy he swore to destroy, is giving him a global stage and a way to a jihadi death is either an irony or a gift from Allah.

The first time he had a stage in America, Khalid was a student doing college comedy skits in North Carolina for *The Friday Tonight Show*, with an informal Muslim group that met near his college campus.² His performances were biting and, former classmates say, very funny. One former student called him "the king of comedy."³ Another told me "he loves the attention."⁴ By all accounts he is going to enjoy every moment of a public trial. It may be his last chance to perform before a large audience.

KSM, as he is universally known in intelligence circles, has put himself at the center of every major Al Qaeda plot for the past fifteen years, leading U.S. intelligence officials to call him “the Forrest Gump of al Qaeda.”⁵ Indeed, KSM was involved with so many major terror plots that some knowledgeable observers, like noted Pakistani journalist Rahimullah Yusufzai, wonder if he is exaggerating his role.⁶ In fact, the opposite may be true. Intelligence analysts say the “9/11 mastermind” is still being tied to *more* plots, including ones that will be made public for the first time in this book.

He admitted to planning the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center (killing six), the bombing of two nightclubs in Bali (killing 202), Richard Reid’s “shoe bomber” plot (which would have killed hundreds aboard a Miami-bound flight), the September 11 attacks (killing nearly three thousand), and plots to bomb London’s Heathrow Airport (one of the world’s busiest), the Big Ben clock tower, and the Empire State Building (where more than a thousand people work). He also confessed to schemes to kill office workers in skyscrapers in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Chicago.⁷ He even planned to bomb the Panama Canal, which would have devastated world shipping and strangled the U.S. economy. KSM was an endless fountain of plans to bomb, murder, and maim.

Nor did KSM ever cease trying to hit targets inside the United States. After the September 11 attacks, he twice tried to infiltrate the American mainland with Al Qaeda–trained terrorists. But both were captured before reaching their destinations, thanks to interrogations and phone taps.⁸

When not engaged in large-scale killings, KSM focused on individual murders. He plotted to assassinate President Bill Clinton and twice tried to kill Pope John Paul II. Several prime ministers of Pakistan narrowly escaped his bombs.

KSM is proud of his central role in the kidnapping and murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, who innocently wanted to get “both sides” of the Al Qaeda story. KSM boasted: “I decapitated with my blessed right hand the head of the American Jew, Daniel

Pearl, in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. For those who would like to confirm, there are pictures of me on the Internet holding his head.”⁹ His tone of voice revealed more than his words; he was boasting while playing to an audience of jihadis worldwide.

KSM likes to present himself as a strictly observant Muslim, but he picks and chooses which Islamic laws to follow. In college in North Carolina, he would go to Burger King and order hamburgers without the meat, telling his classmates that he couldn’t be sure that the beef met Islamic standards of purity.¹⁰ While in U.S. custody, he has grown a long traditional beard and is often seen in flowing robes, handling prayer beads. Yet in the Philippines, he plotted terror attacks over tropical cocktails beneath brass poles of swinging teenage strippers, against a backdrop of pounding rock music. Murder, instrumental music, public nudity, and alcohol consumption are all forbidden by Islamic law.

At times in college and afterward he refused to be photographed because images of living things were “un-Islamic.” Later he spent weeks getting a video of himself onto Al Jazeera (see chapter 11) and hours posing for a Red Cross photographer in prison (see photo section).

In the most famous photograph taken at his capture, KSM seems like a bear of a man. That photo shows a bulky man with a carpet of chest hair and intense, dark eyes. In fact, he is more of a chimp than a bear. He is five feet four inches tall¹¹ and speaks with an accent that one American official at Guantánamo Bay likened to that of Apu, the Indian owner of the Kwik-E-Mart on *The Simpsons*.¹²

He isn’t an impressive speaker in Arabic, either. One Al Jazeera reporter who interviewed him described KSM’s Arabic as “crude and colloquial,”¹³ and another, who watched his testimony at Guantánamo, said he was like “a Pakistani Jackie Mason.”¹⁴

The diminutive terrorist displays a Napoleonic urge to dominate other people, a trait that some interrogators and guards find humorous.

KSM poses as a romantic, but only when the mood suits him. He

adores the grand gesture—writing love poems to the wife of his CIA interrogator or, during a break in planning the pope’s assassination, buzzing with a rented helicopter the dental clinic where a Catholic Filipina girlfriend worked. KSM (and his nephew Ramzi Yousef) smiled down at her, while slowly unfurling a banner reading I LOVE YOU.¹⁵

Still, his romanticism had limits. A laptop seized by Philippine police features audio recordings of him mocking the whores he had rented. He was also an avid consumer of porn. “The vast majority of the captured hard drives of terrorists,” said former CIA case officer Marc Sageman, “is taken up with porn. Don’t think of these guys as strict Muslims. They are essentially seventeen-year-olds.”¹⁶ Again, hardly the mark of a devout Muslim.

KSM’s life is built on a highly disciplined secrecy, but he is, at heart, a publicity hound. During the many terror operations he supervised, he instructed cell leaders never to phone or e-mail him—he would contact *them*, using prepaid cell phones or coin-operated pay phones, which are harder to track. He wanted to be mysterious, even to his coconspirators. Many of his comrades in terror never knew his real name. He used more than two dozen aliases.¹⁷ “He behaves like an intelligence officer,” said Colonel Rodolfo Mendoza, who ran the intelligence section of the Philippines National Police while KSM was there. “He appears and disappears. He is very, very clever.”¹⁸

Yet he wanted the world to know his name. In one of the early versions of the 9/11 plot, in November 1998, he wanted to personally land one of the hijacked planes, release the women and children, and hold a press conference. An incredulous Osama bin Laden vetoed this idea.¹⁹

He presents himself as an earnest idealist motivated by the torments of the globe’s Muslims, but in fact he simply went into the family business. His father was a preacher of radical Islam at the dinner table and in the mosque. His three older brothers (Zahid, Abed, and Aref) plunged into the secret world of armed Islam, blazing the way for bookish young Khalid. When he did become an active terrorist,

he was soon joined by his nephew Ramzi Yousef (the leader of the cell that bombed the World Trade Center in 1993), two other nephews, and a brother-in-law. KSM's relatives, well connected in Pakistani terrorist circles, helped him meet the men who had founded Al Qaeda.

KSM's extended family is intricately intermarried and interconnected with extremism. Another nephew,²⁰ whose mother is one of KSM's two sisters, is Ammar al-Baluchi, who helped KSM coordinate the 9/11 attacks and the Richard Reid shoe bomb plot. Ammar's sister is KSM cousins Ramzi Yousef's wife.²¹ Ramzi Yousef's father (and KSM's brother), Mohammed Abdul Karim, is one of the leaders of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, a terror group based in Pakistan that targets Shia Muslims and others. Two of KSM's nephews (brothers of Ramzi Yousef), Abdul Muneim and Abdul Karim, are also linked to terror attacks.²² KSM's sister-in-law Aafia Siddiqui, an MIT-trained neuroscientist, was later charged with the attempted murder of a U.S. soldier and was linked to a plot to bomb gas stations in Baltimore. She was allegedly casing targets for KSM when she attracted the FBI's attention.

KSM's clan is dedicated to terrorism the way some families are devoted to winemaking or movie production. "The family specializes in killing," one of the KSM clan's former civilian-defense attorneys, Scott Fenstermaker, told me. "And they are really good at it."²³

America and its allies have become really good at disrupting KSM family plots and capturing most of the clan. KSM and his nephew Ammar al-Baluchi are currently in U.S. custody and may well be sentenced to death. His brothers Abed and Aref died in Afghanistan. Ramzi Yousef is in the supermax federal prison in Colorado, where he is scheduled for outdoor exercise at the same time as the Unabomber.²⁴ (We can only wonder about their conversations.) Many of KSM's other relatives are either in custody or actively being hunted by the world's intelligence services.

The KSM family's hatred of America and its allies is based not on ignorance but on personal knowledge. KSM and many of his extended family were educated in America or have traveled widely in the West. As we will see in chapter 2, KSM even had some run-ins

with the police in North Carolina. He later bragged to his CIA interrogator that he'd been radicalized in the United States. A CIA report concludes that KSM's time in North Carolina "almost certainly helped propel him on his path to become a terrorist."²⁵

But, as we shall see, the real story is far more complicated. While he was radicalized before he arrived in America, the Americans he met only confirmed his ideological prejudices. He mostly met Americans in adverse circumstances, after he had injured them in a car accident or, because of his limited English, failed to do his part in college lab work. Unsurprisingly, he didn't find these Americans to be very friendly. He explained their behavior as "racist" or "anti-Arab," while refusing to acknowledge his own role in the encounters. Nor did he seek out Americans to befriend. He kept to himself and his clique while blaming the world for his exclusion—speeding him on his way to terrorism. According to a CIA report once marked TOP SECRET, "his contacts with Americans, while minimal, confirmed his view that the United States was a debauched and racist country."²⁶ America's failure to follow Muslim (Sharia) laws and its support for Israel and various Arab autocrats (including the Saudis) were his main complaints. KSM is akin to Brutus in George Bernard Shaw's play *Julius Caesar* who insists that the laws of his tribe are the laws of nature.²⁷

The laws of his tribe—the jihadi network he has served for more than half his life—are also dictating the script of his last act, his courtroom performances. He is playing a role. Al Qaeda manuals found in Afghanistan instruct "the brothers" that if they are captured by American or Western European forces, they are to vocally and repeatedly demand a public trial for propaganda and martyrdom purposes. He is dutifully, even joyfully, following orders.

In the course of researching and writing this book, I have often been asked "Why?" The families of September 11 victims were concerned that I was going to lionize KSM. Turning down an interview with me in Paris, Daniel Pearl's widow pointedly asked, "What in your right

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mind makes you think I would want to do this?”²⁸ Some members of the intelligence community thought I was going to portray him as “superhuman,” while critics of the Bush administration feared I was going to render him as an evil genius who single-handedly justifies the war on terror. KSM is a kind of Rorschach blot whom others fear you will see differently than they do.

For this reason, I feel compelled to address why I wrote this book. It is an attempt to answer three important and interrelated questions:

- Since the 1970s, the Western world has been plagued by hijackings, assassinations, kidnappings, bombings, and mass murders of civilians. What unites all these atrocities is an ideology that goes by many names, including “radical Islam.” (Perhaps the best name for a global terrorist movement, borrowing from intelligence reports on the Indian subcontinent, is “jihadi,” someone who uses mass murder to terrify civilians into submission to bring about their dark, coercive utopia.) Most of the perpetrators (known as jihadis) are well educated and hail from intact, middle-class families. Why do they do it? Why do promising young Muslims, many of whom are educated in North America or Western Europe, become remorseless killers of people who wish them no harm? To shrink that question down to manageable size: What made Khalid Shaikh Mohammed into an eager planner of mass murder?

- Al Qaeda is an organization of people devoted to killing other humans. It is distinct from an army, which in democracies exists to defend civilians. Al Qaeda seeks to kill noncombatants (in passenger planes, train terminals, office buildings, or at beachside resorts). Its members routinely kill prisoners, often after they have tortured or dismembered them. No Western army routinely does these things—indeed, their officers and enlisted soldiers are punished for far smaller transgressions of the laws of war. As different as Al Qaeda is, we must understand its inner workings if we

are to combat it. What does KSM's dogged rise inside that terror network tell us about the internal workings of Al Qaeda?

8

- Interrogating captured Al Qaeda figures has become incredibly controversial on both sides of the Atlantic. Critics call it “torture.” Others object to holding terrorists without a trial, on constitutional and human-rights grounds. What does KSM's interrogation and treatment tell us? If we look into the internal deliberations and CIA memos concerning KSM, what do we learn about the trade-off between “humane treatment” (however defined) and gleaning information that saves innocent lives?

These questions are important because how terrorists are made, how Al Qaeda works on the inside, and the true nature of CIA interrogations—the three key issues in this book—are the three key issues driving U.S. foreign policy and how Western nations deal with terrorism. The answers to these questions determine how we confront terrorism now and how we eventually end it.

In the course of my investigation, I interviewed current and former intelligence officers, investigators, and analysts in the United States, Europe, and the Arab world. I sought out eyewitnesses and others who knew him firsthand. I interviewed intelligence and military officials involved in hunting the mastermind.

I also pored over government documents and court records in Europe and North America as well as every cataloged newspaper, magazine, and broadcast transcript available in English and many others available in translation. I examined captured and other records at the National Archives, in Washington, D.C. I traveled to the campuses of Chowan University and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, the two places where KSM studied in America. In the college libraries, I examined the student newspapers and yearbooks of KSM's years in North Carolina and tracked down his former professors and classmates.

I did these things in hopes of taking the reader inside Al Qaeda's

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inner circle and into the mind of the man who planned and supervised the deadliest terror attack in world history. My aim here is not to create sympathy but to establish a frank and sober understanding of the 9/11 mastermind. Ultimately, we have to understand what shapes and drives men like KSM or terrorism will go on forever.

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Arlington, Virginia

BOOK I



ORIGINS



BOOK I

1

The Outsider

The plot to kill nearly three thousand people on a sunny morning in New York began fifty years earlier on an equally sunny morning off the coast of Kuwait, on a small, rusty freighter poorly equipped for passengers.

On board was a tall, wiry man with a black beard and a foreign turban. As he walked along the dock leading to the newly prosperous oil emirate, he began to make a series of commonplace choices that would set in motion a chain of events that would create one of the world's most successful terrorist clans and trigger the deadliest attacks in American history on September 11, 2001.

The city was Fahaheel. It had once been a fishing village where local men dived bare-chested for pearls. By 1950, most of the men were digging for a richer buried treasure: oil. An industrial skyline of derricks, pipes, and steel scaffolds overwhelmed the village, a visual metaphor for Fahaheel's new and larger ambitions. At night, the sputtering torches of gas flares made it hard to see the stars.

The bearded man was Mohammed Ali Dustin al-Balushi,¹ and he had come from the highlands of Iran's Baluchistan region to find work. He would later be known simply as Shaikh Mohammed.

Very little is known and even less is certain about Shaikh Mohammed's life. What we know has to be stitched together from the interrogations of his son Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and other members of his family, together with the recollections of neighbors and government officials. Official documents are largely nonexistent, as Kuwait did not issue birth and death certificates in the 1950s. Immigration documents from the period are also sparse. There is precisely one Arab-language newspaper account in which a member of Mohammed's family discusses the family's formative years.²

Walking amid the boom of metal on metal in the towering steel skeleton of the oil industry, Shaikh Mohammed found rows of neat, prosperous brick houses. These were for British engineers and other Western professionals employed by the oil companies.³ For poor and poorly educated immigrants, housing and work were found far from the British-built town center. In the hot inland, in the southern reaches of Fahaheel in a neighborhood known as Badawiya, a shantytown of concrete block huts with corrugated metal roofs sprang up. It was home to a bewildering array of people from the economic and geographic margins of the Muslim world: Afghans, Baluch (like him), Palestinians, Pakistanis, Indians, and others from Pacific islands. Fleeing war and poverty, they had come to the burning desert of Kuwait for a better life.

Traveling on Pakistani passports, he and his ethnic Baluchi wife, Halema,⁴ arrived with four children. Five more would be born in Kuwait, including Khalid Shaikh Mohammed.⁵

Slowly, like other immigrants, Shaikh Mohammed built a life. Slaving as a laborer, he saved enough to become a merchant who sold food and sundries to oil workers. On Fridays, he would preach in the mosque.

By the time his youngest son arrived, in April 1965,⁶ Shaikh Mohammed had carved out a measure of status and security. The "honorific 'Shaikh' was added to his name in recognition of his

knowledge” of the Koran and his teaching abilities.⁷ By then the family was living in nearby Al Ahmadi, an immigrant town near Fahaheel, less than a thirty-minute bus ride from Kuwait City. Shaikh Mohammed had become a preacher at an Al Ahmadi mosque, and his family lived in a small home attached to the mosque.⁸

They named their youngest boy Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. He was known to the family as simply “Khalid Shaikh.”

But the family’s bright future soon darkened. Shaikh Mohammed got into a dispute with a powerful Kuwaiti merchant family and appears to have lost his Kuwaiti citizenship and his place at the mosque. Others dispute this account, contending that he was never a citizen and his mosque job was temporary. What is undisputed is that the Mohammed family was officially “*bidoon*”—legal residents of Kuwait but without the rights of citizenship. While roughly half of Kuwait’s population is ineligible for citizenship, it was an embittering second-class status. As a result, as young Khalid was undoubtedly later told, his father’s fight with a Kuwaiti sheikh was not evenly matched.

Then, in 1969, before Khalid started school, his father died.⁹ The government of Kuwait has no record of the cause of his death or even the date. In those days, vital statistics on immigrants were not tracked by the Kuwaiti government.

Shaikh Mohammed Ali Dustin al-Balushi, who had brought his heritage and his ideas from the distant mountains, was gone before he could bring his family back to respectability. If he had lived, Khalid’s painful early years may have been different.

As a widow with no hope of government aid, Halema was left on her own to raise nine children in an unforgiving land. Halema survived by eking out a living washing female corpses for burial, traditionally a very low-status occupation.¹⁰

Khalid Shaikh earned good grades in nearby government-sponsored Fahaheel Secondary School, a three-story brown-brick structure almost a city block long. He played on the streets with his best friend, Abdul Basit Mahmoud Abdul Karim, the son of KSM’s older sister, Hameda. Wiry, with jet-black hair, Abdul had one lazy

eye that made it hard for him to read for a prolonged period. Though they were officially uncle and nephew, they were only three years apart and, by all accounts, inseparable. Abdul Basit would later become known to the world as Ramzi Yousef, the man behind the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.¹¹ (I will refer to him as Ramzi Yousef throughout, for clarity's sake.)

Family ties aside, KSM and Ramzi Yousef had a lot in common. Both had Baluchi fathers and grew up in strict Islamic homes.¹² Both were poor and, initially, had no connections to call on. They had only the advantages of outsiders: their wits, their confidence, and their willingness to take risks.

The role of Ramzi Yousef's father, Mohammed Abdul Karim, as a shaper of Khalid's thinking is hard to ignore and harder to quantify. He worked as a low-level engineer for Kuwait Airways. "According to those who knew him in Baluchistan he is not particularly religious or politically sophisticated. He is said to have only two passions—Baluchi nationalism and an abiding hatred of Islam's minority Shiite sect," writes Mary Anne Weaver, who traveled to Fahaheel before the September 11 attacks and found residents who had known Ramzi's father. "In the early nineteen-eighties, [Ramzi's father] was introduced to the puritanical Wahhabi school of Sunni Islam and to a fundamentalist group closely associated with it, known as the Salafis. Wahhabism is the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia. According to the doctrine of the Salafis, Shiites are infidels. The most extreme members of the group believe that Shiites should not simply be shunned or converted; they should be killed."¹³ These anti-Shiite convictions would later be converted into bombings.

A familiarity with the tenets of the Saudi school of Ibn Wahhab and the Salafis (Osama bin Laden is one) would later be a major advantage to an intelligent, ambitious boy who wanted to join the global jihad. Many Sunni terror groups share a Salafi viewpoint and, in the 1980s and 1990s, financing from Saudi sheikhs.

Together, Khalid and Ramzi took risks. One day, a teenage Khalid and Ramzi decided to rip down the Kuwaiti flag from their own Fahaheel Secondary School, a symbolic act of defiance. In those

stricter days, they risked expulsion and the future their education could give them. But they did it anyway.¹⁴ The flag and the school were symbols of the authority that they yearned to defy. (Like rebellion, terrorism begins as romantic defiance, with human costs only as an exclamation point. Later, the exclamation points become the point.) Apparently it was Khalid's idea, and he had Ramzi scramble up the pole.¹⁵ It was part of a pattern that would repeat in ever larger challenges to authority.

KSM's hold over his nephew Ramzi Yousef was total and complete. If anything, the relationship had intensified over the years. Al Jazeera reporter Yosri Fouda, who met KSM in 2002, describes the mastermind's relationship with Ramzi Yousef: "All along, Khalid was developing his ideas, knowing that his young nephew would be willing to take almost any risk to carry out his relative's requests."¹⁶

Why would KSM risk his future on a school prank? What were the ideas and events shaping him in the 1970s? These seemingly simple questions are hard to answer.

CIA and other interrogators rarely, if ever, asked KSM and other "high-value detainees" about their pasts, as Governor Thomas Kean, chairman of the 9/11 Commission, lamented.¹⁷ Instead, interrogators were more interested in future attacks and organizational capabilities. Very little about KSM's childhood development was collected, and virtually nothing has been released to the public. In addition, KSM, when he was free, said very little about his formative years. His contemporaries were similarly circumspect. What we have is a bare set of facts and inferences that can be cautiously drawn from them.

With those limits in mind, three forces doubtlessly had a powerful shaping effect on KSM: his Baluch identity and ties to the Palestinian cause, his membership in the Muslim Brotherhood, and the events of 1979 that transfixed and transformed the Arab world. In that year, Ayatollah Khomeini seized power in Iran, the hostages were taken at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. To get an idea of KSM's intellectual development, we will examine each in turn.

Baluchistan

18

Following Friday night prayers, his relatives and older brothers would usually dine around a low table. Talk would often shift to world events. Young Khalid listened as his in-laws and older brothers talked of their lives and their native land of Baluchistan, which sprawls over three modern-day countries: Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Ramzi's father, Mohammed, was obsessed with the Baluchi cause and would move to the Pakistani portion of Baluchistan in 1986.¹⁸

Baluchistan is also the name of one of Pakistan's four provinces; it is the largest (44 percent of the total landmass) and least populated (less than 5 percent of the population of 132 million). And it is the poorest.¹⁹ Home to more than seventy tribes, many of which are mutually antagonistic,²⁰ the province's three main tribes—the Marris, the Bugtis, and the Mengals—have a long history of violence against Pakistan's central government, especially its natural gas pipelines.²¹

For much of the 1970s, during Khalid's childhood years, Baluchistan's armed revolt against Pakistan's central government made news across the Muslim world. The revolt was debated for years afterward, like a kaleidoscope that never got new stones but was constantly turned into fascinating new combinations.

Khalid's homeland of Baluchistan never really wanted to be part of Pakistan. Instead, many Baluch longed for a reunification of their traditional lands, which had been divided by Britain's nineteenth-century imperial officials. Yet British maps did not change Baluchi hearts. Many tribal leaders wanted independence from Britain, India, and, later, the new nation of Pakistan. The British government promised Mir Ahmed Yar Khan, Baluchistan's principal ruler in the 1940s, that his people would be able to choose between total independence or union with India or Pakistan. In 1947, during Pakistan's messy birth, the Khan declared Baluchistan's independence. The Khan believed that restoring independence was part of his princely agreements with the British Empire over the past century and that it was broadly in line with the will of his people. Pakistan's central

government saw it differently, threatening to send its army against the Khan. Realizing the full might of the Pakistani army, and after a long period of deliberation, the Khan surrendered. Baluchistan's independence had lasted a bittersweet 225 days.²²

Nevertheless, guerrilla and terrorist attacks against Pakistani soldiers and installations continued for years. Sometimes the battles were large, involving hundreds of armed men on both sides. The Baluch fought pitched battles in 1958, 1964, and 1965.²³ Ambushes and shootings have continued in a steady trickle ever since. In turn, Pakistan was a brutal foe, repeatedly breaking promises of amnesty and executing tribesmen who had surrendered.²⁴

In the 1970s, as in so many places in the wider world, the situation in Baluchistan worsened. In 1973, under a new constitution, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came in as prime minister of Pakistan. Noting that Baluchistan had not elected a single member of his party to the national parliament he was also suspicious of its new nationalist-Marxist local leader, Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, elected to run the provincial government in 1970. Bhutto also opposed Baluchistan's calls for more autonomy in the federal system and its bid for a more equitable distribution of the natural gas revenues generated from its lands. He dismissed Baluchistan's provincial government (as allowed in the national constitution) and sent in the army.

Bhutto soon won over foreign allies. Fearful of the Baluch living in the southeastern corner of his country, the Shah of Iran joined Bhutto's war. He dispatched American-made Huey-Cobra gunships, manned by Iranian pilots and gunners, to attack Baluchi strongholds in Pakistan.²⁵

Though both the national government and the Baluchi rebels were Muslim, Pakistan's identity was avowedly Islamic. The Baluch, at the time, were not known for their religiosity. Yet the war soon became a kind of jihad for both sides.

Pakistan's central government considered Islam inseparable from its politics and its identity. The country was founded expressly as a Muslim state, is officially known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and its capital city is Islamabad. Both its 1962 and 1973 constitutions

instituted an official government body, the Council of Islamic Ideology, to “ensure all laws were in keeping with the tenets of Islam.”²⁶

But Islam alone turned out to be a poor glue for holding the new nation together. Tribal and regional identities proved stronger than religious ties. Muslim-majority East Pakistan split off from West Pakistan in 1971, forming Bangladesh. In 1973, fearing that the Baluch wanted to reduce the size of Pakistan even further, the prime minister sent the army to occupy the restive province. Claims of a shared religion did little to mollify the Baluch.

By 1977, the Baluch were defeated and had resigned themselves to Pakistani rule—for now.

Throughout his life, KSM’s actions and statements showed a great hatred of the Pakistani state. He made several attempts to kill Pakistan’s prime ministers. And he clung firmly to his Baluchi identity—even using it [al-Baluchi] in many of his aliases. No matter how Islamic Pakistan might be, it could never make up for its treatment of Baluchistan in KSM’s eyes.

KSM’s Baluchi identity was hardly trendy. In 1970s Kuwait, few of Khalid’s neighbors were awed by the Baluchi mystique. Instead, the Baluch were seen as a cheap, disposable people who came from afar to mop hotel floors, tighten bolts on oil pipelines, haul rubble from construction sites, and, as Khalid’s father did, sell or preach to the other hardworking immigrants. The storied history of the Baluch contrasted with their present, humble reality as a defeated and dispersed people.

Money was not the only, or even the main, divider. Cultural and racial differences made the Baluch a distinct and distrusted minority. While Islam is officially universalist and egalitarian, in practice in Kuwait at the time, the Baluch were often made to feel inferior. As always, the discrimination was sharply felt by the minorities who spent most of their time around the cultural majority—boys like Khalid. Kuwaiti officials who’ve spoken to me—on a not-for-attribution basis given the political sensitivity of the topic—often say the feeling of discrimination existed more in the minds of the

newcomers than in the mouths of the Arabs. Still, no one disputed that the feelings of cultural superiority and inferiority were real.

Khalid strongly identified with the Baluch and endured the discrimination that came from being one of them. In this way do identities harden and sharpen, becoming weapons.

The Muslim Brotherhood

Khalid Shaikh's older brothers Zahid and Abed joined the student wing of the Muslim Brotherhood sometime in the mid-1970s. KSM and his nephew Ramzi soon followed.

To boys in Khalid's position, the Brotherhood appealingly taught that all Muslims were equal, no matter their wealth or ethnicity. He could join as an equal and delight in a culture counter to the one he experienced daily in Kuwait. Often meeting under tents in the desert or in the larger homes of more prosperous members, Khalid heard lectures and debates and even got the chance to perform in skits and plays meant to dramatize political messages.

The Brotherhood gave Khalid two important building blocks: an integrated philosophy of life, politics, and religion, and a connection to a network of jihadis who challenged governments around the world. Suddenly the world made sense to him, and his membership gave him a kind of status.²⁷

Understanding the Muslim Brotherhood's origins and philosophy gives some insights into KSM's intellectual development, albeit indirectly. It was his first ideological education, outside of his home.

The Muslim Brotherhood (known in Arabic as Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimin) was founded in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna. Al-Banna, born in 1906, was schooled in Islam by a strict father, a respected Muslim scholar who ran a watch-repair shop near Alexandria, Egypt. Both father and son were devoted readers of *al-Manar*, a magazine edited by a Syrian named Rashid Rida²⁸ that was obsessively concerned "with the decline of Islamic civilization relative to the West."²⁹

Instead of blaming a backward clergy, as many Muslim scholars did at the time, Rida, and later al-Banna, blamed the Arab world's impure understanding and practice of Islam. Going back to the original seventh-century version of Islam, al-Banna believed, would bring Muslims success just as it had in that earlier era.

Al-Banna's ideal was Islam's "golden age" that lasted from A.D. 622 to 660, when the Prophet Mohammed and the four "rightly guided" caliphs (rulers) ran a united Muslim empire. That his utopia lasted only thirty-eight years and that two of the four "rightly guided caliphs" were assassinated did not bother al-Banna at all.³⁰ "The subsequent fourteen centuries are considered less important, even objectionable," writes Gilles Kepel, one of France's most influential scholars of contemporary Islam. Kepel contrasts al-Banna's ideal of Mecca, which vanished fourteen centuries ago, with the Western ideal of Pericles' Athens, which disappeared more than twenty centuries ago. While many supporters of democracy cite ancient Athens as an archetype, Kepel writes, no one wants to "copy all of the features of Athenian society," such as slavery, ostracism, or fewer rights for women. Al-Banna, by contrast, wanted to bring back seventh-century Mecca in every detail, except perhaps technology.³¹ Rather than learning from the past, he wanted to re-create it. Can a historical-cultural moment be reassembled and maintained, when the incentives and ideas acting on individuals, societies, and states have fundamentally changed? Al-Banna never seemed to address that question.

Hassan al-Banna's main political message was that Islam is a "total solution." Al-Banna's intellectual successor, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, summed up al-Banna's view vividly: "Islam is a comprehensive school of thought, a creed, an ideology, and cannot be completely satisfied but by [completely] controlling society and directing all aspects of life, from how to enter the toilet to the construction of the state."³²

Al-Banna believed that going back to the time and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed was the only way to take on the Christian West. After all, he reasoned, in the time of the Prophet, all Muslims were unified under a single law and leader, when Arab armies rode

triumphantly from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the foothills of the Himalayas, conquering all in their path.

Al-Banna's first goal was to turn Egypt into an Islamic state, to be ruled by Islamic law. Over time, he believed, the rest of the Muslim world would fall. "It is the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated, to impose its laws on all nations, and to extend its power to the entire planet," he wrote.³³

While al-Banna's ideal was ancient, his methods were modern.

When he arrived in Cairo in 1923 to be trained as a schoolteacher, he was surprised by what he described as "the wave of atheism and licentiousness."³⁴ With a charismatic presence and a commanding voice, al-Banna recruited fellow students to preach traditionalist Islam not only in the mosques but in the sidewalk cafés.³⁵

Al-Banna, after graduation, was hired as a schoolteacher in Ismailia, a hamlet in the British-run Suez Canal Zone. He continued to agitate and organize, eventually forming the Brotherhood in 1928.³⁶ The Brotherhood leaders openly admired Hitler and Mussolini, partly for their shared antipathy to the British Empire (which ran Egypt at the time) and partly for their hostility to Jews and individual rights.³⁷ For siding with the Axis powers of the Nazis and the Fascists during World War II, al-Banna was briefly jailed by the British.

The Brotherhood's appeal was similar to that of early Western labor unions—it was most powerfully felt among the self-educated strivers. Like early unions, it grew rapidly.

In 1946, al-Banna set up the "Special Apparatus," a secret division for terrorist attacks. The Special Apparatus bombings accelerated across Egypt as British troop numbers declined from 1946 to 1948. Movie theaters and hotel bars were favorite targets, because they were frequented by Westerners and Westernized Egyptians and because movies and alcohol were forbidden by their version of Islam.

Government officials soon became targets. When an Egyptian judge handed down long jail terms to several Brotherhood members convicted of murdering and maiming innocents, another Special Apparatus unit killed the judge.³⁸

In their investigation, the Egyptian police found the Special Apparatus's arms caches and written evidence of plots to kill other officials. The police informed the prime minister, who banned the Brotherhood. In months, the prime minister was killed.

The police intensified their crackdown, ultimately gunning down al-Banna himself in 1949. He was left to slowly bleed to death.³⁹ He was forty-three and almost immediately was hailed as a martyr.

In the wake of Britain's departure, Egypt was plunged into turmoil as communists, nationalists, and Islamists vied to seize power from the king and his prime minister.

Then a new player emerged: a clique of army officers led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser. In July 1952, they captured the palace and the country. For the first time in sixty centuries, Egypt was not ruled by a monarch.

Incredibly, the military chose to ally itself with the Brotherhood, which was reliably anticommunist and anti-British. The Brotherhood brought the military junta a vital asset: a grassroots network. By 1948, one in every eighteen Egyptians was a member of the Brotherhood—more than one million men.⁴⁰ Its vast reach included its own hospitals, schools, factories, and support programs for widows, orphans, and the poor.⁴¹ The Brotherhood had grown rapidly by recruiting future professionals (engineers, doctors, lawyers) and paraprofessionals (teachers, police, military) in universities and technical schools. As these young men graduated, they joined and ultimately dominated the professional unions. (Doctors, lawyers, and virtually every other profession in Egypt is unionized.) Many of the most educated, modernized Egyptians now wanted to upend the modern world and return to an ancient Islamic ideal.

Naturally, the honeymoon didn't last. The Brotherhood was disappointed when the military had no interest in imposing strict Islamic law and the military found the Brotherhood hard to work with.

By the early 1950s, Brotherhood leaders began to complain of Colonel Nasser's "pharaoh-like tendencies." Those were fighting words. When a Brotherhood operative tried to kill Nasser in October 1954,

the strongman retaliated. Thousands of Brotherhood members were arrested and tortured.⁴²

One of the arrested was Sayyid Qutb, who used his prison cell to become the Brotherhood's intellectual leader. His books, all written in Egyptian jails, advanced the ideology of al-Banna with a new twist: armed jihad was permitted, even required, against rulers who were insufficiently Muslim. (The concept of holy war against Muslim rulers was an innovation and, some Islamic scholars say, a questionable one.) Nevertheless, Qutb's books became an underground sensation; during a 1965 crackdown in Egypt, they were found in "virtually every house the police searched."⁴³ KSM almost certainly read Qutb's books, especially *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Koran*.

Thanks to Qutb, jihad became a defining element of Islamist movements across the Arab world.

Qutb was hanged for treason in 1966, but his ideas and books lived on. Indeed, his books continued to kill. After Nasser died, in 1970, Anwar el-Sadat took control of Egypt. Eleven years later, he was killed because of peace efforts with Israel as well as his arrests of Brotherhood members. His killers said publicly they were inspired by Qutb's books. In time, Qutb's writings became one of the primary intellectual sources for Al Qaeda.

KSM would later be connected to two of the key figures in the Sadat plot. One of the plotters against Sadat was Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, currently Al Qaeda's number two. KSM would meet him repeatedly in Pakistan. Also linked to the plot to kill Sadat was Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, later known in the American press as "the Blind Sheikh." Abdel Rahman would come to play a critical role in KSM's first attack on the World Trade Center.

The antagonism between the Egyptian government and the Brotherhood, though it waxes and wanes, persists to this day.

Meanwhile, the Brotherhood established chapters in every Arab country, as well as Europe and the United States. While the chapters operate separately, in response to local politics, their goals and

philosophy remain the same. Middle East scholar Barry Rubin calls it “by far the most successful Islamist group in the world.”⁴⁴

The Brotherhood created Hamas, which today rules the Gaza Strip, and has inspired armed rebellions in Syria, Sudan, and elsewhere. It is the intellectual breeding ground of every major Islamist terror group, including Al Qaeda, even though the Brotherhood officially opposes terrorism.

For KSM in his teenage years, the Brotherhood supplied two important and intoxicating ideas: that the Wahhabi (or Salafi) version of Islam could be combined with a utopian version of seventh-century Arabia to form a real challenge to the West’s dominance of the world, and that armed jihad was the best way to bring that utopia into being.

The Brotherhood gave him more than ideas. It taught him how to use guns in its desert training sessions⁴⁵ and provided him with a web of connections that could be tapped to finance terror attacks.

Palestinians

The bottom of any society is where the speed of the mixture moves the fastest. On the streets and in the classrooms of Fahaheel, Khalid met many Palestinians, who made up roughly 40 percent of the boomtown’s population in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁶ The two groups that had the largest impact on the thinking of immigrants in Fahaheel at the time were “the Palestinian Marxists and the Islamists”⁴⁷ of the Muslim Brotherhood. “The Palestinians, in fact, predominated in the lower middle class and in the professional ranks of teachers and engineers. These included most of the teachers at the Kuwaiti schools attended by” KSM.⁴⁸

KSM so closely identified with the Palestinian cause that, his college friends say, he would spend hours justifying their attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians and, sometimes, claim a Palestinian heritage.

It is easy to see why KSM would believe he has much in common

with the Palestinians he met. While the Palestinians were Arabs, they, too, were strangers in Kuwait, often living without papers and sometimes without jobs. Both peoples were Muslims whose ancestral lands are now ruled by distant, bureaucratic governments that they are powerless to displace and largely unwilling to share power with. Both peoples have lost lopsidedly when they have gone to war with what they each called the “occupying power.” Armed rebellions by the Baluch were brutally crushed by the Pakistani government in 1973, just as the Israelis rapidly defeated the Arab armies sent on behalf of the Palestinians that same year.

Both peoples imagine a glorious past, a legacy that they say has been robbed from them. Glorious pasts are depressing places to spend time in and they defy physics by glowing brighter as they move further away in time.

In general, both peoples adapted to the modern world very quickly as individuals and very poorly as groups. On their own, they became doctors, merchants, engineers, and scientists, building better futures for their families. But too often their organizations look backward with longing and use violence to try to turn the present into a utopian mirage of the past.

But there the similarities end. Palestinians played a pivotal role in the development of Sunni Arab terror organizations, while the Baluch were largely foot soldiers.

Clearly the Palestinian cause was a powerful inspiration for Khalid and his nephew Ramzi Yousef. Khalid speaks Arabic with a distinctive Palestinian accent. (A longtime friend denies this, saying Khalid’s Arabic has a Kuwaiti accent. He himself is a Palestinian from Kuwait.) Al Qaeda rarely, if ever, cited the Palestinian cause as justification for terror attacks—until KSM moved into a senior role. His nephew Ramzi shares his accent and strong identification with the Palestinian cause. He later told Raghida Dergham, of Jordan’s *Al Hayat* newspaper, that “my grandmother is Palestinian.”⁴⁹ In reality, his grandmother was a Baluch from Iran. Yet there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of KSM’s devotion to the Palestinian cause or to believe he is simply playing to a Western audience obsessed with

Israel. He advocated their cause for years before carrying out any terror attacks.

Khalid's three principal influences—Baluch nationalism, Palestinian radicalism, and the Muslim Brotherhood—each have long histories of terrorist attacks under the banner of Islam. To this fuel, the world would add the fire of revolutionary events.

The Events of 1979

In a single thunderbolt of a year, a series of nearly unbelievable events transformed the Muslim world and, most likely, the thinking of young Khalid. He was fourteen, and the year was 1979.

Iran

The Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, fled his kingdom on January 17, 1979. Briefly, the Middle East's first spontaneously formed democracy emerged in Tehran. The new government's prime minister, Shapour Bakhtiar, quickly attracted two powerful enemies, the then-communist-oriented Mujahideen-e Khalq (known as the MEK) and the radical followers of Ayatollah Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini. Democracy never had a chance. Within months, Khomeini would have total mastery over Iran.

While distinct, Khomeini's thought was similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in its choice of enemies. Like the Brotherhood, he saw "pure" Islam as the answer and "secular" Middle Eastern leaders, including the Shah, as the enemy.

Khomeini was opposed to the animating idea of democracy—that voters can change the law through peaceful elections—because he believed that the law is an unchangeable transmission from Allah, as represented in the Koran and the sayings of the Prophet. The law can be modified only through the interpretation of religious scholars, like Khomeini himself. And the room for interpretation is very small.

Khomeini's life and ideas matter because they had an enormous

impact on the thinking of radical Arab Sunni groups, including the yet-to-be-created organization known as Al Qaeda. American intelligence analysts and academics have long asserted that the vehement hatred between some Sunnis and some Shia prevents the transmission of ideas and techniques from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Sunni terror groups. In practice, as we shall see, the barrier between Persian and Shia and Arab and Sunni proved to be quite permeable in the 1970s and 1980s. In his book *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, Al Qaeda's number two, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, repeatedly cites Iranian Shia sources to establish various doctrinal points or to provide a real-world example of those points.

In addition to believing that the Koran and the Prophet's words should govern every aspect of human affairs, no matter how personal, Khomeini advocated a dictatorship of the clerics. Scholars of Marx will see a familiar concept in Khomeini's thought—handing absolute power to small, pure groups (a vanguard) to act on behalf of the majority, which is mired in false consciousness. While Khomeini never publicly acknowledged his intellectual debt to atheistic communism, the regime he created had striking parallels. Little dissent was tolerated. News and entertainment were aggressively censored. Individual rights, the idea that government is barred from invading certain freedoms, were dispensed with as unwanted Western imports. Tellingly, Khomeini had a scholar's impatience with ordinary people's quotidian concerns.

Khomeini's ideas were intoxicating. For the first time, a state run according to Islamic principles seemed possible, an electric idea that surged across the Muslim world. He was succeeding where the Muslim Brotherhood had so far failed. A new intellectual movement was emerging, in different forms, across the Muslim world—one that would soon threaten the communist East and the democratic West.

Khomeini's impact was soon felt by American diplomats in neighboring Afghanistan. In 1979, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan was Adolph Dubs,⁵⁰ but he was generally known by his World War II-era nickname, "Spike," because, he said, "no good American should go by the name Adolph."⁵¹ After his tour as chargé d'affaires

in the Moscow embassy, he was sent to Kabul in July 1978.⁵² The trim fifty-eight-year-old was an expert on Soviet affairs, and Afghanistan was the newest satellite to join the Soviet orbit. At the time, the Soviets ruled Afghanistan through their proxy, the Afghan Communist Party.

In February 1979, Dubs was captured at gunpoint by four Shia Muslim terrorists and held in room L121 of the Kabul Hotel.⁵³

His captors demanded the release of three Shia clerics that they believed the Soviet-backed Afghan government was holding incommunicado. The Afghan government denied it had jailed the religious leaders and refused to negotiate, despite the pleading of U.S. embassy officials.

Instead, Soviet advisers and Afghan paramilitaries ringed the hotel. "When we left that morning for our sightseeing tour," an American businessman said, "we had passed 10 soldiers with sub-machine guns and plainclothes men with drawn revolvers in the corridor."⁵⁴

From the hotel hallway, Afghan police shot their way through the wooden door. One bullet found a water pipe, but others found the captive and the kidnappers. The pipe spewed water onto the floor, sluicing away the blood.⁵⁵ The four kidnappers were dead, and so was the American ambassador.

In Washington, President Carter was reported to be "very angry"⁵⁶ about the Soviet Union's failure to consult with U.S. officials before storming the kidnappers.

Only an unnamed *Washington Post* editorial writer noticed the "coincidence that, within hours yesterday, a respected American diplomat, Adolph Dubs, was killed in Afghanistan, and the American Embassy with 100 people was temporarily captured in Iran."⁵⁷ Even that prescient writer failed to grasp that both events were most likely engineered by Ayatollah Khomeini, writing, "The problem there lay in the difficulty that Ayatollah Khomeini is having in disciplining and disarming the thousands of Iranian revolutionaries who helped him achieve power."⁵⁸

In fact, both the kidnapping of Ambassador Dubs in Kabul and

the temporary takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran were feints by the wily Ayatollah. He wanted to see what America would do. When all the democratic superpower did was lodge diplomatic protests and urge the roughly seven thousand Americans, largely oil contractors, to leave Iran, the Ayatollah knew America was a paper tiger. The *Washington Post's* sympathy for the Ayatollah's difficulty in governing his Islamic republic was a wry bonus.

This would prove to be a dangerous lesson to teach the Ayatollah.

On March 31, 1979, Khomeini had staged a referendum (the very electoral device he opposed for decades) and formally seized power. A second referendum, in November 1979, made Khomeini "Supreme Guide" of Iran. (The same title is used by the head of the Muslim Brotherhood.) By November 4, Khomeini had driven out the lawful parliament, and his partisans controlled many of Iran's key government ministries.

A student group allied with Khomeini stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran in October 1979. Unlike the embassy takeover in March 1979, this invasion was not temporary. Ultimately, fifty-two diplomats were held hostage for 444 days, while a helpless President Carter futilely tried to negotiate.

The hostage crisis helped cement Khomeini's hold on power, even as it cost President Carter his presidency. A month into the hostage crisis, official Tehran radio reports claimed that 95.6 percent of Iranians had voted to make Khomeini dictator "for life." The results were not surprising, because the ballot was not secret. Muslim clerics watched the balloting, noting who deposited a green "yes" ballot and who dared a red "no" ballot.⁵⁹ The first radical Islamic terror state, Iran, was born.⁶⁰

While KSM was the kind of Sunni who hated Shia Muslims—he and his nephew would later plot to bomb a Shia holy site—Iran's experience still provided certain encouraging lessons for him. It showed him that the Muslim Brotherhood's idea of an Islamic state was possible, and it suggested that the United States would not dare move against it. But what about the Arab dictators and the Soviet Union? The next few months would answer that question, too.

The Grand Mosque Takeover

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While American diplomats were held at pistol point in Tehran, another set of Islamic radicals was preparing another daring takeover. On November 20, 1979, some five hundred armed men seized Al-Masjid al-Haram, the so-called Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the holiest site in Islam.

By the Islamic calendar, it was New Year's Day of the year 1400.⁶¹ Some fifty thousand worshippers had gathered for the final day of the pilgrimage that their Muslim faith urges.⁶²

Hundreds of them were taken hostage, and the group's leader, Juhayman al-Oteibi, a onetime Saudi National Guard corporal turned preacher, said that the Mahdi had returned. The Mahdi is a messianic figure that Islam teaches will appear at the end of time. Al-Oteibi said that all Muslims worldwide were commanded to obey the so-called Mahdi, Mohammed Abdullah al-Qahtani, who turned out to be al-Oteibi's brother-in-law. (The two ringleaders had met in prison, and al-Qahtani later married al-Oteibi's sister.) Like Khomeini, the group hoped to create an Islamic dictatorship.

A siege began, making the Saudis look increasingly powerless with each passing day. The Saudis were unable to take back the mosque, which was honeycombed with bombs and pious civilians begging for their lives—while the Arab world watched in absorbing horror.

A series of Saudi police and commando assaults failed, including a suicidal helicopter assault on the main courtyard of the mosque. The commandos were shot dead as they slid down ropes from helicopters.

After two weeks of fruitless assaults and hundreds killed, the Saudi king put Prince Turki al-Faisal in charge. Prince Turki phoned Count Claude Alexandre de Marenches, the French spy chief, who agreed to send a three-man French commando team. Non-Muslims are forbidden by custom and Saudi law from entering Mecca, so the team quickly converted to Islam in a Saudi Arabian airport and arrived in Mecca for reconnaissance. They pumped pressurized non-lethal gas into the underground prayer rooms that had become the rebel bunker. It didn't work. Next, Saudi troops carved holes into

the floor of the mosque and threw grenades into the subterranean lair, killing hostages and hostage takers alike. As some of the rebels fled, Saudi sharpshooters gunned them down. The “Mahdi” was found among the dead.⁶³

After two more weeks of gun battles, the rebels surrendered.

Some sixty-three radicals were taken alive. They were secretly tried and publicly beheaded on January 9, 1980. Never before in Saudi history had so many been beheaded on a single day.⁶⁴

To a young radical steeped in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, the events in Tehran and Mecca seemed to confirm the rightness of those beliefs. See how America trembled? See how it took the Saudis weeks to regain control of the Grand Mosque? With just a hard shove, the old order could be brought down. Despite its conclusion, the takeover of Mecca’s Grand Mosque had actually encouraged jihadis.

But what about the Soviets?

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

Soviet tanks rumbled through the snow-slicked streets of Kabul on December 25. The Soviets, frustrated by the difficulties of dealing with their puppet government in Afghanistan, had decided to rule the country directly.

In Moscow, the invasion seemed unlikely to shift the gears of history. The Soviets had sent tanks into Budapest in 1956 and into Prague in 1968, and the result had been greater Soviet control. Why should an impoverished backwater, with no strategic value to anyone but the Soviets themselves, pose a real problem?

As it happened, the war in Afghanistan would fundamentally weaken the Soviet Union and present Muslim extremists with their first opportunity for a modern jihad. The Soviets failed to anticipate that Islamist groups, which were largely unsuccessful against their own governments, would see the liberation of Muslim Afghanistan as a major opportunity to establish a Sunni Islamic state to rival the new Shia Islamic state in Iran.

Soon the Soviets were bogged down in a guerrilla war that they could not win. The Russian bear no longer seemed so fearsome. It would bleed for ten long years and ultimately have to retreat to central Asia.

The events of 1979 taught KSM that the three largest threats to establishing an Islamic state—Arab dictators, American presidents, and Soviet premiers—were toothless. He and many other jihadis were encouraged and energized.

The Afghan jihad, which began in 1980 and accelerated throughout the decade, soon became a kind of Woodstock for indoctrinated Muslim youth. Every radical—from Morocco to Indonesia—wanted to get there to validate his credentials.

KSM was no different. By 1981, when he was sixteen, he was training at Muslim Brotherhood–run military-style camps in the Kuwaiti desert, according to the 9/11 Commission Report.⁶⁵ He was training to fight, and even to die, in Afghanistan in the great anti-Soviet jihad.

While his jihad training continued, Khalid finished his formal schooling in Kuwait, graduating from the all-boys Fahaheel Secondary School in 1983.⁶⁶ He wanted to follow his older brothers to Afghanistan.

But that was not to be.

Apparently, his family decided that Khalid should be the one to go to college. If every family member was committed to jihad, all would remain poor. If KSM got an engineering degree from an American college, he could support them all. It seemed like a good bet. “Khalid was very genius; in everything he is smart,” said Sheikh Ahmed Dabous, his high school principal. “From the beginning of his studies it’s science. He wanted to go to America for this reason. He wanted to become a doctor [Ph.D.] there.”⁶⁷

Far from science, his American education would accelerate him in a very different direction.