CHAPTER 5

CONTEMPORARY INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

TERRORISM BY ISLAMIST GROUPS

Over one hundred terrorist attacks have been carried out from 1993 through the first quarter of 2016 by nongovernmental groups claiming an Islamic basis. (This discussion excludes attacks on the armed forces of the United States in Iraq and NATO in Afghanistan.) The primary instigator most recently has been the organization that calls itself The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) but is also known as The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It is a Salafi jihadist militant group that follows an Islamic fundamentalist Wahhabi doctrine of Sunni Islam. It appears to have replaced Al Qaeda as the most serious threat. As of May 2016, the group controls a large, landlocked territory in Iraq and Syria, where it enforces its interpretation of sharia law. Related groups are active in North Africa and the Arabian peninsula. A similar group, Lashkar-e-Taiba, is active in Pakistan, and Abu Sayyaf operates in the southern Philippines. Most of the attacks have occurred in countries that are almost total Muslim. Attacks in these countries have specifically targeted different groups on various occasions and may be categorized as follows:

1. Assaults against other Muslims who were members or supporters of the local national government
2. Attacks specifically targeting adherents of a different sect or ethnic group of Islam
3. Attacks targeting local citizens who were Christian; Pakistan’s Minister for Minority Affairs was assassinated in March 2011

R. G. Saltman, Sacred Humanism without Miracles
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4. Attacks directed against local citizens who were Jewish; these have occurred in Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey
5. Assaults against citizens of Christian-majority nations who were visiting or working in these countries; victims have included tourists, journalists, employees of private companies, military personnel, diplomats, and other government workers

Christian-majority countries in which Islamist terrorist attacks have occurred include Argentina, Belgium, France, Kenya, Netherlands, Philippines, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States. The apparent intention of the attackers in many of these incidents is to kill as many people as possible, targeting non-Muslims deliberately but not restraining themselves if Muslims might die also. The attack in Argentina targeted the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires. The latest data from the international crime-fighting organization INTERPOL suggest that the attack may have been carried out by Iranians. The several assaults have varied in their effect, from the one person shot dead in the Netherlands (movie-maker Theo van Gogh) to the nearly three thousand killed in the United States on September 11, 2001.

In the 9/11 attack carried out by Al Qaeda, persons of many different religions (including Muslims) working in the twin-towered World Trade Center were murdered. A vicious lie was publicized by the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah, repeated by a small, radical black group in the United States, that Jews were responsible for the attack and that Jewish workers were notified not to come to work that day. (This fantasy has been adopted by anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists; see below under “Worldwide Anti-Semitism.”) The 19 hijackers of the four planes were Arabs, mainly with Saudi passports, and about 10 percent of those killed at the World Trade Center were Jewish, consistent with the percent of Jewish population in commuting distance of that place of work. US intelligence agencies began to search for Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda. On May 1, 2011, US Special Forces, under the direct order of President Barack Obama, attacked a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, where Osama bin Laden and some members of his family were living. Bin Laden was killed and his body was taken with the