

Ramadan



Islam requires that Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, be devoted to fasting and prayer. During this month, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset each day and eat only small meals in the evening. Muslims are banned from fighting other Muslims during Ramadan, but they may engage in combat with non-Muslims. Islamic extremists have extolled Ramadan as a month of jihad, or holy war, against nonbelievers. Many Islamic extremists believe that suicide operations (“martyrdom”), especially if done during Ramadan, guarantee the operative a place in paradise. In 2009, Ramadan is expected to begin on 22 August and run through 20 September.

NIGHT OF POWER (LAYLAT AL-QADR)

Islamic extremists might consider Laylat al-Qadr (“Night of Power”) especially auspicious for a terrorist attack. Islamic tradition holds that on this night rewards for deeds pleasing to Allah are magnified a thousandfold; extremists, in particular, believe that the gates of heaven are opened then for those who wage “jihad” in defense of Islam to enter paradise. While there is much debate, Islamic scholars generally agree that the most likely date for Laylat al-Qadr to occur each year is the evening of the 27th day of Ramadan—the

anniversary of Allah’s first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad of the Quran—which is expected to be the night of 17-18 September in 2009. However, many scholars believe that other likely dates for Laylat al-Qadr are the evenings of the 21st, 23rd, 25th, or 29th day of Ramadan. Some scholars teach that any of the last 10 evenings of Ramadan are potential dates for Laylat al-Qadr.

THE BATTLE OF BADR

A second date during the month when Islamic extremists might consider it auspicious to attack is the anniversary of the Battle of Badr, the 17th day of Ramadan. Muhammad and his army fought this battle against non-Islamic combatants in the face of overwhelming odds. It is considered to have laid the foundation for the Islamic State. In 2009, the 17th day of Ramadan is expected to be on 7 September.

THE LUNAR CALENDAR AND HOLIDAY OBSERVANCE

The Islamic calendar is based on the movement and observation of the moon. The Islamic year contains 12 months, none of which can exceed 30 days. Each month starts when the lunar crescent is first seen after a new moon. Because 12 lunar months multiplied by 29.53 days equals 354.36 days, the Islamic calendar will always be approximately 11 days shorter than the Western, or Gregorian, calendar. For example, 1 Muharram, the first day of Islamic year 1431 (known in the West by the Latin term *Anno Hegirae*, or A.H.), falls on 18 December 2009; in A.H. 1432, 1 Muharram falls on 8 December 2010. As explained in the footnotes of this calendar, holidays begin the sundown of the previous day. Because of lunar observation and differences in time zones, the observance of Islamic holidays may vary from region to region.