

BLOODY, DANGEROUS AND FALSE?

MUSLIMS

AND THE

WEST

KHAN HUSSAN ZIA

In fond memory of my parents and their love of truth,
knowledge and justice.

*‘You will succeed in pleasing neither the Jews nor
the Christians unless you agree to follow their religion’
('The Koran, Al-Bakr: 120').*

*‘Believers, take neither the Jews nor the Christians
for your friends. They are (only) friends with one another.’
('The Koran, Al-maida: 51').*

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All Comments to bzmtrust@yahoo.com

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INTRODUCTION

It was shortly after the Gulf War in 1991. A white man was working his way towards the immigration desk in a queue at Jeddah airport. When the Pakistani ahead of him in the line presented his passport the Saudi official at the desk pushed it aside and invited the white man to come forward. He took his American passport, kissed and touched it to his eyes before stamping it and letting the man through. It was an expression of gratitude and appreciation on the part of an Arab, convinced that USA had gone to war to save his country from falling into the hands of the ogre Saddam Hussein.

A little over ten years after this incident, CNN interviewed the then Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and President George Bush Senior to reminisce about the Gulf War on television. Among other things, Eagleburger related how he had managed to keep the Israelis from joining the conflict by raising the question, *'When we are fighting this war for you, why do you want to make things complicated for us by insisting on sending in your own troops?'*

Bush Senior recalled that initially he was afraid to sanction the war on Iraq for fear of a backlash among the other Muslim states. This was until Henry Kissinger assured him that his fears were unfounded. Not only was there no adverse reaction from the Muslim countries but many of them contributed their forces to defeat Iraq and, later, more than generously compensated the United States for the expenses incurred in the war.

Today, as another war against Iraq looms over the horizon, things are a little different but not significantly as far the ruling

elites in the Muslim countries are concerned. They have again pledged their support and agreed to provide military bases for operations to the United States. This is despite the overwhelmingly popular sentiment in these countries being against a repeat of the earlier conflict and the tragedy that resulted from it.

The feelings among the Muslims generally, even if not reflected in the actions of their governments, are being echoed by men of conscience in the West, especially in Europe. Despite the inherent political and economic risks involved in displeasing the United States, countries like France, Germany and Belgium have taken a principled stand on the issue. Admirable as these are, in the end, what will matter most is what the Muslims do to save themselves.

The actions of the United States, contrary to popular belief among the Muslim masses, are not directed against Islam or the Muslims per se. These are primarily aimed at securing her own political and economic objectives. It was not so long ago, in the days of the cold war, that the West had formed partnerships with Muslim religious parties all over the world to contain communism. It is just that the situation has changed and Muslims now happen to be at the wrong end of the equation.

If Islam and the Muslims are being maligned in the West today it is a deliberate act, not motivated by religious hatred, but intended to influence and manipulate public opinion within their own countries. The process dates back to the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the embargo by the oil-producing countries that threatened economic prosperity in the West. Within five years the two main architects of the embargo ---- King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and the Shah of Iran ---- were gone.

After the revolution in Iran the ayatollahs balked at the idea of submitting to western dictates. It was not long before Saddam Hussein, with active backing from the West as well as other

Arab states, invaded Iran to provoke a war that lasted eight years. Shortly afterwards it was time to clip Saddam's wings for venturing into Kuwait and we had the Gulf War.

There is a need to explain the necessity and justification for such actions to the people in order to win their continued support. In this case, they are told that Muslims are hostile to the West, not for what it does to them, but because they belong to a fanatic creed that is intolerant of western ideals and civilization and the freedoms vested in them.

People like Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington have hypothesized about the issue at length, curiously, only after the loss of the Soviet Union as the enemy. Their theories are basically centred on the premise that Islam, because of inherent differences, is an enemy of the West. Despite glaring and obvious flaws, such assertions have received consistent and widespread circulation. The attacks of 11th September 2001, regardless of whoever was responsible for the dastardly acts, are claimed as proof of Islam's villainy.

It would be a grievous mistake to band together the entire West in this conspiracy which appears to be primarily the work of a few governments and vested corporate interests. Neither all westerners nor all Christians and Jews fall under this category. In fact, the thinking majority of them are opposed to the current policies.

The old saying that history is written by the victors is still true. People in the West are generally restricted to what is available in the western media for their sources of information. Even most of the Muslims who write depend upon these sources. They also tend to be apologetic for how the Muslims feel and act for some reason. In the end, what is produced is regurgitation and re-processing of much the same basic data. The process has inadvertently created a vicious circle of misinformation about Islam and the Muslims.

Inevitably, there is some bias involved in whatever gets written about such subjects as religion, politics and history. In order to reduce it to as little as possible, western writers have been quoted verbatim in the book, wherever possible, even on Islamic religious issues. It is hoped that it will help to dispel some of the myths, misgivings and misconceptions that have become prevalent in the West about Islam.

The basic purpose, however, is to inform the Muslims of the background, present state of inter-action between their world and the West and its implications for the future, as observed by one of their own. Hopefully, the review would prove useful in drawing appropriate conclusions and lessons for the difficult times that lie ahead. If, in places the tone appears blunt or emotive, it is only reflective of the feelings experienced by the vast majority of the Muslims in the present traumatic and anxiety filled conditions.

K. Hussan Zia
147 Ahmed Block
New Garden Town, Lahore.
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