MEI OCCASIONAL PAPER

How the Islamists betray Islam?

By

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> It is part of the writer's role to point out the drift of his or her own people and to help open their eyes to what blinds them. I insist, as the saying goes, on starting by sweeping in front of my own door.
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> - Abdelwahab Meddeb[1]

B eyond the body count following a fresh terrorist atrocity on the streets of Baghdad or Bali or a US predator drone attacking another target in Waziristan, the 'War on Terror' is truly a struggle between competing ideologies. After all, before a suicide bomber detonates his/her vest he/she must be ideologically indoctrinated to believe that what he/she is doing is the 'right' thing – both in terms of the act and target. Moreover, such an act exists within a social milieu in which they are not only condoned but lauded. For this reason, Martha Crenshaw[2] believes that martyrdom has a cultural base, 'Unless martyrdom was valued by society or at least by a sub-culture, individuals would not seek it.' Moreover, religious authorities in Muslim societies gave legitimacy to such acts by sanctioning them. As Crenshaw goes on to

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[1] Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Islam and its Discontents,* (London: William Heinemann, 2003), p. 4.

[2] Martha Crenshaw, 'Suicide Terrorism in Comparative Perspective,' in The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ed.) *Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference*. Interdisciplinary Centre, Herzliya, Israel, p. 25.

state, 'The martyrs were widely revered in Muslim society. In some cases, the individual who changes his mind about carrying out an attack was scorned as a "half-martyr".'[3]

During the administration of President George W. Bush (2001-09), too much emphasis was placed on the greater deterrence of such *jihadis* through stiffer punishment, better law-enforcement capacities, and the gathering of intelligence on terror financing or weapons supplies. Important as these are, it seems to me that we are fighting the symptoms as opposed to the causes. In my opinion, it is imperative that we *understand* how ordinary Muslims are socialized or, perhaps more accurately, violently radicalized, and primed to engage in acts of terror. By violent radicalization, I refer to '…a process that involves embracing opinion, views, and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism.'[4]

What is this process of radicalization that leads Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who lived a comfortable existence as the son of a banker and a student in London, to want to detonate explosives on an aircraft in which all, including him, will be killed? Why would Faisal Shahzad, the would-be Times Square (New York) bomber, tell the judge that he was going to plead guilty a 100 times over, and that he was proud to consider himself a *Mujahid* – a Muslim soldier?[5] What accounts for this pride in slaughtering the innocent, whether passengers on an airliner or shoppers at Times Square? In answering these questions we need to admit that explanations of terrorism at the level of the individual are insufficient in trying to understand why people become terrorists. Rather, Jerrold Post asserts that '…terrorists are not depressed, severely emotionally disturbed or crazed fanatics. It is not individual psychopathology, but group, organizational and social psychology, with a particular emphasis on collective identity that provides the most powerful lens through which to understand terrorist psychology and behaviour.'[6] It is this collective identity that is given form by ideology. Recognizing the ideological imperative behind the terrorist acts, US President Barack Obama's Administration has moved away from the Global War on Terror (GWOT) to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).[7]

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[3] *Ibid*. p. 28.

[4] Royce Hutson, Taylor Long and Michael Page, 'Pathways to Violent Radicalisation in the Middle East: A Model for Future Studies of Transnational Jihad,' *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 154, No. 2, April 2009, p. 18.

[5] Wright, *op.cit*.

[6] Jerrold Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to Al Qaeda*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 8.

[7] Mark Hosenball, 'Obama's 'Intelligence Czar' Plugs a New Counter-Terrorism Catchphrase,' *Newsweek*, 6 April 2010, http://blog.newsweek.com/blogs/declassified/archive/2010/04/06/obama-s-intelligence-czar, Accessed on 11 May 2010.

On ideology, the Clash of Civilizations and Hobbes

Most of the twentieth century witnessed an ideological struggle between freedom and democracy. Democracy won that struggle while Nazism, Fascism and Communism have been largely confined to the dustbin of history. However, the ideological struggle between freedom and authoritarianism is far from over. The spawn of this twentieth century authoritarianism, Islamism, is alive and well in the twenty-first century. Thus, we witness a clash of two competing ideologies from Johannesburg to Jakarta, from London to Lahore and from Washington to Waziristan. One ideology calls for democracy and greater human rights, while the other calls for global *jihad* and is fundamentally totalitarian in nature. As Walid Phares makes clear, this 'War of Ideas' is raging relentlessly behind the 'War on Terror'.[8] The outcome of the second is ineluctably conditioned by the consequences of the first. Phares is emphatic in his conclusion that if the War of Ideas is not won quickly by democratic forces, then the 'War on Terror' will be expanded into the next generation.

However, let us be clear, this is not an inter-civilizational conflict as envisaged by Samuel Huntington[9], rather this is occurring within Muslim societies, and between radical Islamists and the West. Often media reports tend to omit that more Muslims have been killed by other Muslims than by US or Israeli bombs; a struggle is taking place for the very soul of Islam amongst the world's 1.5 billion Muslims spread over 150 countries. This is a struggle, which is taking place in every Muslim country and every Muslim society. Should moderate Muslims lose this struggle, then I fear Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' will become inevitable and the future will resemble a Hobbesian world of a war of all against all.

To understand this ideational war and its terror implications, the paper will begin with an overview of the Islamic faith. This will be followed by an examination of the rise of what is termed Islamism and certain key ideologues here. The aim is not to present an exhaustive history of Islamic religious thought, but rather to focus on those ideas that have relevance to our subject matter at hand – the manipulation of a noble faith by those who wish to kill and maim in its name.

Islam: A Religion of Peace and Tolerance

Reflecting on Europe's brutal religious war, Voltaire wrote his *Treatise on Tolerance*, which was published in April 1763. In the process, Voltaire, the philosopher of the Enlightenment, introduced Europe to Islam and its tradition of tolerance.[10] In his book,

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[8] Walid Phares, *The War of Ideas. Jihadism against Democracy*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

[9] Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations,' *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, p.76.

[10] Abdel Wahhab Meddeb, *Islam and its Discontents,* (London: William Heinemann, 2003), p. 5.

Voltaire quoted the Qur'anic injunction that there can be no coercion in religious affairs[11] to juxtapose this Islamic tradition with that of Europe's religious intolerance.

Indeed tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others lie at the very core of Islam. Such tolerance stems from a profound sense of humility that Islam encourages amongst Muslims – that there is no one truth, which different sets of people possess. The Qur'an categorically states, 'God gave each people a prophet speaking in its own language.'[12] Moreover, Islamic tradition, Karen Armstrong notes, '…asserts that there had been 124,000 such prophets, a symbolic figure suggesting infinity. All had brought their people a divinely inspired scripture; they might express the truth of God's religion differently, but essentially the message was always the same.'[13] It is precisely for this reason that the Qur'an implores Muslims not to argue with the followers of earlier revelations and to state: 'We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you; for our God and your God is one and the same; and it is unto him that we [all] surrender ourselves.'[14] These Qur'anic injunctions were reinforced by the Prophet Muhammad, who said that he had come to bring a 'middle way' of religious life that shunned extremes.[15] The traditions of the Prophet Muhammad also emphasize this important truism. It was reported that when confronted by two extremes, the Prophet always chose the middle.[16] For this reason Khaled Abou El Fadl stated, '…the Prophet of Islam was always described as a moderate man who tended to avoid falling into extremes. Hence, the term moderate has roots in the Islamic tradition, and it conveys the normative position that the vast majority of Muslims are supposed to have.'[17]

In addition to a rejection of extremism, mercy, compassion and peace are the three most emphatic values taught by Islam. As El Fadl has noted, '…these are the values that each practicing Muslim affirms in prayer at least five times a day.'[18] Perhaps these values are best illustrated upon the Prophet Muhammad's triumphant return to Mecca and forgave all who had previously persecuted him and other Muslims. Instead of retribution, there was the Qur'anic

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[11] *The Holy Qur'an*, 2:56.

[12] *Ibid.* 12: 4.

[13] Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*. (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 8.

[14] *The Holy Qur'an*, 29: 46.

[15] Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

[16] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists,* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), p. 16.

[17] *Ibid*. p. 16.
[18] *Ibid*. p. 11.

verse: 'Let no reproach be on you this day. May Allah forgive you. He is most merciful of the merciful.'[19] Among those pardoned by the Prophet that day was a woman who had eaten the liver of the Prophet's own uncle.[20] This notion of Islam as a religion of peace may well draw incredulous exclamations from non-Muslims who could point to numerous examples of the brutality of so-called Muslims from beheadings in Baghdad to the indiscriminate bombings in London and New York. This inevitably compels us to examine the notion of *jihad* in Islam.

Contrary to popular media culture, the word *jihad* does not mean holy war in the first instance, but rather a struggle or striving in the path of God. Indeed Nazeem Goolam notes that the actual words for war in Arabic are *al-harb* and *al-qital*.[21] This, however, does not mean war is excluded from *jihad*; rather there are four categories of *jihad*:

1. that of the heart (faith);
2. that of the tongue (good speech);
3. that of the hand (good works); and
4. that of the sword (holy war)

Goolam further notes that the first three categories comprise what has been termed the 'greater *jihad*', which is a struggle to purify oneself and to completely submit to the will of God, while the fourth category or holy war is referred to as the 'lesser *jihad*'.[22] Given the fact that it is regarded as a lesser *jihad*, even one of the Islamists ideologues, Sayyed Qutb (1906-66) concluded that peace is the rule while war is the exception.[23] Moreover where war is made, strict limits were placed on what constitutes legitimate war. According to Yusuf da Costa, Islam prohibits the deliberate killing of children, women and the aged as well as those with whom a covenant has been made.[24] The fact that Islam had already developed a humane war code in an age of barbarism was phenomenal and once more underscores the peaceful nature of Islam. In addition, various Muslim scholars are of the opinion that war is only permissible in self-defence.

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[19] Quoted in Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *Murder in the Name of Allah*. (Cambridge, MA: Lutterworth Press, 1989), p. 6.

[20] *Ibid.* p. 6.

[21] Nazeem Goolam, *Jihad in Islam* in Hussein Solomon and Firoza Butler (eds.) *Islam in the 21st Century: Perspectives and Challenges,* (Pretoria: Centre for International Political Studies, University of Pretoria, 2003), p. 89.

[22] *Ibid*. p. 89.

[23] *Ibid*. p. 92.

[24] Yusuf da Costa, 'An Overview of the Challenges Confronting the Ummah in the 21st Century', in Hussein Solomon and Firoza Butler, *op.cit.* p. 13.

The justification for such a view emanates from the very first verse revealed in the Qur'an on the issue of *jihad*:

> To those against whom war is made,
> permission is given to fight, because they are wronged,
> and verily Allah is most powerful for their aid.

The tolerance of early Islamic societies was incredible, judged by even today's standards. Consider one Abu Nawas (763 – circa 813), a poet who sang praises of wine, which is forbidden in Islam, and homosexual love. A sample of one of his poems follows:

> To one who asks me, if I want to go to Mecca
> I answer yes – when the pleasures
> Of Baghdad will have been exhausted
> For how could I make the pilgrimage
> As long as I remain immersed in a brothel or tavern[25]

Interestingly, there was no Salman Rushdie-style *fatwa* (religious ruling)[26] placed on the head of Abu Nawas. The key principle underlying this is the Qur'an verse 2:98, that there can be no coercion in religious affairs. This is again repeated by the Qur'anic verse 18:30: 'This is the truth from your Lord, let him who will, believe, and let him who will, disbelieve.' In the 39th chapter of the Qur'an, the Prophet is ordered to tell non-believers: 'It is Allah I worship in sincerest obedience.' Now as far as you are concerned, 'Worship, what you like, besides him.'[27] At other places, the Qur'an is even more explicit, 'For you, your religion and for me, my religion.'[28] In a similar vein, Allah asks a rhetorical question. Addressing the Prophet, He says: 'If thy Lord had enforced His Will, surely all those on earth would have believed, without exception. Will thou, then, take it upon thyself to force people to become believers?'[29] The underlying point here is that where religion is enforced, faith itself is undermined.

At a political level, the great Mughal emperor Akbar (1542-1605) understood the great value that tolerance has for multi-ethnic, multi-religious communities that occupy the same political space.

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[25] Meddeb, *op.cit*, p. 21.

[26] On 14 February 1989, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa or religious decree for his allegedly blasphemous portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad in his novel, *The Satanic Verses*. See Armstrong, *op.cit.* p. 174.

[27] *The Holy Qur'an*, Verse 39:16.

[28] *The Holy Qur'an*, Verse 10: 100.
[29] Ahmad, *op.cit.* p.8.

Akbar did not, therefore, seek to force his subjects to convert to his religion. Indeed in Akbar's empire Hindus, Buddhists, Jacobites, Jews, Jains, Christians, Zoroastrians, Sunni Muslims and Ismailis were all allowed to practice their religious beliefs freely. His strong Sufi Islamic beliefs led him to '…build temples for Hindus, and in 1575 set up a "house of worship" where scholars of all religions could meet for discussion. Akbar was attempting to establish a polity that expressed the Sufi ideal of *sulh-e-kull* (universal peace), which was merely a prelude to *mahhabat-e-kull* (universal love) which would positively seek the material and spiritual welfare of all human beings.'

At the political level, too, Islam is entirely compatible with liberal multi-party democracy. In Islam one could draw a clear distinction between the religious and political spheres. Karen Armstrong[30], for instance, powerfully argues that the Qur'an insists that the Prophet Muhammad had no political function, and that he was simply a *nadhir* (an admonisher).[31] Of course, he did become head of the first Islamic state, but this was more due to the political vacuum existing at the time as opposed to some divine pre-ordained plan. Also contributing to this separation between religion and the public sphere was that throughout Islamic history there never was a single voice that represented the canons of religion or Sharia law. As Khaled Abou El Fadl has asserted, 'Historically, the Islamic faith and Sharia law have been represented by several competing schools of theological and jurisprudential thought, the most powerful and notable of these organized into privately run professional guilds. Although the state often claimed to rule in God's name, the legitimacy of such claims was challenged by these professional guilds.'*[32]*

What Muslims need to understand is that a secular state is not anti-religion, rather it sets the basis where people of different faiths can coexist harmoniously. This is especially important in our modern heterogeneous and conflict-prone polities. More importantly Islamic concepts such as freedom (*al-hurriya*), equality (*al-musawat*), justice (*al-adl*)[33], and consultation *(shura)* are all norms that can be found in a liberal, multi-party, secular polity. Moreover, the first four caliphs in Islam beginning in CE 632 were all elected by a majority vote.[34] It is for this reason too that I reject the notion of a clash of civilizations – the West does not have a monopoly on liberal democracy. It is for this reason too that I reject the spurious bifurcation of Western freedom vs. the so-called Eastern authoritarianism.

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[30] *Ibid.* p. 12.

[31] Quran, 74:1-5; 8-10; 88:21-22.

[32] El Fadl, *op.cit.* p. 22.

[33] Lubna Nadvi, ''Islam and Politics in the 21st Century,'' in Hussein Solomon and Firoza Butler (eds.) *Islam in the 21st Century: Perspectives and Challenges*. Centre for International Political Studies. Pretoria, p. 75.
[34] Armstrong, *op.cit.* p. 160.

The Rise of Islamism

T his Islamic tradition of tolerance has, however, been increasingly displaced by what Abdul Hadi Palazzi terms 'Islamism.'[35] Islamism is a 20th century totalitarian ideology that seeks to mould Islamic religious tradition to serve narrow political ends of domination. Khaled Abou El Fadl also refers to this as a puritanical tradition within Islam noted for its 'fanatical reductionism and narrow-minded literalism.'[36] While having been moulded and coming together as a somewhat coherent ideology in the 20th century, its theological roots go all the way back to the 13th century, the time of Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (CE 1263-1328).[37] As with other totalitarian ideologies of that blighted century, Islamism shares more characteristics with Nazism and Fascism than it does with the Qur'anic teachings alluded to earlier. Islamism capitalizes on feelings of humiliation and powerlessness that Muslims started feeling in the early 20th century with Western encroachment and colonialism, the dismantlement of the Ottoman Caliphate and the economic backwardness of their societies in relation to their Western counterparts. In this, one could draw parallels with how Adolf Hitler manipulated the feelings of humiliation experienced by the German people at the end of World War I following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

As with other totalitarian ideologies, Islamists do not tolerate difference or accept the proverbial 'other.' Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (CE 1703-92) famously declared all those, who did not conform to his purist vision of Islam, to be apostates and worthy of death.[38] This intolerance was also vividly portrayed when the Taliban desecrated the giant Buddhas that were sculpted out of the walls of Afghanistan's mountains between the third and fourth centuries.[39] Intolerance is also seen in the virulent anti-Semitism of Islamists – another characteristic they share with the Nazis. Notions of Jews controlling the world feature prominently in their discourse, as a perusal of the Hamas Covenant will testify to. It seems that Muslims have forgotten that the Prophet married a Jewish woman, that he attended the funeral of a Jewish man and that he left his armour with his Jewish neighbour for safe-keeping.

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[35] Abdul Hadi Palazzi, 'Orthodox Islamic Perceptions of Jihad and Martyrdom,' in *Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference,* (Herzliya, Israel: The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Inter-Disciplinary Center, 2001), p. 64.

[36] El Fadl, *op.cit*. p. 18.

[37] Walter Laqueur, *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings and Manuals of Al Qaeda, Hamas and other Terrorists From Around the World and Throughout the Ages,* (New York: Reed Press, 2008), p. 388.

[38] Armstrong, *op.cit.* p. 135.

[39] Meddeb, *op.cit.* p. 129.

Discussion, dialogue and open debate are anathema to these Islamo-fascists. Maulana Abul Ala-Maududi (1903-79), the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami organization in Pakistan and the ideological father of the Taliban movement in Pakistan is perhaps the best exemplar on the use of force and coercion to dealing with difference. He had this to say, '...force may be used, and in fact should be used to prevent people from doing wrong. Non-Muslim countries and cultures cannot be allowed to practice immoral deeds.'[40] What is important to note here is the emphasis on non-Muslim countries and societies. Indeed Maududi himself was to call for a universal *jihad*. In this Islamists, too, share another characteristic with the Communists, Fascists and Nazis of the past – that of global domination. Maududi argued that 'Islam does not want to bring about the revolution in one country or a few countries. It wants to spread it to the entire world. Although it is the duty of the Muslim Party to bring this revolution first to its own nation, its ultimate goal is world revolution.'[41] Similar sentiments were also expressed by the Egyptian Hassan al Banna, founder and Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, 'It is the nature of Islam to dominate and not to be dominated, to impose its laws on all nations and to extend its power to the entire planet.'[42]

Like Fascism and Nazism, Islamism is utopian.[43] They put forth a vision of an ideal society drawing inspiration from an idealized seventh century Arabia, which is more the result of myth than the product of historical fact. Consider the myth around the so-called '*rashidun*', – the four rightly guided caliphs – to succeed the Prophet Muhammad. What Islamists politely omit in their discussion of the reign of the first four caliphs is the fact that three of the four caliphs were assassinated; that nepotism, political unrest and outright civil war plagued their reign.[44]

As it is with other totalitarian ideologies, Islamists are quite adept at blaming the proverbial other for their problems. It hardly needs reminding that the Muslim world was already in decline by the time Napoleon entered Egypt in the eighteenth century. Indeed it was precisely their internal decay that allowed much of the Muslim world to be colonized so rapidly. More contemporaneously, this attitude is seen in Islamists refusing to take responsibility for the ills of their own country or region and prefer conspiracy theories such as the West wanting to undermine Islamic nations. As Thomas Friedman put it so succinctly, 'Is it America's fault that Korea had the same per capital income in the 1950s as many Arab states but Korea has managed

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[40] Ahmad, *op. cit*, p. 21.

[41] Ahmad, *op.cit.* p. 58.

[42] Post, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

[43] Palazzi, *op.cit.* p. 64.

[44] Armstrong, *op.cit.* pp.25-36.

its development so much better since that it now dwarfs all Arab economies.'[45] This is indeed the core of the problem of Islamists; we know what they are against (almost everything) but what are they for? I am all for an intifada for an independent Palestine, but what should an independent Palestine look like? For that matter, what about an intifada for women's rights, democratic governance, press freedom and an end to nepotism and corruption, cronyism, and the persecution of minorities in Muslim countries?

Indeed coupled with their desire to not look at their own warts, Islamists also betray a selective amnesia of history. When looking at the glory day of Muslim influence on world history, they tend to omit the fact that this period also coincided with a period when the Muslim world was at its most open – not closed. As Friedman again notes, 'The Muslim world reached the zenith of its influence in the Middle Ages – when it preserved the best of classical Greek and Roman teachings, and inspired breakthroughs in mathematics, science, medicine and philosophy. That is also when Islam was at its most open to the world, when it enriched, and was enriched by the Christian, Greek and Jewish communities in its midst.'[46] A similar case of historical amnesia is Osama bin Laden's lament of the passing of the Ottoman caliphate. However, the Ottoman caliphate was derived less from the Islamic principles and more on the Byzantine model of absolute monarchy.[47]

Islamists also share other characteristics with their fellow ideologues to the right and left of the political spectrum. Violence and intimidation are part of the tools of the propagation of their creed. For Maududi the act of religious worship lost its spiritual purposes and was merely militarized. Thus he noted, 'The prayers, fasting, charity and pilgrimage have been prescribed to prepare and train us for this purpose of jihad. All the governments in the world give their armies special and specific training, their police and civil service too. In the same way, Islam also trains those who join its service – then requires them to go to jihad and establish the government of God.'[48] Indeed Maududi argued that *jihad* was the central tenet of Islam. No scholar or cleric before him made such a claim – placing *jihad* on equal footing as the Five Pillars of Islam.[49] In the process, Maududi was more than just interpreting Islam – he was reinventing it! A few years later, the Egyptian Mohammed Abdus Salam Faraj penned a treatise entitled *Jihad: The Absent Obligation* where he stated, 'It is clear that jihad is now obligatory upon every Muslim.'[50]

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[45] Thomas Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes: Exploring the World Before and After September 11,* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 49.

[46] *Ibid.* p. 52.

[47] Armstrong, *op.cit*, p. 130.

[48] Ahmad, *op.cit*, p. 44.
[49] Armstrong, *op.cit.* p. 168.

[50] Laqueur, *op.cit.* p. 401.

Suddenly Islam moved from having five pillars to six with the inclusion of *jihad* – and the Islamists idea of *jihad* at that.

Indeed, more than re-inventing, Islamists were corrupting Islam at almost every turn. Qur'anic prohibitions on hostage taking and treatment of prisoners were jettisoned whether by Iranians taking US hostages in Tehran or Hezbollah and Hamas in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories respectively. Qur'anic verses 2:178; 8:168; 24:34 and 47:5 forbid the taking of hostages except during a conventional war. Even then, these should be treated with dignity and respect and should be freed as soon as possible with the captor obliged to contribute to the ransom from his own resources.[51] Were the Islamist Chechens who entered the elementary school in Beslan in Russia on 1 September 2004, keeping hundreds of young children captive for three days, aware of these Islamic prohibitions or did it not matter? Some of these children died from dehydration as a result of the summer heat, others were killed when bombs were detonated, collapsing the roof and igniting a raging fire.[52]

Indeed this is not the only Qur'anic proscription that Islamists flout. Mohamed Hafez, for instance, points out that suicide terrorism violates at least three Islamic prohibitions: that against suicide, that against the killing of innocents, and against the killing of Muslims.[53] How did these Islamists justify this? Ayatollah Fadlallah, the recently deceased spiritual mentor of Hezbollah, disingenuously justified such acts as hostage-taking and suicide terrorism on the bases that extreme circumstances require extreme acts.[54] This sounds depressingly similar to the end justifies the means argument and like that argument is equally morally bankrupt. How can we as Muslims justify such just moral relativism is beyond my comprehension?

Again and yet again, Islam is corrupted and betrayed by these Islamists. The Wahhabi predilection to brand other Muslims as apostates, infidels, non-believers or heretics was denounced by none other than Al-Wahhab's own brother Sulayman who pointed out that it violates at least 52 traditions of the Prophet and that of his Companions. In other words, it is a sin to accuse a Muslim of heresy or being an unbeliever.[55]

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[51] Armstrong, *op.cit.* p. 174.

[52] Charles King and Rajan Menon, 'Prisoners of the Caucasus: Russia's Invisible Civil War,' *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2010, Vol. 89, No. 4, p. 20.

[53] Post, *op.cit.* p. 232.

[54] *Ibid*. p. 232.
[55] El Fadl, *op.cit*, p. 58.

Organizationally, too, they share common features with other totalitarian organizations. The organizational structure of many Islamist organizations, for instance, bears striking similarities with the Leninist ideal of the vanguard party. Hassan al-Banna (1906-49),[56] the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has subsequently spawned several other Islamist groups, clearly demonstrated his disdain for democracy when he opposed the establishment of political parties and wanted to have all civil servants to undergo religious training. This was a sure way towards a one-party state and something I am convinced that both Hitler and Benito Mussolini would have felt comfortable with.

As with Vladimir Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler, Islamists seek to capture state power in order to herald their 'New Order'. This is despite the fact that radical political Islamists who seek to capture state power with a view to transform it into an Islamic state would do well to review Islamic history with a sense of humility – a history where kleptocratic political elites pursued narrow interests dressed up in Islamic rhetoric. Caliph Harun al-Rashid (CE 786-809), for instance, referred to himself as the 'Shadow of God on Earth' and got religious scholars and clerics to argue that the duty of citizen must be to obey the caliph irrespective of his religious credentials.[57]

This latter point is best illustrated in contemporary Iran where we see a tiny theocratic elite willing to murder young students on the streets of Tehran in order to remain in power.[58] Where politics merge with religion, religion inevitably suffers and we are all spiritually poorer. This is the real significance of the theological justification that Ayatollah Khomeini came up with the concept of *velayat-e-faqih* – the rule of the supreme jurisprudent.[59] Thus, according to Articles 56 and 57 of the Iranian Constitution, the guardian or supreme religious leader holds God's absolute sovereignty over the world and man. In the process, elections and the democratic will of the people that it represents become so passé.

Indeed the Islamist's ideal state increasingly resembles Joseph Stalin's *gulag*. Here it is important to understand what Maududi's government of God consists of. According to Maududi, 'In our domain we will neither allow any Muslim to change his religion nor allow any other religion to propagate its faith. Whenever the death penalty for apostasy is enforced in a new

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[56] Nikki Funke and Hussein Solomon, *Exploring Islamist Fundamentalist Ideologies in Africa,* (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2006), pp. 119-121.

[57] *Ibid*, pp. 54-55, 58.

[58] Hussein Solomon, 'Fear and Intrigue in Iran,' *IIIS Occasional Paper No. 4/2010*, International Institute for Islamic Studies. Pretoria. 2010.

[59] Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

Islamic state, then Muslims are kept within Islam's fold. But there is a danger that a large number of hypocrites will live alongside them. They will pose a danger of treason. My solution to the problem is this. That whenever an Islamic revolution takes place, non-practicing Muslims should, within one year, declare their turning away from Islam and get out of Muslim society. After one year, all born Muslims will be considered Muslim. All Islamic law should be enforced upon them. They will be forced to practice all the tenets of their religion and, if anyone wishes to leave Islam, he will be executed.'[60] Whatever happened to no coercion in religious affairs?

Where Islamists do capture power as in Shiite Iran or Sunni Afghanistan, to create a paradise on earth with none of the social ills of the decadent West, it just does not seem to work out like that. In 2003, the Iranian newspaper *Entekhab*[61] pointed to the following statistics:

- there are 84,000 prostitutes operating on the streets of Tehran.
- there are also 250 brothels in Tehran – including some who are linked to senior officials.
- sixty new runaway girls are hitting Tehran's streets every day.
- forty per cent of all female drug-addicts in Iranian prisons have AIDS.
- four million youths under the age of 20 suffer from depression.

Similarly, Afghanistan under Taliban governance did not bring about the pristine utopia Islamist yearned about. Indeed their rule violates many Qur'anic injunctions. Ethnic chauvinism is forbidden by the Qur'an and the Prophet. This however, did not stop the Taliban (who overwhelmingly belong to the Pashtun ethnic group) from targeting non-Pashtuns. Moreover, the Taliban's discrimination against women runs entirely against the example of the Prophet as well as the conduct of the first *ummah*.[62]

The point which is being made here is that the capture of state political power and mere enactment of Islamist legislation – whether Khomeini Shia or Sunni Salafist inspired - is hardly the panacea for society's ills.

In their desire to capture political power, Islamists forge alliances which betray the very teachings of the Qur'an they claim to be representing. Who can forget the ties the Muslims Brotherhood forged with Nazi Germany[63] or the thousands of Islamists who were recruited to assist Fascist Italy's invasion and occupation of Ethiopia between 1936 and 1940?

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[60] Ahmad, *op.cit.* p. 55.

[61] Quoted in Friedman, *op.cit*. p. 190.

[62] Armstrong, *op. cit*., p. 170.
[63] Meddeb, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

Lenin promised Russians a workers' paradise and instead gave them Stalin and the *gulag*. Mussolini promised Italians a new Roman Empire and Hitler promised Germans a thousand year Reich. Both led their peoples to war and misery. Islamists promise Muslims a new nirvana, but their path is one of totalitarianism, tyranny and terror. This is not the path of Islam. This is not the path of the Prophet. This is not the path of tolerance and compassion and acceptance of the other. In the final instance, Islamists betray Islam and all Muslims.

Latter day Islamist movements draw much of the basis of their ideology from these previous thinkers. Violence occupies a central part of their creed as Osama bin Laden's *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders* makes clear, 'We with Allah's help– call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded- to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim *ulema*, leaders, youth, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's US troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.'[64] As a Muslim myself, I hate to admit it but I must have missed that divine command to kill the Americans! As for plundering their money, given the state of the US economy, I would much prefer the euro to the ever-weakening dollar, thank you Mr. Bin Laden.

Moreover, given the expansive nature of their goals, world domination, their enemies just keep expanding from Jews and Crusaders (incidentally, one of my favourite Australian rugby teams!). In Al Qaeda No. 2, Ayman al-Zawahiri's, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, the enemies against Islam include the United Nations, multinational corporations as well as international communication and data exchange systems, international news agencies, satellite media channels and international relief agencies – all of which he accuses of being involved in '...espionage, proselytising, coup planning, and the transfer of weapons.'[65] Similarly, following Somalia's Al Shabaab formally merging with Al Qaeda, their goals expanded from merely creating an Islamist state in Somalia to liberating all of east Africa from the Cross as well as sending fighters to Yemen, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Despite the rantings of Messrs Bin Laden and Al-Zawahir, my personal favourite has to be the Hamas Covenant. As with other Islamists, peace is jettisoned in favour of violence. This is beautifully stated under Article 13, 'Peace initiatives, the so-called peaceful solutions, and the international conferences to resolve the Palestinian problems, are all contrary to the beliefs of the Islamic Resistance Movement... There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by *Jihad*. The initiatives, proposals and International Conferences are but a waste of time, an exercise in futility. The Palestinian people are too noble to have their future; their right and their destiny

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[64] Laqueur, *op.cit.* p. 412.

[65] *Ibid*. pp. 427-428.

submitted to a vain game.'[66] Anti-Semitism and the Islamist view of history from Article 22 of the Hamas Covenant makes for interesting reading. Here we are told that Jewish capital controls much of the world; that the Jews were behind the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, as well as the two World Wars. Moreover, we are told that the Jews had set up freemasonry, Rotary Clubs and Lion Clubs as destructive spying agencies.[67] Upon first reading it, I thought perhaps that the authors of the Hamas Covenant had read too many Dan Brown novels – *The Da Vinci Code* – sprang to mind. However, it is clear that they actually believe this, which then raises interesting questions of how conflict resolution or political compromise is possible in the Middle East if this is the ideological baggage Hamas comes with to any negotiating table.

Conclusion

Islam is roughly the same age today as Christianity was when Martin Luther placed his 95 theses on the door of Wurttemberg Chapel and started the Protestant Reformation. Generations of bloody conflict ensued. At the current historical conjuncture, there is a major battle taking place inside Islam between moderates who in my view are real Muslims and the Islamo-fascists. This battle is equally bloody with more Muslims killed by other Muslims than by American or Israeli bombs. At issue is who gets to define Islam for the world's 1.5 billion Muslims. This is a battle that non-Muslims cannot simply regard as an internal struggle and sit on the sidelines – they need to actively support the moderate Muslims. At stake is the survival of the human species itself – a world where peaceful coexistence and respect for the other exists or one of enforced conformity within a worldwide *gulag* state.

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[66] Laqueur, *op.cit.* p. 436.

[67] *Ibid.* pp. 437-438.