“From my two decades of experience in the Islamic world, I am convinced that the vast majority of Muslims would embrace this approach as a means of clearly expressing their beliefs and enabling them to understand ours. The common elements of the three great Abrahamic religions have yet to be tapped as a means of reconnecting societies that have gone off-track in their relationships and which need means to connect that go beyond the security, economic, and political approaches that have failed to resolve the pressing issues that divide us.”

—General Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret), Former Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Central Command; Former U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East.

“This extraordinary book, which builds upon Dr. Johnston’s seminal work on religion and statecraft, offers new and compelling insights into the foreign policy challenges that lie ahead and how they should be approached. Its unique illumination of the Muslim perspective on world events provides the backdrop for a dramatically different way of perceiving and pursuing international relations. At a critical juncture in our nation’s history, this exceptional work promises to crystallize new and helpful debate among policymakers and foreign policy practitioners alike.”

—Dr. Amos Jordan, President Emeritus, Center for Strategic and International Studies; formerly served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. (Also a Senior Fellow of the Wheatley Institution.)

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RELIGION, TERROR, AND ERROR:
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND THE CHALLENGE
OF SPIRITUAL ENGAGEMENT

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The perceived clash between Islam and the West is often attributed to irreconcilable religious differences between Islam and Christianity, whereas it should more accurately be described as a confrontation between Islam and secularism with its seemingly amoral, value-free precepts. Although the religious underpinnings of America’s democratic process could provide a bridge to Islam (and other religions), the US government remains tightly bound in a straightjacket of dogmatic secularism that renders it largely indifferent to religious sensitivities.

Indeed, it is more than a little ironic that a deeply religious nation like the United States should have such difficulty in dealing with the religious challenges of the post–Cold War world. Among the underlying reasons, two stand out: (1) a proclivity for using its rigorous commitment to separation of church and state as an excuse for not doing the homework required to understand how religion informs the world views and political aspirations of those who do not similarly separate the two; and (2) its longstanding exclusion of religious considerations from policy deliberations. The looming specter of religious extremism married to weapons of mass destruction only makes more urgent the need to close this gap.

Muslim grievances with the West are deep-seated and extend back in time to the Crusades, European colonialism and the loss of the caliphate following World War I. The West, on the other hand, is more concerned with the current surge in terrorism and the future demographic implications of Muslim immigration coupled with the wide disparity in European and Muslim birthrates. Many in the West feel that Muslim immigrants are taking flagrant advantage of Europe’s hard-won
tolerance and social liberties and are fearful that a continuation of this trend will ultimately threaten European cultural identities.

The chapters below, which are taken from a new book entitled *Religion, Terror and Error: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Challenge of Spiritual Enlightenment*, examine the concerns of both communities in greater depth and explore the possibilities for finding an acceptable way ahead.
Nobody goes to the other side for fun. There must be a pain in your heart.
—Abdul Wahab, Afghan Taliban commander

While many Muslims admire citizen liberties in the West, including free speech and the fairness of our judicial system, they also harbor a number of deep-seated grievances. Foremost among them is the perceived impact on the Muslim world of U.S. foreign policy, which is simultaneously perceived as meddling, imperialist, and colonialist in nature. Several years ago, Kurdish economist and political theorist Ismael Hossein-Zadeh of Drake University summed up these grievances as follows:

Proponents of the theory of “the clash of civilizations” attribute negative reactions in the Muslim world to the suffocating policies of the imperial powers almost exclusively to Muslims’ fear of modernization. Yet, such essentially political reactions are prompted mainly by the predatory imperial policies and the unwelcome, onerous, and constant symbols of foreign presence in their lands, their markets, and their daily lives. That presence is imposed in a variety of ways: sometimes via direct military occupation, sometimes through military bases and advisors, sometimes through financial gurus of transnational corporations, sometimes through economic embargoes, and sometimes through aggressive commercialism and shabby cultural products such as violent video games or pornographic movies.

The above concerns are not new and were expressed long before September 11, 2001. Nearly 50 years ago, the Iranian writer Jalal Al-e-Ahmad
invented a new word to describe the effect of westernization on his society. His word in Farsi was *gharbzadegi*, which has been variously translated as “occidentosis,” “westoxification,” or “westernitis.” It was introduced in a book clandestinely published in Iran in 1962 and was used to criticize Iran’s imitation of western models of politics, culture, education, and economics, a process that Al-e-Ahmad claimed was destroying Iran’s cultural identity. Ayatollah Khomeini conveyed the same sentiments in his speeches and writings:

The poisonous culture of imperialism [is] penetrating to the depths of towns and villages throughout the Muslim world, displacing the culture of the Qur’an, recruiting our youth en masse to the service of foreigners and imperialists.

More specifically, there is great concern throughout Islam over what Muslims perceive to be the destructive consequences of modernity and its value-free rationality: the triumph of materialism, the decline of morality, unequal global development, the collapse of family and community, and the erosion of religious belief itself.

The Muslim attitude toward the West, however, was not always this negative. The earliest attitudes were developed at a time of unrivaled political and military success as the scope of early Islamic conquests (during the 100 years following the Prophet Muhammad’s death) exceeded those of the Roman Empire at its peak. This success was interpreted as hard evidence of divine favor, and Christians and Jews living under Islamic rule in Moorish Spain were viewed as nonthreatening fellow monotheists whose own mandate to rule had come and gone. Thus for medieval Muslims, Europeans represented a living reminder of Islamic superiority. The first major challenge to this aura of greatness came in the 11th century with the launch of the first of a number of Christian Crusades to evict Muslims from the Holy Land.

Muslims ultimately retained their hold on the Holy Land, but their self-confidence suffered a major blow in the 15th century with the loss of Spain, the last Arab Islamic presence in the West. This, in turn, marked the beginning of Islam’s subsequent displacement to the East by a dynamic European state system, a process that gained considerable momentum in the 16th century.

Further influence was lost with the advent of colonialism arising from western exploration and the opening up of the New World. Prior to Marco Polo, Islamic traders had been the middlemen in Europe’s highly lucrative trade with the Orient; but when European entrepreneurs realized that the middlemen could be bypassed as they exploited these new opportunities for wealth, the resulting economic stagnation in Islamic lands soon led to infighting and other forms of political-economic dysfunction.
The last vestige of Islamic self-confidence all but totally disappeared with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the abolishment of the caliphate in the wake of World War I. Effectively excluded from the shaping of modern history, Muslim resentment toward the subsequent colonialism of intrusive western powers became firmly rooted. As expressed by American scholars Nathan Funk and Abdul Aziz Said:

To this day, the experience of Western imperialism remains the overarching framework within which Muslims reconstruct their memories of the past. A widely shared impression among present-day Muslims is that Islam is struggling to regain its international stature after a prolonged eclipse associated with Western colonial expansion.7

The later treatment of Muslim-majority countries as proxies in the cold war, with little to no regard for their own aspirations, further exacerbated this resentment.

It is not stretching the bounds of credulity to conclude that the contemporary reaction of most Muslims to the West is one of defensiveness, a reaction that has been on full display in response to the post-9/11 efforts by the United States to exert its influence in South Asia and the Middle East. Feeling under siege by the West, there is a natural proclivity on the part of many Muslims to do whatever is necessary to protect Islamic values. Most of them reject terrorism and attacks on civilians as aberrations that contradict their religious norms, but they view al Qaeda as an understandable by-product of foreign hegemony and agree with its stated goals of (1) removing all U.S. military forces from Muslim countries, (2) including Islamist participation in the functions of governance, and (3) preserving and affirming Islamic identity. They also feel that western policies are contributing to the appeal of radical ideas. Finally, a majority of Muslims “see U.S. support for democracy in Muslim countries as conditional at best.”8

The following is an abbreviated catalog of grievances that many Muslims currently harbor against the West, most of which relate in some way to the sentiments expressed above:

1. The malaise/decline of Muslim societies is the legacy of European colonialism and American neocolonialism (implying that Muslims bear less responsibility than the West for their lack of democracy, poor economies, and the like).

For several centuries, many Muslims lived under colonial rule. When the European powers divested themselves of their colonies in the middle of the 20th century, the contrived borders and unelected rulers of the new nation-states that resulted were often arbitrarily selected or approved by the Europeans. Later, a number of these same unelected rulers were
overthrown by military dictators or juntas. A common Muslim complaint is that Europe and America effectively turned a blind eye to these events and supported whoever assumed power in order to secure their allegiance in the cold war and to ensure uninterrupted access to their oil.9 (Western publics, however, point to government corruption, lack of education, and Islamic fundamentalism as the greatest obstacles to Muslim prosperity.)

When respondents to a Gallup poll were asked what the United States could do to improve the quality of life for Muslims in their home countries,10 the most common responses after reducing unemployment and improving the economy were as follows: “Stop interfering in the internal affairs of Arab/Islamic states,” “Stop imposing your beliefs and policies,” “Respect our political rights and stop controlling us,” and “Give us our own freedom.”

2. Islamic extremism and terrorism are merely reactions to western imperialist policies.

This is the broader concept that produces such claims as “The U.S. brought 9/11 on itself.” The implication is that Muslims bear less responsibility than the West for the fact that extremism exists in Islam. As Hossein-Zadeh puts it:

While, for example, the establishment media, eagerly portrays every angry reaction to foreign aggression by every child anywhere in the Muslim world as a manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism, it rarely points out the fact that powerful fundamentalist Christian and Jewish forces support the more destructive military operations of geopolitical policies that trigger such violent reactions in the first place. . . . Western imperial policies in the Muslim world are, therefore, directly responsible for Muslims’ resort to religion and the rise of fundamentalism because those policies prop up loyal but dictatorial rulers who suppress the economic and democratic rights of their people in order to safeguard their nefarious interests, along with those of their foreign patrons.12

3. The West is an aggressor that has killed more people and committed more atrocities than Muslims.

- Hossein-Zadeh contends that “the atrocities committed in the name of Christianity far surpass those committed in the name of Islam.”13 To prove his point, he lists a page and a half of wars that were fought “in the name of Christianity and civilization.”
- In response to President Bush’s 2005 speech to the National Endowment for Democracy, American Muslim activist Mauri’ Saalakhan remarked, “When the ‘insurgents’ deliberately attack and kill innocent people (including Muslims), they demonstrate how far removed from Islam they are. But
how many ‘innocents’ have been cold-bloodedly sacrificed (labeled collateral damage) by western forces, Mr. President?”

- Dr. Ahmad bin Muhammad, an Algerian professor of religious politics, stated on Al-Jazeera TV:

The guest from America asked how a young man could blow up a bus. If only she had asked how a president could blow up a peaceful nation in Iraq. How does a president help the arch-killer of occupied Palestine? Why doesn’t she ask from where Hitler was brought up—Hitler, who murdered 50 million innocent people. Why doesn’t she ask where the people who dropped two atom bombs on Japan were educated? Who killed three million innocent Vietnamese? Who annihilated the Indians? Who maintained imperialism to this day? Who waged the Spanish civil war, which exacted a toll of 600,000 in 36 months? Why don’t we ask these questions? Who has over 15,000 nuclear warheads—Muslims or the non-Muslims? The Muslims or the Americans? The Muslims or the Europeans? We want an answer. Where was Bush educated—if education is really what makes a person a criminal? . . . Who invented slavery in recent centuries? Who colonized the other—us or them? Did Algeria colonize France, or vice versa? Did Egypt colonize England, or vice versa? We are the victims.

4. Western society’s permissiveness is an assault on Islamic values.

- When Gallup asked Muslims what they resent most about the West (in an open-ended question), “the most frequent response across all countries among moderates and radicals [was] ‘sexual and cultural promiscuity,’ followed by ‘ethical and moral corruption,’ and ‘hatred of Muslims.’”

- A 21-year-old Muslim student from Kenya stated in a 2006 survey:

The greatest change in my society has been a large-scale Westernization . . . Americanization of the community. Mostly it affects the young people from the way they think to the way they dress and act. . . . It has become rarer now to find a person as well versed in his own language as he is versed in English. Societal values are being lost as the people race to that which they see as better, with immorality, alcoholism, and such vices on the rise. It is becoming harder to find someone well versed in his religion in a community that once produced great scholars . . . a gradual but sure alienation of people from what is truly theirs.

- When respondents from 10 Muslim countries were asked which attributes they associated with the United States, one of the top picks was “morally decadent” (64%).

5. The United States is not serious about spreading democracy and props up autocratic regimes.

According to the Gallup poll referenced above, “Majorities in Jordan, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Morocco disagree that the United
States is serious about spreading democracy in their region of the world.” Fifty-two percent of “moderates” disagree, while 72 percent of the “politically radicalized” disagree. The principal reason for this attitude is the fact that western rhetoric on freedom and democracy has often been accompanied by support for repressive leaders. A recent and poignant example of this was provided by the Bush 43 administration’s vacillating rhetoric with respect to Egyptian democracy. In 2005, then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice protested presidential opposition candidate Ayman Nour’s imprisonment but appeared to backtrack when she returned to Egypt a year later to describe the Egyptian regime as part of “an important strategic relationship” (while failing to make any mention of Nour or the country’s lack of democratic progress). Secretary Rice also described Egyptian, Jordanian, and six Gulf State autocrats as “responsible leaders,” since they were part of the anti-Iran alliance in the region. Also buttressing this perception was the U.S. decision to sever relations with (and funding to) the Hamas-led Palestinian government despite the fact that it was democratically elected.

Almost two-thirds of the politically radicalized in 10 Muslim countries disagreed that the United States “will allow people in the region to fashion their own political future as they see fit without direct U.S. influence,” while 48 percent of the political moderates held this view.21 As expressed by Pakistani columnist Ayaz Amir:

It’s one of the biggest myths of our time that America wants democracy to flourish in the lands of Islam. How can it when democracy doesn’t suit its interests? If we have popular governments in Muslim countries the first thing they will demand is an end to American hegemony.

The Americans were happy with the Shah, they can’t abide by democratic Iran. They can’t abide Hamas which is the elected representative of the Palestinian people. They can’t abide Hezbollah which has representative status in Lebanese politics. Democracy in the Muslim world and the interests of American foreign policy just do not mix.22

According to Saalakhan, “It appears ‘Al Qaeda’ has been a catch-all phrase of convenience for repressive [post-9/11] U.S. domestic and foreign policy. It has also provided many of America’s allies with a green light to increase repression against legitimate calls for genuine democratization in their respective countries; and all of this is done in the name of another catch-all phrase, ‘the war on terrorism.’” Extremism often becomes the only avenue for political expression when these regimes effectively close off peaceful avenues for change.

6. The War on Terrorism is really a war on Islam and Muslims.
• Saalakhan states that one of America’s five mistakes in the Muslim world is “advancing the notion of a global Islamic conspiracy against the West.” He says there is a “belief among Muslims around the globe that Islam has replaced communism as the new boogeyman on the block.”

• American Islamic scholar Akbar Ahmed observed the following on his 2006 journey through the Muslim world:

I was not surprised therefore to find that the distorted perception of Islam in the West—which includes the attacks on the Prophet—was uppermost in the minds of Muslims when asked what they thought was the most important problem facing Islam. The expected answers—Israel, the plight of the Palestinians, the situation in Iraq—were all overshadowed by the idea that Islam was being maligned in the West. Those planning a strategy in the capitals of the West to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world need to keep this reality in mind.

• Among the top responses in the Gallup poll to the question “What do you admire least about the West?” was “hatred or denigration of Islam and Muslims.” A major contributor to this perception has been the numerous diatribes against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad by prominent Christian leaders, who have millions of loyal American followers. The absence of a response in kind relates to the deep reverence that Muslims hold for the figures of Jesus and Mary, who are considered by Islamic tradition to be the only two humans since Adam and Eve not to have been touched by Satan at birth.

• “Substantial majorities in a 2007 WorldPublicOpinion.org survey of residents of Morocco, Indonesia, Egypt, and Pakistan said the United States’ goal is to ‘weaken and divide the Islamic world.’ Most of those surveyed see the desire to spread Christianity in the Middle East as one reason behind this goal, and to keep Islam from growing and challenging the Western way of life as another.”

• A great deal of Muslim resentment has resulted from U.S. Homeland Security measures that have made it close to impossible for American Muslim charities to transfer donations to worthy causes in Muslim countries.

Among the other incidents since 9/11 that have played into the general perception that the West is waging a “war against Islam” are the Danish cartoons controversy, Pope Benedict’s remarks at the University of Regensburg, prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, and the public execution of Saddam Hussein.

No less than 75 percent of the Muslim world associates the word ruthless with the United States. As noted by John Esposito, a Georgetown University professor and scholar of Islam, and Dalia Mogahed, Senior
Analyst and Executive Director of the Center for Muslim Studies, The Gallup Organization:

One U.S. diplomat who was in Egypt when the Abu Ghraib scandal broke out said she was told by the locals: “We would expect this from our own government but not from you.” Ironically, it may be because of America’s idealized image as a beacon for democracy that its actions elicit such passionate anger. The perception is: For you, America, to go against your own values and how you would treat your own people and to abuse Muslims in this way means you must really despise us and our faith.  

Beneath this angst is a pervasive distress borne of a seemingly endless string of defeats on the world stage following the dissolution of the caliphate in the wake of World War I, Pakistan’s losses to India, the Arab states to Israel, and Chechnya to Russia, to mention only a few. These reverses represented more than ordinary setbacks. Other religions either promise nothing (Judaism) or rewards in the afterlife. Islam, however, also promises victory on earth. The peaceful appeal of some Sufi orders notwithstanding, Islam grew to a considerable extent because of its initial victories. Defeat thus created serious doubts as to the religion’s veracity. As summed up by Pakistani militant Maulana Masood Azhar, “Puritanical Islam faces extinction at the hands of an ascendant secular culture, just as the fledgling religion was challenged by unbelievers in its earliest days.”

7. The United States is incapable of negotiating a fair peace in the Middle East because of its deep-seated favoritism toward Israel.

In actuality the angst runs deeper than that. Because of the controversy surrounding its origins, the mere existence of the state of Israel is viewed as an affront to many Muslims who fail to understand why the Palestinians should pay the price for Nazi atrocities against the Jews. Indicative of this sentiment are the comments of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson in response to a question by John B. Henry, a Washington businessman who at that time was a Harvard student conducting research for his senior thesis on the Vietnam War. In the words of Henry:

It was the high point in my 2.5 hour interview with Acheson in his office at Covington & Burling in June 1970. David Halberstam, who was a speaker at my Kennedy Institute of Politics seminar, told me that I should ask the great man: “When a society gets bogged down in something irrational, how does it go about the process of extrication?” When I asked Acheson this question, I thought I was throwing him a softball on the Vietnam War. Acheson replied: “Young man, let
me take you back to the Middle Ages when a Christian kingdom was founded in the middle of a hostile Islam. It lasted 90 years. There were three near misses. In the end, the sands of Islam blew and there was no more Christendom. Young man, let me tell you what is the biggest mistake in post-war American foreign policy. It isn’t the war in Vietnam. It was the Truman Administration’s decision to support the creation of the state of Israel. We will rue the day we ever did this. Whereas the crusades were an extension of European power to create a Christian kingdom, America’s support for the state of Israel was an extension of American power to create a Jewish kingdom. From an Arab point of view, they are the same thing—a land grab.”

**THE TERRORIST MIND-SET**

The above grievances are widely shared, but one must go deeper to understand the extremist’s point of view. In response to the political reverses over time—colonialism chief among them—and the socio-economic failure of most Muslim regimes, an aggravated siege mentality has taken root among most extremists in which all problems afflicting Muslims are seen to be the result of a carefully crafted conspiracy on the part of the United States, Israel, and various other suspects.

Many in the West have wondered how it is that Osama bin Laden can mount suicidal attacks against innocent civilians and declare a holy war against Christians and Jews when both innocents and People of the Book (Christians and Jews) are protected categories of people in the Qur’an and suicide itself is specifically prohibited. Perhaps a good place to begin is by examining how bin Laden rationalized this in his “Letter to America” published in the November 24, 2002, issue of the Manchester Guardian. After listing a number of grievances relating to Palestine, Somalia, Chechnya, Kashmir, Lebanon, and the actions of so-called puppet Arab regimes, he states:

> It is commanded by our religion and intellect that the oppressed have a right to return the aggression. . . . Is it in any way rational to expect that after America has attacked us for more than half a century, that we will then leave her in security and peace?

He goes on to say,

> You may then dispute that all the above does not justify aggression against civilians, for crimes they did not commit and offenses in which they did not partake.

In answering his own question, he keys to the fact that the American people choose their government through their own free will—a choice
that stems from their agreement with its policies—and that they pay the
taxes which

fund the planes that bomb us in Afghanistan, the tanks that strike and destroy
our homes in Palestine, the armies which occupy our lands in the Arabian Gulf
and the fleets which ensure the blockade of Iraq. So the American people are the
ones who fund the attacks against us.\textsuperscript{34}

And then he repeats,

\textit{Allah, the Almighty, legislated the permission and the option to take revenge.}
Thus if we are attacked, then we have the right to attack back. Whoever has
destroyed our villages and towns, then we have the right to destroy their villages
and towns. Whoever has stolen our wealth, then we have the right to destroy
their economy. And whoever has killed our civilians, then we have the right to
kill theirs.\textsuperscript{35}

There are also forces internal to Islam to consider. As strategic analyst
Michael Vlahos argues in \textit{Terror’s Mask: Insurgency Within Islam}, rather
than thinking of Islamic militant activities as the work of terrorist groups
within a particular political subculture of Islam, one should view their
collective efforts as representing a broader insurgency within Sunni
Islam. This insurgency is a struggle for the heart and soul of the faith as
manifested in a mosaic of intersecting movements, or “brotherhoods,”
that work together as a single Muslim fraternity.

In its early history, Islam under the caliphate came close to creating a
universal empire. Then it splintered and lost its cutting edge as it suc-
cumbed to the pleasures of life. Whenever this has happened, as it has
periodically, a new leader would sweep in out of the desert to set things
right and renew the corrupted \textit{umma} (global community of Muslim
believers). Bin Laden and his colleagues made specific reference to this
drama of renewal in one of the several videos that were released follow-
ing the attacks of September 11. To quote his companion in that video,
“And the day will come when the symbols of Islam will rise up and it
will be similar to the early days . . . of al-Ansar”—referring specifically
to the supporters of Muhammad. And that is how a number of Muslims
view bin Laden’s activities today—as the emergence of a heroic leader
to re-create the spiritual experience of the original struggle to establish a
universal \textit{umma}. Thus 9/11 is seen to be a transcendental achievement,
not merely a passing gesture of martyrdom. The very act of struggle itself
is a triumph that joins one to God and puts one on the path to renewal,

a struggle that according to early Muslim scholars will last until the end
of time.
The secular Sunni states—especially those of Egypt, Syria, and Algeria—also rank high as targets of this struggle. And, while hardly secular, Saudi Arabia is targeted as well, for having permitted the stationing of U.S. military forces on its holy soil. As Bernard Lewis, a widely recognized scholar of Islam, put it more generally:

By abandoning the law of God, the Shari'a, and replacing it with imported foreign laws and customs, they ceased to be Muslims. . . . Such rulers and those who carry out their orders are therefore infidels and as such are not entitled to the obedience of the believers. . . . Far from obeying such rulers, it is the duty of the true Muslim to disobey and indeed remove them in order to bring about a restoration of the true Islam through the enforcement of Holy Law.  

The vision that bin Laden offers as an imagined alternative to today’s uncertainty, however, is that of a restored caliphate from an older, more tranquil world, especially that of the first four “rightly guided” caliphs. Although that period in Muslim history was a time of spectacular successes on the battlefield, the institution of the caliphate itself was marked by violent instability throughout.  

Finally, for some there is a strong psychological attraction to the militant pursuit of religious faith as well. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, an American Jewish convert to Islam, who later became an FBI informant, offers the following observation:

Part of Islam’s seduction is its otherness—how different it is from anything else. And it would be a mistake to shortchange how satisfying a life is inside radical Islam. As I descended into radicalism, I had a greater feeling of certainty than I had known before. I felt that for the first time, I could truly comprehend and follow Allah’s will—and I knew that those who disagreed with me were just following their own desires. There was a sense of community that came with this certainty. I was part of an exclusive club composed of those who could see beyond the shallow Western liberal values with which I was raised.  

**THE WAHHABI DIMENSION**

No discussion of terrorism and Islam would be complete without some treatment of Wahhabism, a branch of Islam founded on the ideas of the noted scholar Ibn Taymiyya around the turn of the 13th century. Taymiyya’s ideas were revived in the 18th century in northeast Arabia under the leadership of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. His interpretation of the Qur’an and shari’ah (Islamic law) competes with the four classical schools of Muslim thought. Wahhabism in its modern form is the strictest version of Islam; and although it is widely known to be strongly rooted in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, now most Wahhabis
are South Asian rather than Arab because of the vast diffusion of the Deoband movement. The Darul-Uloom madrasa founded in 1867 in the town of Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, India, trains teachers and preachers in a rigid version of Islam explicitly derived from Saudi Wahhabism, specifically to win over South Asian Muslims from the more tolerant traditional forms of Islam. The Darul-Uloom madrasa has given birth to more than 15,000 madrasas in India, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and around the world that usually bear its name and are dedicated to its method (which uses Urdu as the language of instruction) and to its extreme doctrine. South Asian Muslims, who outnumber Arab Muslims, largely practiced syncretistic forms of Islam before the advent of the Deobandi movement—they used to worship alongside Hindus at the tombs of famous religious figures.

Employing Wahhab’s ideas over the centuries, Muslim scholars have established a powerful conservative ideology based on the premise that all existing political regimes lack Islamic legitimacy and that Islam itself has become stale and weak. Wahhabis seek to revitalize both faith and society, hand in hand. The result is a hard-line movement seeking to reestablish Islam as it is perceived to have been in the time of the Prophet but to do so primarily through political activism. This type of religious fundamentalism can be threatening, but it is not inherently violent. Osama bin Laden has nevertheless commandeered a number of Wahhabi precepts in his rationale for violent struggle.

SCRIPTURAL MANIPULATION

It is important to note that bin Laden and his al Qaeda operatives do not stand alone in their use of violence in the name of religion. Other Muslim groups like Hezbollah, Jewish extremists like Kach, and the so-called Lord’s Resistance Army of Uganda all carry out violent acts in the name of God. And that is just among the Abrahamic faiths. How are such terrorists able to manipulate religion so easily for their own violent ends? In looking at organizations identified with acts of terrorism, one sees a definite pattern in their methods. Perhaps the most used means for achieving religious legitimacy for violent behavior lies in the misuse of sacred texts. In his self-appointed role as a religious spokesman, bin Laden cites selected passages from the Qur’an and the Hadith to justify his actions.39 One Qur’anic verse in particular, verse 29 of sura 9, constitutes a widely used call to violence for bin Laden and his colleagues:

Fight those who believe not In Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission and feel themselves subdued.40
Taken at face value, it seems clear that it is the duty of Muslims to fight the People of the Book unless they pay a special tax and submit to Muslim rule. But in the historical context to which the Qur’an is intimately tied, this passage refers specifically to the newly organized Muslim community in Mecca defending itself against its opponents, in this case, the Jews of Medina. This tax, or jizyah, is often cited as an example of Islam’s fundamental bias against other religions. This is not supported, however, by the definition provided in the Qur’an. Indeed, it suggests quite the opposite.

As in any secular state, citizens of a Muslim state must contribute to the functioning of its government. This includes mandatory military service to defend the state or, at times, to expand Islam. However, the Qur’an holds that a non-Muslim cannot be compelled to fight for Islam. Hence, non-Muslims are given the choice of either fighting or paying a tax in support of the government’s defense efforts. It is a tax without any of the religious precepts that accompany zakat, the mandatory tax paid solely by Muslims to help the poor. Thus, the jizyah is an accommodation to other religions that is intended to provide a fair sense of burden sharing in defending the state. To justify treating Christians and Jews as enemies of Islam, Osama bin Laden consistently highlights this verse without any reference to historical context. It is this kind of selectivity, or isolation of scripture, that is used to justify intolerance (and which perverts the true meaning of what was originally intended).

Another al Qaeda favorite is sura 4, verse 89: “Slay the enemy wherever you find them.” Again, in isolation, this verse seemingly promotes an aggressive spirit of violence. However, if one continues on to verse 90, one finds the opposite to be the case: “If they leave you alone and offer to make peace with you, God does not allow you to harm them.” Muslim extremists purposely overlook this verse and thus compromise the Qur’anic intent.

There is no end to the verses that al Qaeda can find to meet its ends, just as the Dutch Reform Church did to justify apartheid and Jewish zealots currently do in the West Bank. None of the Abrahamic faiths are exempt from the kind of selective theological justification that lays the groundwork for violent extremism. For example, one could highlight the unholy actions of King David in isolation from the rest of the Old Testament and come up with a very inaccurate picture of Judaism and Christianity; yet these words and deeds are part of the scriptural basis for both religions. It is easy to see how a priest or rabbi could elevate such aspects to the position of cardinal teachings and thereby create a divine mandate for violence.

Within Islam, there is a historically institutionalized process of independent reasoning called ijtihad, which has played an integral role in the
intellectual history of the faith. *Ijtihad* allows the believer the freedom to find the true Islam through his or her own studies and thought, giving room to mystic Sufis and militant Islamists alike. Another way of putting it: *ijtihad* is the periodic reexamination of how religious values should inform daily life in light of major changes in the external environment. The doors of *ijtihad* were closed by most Sunni scholars in the 10th century, but individual Muslim scholars nevertheless continue their search. As Professor Abdul Aziz Said of American University has noted, however, “When Muslims were strong in various periods of history, they were open to new ideas. When they are weak, they are afraid of new ideas.”

**MARTYRDOM AS A WEAPON**

Central to the evolution of religious terrorism have been the activities of Hezbollah, the militant Shiite group operating in the Middle East. Under the spiritual leadership of Shaykh Fadlallah, Hezbollah took advantage of the chaos of war-ravaged Lebanon in the early 1980s to resist Israeli occupation.

Inspired and supported by the newly founded Islamic Republic of Iran, Fadlallah established a coalition of Sunni and Shiite Lebanese, as well as Palestinians, in opposition to the “common enemies of Islam,” which included France, Israel, the United States, and the Maronite Christians of Lebanon. Fadlallah connected the plight of the Lebanese and Palestinian refugees to self-sacrifice as the only appropriate response for defending Islam. He promoted the righteousness of suicide by stressing martyrdom as a means for bringing back the Messiah, thus fulfilling the vision of the Qur’anic apocalypse. He used the concept of a cosmic war and the imminent approach of the “end times” to justify the use of violence by the faithful in the fight to overcome evil, thus creating a divine suicidal mandate for his followers.

Fadlallah’s campaign calling for the unthinkable act of killing one’s self in the name of religion, while unprecedented, was seemingly justified and politically well-timed. The disaffected youth in the refugee ranks seized on the concept of martyrdom as their best weapon against the otherwise insurmountable enemy that caused their suffering. Fadlallah’s teachings focused on the violent and apocalyptic traditions of Islam and replaced the stagnant Palestinian nationalist movement with a religious one, thus giving a new sense of hope to those Arabs and Muslims who had made the Palestinian cause their own. Searching for a face-saving escape from years of humiliation, many Arabs were willing to accept Fadlallah’s call for the creation of an Islamic state. A mass media campaign conveyed this thinking throughout the Arab world, and it was readily accepted
on a broader scale. Social services provided by Hezbollah that were not being provided by the Lebanese government, much like those provided more recently by Hamas in Palestine, lent further legitimacy to Fadlallah’s words. Political passions and the sense of injustice left by colonialism overwhelmed any concerns about unsound religious foundations and forever changed the Palestinian movement.

Another interesting and important perspective on those who commit suicide is provided by Ed Husain, a former radical British Muslim:

Another point that many of us fail to comprehend [is] that suicide bombers aren’t some evil human beings walking in our midst. They’re normal, caring individuals and it’s that normality and sense of being caring when exploited by others that turns them into being suicide bombers.

And with specific reference to a friend who had recently served as a suicide bomber:

Because he didn’t care for his own self and he cared for Palestinians in their repression as he saw them in Syria and also in Palestinian territories . . . it was that selflessness that he could give up his own life in order to serve them.42

WHEN RELIGION TRUMPS

Religious scripture, when retrieved selectively and applied situationally in combination with emotions of hatred and rage, becomes a powerful tool for justifying the unjustifiable. This is crucial for the religious terrorist for whom religious legitimacy dwarfs all other considerations. If religious terrorists can point to a “precedent” in sacred scripture or tradition, opponents will find it difficult to dispute the morality of their actions, despite their obvious contradiction with the overarching spirit of the religion. This is true of all major world religions, as illustrated by the recent bitter half-century conflict in Sri Lanka where the peaceful tenets of Buddhism were turned upside down to justify an endless stream of military atrocities.

Far from being any kind of logical extension of traditional Islam, the kind of nihilistic violence and revolution advocated by Osama bin Laden and others is akin to the revolutionary utopianism of Bolshevism and the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

—HRH Prince Turki-al Feisal, Former Director General of the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate
To provide a more graphic illustration of the relationship between religion and the terrorist mind-set, one has only to think about the passengers who overwhelmed the hijackers on United Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania during the attacks of 9/11. As expressed by Islamic theologian Farid Esack:

The sure prospect of their own deaths didn’t keep them from doing what they had to do to prevent greater harm, essentially to save a larger part of humankind. Difficult as this may be for us to understand, in the twisted minds of these suicide bombers, they too saw themselves as giving their lives so that a larger part of humanity may live. For them, the United States is the enemy, Satan incarnate, who is causing chaos and destruction around the world.43

One could quarrel with this analogy simply by noting that the Americans’ activities were inspired by their love for life, while the *ihabis* were motivated by their desire for death and martyrdom.

Finally, from the vantage point of al Qaeda’s leadership, one might hypothesize the following perspectives:

1. They see our friendship and cooperation with some fraction of the world’s 1.5 billion Muslims as the principal obstacle to their quest for global control under a restored caliphate.
2. Their immediate objective is to expel us from the Middle East so they can (1) overthrow the Arab regimes that depend on us and (2) end the corrupting influence of godless secularism on their culture.
3. They see the confrontation as a war of wits, not capabilities. To the extent that they can use asymmetric warfare to inspire us to overreact by killing, incarcerating, or otherwise persecuting Arabs or other Muslims who may not be sympathetic to al Qaeda, it plays directly into their hands by expanding the pool of future terrorists. As retired Ambassador Chas Freeman cogently stated in reference to Abu Ghraib and our resort to rendition, “In the years of struggle between us, al-Qaeda has not been brought to question its core values or change them. Demonstrably, we have.”44
4. They are playing us like a concert piano, not only by manipulating our reactions, but by capitalizing on our miscues. By invading Iraq, we effectively transformed an intervention in Afghanistan that had the general support of the Muslim world into what to them now looks like a wider war against Islam. And by implicitly or explicitly equating Islam with terrorism through our careless lexicon, we only exacerbate the situation by making it more difficult for our Muslim friends to cooperate with us in opposing the extremism that threatens them as well.

In all probability, bin Laden and his associates look at the economic crisis in the West and conclude that the return on investment of their 9/11 attacks has astronomically exceeded their wildest dreams. Actually, it
goes far deeper than that. Because the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center exceeded al Qaeda’s expectations, the fact that they did collapse was interpreted as divine endorsement (much like Islam’s early successes on the battlefield during its first 100 years). According to al Qaeda, the hijackers didn’t bring down the towers—God did.

NOTES

6. There were other contributors to this loss of self-confidence as well; among them, the inability of Muslim forces to breach the city walls of Constantinople from the seventh century onward at great expense in men and material (and an eroded conviction that Islam was superior to Christianity and thus due Allah’s favors and victories). It wasn’t until the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), when Christian forces from Europe attacked their fellow Christians and sacked the city, that Muslim penetration into the Balkans became possible.
10. The six-year Gallup poll taken between 2001 and 2007 involved over 50,000 interviews conducted in more than 35 predominantly Muslim nations or nations with sizable Muslim populations. It represents more than 90 percent of the world’s Muslim communities. This poll is the largest, most comprehensive study of its kind.
13. Ibid., 10.
17. Ibid., 41–42.
18. Ibid., 84.
19. Ibid., 32.
20. Esposito and Mogahed base the distinction between moderates and the politically radicalized on the basis of whether or not they believed the 9/11 attacks were “completely justified.” Some critics have pointed out that those who said the attacks were “mostly justified” might also be considered extremists.
24. Ibid., 22.
25. Ibid., 50.
29. Ibid., 157.
30. Ibid., 165.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
39. In Islam, the Hadith is the collection of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. It is held as a major source of religious law and moral guidance, second in authority only to the Qur’an.
How do you understand if you can’t differentiate?
How can you differentiate if you don’t understand?

—Oliver W. Holmes

The act of listing grievances can be a debilitating exercise, but any move to foster improved relations between Islam and the West will have to take into account the full array of concerns on both sides. In some respects, western grievances are no less severe than those of Islam.

Despite a number of lower-level attacks against the West over the final two decades of the 20th century, Islamist extremism did not rank particularly high among the concerns of most westerners. For the United States alone, these attacks ranged from seizure of the U.S. Embassy and its staff in Iran in 1979 to the blowing up of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983, the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, the 1996 bombing of the U.S. Air Force Khobar Towers residential complex in Saudi Arabia, the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the attack in Yemen on the USS Cole in 2000.¹ After September 11, 2001, any perceived complacency changed dramatically, and the reverberations are still being felt.

A Pew Global Attitudes Project poll taken five years after 9/11 showed that “many in the West see Muslims as fanatical, violent, and as lacking tolerance.”² Majorities of Americans and Western Europeans who have heard of the Danish cartoons controversy credit Muslim intolerance to different points of view as being more to blame for the tensions than any western disrespect for Islam.³ And in a 2007 poll, also by Pew,
“twice as many people use negative words as positive to describe their impressions of the Muslim religion (30% vs. 15%).” More recently, an ABC News/Washington Post poll on U.S. views of Islam conducted in March 2009 indicated that 48 percent of all Americans held an unfavorable opinion of Islam—its highest unfavorable rating in these polls since 2001.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Despite the seemingly situational nature of western angst toward Islam in the wake of 9/11, the roots of western disenchantment actually run much deeper. In contrast to the previously mentioned political success and cultural self-confidence experienced by early Islam vis-à-vis the West, western attitudes toward Islam were characterized by significant insecurity in the face of the major theological challenge posed by Islam’s rise in the seventh century and the ensuing Arab conquests of huge swaths of territory, ranging from Spain to the Byzantine and Persian empires, that quickly followed. Although Islam has understandably been referred to as a “religion of the sword,” Mahatma Gandhi had a different view:

I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days, in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity; the utter self-effacement of the Prophet; his scrupulous regard for pledges; his intense devotion to his friends and followers; his intrepidity; his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These, and not the sword, carried everything before them, and surmounted every obstacle.

Adding further credence to Gandhi’s view is an earlier observation by French historian Gustave LeBon regarding the early advance of Islam in his book La civilization des Arabes:

It is obvious that persuasion alone could bring the peoples who conquered the Arabs later, like the Turks and the Mongols, to adopt it. In India, where the Arabs only passed through, the Qur’an spread so far that it counts today more than fifty million adherents. . . . The spread of the Qur’an in China was not less considerable . . . though the Arabs never conquered the least piece of the Celestial Empire.

Islam was victorious for the first thousand years in its competition with Christianity. Once Christianity ended its internal wars at Westphalia in 1648, however, it began expanding in earnest; and Islam has been losing ground ever since. Thus, no small part of today’s violence can be attributed to a civilizational grievance.
The dominant image in the West over the centuries was that Islam was irrational, prone to violence, and a threat to western ideals and values. The fact that Islam seemingly gives greater credence to the bonds of religious solidarity than it does to principles of nationality deriving from the Peace of Westphalia only added to this negative image.8

The problem today is exacerbated by unbalanced reporting in the western media, which provides almost no coverage for the helpful initiatives of mainstream, peaceful Muslims. Among other manifestations, these have included innumerable fatwas against terrorism issued by top Islamic religious leaders both in the United States and overseas.9 This negative conception has remained intact up to the present in one form or another, with western attitudes ranging from indifference during the period of European colonialism to outright hostility in the wake of 9/11. Aside from isolated and intermittent periods of peaceful coexistence and cooperation such as those that periodically existed under Islamic rule in Andalusia, Baghdad, and Constantinople,10 the western attitude toward Islam has generally been one of nonacceptance.

THE EUROPEAN QUESTION

A number of books published since 9/11 portray the threat of Islamic radicalism in near-apocalyptic terms. By far the most common theme of such books is the idea that Europe constitutes the critical battleground in the struggle against Islamist extremism, which is out to destroy the western world and will one day succeed if urgent action is not taken to counteract it.

For Europe, the secular state has historically equated to a publicly distanced relationship between church and state in which religion is effectively relegated to one’s personal life. There is reason to believe, however, that this secularist label masks a still-strong cultural-religious identity in which many Europeans “believe without belonging.”11 In Germany, for example, without significant public discussion or dissent, the government collects church taxes that support the main religious institutions in Germany; religious organizations dispense most of Germany’s foreign aid; and religious organizations and their subsidiaries provide many social services. Religion also influences Germany’s foreign policy in at least three key areas: peace, the fight against poverty, and protection of the environment. In a recent poll, two-thirds of the respondents stated that they would like to see more involvement from German churches in ethical international questions and in certain domestic questions.12

A full 75 percent of Protestants in Germany indicated that one can believe in God without going to a religious service on Sunday, thus broadening the definition of religion to include moral behavior and
values without the necessity of institutions. Coupling this reality with the fact that some new members of the European Union (EU), like Poland, bring with them strong religious traditions and that Islam itself has already become a permanent feature of the European cultural landscape, it seems clear that Europe’s secular image will only erode over time. Whether it does or does not, most scholars of religion agree that European secularization is the global exception rather than the rule.

Meanwhile, to avoid the widespread discontent among European Muslims that has already manifested itself in the London bombings, French riots, and the like, it is clear that Europe will have to do a better job of creating a pluralist society to which Muslims can feel they belong and in which they have a political stake to protect. In contrast to the inclusive, equal-opportunity environment of the United States, Europe’s attempts at integration have fallen short of what is needed largely because of structural hurdles that result in job discrimination, poor education, and substandard living conditions. Inadequate citizenship opportunities also weigh in the balance. Forty percent of Muslim youth in America between the ages of 18 and 29 consider themselves to be “thriving,” whereas that number drops to 7 percent in the United Kingdom. Radicalism can become the de facto avenue of choice in the face of such hurdles since it seemingly offers simple answers to complicated global problems and provides a sense of belonging that the surrounding secular society is unable to provide.

In the words of former British Muslim radical Ed Husain,

At home we were exposed to one culture; at school we were exposed to another. So Britishness was never clearly defined for my generation growing up. And the fact that we’ve got communities up and down the country that live totally separate lives—I mean in the name of multiculturalism, we’ve created these monocultural ghettos.

Included among the western grievances are the following:

1. Europeans are chiefly concerned about current demographic trends.

There must be an average of 2.1 live births per woman for a population to sustain itself (the “replacement rate”), and most of Europe is well below that rate. The collective impact of high Muslim birthrates, coupled with liberal immigration policies, has resulted in a rapid growth of the Muslim populations in these countries at the same time that indigenous European populations are shrinking. In the last 30 years alone, the Muslim population in Europe has effectively tripled, making Islam the fastest growing religion in Europe today. As one political commentator has warned,
Over the next four decades, there will be a vast emptying out of Central and Eastern Europe: Germany’s population down 10.3 percent, Poland down 20.5 percent, the Russian Federation down 24.3 percent, Bulgaria down 35.2 percent. And in Western Europe the only population increase will be almost entirely due to the great migration from Africa and Asia. . . . What does it mean for the United States when the other half of the transatlantic alliance enters a demographic death spiral and becomes semi-Muslim in its socio-cultural-political character?

Other scholars, however, have called such predictions into serious question. Jack Goldstone, professor and director of George Mason University’s Center for Global Policy, for example, says that predictions of Muslims soon dominating Europe are “outlandish” and estimates that the 3 to 10 percent of the Muslim population in major European countries will, at most, double by midcentury.

Europe, in its 50 countries and territories, has about 38 million Muslims, which constitutes roughly 5.2 percent of the continent’s total population. In France, which houses the highest percentage of Muslims in Western Europe, Muslims comprise 6 percent of the population. In Spain and Italy, Muslims comprise between 1 and 2 percent and less than 1 percent respectively.

Esther Pan, former staff writer for the Council on Foreign Relations, reported for the New York Times that about one million Muslims immigrate to Western Europe every year; and by 2050, Muslims will comprise one in five Europeans. By the same token, the Population Reference Bureau has reported a decline in the fertility rates of Muslim immigrants over time, often at a rate higher than those among non-Muslims. In Austria, for example, fertility rates among Muslims fell from 3.1 to 2.3 between 1981 and 2001 but remained higher than that of Roman Catholics, whose rates dropped from 1.7 to 1.3.

The narrowing fertility gap can also be seen in the Netherlands, where in 1990, women from the predominantly Muslim countries of Morocco and Turkey had fertility rates of 4.9 and 3.2 respectively. By 2005 though, these numbers had dropped to 2.9 and 1.9. While these recent rates are still higher than that for Dutch women (1.7), the trend nevertheless runs counter to the alarmist projections. Whatever the actual pace of transformation, the associated rhetorical claims have a sobering ring:

- Colonel Gaddafi: “There are signs that Allah will grant Islam victory in Europe—without swords, without guns, without conquests. The fifty million Muslims of Europe will turn it into a Muslim continent within a few decades.”
- Mullah Krekar (Norwegian imam): “Just look at the development within Europe, where the number of Muslims is expanding like mosquitoes. Every western woman in the EU is producing an average of 1.4 children. Every Muslim woman in the same countries is producing 3.5 children. . . . Our way of thinking will prove more powerful than yours.”
• A T-shirt popular among young Muslims in Stockholm reads “2030—then we take over.”
• As prophetically expressed by Algerian President Boumédienne before the UN General Assembly in 1974, when commenting on south/north immigration, “Victory will come to us from the wombs of our women.”

Even if the majority of Muslims in Europe are not violent, there is wide concern that unfavorable demographic trends coupled with the general reluctance of mainstream Muslims to speak out against the violence will provide a soft cushion of support for the extremists. It should thus come as no surprise that a Gallup poll taken in six European countries during 2007 revealed that clear majorities in each felt that greater interaction between Islam and the West would be threatening to their cultural identities. Nor does it strain the imagination to envision growing anti-immigration sentiment ultimately leading to a new European isolationism.

2. The general European commitment to multiculturalism and tolerance is causing Europeans to make unwarranted concessions to Muslims and to appease them in ways that will ultimately undermine western values and lead to the “Islamification” of Europe.
   a. Gradually adopting shari’ah law in European countries and Canada, little by little.
      • In February 2008, the Archbishop of Canterbury suggested that elements of shari’ah should be permitted within the confines of Muslim communities in the United Kingdom where English law could contradict Muslim cultural mores and social values.
      • An Ottawa government report recommended legalizing polygamy.
      • Both the British and Ontario governments have confirmed that “thousands of polygamous men in their jurisdictions receive welfare payments for each of their wives,” which de facto amounts to a form of government-funded shari’ah.
   b. Altering western cultural symbols and behavior so as not to offend Muslims.
      • Non-Muslim females in heavily Muslim neighborhoods in France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands are wearing headscarves in order to avoid the taunts or jeers of their neighbors.
      • The practice of flying the English flag over English prisons has been banned because it shows the cross of Saint George, which was used by the Crusaders and is thus considered offensive to Muslim inmates. The flag has also been removed from Heathrow Airport and the British equivalent of the Department of Motor Vehicles. Similarly, the Church of England is also considering removing Saint George as the country’s patron saint.
      • The mayor of Lille, France, held a meeting with an imam at the edge of a Muslim neighborhood in deference to his demands that she not enter “Muslim territory.”
c. Changing the educational systems.
   • Riksdorfer Elementary School, by German court ruling, must teach its mostly Muslim students an Islamic curriculum.
   • In Milan, school officials are acceding to Muslim parents’ demands that their children be put in Muslim-only classes to insulate them from the secular atmosphere of the democratic West.\textsuperscript{36}

3. \textit{Radical Muslims are using European democratic freedoms and social welfare programs to advance their extremist cause}.
   • Mosques and madrasas that advocate extremism in Norway and the Netherlands receive government subsidies.\textsuperscript{37}
   • The four July 21 London bombers had collected more than £500,000 in welfare benefits.\textsuperscript{38}
   • Muhammad Metin Kaplan, while on German welfare, set up the Islamist group Caliphate State and was extradited to Turkey for planning to fly a plane into Kemal Ataturk’s mausoleum.

4. \textit{The ghettoization of European Muslims (the fact that they are not integrating) is a threat to western culture. Most of whatever assimilation is taking place consists of European communities accommodating their Muslim populations rather than the other way around.}
   • Illustrative of the nonassimilation of Muslim populations is the fact that 80 percent of Pakistani Britons marry their relatives.\textsuperscript{39}
   • Many Muslims in Europe are alienated, which breeds violence: a Hamburg cell was instrumental in executing 9/11; the shoe-bomber was British; and a London School of Economics graduate ordered Daniel Pearl’s execution.
   • Immigrants to Europe bring numerous customs that are flagrantly inconsistent with the western commitment to human rights.\textsuperscript{40}

Recent European initiatives to “fight back” by banning the burka in France and prohibiting the use of full-face veils in public places in Belgium (with similar measures being contemplated in other European countries as well), though understandable, suggest a looming confrontation between human rights, security considerations, and “national values,” a confrontation that will likely exacerbate the challenges of integration.\textsuperscript{41}

Beneath the surface of these challenges lies yet another dynamic that also bears mentioning—that of indifference. As expressed by Maria J. A. van Hoeven, Minister of Economics and former Minister of Education, Culture, and Science for the Netherlands:

Until a few years ago, the Netherlands was known as a tolerant country, in the sense that everyone was welcome and it was taken for granted that everyone would retain their own language and culture. My assessment is that we have taken this a bit too far. Our famous tolerance has degenerated into indifference.
This makes people feel excluded—sometimes literally because they do not speak the language—so that they retreat into their own bastions and cultivate their own truths.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{AMERICAN LEANINGS}

Such concerns are not limited solely to Europe. In the United States, despite its more effective integration policies, one finds the beginning of similar, albeit less threatening, trends:

- In 1997, Nike was forced to recall more than 38,000 pairs of shoes with the word \textit{air} written in flames, because some Muslims said the writing appeared to resemble the word \textit{Allah} in Arabic.\textsuperscript{43}
- Seattle has instituted gender-separate, Muslim-only swim sessions in its municipal pools.\textsuperscript{44}
- The Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that Muslim prisoners must be served special foods for religious holidays, including ox and camel.\textsuperscript{45}
- In January 2008, Harvard established women-only workout hours at one of its campus gyms to accommodate the request of six female Muslim students.\textsuperscript{46}
- School District 122 in Ridgeland Township, Illinois, banned pork from its lunchroom menus to accommodate Muslim students.\textsuperscript{47}

Implicit in all such measures is the belief among pious Muslims that Islamic religious imperatives inherently trump the needs or wants of “unbelievers.” As author Mark Steyn has put it, “What happens when a Western world so in thrall to platitudes about boundless ‘tolerance’ allows the forces of intolerance to carve it out from the inside?”\textsuperscript{48} In Europe at least, the continued tolerance of intolerant Muslims could ultimately threaten the civil liberties and individual rights that European culture has so painfully achieved over the centuries.

During the same period when the earlier-mentioned Muslim attacks against the United States were taking place, America intervened militarily to assist Muslims on no fewer than four occasions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, and Kuwait. The results in each of these interventions are well-known, but lost in most tellings of Somalia are the more than 100,000 Somali lives that were saved as a result of the humanitarian aspects of that intervention.\textsuperscript{49}

By the same token, many Americans can recall the pictures of Muslims overseas dancing in the streets immediately following 9/11. Yet even as they were dancing, then President Bush was visiting the Islamic Center in Washington to declare his support for Islam as a “religion of peace” (in order to minimize a possible backlash against Muslims in the United States). Conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer notes:
In those years since Sept. 11—seven years during which thousands of Muslims rioted all over the world (resulting in the death of more than 100) to avenge a bunch of cartoons—there’s not been a single anti-Muslim riot in the United States to avenge the massacre of 3,000 innocents. On the contrary, in its aftermath, we elected our first Muslim member of Congress and our first president of Muslim parentage.\(^5\)

American Muslims have experienced a number of difficulties ranging from infringements on their civil liberties to seemingly onerous treatment by customs agents when reentering the country. Most of this has been driven by the fear of a second attack. It is important to recall that ever since the War of 1812, the United States has historically been an open country. After 9/11, it could no longer afford that luxury. It is natural that the pendulum of reactive consequences may have swung a bit too far, but it will eventually swing back to a more acceptable midpoint, so long as no further attacks take place. If a second attack bearing Muslim fingerprints does take place, it is not only American Muslims who will have to worry. The civil rights of all Americans will be at risk as the United States gravitates toward a police state, seeking greater security in an increasingly insecure world.

Meanwhile, the respective concerns that Muslims and non-Muslims have will require that each puts on the hat of the other and views the situation from the other’s perspective before significant progress toward a cooperative relationship will be possible. As challenging as this might sound, there are signs that such a rapprochement could still be possible.

A DOOR AJAR

The grievances are many and run deep, but the door is by no means closed to the possibility of improved relations. Indicative of this openness are the following polling data relating to Muslim perceptions of the West:

- Muslim respondents frequently suggest their societies are “eager to have better relations with the West.” In Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Lebanon, for example, the percentage who say a better understanding between Western and Muslim cultures concerns them outnumbers that of those who say that it does not by a margin of 2 to 1.\(^5\)
- The most frequent responses to the open-ended question of what the West can do to improve relations were (1) demonstrate more respect/consideration; (2) do not underestimate the status of Arab/Muslim countries; and (3) make an effort to understand Islam as a religion, and don’t downgrade what it represents.\(^5\)
When asked what Muslims could do to improve relations, one of the top responses was “improve the presentation of Islam to the West and present Islamic values in a positive manner.” Muslims also tend to agree with Americans about those aspects of Muslim societies that they admire least, with “extremism” and “close-mindedness to the ideas of others” ranking high on the list.

One of the top reasons for the resentment of most Muslims is the perceived immorality and cultural depravity of the West, yet when asked what can be done to improve relations, they typically make no mention of this and instead focus on political grievances: “What Muslims request for better relations has nothing to do with asking people of the West to change who they are, but rather what they do: to respect Islam and Muslims and make concrete changes in certain aspects of foreign policy.”

In numerous interreligious dialogue encounters between Muslims and conservative Christians, common ground is often found in moral concerns relating to children, family values, television’s influence, and the like.

According to a February 2008 WorldPublicOpinion.org study, a clear majority of Iranians favor taking steps to improve U.S.-Iranian relations, including direct talks (57%), greater cultural/educational/sporting exchanges (63%), increased trade (64%), greater access to one another’s journalists (70%), and more tourism between Iran and the United States (71%).

American Muslims, by a nearly 2 to 1 margin (63%-32%), don’t see any contradiction between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society.

Furthermore, most of them have a positive view of American society in general and like the communities in which they live.

Western perceptions of Islam vary considerably from one country to the next, but American views generally improve in proportion to (1) the degree of engagement that exists between those countries and the United States and (2) the degree to which individual Americans have established personal relationships with Muslims from the countries in question. The above-mentioned Pew poll confirmed that 56 percent of those who knew a Muslim had a favorable opinion of Muslims, as compared to 32 percent of those who did not. About 45 percent of Americans know someone who is a Muslim, even though Muslims account for less than 1 percent of the total population. As summed up in the March 2009 ABC News/Washington Post poll:

The broad relationship between knowledge and sentiment...is positive. Overall, people who feel they understand Islam, or who have a Muslim friend, are 22 points more apt to view the religion favorably and 17 points more apt to see it as peaceful, compared with those who lack a basic understanding or a friend who’s Muslim.
ON-THE-GROUND REALITIES

Most indicators show that Americans generally support the idea of reaching out to Muslims, but doubt was shed in the summer of 2010 with the controversy surrounding the proposed building of the mosque and cultural center near Ground Zero in New York City. The debate that ensued over religious freedom on the one hand and respect for hallowed ground on the other was intense; but while a majority of Americans opposed a mosque near Ground Zero, most would describe U.S. Muslims as patriotic citizens. Moreover, Muslims in America feel safer and freer than anywhere else in the western world.

The appointment of a Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) by President Bush in 2008 and the appointment of a U.S. Special Representative to Muslim Communities by President Obama in 2009 are additional indicators of American openness to improved relations. Moreover, in his inaugural address, President Obama stated, “To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect.” And in his first official interview, which was conducted by the Arab satellite station Al-Arabiya, the President stated, “My job is to communicate the fact that the United States has a stake in the well-being of the Muslim world; that the language we use has to be a language of respect.” Finally, to give meaning to the idea of being a stakeholder in “the well-being of the Muslim world,” President Obama has established a Global Engagement Directorate within the National Security Council that actively facilitates cooperative initiatives between the United States and Muslim countries in areas ranging from scientific research to combating disease. In April 2010, the Directorate sponsored an “entrepreneurship summit” for Muslim businesses from around the world.

Most Americans and most Muslims, according to recent Gallup poll findings, share a common belief that religion is or should be a key pillar of society, that society should be informed and guided by the Bible or Qur’an, and that family values should be preserved. Common values include political participation, freedom of speech, social justice, and, notably, the eradication of extremism. Both worlds also share the same desires for economic security, employment, and the ability to provide for one’s family. Finally, a letter to Christian church leaders entitled “A Common Word Between Us and You” from 138 Muslim clerics and scholars in September 2007 called for interfaith dialogue and increased understanding based on Islam’s and Christianity’s common beliefs in love of God and love of neighbor. It sparked a welcome response from the Christian community that continues to this day.
SUMMING UP

Anwar Ibrahim, former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, attributes the perceived dichotomy between Islam and the West as springing from the western view of itself as a bastion of reason and enlightenment and its view of Islam as “superstitious, barbaric and dark.” By the same token, the Muslim world sees the West as a “moral wasteland where the institution of the family has broken down and religion and morality have ceased to have any bearing on social mores.” By pointing to the past and calling attention to the present, Ibrahim offers both hope and a challenge:

If we view the past relationships between Islam and the West objectively, we cannot escape the significance of the extended periods of peaceful coexistence. These episodes are not merely confined to the annals of history, for example the well-known story of Muslim Spain. A close study of Islam in Southeast Asia today proves there is in Islam a current that is essentially an embodiment of tolerance and pluralism . . . I am convinced that if we go beyond the noise of the day and reflect more on higher ideals we will discover more of the similarities than the differences. The challenge is to conceive a common vision of the future that goes beyond our current concerns and preoccupations, advancing towards the creation of a global community dedicated to the higher ideals, of both civilizations.

Sound advice, but the current reality in which the West perceives Islam as a threat to its well-being and Islam feels under siege by the West suggests the formidable nature of the task that lies ahead.

NOTES

3. Ibid., 21.


10. In Moorish Spain, the Muslim rulers applied the literal tolerance of the Qur’an toward Judaism and Christianity and created an environment for cooperation and creativity within which ancient knowledge was preserved and pioneering breakthroughs in the arts and sciences were facilitated. While Europe during that period generally embraced ignorance and superstition, the Moors promoted the scholarship that prepared the way for the Italian Renaissance.


13. Ibid.

15. Integration began early in the United States when Roger Williams founded the state of Rhode Island in 1636 to provide a home for people of all faiths to live in peace.


19. According to the CIA 2010 World Factbook, fertility rates are 1.97, 1.42, and 1.32 for France, Germany, and Spain respectively. The average fertility rate of all countries in the EU is 1.5.


23. Ibid., 21.


32. Ibid., xvi.

33. Ibid., 16.

34. Ibid., 197.


36. Ibid., 20.

37. Ibid., 19, 26, and 56.


42. World Economic Forum, *Islam and the West*, 47.
44. Steyn, *America Alone*, 70.
45. Ibid., 82.
52. Ibid., 61.
53. Ibid., 87.
54. Ibid., 156.
55. Ibid., 89 (quote), 159 (concept).
61. Ibid., 23.
68. Ibid.
CONCLUSION

The book from which the above chapters are taken examines how the United States can begin crossing that bridge of commonly shared moral values mentioned at the outset by incorporating religious considerations into its practice of foreign policy and by supporting an emerging new form of engagement called faith-based diplomacy. Equally important, the book also describes how the West can get beyond the rational-actor model of decision making that has long dominated its practice of international relations by moving to a new process that takes into account the roles of non-state actors and “non-rational” factors like religion in addition to all else.

The momentum of current events has been pointing toward increased alienation between Islam and the West. That, however, should not blind us to the lessons to be gleaned from past and present periods of peaceful coexistence in which faithfulness and pluralism have worked together for the common good. More important, what is needed above all else to address such problems is a thoughtful strategy of cultural engagement based on a deeper understanding of other world views.
“From my two decades of experience in the Islamic world, I am convinced that the vast majority of Muslims would embrace this approach as a means of clearly expressing their beliefs and enabling them to understand ours. The common elements of the three great Abrahamic religions have yet to be tapped as a means of reconnecting societies that have gone off-track in their relationships and which need means to connect that go beyond the security, economic, and political approaches that have failed to resolve the pressing issues that divide us.”

—General Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret), Former Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Central Command; Former U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East.

“This extraordinary book, which builds upon Dr. Johnston’s seminal work on religion and statecraft, offers new and compelling insights into the foreign policy challenges that lie ahead and how they should be approached. Its unique illumination of the Muslim perspective on world events provides the backdrop for a dramatically different way of perceiving and pursuing international relations. At a critical juncture in our nation’s history, this exceptional work promises to crystallize new and helpful debate among policymakers and foreign policy practitioners alike.”

—Dr. Amos Jordan, President Emeritus, Center for Strategic and International Studies; formerly served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. (Also a Senior Fellow of the Wheatley Institution.)