

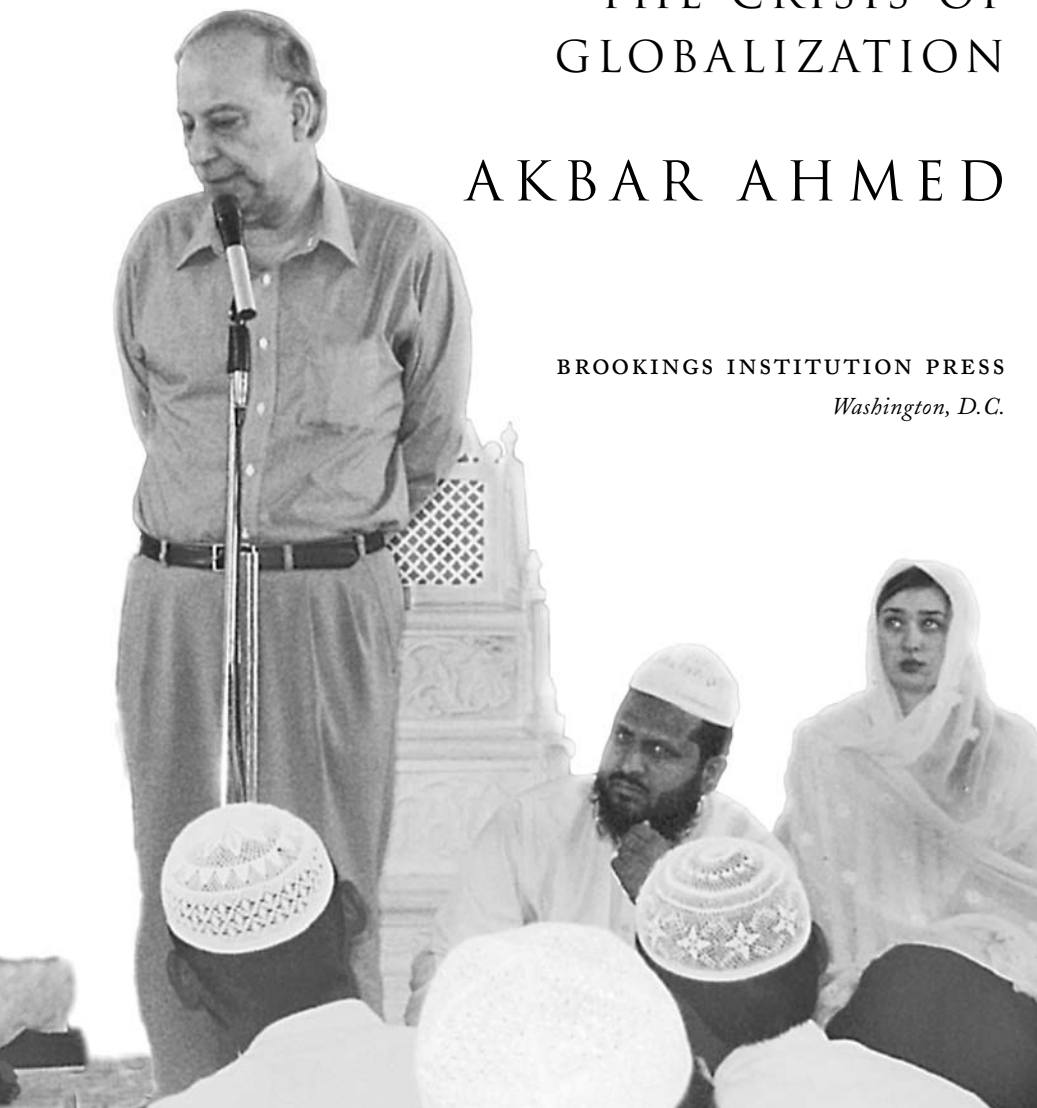
JOURNEY INTO ISLAM

THE CRISIS OF
GLOBALIZATION

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FIVE

The Clash of Civilizations?



“THE MUSLIM SITUATION is so desperate. I would gladly give my life for their cause.” These were the chilling words of my dinner companion on a balmy spring evening in Amman. A seasoned diplomat in smart attire, complete with pink silk tie and handkerchief, this former Iraqi ambassador, now head of a major Arab think tank, spoke in measured and quiet tones shaped by years of service, making his message all the more forlorn: “I have nothing to live for. I have lost my culture, my homeland, my honor. I have lost my religion.”

We were at the Tannoureen, an elegant upscale restaurant famous for its Lebanese food, at a dinner hosted by Pakistan’s ambassador to Jordan, Arif Kamal. The guests were the elite of the city, Westernized and living comfortable lives, able to travel abroad at will and dine at the finest restaurants. They were examples of the successful Aligarh model in Amman.

Kamal, an old friend, had arranged the dinner following my talk at the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, the brainchild of Prince Hassan, uncle of the present king and one of the leading thinkers of the Arab world. It was a well-attended event, chaired by former ambassador Hasan Abu Nimah, the institute’s director, and had drawn scholars, journalists, ambassadors, and senators living in Jordan. Although the atmosphere was cordial, I had faced some hostile questions about the United States and Israel of the kind I would have expected from less polite audiences. A young man in a dark suit and glasses pointedly asked why I appeared to

sympathize so much with the death of one Jewish boy—referring to Danny Pearl—and ignored the deaths of hundreds of thousands of young Muslims. Nonetheless, the dinner afterward seemed a pleasant enough evening of diplomats expressing well-rehearsed and inoffensive platitudes—until the former Iraqi ambassador released his despair.

Only a few days earlier, on February 22, 2006, explosions had destroyed one of the oldest mosques in Iraq, the Golden Mosque of Samarra. It contained tombs from the ninth century of two of the holiest imams in Shia Islam, one being Imam Hassan Al-Askari, the father of the Hidden Imam. As every Shia knows, the coming of the Hidden Imam will herald the end of the world. According to Shia theology, he will fight side by side with Jesus Christ to defeat the Muslim version of the anti-Christ. The destruction of the mosque triggered a bloodbath between Sunni and Shia in Iraq and attacks of vengeance on each other's mosques.

The Iraqi ambassador did not blame the Muslims for what had happened, however. Like President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, he accused the Americans and Israelis of planting the bombs in the mosque. "No Muslim," he said indignantly, "Shia or Sunni, would ever think of destroying such a sacred mosque that had withstood some of the world's bloodiest conquerors—even the Mongols." The ambassador's quiet remarks, almost as if directed at himself, now took an ominous turn: incidents such as the one at Samarra, he said, were a prelude to the eventual destruction of the Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem itself, planned in detail by the Americans and Israelis. Muslims were already at the "boiling point," and the destruction of what Muslims call the Noble Sanctuary with its internationally recognized mosque with its golden dome, their third holiest site after Mecca and Medina, would be a point of no return that would, he was certain, trigger violence on an unprecedented scale. This was not the first time I had heard this notion, recounted only a few days earlier in Damascus by the Syrian minister of expatriates. Overcome by a sense that the world had spun out of control, the Iraqi ambassador had apparently been moved to talk of suicide to a stranger. This was not an al-Qaeda terrorist, a young fanatic, or economically deprived individual—some of the stereotypes of the Muslim suicide bomber. Here was an intelligent human being of the diplomatic world engulfed by despair and anger.

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the former foreign minister of Jordan, who had declared himself a Christian, launching into a tirade against the controversial Danish cartoons of the Prophet of Islam. "How dare the West insult the Prophet?" he said. "He is my biggest hero." The West, he fulminated, knows nothing of true Christianity, a gentle and accepting faith that would never condone such brutal disrespect toward other faiths.

The idea of a Christian extolling the virtues of the Prophet of Islam may seem unlikely to a Westerner. Yet in the cultural context of the Middle East, the Prophet is not just a religious figure, but a historical one considered responsible for bringing peace to the Arabs. Arab Christians lived in the Middle East long before the coming of Islam and in their cultural milieu have learned to see religious figures of the Muslim tradition with reverence and sensitivity.

When the conversation turned to further humiliations, notably Abu Ghraib, my companions drew a direct link between American policies and Muslim anger and despair in this part of the world. America's actions led directly to more violence and talk of revenge among Muslims, which could spiral into more "terror plots" formed and foiled, more distraught families on both sides of the ocean, and more Muslim and American recruits for the war on terror. Even the most optimistic observers would hasten to ask, "Are we finally in the grip of a clash of civilizations?"

It was difficult not to believe that political scientist Samuel Huntington may have been right: perhaps a "clash of civilizations" was under way between the West and Islam, from which there was no escape.¹ The wounds being inflicted were deep, and it would take sustained work and prolonged compassion to bring the different sides together again. In Iraq and Afghanistan, it seemed that the two civilizations were trapped in a quicksand of blood and terror. With each new horror story, people's most dreadful nightmares had turned into reality. When I heard about the Israeli assault on Lebanon in July 2006, I remembered all too vividly the conversation that night in Amman. How would the Iraqi ambassador be coping with the news, I wondered. It was not hard to imagine his deep resentment and anger at the United States, which claimed to fight for justice and peace, yet consistently vetoed a cease-fire at the United Nations to stop the destruction of Lebanon.

Americanization

This turmoil can only be understood in the context of globalization and Americanization, which are synonymous, according to commentators such as Thomas Friedman.² While globalization seeks to spread such cherished American ideals as democracy and human rights, it also corrodes values that many people admire about American society, such as individualism. Unrestrained, the American emphasis on individualism can override duty and responsibility toward the family and community, traditional values that Muslims hold in high esteem. Indeed, the overarching message of globalization and the American spirit, also of sociologist Max Weber's Protestant work ethic, is independence in all its forms, rapid results, and material self-indulgence—all of which can have deleterious effects on the individual and society as a whole.

The term "globalization," though relatively new, encompasses phenomena that have been infiltrating the American psyche and culture for years, particularly the effects of advanced technology with its overnight success stories. Although Americans have always highly valued hard work, today many also seek the "fast track" to success. Emphasis on developing the right experience or skills, which takes time and dedication, has been supplanted by a desire for the "right image." Qualifications are based on "manufactured" talent, rather than on the more solid traits acquired through experience and education. Politicians of both parties are carefully groomed by public relations firms and political advisers, their speeches based on a "sound-bite" formula that is a far cry from the eloquent substance of words by a Lincoln, Jefferson, Franklin, or Washington. Republicans and Democrats alike acknowledge the "genius" of Karl Rove, for example, crediting him with the "creation" and two-time electoral victory of President George W. Bush.

Leading the way in endorsing the value of image is the entertainment world, with its celebrity culture. The success of pop icons such as Britney Spears or Paris Hilton is due to physical appearance, popularity, and public relations; they are products of the two-dimensional world of the television screen more than the real world. Yet many Americans fail to make that distinction and even draw role models from the flat-screened version.³ When I am invited to speak before distinguished audiences and given accommodation in some of the best hotels in the United States, I find

chocolates and flowers in my room, along with cards containing pearls of wisdom, not from the Bible or Shakespeare, but from Donald Trump. Rooms on the executive floor of the Hilton Anaheim in Los Angeles offered this Trumpism in October 2006: "As long as you are going to think anyway, think big."

In American society, the image of success carries as much weight as actual success and power. Individuals across the United States build multi-million dollar homes and spend large amounts of money on clothes, cars, and jewelry to acquire social recognition. This indulgence and extravagance are glorified by the global media in shows such as *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* of an earlier decade and currently MTV's ostentatious *Cribs*, which displays some of the most luxurious and expensive houses in the world. The desire for wealth and overblown consumerism is also the bread and butter of globalization, which needs expanding markets for its vast array of unnecessary and expensive products.

While the "me" culture fuels the engine of globalization and keeps it working, it also produces some serious "pollutants." By encouraging self-centeredness in the pursuit of economic goals and pleasure, it destroys the capacity to empathize with others. Traditional societies, which are mainly community centered, see the world in a different light, viewing excessive concern with the self as both an aberration and a sign of social breakdown. The rich and powerful in traditional societies usually feel a moral obligation to help care for the poor because the community is defined in holistic terms rather than as a collection of individuals. Some recent scholarship on the sense of entitlement common among Americans indicates that the ethos of hard work and personal independence leads many to argue that those who are less well-off have only themselves to blame and could improve their lives if they changed their attitude. This may well be true in some cases but certainly not all and must not be allowed to bias society against the poor or suppress compassion for the needy.

Another adverse effect of globalization is that the gaps between the rich and poor within and among countries are growing, without any sign of slowing down. Already billions are living in poverty and close to starvation while three of the world's richest individuals are collectively richer than half the earth's inhabitants combined.⁴ Globalization and the free market policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, meant to alleviate poverty worldwide, often do not help the disenfranchised in traditional

societies. Yet many commentators see no alternative but to accept globalization and compete under its terms: it is a matter of survival, not choice. If some nations are slower to catch up or share in the benefits, their own sluggishness is to blame, not the system. While America's strong sense of individualism stokes the fires of globalization, the same quality, as already mentioned, discourages responsibility for personal actions, an attitude now spreading around the globe. Americans fail to realize that their rhetoric and actions, particularly consumer behavior, are having a direct impact on the outside world, with increasing criticism. Many observers agree that responsibility and awareness are being abandoned as a result of globalization, even among political leaders.

Many Americans live in a bubble consisting of the office, the supermarket, and their sections of town, where they are not necessarily forced to engage with people who are different from them—racially, ethnically, religiously, or economically. Within this bubble, life can be extremely pleasant and remote from the realities of the nation at war, of a drug-related killing in a poor part of the city, or the desperate poverty in another. Bethesda, where I live, is a beautifully maintained suburb of Washington, D.C., and home to largely white, upper-middle-class residents, a striking contrast to the demographic and sociological range of Southeast D.C., composed mainly of blacks. Washington's infant mortality among African Americans is higher than that in the Indian state of Kerala, and throughout the United States, black children are twice as likely to die before their first birthday than white children.⁵ Oprah Winfrey featured CNN's Anderson Cooper in "Oprah's Special Report: American Schools in Crisis," a two-part television program broadcast in 2006 that exposed the appalling conditions of inner-city high schools including those in Washington. Many of the people I mix with in Washington have little idea of these figures or their social significance because they are so busy with their own lives.

Similarly, few Americans, despite their general wealth, travel outside the United States or possibly Europe and therefore have a very limited perspective of other nations. American news tends to focus on national events interspersed with stories about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Little is heard of the world outside unless it has a direct impact on the United States.⁶ Furthermore, little is done to counteract stereotypes of other countries and peoples. Thus Americans tend to have a narrower vision of the world than one might expect from the sole superpower.

Although individuals appear to be surrounded by noise, color, and movement, they remain isolated from society and even lonely in their daily routines, whether it is in their homes, driving their cars, and or going back and forth to work. This is an age of less and less human contact or reflection upon the state of other human beings. This isolation and emotional desensitization are reflected in the literature of Tom Perotta, for example, or films such as *One Hour Photo*, *American Beauty*, and *Crash*, which opens with a car crash and a voice saying: "It's the sense of touch. Any real city, you walk, you know? You brush past people. People bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much that we crash into each other just so we can feel something."

Perhaps worst of all is the loneliness of children growing up under globalization, which in some cases is drawing both parents into full-time jobs and in others causing the family unit—both the nuclear and extended family—to break down. The incidence of divorce is so high that every second child in the United States comes from a divided home. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 61 percent of all children will spend all or part of their formative years in households headed by a single parent.⁷ These are widely recognized trends with troubling effects: less parental involvement and more independence for children means greater access to adult material and greater reliance on television or video games to keep them company in their environment of solitude. Schools, too, are failing to promote friendship and goodwill. Many have large classrooms and classes that are simply arenas of competitive bullying. From high school onward young men and women are exposed to a culture of permissiveness, hedonism, and self-indulgence.⁸

What a child, and even an adult, sees on the television screen becomes crucial in understanding how average Americans think about a whole range of issues, including race, religion, and society. Many children will acquire their knowledge about the politics of hatred or sex from this source because these subjects are discussed more often on television than by their parents. The perceptions of those who have little knowledge of other ethnic groups can be heavily influenced by violent and ethnically poisonous video games and television shows. Such entities reinforce existing stereotypes through the use of advanced technology. Their profound effect on the young can be seen in the random and senseless violence among high

school students documented in Michael Moore's film, *Bowling for Columbine*. Where religion should be guiding societies toward a more inclusive understanding of the world, it is further exacerbating the prejudices. In a modern interpretation of the Bible titled *Left Behind*, of which more than 63 million copies have been sold, authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins describe the apocalypse in a setting like a flashy action film, prompting many readers to believe that the end is near and thus to support certain political actions both in the United States and abroad. Prejudices are also being fueled by new video games such as "Eternal Forces" in which players fight on behalf of Christ's army against the anti-Christ's army in places like New York City. Here is the literature that accompanies the game:

Are guns used by Christians against non-Christians? Why or why not?:

The storyline in the game begins just after the Rapture has occurred—when all adult Christians, all infants, and many children were instantly swept home to Heaven and off the Earth by God. The remaining population—those who were left behind—is then poised to make a decision at some point. They cannot remain neutral. Their choice is to either join the anti-Christ—which is an imposturous one world government seeking peace for all of mankind, or they may join the Tribulation Force—which seeks to expose the truth and defend themselves against the forces of the anti-Christ.⁹

The target audience is "the millions of parents—and many casual players of games—who are looking for entertainment that also offers positive, inspirational content." The only problem is that the video game identifies all non-Christians as the enemy, implying that all non-Christians are villains and that one must either convert them or kill them. Games and books such as these are extremely popular and emphatically discourage their players or readers from accepting those outside the Christian faith. While I believe that all people should follow their own religious beliefs, this exclusivist line of thinking, much like some extreme elements within the Deoband model in Islam, makes it much harder to reach out to other civilizations in friendship and peace.

Military-minded video games in which players, often portraying U.S. soldiers, shoot crazed Muslims with little or no context, have also become popular. These include "Counterstrike," "Close Combat: First to Fight,"

and the free online game “America’s Army” (with more than 7.5 million users), released in 2002 by the U.S. Army to help bolster recruitment. Although Muslims are not the only villains, the games reinforce stereotypes and feed perceptions in the Muslim world that the United States is waging a war against Islam. In response, some companies in Muslim countries are releasing their own games with players killing Americans and Israelis.¹⁰

The lack of personal responsibility fostered by dynamic individualism affects the future of the planet. Unaware of these wide-reaching consequences, Americans fail to understand that their culture is drawing critical notice in other parts of the world or that the seemingly casual arrogance of their leaders is only making matters worse. Indifference to arguments about the effects of carbon dioxide gases on global warming, excessive military expenditures, the tendency to run up debts in the pursuit of short-term gains, and hastily planned and clumsily executed military adventures abroad may well prove to be a turning point in the fortunes of America and Americanization itself.

Savage Nation

It is far easier to deal with an explosive story like Abu Ghraib by saying that the acts of Lynndie England and her colleagues were simply an aberration of the American way or that Steven Green and his friends who raped a girl in Mahmudiyah did so because they were “under pressure” in Iraq. Even the massacres in Haditha were dismissed as a “mistake,” the assumption being that no American would ever commit such atrocious crimes. However reluctant Americans may be to admit them, these barbarous acts correlate with the climate of hate and violence against Muslims that has developed in the United States in the past few years. Furthermore, because of that reluctance, the correlation has been either missed or ignored.

Radio and TV talk show hosts have emerged from this cultural milieu to define and drive it, often prattling on about subjects they claim to have knowledge of. Their xenophobic and shrill appeal to the crudest form of patriotism feeds into and from the mood of insecurity. Fear and anxiety permeates the land. Airports and railway stations, so central to globalization because they symbolize travel, trade, and communications, have now

become small armed camps where passengers are delayed and frustrated on almost every trip. Muslims are forced to confront the shame of 9/11 every time at these travel points because of the special attention and humiliation reserved for them. They have become victims of the sense of collective responsibility imposed on them by the media for the actions of the hijackers.

The popular Fox television show *24* mentioned earlier, and described by *Time* magazine as one of the “best television events of the decade,” owes much of its popularity to its accurate reflection of the American mood after 9/11.¹¹ The espionage drama traces the events of a single day in the life of counterterrorism agent Jack Bauer, shown constantly racing against the clock to check assassination attempts, foil germ warfare and terrorist plots, and therefore “save the day.” The series presents the highly tense events as they unfold during the day by using split-screen and “real-time” devices, thus moving television in a new direction. But the programs also have a controversial aspect: they tap into the sense of uncertainty and suspicion that pervades society. Muslim villains are never far from the plot, and torture is depicted as necessary to defeat terror in “ticking time-bomb” scenarios. Nonetheless, the show has gained a large American audience. Even Department of Homeland Security head Michael Chertoff commented on the show’s relevance to the U.S. war on terror and on the need for perseverance like agent Bauer’s to help America defeat terrorism.¹²

Living in the age of globalization means that the Fox programs depicting Muslims as villainous terrorists are discussed in the international Muslim press almost immediately after they are broadcast, as the following report from a leading Pakistani daily illustrates: “A popular TV drama, which opened its sixth season this week, is causing much anxiety to the Muslim-American community because of its portrayal of Muslims as terrorists setting off bombs in major US cities. The current season of Fox’s *24* opened with a two-hour episode which pitched the viewer two years in the future, with America being terrorised by Islamic suicide bombers. The African-American president’s chief of staff sets up Muslim internment camps, reminiscent of such camps for Japanese-Americans in World War II.”¹³

In other words, Islamophobia is undisguised and loud in the media. Another case in point concerns Michael Savage, the television and radio host of “The Savage Nation.” Savage, a major radio personality with an

audience of 10 million, espouses blatant hatred against Arabs and Muslims, and has called for the United States to “kill thousands of Iraqi prisoners and nuke a random Arab capital.”¹⁴ Nor is he alone in expressing these sentiments or even remotely aware of what he is doing to make the world a more dangerous place. At a public appearance in San Francisco in May 2004, Savage said: “I don’t give a damn if they [Muslims/Arabs] hide behind their women’s skirts—wipe the women out with them! Because it is our women who got killed on 9/11! And it’s our women who are gonna get killed tomorrow unless we get rid of the bugs who are destroying us!” Savage successfully creates a climate of crude patriotism and blind emotion in his audience. When he asked, “Does anyone in this crowd care a shit about the Iraqis?” the crowd yelled an uproarious, “NO!”

Savage dismisses George W. Bush’s attempt to win Muslim “hearts and minds.” To him, being gentle in dealing with the Muslim world has nothing to do with winning hearts and minds; it is being too “soft.” When the Abu Ghraib scandals emerged, Savage jokingly said, “These are tough interrogations? My father put me through tougher interrogations when I was 16!” He then went on to argue that Lynndie England was the poster girl for the war on terrorism and that kicking “Muslim ass” can be “fun.”

According to this mind-set, the relationship between America and the Muslim world has to be an expression of power. It does not matter what other countries or “bleeding-heart liberals” think about it. Many of this persuasion—Rush Limbaugh is one—insist that what happened in Abu Ghraib was a harmless fraternity prank. James Inhofe, a senator from Oklahoma, insisted that the prisoners got what they deserved. During hearings on the prisoner abuse scandal in 2004, Inhofe said: “I am probably not the only one up at this table who is more outraged by the outrage than we are by the treatment. These prisoners, they are murderers, terrorists, they are insurgents, many of them probably have blood on their hands. And here we are so concerned about the treatment of those individuals.”¹⁵ Senator Inhofe went on to say that it is the U.S. troops who deserve sympathy. “I am also outraged that we have so many humanitarian do-gooders right now crawling all over these prisons looking for human rights violations while our troops, our heroes, are fighting and dying.” This remark came after the Red Cross alleged that 70–90 percent of Iraqi prisoners were “arrested by mistake.”¹⁶ Conservative columnist Ann Coulter also brushed off the incidents as minor errors, if that, in comparison with the

overwhelming brutality of the Muslims. She also laid down her nonsense “policy” for Muslims, which “prompted a boisterous ovation” in February 2006: “I think our motto should be post-9-11, ‘raghead talks tough, raghead faces consequences.’”¹⁷

On a November 14, 2006, broadcast of his CNN Headline News prime-time TV show, commentator Glenn Beck challenged the first-ever Muslim congressman, Democrat Keith Ellison, to “prove to me that you are not working with our enemies.”¹⁸ Beck whips himself up into a frenzy of Islamophobia in almost every show. Anyone who is seen to be sympathetic to a Muslim cause is a potential target—from President Ahmadinejad of Iran, who for some inexplicable reason Beck calls “President Tom,” to President Carter for daring to write about the plight of the Palestinians in his latest book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.¹⁹ Beck also promotes and is generous with air time to the critics of Islam such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Irshad Manji.

As a university professor teaching Islam and a frequent media guest, I receive many responses to my remarks, both positive and negative. Fortunately, the positive outweigh the negative. One letter, written in September 2006, states: “Islam is an evil belief system that seeks to corrupt, dominate and destroy the West. We will never submit to your barbarism and superstition. You will never be able to defeat us. We will NEVER forget September 11th. . . . And WE will destroy this dark evil that has been brought forth into this world by the devil’s messenger Mohammed. . . . Stop promoting this evil in the United States of America.” Another is from a friend, a prominent media personality, responding to my request for her advice concerning the hate: “Frankly, this guy sounds to me like the dyed-in-the-wool racists I’ve met a few times in my life. His views sound like they are rooted more in emotion than reason, and many folks like this are not open to change. And the right-wing media like Fox only make it worse. And he probably listens to such networks.” She, too, had seen the connection between the person who sent me the hate letter and the climate of fear and hatred being cultivated by the media.²⁰

Even before the events of 2001, a climate of hostility and intimidation had been building against Muslims in the United States. Hollywood films and media commentators were depicting Muslims, especially Arabs, as extremists or advocates of violence who were intrinsically hostile to the United States. After 9/11, the hatred and violence grew exponentially.

Since the war in Iraq, it has become even worse. Some people even refer to Arabs as “dot-heads,” confusing religion and gender, in that only Hindu women paint dots on their foreheads.

Indeed, as pointed out in the earlier discussion of the Orientalists and the neocons, there is a pattern of anti-Muslim rhetoric in recent American history that has infiltrated the U.S. Army and now translates into action: “You have to understand the Arab mind,” one company commander told the *New York Times*, displaying all the self-assurance of Douglas MacArthur discoursing on Orientals in 1945. “The only thing they understand is force—force, pride, and saving face.” Far from representing the views of a few underlings, such notions penetrated into the upper echelons of the American command. In their book *Cobra II*, Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor offer this ugly comment from a senior officer: “The only thing these sand niggers understand is force and I’m about to introduce them to it.”²¹ Similarly, well-known Christian leaders have not been living up to their own statements about love and justice for all. The Reverend Franklin Graham, who offered the invocation at President George Bush’s inauguration, called Islam “a very wicked and evil religion.”²² Islam’s God was not the God of Christianity, he said. The Reverend Jerry Vines denounced the prophet of Islam as “a demon-possessed pedophile.”²³ For Jerry Falwell, the Prophet was a “terrorist.”²⁴ In a later controversy, General William Boykin, deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence and a key figure in the war on terror, declared that Islam was a satanic religion of idol-worshippers.²⁵

Matching the mood of these statements, U.S. legislation opened the door for the objectification of Muslims and denial of rights afforded to every other American citizen. The Patriot Act has been regularly challenged for trampling over the civil rights of Muslims and Arab immigrants. Intended to fight terrorism, the law is often used to harass Muslims unnecessarily and in far too many cases persecute them with little or no justification. In one instance, investigators are looking into what they call a credible claim in which a guard at an immigrant detention facility held a loaded gun to a detainee’s head. In another case, Muslim prisoners have presented persuasive evidence that they were taunted because of their religion and possibly forced to eat food that Islam prohibits. The base at Guantánamo Bay, too, circumvents U.S. laws to implement illicit policies that the Pentagon and White House feel are necessary. According to the Council on

American-Islamic Relations, attacks on Muslim girls wearing the hijab, on mosques, and on Muslims have gone up dramatically since 9/11.²⁶

In this climate of Islamophobia, the appearance of a burning cross outside the Prince George's County Mosque and Islamic School in Maryland in July 2003 was not entirely unexpected. Reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan's symbols of hatred toward African Americans in the early part of the twentieth century, the burning three-foot-high wooden cross was not large by KKK standards, but its significance was enormous. A videotape from a surveillance camera on the property showed that several white men were involved in what was the first cross burning reported to authorities in Maryland in at least three years. A few days earlier, two young Muslim students were shot to death in the same county. Soon after 9/11, in Arizona, a Sikh male who may have been mistaken for an Arab because of his beard and turban was shot in Phoenix. In Illinois, an explosive device destroyed a Muslim family's van.

In the United States, cross burning and the rhetoric of hate also evoke the struggle for American identity and sense of self. They speak of an ongoing battle for a more just, more tolerant, and more democratic society fought by visionary leaders such as John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. The central paradox of the burning cross is that it symbolizes hatred, while the cross itself is an undisputed symbol of Christianity, which by definition carries the message of its founder—Christ. As Muslims know from the high reverence and affection they have for him, Christ embodies love, compassion, and humility. To kill or be violent in Christ's name is a gross distortion of his teachings. Besides, for American leaders who are trying desperately to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world, such acts undermine their initiatives and credibility. The symbol of a burning cross at a mosque will play into the hands of those in the Muslim world who are arguing that America is on the warpath against Islam itself. Such acts do not help Americans either at home or abroad.

The climate of hostility both before and after 9/11 in the United States is described by a member of our journey team, Hadia Mubarak, who has worn a hijab since her youth:

Recently, when my husband and I were walking back to our hotel in Hershey, Pennsylvania, after celebrating our one-year wedding anniversary at a nice restaurant, I was startled when a red truck drove

really close up to us and the driver yelled, “You suck!” It was dark and there were no other cars or pedestrians on the street but us and the truck. My heart skipped a beat, as the truck roared past us and its tires skidded as it made a quick turn.

Religious bigotry is nothing new to me. I was only four years old when our next-door neighbor called my mother a “rag head,” as she buckled my sister and me into her white station wagon and silently drove us to our day-care in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

I was about twelve years old when two young teenagers fishing at a creek near my parents’ house in Panama City, Florida, yelled out to me, “Do you fuck with that on?” in reference to my headscarf.

I was the last one to walk out of the Islamic Center of Tallahassee when Charles Franklin—who was later convicted and jailed—slammed his truck into the front entrance to “let Muslims know they’re not safe in this country,” as he later admitted to authorities.

Growing up in a country where Islam remains a mysterious, widely misunderstood religion, stereotyped by the images of submissive veiled women and the absurd notion of “Holy War,” I have become accustomed to the double takes at my headscarf, the racial slurs at my religion or ethnicity, and the sheer prejudice produced by ignorance. Nevertheless, 9/11 provided a new context for much of the growing tension toward Islam in this country.

The unfathomable images I witnessed on the morning of 9/11, sitting among a large circle of students at Florida State University, as planes crashed through one of the greatest economic symbols of our nation, pierce my mind as if it just happened yesterday. I can still conjure to memory every moment of that chaotic day, every emotion that penetrated my being, and every thought that swam through my consciousness, as if I was in a state of paralysis and as if logic and reason were only products of our imagination.

It was also the first time, however, that I realized my own displacement as an American Muslim in the American public consciousness. Before I was allowed to shed my tears, grieve for the thousands of innocent lives, or try to make sense out of the absurd violence that shook our lives, I was put on the defense seat. American Muslims quickly became the target of hate crimes and discrimination due to sweeping generalizations that associated all Muslims with the terrorists.

Those days, as a junior at Florida State University and the Public Relations Director of the Muslim Students Association, were some of the most testing in my life, as my beliefs were questioned, my religion misunderstood, and my identity as an American Muslim regarded with suspicion. The moments I experienced after 9/11 were the most defining of my life as I began to explore questions of loyalty, identity, and belonging. Where was home? Where did I belong? The double pain I experienced as an American whose country had been attacked and as a Muslim whose religion was now being vilified confirmed my hyphenated identity as an American Muslim.

While Muslims in the United States were plunged into self-reflection, prominent figures in the administration explicitly attacked Islam, and with the hostility against Muslims in the media, it created a negative environment for understanding Islam. Young Americans, like Lynndie England and Steven Green, thus went abroad with an idea of Muslims in their minds as a demonized community that was even less than human. The social and cultural environment in the United States that is unpleasantly aggressive toward Muslims is encouraging Americans in authority to behave in a manner that is far removed from the ideals of the American Founding Fathers and to condone inhumane acts such as torture. In the climate of anger and ignorance toward the “other,” Americans are permitting a deeper distortion of American ideals of acceptance and freedom of religion—even if individuals still retain them—once held in such high esteem by the society and its leaders.

When radio host Jerry Klein suggested on his show that all Muslims in the United States should be marked with a crescent-shaped tattoo or an armband, callers jammed his phone lines to present even wilder ideas. Some suggested interment camps like those for the Japanese and Germans during World War II. Others had a simpler solution: “Not only do you tattoo them in the middle of their forehead but you ship them out of this country . . . they are here to kill us.”²⁷ But the joke was on the callers. Klein had deliberately played a hoax. “I can’t believe any of you are sick enough to agree for one second with anything I said,” he told his audience on November 22, 2006, on AM station 630 WMAL, which covers Washington, Northern Virginia, and Maryland. The responses of his callers had, however, illustrated a deeper truth. The years of hatred and ignorance had

taken their toll. The prejudice against Muslims was high and was reaching dangerous levels of intolerance.

Irresponsible Action

During the dinner in Amman and discussion of the Abu Ghraib scandal, I was reminded of the high moral standards Islam expects of those in authority. My hosts were right. Islamic role models like the Prophet, Abu Bakr, Umar, and Ali behaved with magnanimity toward captured prisoners. Abu Bakr had laid down the conduct of war for Muslims, which, as mentioned, forbade them to harm women and children, noncombatants, and even priests and holy men of other religions. Destroying trees or vegetation was strictly forbidden. The bloody massacre in Jerusalem in 1099—when the crusaders, according to Christian accounts, killed thousands and the blood in the streets ran so deep as to reach the stirrups of the horse-men—created an outrage in the Muslim world and a yearning for revenge. Saladin, after capturing Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187, demonstrated his generosity and compassion by allowing the well-off to pay their ransom and then covered the ransoms of the poor Christian crusaders from his own estate.

In my presentation in Amman, I pointed out that despite American anger after 9/11, this emotion was out of character. Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers, had warned his nation: “Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.”²⁸ As for the scandals emerging from the American prisons, I shared the story of George Washington during the Revolutionary War against the British. When American soldiers, who were then “insurgents” to the British, were captured, the British threw them, sick and wounded, into dank prisons with no hope of release or justice. In contrast, the American commander-in-chief, who had everything to fight for and to lose, went out of his way to ensure that captured British soldiers were treated with dignity and fairness in spite of the desire for retribution. “Treat them with humanity,” Washington instructed his lieutenants, “and let them have no reason to complain of our copying the brutal example of the British army.”²⁹ Washington understood that the mistreatment of British soldiers would only lead to moral degradation of his cause and would sully the character of the new nation. It would also lead to repercussions ten times worse than the mistreatment itself. Thus, for Washington

the government and those in authority always had to be held to a higher moral standard, as expressed in words widely attributed to him: "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force; like fire, a troublesome servant and a fearful master. Never for a moment should it be left to irresponsible action."³⁰

The invasion of Iraq and the subsequent developments provide a good case study of how war is being conducted in the age of globalization. For most Americans, the removal of Saddam Hussein meant an instant change in the way Iraq had been run in the past. Free elections, democracy, and free speech would flourish and there would be security and justice for all. With much fanfare, President Bush declared, "Mission Accomplished." In a culture of instant information, high expectations, and simplistic ways of looking at the world, most Americans took that pronouncement literally.

That culture has disconnected thought and consequence, which explains the reckless actions abroad, such as American soldiers indulging in "irresponsible action" with little consideration of the consequences. While many soldiers behave bravely and justly, a few bad apples are staining the name of the army and compromising the ideals of a whole country. Perhaps Donald Rumsfeld's dismissal of the looting of the treasures of the Baghdad Museum indicated the attitude of the Pentagon and White House leaders in a nutshell. When told that priceless antiquities were being carried off openly in spite of the presence of American troops in Baghdad, he shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Stuff happens."³¹

President Bush's own attitude may well have set the tone for his administration. Bob Woodward's third book dealing with the Bush presidency, *State of Denial*, has some startling revelations, perhaps none more illuminating than the president's instructions for the senior general that he was dispatching to Iraq as his chief administrator. When General Jay Garner looked at the list of objectives, he replied that he could not hope to achieve more than four of the items. Presidential clarification came in the form of the crystal-clear response: "Kick ass, Jay."³²

The inevitable disaster in Iraq was set in motion at the very moment that the Americans were appointing their first viceroy. Historical figures from Alexander, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon Bonaparte to America's Dwight Eisenhower have instructed their subordinates on how to manage territories after fresh conquests, but perhaps never in history has the

complexity of tribal, sectarian, and religious identities and politics in one of the most turbulent regions of the world been reduced to one phrase. Bush's ultimate sound bite is as much a reflection of his vocabulary and philosophy as it is of the age of globalization, which demands that even the most complex issues be reduced to simplistic and graphic phrases. Clearly, Americanization and globalization, which reflect each other in so many complex ways, both encourage such reduction.

Even if Americans cannot yet see what they have lost in these debacles, other countries have spoken up, noting that the United States has lost its credibility. After President Bush called on him to implement more democratic measures at the G-8 summit in Moscow in July 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin replied, "We certainly would not want . . . the same kind of democracy as they have in Iraq."³³ Principles like human rights and the rule of law, once compromised, cannot easily be taken up again with any authority. George Washington understood this well, but unfortunately the United States has now lost its virtue in the eyes of the international community.

One incident contributed significantly to that loss. Steven Green, of the Army's 101st Airborne Division, according to an FBI affidavit, is now charged with raping a fourteen-year-old Iraqi girl, then setting her body on fire to eradicate traces of his guilt, in the village of Mahmudiyah south of Baghdad in March 2006. He is also charged with killing three members of her family, including a five-year-old girl. Unlike the Vietnam war's My Lai incident, an act that came to be recognized as limited to the madness of the moment, Green and three companions from his unit spent several days planning to hunt the girl down and trap her just as a group of hunters in the forest would pursue a prized animal. On March 12, Green, the alleged ringleader, and the other soldiers got drunk, abandoned their checkpoint, and changed clothes to avoid detection, before heading for the victim's house. Eventually tried back in the United States by military court, the perpetrators appeared unrepentant. When asked why they committed the terrible crime one of them answered: "I hated Iraqis, your honor."³⁴

The irresponsible actions of Lynndie England and Steven Green are not the only cases of their kind. Others are emerging, indicating something has changed in American society and its high standards have sunk well below those originally established by the Founding Fathers.

The Other Side of the Same Coin

Three short months after the terrible episode in Mahmudiyah, three American soldiers from Green's unit were on patrol with their guns strapped to their chests, helmets on, walking down a dusty road southwest of Baghdad in the town of Youssifiyah. Suddenly they heard gunshots and ducked for cover but were separated from the rest of their battalion. In the skirmish that ensued, two of the soldiers were taken captive and a third killed. A video later released by the Mujahadeen Shura Council, which is linked to al-Qaeda, showed two bloodied bodies lying on the edge of a bridge. An Associated Press report described the 4:39 minute video in gruesome detail: "One of them, partially naked, has been decapitated and his chest cut open. The other's face is bruised, the jaw apparently broken and his leg has long gashes. Fighters are shown turning the bodies over and lifting the head of the decapitated man."³⁵ According to the Shura Council statement, the video was released as "revenge for our sister who was dishonored by a soldier of the same brigade." The fighters were determined to take this brutal action as soon as they heard of the rape-slaying but "kept their anger to themselves and didn't spread the news. They intended to avenge their sister's honor."

While their anger was rooted in notions of honor and revenge, their violence represented an abandonment of the core values of Islam. The great Caliph Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin, faced a similar dilemma in a fight with an enemy warrior, when he threw him to the ground and raised his sword to finish him. At this point, Ali's opponent spat on his face, whereupon Ali stood up and walked away, to the amazement of both armies. He later explained that had he killed his foe, he would have done so in anger, rather than in opposition to the forces of tyranny and injustice against which he was fighting. Today's post-9/11 world—with its revenge, dishonor, and gratuitous violence—is far from the ideals of either Ali or George Washington.

It is not only on the battlefield where people are forsaking the ideals. I observed the nuances of the "clash" between Islam and the West from another angle in Cairo in December 2005. Although some leading intellectuals I interviewed in Egypt—Ismail Serageldin at the Alexandria library, Saad Eddin Ibrahim at the Ibn Khaldun Center, and Sallama

Shaker at the Foreign Ministry in Cairo—dismissed the idea of a civilizational clash I saw it manifested in my taxi ride.

At one point during the trip, an Egyptian friend had stopped a taxi for me and explained to the driver in Arabic the name and address of my hotel. As we drove off, the driver increased the volume of the recitation of the Quran that he was listening to. He himself began reciting the Quran loudly while revolving prayer beads in one hand. Dangling from the mirror were verses from the Quran. Egyptian taxis are small with low ceilings, and the space can become claustrophobic, which the volume accentuates.

As a Muslim, I find few things more pleasant than the sound of the recitation of the Quran. The driver saw me, in my Western clothes and speaking English, as someone from the West and therefore probably a non-Muslim. Why should he therefore be playing the Quran so loudly and almost aggressively to a non-Muslim? Was it an attempt to intimidate the passenger? Or to express pride in his identity as a Muslim? Was it cumulative anger at the poverty, hopelessness of life, and vast gap between the lives of the corrupt ruling elite and those of the poor?

When the recitation of the Quran reached a crescendo, I punctured the tense atmosphere by repeating some of the Quranic verses that I knew. Seeing the driver staring at me in his rearview mirror, I announced that I was from Pakistan and a Muslim. His attitude changed completely. Pakistanis were good Muslims, he said with a smile and a *salaam* (greeting of peace), and his hand discreetly moved to the dial and turned down the volume.

One of my female American students who had studied abroad in Cairo—intelligent, blue-eyed, and blond—complained that most drivers would make lewd sexual advances when she was alone in taxis. In both the Quran and Arab society, women are treated with respect, and men will even avoid looking at women directly for fear of violating their modesty. Yet for my student, men masturbating and exposing their penises were hazards. She would remind them that God expected modest behavior in females and males and that they would have to answer to God. This apparently had the effect of inflaming the passions in the heart of the amorous Arab male even further. They saw her as a sex-crazed Western woman like those seen in movies or television shows. Another student of mine, an American from India, dark-haired and dark-eyed, did not face similar

problems as people saw her as a “native” and did not attach the same stereotypes to her as to the blond American student.

For me, the taxi ride—and I had several similar experiences in taxis—revealed another side of the complex encounter between the West and Islam. I felt that here was one of the few points of contact in a neutral zone between Muslims and foreigners where the Muslim could express his sentiments away from the security detail and police. If I had been a non-Muslim, the encounter would have left me feeling uncomfortable and even intimidated. The taxi had thus become a front line in the confrontation between Islam and the West. It was the Lynndie England situation in Abu Ghraib in reverse. Like England and her cohorts, the Arab taxi driver was perverting the ideals of his culture and fueling the charged, abrasive, and too often violent encounters between the two civilizations. To understand these developments in the Muslim world, one must look at current society there and the factors that shaped it.

On the political front, for example, Muslims are using local elections to respond to what they see as attacks from the West, voting in Islamic parties, which are more critical of the West than any others. This trend can be seen even in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, which for the past century has maintained a fine balance between several political forces. The religious parties—collectively and somewhat contemptuously called the mullahs by others—never got more than 15 to 20 percent of the seats in the provincial assembly. After September 2001—with the increasing attacks on Islam begun in the United States, led by prominent religious figures such as Franklin Graham, Pat Robertson, Jerry Vines, and Jerry Falwell—the mullahs saw their chance. In the next elections they entered the political fray by declaring that they would fight for the honor of Islam whereas everyone else had compromised. Anti-American sentiments were so strong that this time the mullahs won almost every seat in the assembly, sweeping away what were once unbeatable tribal chiefs and princely figures. As a result, the critical Tribal Areas of the province, stretching along the Afghan border, began consorting with the Taliban, rumored to be in the area in growing numbers along with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Before long, large parts of the province were directly under the control of those openly sympathetic to the Taliban. With this strategic advantage, the Taliban became a serious threat to Western forces in Afghanistan. These

events trail back to insensitive attacks on Islam and its Prophet, which thus may have placed American lives and interests abroad in jeopardy.

The confrontation between Islam and the West was soon spreading to other arenas as well. International tourism in Bali, Indonesia, for example, became a target of attack, intensifying social tensions in an already strained community of Muslims living on the Hindu-majority island. The invasion of global tourism had been the last straw for the culturally and religiously threatened Muslims, particularly with the announcement that *Playboy* was about to launch an Indonesian version of its magazine. An intense debate ensued over how to handle the crisis and how far an outside culture should be allowed to affect Indonesian values.

Just as our team was leaving Bali, it came across a *Time* magazine containing a two-page article on Indonesia's pornography laws.³⁶ The Muslims in Indonesia were seeing almost naked men and women on the beaches or dancing and drinking in discos, which violated their sense of Islamic propriety. This clash of cultures was behind the 2002 bombing of the discotheque in Bali that left several hundred people dead. "We could be going the way of the Taliban," lamented Leo Batubara, a member of the Indonesian Press Council, in the *Time* article.

The tensions between the demands of ideal Islam and the irresistible tidal wave of globalization, with its powerful stereotypes, were observed by Amineh, the young Muslim anthropologist on a tour of Bali to "get a real anthropological feel" of its culture.

We took a tour guide from our hotel to see a traditional Hindu dance illustrating the story of Rama and Sita. Our guide was Hindu and eager to express his knowledge of Bali in his English. . . . I asked the guide to explain from his perspective the Balinese bombing and his reply was that Bali was a peaceful place dominated by Hindu and Buddhist ideas of harmonious existence until, he paused, frowned disapprovingly and pointed to his clean-shaven chin, gesturing the shape of a beard and a turban on his head, i.e., implying Muslims.

To me, trained as an anthropologist, I found the Hindu guide's comment striking and one that possibly reflected a widely held perception about Muslims in Bali. Bali is a "Paradise Island"—the type one sees in Hollywood movies or reads about in novels. Its



A Hindu religious procession passes by in Bali, where Hindus are in a majority, although Indonesia itself, the world's largest Muslim nation, has a Muslim majority population. Traditionally peaceful, Bali has recently seen acts of terrorism aimed at encroaching western culture.

beaches and bikini-clad bodies, palm trees and orchids, sunshine and tropical weather, night clubs and expensive up-to-date modern hotels arouse the human senses and give the holiday-maker a sense that he or she has here all the self-gratifying comforts of this world. Yet it is this worldly paradise that seems to offend some groups of people who see themselves as battling hard in a temporary world to avoid wastrel superficiality, sensual pleasures, and carnal desires. Muslims make up the majority of the population of Indonesia, but are a minority in the Indonesian island of Bali, where the population is largely Hindu and Buddhist. Amongst this diverse population of Indonesian Muslims are more stringent groups who would go literally to the extreme end to blow themselves and many others up in night clubs and discothèques as a form of protest to the way of life described in the Balinese "Paradise Island" scenario.

An even more dramatic flashpoint between the West and Islam concerns the theological aspect of Islam, particularly since the publication of Salman Rushdie's controversial *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, the depiction of the Prophet in Danish cartoons, and questionable remarks by Pope Benedict XVI. To the West—and those who value free speech and freedom of expression—the right of an individual to say and write what he or she wishes is fundamental to civilization itself. For Muslims, any form of criticism of the Prophet is a serious transgression. Because the Prophet embodies the divine word of God, the Quran, an insult or a perceived insult to the Prophet is an attack both on the faith and on the person. Moreover, because the Prophet is known and loved as a father, husband, and leader in times of hardship, Muslims think of him in highly personal ways, even as a part of their own family. It is this intense love and personalization that largely explains the emotional response to perceived attacks, which are thought to indicate that the West is denouncing the core of their religious, cultural, and personal identity, and in turn their notions of honor and pride.



Akbar Ahmed (left), Amineh Ahmed (center), his eldest daughter and fellow anthropologist, and Hailey Woldt (right) with traditional Hindu dancers in Bali, who performed the monkey dance based on classic religious texts.



In Bali, Jonathan Hayden gets acquainted with a denizen of a sacred monkey temple. Hindus revere monkeys, as well as other creatures, which are featured positively in classic religious texts.

While Muslims have desired free speech, they have also underlined the need to respect people's beliefs and traditions. Muslims are aware of limitations to free speech because in their multicultural and multireligious societies, careless and disrespectful comments would degenerate into confrontation. Even in the United States, Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic comments, and those of comic actor Michael Richards (also known as "Kramer" from the *Seinfeld* series) shouting the objectionable word "nigger" repeatedly at young African Americans at a comedy club in 2006, caused understandable outrage. Such hateful remarks remind all of us of the nature of intolerance and prejudice. The African American and Jewish communities have faced terrible suffering and persecution in the past in different ways and in different historical contexts. The compassion, wisdom, dignity, and humor associated with their communities are therefore nothing short of the triumph of the human spirit and its refusal to be crushed.

Muslims note that no such outrage follows in the United States when there are equivalent slurs about Islam. The feeling that Muslims are being isolated and victimized has grown and has created resentment in many individuals. The violent response in some parts of the Muslim world is due primarily to a combination of the perception that Islam is under attack from the West and the emergence of the Deoband model, which emphasizes Islamic pride and stimulates Muslim emotions. In contrast, the enfeebled Ajmer model, which advocates calm discussion, and the Aligarh model, which urges the building of modern institutions such as free speech and allegiance to the nation-state, are becoming marginalized. Had the Aligarh model been dominant, the Muslim responses to the Danish cartoons and the Pope's remarks would have been to engage in debate and write letters. Because the Aligarh model has failed to provide a forum for expression or to represent Muslims, the nation-state and the Aligarh model are not a viable alternative in the Muslim world at present.

The Taj Syndrome

Muslim fury and despair arise not only from the perception that U.S. policies are misguided. There are also inner demons. Muslims today, especially those living in what were once the famed capitals of Islam such as Istanbul, Damascus, Cairo, and Delhi, suffer from what I call the "Taj Syndrome." A building like the Taj Mahal evokes the glittering past for Muslims. Its physical splendor juxtaposed with the painful and wretched present triggers a mixture of emotions—pride, anguish, and anger: pride at the splendor of the past, anguish at the reality of the present, and anger at the uncertainty of the bleak future. This is the Taj Syndrome, and Muslims of every kind are in one way or another affected by it: looking at the Taj Mahal, those of the Ajmer model see a timeless ethereal beauty that confirms for them the universal message of love; followers of the Deoband type are inspired to renew the struggle to revive the past and restore its glory; while those who subscribed to the Aligarh form see the splendor of Islamic civilization, long capable of synthesis and excellence, and hope it can once again be at the cutting edge of art, architecture, and knowledge.

The Taj, the very symbol of the power and compassion of Muslim rulers, now sits forlornly amidst a sea of squalid dwellings inhabited by impoverished Muslim artisans claiming descent from its builders. Visiting

the Taj Mahal in Agra with my team, I experienced again the sophistication of concept, beauty of execution, and depth of spiritual thought of the architecture, symbolizing a civilization at its zenith. It reflects the most magnificent synthesis of both the Islamic and the Indic traditions. The Taj evokes the passions that move human beings—love, compassion, and sorrow—yet it also reaches out to concepts of the hereafter and forces visitors to confront themselves.

Islam once gave the world a rich civilization that included powerful empires such as the Abbasid, Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal. Muslim rulers welcomed people of all faiths and were among the most benevolent and enlightened of history. Driven by the spirit of *ijtihad*, Muslims adapted the traditions of Islam to the changes taking place around them. Tradesmen created new caravan routes, moving goods and products between Asia, Africa, and Europe. The legendary “silk road” through central Asia, which linked China with the Muslim world, was a testimony to their thriving civilization. Ever since the time of the Prophet, who was also a merchant, Islam has held the trader at a certain level of respectability.

Knowledge, too, has always been held in high esteem. At the peak of Islamic civilization about 1,000 years ago, the court library in Córdoba contained some 400,000 books, while the largest library in Europe at the time had only about 600. Acknowledging the debt the West owes to Islam for retrieving Greek thought, which had laid the foundations for the European Renaissance, historian Philip Hitti notes that “had the researches of Aristotle, Galen, and Ptolemy been lost to posterity, the world would have been as poor as if they had never been produced.”³⁷ Religious scholarship was encouraged along with the growth of literature, which explored new expressions of verse. Emphasis was placed on dialogue and understanding between those who believed in the Ajmer, Deoband, or Aligarh models. The great Islamic philosophers such as Imam al-Ghazzali reflect the balance between these three models. It is little wonder that Islamic civilization was the light and glory of the world in its day.

The Taj Syndrome is further reinforced by the state of the media in the Muslim world. On our journey, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, we saw satellite antennas and dishes everywhere, even in the poorest neighborhoods. In the midst of these crowded and depressing neighborhoods, Muslims see glamorous and seductive images from the West that challenge their traditional values—some of naked women in provocative poses, some



The Taj Mahal, built by the emperor Shah Jehan, reminds Muslims of the splendors of the past. The struggle between the emperor's sons, Dara Shikoh, the mystic, and Aurangzeb, the orthodox, resulted in Dara's death and reflects current debates concerning Islam.

of wars against fellow Muslims, and some of grandiose luxuries, all of which serve to disillusion Muslims with the outside world or with their own society.

The Taj Syndrome is symptomatic of the crisis in the Muslim world. Leadership, authority figures, relations with the state, the economy, how people view their neighbors and treat the women in their families, and religion itself are all caught up in the mixture of emotions engendered by the syndrome. This crisis is not a direct consequence of the events set in motion after September 11, as some commentators in the West believe, but has been under way for the past two centuries. The mounting anger and perception of injustice among Muslims in the wake of that fateful September day is but a further flare-up of the Muslim fire of unrest. One college student at Fatih University in Istanbul aptly described the Muslim world as “a sleeping bear that has been awakened. It is difficult to put that bear back to sleep.”

That unrest, as we saw on our travels—especially in the great cities of the Muslim world—is rooted in the gaps between the rich elite and the poor, now reaching dangerous proportions. Large estates with magnificent houses similar to those in America’s wealthiest communities sit amidst poverty and squalor. New office buildings and international hotels rise above a sea of makeshift homes and shops. The two sides are separated by watchdogs and armed security guards who check everyone entering the expensive homes and hotels to guard against suicide bombings. The poor feel not only left out but also angry at the realization that they have little chance of sharing the economic cake the elite seem to be consuming so greedily. As for the elite, their primary concern seems to be to protect the money that has come with international contracts and deals, in some cases from a lucky venture in globalization with a swift payback, much like the “dot-com” phenomenon in the United States. The Islamic injunction of giving to charity and providing for the community is sidestepped with excuses such as the “trickle-down theory,” suggesting that if the wealthy spend enough money, eventually the poor will see some of it. Globalization is successfully injecting such communities with one of its more toxic characteristics—greed.

Meanwhile, the small apartments and shantytowns of the poor are becoming more crowded and rundown. In most of the cities I visited, the infrastructure was collapsing under the weight of the population explosion and constant influx of migrants from the rural areas. Water supplies, transportation, electricity, and public health facilities were erratic at best, sometimes not even available. Karachi and Jakarta are urban nightmares with large populations living in poverty. In Cairo, the poor live in such desperate circumstances that they have become squatters in cemeteries.

This is not to say that we saw no beneficial effects of globalization on our journey. Living standards were certainly higher in some places, Delhi being one, and the gap between rich and poor showed some signs of decreasing. In general, however, I saw only the rich growing richer from globalization. The elite of the oil-producing Muslim countries are perhaps the worst culprits, leading lives far removed from the majority of the ummah and in many respects from the ideals of Islam itself. The vulgar “conspicuous consumption” of the elite is apparent in the way they live, dress, and move physically. Their girths would suggest poverty must not

exist in the Muslim world. The fact is that they are guzzling the honey of globalization all by themselves.

The ordinary Muslims who are watching the elite are not as willing to “ride the wave” of globalization. One fifty-year-old man in Indonesia said that he had recently seen “more dependency on technology, materialism, and selfishness” with a resulting “lack of good deeds, no sincerity, and the contamination of Western civilization.” The danger is real as many are watching television several hours a day, surfing the Internet, and buying the latest technological products like iPods. Even a thirteen-year-old in Indonesia told us that technology had made “young people lazy and irresponsible” and dependent upon an “instant culture.” Although a middle class is emerging in many places, its focus is not necessarily on re-creating Islamic values. What Muslims see on television both repels and attracts them, and this is the dilemma afflicting the Aligarh model.

While each Muslim country we visited could boast a few excellent centers of learning, the overall picture of education in the Muslim world is depressing. Comparative figures published by the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank consistently put Muslim countries at the bottom of the ladder. Their dismal educational performance is a particularly sore point because the pursuit of knowledge is the highest calling in Islam, some would say even higher than prayer itself, yet the number of educational or intellectual prizes won by Muslims on the international stage is small in proportion to their world population. In desperation, Muslim parents send their children to madrassahs with limited facilities and even more limited syllabi. In most Muslim societies, the few elite schools are too expensive and out of reach for the majority of the population and free public education offered by the state limited.

The education of the elite who study abroad unfortunately does not help Muslims resolve social ills. They return with a few Western phrases and clichés on their lips, and they make no serious attempt to relate the rich legacy of their own Islamic traditions to the great Western minds they study. A tradition of critical thinking has been missing for the past few decades in the Muslim world. Indeed, some Muslims appear blissfully unaware of the need to provide hard and sometimes painful answers to the difficult questions relating to the disconnect between the West and Muslim world. Their understanding of both worlds is often superficial,

compartmentalized, and even manufactured by the West. When I asked a prominent Arab minister in Doha who his favorite author was, he replied with a broad grin, "Professor Bernard Lewis." He was clearly oblivious to the irony that an Arab might quote with such relish the quintessential Orientalist, accused by Arabs themselves of contributing to the Western misunderstanding of their culture and history. I wondered whether the seminal work of Edward Said on Orientalism had made any impact on the Muslim elite.

As someone who grew up in the mainstream of the Aligarh model, I am amazed at its slow but steady decline over the last decades. It is difficult to imagine now that Muslims were actively engaged in relating the traditions of their past with the conditions of the present, and doing so within the frame of *ijtihad*, or "innovative thinking" encouraged in Islam. These Muslims were at the cutting edge of change and were truly towering figures, with admirers both in the East and the West. Today their names redound in glory—Muhammad Abduh and Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani in the Middle East; Sir Sayyid, Jinnah, and Iqbal in South Asia. These thinkers were not isolated scholars living in ivory towers. Their ideas were a catalyst for change affecting the lives of millions of people.

What is evident is that the Aligarh form of leadership became corrupt and distorted during the second half of the twentieth century. While those who followed the Aligarh model strove for a modern democratic Muslim polity based on Western legal systems, they found the pressures of the cold war forced them to choose between either socialist or capitalist camps. Joining one or the other camp brought aid, weapons, and international standing but also led to a dependence on the source of this support and a lack of accountability to the state's citizenry. The resulting repressive regimes precluded the development of genuinely modernist Muslim societies. Gamal Abdel Nasser, for example, was a hero of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, but he resorted to torture and executions to deal with orthodox Muslims such as Syed Qutb, who became a martyr for orthodox Islam after he was executed in 1966. Such acts of repression radicalized a large segment of the population and would reverberate during the next decades with each misstep taken by so-called democratic leaders, who were compromising the Aligarh model.

Another factor that hinders the development of democracy in most Muslim countries is that the army is by far better organized and trained

than any other part of the establishment, to the exclusion of democratic systems of governance. There is a more sinister aspect to the lack of democracy, too. The intelligence services are now being widely used to persuade politicians and critics of the government to fall in line. Tactics can range from assassinations to straightforward blackmail or the abduction of family members. The army's anticorruption or antiterrorism agencies have become the most coercive authority to win over wavering politicians, poisoning the atmosphere almost as much as in the time of Saddam in Iraq. Ultimately, dictators rule through fear. When people are too frightened to stand up and speak their mind because of what happens to critics, democracy is further discouraged. Even if a democracy is present, political parties tend to be opportunistic and disorganized, and to easily shift alliances, abandoning their leaders when offered a better deal. When the military hanged Pakistan's most popular elected political leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in 1979, people expected a storm of reaction, but nothing very much happened and life went on as normal. The new military dictator was hailed as a savior, and he ruled with an iron fist for over a decade, until his plane exploded mysteriously in midair.

The failure of the world powers and the helplessness of Muslim leaders to solve the long-standing problems of the Palestinians, Kashmiris, Chechens, and now Iraqis, Afghans, and Lebanese, have further angered Muslims. Political developments over the past century have left millions of Muslims displaced from their homes, surrounded by despair and uncertainty. The stagnation and lack of moral leadership have only added to Muslim anger and frustration, feeding directly into the Deoband model.

Most Muslims whom our team talked to felt dissatisfied with the state of affairs and desperately wanted change. Whatever misgivings Muslim commentators may have had about the American-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, they were tempered with the hope that perhaps a new era of democracy would be introduced to these nations, and people would lead better lives. There was heady rhetoric about democracy, human rights, and civil liberties following the invasions. Unfortunately, the biggest challenge for both Kabul and Baghdad has been to maintain law and order. The rapid collapse of society into tribal and sectarian rivalries and killing dissipated whatever goodwill remained for the experiment in democracy, especially after scandals emerged of the almost casual cruelty inflicted on local people by American troops. The uncertainty of life for most people

turned to despair and then anger. However loathed the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam in Iraq, people looked back with nostalgia to recent times that offered some semblance of stability. Thus in its attempts to improve its image, the United States was now in lower esteem than even the harshest of religious governments or the worst dictator.

“Fool Me Once, Shame on You—Fool Me Twice, Shame on Me”

While Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld helped President Ronald Reagan—with advice from Henry Kissinger and Lewis—to change the world for the better by hastening the demise of the Soviet Union a quarter of a century ago, they also set in motion contradictory policies involving the Muslim world that plague us today. Even with the end of the cold war, cold war-era policies toward the Muslim world remained in place, partly because of the durability of some of the same players, with the same worldview.

Cheney, Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Kissinger still dominate and define American foreign policy, which continues to be directed at the “problem nations”: the Palestinian territories, Iraq, Syria, and Iran.³⁸ The U.S. relationship with these countries remains problematic even after decades of American intervention. The same policies and tactics that failed with these Muslim nations earlier are again being employed for them by the same U.S. leaders. The chances of a different outcome this time are not high.

Broadly, U.S. policies toward the Muslim world are based on the assumption that Muslim leaders can be divided into two camps: the “moderate Muslims” and the “radical Islamists.” The former are believed to want close ties with the West and make large defense purchases from it or agreements of mutual interest; the latter are the bearded clerics in black robes who make radical anti-American statements, take American hostages, and are inherently evil. The “good guys” are thus separated from the “bad guys.” Washington’s policy has been to see the world in this simplistic binary frame and act upon it.

The American public has yet to recognize the irony that the leaders they are looking to for safety are the same ones who brought today’s “evildoers” to power and are again keeping them there with their flawed policies. A quarter of a century after U.S. policies, directly or indirectly, helped bring Khomeini to power in Iran, they have precipitated another sequence

of events that inflated the prominence of anti-American Shia leaders: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran, Muqtada al Sadr in Iraq, and Hasan Nasrallah in Lebanon. The popularity of these leaders is a direct consequence of their defiance and ability to bait the United States and Israel. U.S. policies, aiming to check these very “extremist” Islamic leaders, instead created an arc of revivalist Shia charismatic leadership in the heart of the Muslim world, thus upsetting the delicate ethnic and sectarian balances in the region. The emergence of the Shia leaders, who tower like giants even on the Sunni horizon, may be a temporary phenomenon, and ethnic and sectarian instincts may soon reassert themselves, but for the present time, ill-conceived Western policies have succeeded in bridging the deepest divide in Islam in some parts of the Middle East. Throughout our journey, many Sunni quoted Shia leaders as their role models. And despite the severe sectarian violence in Iraq, the larger perception that Islam is under attack still guides Muslim emotions.

Two commentators from the Muslim world provide valuable perspectives here: a Pakistani journalist and an Egyptian scholar, each from an important capital in a Muslim nation that is a key ally of the United States. They provide us with a fairly clear picture of how Muslims are viewing current events. The first, widely read Pakistani columnist Ayaz Amir, had this comment to make about the situation in the Muslim world after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon:

Hezbollah already is a symbol of defiance far beyond the confines of Lebanon, its leader, Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah, arguably the most popular figure in the Islamic world today. So what will the Israeli aggression against Lebanon, and American policy supporting it, achieve? Hezbollah will still be around. But with the one big difference that more young men and women will be ready to join the Islamist cause, more people holding up Hasan Nasrallah as an icon of resistance.

Personally I find myself in a strange position. I am as secular in my thinking, if not more than most other people. . . . My secularism, however, collides with an unpleasant reality: the picture of the Islamic world in thrall to American power, Muslim elites dancing to America’s tune, Muslim countries little better than satellites orbiting around the U.S. I see this in my own country where there is too much American

influence, much of it of the wrong kind. If the Muslim world is to progress, this bondage has to be broken.

Even democracy won't come to the Muslim world unless this influence is overthrown. 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 democratic Iran. They can't abide Hamas which is the elected representative of the Palestinian people. They can't abide Hezbollah which has a representative status in Lebanese politics. Democracy in the Muslim world and the interests of American foreign policy just do not mix. That is why any kind of popular movement in the Muslim world finds itself on a collision course with U.S. interests.

Now if we take it as correct that American domination of the Islamic world is not a good thing and deserves to be resisted, it becomes hard for so-called secularists like myself to close their eyes to the uncomfortable fact that the only forces resisting this domination, often successfully, are those which, in some form or the other, draw their inspiration from Islam.

Savour then the irony of it. The "war on terror" was meant to fight and contain radical Islam. Instead, the Bush administration has turned out to be its biggest supporter, through its arrogance, lies and blind support of Israel giving radical Islam an impetus it could never have hoped to achieve on its own.³⁹

Second, Egyptian scholar Saad Eddin Ibrahim traces the rise of Nasrallah and correlates it with the lackluster standing of the Arab establishment leaders:

In more than four weeks of fighting against the strongest military machine in the region, Hezbollah held its own and won the admiration of millions of Arabs and Muslims. People in the region have compared its steadfastness with the swift defeat of three large Arab armies in the Six-Day War of 1967. Hasan Nasrallah, its current leader, spoke several times to a wide regional audience through his

own al-Manar network as well as the more popular al-Jazeera. Nasrallah has become a household name in my own country, Egypt.

According to the preliminary results of a recent public opinion survey of 1,700 Egyptians by the Cairo-based Ibn Khaldun Center, Hezbollah's action garnered 75 percent approval, and Nasrallah led a list of 30 regional public figures ranked by perceived importance. He appears on 82 percent of responses, followed by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (73 percent), Khaled Meshal of Hamas (60 percent), Osama bin Laden (52 percent) and Mohammed Mahdi Akef of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (45 percent).

The pattern here is clear, and it is Islamic. And among the few secular public figures who made it into the top 10 are Palestinian Marwan Barghouti (31 percent) and Egypt's Ayman Nour (29 percent), both of whom are prisoners of conscience in Israeli and Egyptian jails, respectively.

None of the current heads of Arab states made the list of the 10 most popular public figures. While subject to future fluctuations, these Egyptian findings suggest the direction in which the region is moving. The Arab people do not respect the ruling regimes, perceiving them to be autocratic, corrupt and inept. They are, at best, ambivalent about the fanatical Islamists of the bin Laden variety. More mainstream Islamists with broad support, developed civic dispositions and services to provide are the most likely actors in building a new Middle East. In fact, they are already doing so through the Justice and Development Party in Turkey, the similarly named PJD in Morocco, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine and, yes, Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁴⁰

Even before the Lebanese-Israeli conflict erupted in 2006, authoritative American voices were questioning whether certain U.S. policies in relation to Israel were detrimental to both countries. Clayton E. Swisher, director of programs for the Middle East Institute, for example, has argued: "If we are ever to repair our relations with the Arab and Muslim world, we must have an honest and open examination regarding our role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Too many American, Israeli, and Arab lives depend on it. Considering all the threats facing our country in the Middle East, the time for petty politics and mythification has passed. There

are many sides to this complex story, yet the one-sided mantra of Arab blame is still all-pervasive.⁴¹ A highly controversial article on this subject by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, “The Israel Lobby,” triggered a national debate among intellectuals, one of whom, Scott Ritter, an expert on the geopolitics of nuclear weapons, linked Israeli policies to the neocons in Washington.⁴² In Ritter’s view, the war in Iraq, however great a disaster it was, and the talk of attacking Iran were part of the same nexus between Israel and the neocons.

A debate was also emerging around the role and position of dictators and the support they have received from the United States for decades in the struggle against communism. Since 9/11 the rhetoric and role of dictators have changed subtly, although their relationship with their people remains the same. They, too, talk of democracy while continuing to suppress their people. Having learned to exploit their distant masters in Washington, they have turned the situation to their own advantage by crushing any opposition to their power and labeling it as “terrorist,” with Washington then giving them a blank check to continue committing human rights violations and accumulating unchecked power and wealth.

David Wallechinsky of the *Washington Post* recently defined a dictator as “a head of state who exercises arbitrary authority over the lives of its citizens and who cannot be removed from power through legal means. The worst commit terrible human-rights abuses.”⁴³ Drawing on information from global human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, Reporters without Borders, and Amnesty International, Wallechinsky finds that five of the world’s top ten dictators and eight out of the top twenty are Muslim. In 2005 and 2006, a Muslim ranked number one—Omar al-Bashir, the president of Sudan. Both Moammar Gaddafi of Libya and Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan were in the top ten in 2005 but then dropped to the top twenty, “not because their conduct has improved, but because other dictators have gotten worse.”⁴⁴

It should also be pointed out that at least three of the Muslim dictators are closely allied to and supported by the United States: King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, and Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, facts that are not widely reported in the U.S. media. The United States, convinced that it had to choose between a Muslim dictator and a Muslim religious leader, invariably found the former more attractive than the latter when it saw a rising tide of Islamic fanaticism. As President

Franklin D. Roosevelt once put it when making similar choices in the South American context: "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch."

Iran provides a good example of how the United States has gotten into difficulties by supporting autocratic leaders. The story goes back at least half a century. In the early 1950s, the democratically elected prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadegh, upset the United Kingdom by nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. With the help of the United States, the United Kingdom deposed Mossadegh and brought the shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, back to power. The United States justified its support under its policy of containment, which sought to safeguard U.S. economic interests and stop the spread of communism.

Beginning with the Kennedy administration, the United States worked to improve Iran's infrastructure through massive loans to the country's development bank. Funds went into agricultural and industrial projects such as textile and cement plants, pest and water control projects, and the creation of agricultural cooperatives. They helped establish health programs in Iranian universities, created a network of rural health care centers, and set up programs in the United States to train qualified Iranians as doctors and public health care officials.⁴⁵ When Richard Nixon assumed office in the early 1970s, however, U.S. emphasis turned from developing Iran to doing business there. Meanwhile, the shah made increasingly outlandish attempts to safeguard American aid by demonstrating the power of the "new Iran," in the grand tradition of earlier Persian empires under Darius and Cyrus the Great. He staged spectacular events, including a theatrical coronation for himself in 1967. An even greater event in 1971 in honor of Cyrus featured the best the West had to offer, ranging from Parisian chefs to the finest Western china. Fine ceremonies were presented for the benefit of Western diplomats, and businessmen found Iran to be a gold mine for their operations and a viable market for services and technology. The shah's displays may have worked to his advantage in securing Western support, but they alienated the Muslim population.

In the wake of the Vietnam war, U.S. foreign policy sought to deal with regional crises through proxies rather than direct military involvement, a policy that became known as the Nixon Doctrine. Both the Nixon and Ford administrations, convinced that Iran was an effective cold war ally, readily endorsed the shah's concept of Iran's policing the Persian Gulf area.

They permitted the shah to acquire virtually unlimited quantities of any non-nuclear weapons the United States could produce. Within a few years, he had built up what was the fifth or sixth largest army in the world. By 1976 it had an estimated 3,000 tanks, 890 helicopter gunships, more than 200 advanced fighter aircraft, the largest fleet of hovercraft in any country, 9,000 anti-tank missiles, and much more equipment either on hand or on order from the United States and its allies.⁴⁶

For its part, the United States sought to develop Iran's nuclear program. In 1975 Secretary of State Henry Kissinger signed a national security document, U.S.-Iran Nuclear Co-operation, laying out the details of the sale of nuclear energy equipment to Iran. In 1976 President Gerald Ford signed a directive offering Tehran the opportunity to buy and operate a U.S.-built reprocessing facility for extracting plutonium nuclear reactor fuel. President Ford's team—which included Dick Cheney, who had succeeded Donald Rumsfeld as chief of staff, and Paul Wolfowitz, who oversaw nonproliferation issues at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency—not only endorsed Iranian plans to build a massive nuclear energy industry but also worked hard to complete a multibillion-dollar deal that would have given Tehran control of large quantities of plutonium and enriched uranium, the two pathways to a nuclear bomb. In addition, it continued efforts to supply Iran with nuclear technology. U.S. companies, led by Westinghouse, stood to gain \$6.4 billion from the sale of six to eight nuclear reactors and parts.⁴⁷

The increasing influence of the United States, through billions of dollars intended for business purposes and oil deals, served to widen the gap between the rich and poor at an alarming rate. As the shah and his Western corporate backers enjoyed lavish celebrations, millions languished in poverty. When a tangible backlash to the shah's obsessively pro-Western stance began to grow in the early 1960s, the shah became increasingly authoritarian, unleashing his notorious secret police, SAVAK, to deal with the dissent. The regime's opponents ranged from socialists and Marxists to conservative Muslims, some "moderate Muslims," and elements of both the rich and poor. Anti-Americanism also grew.

One of the only figures able to stand up to the shah's government and SAVAK was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a cleric teaching Islamic ethics at the Fayziyah Madrassah in Qum. Believing that Islam was under attack in Iran by the United States, Khomeini had no scruples about saying this

publicly and in 1963 took the first step in what became a sustained attack on the shah, whom he portrayed as an enemy of Islam. Khomeini protested the cruelty and injustice of the shah's rule, torture, and wicked suppression of all opposition, with denunciations of the United States and Israel as well. He spoke loudly and passionately on behalf of the poor, calling on the shah to leave his palaces and visit the shantytowns of south Tehran. The shah, alleged Khomeini, wanted to destroy Islam itself: "Our country, our Islam are in danger," he said in 1963, "we are worried and saddened by the situation of this ruined country. We hope to God it can be reformed."⁴⁸ He further declared Iran an American colony, asking, "What nation would submit to such indignity?" and lamented that he expected many would die in the coming winter, "God forbid, from cold and starvation."⁴⁹

Khomeini also railed against the immunity the shah had granted U.S. forces, declaring the shah had "sold" Iran's independence: "If some American's servant, some American's cook assassinates your *marja* [inspiring religious figure, ayatollah] in the middle of the bazaar or runs over him, the Iranian police do not have the right to apprehend him! Iranian courts do not have the right to judge him! . . . [T]hey have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog. If someone runs over a dog belonging to an American, he will be prosecuted. But if an American cook runs over the shah, the head of state, no one will have the right to interfere with him."⁵⁰ In a society still defined by tribal notions of honor, these actions inflamed the national pride of ordinary Iranians and their sense of public indignation.

Following this speech, Khomeini was forced into exile in Iraq, and the government launched another crackdown on dissent. It targeted the madrassahs for supposedly teaching hate against the government, torturing to death Ayatollah Riza Saidi for objecting to a conference to promote American investment in Iran and for denouncing the regime as a "tyrannical agent of imperialism."⁵¹ Tension mounted in the late 1960s and early 1970s as hundreds were killed amid the crackdowns, and inflation began running rampant, while many villages remained desperately poor. These are the very conditions in which the Deoband model thrives and rejects the "democracy" and "free trade" promoted by the United States.

Recognizing that it was only infuriating the masses by effectively trying to erase aspects of Islamic culture, the government tried a different approach. Islam was to be "modernized" and dubbed "civil Islam." To

facilitate this transition and show that the government in fact honored Islam, it formed a new agency that would rely on “mullahs of moderation” to go out to the masses and promote literacy, build infrastructure, and vaccinate livestock, thereby showing that Islam was compatible with the modern age. This was the Aligarh model. To the shah’s once loyal subjects, however, the friendly hand reaching out seemed too little too late. By then Iranians were filled with such resentment and anger that not even these positive reforms could erase the memory of his arrogance, lack of compassion, and unwillingness to work with different groups issuing legitimate demands for democratic participation. Compounding their anger was the perception that Americans were the real power behind the throne.

The public then turned to Khomeini as a credible and promising alternative to the shah, using modern technology such as cassette tapes to spread his defiant messages from his home in exile. He gained further credibility with the ordinary Muslims when a son who was with him in exile died suddenly, and it was assumed SAVAK was involved.

Like other Iranian figures of the time, such as Ali Shariati, Khomeini believed that Shia Islam carried a very modern message in an age plagued by inequality, misery, and uncertainty: “Islam is the religion of militant individuals who are committed to faith and justice. It is the religion of those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism.” Islam, he said, championed the modern ideals of liberty that the West claimed to have, and he urged Iranians to reject Western culture and to rediscover their own heritage: “We have forgotten our identity, and replaced it with a Western identity, . . . becoming enslaved to alien ideals.”⁵²

As social conditions worsened and disenchantment with the government increased, all sections of society, including the artistic community and business leaders, joined the clerics in a chorus of protest against the government. By now, the upper classes, the lower classes, and everyone in between despised the United States, and violent protests picked up. From 1971 to 1975 there were thirty-one bombings and bomb threats against American organizations and facilities, including two bombings of the embassy itself.⁵³

In strongly anti-American rhetoric echoing the sentiments of all sections of Iranian society, Khomeini painted the United States as a source of evil in the world. Apparently unable to understand the situation,

Americans clung to the view that Iran was central to U.S. business interests and strategic geopolitical goals—the elite of Tehran were people they could work with. In 1977 President Jimmy Carter arrived in Tehran on a state visit and toasted the shah with the extraordinarily ill-timed observation that Iran was an “island of stability in a turbulent corner of the world,” which it owed to the shah’s “enlightened leadership,” and was “a tribute to the respect, admiration and love” the Iranian people had for him. Little more than a week after Carter left Iran, the revolution was in full swing at the behest of Khomeini from Paris, and riots broke out across Iran.

While the United States continued to insist that a revolution was not imminent and to express its loyalty to the shah, graffiti appeared on the streets of Tehran casting Jimmy Carter as Yazid, the ruler who martyred the Prophet’s grandson Hussein in 680 C.E., and the shah as Shimr, the general Yazid dispatched to massacre Hussein and his army. It is important to understand just how powerfully evocative the names of Hussein and Yazid are for the Shia: the former is the ultimate symbol of heroism in the face of tyranny and the latter that of evil itself. This perception was reinforced by SAVAK’s brutal crackdown on demonstrators, which left many dead in Qum and elsewhere, encouraging Iranians to see themselves as martyrs rising up against the tyranny they had withstood for far too many years.

Although the United States expressed steadfast support for the shah, it was wary of a bloodbath. It had invested so much in Iran and so many of its citizens were living in Iran and Iranians in America that it was reluctant to do anything that could jeopardize their position. Yet it could not escape the realization that the shah was rapidly losing influence, especially when demonstrators turned out in the hundreds of thousands in August 1978 to protest the introduction of martial law. On September 8 SAVAK opened fire into a crowd in Jaleh square, a practice that had become routine whenever and wherever large crowds gathered in 1978, and killed hundreds of protesters. Nevertheless, President Carter called the shah after the Jaleh incident to express America’s unwavering support, which pleased the shah so much that he published their conversation. To many Iranians, it appeared as though the shah were being congratulated by Carter on the massacre.⁵⁴

As the crisis spiraled out of control, the United States grew increasingly impatient with the shah. Realizing its interests in Iran were in grave

danger, the administration implored him to act in any way he could to stabilize the country, even if it meant stepping down in favor of an appointed successor. Khomeini then returned to Iran, greeted at the airport by a million people, and the shah's regime collapsed like a house of cards.

In October 1979 the hated shah was admitted to the United States for medical treatment but was subsequently refused asylum and asked to find refuge elsewhere. This refusal, perhaps intended to show Muslims that the Americans were distancing themselves from the shah, backfired—merely confirming for Muslims that Americans had no sense of honor or loyalty even toward an ally who had been so faithful to them. Honor and loyalty, as explained in chapter 3, are central to Muslim culture, and this action highlighted the dramatic differences between the two societies. In the chaos after the revolution, students overran the American embassy and seized hostages, refusing to relinquish them until the shah returned to Iran for trial. While still in exile, Khomeini had opposed an earlier takeover attempt by Marxists but lent this new action by a disorganized group of angry student revolutionaries his support. Remembering the 1953 coup, they were convinced that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was heavily involved in Iran and would soon act to reinstate the shah. The students stormed the embassy both to forestall a new coup and to avenge the 1953 overthrow.

Radicals now seized control of the revolution, sidelining those who did not fall in step and labeling them supporters of America and thus enemies of the revolution. The hostage standoff lasted 444 days and poisoned relations between the United States and Iran. The students grew frustrated when it seemed that more Americans were not taking notice of the revolution, a key motive for seizing the hostages in the first place. As the crisis wore on and relations with the United States worsened, the students and Khomeini shored up their position inside Iran.

In early 1980 the United States approached the UN Security Council for assistance, hoping sanctions would be imposed on Iran. This idea was opposed by the Soviet Union, however, which had just launched an invasion of Afghanistan, fundamentally altering the geopolitical landscape. The U.S. National Security Council discussed many other strategies for getting the hostages back, including military strikes and blockades. It even considered launching a coup against the revolutionary government but ultimately decided against such a move.

Instead, a group from the U.S. Army Delta Force went into Iran to rescue the hostages with helicopters. The mission, dubbed Operation Eagle's Claw, was a complete failure. Poor weather conditions, which the army had overlooked, caused one helicopter to drop out of the mission with mechanical failure and another to collide with a C-130 transport plane, killing eight crew members. For the Carter administration, the military option was now permanently off the table, forcing the most powerful nation in the world to simply wait until the Iranians were ready to release the hostages. Although they showed some signs in this direction in mid-1980, Khomeini decided to wait until January 1981, on the eve of Ronald Reagan's inauguration, to prove, it is said, that he could unseat an American president just as the CIA had unseated Mossadegh in 1953.

Almost overnight, the United States not only lost its key ally in the region but also inadvertently put into power an extreme Deoband-model leadership that saw the United States as the "Great Satan." Matters could have taken a far different course—if the United States had restored diplomatic relations with Iran immediately after Khomeini's revolution and underlined its respect for Islam as a religion that could accommodate democracy; if it had helped strengthen the new Iranian democracy by assisting with elections, developing civil services, and engaging with educational institutions; if it had not launched what Iranians perceived to be a media onslaught on their culture and religion; and if it had addressed the *people* of the nation through some strong gestures of goodwill to signify a change from the dictatorship of the years past. Although there would have been a residue of anti-American feeling, the aftermath of the hostage crisis and the subsequent steps along the path to the present confrontation could have been avoided. Yet the United States seemed unfazed by its experience in Iran: it soon became the patron of another dictator, Saddam Hussein, also another future enemy.

Following the revolution, Iran took growing interest in the Shia of Iraq, who were being persecuted under the government of Saddam Hussein, and urged them to launch a jihad against the Iraqi dictator. The Iranians frequently referred to Saddam as a "puppet of Satan" and accused him of being "mentally ill."⁵⁵ For his part, Saddam had been watching the Iranian situation through the 1970s with a concerned eye, especially after Khomeini threatened to export the revolution to Iraq, notably to the holy city of Karbala. Seeing what Khomeini had already accomplished against the

shah, Saddam thought his fears were justified. Many figures from the shah's military fled in droves to Iraq, where they attempted to persuade Baghdad to help them regain their country. Some said that the Iranian army had been plagued by desertions and purges (hundreds of political dissidents had been executed). Convinced that the Iranian revolution could be reversed in favor of a more friendly government to Baghdad, Saddam decided to launch a surprise invasion of Iran. More to the point, Iraq would gain oil revenue, and Saddam would become the undisputed master of the Arab world. So, on September 22, 1980, Saddam began a long and bloody war that would claim more than a million lives.

The United States began giving significant support to Iraq. In February 1982 it removed Iraq from its list of states supporting international terrorism, thus paving the way for a significant boost in U.S.-Iraqi trade relations. In December 1984, merely a month after the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, the newly opened U.S. embassy in Baghdad began supplying the Iraqi army with important military intelligence. At the same time, Washington nearly doubled Iraq's credits for food products and agricultural equipment, from \$345 million in 1984 to \$675 million in 1985. In late 1987 Iraq was promised \$1 billion credit for fiscal year 1988, the largest such credit given to any single country in the world.⁵⁶ The U.S. military also intervened in the war directly, sinking Iranian ships in the Persian Gulf.

With the war progressing toward a stalemate, Iraq grew frustrated by its inability to score decisive victories and decided to try using chemical weapons. By late 1983 Baghdad had stockpiled enough mustard gas for the purpose, soon followed by choking agents such as phosgene, and then nerve agents such as tabun, soman, and sarin. Saddam's chemical attacks on Iran inflicted horrific damage mainly on unprotected civilians. Iranians scrambled to purchase gas masks, but these offered little protection against the more advanced nerve agents, lethal on exposed skin. Many Iranian men who had grown beards could not wear the masks properly and died. In all, Iraq's chemical agents probably killed about 50,000 Iranians during the war.⁵⁷ In the closing months of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, Saddam launched his worst chemical attack on Kurds and their Iranian backers in Halabja, massacring at least 5,000 people.⁵⁸ The Kurdish areas of Iraq were not only subjected to chemical weapons, but their villages were also destroyed and their populations transferred to labor camps. Almost certainly aware of

these operations, the United States, in violation of the 1925 Geneva protocols and in defiance of the United Nations, had authorized the sale to Iraq of poisonous chemicals and deadly biological viruses, such as anthrax and bubonic plague. The U.S. Department of Commerce also approved the export of insecticides to Iraq, despite widespread suspicions that they were being used for chemical warfare. In February 1984, an Iraqi military spokesman issued this chilling warning to Iran: "The invaders should know that for every harmful insect, there is an insecticide capable of annihilating it . . . and Iraq possesses this annihilation insecticide."⁵⁹

The previous year a senior State Department official, Jonathan T. Howe, told Secretary of State George P. Shultz that intelligence reports showed Iraqi troops were resorting to "almost daily use of chemical weapons" against the Iranians. But the Reagan administration had already committed itself to a large-scale diplomatic and political overture to Baghdad, culminating in several visits by Donald Rumsfeld, the president's recently appointed special envoy to the Middle East. Iraq was supplied by a multitude of Western corporations, including Bechtel, Union Carbide, and Honeywell. CIA director William Casey used a Chilean company, Cardoen, to supply Iraq with cluster bombs intended to disrupt Iranian human-wave attacks, where thousands of martyrs would rush the Iraqi lines.⁶⁰

The United States was determined to do anything it could to stop Iran, which included supporting Saddam, an authoritarian dictator, and was creating another "shah of Iran" situation for itself. Had the United States respected international laws and continued to observe its highest ideals, Americans would not have the stain of this Middle East blood on their hands, which has not been forgotten in that part of the world. Nor would it have waged two wars with Saddam that have resulted in so many thousands of lives being lost.

Not only have lessons from the spectacular collapse of the shah of Iran and the equally spectacular rise of Khomeini been ignored, but policies from that debacle have once again been activated. The pundits and politicians who misled the American people then appear on a similar track once again with regard to the threat of Syria and Iran, even while problems in Iraq and Afghanistan remain unresolved. Indeed, it seems Americans have run into a dead end with Ahmadinejad. Foreign policy experts who counseled the shah to ignore the Islamic voices are now advising the U.S.

administration to ignore them. This is only creating resentment and agitation against the United States. Moreover, whereas before Americans had an alternative “secular” government to work with, there are only Islamic parties to deal with now, all of which require different and nuanced approaches. As it is, Americans are ignoring too many Muslim governments and genuine popular movements, instead misunderstanding and labeling them “terrorists.” Thus Americans are losing and alienating vast populations and making enemies of them, rather than forging a working relationship that could develop into support and friendship.

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, backed by hard-line clerics, became president of Iran in the summer of 2005, it ended the sporadic but steady talk of dialogue between civilizations that his predecessor Khatami had initiated.⁶¹ Already unstable with the entrenchment of Western troops in two bloody wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the world now lurched toward an even more dangerous level of confrontation.

Nasty rhetoric, broadcast in the media, has painted Ahmadinejad as a Hitler in the United States and Bush as the great Satan in Iran. Yet Ahmadinejad’s worldview has been directly shaped by U.S. policy toward Iran in the 1970s and 1980s, when he was a student leader during the revolution and later fought in the Iran-Iraq war. Ahmadinejad’s highly provocative statements calculated to infuriate the United States and Israel need to be seen in this light. I suspect he believes that American troops are now so helplessly trapped in the quicksand of Iraq that the United States has been reduced to a toothless tiger. What is undeniable, though, is that Ahmadinejad’s extreme statements have gained him popularity with ordinary Muslims, even among the Sunni as we saw on our journey.

Lebanon, too, fits neatly into the Iranian worldview. When the newly formed, anti-American government of Ayatollah Khomeini looked out at the world to find similar instances in which Muslims were being dominated and oppressed, particularly fellow Shia, it quickly focused its attention on Lebanon. Israel had invaded Lebanon in 1978 to stop the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from attacking northern Israel with rockets. In 1982 the Israelis pushed all the way to Beirut and occupied the city, seeking to establish a buffer zone in Southern Lebanon. The Israeli occupation of Lebanon was often brutal and led to widespread dissent, especially among the Shia. To fight the occupation, the new government in

Iran took money and weapons to Lebanon, which it used to form a militant organization that could struggle not only against the Israelis but also against America. Countering both the United States and Israel, Hezbollah embraced suicide bombings during its 1983 attack on the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, a new maneuver introduced in 1981 when an Islamic Shia group attacked the Iraqi embassy in Beirut. Hezbollah and Iran viewed these as missions of “self-martyrdom,” not suicide, which is forbidden in the Quran.⁶² When Hamas among the Palestinians began the use of suicide bombings, it spread from Shia Islam to Sunni Islam to become the militants’ weapon of choice against the West. After the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, Sunni and Shia were both employing suicide bombing to battle each other, challenge the establishment, and fight Western troops. Soon the suicide bomber was making his—and even her—impact felt in other Sunni-dominated countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Pakistan. Muslim outrage at tyranny and injustice had combined with tribal notions of revenge and honor to create new, controversial, and apocalyptic interpretations among scholars of the Quranic notion of suicide.

With this context in mind, one can more readily compare the perspectives of the September 19, 2006, speeches of Presidents Bush and Ahmadinejad before the United Nations. Directing his remarks to the Iranian people, President Bush said that although “your rulers have chosen to deny you liberty and to use your nation’s resources to fund terrorism and fuel extremism and pursue nuclear weapons,” he was hopeful for “the day when you can live in freedom, and America and Iran can be good friends and close partners in the cause of peace.” Ahmadinejad presented several criticisms, noting the UN Security Council had failed to call for an immediate cease-fire after war broke out between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006. It took thirty-four days to arrive at a truce to end the conflict: “The Security Council sat idly by for so many days, witnessing the cruel scenes of atrocities against the Lebanese . . . Why?” asked Ahmadinejad. He also stated defiantly: “I am against the policies chosen by the U.S. government to run the world because these policies are moving the world toward war.”⁶³

Although different on the surface, the remarks by Bush and Ahmadinejad are quite similar in their understanding of what the Abrahamic faiths call the end of time. It is this understanding that shapes their view of the

world. Both believe in a final once-and-for-all battle between good and evil and each thinks that he represents good as much as his opponent embodies evil. Both also believe that Jesus will return to earth and join them against their opponents—and here the paradox that both Christianity and Islam belong to the Abrahamic family overwhelms the argument and reduces it to absurdity. Most striking, each believes he was specifically chosen to lead his nation by a divine power and actively propagates his eschatological vision. Bush believes that Jesus is on his side—when asked to name his favorite book, he invariably replies the Bible—while Ahmadinejad believes in exactly the same thing, that is, God is on his side. According to Muslim tradition, the end of time will be marked by the return of Jesus Christ, who will fight the evil forces of the *Dajjal*, who is the Muslim version of the anti-Christ. For devout Shia Muslims like Ahmadienjad, this moment is of added significance because it will pave the way for the return of the Hidden Imam, a direct descendant of the Prophet, who will fight alongside Jesus Christ against the anti-Christ.

Bush's Christian belief demands that he secure Jerusalem in preparation for Jesus's return, just as Ahmadinejad's Muslim belief requires him to welcome the return of the Hidden Imam, whose arrival would herald the coming of Jesus. Both are committed to hastening the process that would bring Jesus back to earth. As legitimately elected leaders of two major nations, these men are actually reflecting the beliefs of a large segment of their population.

The American campaign to prevent Iran from developing a uranium-enrichment program and Iran's determination to do so needs to be seen within this context. Each country's foreign policy was based on the vilification and abuse of the other's president and culture. That helps explain why, at the World Affairs Council conference in Philadelphia in 2006 (see chapter 4), Henry Kissinger laid down an outline for a nuclear assault on Iran. Only a few weeks later, the Middle East erupted in war when Israel invaded Lebanon and American commentators openly clamored for a nuclear strike against Iran to prevent it from acquiring nuclear technology. Iran was not Iraq or Afghanistan, which were smaller, more impoverished, and less homogeneous nations. A nuclear strike on Iran would not only inflame the world's Muslim Shia population but also destabilize Iran's important neighbors Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, key American allies. The

complicated interplay between confused foreign policy and theology was driving the world to the brink of a global war.

These policies are making the Ajmer model irrelevant and the Aligarh model little more than an excuse to compromise with the West. Muslims who consider themselves under attack from the West, not only militarily but also culturally, see little point in talking about Ajmer universal humanism and, given the established track record of U.S. foreign policy, have little hope of support for democratic leaders of the Aligarh model unless they are prepared to surrender national interests. That is why so many Muslims rally to the Deoband model. But because the United States refuses to talk to them, communications break down, the same old arguments of the past few decades resurface, the same old policies are implemented, and the same disasters take shape.

As Americans struggle to either help the Muslim world or to control it, the situation only seems to grow more chaotic and to continually echo the past. The Muslim world notices this and is not fooled by U.S. talk of democracy. Instead it awaits the predictable—and avoidable—disasters that loom on the horizon.

Even now, a radical shift in policies toward the Muslim world could avert those disasters, both in the long and short term. A giant step in the way of creating trust and goodwill would be to reach out to the Muslim world and emphasize respect for its culture and religion. The United States should also match its rhetoric about democracy with genuine support for the democratic process irrespective of the need for convenient allies. Similarly, rather than giving military aid to Muslim countries, it should develop educational programs and facilities that would change the thinking of the young Muslims now schooled by radical madrassahs. The Muslims' hateful view of the Americans comes from being at the receiving end of American weapons used by either their dictators or American soldiers to the point where they attribute these brutal actions to the United States as a whole. If these policy shifts were implemented in the war on terror, it would change the relationship dramatically and reduce the number of current and future enemies. None of these initiatives are expensive or require anything more than applying sensible thinking to the complicated issues that have U.S. policymakers in a quandary following the backlash against the neocon enterprise and the "Bush Doctrine," reflected in the 2006

midterm election results: the Democrats won control of both the House and Senate (the Senate by a narrow margin), widely seen as a referendum on the war in Iraq and the war on terror.

As the cycle of violence that now embraces the planet continues in its seemingly uncontrollable orbit, Western and Islamic civilizations are moving further and further away from their cherished ideals of justice, compassion, and wisdom. It is essential for all humankind to understand this complicated relationship, whatever one's political perspective or religious beliefs. Without the universal will to halt this momentum, the violence and uncertainty will eventually progress into an unending global nightmare. Societies need to return to those ideas that have nourished them over the millennia and created in them compassion and empathy for others. In sum, the current crisis is nothing short of a challenge to the very identity of humankind as a caring and thinking species.