

## **“Does ‘Blaming the Other’ Fix our Problems?”**

Author : Jacob Thomas on Sep 29, 2007 - 11:06 PM

*“Lawm al-Akhar’, Hal Yusleh Awda’ana?”*

Early during the Six Day War of June, 1967, President Nasser realized that the war was lost. His entire Air Force was destroyed by the Israelis before any Egyptian plane could take to the skies and face the incoming Israeli Air Force. Rather than acknowledging his defeat, and taking full responsibility for starting the war with Israel, Nasser telephoned King Hussein of Jordan; and together they concocted the story that US and British war planes had joined in the Israeli attack on the Egyptian airfields! Nasser resorted to an age-long habit among Arabs and Muslims, that of blaming others for their own mistakes and misadventures. In fact, this is a trait of the Arab mind that is illustrated in Raphael Patai’s *“The Arab Mind,”* Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, (1973,) and David Pryce-Jones’ *“The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs,”* HarperPerennial, New York, (1991.)

Early in 2007, an Arab writer dealt with this subject in an article under the title, *“Lawm al-Akhar, Hal Yusleh Awda’ana?”* (Does ‘Blaming the ‘Other’ Fix our Problems?) It was posted on the liberal online site, [www.kwtanweer.com](http://www.kwtanweer.com) on 4 March 2007. When I saw it on 22 August, 239 people had already read it during the previous six months. Here are excerpts from the article, followed by my analysis and comments.

*“Why does the treason-discourse seem to rule the Arab scene? It is a discourse which labels ‘others’ as kafirs. Why do the Arab masses accept a confrontational discourse, rather than the one that advocates enlightened points of view? Why does the conspiratorial mind dominate the collective Arab mind? Why do preachers of hate have more followers than preachers of tolerance? And finally, why do the religious pulpits keep on cursing the “Others,” and calling for divine retributions to fall upon them?*

*There can be only one reason for that, namely the belief of both the elites and the masses that the “Other” must always be blamed; and that he deserves our hatred and enmity. Actually, it is this culture of “blaming the Other” that relieves a person of his responsibility to deal with his own situation, and makes him blame the ‘Other.’*

*“Recently, Sunni and Shi’ite religious leaders met in Doha hoping to achieve a rapprochement between the two religious groups, and to prevent war between their followers. After some deliberations, they concluded that Israel, the United States, and the West were to blame for the problems that hound the Middle East!*

*“The ‘Other’ must always be blamed, as far as the Arab Mind is concerned. He is the cause for our suffering, and the failures of our development projects. The ‘Other’ is responsible for the collapse of our democratic experiments, and for the rise of religious factionalism among us. And yes, it is the ‘Other’ that brought **Irhab** (terrorism) into our*

lands!

*“The culture of **‘blaming the Other’** is a doctrine believed by some Arab elites and by the Arab masses who remain transfixed by the **‘Other.’** This frame of mind is not of recent origin, it has been with us across our entire Islamic history, going back all the way to the **Great Schism**. Rather than try to understand the human nature of the **Sahaba\***, and admit their role in the troubles that irrupted after 632 A.D., Arab historians searched for an imaginary ‘enemy.’ They invented a mythical Jewish figure, **Abdullah bin Saba**, and made him the villain responsible for the **Schism of 656 A. D.***

*“If we glance at the contemporary Islamic text- books, we discover that **‘The Protocols of the Elders of Zion’** are taught as authentic Jewish documents, and are claimed to be responsible for the present-day divisions in Islam. They also claim that the Jews were behind the fall of the Caliphate through the instrumentality of **Ataturk\*\****

*“Many Arabs exhibit the same logic by attributing to the **Mosad\*\*\*** a principal role in the plot of 11 September 2001. The Mosad must take the blame for the bombings in **London, Taba, and Sharm el-Sheikh**; and in the assassination of Sunnis and Shi’ites in Iraq. And let’s not forget, the Mosad was behind the plots to assassinate Arab leaders beginning with **Gamal Abdel-Nasser, Yasser Arafat, and Rafik al-Hariri**, the Prime Minister of Lebanon.*

*“It’s high time we cease blaming the **‘Other’** and begin engaging in self-criticism. We gain nothing by blaming the **‘Other,’** and by clinging to the conspiracy theories. We don’t help ourselves by talking about cultural imperialism, or by regarding globalization as an evil thing. Let’s learn from those nations which transcended their defeats after WWII. For example, Germany worked on the eradication of Nazi ideology; and Japan jettisoned its Imperial dreams of superiority. Both Germans and Japanese engaged in self-criticism, corrected their mistakes, and rose again on the world scene. As for us Arabs, we go on cursing the Satans of darkness, without ever lighting one candle to expel the darkness surrounding us.”*

## **Analysis**

It is refreshing to read such words that describe a regrettable trait of the Arab-Muslim mind. After some tragic events have taken place, rather than admit their true nature, and the causes that led to them, Arabs resort to blaming the **“Other.”** There is a total absence of self-criticism that would seek the causes that led to a national or communal tragedy. The author ended his article by pointing to the great benefits that accrued to both Germany and Japan, when they exercised self-criticism after their defeat in WWII, and the Arabs’ reluctance to do anything to change their habit of blaming the **“Other,”** by engaging in self-criticism!

## **Comments**

The early history of Islam manifested tremendous successes, especially in the speed of

their *futuhats* (conquests) in the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain. After the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate in the 13th century, the newly converted Turks continued the Islamic conquests in the Balkans, and in parts of Central Europe. The Ottoman Turkish Caliphate, having joined Germany and Austria in WWI, lost its colonial territories. The last Islamic Caliphate was abolished in 1924, by Ataturk, the father of the Turkish Republic.

Ever since then, Muslims have not stopped asking, “*What Went Wrong?*” Rather than approaching their problems by engaging in an objective analysis of the causes for their decline, Muslims play the blame game, and point to the “*Other*” (*al-Akhar*) as the source of their failures.

Now what is rather helpful about the article is that it brought to light certain forgotten details of Arab history, as it pointed out that the habit of blaming “*Others*” is ingrained in the Arab-Muslim mind. It referred to a Jewish person, *Abdullah Bin Saba*, and his involvement in the *Schism of 656 A.D.* This tragic event in the early history of the Islamic Umma was an internal affair that surfaced after the assassination of Caliph *Uthman*. When *Ali*, the cousin and son-in-law of *Muhammad*, succeeded Uthman in 656, *Mu’awiya*, the governor of Damascus, claimed that *Ali* was involved in the murder of his relative, *Uthman*. He refused to acknowledge *Ali’s* caliphate, and rebelled against him. He was joined by *Aisha*, the youngest wife of *Muhammad*. The civil war lasted five years, and ended with the murder of *Ali*, and resulted in the Great Schism in Islam, pitting the followers of *Mu’awiya* (to be known as *Sunni*) against the followers of *Ali* (to be known as *Shi’at Ali*, or simply, as *Shi’ite*.)

Not wanting to tell the whole truth about the abrupt collapse of the unity of Islam, some close friends of the Prophet known as the *Sahaba*, invented the myth of a Jewish role in the *Great Schism*. This shows that even those venerated *Sahaba* were ordinary humans afflicted with worldly desires and ambitions. They could not admit that such a terrible thing could have happened, and began the tradition of blaming “*Others*” i.e., non-Muslims, for the division of Islam into two rival groups!

Blaming others, or “*Lawm al-Akhar*,” has been joined by a *Conspiracy Theory of History*. For the “*Akhar*” to be successful in his plots against the Islamic Umma, he must acquire the cooperation of anti-Islamic circles. So this theory has gained acceptance among Arabs, and is invoked whenever a crisis occurs in an Arab or Islamic country. So why not blame the United States, and Western Europe, for all the failures and debacles that have bedeviled the lands of Islam?! And then there is the arch-enemy of Islam, Israel and its Mosad which is ubiquitous. It must have been behind 11 September, 2001, and all the lesser attacks in Europe and the Middle East. As to ‘*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.’ it was actually a Russian secret police forgery aimed at justifying the persecution of the Jews. But it has now been taken over by the Arabs and declared to be an authentic Jewish treatise that has a blue-print for Zionist world domination!

The ingrained habit of blaming the “*Other*” for the woes of the Islamic Umma deepens their intensity. It is high time that, having taken note of the futility of blaming others,

Arabs engage in self-criticism. This painful exercise would begin a process that will allow them see that most of their problems are self-inflicted. Unless they swallow their pride, and acknowledge that blaming the **“Other”** has gotten them nowhere, they will continue to sink deeper and deeper in the quick sands of their own making!

**\*Sahaba:** The Companions of the Prophet Muhammad who came with him to Medina in 622 A.D. They constituted an “inner circle” among the larger group of Muhajiroun (Immigrants).

**\*\*Ataturk:** The Turkish general, **Mustapha Kemal** led the remnants of the Ottoman Army after the defeat of Turkey in WWI. He succeeded in pushing back the Allied armies that threatened the integrity of the Turkish heartland. He founded the Turkish Republic, and abolished the Caliphate in 1924. He was responsible for the founding of a secular tradition in Turkey that sought to keep Islam out of politics. He was honored by receiving the title of Ataturk, the Father of the Turks. His legacy received a severe blow on 28 August, 2007, when an Islamic politician, **Abdullah Gul**, was elected President of the Turkish Republic.

**\*\*\*Mosad:** The Israeli intelligence agency that operates outside Israel.