

[Islam: Contra Mundum](#)

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Islam Confronting the World

On Friday, 11 August 2006, an Arab intellectual, well-known for his advocacy of modernization and tolerance, contributed to the online daily, *Elaph.com*, an article titled: *Al-Islam Fi Halat Mujabaha Ma' al-'Alam*. The Latin and English equivalents of the Arabic words are in the headline I gave to the article. He had previously written a series of three articles on the theme, *"Is Islam a Tolerant Religion?"* You may find them on the FFI website on 30 June, 9 July, and 12 August, 2006.

The author was greatly disturbed at the news of the Islamist plot to blow up several American airplanes crossing to the Atlantic. He wrote his impassioned article warning of the devastating results that will happen, should the radical jihadist spirit continue to spread among Muslims; whether they live in their homelands, or have moved to host countries on both sides of the Atlantic.

Here are excerpts from his article, followed by my analysis and comments.

"Yet another time, and the forces of evil have succeeded to place Islam and Muslims in a bloody confrontation with the civilized world. The religion that was supposed to have come with mercy for mankind has been transformed, by radical Islamists, into a mindset of resentment and grudge, not only against the world, but against Muslims as well. On 10 August, the British security services succeeded with the help of their American and Pakistani counterparts, to discover terrorist cells of British Muslims (of Pakistani origin) who had plotted to perpetrate crimes that would have been more horrific than what took place on 11 September 2001. An official of Scotland Yard described the plan 'as an attempt of mass murder that was beyond imagination!' To date, 24 people have been arrested in Britain, as well as others in Pakistan. The plan for this Irhabi plot was to smuggle chemicals and electronic devices that looked harmless, and use them as explosives in ten American airplanes crossing the Atlantic en route to the USA.

"That plot reminds us of another reason why the war against terrorism is a matter of extreme importance. The future of mankind, its security, and its civilization, depend on carrying on this war. We have witnessed again how a group of Muslims who have gone astray, rushed to engage in Irhab. They resorted to their action, propelled not by social or economic factors, as some are claiming. Other ethnic communities in Europe, whose conditions are similar to those of the Muslims, have not resorted to terrorism, or violence, as Muslims have been doing.

The main reason that propels young Muslims to join the Irhabi cells is the fact that they

have received wrong teachings based on the improper use of certain religious texts. These young Muslims have been brainwashed during a very sensitive period of their lives; being nurtured on a culture of hatred vis-à-vis non-Muslims. They were inculcated with a worldview that divides the world into areas of belief and unbelief, the household of war, and the household of Islam. They have been encouraged to wage a jihad against the world, considering that the killing of non-Muslims is actually a jihad in the pathway of Allah, a duty for every Muslim, and a sure way to enter Paradise.

*“Certain studies have unveiled that many of the **khutaba*** in European mosques fill the minds of the worshippers with hatred towards the countries that had welcomed them, exhorting the worshippers to engage in a jihad against their hosts! For example, British newspapers reported that after the bombings of 7 July 2005 in the London Underground, several **khutaba**, who had been appointed by the British authorities as prison chaplains, actually engaged in the brainwashing of Muslim prisoners and encouraged them to join terrorist organizations after their release!*

“Some Muslims exhibit a total lack of gratitude towards those Western governments that had given them shelter and offered social services, including education for their children. In exchange, they responded with acts of Irhab, and justified their terrorism by reference to religious texts, and the example of their forefathers.

*“It is important to point that most terrorists have attended religious **madrassas**** in Pakistan. These schools spread rapidly during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; and were supported by **salafi***** and jihadi groups in the Gulf area. Furthermore, most of the **Taliban****** who engaged in the movement known by their name, and participated in the organization of the Taliban State with the help of Al-Qaeda, were actually graduates of these madrassas that numbered around 13,000 throughout Pakistan.*

“In spite of the role that Pakistan claims to be playing in the fight against Irhab, some experts believe that it has adopted a two-faced attitude in its dealing with al-Qaeda and the Taliban. On the one hand, Pakistan attempts to please America and the world community, by engaging in minor campaigns against the jihadis. On the other hand, Pakistan is not serious in its attempts to arrest Ben Laden and Ayman Zawahiri, who operate near or within its borders. In fact, Pakistan has the ability to dry up the sources of Irhab, by closing those Madrassas that had become a breeding ground for the activities of the Jihadis.

What should be our Response?

“As we have repeatedly mentioned, it is incumbent upon Islamic governments and religious authorities, to get seriously engaged in dealing with a growing and extremely dangerous crisis. We offer the following suggestions with the hope that they will be seriously considered:

*“1. The religious texts, known as the **Sword Ayat**, should be reinterpreted according to their historical context, and be considered as no longer normative for our times.*

2. The authorities must wage a serious fight against a culture of hatred. They should forbid discrimination based on religion, race, or a specific group. Instead, they should spread a culture of love and fraternal relations among all people, whether they are followers of various religions, or no religion. God alone is the One who judges people with respect to their religious attitudes.

“3. Western governments should be vigilant in keeping a close watch on the imams in the mosques of the host countries; no one should be permitted to spread a culture of hatred towards the host countries.

“4. Throughout the Muslim world, a serious effort should be undertaken to bring about separation of religion from the state. No imam or Muslim religious teacher should be allowed to interfere with political issues. Equally, politicians should not meddle with religious matters.

“5. Liberal intellectuals should no longer be harassed. At present, it is only the Islamists who enjoy a complete freedom to spread their culture of hatred and violence, and to politicize religion. The wave of Irhab that is going on nowadays is a direct result of that reactionary and oppressive educational system that has been practiced throughout the Islamic world, as well as among Muslims living in the West.

“Unless we take the necessary measures listed above to face the Irhab that is being inflicted on the rest of the world, more and more catastrophes are on their way, and bloodier confrontations with the civilized world will take place. No one should remain unconcerned about what the Islamists are doing in the name of Islam. As President Bush put it on the day when the plot to destroy several trans-Atlantic planes was uncovered, the plot reminded him that his nation was in a state of war against Irhab, five years after the September 2001 attack.”

Analysis

This brave Arab intellectual does not hesitate to point to the fact that Islam is in a state of confrontation with the entire world. The plot that was uncovered on 10 August, 2006, refocused the attention of the world on a phenomenon that has functioned within the household of Islam, from its very beginning. But now that humanity has entered the globalization era in history, interdependence between nations is an essential element for the proper functioning of modern civilization. However, Islamist radicals are placing Islam in a totally adversarial position vis-à-vis all non-Islamic nations and cultures. This dangerous situation should be dealt with by the responsible governments and religious authorities of Islam.

Comments

The author should be commended for continuing to draw attention to the important task that must be undertaken to drastically alter Islam's view of its relationship with the

modern world. If, as our author has already proven in his previous articles, the real problem resides in the sacred texts of Islam, they must be reinterpreted to enable Islam to change its traditional stance towards the rest of the world, and adopt a policy of peaceful coexistence with non-Muslim countries and civilizations.

The sacred texts he has in mind are known as the Sword Suras of the Qur'an that breathe a spirit of violence towards all those who refuse to accept the mission and the message of the Prophet. They are located in the Medinan chapters, and 'descended' after Muhammad had migrated there, and engaged in several military campaigns against the Meccan caravans. These chapters focused the ire of the Prophet on Jews and Christians; who were either eliminated, or forced to leave the Arabian Peninsula. It is these martial parts of the Qur'an, according to our writer, that must be declared no longer normative for the present. All the troubles that have spilled into our world at the hands of the Jihadis can be traced back to this sacred source of faith and life in Islam.

To write such articles in Arabic, and post them on a web site that is widely read, judging by the multitude of responses that Elaph.com receives, is an act of bravery that seldom takes place in the Muslim world. I applaud this honest and forthright intellectual.

Unfortunately, as I have mentioned in the past, it is not unusual for enlightened Muslim intellectuals to write openly about their deficient cultural and religious heritage. **The real problem is in the application of the remedy that he proposed in his five points.**

What state within the Muslim world, authoritarian or otherwise, can seriously curb the activities of the *Salafis*, and their destructive and violent ideology? Can we look to Egypt for such a reformation? It is extremely doubtful that any Egyptian government can lead a real and effective campaign against extremism. After all, Egypt has a long tradition of sprouting radical movements such as the *Muslim Brotherhood*, with ideologues as *Hassan al-Banna* and *Sayyid Qutb*. Let's never forget that *al-Azhar University* in Cairo has always been against a genuine reformation of Islam. No scholar at al-Azhar will ever dare to call for a new hermeneutic of the Qur'an that would declare the violent part of the Medinan Surahs as no longer valid.

Or should we expect Muslim leaders that have migrated to the West, and got themselves good positions at various Western universities, to lead the march for reforming Islam? While some, like *Tariq Ramadan*, pose as spearheading a tolerant and gentler form of the faith, actually their real goal is nothing less than the Islamization of the host countries.

I am not very optimistic about the near future; Islam is actually in confrontation with the whole world. I would like to end these comments by quoting from an excellent commentary that appeared in the 17 August issue of the **Wall Street Journal**, on page A8, under the title of "Islamofascism."

"Now of course it is wrong to give gratuitous offence to people of other faiths; it is right to respect people's beliefs, when these beliefs pose no threat to civil order; and we should extend toward resident Muslims all the toleration and neighborly goodwill that

we hope to receive from them. But recent events have caused people to wonder exactly where Muslims stand in such matters. Although "islam" is derived from the same root as "salaam," it does not mean peace but submission. And although the Koran tells us that there shall be no compulsion in matters of religion, it does not overflow with kindness toward those who refuse to submit to God's will."

You may do well to read the entire article; it is one of the best to appear in a mainline, national newspaper, completely free from the deadening effects of political correctness.

**Khutaba*, plural of *Khatib*, a preacher who delivers the Friday sermon at the mosque.

***Madrassa*: the Arabic for school. In the context of non-Arab countries, the word has assumed a specific meaning, a school that inculcates the teachings of radical Islam.

****Salafi*, an adjective derived from the Arabic, *Salaf*, i.e. ancestors. Doctrinally, it has assumed a meaning equivalent to Islamic fundamentalism.

*****Taliban* has its root in the Arabic word, *Talib*, a student. *Taliban* became synonymous with graduates of the *Islamist Madrassas*, whose goal was the establishment of ultra radical regimes in the Muslim world. They controlled Afghanistan for some time, until their ouster by the US and some European forces.