

## Pondering the “War on Terror”

Why do we call it the “war on terror?” Would we fight a “war on bullets?” Our enemy is neither bullets nor terror. Our enemy is a few of our fellowmen who are motivated to use terror against us. They may call themselves “jihadists,” but that name is a corruption of the noble Islamic concept of personal striving for self-improvement. The unfashionable, “Islamic Fascist” could be a name for this enemy, if it did not encompass all Muslims. “Radical Islam” might be appropriate.

Even if we can’t agree on a name for our enemy, we should at least know *why they chose us to be their enemy*. We need to know why they attacked us on 9/11, and why they fight against democracy in Iraq. A TV journalist tried to excuse an Iraqi “combatant” by suggesting that he was “just fighting for his country.” He corrected her by saying, “No! We are fighting for our religion!” During a different interview, an “insurgent,” was asked how America could end the conflict in Iraq. He replied, “Go home and convert to Islam.” Their hostility toward us is inescapably linked to their religion, but our American mindset wants to ignore the religious nature of this conflict.

**Background:** Today’s Muslims remember that for a thousand years the Islamic world was a bright center of educational, scientific, and cultural advancement, while Europe struggled through the “dark ages.” Those medieval Arabs rescued Greek science from obscurity and gave us our modern system of numbers.<sup>1</sup> Gradually their domain darkened. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt started the humiliation of Western political and economic subjugation.<sup>2</sup> Festering frustrations over European colonial rule were exacerbated by the creation of the State of Israel and the flow of “Zionist Jews” into Palestine. When Arabs could not displace the incoming Jews by war, their resentment grew. Hatred became an effective tool for the violent. Even the smallest of children<sup>3</sup> were taught in Muslim schools to hate Jews and blame all their problems on the non-Muslim West, particularly America. American protection of the hated Israelis is especially galling in the spotlight of TV news coverage of bloody Arab/Israeli (“Muslim/Jew”) conflicts, when mixed with hateful propaganda. So, when radical Muslims, worldwide, refer to Israel as a problem, or chant “Death to America,” they mean it.

**Reform:** Muslims resent external domination. They also lament their internal economic and spiritual declines. In response to these weaknesses, the worldwide “Islamist Movement” with its slogan, “Islam is the solution,”<sup>2</sup> aims at reform by:

1. Cleansing their societies from within by returning to Islam.
2. Reducing or eliminating Western secular influences.

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<sup>1</sup> E.J. Gardner. 1960. “History of Life Science.” Burgess Publishing Co. Minneapolis, Minnesota. 180 p.

<sup>2</sup> S.J. Palmer, R.R. Keller, D.S. Choi, and J.A. Toronto. 1997. “Religions of the World: A Latter-day Saint View.” Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. 296 p. (Revised and enlarged edition).

<sup>3</sup> Fox News. 2006. “Obsession: The Threat of Radical Islam.” Special hosted by E.D. Hill with documentary filmmaker Wayne Kopping on November 5, 2006. Raphael Shore, Producer. One hour.

Islamists are deeply divided over which methods should be used to achieve these two goals. The minority, who advocate violent means, have become our bitter enemy. However, it seems that non-violent Islamists may quietly acquiesce to violence when it helps achieve those Islamist goals. Violent Islamists also intimidate fellow Muslims, thereby largely silencing moderate Islamic voices.

**Their Motivation:** In this Islamist context, the violent 9/11 attacks were justified to destroy Western economic and secular influences. Similarly, attacks on Iraqi “apostates and collaborator dogs” are justified because a Western-style democracy in Iraq threatens the Islamist cleansing processes. It interferes with their goals of establishing Islamic laws and principles in all phases of public and private life, including economics, politics, education, and family relations. Western influences in their countries also constrain Islam’s religious dominion. In Islam, religious conversion seems to be a one-way-street. It is OK to become a Muslim, but if a Muslim converts to another religion it is taken as an insult to Islam, worthy of death. The radical Islamist solution is worldwide conversion to Islam.

**So, how can this radical enemy be defeated?** Perhaps a key to their defeat can be found in their own words. For example, the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon said:

“The martyrdom operation is the weapon Allah gave this nation and no one can take it away from us. They can take away our cannons, our tanks, and our planes, but they can not take away our spirit, which yearns for Allah, and which is determined to achieve martyrdom.”<sup>4</sup>

And in a similar, video-taped declaration by a radical Muslim whose whole face, except for his left eye, was masked with a black and white scarf:

“We have one card left that we are proud of. It is one of our strongest cards, and even our ace: the seekers of martyrdom. The stream of youth volunteering to become martyrs is no accident.”<sup>5</sup>

Both of these Islamist leaders assert that radicalized martyrdom-seekers are their last and best weapon in their war against us. What if this martyrdom weapon *could* be taken away from them? The following three principles might help dissolve that martyrdom weapon.

**1. Understand the enemy’s mindset so that his violent, religion-based behavior makes sense to us.**

What may seem to be ridiculous religious hyperbole to us, can be absorbed as fact by discontented Muslims who yearn for more respect and for a way out of the misery of their daily lives. We must listen to what they say and understand what they mean. We must take

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<sup>4</sup> Sheikh Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of the Lebanese Islamist party, Hezbollah, in video taped speech shown on Fox News, “Radical Islam: Terror in Its Own Words” Special hosted by E.D. Hill on March 3, 2007. One hour.

<sup>5</sup> Fox News. 2007. “Radical Islam: Terror in Its Own Words” Special hosted by E.D. Hill on March 3, 2007. One hour.

their religious fervor seriously. However, we must not be intimidated into behaving submissively toward radical organizations and regimes for fear of their irrational anger erupting into massive violence.<sup>6</sup> We must cope with the prospect of violence, not cower before it. Neither should we assume that warfare is the only option.

The task of understanding a religious people is difficult. Beliefs and emotions can differ substantially among them. Trying to describe their religious doctrines or to decipher their scriptures is fraught with danger. Misunderstandings and inadvertent insults can happen. This is especially true of intense but “disorganized” Islam, which has no central leadership to speak for all of Islam. None-the-less, we can find much to be admired in Islam. We can anchor ourselves to those mutually agreeable qualities while we respectfully work to accommodate our differences.

## **2. Recognize and effectively constrain sources of radicalizing propaganda, especially among Muslim youth.**

We must find an effective way to counter the Islamist’s radicalizing propaganda machine. Steve Emerson defined the problem this way:

“The number one problem facing the Islamic world today is that the radicals, the Islamic fundamentalists, are in control of the institutions of broadcasting, of education, of the media, and they basically set the pace and tone for how the religion is expressed throughout the world.”<sup>6</sup>

Competent *Muslim* voices need to facilitate any developing sea changes in popular Islamic theology. For example, authoritative, well-disseminated fatwas<sup>7</sup> declaring that suicide bombers go to hell, instead of to paradise could be effective deterrents. Consider these words from a 2005 fatwa:

“The result in Islamic jurisprudence is: if a Muslim carries out such an attack voluntarily, he becomes a murderer and not a martyr or a hero, and he will be punished for that in the Next World.”<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, consider the impact of trusted scholarly assessments of words in the Qur’an, if they linguistically confirm that “white raisins”<sup>9</sup> (a prized delicacy in the Prophet Mohammad’s time) await you in paradise, instead of mythical “virgins.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Steve Emerson, Executive Director of “The Investigative Project” as shown on Fox News. 2007. “Radical Islam: Terror in Its Own Words” Special hosted by E.D. Hill on March 3, 2007. One hour.

<sup>7</sup> A **fatwā** (Arabic: فتوى; plural **fatāwā**), is a legal pronouncement in Islam made by a mufti, a scholar capable of issuing judgments on Sharia (Islamic law). Usually a fatwa is issued at the request of an individual or a judge to settle a question where fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) is unclear. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatwa>

<sup>8</sup> Shaykh Muhammad Afifi al-Akiti. 2005. Defending the Transgressed By Censuring The Reckless Against The Killing Of Civilians. *Fatwa* according to the Madhhab of Imām Shāfi‘. [http://www.livingislam.org/maa/demm\\_e.html](http://www.livingislam.org/maa/demm_e.html)

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Stille. 2002. Scholars Scrutinize the Koran's Origin - A Promise of Moist Virgins or Dried Fruit? New York Times, March 4, 2002. <http://www.corkscrew-balloon.com/02/03/1bkk/04b.html>

A well directed educational campaign could provoke potential suicide bombers to reassess their expectations of the rewards (or punishments) they may receive for their suicidal sacrifice. Any anticipated sexual bliss in paradise with 72 virgins could not happen if, in the Next World, they are punished as a murderer and banished to hell. Also, what if the concept of paradise (that beautiful garden of delicious satisfactions) has been twisted into a false notion of enormous sexual pleasure? Shouldn't young Muslims be warned about evil and vain promises of mythical virgins as a reward for suicide and homicide?

Benevolent Islamic voices need to promote better ways for pious Muslims to defend their religion. The benefits of each Muslim's personal strivings for self-improvement (the inner jihad) will improve the cumulative condition of the umma<sup>11</sup> (and of all mankind). For as the Qur'an says: "Verily, never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."<sup>12,13</sup> This is what the Prophet Mohamed called the "greater jihad" (the inner struggle against the evil inclinations of the soul).<sup>14</sup>

### **3. Protect and promote the voices of peaceful, benevolent Islam.**

After their medieval period of glory, the Islamic world was largely left behind while the western-oriented world claimed scientific and economic benefits from modern progress. We need to create *new conditions* where peaceful Muslims can *regain their world status* as respected participants in cultural development and improving prosperity. Those conditions should honor them for ennobling achievements and reward them for their productive work. We may then see strong, benevolent Muslims rise up in their own jihad to defend their families, homes, religion, and innocent people against the violent few of their own religion who would use terror and tyranny to control their Islamic homelands.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibn Warraq. 2002. "Virgins? What virgins?" Guardian Unlimited Special Report. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/religion/Story/0,2763,631357,00.html>

<sup>11</sup> **Umma** (Arabic: أمة) is an Arabic word meaning community or nation. It is commonly used to mean either the collective nation of Islamic states or (in the context of pan-arabism) the whole Arab nation. In the context of Islam, the word *umma* (often spelled ummah) is used to mean the diaspora or community of the believers (*ummat al-mu'minin*), and thus the whole Islamic world. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ummah>

<sup>12</sup> Qur'an 13:11, as quoted in reference #2 above.

<sup>13</sup> Other translations of Qur'an 13:11 include: **YUSUFALI:** Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts. **PICKTHAL:** Lo! Allah changeth not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their hearts. **SHAKIR:** surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition; <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/013.qmt.html>

<sup>14</sup> A contemporary discussion of jihad from a Sufi perspective is expressed in the essay *The Spiritual Significance of Jihad* by Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr of George Washington University. <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/jihad-nasr.htm>

Like others in the Islamic world, benevolent Muslims will be confronted with vexing disputes over territory (e.g. Palestine and Israel), over political power (e.g. Fatah and Hamas) and over sectarian differences (e.g. Sunni and Shia). None-the-less, they may become the mellowing force that leads toward accommodation of differences instead of violent confrontations. As their ranks grow, more of their fellow Muslims may come to believe that the proven path to real respect and prosperity lies through the inner jihad, productive work, and ennobling achievements. They may begin to view America as a reliable ally in their quest for respect and prosperity. They may well appreciate our muscle in helping them snuff out radical Islamist terror. They will begin to realize that, because of America's commitment to liberty and religious tolerance, they do not need to feel threatened by their choice of religion. Perhaps their tolerance of persons of other faiths will also grow.

With the empowerment of benevolent Islam, the Qur'anic admonitions for peaceful co-existence<sup>15</sup> and mutual understanding<sup>16</sup> between Muslims and non-Muslims may be realized. Perhaps then, victory over terror can be claimed.

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<sup>15</sup> Qur'an 3:64 - Say: O People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians]! Come to an agreement between us and you.... [as quoted in #2 above]. *Other translations:* **YUSUFALI:** Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will). **PICKTHAL:** Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). **SHAKIR:** Say: O followers of the Book! come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate aught with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah; but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.  
<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/003.qmt.html>

<sup>16</sup> Qur'an 29:46 - And argue not with the People of the Scripture, except in the best way [as quoted in #2 above]. *Other translations:* **YUSUFALI:** And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)." **PICKTHAL:** And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our Allah and your Allah is One, and unto Him we surrender. **SHAKIR:** And do not dispute with the followers of the Book except by what is best, except those of them who act unjustly, and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our Allah and your Allah is One, and to Him do we submit.  
<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/029.qmt.html>