

Arabs, Muslims, and America, Post-September 11

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In-Depth Reports

At the turn of the century, terrorism emerged as a formidable threat to civil societies, casting its long shadow over the present reality and the vision of years to come. Terrorism, of course, is not a new phenomenon. It has manifested itself throughout history in various embodiments on behalf of diverse causes. What makes the present wave of terrorism unprecedentedly fearsome is its link with modern technology and the instruments of globalization.

Terrorists today can spread their words rapidly and extensively through the internet, expand their activities worldwide through the highly developed network of commercial airlines, finance their operations through sophisticated international banking systems, and experiment with devices of mass destruction. What we are talking about in my part of the world is really the parallel state -- the gray economy -- and the parallel reality.

I remember a conversation between a BBC correspondent and a representative of Hamas. The correspondent asked, "Now that we have blocked the funding of your organization, will it cease to exist?" And the Hamas man replied, "You make a fatal mistake. We are not an organization. We are a movement, and so long as people are alienated, we will continue to regenerate."

In many parts of our "arc of crisis" -- from Morocco down to the Congo and Sudan, south of the Arabian Sea to the north of the energy ellipse -- which contains 70 percent of the world's oil and 40 percent of the world's gas, states have lost their communities, what are sometimes referred to as their "streets." It is important to recognize that leadership in our part of the world is teetering on the brink of the abyss. If we do not begin to think "extraterritorially" and develop a complementarity between the oil resource-rich countries and the manpower resource-poor countries in developing a sense of "region," we could fall into that abyss and tear ourselves up into ethnic and sectarian rivalries, Balkan-style. (You will note that the international community insisted on the creation of a multiethnic state in the Balkans, which may not be going as well as it could be.)

In my conversations with officials over the past few days, I have tried to emphasize the importance of this complementarity. Of course, it might be easier to deal with the manifestations of terror and violence in the region, which in itself is a demanding task. But I still feel that the United States has the stature to talk to the region about statecraft and humankind-craft on the basis of international norms and mores in which we can participate, and to which we should conform.

Terror, in essence, is not religion-specific. This business of monopolizing the truth is, unfortunately, one of the areas in which we find it so difficult to understand the extremes. Osama bin Laden consistently highlights his conviction that his actions are God-ordained. He once proclaimed in a fatwa (religious ruling), "We call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to obey God's command to kill the Americans and their allies and God's command to kill civilians and military." When I was speaking on al-Jazeera, someone asked me, "How do you judge Osama bin Laden?" I said, "I don't judge him, and I don't expect him to judge me. Judgment is God's." (This reminded me of a talk I gave at a British university some years ago, shortly after the signing of the Jordan- Israel peace treaty. Certain audience members stood up to say, "You will die in hellfire on the day of judgment with your friend, Yitzhak

Rabin." I replied, "With respect, I think the day of judgment is about all of us, not only about me and Yitzhak Rabin.")

On the Jewish side, Kach, the notorious terrorist movement in Israel, was banned in 1994. It was led by an orthodox rabbi, Meir Kahane, and almost all of its members came from the religious sector. Kahane based his movement's platform of violently expelling Palestinians from the Holy Land on his reading of the Bible. He often quoted Numbers 33:55, "If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those of them whom you let remain shall be as pricks in your eyes."

I would like to suggest that the purpose of my visit to the United States is to promote a better understanding of Islam and Muslim diversity. I would like to develop a long-term, meaningful engagement to address needs in the Muslim world without seeking to convert or alter the culture of Western foundations. The work of Western foundations is extremely important, not only in trying to develop the script for the media. (Sometimes I refer even to CNN by saying we need to disintermediate the media.) Academe can provide that script, but unfortunately, academe is not networked -- in the United States or Europe -- sufficiently to provide the kind of substance that the Europeans provided in the post-war Erasmus, Socrates, and Minerva programs, in which they taught history by analogy. Those programs revisited the text, heritage, and history of the "other."

I studied French history from an English point of view. The French say the British are strange because they raise monuments in London to French victories -- Waterloo and Trafalgar -- which are British victories, of course, but also French victories from the French point of view. In my part of the world, too, nobody loses a war. (Laughter.)

I met some Arab Americans this morning at breakfast, and one of them said, "You are going into the lion's den!" I replied, "Well, I did not come here to preach to the converted." Nor am I a proselytizing figure, but I am trying to suggest that we should develop a platform for progressive thinkers in our world to disavow terrorism and advocate moderation and collaborative problem solving.

How do we do that? As president of the Club of Rome, I find it very frustrating to go to Vienna to launch European Environmental Education, to speak to Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Bosnians about the conditionality of becoming a part of greater Europe. An Arab journalist asked me, "Why can't we do this in the Arab world?" I said, "Let's go back to basics. How can we have citizens conferencing on an extraterritorial approach to water, energy, and the human environment in a region where the barriers continue to rise, not only among Arab countries, but between Arab countries and Israel, between Arab countries and Turkey, between Arab countries and Iran?" We are a region in name only.

In terms of the values we share, I prefer to talk about ethical laws rather than values because the latter is rather a wishy-washy way of dismantling commitment to a civilized world. A world order needs regional order, and order requires law. That is why I presented to the United Nations (UN) the call for a culture of compliance, which applies to both state actors and nonstate actors, and which recognizes that we begin with commonalities. I would hate to think that the only commonality we share today is the spiral of hatred. I would rather think that there are still commonalities enshrined in our religious education. If we all observed and abided by the Ten Commandments, we would not have a problem.

So to create what I describe as a "militantly moderate" platform, we all have to get up and do something about what we stand for -- if we are genuinely interested in centrism as the way ahead. The shari'a (Islamic law) is the path to the essence of religion, which consists of two elements: faith in God and right conduct. I was speaking on Islam in the former Soviet Union the other day, and a Russian antiterror expert suggested that we have to prevent the spread of shari'a. I replied, "Shari'a is Muslim canon law. It's not an infectious disease." (Laughter.)

There are Christian communities that observe canon law, and there are those more liberal in their perceptions. The confrontation between "liberals," if that is the right word, and the more conservative elements of society is not

peculiar to Islam. It is also characteristic of other faith groups. A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of engaging in a conversation with Ambassador Shimon Shamir on contemporary liberal interpretations of Judaism and Islam. Of course, I do not want to go back to Moses Mendelsohn and Franz Rosenzweig and talk about the idea of pluralism and recognition of the other. But only at the end of the nineteenth century did Christianity begin to talk about pluralism and respect for the other, as Isaiah Berlin describes in his reference to Vico and Herder. In this case, Ich bin ein Berliner. (Laughter.) And the twentieth century has certainly not been remarkable for its tolerance and acceptance of the other.

So the idea of building a dynamically moderate platform is not wishful thinking, although it may be hard work in the interim. Problem solving and visits to the region should march hand-in-hand with the beginning of a process. I am not talking about UN resolutions and initiatives, deciding who did what to whom in the last five minutes. I am talking about the process of building a region. Every region in the world has an identity except for our benighted Middle East. Richard Holbrook, when he was U.S. representative to the UN, once said to me, "You are an Asian." Quite right by the geographic definition of the UN. Incidentally, Europe is also a part of Asia geographically; to say that there is an independent Europe is essentially a political comment. A Moroccan is an African by the UN definition. And an Israeli is not part of any UN-defined region. No wonder we have difficulty in thinking extraterritorially.

The purpose of my present tour of the United States is to ask you to help us think extraterritorially. We need a code of conduct for the region, based on the ethical laws we share. We need a call for a limitation on weapons of mass destruction, based on our real and felt needs. Someone in the arms industry once said to me, "People like you are not good for business." If the business he is referring to is security, then it is about time we attended to the alleviation of poverty on a nondiscriminatory basis. (Applause.)

In 1994, after signing the Jordan-Israel peace treaty, Shimon Peres and I met in Casablanca. We presented a report on the need for a decade of infrastructure development from Morocco to Turkey that would require \$35 billion in investment. When we went to the European Community, I thought they would say, "We will mobilize task forces and come back within a few months to talk about it." Europe began with coal and steel. We were offering to start with water, energy, and the human environment. What did they say? "First come, first served."

If mercantilism is the order of the day, it is no wonder that ten years later Europe is worrying about how much to invest in security arrangements to prevent the entry of illegal migrants, instead of worrying about how to encourage the will of those migrants to remain in their own countries. With these thoughts, I invite your questions. (Applause.)

Discussion

Michael Stein, The Washington Institute: Your Highness, thank you very much. It is no overstatement to say that your presentation was a breath of fresh air in a city that knows too much "old think." You have just made a very bold call for Middle Eastern peoples and leaders to rethink their region -- to begin building institutions, culture, and ideas on a regional basis.

For so long, it has seemed that people in your part of the world, as well as policymakers here in Washington, have focused on just one part of the regional equation -- the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What advice do you give to both Americans and regional leaders to get on with business at home, while at the same time pursuing their desire for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians?

Prince Hassan bin Talal: The confrontation seems to be inevitable, and there are a lot of interests at stake in the continued confrontation on the ground. But I would like to focus on the importance of normalizing our thinking within our own communities and living up to our own values. I agree with Nicholas Kristoff, who in a March 29 New York Times article wrote, "India's national tumult produced Gandhi and Nehru. America's nurtured Jefferson and Madison. So why did the decadeslong Arab crisis spawn the likes of Yasser Arafat and Saddam Hussein?" Perhaps we

could add Ariel Sharon. I do not know, but that is the Middle East, or the "Muddle East," if you will. Kristoff goes on to say:

At a time when Arab nations face far-reaching choices about economics, democracy, Israel, and religion, the region needs most what it lacks most: leaders. Most of those in power seem to lead by staying in the crowd, distracting it when possible, and running around in front of it when necessary.

The sad reality is that real leadership, the effort to articulate the vision and take risks to persuade people to share it comes mostly from Osama bin Laden and other Islamists. Their vision may be harmful, frightening and deceitful, but they have one and they struggle to persuade people to follow them. Some Arab thinkers, like Naguib Mahfouz, the Nobel Prize-winning writer and conscience of Egypt, have had the courage to stand up for their beliefs against the militants. But Mahfouz was stabbed for his troubles, and so the educated often seethe in their salons rather than over the airwaves.

In 1957, Sir Isaiah Berlin wrote a brilliant critique . . . of the Soviet Union titled, *The Silence in Russian Culture*. It is striking how much of what he wrote applies to the Arab world as well; how much of the Middle East's problem arises from a 'silence in Arab culture.'

In 1958, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Jordan, and Afghanistan leaned toward the West. Thirty-five women and children from my family were murdered in front of the Royal Palace in Baghdad, holding the Holy Book in their hands.

Within a month, then-despot Abdul-Karim Qassem went to Selwyn Lloyd, the British foreign secretary, and said, "Had we known that your interest was solely in oil, we would not have killed members of the royal family." And we were accused of being Western-leaning. I do not know what Abdullah Akayleh would accuse me of, but I am sure he will accuse me of something when he returns to Jordan. (Laughter.)

Today, if you are not Western-leaning, you are perceived as a terrorist. An intermediate identity must develop. There must be a relationship with the imperial partnership being proposed today that recognizes that we are not vassals, but friends. We must recognize that globalization cannot be an American or a Western imposition on the traditions and culture of the other. We must recognize that human dignity and anthro-politics are complementary. By all means, this must also be true of hydro-politics and petro-politics. The time has come to develop a conversation based on the courageous initiatives that are being taken in these realms even as we speak.

I would like to cite a paragraph from a forthcoming press release from the executive committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, of which I am moderator:

The anguish of innocent suffering and cries of 'peace with justice' in the Holy Land have seized the hearts of people around the world. As representatives of the world religions, we are united in rejecting terror, the intentional killing of innocent people, whether perpetrated by individuals or by states. We are also united in our conviction that both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples have the right to live in peace and security as neighbors. This can be realized through the creation of a Palestinian state, and the recognition of the right of the state of Israel to exist, both states with secure, internationally recognized boundaries.

It might be interesting for you to know that we commended the courageous leadership of our Jewish, Christian, and Muslim colleagues in the Holy Land. Yes, this was undersigned in January 2002 by Ariel Sharon and Yasir Arafat, who committed themselves to religious cooperation for peace with justice and common living.

My advice would be to let us live with two perspectives. We have legitimate grief and sorrow for the developments on the ground. I have eight-year-old grandchildren. They were born during the euphoria following the Jordan-Israel peace treaty. Today, how can I educate them? How can their parents educate them for peace? What of the tens of

millions like them, who see the horrors every day on television?

On the second side of the equation, we have to do the normal things. If there is an interactive cultural outreach program, it should include the participation of all the children of Abraham in the United States. But if each lobby only promotes its own interests in isolation of the other, we are not beginning with commonalities. And that is extremely worrying.

Lastly, let us not forget that there is a third dimension, and that is to remind the world of the importance of our region, but not as a monolith. It pains me when someone walks up to a bishop from Jerusalem and says to him, "Oh, you are an Arab and a Christian. When were you converted?" I said that in a room full of two hundred people the other day, and someone said to me, "Only ten people here probably understood what you meant." Only 6 percent of Americans carry passports, removing the 2 percent who are on field service abroad. How can we have globalization without comprehension of the world in which we live?

Ben Barber, Washington Times: Why is it that when I go through the news wires every day, eight out of ten lead international stories involve Islam? I typically see stories from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, India, Palestine, Israel, Bosnia, Abkhazia, Chechnya, Iran, Iraq, and Sudan.

What is happening in the world of Islam that propels these stories to dominate our wire services and our consciousness?

Prince Hassan: You ask a very clever question, and the world is full of clever people, but not enough wise men, even at the Washington Times. If you are suggesting that we are a bunch of blood-thirsty SOBs simply because we are Muslims, and you are trying to typecast us with your question, then I am not your greatest enthusiast. You may not be my greatest enthusiast either, but the question is not whether you like me or hate me. The point is to talk to each other, rather than at each other.

U.S. policy toward the Middle East since World War II was dominated by the containment doctrine. At a given moment, Islam was good news, with five Muslim countries opposing communism. The mujahadeen in Afghanistan fought against the Soviet Union and ensured access to oil and continued exploration. U.S. policy was based on economic self-interest and, of course, the security of the state of Israel.

Today, after September 11, we have the problem of terrorism, and I would like to suggest in the words of my dear Israeli friend and expert on terror issues Boaz Ganor, executive director of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, "No prohibition without definition." He suggests -- and I say this because there is an underlying feeling in the West that all Muslims are terrorists -- that this is typecasting. I received a degree from Queens University in Northern Ireland, a nondenominational university with a Jewish chancellor. They started talking about Christian terror. I said, "Does such a thing exist?" If you look at liberation theology in Latin America, were its followers not regarded as militants? When the Oklahoma City bombing took place, I was sitting among Arabs in Doha, Qatar. The first news flash mentioned suspects of Middle Eastern complexion, and sixty of us looked around at each other to see who had the most Middle Eastern complexion. (Laughter.)

Ganor says,

Without an objective, authoritative definition accepted by all nations, the fight against terrorism will always suffer from cultural relativism. Without a change in the priorities of all the enlightened countries, and their determination to fight against terrorism -- apart from any other political or economic interests -- it will not be possible to wage an effective war against terrorism. And with such a unified stand by all nations, the September 11 attacks on the United States will be insignificant compared to the attacks yet to come. The free world must understand that cultural relativism applied to terrorism and the terrorists' goals will lead only to more terrorism.

So, please do not consider that there are hundreds of millions of would-be "Muslim" suicide bombers. Suicide bombers have nothing to do with Islam. Islam clearly abhors suicide.

I cannot understand American television, quite honestly, when news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian carnage carries the title, "War on America." What does that conflict have to do with war on America? Five hundred Muslims were killed in the Twin Towers. Why is no reference made to them? Perhaps it was when I was not listening. But the time has come for us to realize that we are interconnected, and that we share the same values.

Joan Van Wessel, Jerusalem Report: Your Highness, you mentioned a Russian terrorism expert who said that shari'a had to be contained. Isn't the lack of real separation between "church" and state one of the problems in the Arab and Islamic worlds?

Prince Hassan: We need to legitimate religion with a Vatican in Jerusalem, a Vatican in Mecca, and a Vatican in Najaf, the seat of Shi'ism. When I saw Shimon Peres a few months ago, I asked, "Why does the Israeli ministry approve a license for the building of a mosque outside the Basilica in Nazareth?" It is the beginning of a rift between Christians and Muslims. We do not need that.

The statement, "Don't interfere in our internal affairs," whether in reference to the destruction of the fort overlooking the Haram in Mecca, or with reference to the question of the mosque in Nazareth, indicates how little states feel any extranational responsibility. If we are to develop a religious code of conduct in the Holy Land, then we have to legitimate religion.

I was asked at the Wharton School the other day, "What about wahhabism?" Wahhabism is not a school of Islam. There are four orthodox schools of Sunni Islam and two schools of Shi'a Islam. They have to engage in a legitimate dialogue. They have to produce an absolute fatwa and only then will there be a reduction of these splinter groups and their self-styled fatwas calling for jihad. Once upon a time, jihad represented the umma (community of Muslims). Today, there is no sense of umma, even in recognizing the fifth pillar of Islam, zakat, which means "alms," not "arms." (Laughter.)

The time has come to recognize that if you want to reduce the plethora of voices, the "tower of Babel," if you will, you have to legitimate religion. In becoming legitimated, religion transcends itself. In a sense, when you talk about science and progress, you are transcending the concept of church and state. Progress in its entirety includes spiritual development as well as technical and economic development.

We have the example of Turkey, which preaches secularism. In my humble opinion, there is a difference, or maybe a complementarity, between political secularism that recognizes freedom of belief and religious expression (religiosity is quite high in Turkey) and social secularism. Many in the Middle East do not recognize a difference between secularism and atheism.

The West has an ethos of Christendom. We do not have an equivalent of Christendom, as Bernard Lewis points out in his most recent book, *What Went Wrong?* I am trying to develop a concept of how to put it right. We need the recognition that although we do not have the Christendom concept, Islam -- to Muslims -- is not only a faith, but also a value system.

A French commentator asked me, in reference to my recently published book, "How could you write that women should cover their heads when they go into places of worship?" I replied, "Please look at the quotation marks." She looked down at the bottom of the page, and saw that I had quoted Saint Paul. (Laughter.)

So please keep the text in context. That is really what is required -- an overarching understanding of the role of religion and state, and a contextualizing of the references that are made.

Martin Gross, The Washington Institute: I understand why terrorism occurs, and I understand political conflict.

What I cannot grasp is that before many suicide bombings that are carried out by teenagers, videos are made in which they celebrate their plans with their families. The parents are aware of what the child is about to do. From the perspective of the relationship between a parent and a child, please explain to me how a culture can allow this phenomenon to continue. I do not understand it.

Prince Hassan: The culture does not promote videotaping an act of suicide before it occurs. It has nothing to do with the culture. The rules of the culture clearly oppose suicide. However, there presently exists a mood of nihilism. And cynical political masterminds believe that these people have to be seen to be celebrating what it is they are about to do.

I do not want to get into this whole business. Was the bombing of the King David Hotel by Jewish extremists in 1946 an act of terrorism or an act of guerrilla warfare? The muddying of the waters at the present time is creating a polarization between extremes that we have to break by saying the right things at the right time.

David Makovsky, The Washington Institute: Prince Hassan, I recall that your brother spoke in 1994 of the holy places of Jerusalem. He said, "Sovereignty belongs to God." I remember that Yitzhak Rabin, upon hearing that statement, replied, "This is the way to solve the problem of Jerusalem. There is the earthly Jerusalem and the celestial Jerusalem."

I subscribe to King Hussein's formulation, and I wonder if you feel that this should be the solution for Jerusalem today.

Prince Hassan: I referred to ecumenical pluralism, which is exactly in the spirit of my late brother's remarks. Sovereignty is God's when it comes to the participation of three concentric circles, the clerics on the ground in their three denominations. The sooner we are aware of that, the better. How much effect that realization will have on day-to-day political and administrative sovereignty, I do not know. But I firmly believe the crowning glory is that we share in the one God, and we must legitimate that sharing.

Barbi Weinberg, The Washington Institute: Jordan is unquestionably one of America's best friends in the Middle East. The United States has great concerns about Saddam Husayn and his destabilizing influence in the region and world. One concern has been what would follow Saddam, and that concern has served as a protection for him.

Do you think a constitutional monarchy would be a good solution for Iraq after Saddam? Perhaps you can comment about the possibility of a Hashemite restoration there. How would this affect Jordanian stability?

Prince Hassan: Obviously, the stability of Jordan is affected by her existing between "Iraq and a hard place."
(Laughter.)

As for the Hashemite contract and pluralism, well, that was the formula that Faisal I, my late great-uncle, presented in Iraq. I believe firmly in pluralism. But we will have to see how things play out. I do not want to jump out of the frying pan and into the fire quite yet. (Laughter.)

Thank you very much. ❖

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