

The Islamic State: Obama follows W's lead

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There is a residual anti- “Christian West” dimension to the “Muslim” narrative in many parts of the world, including among a great many Muslims enjoying the “freedoms” and social benefits guaranteed residents in Western “democratic” lands.

Many argue that the elemental roots of this “againstness” are endemic, woven into the very fiber of the religion itself. Many brilliant writers devote the full force of their genius to establishing this line of reasoning. I believe it would be wise for Muslims

engage this debate and make the case otherwise.

But there is much on the other hand to suggest that these anti “Christian West” impulses are quite unrelated to Islam, and are tied rather to geopolitical history both recent and ancient. This view recommends that anti-”Christian West” impulses found in “Muslim” sector narratives are not religious at all, but rather plain old secular, economic, military, geopolitical greed, betrayal, oppression, and abuse driven rage that gets draped in a sick and demented perversion of the religious genius that calls upon people to be compassionate, repentful, and merciful.

A “side-by-side” prism for analysis can help. For example, I am a Muslim, AND ALSO I happen to resent what I perceive to be the arrogance and militarism of the “Christian West” in my lands for as long as I can remember. Or I am a Christian, AND ALSO I hate it when people blow up mothers shopping for diapers claiming to do so in the name of Allah. This “side by side” heuristic is not a call for compartmentalized, schizophrenic mind games. The AND ALSO should integrate these twinned identities and commitments. I hate bombing mothers, BECAUSE I am Christian. I hate “the WEST” meddling in my lands BECAUSE I am Muslim.

It is AS Christians, and AS Muslims that we end up with points of view that tempt us away from the most elegant and peaceful parts of our own religion’s teachings. That is normal. But suddenly conflict becomes severe, and we find ourselves standing in the same room with people whose extremism, militancy and rabid ways of being in the world are not our own. In fact they are a horror, a shame, and an embarrassment. There are plenty of otherwise pleasant American “Christians” with mild, displeased generalized emotions against “all Muslims.” But would they stand proud upon hearing “Oh I see, you hold the views of the Westboro Baptist Church”? Likewise the world is full of Muslims with mild, displeased generalized emotions against the entire “West.” But again do these people nod happily upon hearing, “Oh I see, you hold the same views as al-Qaeda.”

We try to live with and sort out our natural rage and the intensity of emotions as our people are violated and slain. We try to blend proper degrees of righteousness, defense of “our own,” and defense for the weak and helpless, with a longing for peace, for ideals co-prosperity, and for rights and dignity for all. These efforts combine political outlooks to create opinion and eventually policy. At this moment we have ended up with a US President in error.

It is tragic indeed that President Obama has chosen to strut, chest out in complete lock step with his own favorite straw man, President Bush junior. The rhetoric and now the policy arising out of the Obama-Cameron weakness and impatience has resulted in policy that repeats precisely the original Iraq invasion mistake.

The key to recognizing this lies in grasping how the impact of the IS resembles in all ways the impact of the 9-11 attack on New York and Washington, D.C.

Every so often, the embodiment of widely held, resentment, hatred, and discontent reaches such extreme and abhorrent manifestations that the soft narrative of conflict and resentment can no longer hold. Hardened divisions melt, and the chance for solidarity arises. Such was the case when the US was bombed on September 11, 2001.

Prior to that attack, “hating” America was de rigeur. All poverty and suffering in the world, especially all poverty and suffering in the Middle East was America’s fault. In just the same way that the guy speeding by in his Jaguar is “a bastard.” This foolish way of seeing things is built sadly into a certain part of human nature. No amount of reasoning can help a fool see otherwise. But every so often something happens to crack the hardened, inherited, self-debilitating resentments. The guy in the Jaguar’s 11 year old son

drowns trying to save his little friend at camp. Suddenly he's not "a bastard" anymore, no matter what kind of car he drives.

That is just what happened in the weeks and months following 9-11. There was an unimaginably golden moment for the "Christian West" and "the Muslim world" to forge a deep bond and solidarity, transcending the resentments that arise from our tragic history. Everyone loved America and Americans in this moment. Muslims especially were anxious to be helpful to America because the perpetrators of 9-11 used the name of Islam in their heinous violence. In short the anti-"Christian" West narrative had suddenly become too ugly. It had gone too far. But instead of seizing this precious historical moment, President W (or whoever are the authors of constant war) invaded Iraq and set in motion the era of America's most precipitous moral decline, followed by grotesque and far-reaching global instability.

These "Islamic State" moments and theater of pure and vile barbarism give us in all ways the same opportunity as was offered and promptly blown by President W. The anti "West" narrative likewise has become too ugly, it has gone too far. The need to reclaim and clearly define Islam's peace is far more pressing in practically every quarter than the need to hate "the West." The evil of the IS is creating a chance for solidarity just as the 9-11 tragedy had.

The problem posed by the IS is far more profound for Syria, Iraq and the surrounding nations of the region. The vast array of "Islams" in the vicinity, from Turkey to Kurdistan, from Syria to Iraq to Iran all have a desperate stake in denying the IS any claim to Islam, and any enduring hold.

Why then is it for Obama's America and Cameron's England to charge in like Yosemite Sam and "save the day" by adding war, destruction, and killing in the region? The IS already is the target for a slew of armies and resistance forces. George Friedman of Stratfor found the perfect turn of phrase to describe America's military helplessness, "The United States cannot win the game of small mosaic tiles that is emerging in Syria and Iraq. An American intervention at this microscopic level can only fail."

America (and England) has every right to be active in efforts to destroy the IS. As Freedman says, "There is no reason not to bomb the Islamic State's forces and leaders. They certainly deserve it." But can we not learn from a mistake so clear, so destructive, and so recent at least once? The rhetoric and now policy of President Obama (together with the same repulsive chest-thumping from the UK) perfectly repeats the profoundly disruptive and destructive errors of President W when he had then lost the world's sympathies post 9-11. Shouldn't we think for a moment every now and then, and occasionally pass up on the chance to be dead wrong once in a while?