

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN - II alexis dolgorukii © October 2001

In the first of these essays I examined the nature of Fundamentalisms. Now in the rest of this series of essays, I want to clarify my own position further, and then to discuss the various fundamentalisms, and their goals and agendas, more fully. Most of this particular essay, however, is going to be devoted to the particular fundamentalism that gave rise to the events of September 11th 2001. But mostly I want to clarify my views on where it is that we find ourselves at this moment, and why.

First: let me say that to all of you who have read my other essays and works, I think it will be very clear that I am second to none in my fervor for personal liberty and individual freedom and independence. I strongly disagree with all fundamentalisms, and believe very strongly that they, and all religious phenomena, are intrinsically very harmful. My position regarding fundamentalism, fundamentalists, and all religion is akin to the old cliché “I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend, to the death, your right to say it”. However, I believe that fundamentalists and mainstream ‘believers’ have every right to believe anything they choose; but, I demand and insist that they grant me the same right. And that is where we ‘come a cropper’!

The major flaw with almost all religions, and most clearly with all fundamentalisms is their absolute refusal to believe what they believe *privately* and leave other people alone. The fundamentalists of this world tend not merely to be evangelical, but to be militantly and violently so.

Nothing proves this point more than the current phenomenon of Islamist fundamentalism. It is not just that they pretend to an Ühr Theology. That, as I cannot emphasize enough, is their right; but **what isn’t right** is their belief that it is necessary to force all other people to believe as they do and act upon that belief murderously! **Nothing will satisfy these people other than the complete conversion of all mankind to Islam**, and that not simply mainstream Islam but the kind of regressive and deeply perverted Pseudo-Islam of the Taliban and other Pan-Islamist Groups.

We have all recently heard or read of Imams and Mullahs and Islamic Scholars who claim that their scripture, the Koran, gives them the mandatory duty of Jihad, which they define as *armed* struggle, against all “infidels”. They state that the killing of Infidels is compulsory for all Muslims. Of course, anyone who doesn’t believe exactly as they do is an ‘infidel’.

Now it is true that “Jihad” translates as “struggle” but most scholars of Islam (and I refer to those within Islam) define that to mean the **inner struggle** which each individual Muslim must make in order to truly follow the path of Islam or “righteousness”.

To be perfectly fair, and I try to be so. There are, of course, many other Imams and

Mullahs and Scholars of Islamic Law, some of them of great prestige and importance, who are making very clear and strong statements refuting these extremists, but unfortunately, while some of them have immense prestige, they have no real authority, their views do not suit the Zeitgeist of the Muslim 'street' and so while they are theologically correct, it doesn't help one iota. The important thing is that **Islam is almost entirely decentralized, so much so that it could reasonably be called anarchic**. Anyone can set himself up as a cleric and there is no board of certification to regularize those positions. Though it is true that one is supposed to have 12 years of Koranic studies prior to being eligible to be named a Mullah. This rule is frequently not followed. Certainly the currently infamous Mullah Mohammad Omar doesn't meet those criteria.

As we have seen recently, apparently anyone who calls himself a Mullah, can declare a Fatwa (decree), but we also see that no one really has to obey these Fatwas unless they so choose. Normally, this is the kind of freedom of choice I approve of greatly, but experience clearly shows that where religion is concerned, this kind of anarchism is terribly destructive.

Perhaps if Islam weren't so decentralized it would be possible for the various Ulemas to correct the problem. But it isn't and it won't be. One of the things that has always fascinated me is the fact that the Sharia, or religious law, of the Muslims; clearly is one of the most rigidly authoritarian of such laws, yet the religion itself has no real power structure. I am talking primarily about majority or Sunni Muslims here, for the Shiites, or Iranian Muslims, there is a distinct and powerful hierarchy.

It would also help if the governments of Islamic Nations would give these reasonable theological statements the wide publicity they deserve, but they don't and won't. Why don't they do so? I think it's very clear that being what they are, they're afraid to do so.

The same phenomenon is present in non mainstream Protestant circles too, anyone can call himself a Minister and start his own Church and a great many extremists have done so. They too are at war with the 21st century. All fundamentalisms are engaged in a kind of war against all of us who welcomed the 21st century gladly! But with the Islamists it's become an actual war.

I have a question that has been bothering me for some time, both well before (in relation to the Palestine question and the Gulf War) and of course infinitely more intensely since the 11th of September. Our leaders have carefully emphasized that we are at war with the terrorists and NOT at war with Islam itself. This of course is absolutely true. But only from our point-of-view. I am less in favor of religion than most people, but I am not now, nor have I ever been, nor shall I ever be "at war" with any religion. I am engaged in an intellectual battle, that is undeniable, but not a war of destructive properties.

The question bothering me is this: While we are clearly not at war with or against Islam or, if you prefer the Muslim World; does the purity of our motives matter if, in fact, a goodly

segment of Islam; i.e. The Muslim World, if not most of it, **is at war with us? And it isn't simply a 'war of words'**.

It is important to keep in mind that the animus is directed at the United States primarily but that, I think, is because The U.S. is viewed as the concentrated essence of all western culture, and it is the Culture of the West and its historic rejection of Islam that lies at the bottom of the hatred. Though the Muslims tend to denounce the idea furiously, I believe that the difference in the quality of life in the West is one of the primary causes of the hatred.

What do I mean by "quality of life"? I think the first item we need to discuss is freedom. The cultures of the west have slowly but steadily been approaching the libertarian ideal of truly democratic forms. It is very hard to find even vestiges of Democracy in the Muslim world. All three of the mainstream Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions are anti-democratic but in the 21st century Islam is the most obviously so. These three religions view "God" as an autocrat, autocracy and democracy are dichotomous! It is impossible to find a truly democratic form of government in the Muslim world. There are a few pretenses, but no reality.

Unfortunately, one of the 'reasons' given for hatred of the united States within the Muslim World is the notion, partly but not entirely true, that the United States has supported despotisms. With one single exception, there is nothing in the Muslim World to support but despotisms of one kind or another, some few of them benign, others less so, some not at all benign. The problem here has its roots in the late and totally un lamented "Cold War" a period in which the United States Government acted on the premise that "The enemy of My Enemy is my friend", today we're paying a bitter price for that attitude. Unfortunately too, some of the regimes were supported to maintain access to the vast amounts of petroleum they controlled. Here is one instance at least in which the animus against the United States is not without merit.

If we step back a look at the nations that comprise the Islamic World we see that a few of them claim to possess Democratic functions, but if we seriously look at their realities we see that their 'elected' leaders are despots and only semantically democratic. Hosni Mubarak of Egypt is a perfect example of this phenomenon. On the other hand, some of the kingdoms in the Arab world have rulers who are truly seeking to democratize their countries (Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait and Dubai) but these rulers face terrible opposition from the Islamists in their nations. Turkey is the nearest thing to a democracy in the Muslim world. Since Mustapha Kemal (Ataturk) destroyed the Sultans , Turkey has been determinedly secular and very anxious to be democratic. But in the course of their desire for secularism they have been forced to be terribly autocratic. Turkey is a Democracy that exists within the protective aura of a Military Protectorate. The Turkish military has been terribly draconian in trying to defend Turkish Secularism from religious fanatics They know that if they drop their guard for an instant, it will be all over.

The Emir of Kuwait is trying diligently to give his country a United States style constitution but he is being thwarted by the conservative clergy and their followers because he is trying to make women even relatively equal citizens.

At the present time the conservative Islamic clergy is terribly active in stirring up Muslim public opinion against the United States and its allies, though it might be far more accurate to say that they are stirring up implacable hatred against both the culture of the West and any manifestation of secularism or modernism in the Islamic areas.

Now, it is important to note that there are many Muslims who are desperately trying to find some more contemporary paradigm for their religion which will preserve its essence in a form more harmonious with the 21st century. But these people are in every bit as much actual danger as the United States of America if not more immediate danger as they are in closer reach. The problem both they and we face is that it seems that Islam just doesn't seem to be compatible with the 21st century. At least not as presently constituted. That is why the ultra-conservative Islamists all seem to want to return to the period when Islam began.

We see this clearly demonstrated in Taliban controlled Afghanistan. In Iran, the Conservative Mullahs would like to attain the same level but are constrained by the fact that the Public in that country are not willing to go down that road, and the Mullahs are terrified that the public will do to them what it did to the Shah who was one of those trying so hard to make Islam relevant to the 21st century, although his methods left a lot to be desired. While Islam isn't compatible with the 21st century, neither is despotism..

We can see the phenomenon demonstrated all over the Muslim World. In Indonesia there have been terrible and murderous riots by Muslims against Christians, only recently in Pakistan there was a massacre in a Christian (Roman Catholic) Church perpetrated by Islamist extremists. In Algeria, both the Islamists and the secularist but despotic Government have perpetrated atrocities.

The primary excuse for their hatred of America is its support of Israel, but this is only an excuse not a reason.

I want to take a moment or two to talk about the seemingly eternal Palestinian-Israeli Problem because, as long as it is being used as an excuse for the actions of the terrorists, it's a very important factor that we need to consider.

When, in 1948, The United Nations agreed to partition Palestine into a Jewish State and a Palestinian State, President Truman was very uneasy about it, foreseeing trouble ahead. Winston Churchill was even more uncomfortable predicting much bloodshed ahead. Of course he has been proven right. The creation of the Jewish State only occurred because the Jewish People, after the horrible experience of the Holocaust, and because of their long held traditions regarding a "return to their original homeland", had demanded, on biblical rather than historical grounds, that piece of land and no other. In fact, other places

had been offered to the Zionist leadership (such as Mauritania) but had been adamantly refused.

Unfortunately, there had always been a tradition of Jew Hatred in the nations of Europe and much of their reaction to the Nazis Racial policies were based at least subliminally in that hatred. Even more unfortunately, that undercurrent of hatred of the Jews is far from extinguished in Europe and many of their present reactions to The State of Israel is based in it though much euphemized. In any case, in 1948, the majority of nations in the United Nations at the time were all feeling guilty, and quite deservedly so, in that they had, to a very large degree, through if nothing else their passive acquiescence, permitted the holocaust to occur; and so they assuaged their guilt by abrogating one people's rights to palliate the pain of another people.

Now, I believe that "two wrongs do not make a right" and I certainly agree with Churchill that it has caused much trouble. However, the State of Israel is an accomplished fact, the Palestinians, through their representatives apparently agreed to the partition, but changed their minds almost instantly.

I do not believe, even for one moment, that the Jewish people who became the Israelis had any intention whatsoever of not living peacefully and creatively within their enclave. Based upon their record through the ages of the Diaspora, the Jewish people are not violent. Except for that one rare event, the Warsaw Uprising; the Jews went far too peaceably to their deaths. But in 1948 the worm, as it were, turned!

Almost instantly several Arab armies, inspired by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem (among others), and not so secretly aided and abetted by the British, attacked the new State of Israel. But surprisingly, the poor 'raggle taggle" Israeli armies, composed mostly of people only recently emigrated, only recently liberated from concentration camps, fought the invaders and astonishingly.. won. From that day to this the Arabs have not accepted the existence of the State of Israel. From that day to this, the Israelis have taught themselves how to be among the most superb fighters in the world. Did they have any choice? Not really, the 1948 war was only the first in a series of Arab launched attacks on the Jewish State. In each of these attacks the Arab armies were repulsed with great losses.

Unfortunately, the Israeli policies and behavior toward the Palestinians since that time has been far less than desirable. Understandable? Yes. Wise? No! There's an old saying that: "We become what we hate", and in at least some of their policies the Israelis very much resemble the people they hate most.

It cannot be denied that the situation in Palestine has contributed to the situation in which we find ourselves. But what can we possibly do to change it? Israel, for all it's faults, and they are many, is still the only nearly Democratic State in that part of the world. I say "Nearly Democratic" because there is an element of theocracy present in the Israeli Government that denies to the majority of Israel's citizens, who are principally secular, their full rights and liberties. Nonetheless, their Knesset is a real hot bed of true Democracy and it cannot be denied that their elections are scrupulously fair. But like all places with

proportional representation it is not really democracy.

America claims to have the duty of fostering Democracy all over the world, how then can we not support a truly Democratic State when most of its opponents are despotic. The American People have almost always 'rooted for the under dog' and despite its very high quality military, Israel is clearly the Under Dog in the Middle East.

The United States of America supports Israel, because it is a democratic nation. The American people, by and large, and not simply Jewish Americans, support Israel, and their government must follow suit. The Muslim world, having very little real experience of real democracy does not comprehend that at all. Most Americans feel sorry for the plight of the Palestinians, but most Americans also do not approve either of the methodology which the Palestinians have chosen to further their cause or of the obvious goal of the Palestinians in causing the total extinction of the Jewish State and the expulsion of such Jews who are lucky enough to survive. I strongly believe that the events of September 11th 2001 hurt the Palestinians more than anyone else.

Regarding the "Palestine Problem"; I think the only solution possible in this otherwise insoluble problem is that the parties concerned have to accept the situation, make the changes absolutely needed, and try to live with it as best they can. The alternative is, I hope, unthinkable.

Yet another excuse being given for the September 11th catastrophe, is that the perpetrators hate America for its power and wealth. This may be somewhat true, as envy is one of the worst human traits. However, envy wasn't the cause of these attacks. To be very blunt, I have to ask; if all Muslims hate America for its vast wealth, why do so very many of them come here to share in it?

I see many accusations that America is arrogant. Brash? Yes. Thoughtless? Yes, usually quite thoughtless. But not arrogant. I personally find those accusations totally without merit.. Especially when they come from places like England, whose late Empire could give anyone lessons in arrogance.

The United States is the richest and most militarily powerful nation in the history of the world. It is also the most entirely diffident in the use of those assets. In fact, if one looks at history since the foundation of the United States, the people of that country and their governments have always been terribly nervous about being considered arrogant. Mostly because Americans, at least most of them, are allergic to arrogance.

In fact, The United States, considering its position as what the French have taken to calling "The Hyper power" is unusually abashed as to exercising that immense power. I think that even our most strident critics would be hard put to accuse the United States of wanting external territorial expansion.

Let me deal for a moment with past *internal expansion* by which I mean the kind of

territorial acquisition that took place during the “manifest destiny” epoch. There is, I believe, a tremendous difference between the expansion of settlement into contiguous territory an immense amount of which was obtained by purchase. Great Britain conquered an empire, in the United States the phenomenon was really ‘nation building’. It is also long since over and done with. Today, there is not an iota of territorial imperialism in the policy of the United States of America.

The most frequent accusation is “cultural imperialism”. Now, it is true that many elements of American culture are establishing themselves all over the planet. **It’s not imperialism it’s assimilation.** But even this is not due to any conscious cultural imperialism. Can there really be such a thing as unconscious imperialism? I really think not. The spread of American style and culture is unconscious true, but it is not Imperialism! Blue jeans and Big Macs are a most unusual method of expansionism. Michael Jackson is wildly popular among mindless kids all over the world. Is this some plot by the CIA? You and I both know it isn’t. He’s popular, just as blue jeans are popular, because the youth of this world think it’s ‘cool’.

Thanks to Steve Jobs and Bill Gates and their like, the United States is the cyber center of the world. Our computer know how has become the standard for the whole planet and because that is so, the English Language (American version) is now ubiquitous just as the computer and the Internet is ubiquitous.

The main flaw that America and it’s citizens have is that they are so smug (to some degree rightfully so) about their country, that they have, at least until lately, been utterly ignorant as to the rest of the world. There’s a flavor in the American character that seems to feel that, as all of our ancestors came here to get away from the places our families originated to seek better lives, then why care about the places they rejected? Needless to say, this is a mistake. But I think it’s an understandable mistake, and it certainly shouldn’t drive people to murder.

But these things are not at all the things that motivate El Qaeda! The true reason for their words and actions is hatred of our lifestyle and culture **for not being Islamist.** When I said that the goal of the Islamist is a universal Islamic Empire, I really meant it. They want to re-establish the Caliphate, only on a global scale.

This phenomenon is no different from its reverse when in the tenth century European fanatics attacked the Islamic World in what was called “The Crusades” well this is it’s ‘pay back’. But, the west cannot accept it as a fair payback because in the interim the west has changed completely for the better while the Islam of the tenth century has regressed and changed for the worse. In the tenth century the Islamic World was infinitely more civil than the west, but something in it’s nature lead to stagnation and regression. I believe that to be inherent in both the despotism intrinsic to the area and to the religion which fostered that despotism. There’s another inherent factor and that is extreme ignorance in the general public. This ignorance was fostered by both the clergy and the rulers as a method of maintaining control over the public.

The medieval church and rulers did the same thing in Europe but were thwarted by the Renaissance and reformation. There has been neither a renaissance nor reformation in the Islamic world. There definitely needs to be such a thing. But from whence can it come? The Renaissance was the intrinsic cause of the Reformation and the Renaissance was the product of the re-birth of classical Greek Philosophy and Science in the World of Roman Catholicism. That re-birth made the reformation unavoidable. But from what source can an Islamic reformation come? Actually, probably the same source. For many centuries the Islamic Scholars were not simply the primary mathematicians, chemists and astronomers in the world but far more importantly (to me at least) the primary source of commentaries on Greek thought, in fact, the Scholars of Islam were the principle saviors of Greek thought. (There's a listing of these people in my forthcoming book "The Keltic Knot".) So it seems to me that the people within Islam who are seeking to reconcile Islam with the 21st century need only turn to their own past to find impeccable sources to enable Islam to comfortably fit into the 21st century. BUT, to gain that goal, they must first enable the masses within those countries to have educations far beyond those available at the Madrassas. Life within the Muslim world will never improve for all the people until they are sufficiently educated to understand both the past and the present. For this to occur the ruling classes must understand the absolute necessity for the education of their citizens. It will eventually mean their replacement with Democratic forms, but if they don't permit the education of their people, they will be replaced by fanatics who will make life infinitely worse for the people. There's a very important difference though, a Democratic replacement of government will be peaceful, the fanatics will murder the power structure, so it's really a matter of self preservation.

If that is true, and I believe it is, how can we ameliorate the situation? What can we do that is not barbaric. I'd prefer to leave the barbarisms to the other side. These are questions which we must answer because not answering them is so dangerous I don't want to really contemplate the results.

All fundamentalisms are fundamentally dangerous to the rights of people who don't share their beliefs. On the 11th of September, in New York City the Islamists showed their respect for the lives and property of those who disagree with them, and now they are paying an awesome price. It is but the latest in an age's long series of wars caused by religion. But we in the west are paying an awesome price too, we have lost our sense of security.

Is this war the right thing to do? Bearing in mind that war is never the best thing to do, in this particular instance, war is the **only** thing open to us to do. There are those who claim we should have negotiated. But about what? Israel and the Palestinians have things to negotiate. But with the Islamists what possible thing is there to negotiate about? Is it possible to negotiate with those who deeply believe your culture, your way of life is abominable? Is it possible to negotiate with those whose demand is that you become like them and give up everything that makes your life and individuality what it is???? It's very nice to be reasonable and negotiate, but sometimes, the differences are so intrinsic that no commonality is possible. The Jews could no more have negotiated with Hitler than we can

negotiate with Osama Bin Laden!

One person's rights must always be circumscribed by the equal rights of others. Those, like the Islamists, who will not permit another person to have views that differ from their own, do not have the right to that position.

Unfortunately I do not believe this present war with the Taliban and Al-Qa'ida can be limited to those parameters. But we will have to "keep at it" until those who would deny us our rights to believe or not to believe, have given up both their efforts and their goals permanently.

As to terrorism, each act must be revenged, in spades! This is no place to turn the other cheek. This is not an area in which the victims can be "reasonable". The most important concept extant that must be inculcated universally is this:

Freedom **of** Religion is an important right, but so is freedom **from** religion!