

The Muslim World: An Unbiased Perspective

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Adapted from Jürgen Tödenhöfer¹, “Ten Theses,” in *Why do you kill, Zaid?*

Abstract

The last two hundred years have seen Muslims at the receiving end of an oppressive form of colonialism. They have been misrepresented and often vilified in the popular media. The following adaptation of Jürgen Tödenhöfer’s “Ten Theses,” in his book *Why do you kill, Zaid?* is an attempt to portray the world from the viewpoint of a Muslim. In it, the author enumerates ten theses, or discussion points, with the hope of challenging some of the common assumptions regarding Muslims, such as the link between Islam and “terrorism”. He concludes by calling Western governments to focus more on the art of statesmanship and not the art of war in divising their foreign policy. It is hoped that these ten theses will open a window onto another way of seeing the Muslim world.

Keywords: Muslim world, colonialism, Islam and the West, U.S.–Iran relations, Iraq war, terrorism, tolerance in Islam, U.S. foreign policy.

Thesis 1

Thesis 1: The West is much more violent than the Muslim world. Millions of Arab civilians have been killed since colonialism began.

The great French historian and politician Alexis de Tocqueville was a passionate champion of the freedom of the individual...In his major work *Democracy in America*, published in 1835, Tocqueville made a remark that characterized the era: “If we reasoned from what passes in the world, we should almost say that the European is to the other races of mankind, what man is to the lower animals: he

makes them subservient to his use, and when he cannot subdue, he destroys them.” For the liberal thinker there was “consequently no reason to treat Muslim subjects as if they were equal to us.” And that is precisely how the West has treated the Muslim world for the past two hundred years...The strategy that the 19th-century colonial rulers adopted to break resistance to their “civilizing mission” was to “ruin, hunt, terrorize” (Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison). In Algeria entire tribes that had sought refuge in caves were “smoked out” (“enfumades”). Napoleon III, nonetheless, saw the hand of God at work: “France is the mistress of Algeria, because that is what God wanted.”

The Algerians saw it differently. They had to pay a very high price for their freedom. In the war of independence from 1954 until 1962, 8,000 Algerian villages were destroyed with napalm bombs by the French air force. The Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) also committed gruesome acts of terror, as Albert Camus rightly pointed out. But in terms of numbers, there is no comparison between those acts and the violent deeds committed by the colonialists. During their 130-year civilizing mission they killed well over two million Algerians, according to Algerian sources. French estimates say more than one million Algerians and 100,000 French nationals were killed. The Iraqis, colonized by Britain, did not fare much better. When they rose up against British oppression in 1920, Winston Churchill accused them of “ingratitude” and used chemical weapons against them – “with excellent moral effect,” as he noted...During the Kabyle rebellions in Morocco the Spaniards also used chemical weapons with horrible effect here too.

The model for the treatment of the Arabs was the strategy adopted to wipe out the indigenous peoples of America. The mad ideas about racial and cultural superiority prevalent at the time knew no bounds. Gustave Le Bon, founder of mass psychology and opponent of the “superstition of equality,” divided mankind into four classes: the native Australian and American peoples he termed “primitive races,” “Negroes” as “inferior,” Arabs and Chinese as “intermediate” and the Indo-Europeans as a “superior race.” Since the Second World War as well, the West has often treated the Arabs as subhuman beings on a “level with the higher apes” (Jean-Paul Sartre).

This is true of the wars against the colonial powers, interventions to secure supplies of raw materials, for the question of Palestine and for the sanctions against Iraq that were pushed through by the United States and Britain. According to UNICEF, these punitive measures, which the Vatican called “perverse,” caused the deaths of more than 1.5 million civilians, including half a million children...A study conducted by independent American and Iraqi physicians, and published in the medical journal *The Lancet*, estimates that more than 600,000 Iraqis had met with violent deaths by June 2006 as a result of the war and the chaos caused by occupation forces. It says 31 percent were killed by U.S.-led coalition forces, and 24 percent as a result of sectarian violence and suicide attacks...

A study by the independent British research institute, ORB, in autumn 2007, estimates that more than one million Iraqis have been killed and around the same number injured. It reports that in Baghdad almost one in two households has lost a family member. According to Human Rights Watch, Saddam

Hussein was responsible for the death of 290,000 Iraqi civilians in the course of his 23-year rule.

Since fall 2007, the number of fatalities has declined in Iraq. But according to experts' conservative estimates, more than 6,000 Iraqi civilians are still dying each month in the chaos of the war...

Over the past two hundred years, no Muslim state has ever attacked the West. The European superpowers and the United States have always been the aggressors and not those under attack. Since the beginning of the colonial era, millions of Arab civilians have been killed. The West is clearly at the top of the league when it comes to killing, by a ratio of more than ten to one. The current debate about the Muslim world's alleged propensity to violence is a mockery of historical facts. The West was and is much more violent than the Muslim world. The problem of our era is not the violence of Muslims but the violence of some Western countries.

To understand Muslim extremism, one has to try to see the world, at least for a moment, from the point of view of a Muslim. Our horizon is not the end of the world. A young Muslim, who follows the news on television, sees day after day how Muslim women, children and men are killed by Western weapons, Western allies and Western soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon, Somalia and elsewhere.

It is cynical of great Western thinkers to frown their brows and ponder the decline and fall of Arab civilization, which once was "militarily, economically and culturally far superior" (Hans Magnus Enzensberger). The West played a major part in making that happen. It plundered and ravaged the colonies and then withdrew. In 1830, when the colonization of Algeria began, that country had a literacy rate of 40 percent, higher than that of France or England. In 1962, when the French occupying forces pulled out, it was under 20 percent. Colonialism stole from the Arab world more than a century of development. Seventeen years after the French conquest of Algeria, Tocqueville noted with resignation: "The lights have been extinguished... We have made Muslim society much more miserable, disorganized, ignorant and barbaric."

Thesis 2

Thesis 2: Western oppression supports the growth of Muslim extremism.

Western colonialism raged in almost all parts of the world. But in the oil-rich countries of the Mideast it never stopped. That sets this region apart from other regions in the world, and makes it a breeding ground for terrorism.

Terrorism is not a Muslim problem but a global one. It has always existed and has been used by all kinds of movements. Alongside Arab terrorists who murdered Jewish settlers, there were also "Zionist terrorist organizations" such as Irgun, led by Menachem Begin, and the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, led by Itzhak Shamir, who described themselves as terrorists. They fought with terrorist tactics – also against civilians – against the British and the Arabs for a free Israel.

In the current debate on terrorism, it is often said: “Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims.” That is simply wrong. Until September 11, 2001, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka were indisputably considered the world’s deadliest terrorist organization. They murdered thousands of innocent civilians. They professionalized and perfected suicide terrorism, and were copied down to the last detail by others around the world, especially in the Mideast. They continue to bomb and murder even today. They are Hindus, not Muslims. And they do not kill Westerners. That is why their attacks are not reported in depth. Of the 48 organizations classified as terrorist by the European Union in 2006, 36 have nothing to do with Islam. These “anti-imperialist,” “anti-capitalist,” “anti-Indian,” or “anti-Singhalese” terrorist groups are responsible for the deaths of countless civilians in Latin America, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the West, they do not figure in public awareness because they do not kill people from our cultural sphere.

After the official end of colonial rule, the colonial powers were often replaced by financially and militarily dependent puppet regimes, pawns in the geopolitical game of Western superpowers.

Whoever did not play along were advised that a people only have a right to self-determination as long as it did not infringe Western interests. Freedom never meant freedom from us. One might call this “lex Mossadeq” in memory of the Iranian prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, who was democratically elected in 1951 and deposed two years later by the CIA and the British.

Whoever fails to act in accordance with this law is ousted in a putsch or subjected to a concerted media campaign and branded a “rogue”. Using the media to create “villains” is a specialty of Western foreign policy. As the example of Gaddafi shows, the title of ‘rogue’ can be revoked at any moment.

Even Saddam Hussein, a “partner” who was renamed a “rogue,” might still be doing as he pleases, even today, had he remained a partner of the United States. The massacre of Dujail, in which 148 people died and for which he was executed, occurred 26 years ago in 1982. At the time, Saddam was, for the United States, an important player in the Mideast and waged war with Western support against Khomeini’s Iran. Donald Rumsfeld visited Saddam in 1983, as special envoy of the U.S. president, even though he had been thoroughly informed about Dujail. Saddam was, after all, our anti-Islamist comrade-in-arms; he was supplied by Germany with components for chemical weapons, by France with fighter jets, and by the United States with satellite data on Iranian positions. In the Mideast, the West never showed any interest in human rights or democracy; it was and is fighting for oil.

Cynical dehumanization in the name of human rights, which the bloody images from Iraq, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries document daily, has left a deep and painful mark on the Muslims’ cultural memory. Samuel Huntington was right on at least one point: “The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion, but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do.” How can the Muslim world believe in our values of human dignity and the rule of law and democracy if all it sees is the way we oppress, humiliate and exploit it? Is it really surprising that extremists gain more and more support? Or that some people

eventually hit back when their families are again and again mowed down by our machinery of destruction? Nobody is born a terrorist.

Despite all this, the kindness and hospitality still shown to Western visitors in oriental countries is overwhelming. One can visit religious sites with no problem, not only in secular Syria, but also in theocratic Iran – churches, synagogues and mosques. Most Muslims feel more respect towards Judaism and Christianity than we do...

The Muslim world is a far cry from the image depicted in the Western media. Western television broadcasters show a manufactured, distorted image of mobs raging against the West. In September 2001, after the attacks on the World Trade Center, many television stations showed Palestinian children rejoicing. But the footage had been staged. According to reports in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the children had been given sweets so that they would rejoice in front of the cameras. “Spontaneous” anti-Western demonstrations in the Arab world usually take place only when they are carefully organized and staged in cooperation with Western broadcasters. As soon as the cameras are turned off, the “TV demonstrators” are given a little *baksheesh* and are taken back home in the same trucks that brought them. In contrast to the West, xenophobia is unknown in the Muslim world. We may be more economically and technologically advanced than these countries – but not in human terms. When it comes to kindness and love of one’s neighbor, and a sense of family and hospitality, we could learn a lot from the Muslims.

This cordiality can, as in the case of Iraq, turn into raging anger when the West yet again scornfully tramples upon the rights of the Muslims. Jean-Paul Sartre described this self-destructive despair during the Algerians’ war of liberation in 1961: “If this suppressed fury fails to find an outlet, it turns in a vacuum and devastates the oppressed creatures themselves. In order to liberate themselves they even massacre each other. The different tribes fight between themselves since they cannot face the real enemy – and you can count on colonial policy to keep up their rivalries; [...] the torrent of violence sweeps away all barriers...It is the moment of the boomerang; it is the third phase of violence; it comes back on us, it strikes us, and as before, we fail to realize that it is our own violence.”

The “coalition of the willing” has taken from the Iraqis everything that might have given them the opportunity to be as “noble, helpful and good” as we like to perceive ourselves. It has destroyed all their state structures and has trampled upon their dignity and pride. It has systematically incited the Iraqis to turn on each other. It is so hypocritical of the West to then be “amazed” that the strategy really works and that the despair of the Iraqis sometimes turns into self-destruction. It is absurd to claim that “something like that could never happen here” – a claim often uttered with an undertone of racist disgust. Just consider how a power outage in New York in 1977 and a hurricane in New Orleans in 2005 were enough to trigger widespread looting, murder and mayhem. *Homo homini lupus* – “Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe” (Thomas Hobbes). This is true, not only of Muslims, but of Jews and Christians as well.

Thesis 3

Thesis 3: Terrorists in Islamic disguise are murderers; but the same holds true for those disguised as Christians who wage wars of aggression in contravention of international law.

The attacks carried out since the mid-nineties by Arab terrorists on Western facilities are in their view a response to the never-ending “organized robbery and murder” on the part of the West. The attacks, including those on the World Trade Center have killed more than 5,000 Western civilians. They are morally completely unacceptable. The end never justifies the means. That is why the attacks on the World Trade Center were condemned by all Muslim governments: by Syria and Iran and even by Hizbollah and Hamas. In many Muslim countries, distraught people laid flowers in front of the U.S. embassy. Terrorists who kill innocent people are not freedom fighters, resistance fighters, holy warriors or martyrs. They are murderers.

But are not those who mastermind illegal wars of aggression also terrorists and murderers – even murderers of their own soldiers? If one talks about the 5,000 Westerners murdered by Al-Qaeda, must one not also talk about the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians who have been killed in George W. Bush’s illegal war? Do not the legal yardsticks we apply to Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic also apply to Western heads of governments? Why do Western elites not even dare to ask whether George W. Bush and Tony Blair should be brought before an international criminal court because of a war in Iraq that was based on lies?

In the opinion of the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal, “To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime: it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within it the accumulated evil of all crimes of war.” The chief U.S. prosecutor Robert H. Jackson stated: “We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants today constitutes the record on which history will judge us tomorrow.”

“Wars of aggression are the terrorism of the rich,” as Peter Ustinov put it. For an Iraqi child it makes no difference whether he is blown apart by an “Islamic” suicide bomber or a “Christian” bomb. For this child, George W. Bush and Tony Blair are just as much terrorists as Bin Laden is for us.

The high number of civilian victims of military operations is often excused with the argument that such “collateral damage” is not intentional. That is disingenuous – at least with respect to aerial attacks – because the death of civilians is almost always tacitly accepted in such cases. However, in advanced legal systems “tacit acceptance” means ‘intent.’ Aerial bombardment is, moreover, rarely effective. Special-forces operations on the ground can usually achieve much more. But then one would have to accept a greater number of fatalities within one’s own ranks. And that could cost votes. So, instead, one drops cluster bombs and tacitly accepts the death of civilians. Dropping cluster bombs from the safety of a pilot’s cockpit is the most cowardly form of terrorism on the part of the powerful. The myth of the honorable war is mankind’s greatest lie. “Dulce bellum inexpertis” – War is sweet to those who have not

experienced it (Erasmus of Rotterdam).

Armed resistance to wars and occupation that are illegal under international law is nonetheless only legitimate if it is conducted in accordance with the humanitarian law that applies in armed conflicts. Suicide attacks against civilians who have different beliefs, such as we see every day in Iraq and elsewhere, are acts of terrorism. They have nothing to do with legitimate resistance. The most spectacular attacks on civilians in Iraq are, however, for the most part directed from outside the country. According to a statement issued on July 11, 2007, by the spokesman for the multi-national forces in Iraq, General Kevin Bergner, between 80 and 90 percent of the suicide bombers come from abroad.

One must clearly distinguish between this almost entirely foreign terrorism directed against civilians, and the legitimate multi-confessional Iraqi resistance to foreign occupation. Nobody can take away from the Iraqis' their right to resist. It is a timeless inviolable right of all peoples. The great majority of the Iraqi people support the resistance movement, which explicitly rejects attacks on civilians. The resistance not only involves Sunni and Shia Muslims, but Christians as well. The number of Christian resistance fighters in Iraq is greater than the number of Al-Qaeda fighters. Women also fight in the multi-confessional Iraqi resistance. Is that really surprising? What would we do if there were enemy tanks on our streets? Are only those resistance fighters who are on our side "freedom fighters" and the rest "terrorists"? . . .

Of course, non-violent resistance in the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, would be preferable to violent resistance, even when it is legitimate. In the religious war between the city states of Mecca and Medina, Muhammad's most fascinating victory came when, to the amazement of his enemies in Mecca, he and his followers gathered, unarmed, outside the gates of Mecca and demanded access to the holy sites. Passive resistance born of the power of faith would also make the Iraqi resistance more credible. But for centuries have we not shown the world that only brute force guarantees success?

Thesis 4

Thesis 4: Muslims were and are at least as tolerant as Jews and Christians. They have made a major contribution to Western civilization.

It was not Muslims who invented "holy war", joined Crusades under the rallying cry "Deus lo vult" – God wills it (Urban II) and in the process massacred more than four million Muslims and Jews. It was not Muslims who waded "ankle-deep in blood" in Jerusalem before they began "rejoicing and weeping from excess of happiness ... came to worship and give thanks at the sepulcher of our savior Jesus," as a contemporary reported. Islam never associates the word "holy" with war. Jihad means "exertion, a struggle on the pathways of God" (Hans Küng), an effort that can involve defensive war. Nowhere in the Qur'an does jihad mean "holy war." Wars are never "holy", only peace is holy. "Holy war" is unfortunately a concept from the Old Testament (see Jeremiah 51/27).

Nor was it Muslims who massacred up to 50 million people in the name of colonizing Africa and Asia. It was not Muslims who instigated the First and Second World Wars, in which almost 70 million people perished. And it was not Muslims, but we Germans, who ignominiously murdered six million Jews – fellow citizens, friends and neighbors – in an industrially organized breach of civilization. No other culture has been more violent and bloody over the past centuries as Western civilization. When have so-called “Christian” politicians ever honored Christianity, this wonderful religion of love?

Nobody can deny that the territorial expansion of the Muslim dynasties between the 7th and the 17th centuries – like that of the European powers over the same period – was conducted mainly with the sword. On the Muslim side as well, there were inexcusable massacres. Muslim conquerors did not, however, as a rule, attempt to force Christians or Jews to accept Islam, expel them, or exterminate them. When Saladin won back Jerusalem after a hard-fought battle in 1187, he made a point of not exacting revenge and let the Christians go free in exchange for a ransom. He waived the ransom for poor Christians. Tolerance towards Christians and Jews was the law and the pride of Muslim civilization. Under Muslim rule entire peoples remained Christian or Jewish, while the “Christian” Inquisition burned those who held different beliefs at the stake.

When the Muslim general, Tariq ibn Ziyad, landed on the Iberian Peninsula in 711, a period of cultural and scientific flowering began, which was to last for more than seven centuries and contribute enormously to Western civilization. In the most modern state in Europe the coexistence of Muslims, Jews and Christians proved to be an unparalleled success. The Jews fared much better under Muslim rule than under “Christian” hegemony. It was only when the “Christian” King Ferdinand of Aragon completed the Reconquista in 1492 by taking Granada, the last Muslim bastion in Spain that the merciless expulsion of the Jews began. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were forced to leave the country. For centuries, the Jews had been respected, held high office, and lived together in harmony with their Muslim contemporaries. Most fled to Muslim countries around the Mediterranean. The coexistence of Christians, Jews and Muslims in Muslim countries only became troubled with the advent of colonialism and nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Armenian tragedy in Turkey was a result of nationalist, not religious intolerance.

Muslims in the enlightened Andalusian era not only salvaged for us the sunken treasures of Greek and Roman culture and philosophy, they also created new sciences. They pioneered experimental optics, invented the compass, discovered the paths of the planets and crucial elements of modern medicine and pharmacy. Even if we do not want to believe it: We live in a culture that was formed by Judaism, Christianity AND Islam.

Thesis 5

Thesis 5: Love of God and love of one’s neighbor are the central commandments, not only in the Bible, but also in the Qur’an.

A comparison of the texts shows that the Qur'an is at least as tolerant as the Old and New Testaments. God and his prophets do, to be sure, sometimes express themselves in very martial tones in all three scriptures. In the Old Testament Book of Numbers 31/7, 15, 17, it is written: "They did battle against Midian, as the Lord had commanded Moses, and killed every male. ... Moses said to them, 'Have you allowed all the women to live? ... Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him'."

In the New Testament, Jesus is quoted in Matthew 10/34 as having said: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." In his Table Talk, the powerfully eloquent Protestant Martin Luther said: "One may give short shrift to heretics. While they perish at the stake, the faithful should destroy the evil by the root and bathe their hands in the blood of the bishops and the pope."

Surah an-Nisa' of the Qur'an is no less violent:

"They but wish that ye should reject Faith, as they do... Take...not friends from their ranks until they flee in the way of God (from what is forbidden). But if they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them." (4:89).

Extremists and preachers of hate in the East and West almost always ignore the historical context of these passages. Moses, Jesus and Muhammad were not born in a historical vacuum but into a belligerent world. At first glance, the Old Testament, especially in its historical passages, might seem to be the bloodiest of the three holy books – much bloodier than the Qur'an. But anybody who has studied the Old Testament knows that its central commandment – apart from the commandment to love God and justice – is: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19/18). For Christians too, love of one's neighbor and justice are the most important commandments after the love of God (Matthew 5/6, 5/10).

The Qur'an tells Muslims to:

"Do good ... to neighbors who are near, or neighbors who are strangers" (4:36).

The Qur'an calls for "more humanity and more justice" (Hans Küng). The main problem with the Western debate about the Qur'an is that everybody talks about it but hardly anybody has read it. The bellicose passages in the Qur'an have to do with "the religious wars of the period between Mecca and Medina and therefore only (have to do with) the people of Mecca and Medina of the period," as the Egyptian minister of religious affairs, Mahmoud Zakzouk, has correctly pointed out.

In Surah Al-'Akabut it is written: ***"Our God and your God is one" (29:46)***, even though God is called Jehovah in Hebrew and Allah in Arabic – by Arab Christians as well. Is it not outrageous blasphemy when Jews, Christians or Muslims misuse the Bible and the Qur'an as a weapon, in order to hammer home their particular view of this one God?

Terrorism is never religious. To be a terrorist is to adopt the methods of the devil; no terrorist may invoke God. There is no “Islamic” terrorism, just as the terrorism of the IRA in Northern Ireland was never “Christian” or “Catholic.” There is merely terrorism that bears an Islamic mask, and it does not lead to paradise, but to hell, as do wars of aggression that bear a Christian or democratic mask. The claim that violence is, above all, a religious problem is an atheist myth. People committed murder before religion existed and have continued to do so ever since. The mass murder of the National Socialists and of the Soviet and Chinese Communists are the sad proof that man is the cruelest creature – with and without religion...

Thesis 6

Thesis 6: Western policies towards the Muslim world suffer from a shocking ignorance of even the simplest facts.

One of the favorite sayings of bar-room strategists is: “Whoever demands the right to hear the call of the muezzin in our cities should also demand the right to hear the sound of church bells in Tehran.” The reality, however, is that in Tehran the bells ring in 34 churches and that Christian children receive instruction in their own religion. There are seven synagogues in Tehran, and about 4,000 Jewish children go to Jewish schools. There are six kosher butchers, two kosher restaurants and a Jewish hospital, to which the notorious troublemaker, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, recently donated some money.

The 25,000 Jews have a constitutional right to a representative in parliament, as do the Christians. In 1979, shortly after the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini even issued a fatwa decreeing that Jews were to be protected. His words are painted on the walls of many Iranian synagogues: “We respect religious minorities. They are part of our people. Islam does not sanction their oppression.”

Relations between Jews and Persians have been good since ancient times. It was the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, who in 538 B.C. freed the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. The Bible calls him a “shepherd loved and anointed by God.” It is true that, as protected minorities, Jews and Christians in Iran do not enjoy the same political rights and duties as do Muslims. But do we really grant the Muslims the same rights as Christians and Jews in their everyday lives in Europe? Does Israel really grant its Arab fellow-citizens the same rights in daily life as its Jewish citizens?

Ahmadinejad has in fact made vicious “anti-Zionist”, anti-Israeli statements. However, his aggressive stance...is not to be equated with hatred of the Jews or anti-Semitism. Orthodox Jews, such as the Hasidic Satmar community, also reject an Israeli state “before the advent of the Messiah” and thus also represent an “anti-Zionist” position.

In Iran and other Muslim states, there has never been real anti-Semitism or persecution of the Jews by the state, as was the case in Europe. During the Nazi era many European Jews fled to freedom via Iran. The Jews in Iran are respected citizens. As Ciamak Morsathegh, the Jewish director of the Jewish

hospital in Tehran, put it: “Anti-Semitism is not an Islamic phenomenon, but a European phenomenon.”

...

Western ignorance of the Muslim world is also evident in much more banal issues than the Iran conflict – for example, in the view, widely held in Europe, that the Muslim headscarf amounts to a battle cry or is a “symbol of the oppression of women.” On this issue, the United States is much more tolerant. The U.S. Department of Justice has stated that the intolerance evident in banning headscarves “is un-American, and is morally despicable.”

The German weekly Die Zeit jokingly commented on the crusade to free Europe of the headscarf: “If you ask five Muslim women why they wear a headscarf, you will get five different answers: One covers her head for God; another because the scarf goes well with her fashionable H&M clothes; the third will reveal herself to be an ardent feminist; the fourth cites traditions in her village; while the fifth is defying her ultra-secular mother, who has forbidden her to wear a headscarf.” Of course, forcing anyone to wear a headscarf is unacceptable. But is not forcing anyone to take it off just as unacceptable?

The debates about forced marriage, female circumcision, or honor killing are also conducted with a shocking degree of ignorance. There is nothing in the Qur’an or the Ahadith of Muhammad about these completely unacceptable misogynist practices. They derive from a pre-Islamic patriarchal and heathen era. Some of these practices are several thousand years old – the gruesome “pharaonic” circumcision of women, for example. This brutal mutilation is not only practised in Muslim countries, such as Egypt and Sudan, but also in predominantly Christian countries, such as Ethiopia and Kenya. The victims are Muslims, Christians, Jewish Falashas, as well as members of other religions. So-called honor killings unfortunately also occur among Christians – for example, in such Christian countries as Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela. Most Muslim governments rightly take legal measures to counter these deplorable pre-Islamic and un-Islamic customs and crimes.

In some Muslim countries, the advancement of women has gone much further, in certain respects, than in the West. In Egypt, 30 percent of all professors are women; in Germany the figure is only 10 percent. In Iran, well over 60 percent of students are women, which has prompted some arch-conservatives to reflect on introducing a quota for men. There is also a longer tradition of female heads of government in Muslim countries than in the West...

Nonetheless, a lot still needs to be done if women are to attain full and equal rights in all Muslim countries...However, that is not a problem with Islam. It is a political problem and one that has to do with antiquated patriarchal social structures. The fact that shelters for battered women are bursting at the seams in the West shows that here too violence against women is a grievous social problem that has not yet been resolved...

Whoever wants to see an end to hatred and intolerance should, above all, overcome his own ignorance. Everybody has the right to his own opinions, but definitely not to his own facts. What is to prevent us

from traveling to Syria or Iran to form our own opinions on that alien and purportedly so dangerous world? The streets of Damascus and Tehran are much safer than the streets of New York or Detroit. According to United Nations statistics, in 2006, the homicide rate in the United States was 5.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. In Iran the rate was 2.93 and in Syria 1.4. Most Muslim countries are safer than the United States, even safer than Switzerland, where the rate is 2.94 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Why don't we start intercultural dialogue in our own personal environment? Why not expand student exchange programs between Muslim and Christian countries – or even with Israel? Why not get to know some works of wonderful Arabic literature or read the famous Ring Parable in Nathan the Wise by the great German writer of the Enlightenment era, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing? A father (God) bequeathes to each of the three sons he loves equally (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) an identical ring. One ring is the original; it has the ability to render its owner pleasant in the eyes of God and mankind. The other two are replicas. The brothers call on a judge to establish which of them has the original. The judge, with the wisdom of Solomon, explains that the bearer of the authentic ring is he who earns the love of his fellow men.

For German chancellor Angela Merkel, the most beautiful passage in the play is when the Muslim, Saladin, calls out to the Jew, Nathan, “be my friend!” Could we not all learn from this ancient Sephardic Jewish parable and its dream of a peaceful competition among the religions?

Thesis 7

Thesis 7: The West must treat the Muslim world just as fairly as it treats Israel. Muslims are worth as much as Jews and Christians.

With a mixture of self-righteousness, ignorance and hatred, many people in the West think Islam is a bloodthirsty religion and that Muslims are potential terrorists who are hostile towards democracy, women, Jews and Christians. The friend and spiritual advisor of U.S. president George W. Bush, Frank Graham, has called Islam “a very evil and wicked religion.” Bill O'Reilly, TV idol of American conservatives, has said: “We cannot intervene in the Muslim world ever again. What we can do is bomb the living daylights out of them.” The American television commentator, Ann Coulter thinks: “We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity.” She also says: “Perhaps we could put aside our national, ongoing post-9/11 Muslim butt-kissing contest and get on with the business at hand: Bombing Syria back to the Stone Age and then permanently disarming Iran.” The list of such statements could be extended indefinitely.

Just imagine for a moment that Graham, O'Reilly or Coulter had said “Judaism” instead of “Islam” and “Israel” instead of “Muslim countries”. There would have been a storm of protest, and quite rightly so. Why may one say fascistic things about Muslims and their religion, while any such comments about Christians or Jews would be rejected as entirely unacceptable, and rightly so? We must end this demonization of Islam and Muslims. It is not only shameful, it also harms our interests.

The deepening divide between Orient and Occident also endangers the security of Israel. The strongest long-term guarantee of the survival of Israel and its five million Jews is not the enmity, but the friendship of its 300 million immediate and more distant Arab neighbors. To attain this, the West, but also Israel, must make a fair contribution.

The Jewish people did not attain its moral stature because of its military victories or because of the impressive number of its talented members. It attained its moral uniqueness through its piety, wisdom, humanism and creativity, as well as through its long, brave and often cunning struggle for justice and against oppression. It is understandable that after the Holocaust, Israel has sought to ensure its military strength – and to defend its legitimate interests with great vigor, even severity. But severity without justice is a strategy that is doomed to failure. If all the productive country of Israel does is destroy, it will destroy itself as well. Israel – and the entire Western world – must invest at least as much in justice as in weapons. The treatment of the Palestinians is not compatible with the moral stature and uniqueness of the Jewish people. This is the only conclusion one may come to, especially as an admirer of Jewish culture.

The Palestinians must also change their policies. The West is right to demand that they renounce violence against Israel. But should it not also demand that Israel renounce violence against the Palestinians? According to the Israeli human-rights organization B'Tselem, in 2007, thirteen Israelis were killed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while 384 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces.

Reconciliation between Jews and Arabs is just as possible as the miraculous reconciliation between the Germans and the French proved to be. Jews and Arabs have more in common in religious, cultural and historical terms than most people realize.

As Israeli president Shimon Peres put it, they “have the same parents, Abraham and Moses.” For centuries both Jews and Arabs were persecuted – and not only during the Crusades and the Reconquista. The Vichy government in France, for example, applied the same racist discriminatory laws to the Jews that had been “successfully” tested on the Algerians (Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison).

The challenge of our era is to help heal the wounds in the Mideast – by means of security guarantees for Israel to which Europe must provide a robust military contribution, but also through helping to establish a viable Palestinian state. We must build bridges, not walls.

A model Palestinian state, that is backed by the West and acknowledges Israel's right to exist within just borders, and that opposes all forms of terrorism really would mark a new start for the Mideast – and for the relationship between the Western world and the Muslim world. We cannot continue on our current path. The “wars on terror” against the Muslim countries Afghanistan and Iraq have already cost \$700 billion, which is more than the Vietnam War cost.

The United States spends more than \$100 billion on the war in Iraq each year, but less than \$5 billion for economic reconstruction there. In light of these figures, can one seriously ask what a successful

alternative to the current “anti-terror” policies might look like? We have to turn the ratio around. We have to treat the Muslim world just as fairly and as generously as we – quite rightly – treat Israel. We must ultimately deprive international terrorism of any arguments in its defense.

Thesis 8

Thesis 8: The Muslims must champion a tolerant Islam, as did their prophet Muhammad. They must strip terrorism of its religious mask.

Muhammad fought passionately for social change. He stood up for the poor and the weak and – to the annoyance of many of his male followers – for a massive improvement in the rights of women, who in pre-Islamic times in almost all cultures, enjoyed virtually no rights at all. Men who oppress women may not claim to have the backing of Muhammad or the Qur’an.

Muhammad was – like our Jewish forefathers Abraham, Moses and King Solomon, who according to the Bible had a thousand wives and concubines – married to several women, one of whom was Jewish and another Christian. They both remained true to their religion. Muhammad warned his followers: “Whoever wrongs a Jew or a Christian, will have to face me on the Day of Judgment.” Muhammad was neither a fanatic nor an extremist. He wanted to tell the polytheist Arabs of his day about the God of the Jews and the Christians – in authentic, pure form. The Qur’an is, in part, a wonderful re-telling of the central messages of the Bible: **“And before this, was the Book of Moses as a guide and a mercy: And this Book confirms (it) in the Arabic tongue” (46:12)**. For Muslims, the Qur’an is the “Newest Testament.”

After the capitulation of Mecca in 628, Muhammad entered the Ka’bah and smashed all the pagan idols – just as Jesus had cleansed the Temple – but out of respect he spared the statue of Jesus and his mother, Mary. Both were, for him, pure and inviolable. Muhammad repeatedly proclaimed that Jesus would rise again before the Last Judgment: “How happy you will be when the son of Mary descends to you. **“Jesus and Mary are described in the Qur’an with great love as “signs for all peoples” (21:91)**. The Qur’an also treats the great Jewish prophets, especially Moses, as prophets. “A Muslim who does not believe in Muhammad’s precursors Moses and Jesus is not a Muslim” (Mahmoud Zakzouk).

Today’s terrorism is an absurd distortion of Muhammad’s teachings. It is a crime against Islam. Islam means submission to God and peace. The Muslim world may not permit its great and proud religion, with its ethos of humanity and justice, to be sullied by raging hate-filled terrorists. Nobody has caused greater damage to the standing of Islam in the course of its history, which spans almost fourteen centuries, than terrorists pretending to be Muslims. The Muslim world must rip the religious mask from the face of the terrorists. It must smash the idols of terrorism, just as Muhammad smashed the idols of the pre-Islamic era.

Thesis 9

Thesis 9: Nothing fosters terrorism more than the West's "war on terror". Muslim countries must resolve their problems with radical Islamism themselves.

We must also unmask the West's warriors of aggression. Wars of aggression are not only the most immoral but also the least intelligent way to combat terrorism. Terrorism in the guise of Islam is an ideology; ideologies cannot be shot down. One has to undermine its foundation and prove it wrong...

Al-Qaeda's attack on New York and Washington was not just an act of revenge but also an attempt to regain the high ground. Through an act of such diabolical boldness and the ensuing media spectacle, the radical Islamists wanted to win back the sympathy of the masses. They wanted to provoke the United States into overreacting, which would in turn give radical Islamism a new impetus. The strategy worked perfectly. The countless bombs that rained down on the heads of Afghan civilians, who had already tired of the Taliban, revived prostrate radical Islamism and helped it back on its feet. The Afghans certainly wanted to be rid of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda – both groups that had been created by the secret services of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan – but they did not see why thousands of Afghan civilians had to be bombed to death to achieve that goal.

None of the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center were from Afghanistan or Iraq. They came from Germany, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. More intelligent methods could have been adopted in order to neutralize their Saudi Arabian ideological leader, Osama Bin Laden, at his retreat in the mountains of the Hindu Kush, than bombing and occupying Kabul.

So, the radical Islamists once again had reason to issue a worldwide call-to-arms against the foreign invaders and against their own authoritarian pro-Western governments – just as they had done in 1979 when the Soviets marched in...

The West does not have the right to take military action all over the world against radical Islamist movements – or against leftwing radical or rightwing radical organizations. It does not have the right to turn the world into a bloody and chaotic battlefield in order to impose its vision of a world order. Western troops have no business fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan or Somalia. Muslim countries must solve their problems with radical Islamism by themselves. Even where radical Islamism degenerates into terrorism, it is primarily the task of national forces to combat it. Only in extreme and exceptional cases, and with the non-partisan of the United Nations Security Council, should international task forces provide reinforcement.

The damage such interventions cause is almost always greater than the benefit, even when the motives are honest and humanitarian. It is not enough to *want* to do good, rather, one has to actually *do* good. The war on terrorism will not be won by military means – either in the Hindu Kush or in Baghdad. It will be won in the hearts and minds of the world's 1.4 billion Muslims, who live in the East and the West, the

North and the South, and who are observing the politics of the West very closely. With every Muslim child killed by a Western bomb, terrorism grows. With each day that passes, we are sinking deeper into the morass of our own policies.

It is above all aerial warfare that has failed miserably as a means of fighting terrorism. Despite continuous aerial bombardment, Bin Laden managed to escape from Tora Bora because there were more journalists than American soldiers surrounding the cave complex where he was believed to be hiding. At about the same time, the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, succeeded in breaking through the thin ranks of U.S forces on a motorbike. Tora Bora is a grotesque symbol of the folly of the anti-terror crusade. Not even Cervantes, the creator of Don Quixote, could have dreamed up a more bizarre slapstick finale.

Thesis 10

Thesis 10: What is needed now is the art of statesmanship, not the art of war – in the Iran conflict, the Iraq conflict and the Palestine conflict.

The almost childish refusal of the American president to talk directly to politicians he does not like – a position he maintained for years – such as Arafat, Assad, Saddam or Ahmadinejad, along with the decision – taken after “consultations with God” – to develop strategies to bomb them out of office, are two of the most absurd and wrong-headed decisions of our time. “A statesman who seeks to promote peace must talk to the statesman in the opposing camp” (Helmut Schmidt, former German chancellor). It was only possible to resolve the East-West conflict of the post-war years because Ronald Reagan never felt squeamish about meeting with the rulers of what he termed the “evil empire.”

It is simply not true that in the Iran conflict there is, apart from the strategy of imposing ever tougher sanctions, only the “catastrophic alternative” of an “Iranian bomb or bombing Iran” (Nicolas Sarkozy). The real alternative to the ostracism and demonization of a great nation such as Iran is its reintegration into the community of nations – with all the same rights and obligations as any other member. The main reason Iran is a problem for the West is that by marginalizing it and severing ties – in order to punish it for deposing the pro-Western Shah and his regime – the West has forfeited any influence it might have had on political decision-making processes within Iran. This development is not irreversible. There is a wise saying: “If you cannot beat your enemy, embrace him.” . . .

The complex problems facing the Mideast can only be solved by political means. The best way to tackle them would be with a long-term conference for the whole region modeled on the OSCE’s forerunner, the CSCE. Besides the UN Security Council, all the major players in the region should be represented – including Syria, Iran, the democratically elected representatives of Palestine, and the leadership of the legitimate Iraqi resistance. A solution to the Iraq conflict will only be found if the United States negotiates – as it did in the Vietnam War – with the leaders of the resistance; though, of course, not with Al-Qaeda. The leaders of the nationalist, Baathist and moderate Islamist resistance are almost all prepared to take

part in such talks.

Just as in the East–West conflict of the 1980s, comprehensively tough, but fair, negotiations now present a real alternative to irresponsible wars and equally irresponsible passivity. All parties would benefit from such an approach, as has proven to be the case with the OSCE process. After two years of difficult negotiations, it brought freedom, human rights, democracy and increasing prosperity to Eastern Europe. The CSCE process brought Europe as a whole stability, freedom and disarmament. “Mortal enemies became friends – without a single shot being fired” (Hans–Dietrich Genscher). That should be the goal of a “Mideast CSCE”. Perhaps one day, a common economic area or even more will emerge in the region. Who would have thought 60 years ago that there could ever be a united Europe? Politics requires vision, and that holds true for the Mideast as well.

In view of the massive military superiority of the United States, how one can compare such a policy of engagement to the cowardly policy of appeasement before the Second World War, remains a neocon secret. It would not be appeasement if the current U.S leadership stopped inventing more and more horror stories about Muslim countries, or if it stopped bombing a path to the natural resources it wants, or if it stopped destroying the great values for which so many people once loved America and would love to love America again.

Which Muslim country could hope to attack either the West or Israel with even a remote prospect of success, given the overwhelming nuclear and conventional second–strike capability of the United States and of Israel. Even if Iran had nuclear weapons – and that would certainly not be a desirable state of affairs – the basics of nuclear strategy would still apply: Whoever shoots first, dies second. Whoever attacks the United States or Israel with a nuclear bomb, might as well blow himself up straightaway. In terms of numbers, the United States has the nuclear weaponry to kill 20 billion people. That means it could burn to a cinder all 70 million Iranians three hundred times over. Iran knows that – even its president knows that. His defense budget is just one hundredth of that of the United States. Unlike the major Western powers, Iran has not attacked another country for 150 years, though it has been attacked several times – also with the help of the West. There are 400,000 Iranians who were severely wounded or injured in the war with Iraq, among them 50,000 victims of chemical weapons. We are partly responsible for their suffering.

The Iran problem can be solved. The U.S. leadership must, at long last, change its ways and sit down at the negotiating table with the Iranian leadership – for top–level bilateral talks, or talks within the framework of a Mideast CSCE. It must offer Iran substantive security guarantees – as it did in the case of North Korea and, ultimately, Libya as well – in exchange for substantial concessions on its nuclear program and a verifiable commitment not to meddle in any way in the internal affairs of Iraq.

It is not just Iran’s purported nuclear designs but also the very real nuclear weapons of today’s nuclear powers that should be relegated to the junkyard of history. All nuclear weapons, including those of the United States, are – as the political hawk Ronald Reagan stated way back in 1986 – “totally irrational,

totally inhumane, good for nothing but killing, possibly destructive of life on earth and civilization.” In 2007, even Henry Kissinger voiced support for such a “bold vision of a nuclear-free world.” The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty calls in unequivocal terms for complete nuclear disarmament. The current nuclear powers are, therefore, all in permanent breach of the treaty.

Appeasement does not represent the greatest danger of our time; it is the patriotic Western armchair strategists who cling obstinately to their narrow-minded view of the world and to their furtive racism, and who are letting the world slide into the same kind of foolhardy cycle of violence and counter-violence that led to the First World War.

Statesmanship instead of warfare; vigilant, patient and tenacious negotiations – that is the appropriate strategy towards the Muslim world, as it was in the East-West conflict. In a just world order, terrorism will find no sustenance and will fail to thrive. In a nutshell, we must demonstrate both severity and justice. Severity with respect to terrorism, and justice toward the Muslim world.

The objective must be a world order that all states can accept as just; a world in which there is no longer discrimination against Muslims in the West and against Jews and Christians in the Muslim world; a world that no longer conducts mutual demonization of religions and cultures; a world order which decommissions the West’s weapons of mass destruction and shuts down its lie machines; a world in which the U.S. is again a symbol of peace and freedom, rather than of war and repression; and finally, a world in which everyone sees the log in his own eye and not only the speck in the eye of his neighbor.

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