**Understanding the Hate Behind Terror**

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The twenty-first century has seen dramatic human advancement unchaining our collective potential, and subsequently bred a visceral brand of value-protectionism. Along with the technological and information revolutions brought about by globalization, this new era of interconnectedness has also born the collision of ideas. For the United States and Western Europe, the last twenty years of dramatic advancement has been marred not only by a new enemy but also by a new understanding of conflict. The West’s introduction to Islamic terrorism revealed within each of its citizens a new catalogue of emotional understanding. We have seen in perhaps the rawest fashion, hate. It appeared that a people group we did not know was so reviled by our existence that they would methodically and callously attempt to destroy us. While our exposure to this hatred is new, the conflict is not. Upon further examination, it becomes clear that the rhetoric used by Islamists today to incite, encourage and reinforce violence against the West is reminiscent of language used long ago.

Though Europeans and Muslims first clashed nearly one thousand years ago, I will focus on what is often called the modern Islamic period spanning the last century and a half. I will examine the rhetoric of three Islamists from the last 130 years to highlight the common thread of resentment toward the West thereby providing the basis for my conclusion as to why Islamists’ hatred of the West has been manifested through fear, resentment and violence toward the West.

Fifty years before the Ottoman Empire fell, European presence and influence began to ferment and expand throughout the Muslim world. Foreign effects on the politics and culture of Muslim societies began to create an atmosphere of paranoia by Islamists. The dominating power in the West was moving east to acquire land and power. While the Muslim resistance to this European power extension was minimal, it proved to be the source of skepticism that would evolve into resentment, animosity and ultimately acts of terror.

Intrinsic within the formation of Arab nationalism after WWI is the deeply rooted presence of colonialism. The Middle East was largely carved up by European powers setting the geopolitical chessboard for their own economic and political interests. Because many of the original European-drawn lines are still primarily adhered to today, the implications of this early imperialism are critical to understanding much of the modern Muslim resentment toward the West.

The imperialistic manner in which Western Europe approached its relationship with the Muslim world has been instrumental in forming many of the views held by Islamists today. However, the preeminent rallying cry of modern Islamic fundamentalists is in response to the most seminal event in recent Middle Eastern history: the establishment of the state of Israel. While the manifestation of Western presence in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia have changed, Western colonialism, real or perceived, has produced the discontents and disillusions the Muslim populace possesses toward the West. Though the inhabitants of the Islamic World are more recently inclined to view Western infiltration as a threat to their political norms, Muslims have feared the Western threat to their faith and religious expression since the first interaction.

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I ushered in the beginning of a colonialist pattern in the Middle East and North Africa that would lay much of the groundwork for resentment Arabs would later demonstrate toward their Western conquerors. State building became the new practice in the span between the two World Wars. In the midst of promoting “freedom and self-determination” the European forces established a mandate system in which the local ‘leaders’ would be required to submit to standards of ruling handed down by the colonizing nations. These rules were then to be disseminated throughout the population of the colonized. Thus, the European forces ruled the Middle Eastern populace by proxy. The colonial forces in Europe were also adamant in expressing the temporal nature of this new ruling system. It was only to be a governing catalyst between Ottoman rule and self-rule (Owen, 6). Imposing this completely foreign concept of governance on Arab populations created tension. Revolts broke out across the region.

The concept of nationalism in the Middle East and North Africa was imported from Europe. Before colonization, there had existed ethnic subgroups throughout the region, but the idea of identifying with a specific country with borders was foreign to the population in the Middle East at the time. Roger Owen relates the realities of identification at the end of the nineteenth century as having many forms including “Arabness [which] was just one of a number of possible identities at this time, and usually much less important than that of belonging to a particular family or tribe or region or town” (Owen, 57). National identity was simply non-existent. Another attribute pivotal to Arab identity in the time leading up to WWI was that of religion. “The vast majority of them who were Muslims possessed not only a common religion but also a set of religious practices, like the pilgrimage, that brought significant numbers of them together at the same revered holy sites” (Owen, 57). This common bond of religion proved to be a critical commonality that would later play a role in the effectiveness of Islamists who attempted to unite the broader Muslim population around a set of political ideals.

The Western European powers completely colonized the region. From Morocco to Iraq, Syria to Sudan, the British and French carved up and controlled North Africa and the Middle East.[[1]](#footnote-1) In most of these countries, their European counterparts helped build their ‘modern’ state. Each state was “[given] a centralized administration, a legal system, a flag and internationally recognized boundaries” (Owen, 9). Europe created an entire region of nations from the ground-up. While locals operated the specific components of their new, respective states, the infrastructures set up were nothing more than a handle by which the European powers could more succinctly and effectively control their newly established colonies. Roger Owen states that “[o]nce a specific territorial state was established…[there] was the attempt to enumerate, control and define the people who lived there…as well as the need to control and police the new borders in order to prevent incursions, smuggling and illegal migration” (Owen, 9). These problems were imported with the concept of national identity. The arbitrary, over-night imposition of physical borders made certain activity, trade, travel and migration illegal. Arab and Muslim populations were committing crimes they did not know existed against governments they did not know existed.

The governance frameworks constructed by the European occupiers were established to mitigate opposition and create order, thus limiting the possibility of upheaval and rebellion. However, several of the Arab populations were not content with this foreign occupation. Revolts sporadically arose throughout the Middle East immediately following the colonialism in the post-WWI era. There were anti-Jewish revolts in Palestine, anti-British uprisings in Iraq and government-led opposition movements in Syria (Owen, 6). However, despite these sporadic uprisings, the only real effect they had at the time was to insight stricter, more oppressive regulations by the colonial forces in Western Europe.

European colonialism in the Muslim world has been a consistent unifying force for Muslims. Through a series of speeches and writings, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani discusses what he believes to be true Islam, why it does not exist and how best to realize it in society. In 1882 al-Afghani gave a speech in Calcutta, India where he laid out a nuanced definition of Islam, its philosophic foundation and practical implications. Al-Afghani elaborates on the prerequisites of true Islam in a book he wrote called *The Truth about the Neicheri Sect and an Explanation of the Neicheris* written in 1881. In this book he discusses the historical path of destruction laid by the *Neicheris* or materialists. Al-Afghani claims that from the Greeks to the Mormons, the passions of man have been allowed to roam free resulting in the physical and moral destruction of civilizations for thousands of years. He concludes by stating,

“no force remains for restraining men of passions from their transgressions and oppression other than…the belief that the world has a Creator, wise and powerful; and the belief that for good and evil deeds there is a fixed recompense after this life” (Keddie, 167).

In other words, short of religion, the passions of man that inevitably culminate in destruction are only tempered by religion or more specifically, Islam. This definition of true Islam is the bedrock for Al-Afghani’s prodding for appropriate, Islamic action.

In a later text written by Al-Afghani, he discusses the need for Muslims to seek a mitigation of their suffering by means of a “sage and renewer” who will “repel the unforeseen corruption, and again educate [the Muslims] with a virtuous education” (Keddie, 125). Thus, there is a direct correlation between suffering and corrupted education. The corruptors of education in the context in which he was speaking and writing were the British colonizers; the most recent brand of *Neicheris*. Premised on the necessity to promote the resurgence of true Islam, al-Afghani began testifying to and opposing the woes of imperialism in places as far East as India. Al-Afghani begins a lecture entitled “The Materialists in India” describing the beginning of the British occupiers:

“[The English] perceived that as long as the Muslims persisted in their religion, and as long as the Koran was read among them, it would be impossible for them to be sincere in their submission to foreign rule, especially if that foreigner has wrested the realm from them through treachery and cunning, under the veil of affection and friendship. So they set out to try in every way to weaken belief in the Islamic faith” (Keddie, 175).

Here al-Afghani intimates the resentment and skepticism felt by the colonized. He detects sinister motivation on the part of the British to seek their own colonial pursuits even to the extent of undermining local Islamic practice. Thus the line of hostility is not simply drawn between the British and the Indians, but rather between the materialists and the faithful Muslims. Al-Afghani transforms the discussion from a conflict of land to a conflict of values. This early aversion to colonialism by Muslims paints a foreboding backdrop to the larger-scaled imperialism seen in the Middle East and North Africa in the time between the two World Wars and the following era of decolonization.

Another formidable voice in opposing the West on the grounds of its detrimental effect on Islamic society was Sayyid Qutb. Qutb explicitly linked societal degradation in the West to its lack of adherence to religion. Qutb believed Americans to be a godless people. Having spent time in the United States undergoing courses in education, Qutb saw first-hand what he considered the woes of secularism and materialism. He understood this societal ethos to not only be the cause of the West’s moral decline but also a threat Islamic society. In his *Social Justice in Islam*, Qutb claims that “[Muslims] have…not a single reason to make any separation between Islam and society, either from the point of view of the essential nature of Islam or from that of its historical course; such reasons as there are attach only to European Christianity” (Qutb, 32). The concept of separation of church and state is one that is not only foreign to Qutb and his Muslim compatriots; it is a concept that is fraught with danger. This separation ushers in the decline of the state down the slope of immorality. He explains how the West’s refusal to marry religion and state is the source of its downfall. In perhaps his most seminal work, *Milestones*, Sayyid Qutb states “[t]he period of the Western system has come to an end primarily because it is deprived of those life-giving values which enabled it to be the leader of mankind” (Qutb, 8). Unlike in Islam, the Western religious expression is devoid of discipline from sinful passions; it is fraught with self-indulgence and an utterly debased prioritization system. Qutb’s critique is not in the theology of Christianity (at least not here), but rather in the failure of Western societies to embed their religion in the public square: societal depravity due to the absence of religion. By making these claims, Qutb sheds light on what *could be* in Islamic society if the West is allowed to continue its imperialism.

According to Qutb, secularism is a contagious disease that always results in decline. The only successful alternative is found in Muslim societies. For Qutb, Islam is universal. He argues, “Islam reckons itself to be a message for the whole world” (Qutb, 35). Qutb even gives Qur’anic evidence for the benefits of a global adoption of Islam, found in Surah 3:10 which states, “You are the best nation which has been brought forth for men; you enjoin the good and you forbid the evil” (Qutb, 35). Qutb thus argues that only Islam can promote the social justice needed for a society to be truly and lastingly just. Thus, there is no need to divorce religion from society; in fact, doing so would be counter to the promulgation of justice. In *Milestones*, Sayyid Qutb claims “when such a group of people is ready and also gains practical control of society, various laws will be legislated according to the practical needs of that society. This is what God has intended for [Islam]” (Qutb, 35). While he does make lofty claims about the altruism exemplified in Muslim societies, Qutb is not so naïve as to believe that Islam makes all men perfect, which he expresses by stating that “[Islam] indeed threatens [straying Muslims] with dire punishments for having exchanged the signs of Allah for trifling price” (Qutb, 32). Thus even when fallible Muslims stray from the will of Allah, Islam is fitted to right those wrongs with the admonition from Allah Himself. Qutb’s understanding of Islam and its role in society is one that is not only ubiquitous, but also all-encompassing, capable of providing answers to all issues that arise in a society, whether spiritual or secular.

Islamic thinkers such as al-Banna and Qutb took the already prevalent resentment toward Western colonialism and created a religious argument against this imperialism. They justified the anti-Western views with Islam. Because of the integral role that Islam plays in lives of Muslims, having an Islamic justification for their hate proved to be a very powerfully solidifying force in the minds of the average Muslim citizens of Western-colonized states. By successfully making the linkage between the evils of colonialism and the antithesis of Allah’s will, Islamists such as al-Banna and Qutb established a framework that was drawn on by later Islamists to drum up support for revolution against the West as well as the Western-imposed regimes of the region.

Along with the deterioration of the societal moral fabric, there was a growing undercurrent of frustration at the autocratic manner in which the Western-imposed leaders of Arab countries hindered citizen efforts to pursue self-actualization. Western imperialism was not only an imposition on the metaphysics of Muslim populations but on their inalienable rights. This is seen most evidently in that the colonizing forces went so far as to install rulers who were effectively extensions of the British and French empires. Roger Owen illuminatingly depicts the original intent by these European powers as to why they first took an interest in removing the Ottoman Empire,

“[t]he British and French attempted to manage affairs in such a way that they monopolized these relations, awarding contracts and concessions to their own nationals, looking after the interests of their own merchants and, in general attempting to keep the colony as their own economic reserve” (Owen, 14).

By treating the handpicked regimes in such a diametrically different way from the Arab proletariat, the European powers began to foster widespread, deeply embedded resentment in the minds of many citizens of the region, commensurate with the aforementioned grievances espoused by the radical Islamic thinkers years earlier.

 Another detrimental – and yet not as widely discussed – impact widespread colonialism has had on the Middle Eastern populations is the psychological impact. In his influential piece, *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o stated, there are the

“ceaseless struggles of African people to liberate their economy, politics and culture from that Euro-American-based stranglehold to usher a new era of true communal self-regulation and self-determination. It is an ever-continuing struggle to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-determination in time and space” (Thiong’o, 4).

While Thiong’o is speaking specifically about African reactions to Western colonization, the consistent, widespread colonialism of Western Europe throughout the Middle East and Africa underscore the relevance of this sentiment for the case of Middle Eastern colonialism and the subsequent psychological effects on the population at-large. The mass dispossession of land has plagued the Palestinian population and increased the paranoia of the neighboring Arab and Muslim populations exponentially.

In a region where people were still reeling from war and seemingly endless conflict and occupation, hope seemed to glimmer on the horizon as the British and French forces of WWI began bargaining with local, Arab leaders amiable to the idea of fighting for the Allied cause in return for power, albeit *limited* power. However, with the defeat and eradication of the Ottoman occupiers, the new European forces quickly filled the vacuum. The notion of self-reliance and self-actualization were so close to the Arab and Muslim people and yet they saw this bright potential pulled from them as quickly as it was promised. The Arab people were becoming a populace perpetually possessed.

In 1948, the Balfour Declaration – established in 1917 – reached its peak with the establishment of a sovereign Israeli state. From the moment of its inception, Israel was viewed as a group of Zionist intruders, backed by Western powers that had lied to and brutally oppressed the Arab and Muslim populations of the Middle East. Hassan Nasrallah (the leader and founder of Hezbollah) called Israel’s creation “a historic catastrophe and tragic event” (Noe, 188). Perhaps most vividly in the 1967 war, Israel’s brief history is one fraught with expansionist – often violent– tendencies and policies that further exacerbate the resentment exhibited toward it by *all* of its neighbors. Supporters of the Israeli actions in 1967 call to attention the ‘necessity’ Israel had to protect itself from angry, imposing border-states. Thomas Friedman in his book *From Beirut to Jerusalem* describes this moment as the time “when for the first time the widening awareness of the Holocaust among Israelis would begin to merge with their immediate predicament” (Friedman, 278-9). However real the possibility of Israel being militarily defeated, Arab and Muslim counter-forces viewed this war as an opportunity to rid the region of an unwelcomed guest; a guest that had been force-fed to the Middle East by the ever-imperialistic Western colonizers.

The Middle Eastern populace viewed the establishment of the Israeli state as much more than an imposition of a regionally and historically despised people; it was the reinforcement of their fears and resentment for the Western colonizers. It gave credence to their paranoia. According to Congressional Research Service’s report in late 2010, the U.S. has given a total of just over $109 billion to Israel since its inception into the realm of sovereign states in 1948. This amount includes over $61 billion in military grants (Sharpe, 24). In the minds of Islamists, these dollar figures are equivalent to the monetary extent to which the U.S. is willing to support an evil, unjust form of imperialism. In the time period between 2000 and 2009 the United States has contributed over $ 21.5 billion to Israel through grants and credits. In this same time period, in the same form, the U.S. has given just over $2 billion to the West Bank and Gaza. (U.S. Census Bureau, 802). As the U.S. budget of foreign aid for Israel grows, the trust and amiability that Arab and Muslims have for the West proportionately diminishes.

Because of the inextricable connection made between Western colonialism and the state of Israel, any continuation of alliance and amiable interaction between the West and Israel is seen as a perpetuation of neo-colonialism. The aforementioned arguments made by al-Afghani, al-Banna, Qutb and others that make opposing Western imperialism a religious responsibility greatly contributed to the proliferation of – in the minds of Muslims in the Middle East – justified hate toward the zealous, unjust Western proverbial leviathan. Thus, every dollar, every aid package, every development project provided to Israel by the West is fuel for the fire of Middle Eastern resentment and hate. The perception held by many Middle Eastern citizens today is that the U.S. and Western Europe are nothing more than pro-Israel, imperialistic, materialistic consumers. However, much of the blame must fall on the West as they rarely, if ever, challenge this perception with substantive policy changes. Support for Israel remains stronger than ever. The West’s interaction with Muslim cultures in recent history has been limited to the ‘invasion’ of Iraq, the occupation of Afghanistan, drone attacks in Pakistan and rhetorical support for Muslim leaders that are despised by the populace such as the recently deposed Hossni Mubarak, Momar Qadaffi and Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali.

Positions such as these have consistently reinforced the skepticism held by the Middle East proletariat. Thus, when a paramilitary, non-state actor seeks to drum up support for a military action against Israel or the West, the respective demagogues do not need to look far for a rousing, effective script. One of the most influential figures in the post-colonial Middle East is the leader and founder of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah. Nasrallah’s Hezbollah has been one of the more vocal and violent opponents to the establishment of Israel. From funding the Palestinian *intifada* in 2000 to actually starting the war with Israel in 2006, Hezbollah has consistently engaged in hostility as a response to what they see as the ultimate form of imperialism in the Western supported and established Israeli state. However, in order to fully understand the extent to which their actions are responsive, it is helpful to refer to the words of Nasrallah himself. When describing why Hezbollah had proved time and again to be a fierce, legitimate military presence in the Middle East, Nasrallah stated, “[Hezbollah fighters] fight and do jihad with serious intent and deep conviction that the only way to *regain their usurped territory* is by waging war on the enemy” (Noe, 8).[[2]](#footnote-2) This statement is critical in that it articulates the very real sentiment held by many citizens in the Middle East that Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian, Jordanian and particularly Palestinian people have been displaced, by a people group that ‘does not belong.’ This is the newest and perhaps most potent display of imperialism in recent Middle Eastern history, and it is the source of much of the hostility present today.

The extent of the reparations required by Middle Easterners differs widely depending on nationality, religion and the innumerable subsets of these subgroups. For Nasrallah, he has been clear to “angrily reject” the suggestion that Hezbollah’s resistance to Israel will be complete if Israel withdraws from southern Lebanon and adheres to firm, secure borders (Noe, 188). There is a clear presence of a current much deeper than tolerant, mutual existence with Israel. Nasrallah and Hezbollah see Israel as an imperialist, oppressive force whose mere existence is a slap in the face of Arabs. Nasrallah statedin a speech, “But [Lebanon] will not accept from Netanyahu 1 percent [of Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank], 9 per cent or 30 per cent. This nation will only accept every inch of the sacred land of Palestine” (Noe, 190).[[3]](#footnote-3) The zero sum game promulgated by Nasrallah is emblematic of the mentality of many Islamists and Islamist fundamentalist groups. For Hezbollah, according to its leader, “the struggle [with the Zionist enemy] is [their] religion, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and life” (Noe, 192).

 In summation, there is indeed a strong current of animosity and violence that flows from the Middle East toward the West. Its genesis is a well of resentment dug by years oppressive, and at times, violent colonialism imposed by the West. This extensive brand of imperialism pushed the Middle Eastern populace into a corner of fear and distrust toward Western Europe and the United States. The continual, colonial pressure applied on Arabs and Muslims in the region culminated into what many in the region still view as a gregarious moment of absolute repression of the wants and desires of the local, Levantine populations: the establishment of Israel. Because this moment in 1948 was a realization of the intense suspicion held by the residents of the region, a line was drawn in the sand separating Arabs and Muslims from Jews and the West.

This zenith of tension is still widely seen as a paradigmatic moment because of the expansion and repression of Israel in the half century it has been a sovereign state. Because of this, the leaders of uprisings and revolts in the world of Islamic fundamentalism have chosen to implement the woes associated with Israel when assembling their respective armies. Thus Islamists have infused the heart of their rhetoric with the Israel-Palestine conflict.

From the early colonial frustrations articulated by Jamal al-Afghani to Sayyid Qutb’s Islamic argument against imperialism, to Hassan Nasrallah’s call to violent jihad against the Western aggressors, there exists a common thread of anger and resentment toward the West for its early colonialism. Though the specific manifestation of Western colonialism has ebbed and flowed, some Islamists have consistently feared Western intrusion, real or perceived, and have sought to end it with violence. Thus, when searching for an informed, comprehensive answer as to why there is violent action toward to the West, let us consider our historic presence in the region, question our motivations for future intervention and evaluate what our presence communicates to our Near Eastern neighbors.

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1. The only other European nation possessing land in this region was Italy, who had colonized Libya. Also, Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were considered independent during this period of colonization. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quoted from ‘Toward Liberation’ delivered on June 21, 1999. (italics added) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Narallah’s speech entitled “On Jews” was given in Beirut at a ‘party rally’ on May 7, 1998. It was also broadcast on *Al-Manar*, a Hezbollah-affiliated television station. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)