

Excerpts from *2084 and Beyond*

Note to reader: The material in the book that precedes this text introduces the Islamic terrorist. So, the “they” in the text refers to al Qaeda, ISIS, etc. Also, the material is written in the past Tense (for reasons that are defined by the book’s structure), but the points here are topical.

Then why would “the kind of guy you could have taken home to Mom” pull away from his supportive society in such a brutal way? After hundreds of congressional hearings, interviews with terrorists, surveys of victims (those who were still alive), and Gallup polls, their reasons were understood. They were starkly simple: (a) moral outrage about their perceptions of injustices against their religion, (b) the American-sponsored Jewish colonization of their religious turf, (c) the audacity of the United States to tread on parts of Islamic religious turf (Saudi Arabia during the U.S. invasion of Iraq), and (d) their fervent wish to have the public know about their grievances as a means to justify their actions.

The indignation of the political/religious terrorists was accentuated by proselytizing zealots, who were deeply bitter about their loss of an empire. Their once unassailable domain over vast areas of the world was now a distant memory, a faint reflection of the former greatness of their culture. The Muslims’ intellectual, military, administrative, and political domains (turfs) had expanded into Europe (as far away as England), almost all of North Africa, Asia (as far away as Indonesia and the Philippines), parts of Tibet, and sections of East Russia. Between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, a period of intellectual darkness and economic regression in Europe, Muslim societies fostered science and scholarship:

- Many caliphs “showered money on learning.” This education was not just rote learning of the Quran, but critical thinking.
- For hundreds of years, the “Canon of Medicine” written by a Muslim was the standard medical text in Europe.
- Muslims created the principals of algebra, pioneered the studies of light and optics, and laid the foundations of modern trigonometry.
- Muslims did much to preserve the “intellectual heritage” of the Greeks, which scholars believe was a lynchpin to Europe’s later scientific revolution. But in the twenty-first century, their revered Caliph, who had formerly presided over an extensive empire, no longer existed.

As well, where once the Muslims were leaders in the succoring of knowledge, by this time they had consigned themselves to the backwaters of intellectual advancement:

- In 2005, Harvard University produced more scientific papers than the combined efforts of seventeen Arabic-speaking countries.
- 1.6 billion Muslims had produced two Nobel Prize laureates in chemistry and physics. Both moved from their homes and Muslim culture to the west and its worldly ways.
- The United States' 300 million citizens had produced 63 laureates in chemistry and 85 in physics.
- The Jewish community, laboring under a disproportionate population ratio of 1 Jew to every 100 Muslims in the world, labored to produce 79 Nobel Prize winners to the two produced by the Muslim community.

These ratios—1:100 and 79:2—spoke to the heart of the matter. From the beginnings of recorded human history, the wealth and power of a population, be it a cluster of clans or an assemblage of tribes, was determined by the intellectual strength of that society. Mental muscle translated into the communal brawn, both in wealth and power.

Much of the Muslims' disillusionment was of their own individual making, or the collective fault of the country in which they were born and reared. The fact that thousands of young Muslims were unemployed and bitter was not the fault of anyone but their own failed nations and themselves.

In addition, growth and vitality were restricted in some Muslim societies that barred women from participating fully in the economic arena. The Quran was not the problem. It clearly stated man and woman were equal. But in practice they often were not.

Scholars had differing views on how the Muslim empire came apart. No one questioned that the many invasions and wars with the Crusaders and Mongols sapped much of the Muslims' vigor. Later, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, one factor was starkly evident: the paranoid and intensified emphasis on religious scholarship with its associated repression of critical thinking. For centuries, the Muslims snuffed out the learning of much of anything but their holy book:

- Rote learning of the Quran was considered the keystone of education. Learning how to apply the Pythagorean Theorem to the building of bridges—their passages to commerce—took a backseat to learning how to memorize spiritual passages—their bridges to paradise.
- If a scientific finding countered any passage in the Quran, the finding was rejected as being “scripturally indefensible.”
- Apart from being anti-science, an utterance against the Quran or Prophet Muhammad could result in being killed. Counter views that might lead to a tiny bit of enlightenment were forbidden. A Pakistani court sentenced a woman to death for committing an act of blasphemy against Muhammad. If she were pardoned, the Muslim clerics vowed to take to the streets, launch a jihad against the Pakistani government and the entire world, and kill all the blasphemers.
- If a thinker wished to stay healthy, he or she had to be careful about any critical comments that might reach the Muslim religious-thought police.

Essentially abandoned was the concept of *ijtihad*, the making of a decision independently of any Muslim school of law or any religious jurisprudence. Instead, religious experts (*mujtahids*) interpreted and made decisions (*taqlid*), often without the individual Muslim citizen examining the Quran. Many of these Islamic scholars were wise and practical. Others, such as the *Mutaween* in Saudi Arabia, were not scholars but doctrinaire-thought police.

On March 11, 2002, the *Mutaween* prevented schoolgirls from escaping a burning school. Why? Because the children were not wearing headscarves and were not accompanied by a male. Result? The death of fifteen girls. Aftermath? The *Mutaween*, considered guilty of murder by some (including bystanders at the scene), went scot free with no taint on their resumes.

In the early twenty-first century, fifty-seven countries in the Islamic Conference spent 0.81 percent of their GNP on research and development. Fortunately for these countries, recent figures (late first and early second decade) showed an increase to 1.8 percent. Still, that figure was paltry in comparison to other countries. America alone spent 2.9 percent. Israel, the religious enemy of the Muslims, spent 4.4 percent of its GNP on endeavors that would make the Jews an even more formidable opponent of the Islamics.

True to the lag effect, it took a while for the Muslims' once-mighty empire to decay. But what did not decay was Muslim pride and vanity.

After all, they had carved out a majestic intellectual, governmental, and military presence that was equal to that of the Roman Empire. But as the American statesman Benjamin Franklin said, "Vain-glory flowereth, but beareth no fruit."

As suggested by Mr. Franklin, humans' pride reared its self-defeating head. Consider Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh. He was a decent, peaceful man, one a daughter would be proud to bring home to meet her parents. But he became a lethal radical, a transition fueled by his "scrupulous moral outrage" at his perception of the United States and Israel waging an asymmetrical war against Islam.

His pride and the pride of his tribe had been compromised. In fairness to his plight, so had his place in life. As discussed earlier, the United Nations' and the United States' asymmetrical allocation of boundaries in the "holy land" for Jews and Arabs to occupy made no sense. With this exception, the actions made no sense to anyone but the Jews and their supporters. For others living in the area, the partitioning was an outrage.

Notwithstanding his faults, the faults of this tribe, and the ill-conceived U.N. partitioning of the Jews' and Muslims' holy turfs, Mr. Sheikh eventually resorted to self-defeating actions.

As he reached the end of his rope, he proudly proclaimed the righteousness of beheading any person who, however distanced from the source of his grievances, was aligned with the United States and Israel.

Note: I continue this chapter by suggesting future scenarios for the Middle East. None have a happy ending.