



WWW.PRAGERU.COM

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Halfway through the video, Mr. Aboubakr states that, “It is not Islamophobic to note the tragic fact that at this time in history, the Muslim world is dominated by bad ideas and bad beliefs... It is these bad ideas and beliefs that provide the soil in which radical Islam grows. Ignoring this only prevents us from effectively fighting Islamist terror, and at the same time it hurts those heroic Muslims who really are moderate.” What do you think the bad ideas and bad beliefs are that Mr. Aboubakr is referring to? How do you think ignoring this reality hurts genuinely moderate Muslims?
- Mr. Aboubakr goes on to explain, “That is why millions of so-called moderate Muslims don’t rise up to denounce Islamist terror - because the word “moderate,” as we understand it, doesn’t really apply. If moderation means you tolerate freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, women’s rights and gay rights, moderate Muslims are a distinct minority. Of course, they exist. Millions of them. But among believing Muslims, they don’t represent anywhere near a critical mass.” Given this explanation, what do you think politicians are referring to when they reassure the public after a terror attack that most Muslims are moderate? Do you think that the politicians are lying, misinformed, or both? Why do you think that a majority of Muslims are not moderate by Western standards?
- Mr. Aboubakr answers this last question when pointing out that, “The values of the West and the values of Islam as practiced in the Muslim worlds of the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, and more and more in Europe, are not compatible.” Why do you think that this is the case? What do you think the consequences are of Islam and the West having irreconcilable values, in terms of terrorism and in terms of the rule of law?
- Following on this last point, Mr. Aboubakr goes on to share with us that, “Until we begin to tell the truth about Islam... the only solution to Islamist terror will never take place. That solution is Islam reforming itself.” What do you think Mr. Aboubakr is referring to, specifically, when mentioning Islam ‘reforming itself?’ Do you agree that Islamic reform is the only solution to Islamic terror? Explain.
- Mr. Aboubakr ends the video by stating, “The West can be a part of that [Islamic] reform - but only if it faces - and tells the truth. The sooner it does so, the better - for all of us.” What do you think Mr. Aboubakr means when he refers to the West ‘facing’ and ‘telling’ the truth? What, exactly, will be ‘better- for all of us, and why do you think that Mr. Aboubakr feels that such reform needs to happen sooner rather than later?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Arab Core Muslims

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Why Did So Many Muslims Seem to Celebrate 9/11,” then answer the questions that follow.

- How did Princeton historian Bernard Lewis characterize 9/11? How did Professor Said characterize Islam and say it should be treated? What happened to the Arab regimes designed after Western Models? How have Islamists fared in and out of the Arab world? What points did Michael Vlahos make in his study? What did Kepel write about in regards to 9/11 and the Islamist movement?
- What is the author’s point in the last line of the article? Do you agree with the author’s overall analysis? Why or why not?
- What relationship do the points made in the article have with the points made in the video, if any? Explain.



QUIZ

WHERE ARE THE MODERATE MUSLIMS?

1. **How did Mr. Aboubakr's teachers and mosque imams react to the news of 9/11 when it happened?**
 - a. With concern.
 - b. With sadness.
 - c. With contempt.
 - d. With joy.

2. **According to the Pew Research Center, what percentage of Muslims in Egypt believe that any Muslim who chooses to leave Islam should be put to death?**
 - a. 22%
 - b. 51%
 - c. 66%
 - d. 88%

3. **What areas of the world have significant percentages of Muslims that support Sharia law as the law of the land?**
 - a. The Middle East.
 - b. South Asia.
 - c. The West.
 - d. All of the above.

4. **Among believing Muslims, moderate Muslims do not represent anywhere near a critical mass.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. **How can Islam be reformed?**
 - a. There is no way to reform Islam.
 - b. Through the enforcement of Sharia law.
 - c. It can only be reformed from within Islam.
 - d. Through government intervention.



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

WHERE ARE THE MODERATE MUSLIMS?

1. How did Mr. Aboubakr's teachers and mosque imams react to the news of 9/11 when it happened?
 - a. With concern.
 - b. With sadness.
 - c. With contempt.
 - d. With joy.

2. According to the Pew Research Center, what percentage of Muslims in Egypt believe that any Muslim who chooses to leave Islam should be put to death?
 - a. 22%
 - b. 51%
 - c. 66%
 - d. 88%

3. What areas of the world have significant percentages of Muslims that support Sharia law as the law of the land?
 - a. The Middle East.
 - b. South Asia.
 - c. The West.
 - d. All of the above.

4. Among believing Muslims, moderate Muslims do not represent anywhere near a critical mass.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. How can Islam be reformed?
 - a. There is no way to reform Islam.
 - b. Through the enforcement of Sharia law.
 - c. It can only be reformed from within Islam.
 - d. Through government intervention.

Why Did So Many Muslims Seem to Celebrate 9/11?

The seeds of hatred.

By Jay Tolson, Staff Writer | April 7, 2008, at 3:18 p.m.

From the moment Americans learned that the 19 aerial assassins of September 11 were Muslim Arabs, they began to wonder: What did Islam have to do with it? The answers were plentiful and quick to come but often contradictory and confusing. Heads of Muslim nations and leaders of Islamic organizations emphasized that Islam was incompatible with terrorism and intolerance. And the spirit of the oft-quoted line from the Koran, "Let there be no compulsion in religion," seemed to reassure most of America's religious, civic, and political leaders. "The face of terror," President Bush confidently announced, "is not the true faith of Islam."

But if all that were true, why did so many inhabitants of the long Muslim "street," stretching from Morocco to Indonesia, appear to be overjoyed by what Osama bin Laden's henchmen had accomplished? For that matter, why were certain Islamic jurists in Pakistan issuing *fatwas* directing Muslims to fight American infidels if they attacked Afghanistan? And why do firebrand clerics throughout the Islamic world continue to issue equally inflammatory decrees? Most disturbing, some of those same voices of moderation had occasionally expressed their approval of Islamic groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah that engage in terrorism.

In the years since 9/11, scholars and experts have done little to resolve the contradictions. Often, they have merely taken them to a higher level. On one side, broadly speaking, are those sympathetic to the views of Princeton historian Bernard Lewis. The British-born scholar and author sees the events of 9/11 as the tragic consequence of a long conflict between the Islamic world and the West, a conflict largely dominated by the former until a little over 300 years ago, when the Ottomans failed in their second attempt to take Vienna. Crediting bin Laden with a strong (if not altogether accurate) sense of history, Lewis argues that the al Qaeda leader gave expression to the "resentment and rage" of people throughout the Islamic world.

Strongly rejecting this reading of the problem are the experts associated with the late Columbia literature Prof. Edward Said, author of the influential book *Orientalism*. The Palestinian-American scholar charged that Lewis is one of those western "orientalists" whose oversimplification of eastern civilizations has helped to justify European imperialism. Said insisted that Islam is no "monolithic whole" but a divided body of competing "interpretations." It should be treated the same way Christianity and Judaism are, Said urged, "as vast complexities that are neither all-inclusive nor completely deterministic in how they affect their adherents." On such disagreements turns an even larger question: Was September 11 the outgrowth of a "clash of civilizations," in the words of Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington? Or was it the product of a struggle within a civilization?

Bewildering as all this has been, Americans might have found it easier to negotiate if they had paid as much attention to the Arab side of the terrorists' identity as they did to the Muslim side. The friction between Lewis and Said loses some of its heat, for example, when 9/11, bin Laden, and al Qaeda are seen as key elements of a struggle that is taking place primarily within the Arab core of the Middle East. At the heart of this struggle is the political failure of the various Arab regimes that emerged after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the end of European colonialism. Those regimes—whether kingdoms, parliamentary democracies, or single-party socialist states—were all roughly designed after western models, with

elements of western law. But all quickly devolved into despotic states, corrupt and generally incompetent in meeting the basic needs of their citizens. Not coincidentally, leaders of some of those states—notably, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq—for a time paid lip service, and perhaps something more, to a largely secular vision of pan-Arab political unity. A humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis in 1967 largely dashed that dream.

Quickly emerging in its stead was a highly politicized version of Islam—what scholars have come to call Islamism. Its leading ideologues, such as the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (hanged in 1966 for allegedly plotting to assassinate President Gamal Abdel Nasser), advocated the rejection of all western political models and the creation of "pure" Islamic states run according to *sharia*, or religious law.

To some extent, this notion was as old as Islam itself, which in its classical form brooked no division of the political and religious spheres. But in practice, as Islam spread, divisions occurred. And religious law, far from being a simple set of prescriptive rules, was interpreted and elaborated by hundreds of schools of law and further tempered by local traditions and customs.

Throughout the history of Islam, however, there have been puritans who demanded a return to the purity of the earliest caliphates, no matter how mythical this pristine condition was. But no puritan reformer has been more influential than the 18th-century Arab firebrand Muhammad ibn al Wahhab (1703-92). Critical of mainstream Sunni legalism, Sufi mysticism and philosophy, and anything smacking of "innovation," he forged a crucial alliance with the Saud clan, then engaged in a struggle with the Ottoman overlords.

The critics of Wahhabism, including many prominent Sunni jurists, saw it as a crude attempt to re-Bedouinize the religion by elevating the customs and practices of the desert Arabs (such as attitudes about the covering of women) into bedrock principles of the faith. Crude as it was, however, Wahhabism endured because of its ties with the Saud clan, which only strengthened over time through mutual support and intermarriage. In 1932, when the clan was established as the royal family of Saudi Arabia, the narrow, intolerant Wahhabi strain of Islam effectively became the established religion of the kingdom. And soon, with the Saudis' growing oil wealth, the Wahhabi religious establishment became one of the most richly funded and aggressive pros-elytizing bodies in the world, spreading an intolerant version of the faith that began to compete with other more tolerant and locally inflected varieties of Islam.

But if Islamism and Wahhabism emerged in the Arab core of the Muslim world, one of the ironic turns of recent history is that political Islam fared better beyond the Arab core than in it. An Islamic republic, albeit Shiite rather than Sunni, arose in Iran in 1979, and in both Turkey and Algeria, Islamist parties became important political players (at least until the one in Algeria proved too successful and was suppressed by the military). In nations of the Arab core, by contrast, Islamists have been tolerated—and often modestly encouraged—to the extent that they posed no direct threat to the political regimes. Those individuals who take Islamist notions too seriously, including bin Laden (whose unhappiness about the Saudi kingdom's close ties with the infidel Americans is now well known), have faced exile or worse. But, as the world has learned, those outcast Islamists have learned to operate quite effectively in strange lands, whether in Afghanistan or Europe or even the United States.

Is Islamism, then, a clear and present danger—to the United States and to the world in general, including its 1.2 billion Muslims? The answer might seem obvious in light of the havoc wreaked by a band of Islamist zealots on September 11. To the extent that it nourishes and encourages fanatical hatred, it clearly is a danger. And as Johns Hopkins University international security specialist Michael Vlahos argues in his cogent study *"Terror's Mask: Insurgency Within Islam,"* Americans must be forthright in naming their foe. It is not some nameless "terrorism," Vlahos writes, but a dangerous movement within Islam.

This Islamist insurgency is certainly not all of Islam. And in his book *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, the French scholar Gilles Kepel makes the persuasive case that Islamism itself has split into moderate and extreme elements, with the former championing various notions of Muslim democracy and the latter resorting to violence and terrorism to bring about totalitarian theocracies. Indeed, Kepel argues that

September 11 was a last-ditch effort on the part of Islamist extremists to revive their waning movement. "In spite of what many hasty commentators concluded in its aftermath," Kepel writes, "the attack on the United States was a desperate symbol of the isolation, fragmentation, and decline of the Islamist movement, not a sign of its strength and irrepressible might."

Perhaps. But even if true, Kepel's analysis offers little comfort to the victims of this desperate insurgency within Islam. And even if extremist Islamists are only a minority within Islam, no one should forget the lesson of the Russian Bolsheviks: Determined minorities sometimes win.