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JN Thoughts

A MONTHLY MIX OF IDEAS

Islamic Peace Versus Western Peace

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President Bush's push for Middle East peace in 2008 highlights the huge gap in understanding of the Islamic world on every level in the West, from the man on the street, to Jewish and Christian religious leaders, to our elected officials. Only by gaining an appreciation of Islam's worldview, through its theology and historic trials, can Israel and the West begin to deal with the real issues and challenges.



Joel Gilbert

From the inception of Islam, the Christian West has had difficulty understanding Islam as a different religious phenomenon than Christianity. When Muslims conquered the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century, Christians referred to Muslims arriving from North Africa as "Moors."

Over the centuries, Spaniards continued to refer to Muslims as Moors, even if they were from India or Indonesia. In the rest of Europe, Muslims were referred to as "Turks," after the group of central Asian nomadic invaders who converted to Islam and governed the Islamic Empire in the Middle Ages. In Asia Minor, Christians referred to Muslims as "Tartars," an ethnic name.

When Europeans finally understood that Islam was not an ethnic group, they

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mistakenly perceived it in terms of a Western religious group. In the early 1900s, Europeans began referring to Islam as "Muhammadanism," and Muslims as "Muhammadans," incorrectly assuming the Prophet Muhammad had the same role in Islam that Jesus did in Christianity.

To this day, misunderstandings continue: Westerners describe the mosque as a "Muslim church," equate the Muslim Friday to the Christian Sunday, refer to the Koran as the "Muslim Bible" and believe sheiks to be "Muslim priests." Also, Westerners mistakenly resort to their own worldview by grouping Muslim leaders as left and right wing, "moderate," "conservative" and "radical."

So different are Western and Muslim worldviews that identical words can have two different meanings. In the West, "freedom" is the ability of individuals to participate in the formation, conduct and lawful removal of governments from power — the basis of constitutionalism and parliamentary government. For the Islamic world ruled by foreign powers in

modern times, "freedom" means national independence from foreign rule, which they equate with "tyranny." In the West, the opposite of tyranny is "freedom." In Islam, the opposite of tyranny is "justice." For Muslim thinkers, justice is the ideal and justice distinguishes good rulers from bad rulers.

As for the word "peace," Westerners have liberal and romantic notions of harmony between nations. In Arabic, the modern definition of *salam* simply means an absence of conflict, more like the word "truce" in English. The Arabic word *sulha*, defined as "reconciliation," is much closer to the Western definition of "peace." For example, the Arab-Israeli conflict was in a state of *salam* between 1956 and 1967, from a Muslim point of view, yet there was no "peace" from a Western point of view.

Pursuit Of Peace

Beginning with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's unprecedented visit to Israel in 1977, Israel has been at a disadvantage negotiating "peace" with Muslim coun-

Islamic Peace Versus Western Peace

(continued from previous page)

tries. Muslims have 1,400 years of experience in dealing with Jews and a set of religious principles and historic precedents to rely on that regulate the status of Jews under the leadership of Islamic society.

However, on the Israeli side there was and is no explicit ideology of how to coexist with Muslims since Judaic scriptures and codes of law predate Islam. Hence, Israeli political parties and Jews worldwide have largely misunderstood the negotiating positions of Islamic countries and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) toward Israel, supporting the “land for peace” concept, believing it means “peace” in Western terms.

Israelis and Western observers viewed Sadat’s 1977 mission to Israel as a fundamental ideological breakthrough. However, Sadat did not really break with the past. A devout Muslim, Sadat did not give any legitimacy to Israel. Sadat simply chose a different path to achieve the Islamization of Palestine by exercising a preexisting diplomatic strategy that would, through several diplomatic stages, eliminate Jewish statehood.

In 1947, Jordan’s King Abdullah had proposed acceptance of Israel on U.N. terms because Muslims would retain a huge geographical advantage, allowing them to ultimately defeat the Jews at a later time. Abdullah was correct, the pursuit of a “military only” solution since Israel’s inception in 1948 resulted in the Jews gaining much more territory in each war.

Parameters Of Peace

After the 1967 military defeat to Israel, Cecil Hourani, an adviser to Tunisia’s president, presented three objectives that were later wholly adopted by Egypt:

- *Containment of Israel, territorially and demographically, as a basis for*
- *Weakening and “de-Zionising” Israel, as preparation for*
- *The final transformation of Israel from a sovereign Jewish state into a Muslim state.*

In Sadat’s 1977 Knesset speech, he stated:

In the name of God, I decided to come to you so that we might establish permanent peace based on justice ... Complete withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied after 1967 is a logical and undisputed fact ... It is no use to refrain from recognizing the Palestinian people and their right to statehood as their right of return.

In return for “peace,” Israel relinquished to Egypt the Sinai Peninsula, all the military airfields, oil wells and civilian settlements it had built there and agreed to a system of “autonomy” for Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank. To Israel and the West, the Camp David agreement and diplomatic exchanges with Egypt implied recognition of Jewish statehood while Egypt saw it as only an insignificant formality. For each stage of withdrawal Israel completed, Egypt would grant another degree of “normalization” on the road to returning sovereignty to Islam. If Israel acted differently, degrees of “normalization” would be withdrawn. And

Sadat never called for “peace” nor *sul-ha* (reconciliation) with the Jews. He only proclaimed, “No more war.”

The demands of “The Diplomatic Strategy Against Israel” have never changed since Sadat’s mission to Israel: total Israeli withdrawal to 1967 borders and return of Palestinian refugees into Israel proper — which would transform Israel into a Muslim state. Despite this, Israel agreed to give the PLO land, territory, international status, arms and money, which the PLO accepted, without changing its demands.

Israel’s unelected Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, is now satisfied simply to establish a Palestinian state and divide Jerusalem based on his latest idea that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who was defeated in Palestinian elections by Hamas, in fact does recognize Israel “in his subconscious.”

In order to prosper in the world, the United States needs countries sympathetic to Western democracy; and U.S. security requires a global environment that includes a friendly and secure Western Europe, Japan, Israel and Australia. For decades, Israel has been a strong, democratic Western ally in the Middle East that has enhanced Western security. However, after territorial withdrawals and concessions to the PLO, Israel is no longer a strategic asset for the United States, but instead a security burden.

While President George W. Bush and Israel’s Shimon Peres stress that “peace” is at hand between Israel and “moderates,” the reality is complete consensus across all schools of thought in the Islamic world that Israel’s existence is an injustice and must be eliminated on the path to successful Islamic revival. Misunderstanding of the realities of the Islamic worldview by the United States and Israel is ushering in a coming war for survival by Israel and explosive consequences for Western security. □

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