

Theocracy Alert

'Muslim World Outreach' another US recipe for disaster

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May 5, 2005—The Bush administration's interest, some would say obsession, with the Middle East and the Gulf goes way beyond its stated objectives of ridding the region of regimes antipathetic to the United States.

According to a four-month investigation, written up by David Kaplan in US News, "Washington is ploughing tens of millions of dollars into a campaign to influence" Muslim societies.

So as to achieve this goal, says the report, "the US Government has embarked on a campaign of political warfare unmatched since the height of the Cold War" using teams specialised in military psychological-operations, covert CIA operatives, think tanks and US-funded media.

Washington's strategy to influence the thinking of Muslims is encompassed in "Muslim World Outreach", a grand plan supported by US President George W. Bush, which has been distributed to all arms of the American Government.

It aims to disseminate American "values" concerning "democracy, women's rights and tolerance" and promote the Western way of life so as to split radicals from moderates. At the same time, the CIA undermines and discredits religious leaders and Islamist parties not on the same page.

In my view this is entirely the wrong strategy. While it is true that anti-Americanism is rife throughout the Muslim world, it isn't so much due to fundamentalist religious beliefs but because of America's aggressive foreign policy, its ongoing occupations of Muslim countries and its glaring double standards when it comes to Israel-Palestine.

The fact is most Muslims have long realised US ambitions to alter their thinking, which has made them even more resentful and those beliefs more entrenched. Al Hurra and Sawa, for all their superficial sophistication, are watched and listened to more for their curiosity and entertainment value than anything else, while Arabs, in particular, still prefer to get their news from that scourge of US spinmeisters, Al Jazeera.

Furthermore, such American policies are intrusive and even grossly insulting. There are many Arabs, for example, ordinary folks not extremists, who dislike aspects of Western society including violent, sexually explicit and deviant behaviour depicted in movies and music videos, and the cult of the pleasure-seeking individual, responsible for the erosion of family ties in the West.

Certain Mores

The fact is when it comes to certain mores and core values East is still East and West is West and that's surely as it should be. What a dull monochrome world we would live in if we were all programmed to think the exact same way. It may come as a surprise that the American dream can often seem a nightmare to the uninitiated.

What if the Arab world were to band together to pour millions of dollars into, say, "Western world outreach" to influence and infiltrate schools and churches. What if such a body set-up satellite media outlets targeting Westerners and designed to change the very personas of their listeners and viewers using indoctrination techniques, perhaps even subliminal messages?

Can you imagine the outrage? Fox News anchors would have apoplexy, anti-Islamic preachers, such as Jerry Falwell, Franklin Graham and Pat Robertson would be calling for a crusade.

In truth, Washington's foreign policies have not only failed abysmally, they have made things worse. Prior to the United States going on a rampage of revenge post-9/11, most of the region's youth looked up to America as a force for good. Most genuinely saw democracy as the way forward. Certainly, they were disgruntled over America's favouritism, putting Israelis before Palestinians, but during Clinton's watch, they saw the United States as halfway to being an honest broker.

Washington's mistake was its reaction to the 9/11 attacks. The 19 alleged attackers and their backers were ideological maniacs of the kind found in most societies, and Osama Bin Laden a weird individual, a cast aside warrior remnant from the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, rejected by family and country. Their acts were criminal and instead of being labelled as "Muslims" they should have been given their proper title: killers.

Instead, in the eyes of the more uninformed sectors of the American public, the world's approximately 1.5 billion Muslims were banded together and thought of as extremists or even potential terrorists. American Muslims were rounded up in their thousands and made to disappear for months; Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded and thousands dumped in jails around the world, including Guantanamo, Bagram and Abu Ghraib, where many were abused, tortured and even killed.

More Hawkish

It seems to me that this blanket thinking was promulgated by the more hawkish members of the US administration, who needed a new enemy following the collapse of the Soviet Union able to unite the American people under the Stars and Stripes and smooth the implementation of their long drawn-up neo-imperialist agenda.

The irony is this. Despite US efforts in fighting the so-called war on terror, terrorists have multiplied as evidenced by a new Patterns of Global Terror report, which US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sought to suppress, with the main victims of terrorism being Arabs themselves.

The report concluded that there were more terrorist attacks in 2004 than in any year since 1985, when the first such terror report was published. So embarrassing is the report evidencing Bush's failure that the State Department has decided to stop publishing it in the future.

In short, rather than spend billions of American taxpayers' money on policies which do not bring desired results, winning the region's hearts and minds over time could be achieved far more simply and cheaply thus: The United States should seriously work towards the roadmap without pro-Israel bias. If it cannot or will not, then it should stand aside to allow other countries centre stage in mediations. America should seek a nuclear-free Middle East and that includes Israel.

The United States should set a timetable to withdraw its military from Iraq, leaving not a single base behind and make reparations to the war's many victims. At the same time, it should quit its proliferation of military bases throughout the region. The United States should quit threatening Syria and Iran and instead adopt a hearts and minds policy with those countries in a genuine spirit of reconciliation so as to help them rejoin the community of nations.

And lastly, the United States should quit meddling in the internal affairs of other countries and stop trying to mould the beliefs and religions of others in its own image. This is the way forward if it truly wants to succeed. Let it put aside the sword and the drip-drip of mass indoctrination and turn again to open

dialogue and mutual respect. Only then will the soil in which terrorists currently breed once again blossom in its favour.

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