

Editorial

As if to give the lie to my last editorial, in which I argued that the “war on terror” was a smokescreen covering the imperial ambitions of the United States’ neo-conservative political elite, on the day that the issue went to press, Toronto’s Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) announced the arrest of seventeen young Muslim men on terrorism-related charges. Five are under 18, several are over 30, and the rest are in their late teens and early 20s.

The shock permeated Toronto. Non-Muslims were shocked that “it could happen here,” and Muslims were shocked that some of their own were willing to kill fellow Canadians. As can be imagined, the following media frenzy displayed the usual racism (disguised as attacks on multiculturalism) from commentaries, editorials, letters to the editor, and experts concerning the “threat” of Muslim extremism in Canada. Muslim organizations and those with links to the media were back on the media circuit (or is it circus?) doing interviews, hot on the heels of the cartoon controversy, trying to explain this and to distance themselves and Islam as a religion from attack. There was the usual spike in Islamophobic backlash, although this was largely contained by Toronto’s Mayor David Miller and other leaders.

There was also the usual skepticism and claims of anti-Muslim discrimination from some Muslims. While we do not know the veracity of the evidence, and while it may be admirable that the belief is so strong that Islam prohibits terror that we cannot conceive of fellow Muslims doing such a thing, it ultimately harms the community that this kind of response is so widespread. For one thing, the media use this sentiment to mock us and portray us as cold and indifferent to the threat of terror. For another, although it seems to be painful for some to admit, our community has to take ownership of the extremism existing in its midst.

These men may be innocent and may have been framed or discriminated against, but we have to face up to the results of such extremist interpretations. It is all very well to say that “this is not Islam” and to worry about the media’s portrayal of Islam as a religion of violence, but we must also talk to ourselves and our youths and show them that such actions are beyond the pale of Islam. Moreover, we need to debunk the arguments of those Muslims who challenge this view.

By the same token, we must follow proper Islamic etiquette when engaging in such critiques. The “progressive Muslim” approach of attacking fellow Muslims and mainstream Muslim associations as “Wahhabist” extremists and portraying themselves as the only peaceful, moderate Muslims available to Canada was quite shameful. One radio documentary about Islamic extremism in Toronto played a clip from a prominent Toronto “progressive” Muslim spokesman followed by one from Steven Emerson, a known Islamophobe. One has to imagine that the Muslim community has reached a new low when such people are quoted supporting each other.

Following the case is hard, due to the publication ban, but the lawyers have revealed what they can. Incredibly, the young men were charged with planning to storm the Parliament in Ottawa, hold MPs hostage and decapitate Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and blow up the Canadian Security Intelligence Service’s (CSIS) headquarters and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), among other targets. For the briefest moment, I considered the idea that these arrests had proven me and other skeptical scholars of the “war on terror” wrong: I have been in the CBC building before, and could have died had such an attack been successful. (Nothing like confronting one’s own mortality to alter one’s thinking.) “Thank God that the RCMP and CSIS investigations foiled this plot” was an early thought. But upon deeper investigation, my original position remains the most robust theory to understand this “war,” even if it turns out that we should be grateful to the RCMP/CSIS for foiling indiscriminate bombings.

Before proceeding, I would like to state emphatically that Islam does not support the killing of civilians and that those who argue otherwise are perverting the Qur’anic text. While self-defense is enjoined, indiscriminate aggression is not. Moreover, the Prophet’s prohibition on killing women and children, as well as those devoted to the religious life and old people, has been upheld by Islamic jurisprudence from the beginning.

However, let’s not forget the “Project Thread” fiasco of 2003, in which twenty-one young South Asian men were arrested for “planning an attack” on the Pickering nuclear power station. Supposedly an al-Qaeda sleeper cell, the charges were dropped by the end of the month for lack of evidence. Even though they were never formally charged (or convicted) of a crime, most of them were deported to Pakistan. No apology or clearing of their names was issued. Their lives were ruined, and the Pakistani authorities continue to harass them (www.threadbare.tyo.ca).

And then there was the dramatic revelation about a month later by Mubin Shaikh, a Muslim informant. During an interview with the CBC

about how the CSIS and then the RCMP had recruited him, as well as his role in the arrests, he stated:

So I met with the CSIS guys and they were very interested in me now, so basically they put to me the prospect of working with them,” he said ... [I was asked to find out about] certain people, certain groups, getting close to leaders of certain groups, talking to them, seeing what kind of views they had and reporting on those views, what I thought those views to be, were they nefarious, weren't they nefarious.” (Stewart Bell and Katie Rook, *National Post*, Friday, 14 July 2006.)

His revelations are troubling, because they suggest that the CSIS and the RCMP sought to influence these youths. Muslim community leaders recalled seeing him talking to and befriending these youths outside their mosques. Although they looked up to him as a role model, instead of guiding them and helping them understand the Qur'an properly, he encouraged their line of thinking ... perhaps even directed it. This is entrapment, defined as when undercover law officials lure or encourage people to commit an illegal act that they may not otherwise have thought of doing.

In the East Vancouver newspaper *The Republic*, Michael Nenonen notes: “Noam Chomsky said that during the Vietnam era's anti-war protests, the easiest way to spot an FBI mole was to look for the person advocating the most violent strategies.” A similar phenomenon may be occurring with western governments' undercover officers actually creating the so-called radical Islamist threat. In her report on the Muslim informant, *Toronto Star* reporter Michelle Shephard pointed out:

Australia's first terrorism trial ended in an acquittal last year after jurors heard that a police agent working for the country's spy service, and posing as a journalist, had offered 21-year-old terrorism suspect Zek Mallah \$3,000 for a videotape of him uttering threats against government buildings. In acquitting him of the terrorism charges, the jury concluded that Mallah was not a terrorist, but a troubled orphan full of bravado. The involvement of an FBI informant in the case of seven Miami men charged with terrorism offences two weeks ago has been criticized by some of the defence lawyers who argue that the agent had concocted part of the case. The men are accused of plotting to blow up Chicago's Sears Tower and federal buildings in five cities, and of having ties to Al Qaeda. Lawyer Nathan Clark told the *New York Times* that his client was “induced by the government,” calling the case one of “entrapment.” But the involvement of an undercover officer and informant in a New York case led to a conviction this May and was trumpeted as a milestone in the city's fight

against terrorism. The trial of Shahawar Matin Siraj, convicted of plotting to blow up a subway station, revealed that an Egyptian-born police officer and undercover agent were instrumental in the case. (“Mounties had mole in alleged terror cell Exclusive: Law prohibits publication of prominent member of Muslim community,” *Toronto Star*, 13 July 2006.)

In the article cited above, Nenonen reminds us that the RCMP has played this kind of role before:

During the 1970s, as part of the police action against the FLQ, the RCMP monitored election candidates, stole a Parti Quebecois membership list, opened mail without authorization, engaged in 400 break-ins, electronically spied on at least one member of Parliament, and even burned down a barn in Quebec.

These worrying signs recall the theory that the “war on terror” is a smokescreen for the imperial ambitions of an elite (supported by their followers in satellite countries): The general public remains distracted by supposed terror threats at home, while abroad the empire is being expanded. That fact that Ottawa has embarked on a massive military spending spree at the same time cannot be a coincidence: \$2 billion for helicopters, \$3.4 billion for cargo air, \$2.1 billion for naval supply ships. Including maintenance, this adds up to \$15 billion over 20 years. These announcements were made in June 2006, just as Canadians were feeling grateful that the RCMP and the CSIS had foiled a “terrorist plot” in Toronto.

The subsequent support in Washington, London, Ottawa, and Canberra for Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, which deserves an editorial in its own right, simply “confirms” this theory. This tragedy was portrayed as democracies supporting the “only” democracy in the Middle East against the “terrorist” Hezbollah. That Lebanon is also a democracy, as well as Israel’s actions that invite the appellation of “terrorist” (e.g., the July 30 attack on Qana), seem to be irrelevant. And thus we come back to a theory that exposes such moralizing for what it really is: territorial, expansionist, and imperialist.

This issue’s first article, “Classification of Abrogation in the Qur’an: A Critical Analysis,” tackles an important topic that implicitly addresses some of the themes alluded to above. Abrogation is the concept that later revelations cancel earlier ones, or that the Prophet’s later practices cancel his earlier ones. The author uses the traditional methods (*viz.*, examining the chain of narration and the text for logical consistency) to investigate the relevant hadiths. He argues that the reports of abrogation are not authentic, and that abrogation endangers the Qur’an’s “safety and authenticity.”

Politically, we can see the importance of this kind of investigation in that some zealots, who like to resort to militancy to achieve their goals, often claim that the Qur'anic verses enjoining tolerance were abrogated by those enjoining fighting the enemy.

One of the more distressing aspects of the "war on terror" is its impact on human relations at the micro-level – neighbor to neighbor, colleague to colleague. A growing number of Americans favor racial profiling, and a July 2006 Gallup poll reported that nearly 22 percent would not like to have a Muslim neighbor. Hence, it is timely for AJISS to publish two articles dealing with Muslims and tolerance. Hilman Latief's comparative study of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1048) and Abdul Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153) shows that Muslim civilization is not innately hostile to non-Muslims and so can cultivate sophisticated and respectful ways of relating to non-Muslims. While the modern West prides itself on having invented tolerance, this was a marked feature of medieval Islam. To be sure, many contemporary Muslims, along with their hostile or unaware non-Muslim western counterparts, need to be reminded of this. Many people might be surprised that al-Biruni and al-Shahrastani produced very sophisticated and objective analyses of Indian and Chinese religions, and that, as "Eric J. Sharpe writes, "the honor of writing the first history of religion in world literature seems in fact to belong to the Muslim Shahrastani."

Maher Abu-Munshar's "Islamicjerusalem: A Model for Multiculturalism" examines how these two rulers established a multicultural society in Jerusalem. He introduces the novel concept of "Islamicjerusalem" as a way to designate those periods of Muslim rule in which this city's Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived together in harmony. This essay is a timely reminder that when Muslims rule non-Muslims, they do not force them to convert or kill them on every street corner, as is commonly claimed in some quarters today. Indeed, Usama bin Laden would do well to reflect on the compassionate treatment that `Umar ibn al-Khattab and Salah al-Din (Saladin) extended to Jews and Christians, even as they signed treaties ending bloody wars. Salah al-Din was renowned in Europe for his military prowess tempered by his chivalry and merciful nature. In contrast, bin Laden is reviled and hated for his barbarity.

In their "Islamic Concept of Education Reconsidered," Khosrow Bagheri and Zohre Khosravi provide a thoughtful exploration of the assumptions about rationality that underpin liberal critiques of religious education. They conclude that, contrary to the liberal presumption that religious education is akin to indoctrination, "rationality is involved in all elements of the Islamic concept of education." They also argue that both modern Muslim madras-

sahs and modern western classrooms rely more on indoctrination than on education through reason: “It must be noted that it is not too difficult to create a ‘doctrine’ from science and then indoctrinate the people with it.”

We are pleased to include in this issue’s “Forum” section a submission from Walter R. Schumm, a retired colonel and professor of family studies who has a unique perspective on the underlying sociological causes for the Bush administration’s abuse of military prisoners. He presents a very strong argument that such abuse is morally wrong as well as pragmatically and strategically counter-productive. Most importantly, Schumm recognizes the disastrous impact that this abuse is having on the United States’ relations with the Muslim world and offers the following very moving apology that deserves widespread publicity:

If it were possible for me to apologize to the entire Islamic world for our errors and pray for their forgiveness, I surely would, though it would not be deserved and perhaps not likely to be granted. I can certainly say that abuse of EPWs is not consistent with the American military and moral principles that I was taught to respect and obey.

His essay reminds us that even in a time of war, people of different faiths can reach across the divide and grasp the hand of the “other” in order to bring about peace, justice, and mutual respect. AJISS is proud to be his companion in this.

To end on a sad note. Dilnawaz Siddiqui, a long-time member of the AJISS Editorial Board, passed away on 3 August 2006. *Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji`un*. Always willing to make time to work for AJISS, he excelled in doing article peer reviews, writing book reviews, and offering guidance for the journal’s editorial. Most recently, he had agreed to take over some of my responsibilities as editor during the birth of my last child, including writing the editorial for the AJISS 22:4 issue. He will be sorely missed. May Allah (swt) forgive his sins, give him ease in the grave, and grant him Paradise.

Katherine Bullock