

Islam  
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# What Muslims hate about the US

Sidney Blumenthal

Pentagon experts have made a discovery: Muslims do not hate America's freedoms, but its policies. Who wrote this - a pop sociologist, obscure blogger or anti-war playwright? "Muslims see Americans as strangely narcissistic - namely, that the war is all about us. As the Muslims see it, everything about the war is - for Americans - really no more than an extension of American domestic politics and its great game.

This perception is ... heightened by election-year atmospherics, but none the less sustains their impression that when Americans talk to Muslims, they are talking to themselves." Actually, this is the conclusion of the report of the defence science board taskforce on strategic communication - the product of a Pentagon advisory panel - delivered in September. Its 102 pages were not made public in the presidential campaign, but, barely noticed by the US press,

silently slipped on to a Pentagon website on Thanksgiving eve.

The taskforce of military, diplomatic, academic and business experts, assigned to develop strategy for communications in the "global war on terrorism", had unfettered access, denied to journalists, to the inner workings of the national security apparatus. There was no intent to contribute to public debate, much less political controversy; the report was for internal consumption only. They discovered more than a government sector "in crisis", though it found that: "Missing are strong leadership, strategic direction, adequate coordination, sufficient resources, and a culture of measurement and evaluation."

As it journeyed into the recesses of the Bush foreign policy, the taskforce documented the failure of fundamental premises. "America's negative image in world opinion and diminished ability to persuade

are consequences of factors other than the failure to implement communications strategies," the report declares. What emerges is an indictment of an expanding and unmitigated disaster based on stubborn ignorance of the world and failed concepts that bear little relation to empirical reality, except insofar as they confirm and incite gathering hatred among Muslims.

The Bush administration, according to the defence science board, has misconceived a war on terrorism in the image of the cold war. However, the struggle is not the west versus Islam; while we blindly call this a "war on terrorism", Muslims "in contrast see a history-shaking movement of Islamic restoration" against "apostate" Arab regimes allied with the US and "western modernity - an agenda hidden within the official rubric

of a 'war on terrorism'". In this conflict, "wholly unlike the cold war", the Bush administration's impulse has been to "imitate the routines and bureaucratic ... mindset that so characterised that era".

So the US projects Iraqis and other Arabs as people to be liberated, like those "oppressed by Soviet rule". And the US accepts authoritarian Arab regimes as allies against the "radical fighters". All this is nothing less than a gigantic "strategic mistake". "There is no yearning-to-be-liberated-by-the-US groundswell among Muslim societies - except to be liberated perhaps from what they see as apostate tyrannies that the US so determinedly promotes and defends." Rhetoric about freedom is received as "no more than self-serving hypocrisy", highlighted daily by the US occupation in Iraq.

"Muslims do not 'hate our freedom', but rather they hate our policies."

The "dramatic narrative ... of the war on terrorism", Bush's grand storyline connecting all the dots from the World Trade Centre to Baghdad, has "borne out the entire radical Islamist bill of particulars". As a result, jihadists have been able to transform themselves from marginal figures in the Muslim world into defenders against invasion, with a following of millions.

"Thus the critical problem in American public diplomacy directed toward the Muslim world is not one of 'dissemination of information', or even one of crafting and delivering the 'right' message. Rather, it is a fundamental problem of credibility. Simply, there is none - the United States is without a working channel of communication to the world of Muslims ... Inevitably, therefore, whatever Americans do and say only

serves the party that has both the message and the 'loud and clear channel: the enemy.'"

Almost three months ago, the board delivered its report to the White House. But, a source told me, it has received no word back. The report has been ignored by those to whom its recommendations are directed. For the Bush administration, expert analysis is extraneous, as it is making clear to national security professionals in its partisan scapegoating of the CIA.

Experts can only be expert in telling the White House what it wants to hear. Expertise is valued not for the evidence it offers for correction, but for propaganda and validation. But no one, not in the White House, Congress or the dwindling coalition of the willing, can claim the catastrophe has not been foretold by the best and most objective minds commissioned by the Pentagon - perhaps for the last time.

# American Muslims' anxieties

By Akhtar Mahmud Faruqi

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ELECTION 2004 is over. Never before have the rural red — the Republican supporters, and the urban blue — the Democratic voters in the US were seen in such combative mood, locked in a fierce battle for the White House. Visionary wisdom was missing as grimly faced aides resorted to emotional catchphrases and commonplace buzzwords during the days leading up to the elections.

The outcome was difficult to predict to the last. Yet, in the wee hours of November 3 President Bush triumphantly emerged as the winner. As an analyst observed, the last 48 hours saw a marked decline of the secular intelligentsia and a visible rise of the religious right. Fifty-one per cent of the rural red had voiced unequivocal support for President Bush.

Conceding defeat, a teary-eyed Senator John Kerry "talked about the danger of division in our country and the need — desperate need — for unity, for finding the common ground, coming together" in his congratulatory call to President Bush. "Today, I hope we can begin the healing..."

Healing indeed was a pressing need. Election 2004 created an unprecedented stir in the US and beyond — across the Atlantic and the Pacific. Understandably so. The election's outcome was to impact Americans and non-Americans, though in varying degrees and different ways. Not surprisingly, both the Americans and the non-Americans aired their views.

The Muslim Americans voted en bloc for Senator Kerry. Demonstrating their collective strength, thanks to the sustained strivings of the American Muslim Task force (AMT) headed by Dr Agha Saeed, a Pakistani. According to Dr Lisette Poole of California State University Howard, Muslim

Americans and Arab Muslims "are firmly embarked on the road of political involvement".

The Muslim support for Kerry raises the crucial question: Will the defeat of the Senator adversely affect Muslim Americans? Will the anticipated introduction of Patriot Act II by the triumphant Bush administration compound their problems? And will the president, who visited a mosque in the immediate post-Sept 11 period and described Islam as a religion of peace, continue to hold the Muslims in a similar esteem?

In his victory speech, Bush gave a hint of his intentions as he outlined his priorities: "Reaching these goals will require the broad support of the Americans. So today I want to speak to every person who voted

require rapid restoration of civil rights of all American citizens and treating them at par with others. An equally paramount need of the time is to deal with the terrorists with an iron hand without blurring the distinction between genuine freedom fighters and adventurous, hardcore hoodlums.

Dr M. A. Muqtedar Khan, an educationist, says: "The American identity is gradually changing. What we saw on November 2 was just the tip of the iceberg. American Muslims have to think hard about what position they wish to occupy in the New Republic and fight even harder to get it. American Muslims must respect the diversity within the community and use it as a strategic asset. American Muslims will likely face a tough future."

While such observations carry considerable weight, the fact remains that the bloc vote has done Muslims more good than harm. It also holds the promise of precipitating a wholesome change. Its immediate benefits enunciated by an AMT supporter, can be summed up as follows:

1) Self-correction — the errors and omissions of 2000 were corrected in 2004 and broader consultation has resulted in better results.

2) Environment — they are beginning to understand America and America is beginning to understand Islam and Muslims.

3) Contextualization — even though Bush won the

election, about half the country voted against him. The Muslims were not alone and isolated as they would have been had they voted for a third party.

4) Maturity — they have learnt to agree and disagree without a split.

It is for American Muslims to transform the 'worst of times' into the 'best of times' by reaching out to fellow Americans and present the peaceful face of Islam. As for Pakistani Americans, President Bush's victory should signify the end of the roller-coaster equation that has characterized ties between Washington and Islamabad in the past.

It is for American Muslims to transform the 'worst of times' into the 'best of times' by reaching out to fellow Americans and present the peaceful face of Islam. As for Pakistani Americans, President Bush's victory should signify the end of the roller-coaster equation that has characterized ties between Washington and Islamabad in the past.

for my opponent. To make this nation stronger and better, I will need your support and I will work to earn it. I will do all I can do to deserve your trust."

Later, at his first press conference after re-election, the President remarked: "I will be your president regardless of your faith, and I don't expect you to agree with me necessarily on religion. As a matter of fact, no president should ever try to impose religion on our society...The great thing that unites is the fact you can worship freely if you choose..."

Scrapping Patriot Act could lend meaning to this resolve. 'Healing wounds' will, inter alia,