

There are people in the United States who have been quick to demonise Islam. Some equate Islam with terrorism. Hate drawings have depicted not Osama bin Laden or al-Qaeda figures but the venerated Prophet Muḥammad (SAW). This appears as “a direct attack on Islam” and is “a denigration of faith.” However, Muslims should take some solace from the fact that of Britons polled, 57 percent believe that free speech protection should not allow newspapers to print pictures of the Prophet Muḥammad (SAW). There is no doubt that framing the debate about the hate drawings of the Prophet Muḥammad (SAW) in absolute terms played directly into the hands of some autocratic Muslim rulers who charge that Western democracy is anti-religious and incompatible with Islam.

The Gallup poll found that the majority of Muslims around the world do not want their religious leaders to draft constitutions or rule the country. But they do favour *Shari‘ah* as a source of legislation. This is not due to Muslims’ distrust of religious leaders but largely because Muslims do not support a theocratic government ruled by religious leaders. Nevertheless, it is true that most religious leaders are somewhat detached from reality and, therefore, may not understand the complexities involved in drafting a constitution for a desired political system.

This book is a must for those who want to know what the majority of Muslims around the world think. It is highly recommended for those in the United States who still think that Muslims around the world hate America for its freedom and democracy.

Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization. By Akbar Ahmed. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007, pp. 323. ISBN-10: 0815701322.

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Journey into Islam is an account of Akbar Ahmad’s “anthropological excursion” of countries in the Middle East, South Asia and East

Asia “observing, talking and listening to Muslims” (p. 12). He was accompanied by his research assistants and the project was generously funded by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. The research team interviewed some 120 people at universities, hotels and cafes, religious seminaries and mosques asking them their thoughts and opinions about the world they live in. The interviewees included prime ministers, presidents, princes and sheikhs, taxi drivers and indeed ordinary Muslims. The observations and reflections are documented in prose and photographs.

The book proceeds from the assumption that the people in the West, particularly, in the United States have a distorted image of Islam largely due to the “war on terror” and the rise of Islamic radicalism. Equally persistent is Muslim anger towards and mistrust of the United States and the West. One theme that repeatedly emerges from reading this book is the persistence of misunderstandings in the West about Islam and vice versa. Akbar Ahmad, the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at American University in Washington DC, is knowledgeable about and comfortable with both Islam and the West and hence assumed the responsibility of correcting these gross distortions and thus to prevent the “clash of civilisations” becoming a reality. Interestingly, the phrase “clash of civilisations” appears as a chapter heading followed by a note of interrogation. Akbar’s preferred term is “a world civilisation” in which people depend on each other and in which people do not simply tolerate but respect each other’s ways of life.

One of the major findings of this study is that Muslims generally have feelings of anger towards the West, particularly towards the United States which has consistently taken an unjust pro-Israeli stand vis-à-vis Palestinians and Muslims. They feel that everywhere Islam is under attack and their beloved Prophet Muḥammad (SAW) is, to say the least, belittled. The forces of globalisation and the “war on terror” have exacerbated such feelings leading the two sides “in an adversarial relationship” (p. 6). Muslims, therefore, return to their roots.

The book divides Muslim attitudes towards Islam into three categories: Ajmer, Aligarh and Deoband—all in India. Ajmer represents peaceful Sufi mysticism exemplified by the poet, Rumi. “Genuine Sufis are essentially similar wherever they come from, in

that they share an inner light and awakening and an outer courtesy and service to humanity” (p. 34). They are generally open to accepting the beliefs and practises of others. Aligarh, founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, represents Islamic modernism. Followers of Aligarh school, such as Mohammad Ali Jinnah of Pakistan, Muḥammad Abduh of Egypt, and Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran, “share the desire to engage with modern ideas while preserving what to them is essential to Islam” (p. 37). However, the Aligarh approach “had become enfeebled and in danger of being overtaken by the Deoband” (p. 192), the school which represents non-fatalistic, orthodox Islam. Deobandis consciously “trace their world view to mainstream Islamic tradition and thought” (p. 35). They believe that Islam is under attack from the West and must be defended. A few of its adherents might have been drawn to terrorism but the vast majority is non-violent.

Ahmed describes in detail how the three movements express themselves in the countries that he and his team studied. The author misses two important groups. Among Muslims, a large majority of them are neither extremists nor mystic. They might not belong to any of these groups. It would, therefore, seem an over-simplification of the reality to box all the Muslims in a three-fold classification. Second, it is unfortunate that Iranians are excluded from the study. The countries visited are predominantly Sunni to the neglect of the Shia perspective to be found in Shia dominated Iran. Akbar Ahmad does discuss basic Shia-Sunni differences but that cannot be a substitute for eliciting Shia opinion about the world they live in.

The book, it may be noted, is not simply a travelogue but also an empirical study like many others. It documents not simply interviews and discussions but analyses the data collected through extended surveys. Likewise, his criticisms of the West and of globalisation are very familiar. It is not something new to read that globalisation lacks a moral core and that it legitimises a culture of individualism and materialism antithetical to the teachings of Islam. Finally, the findings of this anthropological study are consistent with those of the surveys of public perceptions and opinions in the Muslim world conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project and others. What distinguishes *Journey into Islam* from other works, however, is its author’s penetrating analysis of the lessons learned from the trip

and the challenges they pose for the West and particularly the United States. Written with a good deal of passion and a sense of urgency, Akbar Ahmad makes a powerful case for initiating a dialogue between Islam and the West to usher in a just and humane world. This is a compelling reason to read and admire the book.

By portraying the three-dimensional picture of the Muslim world, Akbar Ahmad achieves three objectives. One, he conveys the message that the Muslim world is not monolithic. Two, he advises the West to engage with Muslims and acknowledge “their common humanity.” Three, he advises Muslims to be eclectic: open as in Ajmir, committed as in Deoband and skilled in negotiation with governments and organisations as taught in Aligarh.

Journey into Islam reveals that Muslim understanding of Islam is undergoing reform. Muslims are seeking their religious roots for answers, but they are not stuck in the past. The West can influence this crucial process for a better world by showing more interest and respect to Islam and the Muslims. The book recommends that the West and the government of the United States in particular should reach out sincerely and seriously to the Muslim world and engage in serious dialogue. They should find ways to overcome stereotypes, respect Islam, and adopt a programme for sharing economic, educational and other resources. Finally, the U.S. should shun its reliance upon instruments of war and live up to its own ideals of democracy through promoting international dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq. By Ahmed S. Hashim. London: Hurst & Company, 2006, pp. 482. ISBN: 1-85065-795-5.

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In this sobering account of the ongoing violence in Iraq, Ahmed Hashim, a specialist on Middle Eastern strategic issues and irregular