

IDEAS

Irshad Manji: 'A common aspiration such as the American Dream is crucial to giving Muslims a sense of belonging to something larger than cultural enclaves'

In praise of the great satan

IRSHAD MANJI

Against the backdrop of civil war, Abraham Lincoln stirred Americans by appealing to their "better angels." Now some of those angels appear in an unprecedented study about Muslims in the United States — and they may show us how to prevent civil war in Europe.

Muslim Americans, released by the Pew Research Center, contains moments of bad news. For example, one in four respondents under the age of 30 accepts suicide bombing. As a reformed-minded Muslim, I say that honouring any religion of peace through violence is like preserving virginity through pre-marital sex.

But the Pew report offers a lot more good news. Political Islam has not caught on in America as it has in Europe because most Muslims in the U.S. are — dare it be said — treated with dignity.

The vast majority of those surveyed like their communities and describe their lives as "pretty happy" or "very happy." Which means lobbyists do not speak for Muslim Americans when they cry that the U.S. hates Islam.

In Berlin recently, an audience buzzed nervously when I suggested that Europe can learn from America about integrating Muslims. Afterwards, several people confided to me that they know the U.S. is getting something right. What is that something? As I engage with young Muslims on both sides of the Atlantic, I see three factors: economics, diversity and faith.

For plenty of Muslims in the United States, ambition and initiative pay off. The Pew survey reinforces this lesson, telling us that 71% of Muslim Americans believe most people in the U.S. "can make it if they are willing to work hard."

Meanwhile, in Europe, young Muslims face blatant discrimination in employment, educational and social opportunities, even when they are citizens. Many subsist on welfare, which only gives them time to stew and surf the Web for preachers who spew a rigid identity. This is the path that led Mohammed Bouyeri to murder Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh.

In much of the U.S., diversity is a reason to intermingle. The Pew study reveals that most Muslims are close friends with non-Muslims.

In much of Europe, diversity has become an excuse to self-segregate. Many of Europe's mosques, and the Muslims who attend them, refuse to communicate in the language of their new surroundings. As a result, young Muslim men drift away from moderate religious authorities and fall for online opportunists. That is how Mohammad Sidique Khan, mastermind of the London transit bombers,



SHAH MARAI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Mourners surround the body of slain Afghan journalist Zakia Zaki.

Afghanistan's silenced female voices

KHORSHIED SAMAD

The recent murders of two well-respected Afghan women journalists have shocked the Afghan people, especially those brave female activists and journalists who continue to fight for freedom of expression and equality in their war-stricken nation.

Zakia Zaki, 38, was shot seven times while she lay sleeping with her 10-month-old child. (The baby, along with her five other children, thankfully was unharmed.) Ms. Zaki was a role model, working tirelessly to defend her people's rights. Since the fall of the Taliban, she was the station manager of Radio-Solh, or Peace Radio (once supported with Canadian aid money) in Jabal-Seraj, just north of Kabul, in addition to being the headmistress of a girls high school and a political activist.

Ms. Zaki was killed just six days after the murder of a popular reporter and anchorwoman from the private television station Shamshad TV, in Kabul. Shekaiba Sanga Amaaj, 22, was shot in her home in Kabul, reportedly after refusing the advances of a relative who'd asked for her hand in marriage. (This same relative allegedly had been involved in a previous kidnapping attempt against Ms. Amaaj's younger sister.)

While police claim her killing was based on personal, not political, motives, the barbaric murder of Ms. Zaki appears to have been perpetrated by terrorists. The targeting of such prominent figures, which began with the murder of gender-rights activist Ama Jan in Kandahar last year, should be seen as a test of will between violent Islamists and those who long for a free, pluralistic Afghanistan.

For those in the West who call for a premature pullout of NATO's military forces from Afghanistan, such murders demonstrate what is at stake.

These valiant Afghan women personify courage in a country still reeling from the cumulative effects of nearly 30 years of invasion, political upheaval, acute poverty and the oppressive cruelty of the Taliban regime and al-Qaeda's transnational terrorism. Despite significant strides over the past five years, Afghan women continue to be the nation's most vulnerable group.

The statistics are staggering. Afghan women still suffer the highest maternal mortality rate in

people felt when the Taliban were driven from power in late 2001.

And yet some Westerners — including some politicians and activists right here in Canada — want to abandon the Afghans once again, as the West did in the early 1990s, to the poisonous agenda of extremists.

The other option is to stay the course — as difficult, harrowing and unpredictable as it may be.

I, for one, hold out for the more difficult path — the road less travelled in this weary day and age. I believe that we must take the higher moral ground against our common enemies, and maintain our efforts at building peace, security and economic improvement for the Afghan people.

Having worked and lived in Afghanistan as a journalist for a few years among these brave people, I made a promise, as did the international community, that we would not let them down yet again. For the sake of victims such as Zakia, Shekaiba and Ama Jan, and the brave fallen soldiers from Canada and other countries who have served in Afghanistan, we need to show our resolve and continued commitment.

National Post

■ Khorshied Samad is the former correspondent and Kabul bureau chief for Fox News, former reporter for ABC News and the wife of the Afghan ambassador to Canada. She is also the co-curator of the photo-journalism exhibition, *Voices on the Rise: Afghan Women Making the News*, which is focused on the lives and work of Afghan women journalists. The exhibition will appear at the Alliance Française de Toronto at 24 Spadina Rd. from June 14 to July 5, then will be exhibited at the Toronto Public Library City Hall branch from July 9 to Aug. 31.

Could Israel do it?

A fleet of 50 jets would be enough to hobble Iran's nuclear program

DANIEL PIPES

Barring a "catastrophic development," reports *Middle East Newsline*, George W. Bush has decided not to attack Iran. An administration source explains that Washington deems Iran's co-operation "needed for a withdrawal [of U.S. forces] from Iraq."

If correct, this implies the Jewish state stands alone against a regime that threatens to "wipe Israel off the map" and is building the nuclear weapons to do so. Israeli leaders are hinting that their patience is running out: Deputy Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz just warned that "diplomatic efforts should bear results by the end of 2007."

Can the Israel Defense Forces in fact disrupt Iran's nuclear program?

No doubt, the question has been addressed in secret by many of the world's intelligence agencies. But talented outsiders, using open sources, can also try their hand. Whitney Raas and Austin Long studied this problem at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and published their impressive analysis, "Osirak Redux? Assessing Israeli Capabilities to Destroy Iranian Nuclear Facilities," in the spring, 2007 issue of the journal *International Security*.

Raas and Long focus exclusively on feasibility, not political desirability or strategic ramifications: Were the Israeli national command to decide to damage the Iranian infrastructure, could its forces accomplish this mission? The authors consider five components of a successful strike:

■ Intelligence. To impede the production of fissile material requires incapacitating only three facilities of Iran's nuclear infrastructure. In ascending order of importance, these are: the heavy water plant and plutonium production reactors under construction at Arak, a uranium conversion facility in Isfahan, and a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz. Destroying the Natanz facility in particular, they note, "is critical to impeding Iran's progress toward nuclearization."

■ Ordnance. To damage all three facilities with reasonable confidence requires — given their size, their being underground, the weapons available to the Israeli forces, and other factors — 24 5,000-pound weapons and 24 2,000-pound weapons.

■ Platforms. Noting the "odd amalgamation of technologies" available to the Iranians and the limitations of their fighter planes and ground defences to stand up to the high-tech Israeli air force, Raas-Long calculate that the IDF needs a relatively small strike package of 25 F-15s and 25 F-16s.

■ Routes. Israeli jets can reach their targets via three paths: Turkey to the north, Jordan and Iraq in the middle or Saudi Arabia to the south. In terms of fuel and cargo, the distances in all three cases are manageable.

■ Defence forces. The authors calculate how many Israeli planes would have to reach their target for the operation to succeed. They figure 24 planes must reach Natanz, six to Isfahan, and five to Arak, or 35 all together. Turned around, that means the Iranian defenders minimally must stop 16 of 50 planes, or one-third of the strike force. The authors consider this attrition rate "considerable" for Natanz and "almost unimaginable" for the other two targets.

In all, Raas-Long find that the relentless modernization of Israel's air force gives it "the capability to destroy even well-hardened targets in Iran with some degree of confidence." Comparing an Iranian operation to Israel's 1981 attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor, which was a complete success, they find this one "would appear to be no more risky" than the earlier one.

The great question mark hanging over the operation, one which the authors do not speculate about, is whether any of the Turkish, Jordanian, American or Saudi governments would acquiesce to Israeli penetration of their air spaces. (Iraq, recall, is effectively under American control.) Unless the Israelis win advance permission to cross these territories, their jets might have to fight their way to Iran. More than any other factor, this one imperils the entire project. (The IDF could reduce this problem by flying along borders, for example, the Turkey-Syria one, permitting both countries en route to claim Israeli planes were in the other fellow's air space.)

Raas-Long imply, but do not state explicitly, that the IDF could reach Kharg Island, through which over 90% of Iranian oil is exported, heavily damaging the Iranian economy.

That Israeli forces have "a reasonable chance of success" unilaterally to destroy key Iranian nuclear facilities could help deter Tehran from proceeding with its weapon program. The Raas-Long study, therefore, makes a diplomatic deal more likely. Its results deserve the widest possible dissemination.

National Post

■ Daniel Pipes (www.DanielPipes.org), director of the Middle East Forum, taught for two years at the U.S. Naval War College.

MANY YOUNG MUSLIMS IN EUROPE WHISPER TO ME, 'I WISH I LIVED IN THE U.S.'

fell under the sway of "Sheikh Google," the collective nickname for Islamist Web sites.

■ To Americans, it is not the fact of having faith that invites scrutiny, but what one is perceived to be doing with that faith. Western Europeans, still steeped in a backlash against the Catholic Church, often show suspicion or outright contempt to people of faith. Such "secular fundamentalism" leads some Muslims to believe that they will never be accepted by their adopted countries. So why integrate?

Small wonder that young Muslims in Western Europe whisper to me, "I wish I lived in the United States." The honesty doesn't end there. Muslim men, in their 20s, have complained to me that in an effort to appear sensitive, Europeans downplay shared values. This confuses many Muslim youth and creates a vacuum that radical clerics can exploit.

Translation: A common aspiration such as the American Dream is crucial to giving Muslims a sense of belonging to something larger and more dynamic than cultural enclaves.

But what about the Patriot Act and Guantanamo Bay? The answer always comes back that these are unfortunate and unjust exceptions. In America, they say, you can be more than a Muslim. You are a member of the wider public.

Naive? Not according to the Pew study. More than half of Muslims in the U.S. identify themselves as Americans first, easily eclipsing patriotism among Muslims in Germany, Spain or Britain. Clearly, the U.S. has retained its genius as a nation of immigrants.

To be sure, there is a long way to go in giving non-immigrant Muslims, especially African-Americans, a sense of belonging. Most are not among the better educated, wealthier and politically influential Americans that so many South Asian, Iranian and Arab Muslims are.

However, that gap is the product of America's persistent racial battle. It has almost nothing to do with a fear of Islam.

For all the slogans, accusations and fulminations of the Islam industry's lobbyists, fear is not what mainstream Americans feel about Muslims. Just ask the 73% of Muslims who told Pew that they have never been discriminated against in the U.S.

Europe, take notes. The U.S., take a break from self-flagellation. Reformist Muslims, take your cue. In the U.S., you have the possibility of a voice. Islam's better angels depend on it.

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