

Religious Freedom in Saudi Arabia

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In the Name of Allah
Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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Preface

Thirty hours had not passed since the shocking, unlawful events of September 11, 2001, before television screens across the United States and the world were saturated with the images of two ‘pilots’ – two young men from Saudi Arabia, Amir Bukhari and Adnan Bukhari. These images, repeatedly flashed in the global media, suggested the American authorities had discovered the identities of two of the pilots, both Saudi nationals, who had crashed their respective aircraft into the World Trade Centre towers in New York, as well as the Pentagon in Washington.

When it subsequently came to light that Adnan Bukhari was in fact alive and well, and that his brother Amir Bukhari had actually died in the United States a year prior to the attacks, few learned the truth. Fewer people still knew that at as the image of Adnan Bukhari were flashing across the screen, he was in the custody of American intelligence services and incapable of defending himself until long after the presumption of guilt was firmly established.

Shortly after 9/11, the world also came to ‘know’ that American authorities had identified the hijackers – nineteen Muslims, eleven of whom were Saudi nationals. Thereafter, their full identities were revealed, alongside their photographs, in the media and posted on the walls of all international airports. However, many of these suspects managed to rebut these reports by contacting newspapers and announcing that they were still very much alive. Within ten days, it emerged that at least eight of the suspected identified as participants in the attacks were actually still alive!

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The passport of a ninth suspect was presented by the American administration as proof that a Saudi national had been amongst the hijackers. This despite the fact that it was highly unlikely for a passerby to discover an intact, unblemished passport in the debris of an incinerated aircraft several days after it crashed. As this official account gradually faded, the mystery of how this sole passport of a missing passenger, who was Muslim and a Saudi national, reached the American authorities remains an enigma.

For a long time, terminals of international airports were filled with photographs of the alleged dead persons who have been living. The strength of the media, whether by remaining silent or going public, is sufficient enough to assure that, at least, eight lies remained undiscovered in a bid not to negatively affect the credibility of the US administration and its official version of the incident.

Less than a month after 9/11, letters laced with artificially synthesized anthrax germs, featuring the message ‘Death to Israel! Death to America! Allah is the Greatest!’, were sent to members of Congress and journalists. Thereafter, American politicians and journalists professed that terrorists had the ability to manufacture biological weapons, and had begun to use them. Fear entered into every home in North America, relevant vaccines ran short, and the postal system was altered.

However, an expert on biological weapons, Barbara Rosenberg, would not be the first to discover that the powder enclosed in the envelopes was actually a product of an American military laboratory. This was a fact the American

administration of George W. Bush knew full well from the time that the letters first surfaced.⁽¹⁾

So what was the motive behind the Bush Administration deluding the world into believing that it was Saudi pilots who had been responsible for this crime while it knew the truth? What was the motive behind the American administration hoodwinking the world into believing that it was eight or more Saudis that were responsible for this crime when, in fact, they were still alive? The American administration did not revise their initial official account about the 9/11 tragedy event even after certain facts later came to light. If their account was based on factual evidence, why was false evidence needed to support it?

The reputations of the 9/11 “living dead” were tarnished internationally in a manner unprecedented in history. The presence of the definitive evidence mentioned above establishes various aspects of governmental liability, enough for any fair minded judge to order compensation or damages to the accused. So why wasn’t the conscience of a single American stirred enough to remedy the harm caused by this injustice by, at the very least, apologising?

Is it because the honour of a Muslim is not respected on the same level as other human beings? Or is it because an apology would have drawn attention to the reality behind the whole sordid affair? Moreover, why did the Bush Administration leave the American public in a state of panic and terror for a more than a month, and not disclose to them the reality it knew from day one? They, in fact, continued to embellish facts so every American citizen came to believe they were at

(1) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/archive/1873368.stm>



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risk of an impending act of ‘Islamic biological terrorism.’

In a democratic country, is it not strange that not a single citizen out of 300 million questioned the government regarding the potential harm they faced due to their leaders penchant for suppressing the truth? Is not an examination of this depressing public response regarding these facts enough to show us how, at the end of time, people will believe in the anti-Christ and concur with him without the benefit of an accurate assessment revealing the truth?

I had initially embarked on this work in the wake of a report that was issued by the U.S. State Department on International Religious Freedom for the year 2005. Later, certain additions were included and, as the reader will see, the initial input of the author and his specific opinions has largely disappeared. I have limited myself to citing specific, documented facts. It is hoped that this will help the reader assess the credibility of the State Department’s religious freedom reports, and that readers might find answers to other questions periodically raised in examining similar reports.

The Author,
September 11, 2008
Makkah

International Religious Freedom Report 2005: False Allegations

The annual reports issued by the U.S. State Department on global religious freedom regularly featured sections on ‘Religious Freedom in Saudi Arabia,’⁽¹⁾. These reports are distributed by the U.S. State Department via its official information outlets, from where it is circulated to centres of research in the West, the international media, and governmental and non-governmental organizations.

These reports, which the State Department claims offer balanced assessments of religious freedom in Saudi Arabia and other countries around the world, are in fact politically motivated, arising from specific cultural viewpoints which desire that their standards be the criteria for judging the cultural values of others.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, specifically, is a primary recipient of attention in these reports. The Kingdom is given more prominence due to its religious, political, and economic significance, not only in the Middle East but globally.

Accordingly, it becomes incumbent on Saudis, cognizant of our significant global role, to challenge the contents of

(1) International Religious Freedom Report 2005, Saudi Arabia
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51609.htm>

these reports, make our viewpoints clear to the world, and present facts ignored by these reports. This will enable the reader to learn the truth.

It is appropriate to emphasize that the report issued by the State Department in 2005 is not intended to be the focus of this piece in and of itself. Rather, the original version of this article was written in response to it, and to the reports which preceded and were issued subsequent to it. Moreover, the U.S. religious freedom reports influence the reports issued by other international organizations concerned with human rights in form as well as substance. For example, the report issued in January 2009 by U.S.-based Human Rights Watch, which stated the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

'... systematically discriminates against its religious minorities - in particular, the Twelver Shia... Official discrimination against Shia (including Ismailis) encompasses government employment, religious practices, education, and the justice system.'⁽¹⁾

I am hopeful that the impartial reader will find in the following discussion responses to the criticism outlined in these reports. From the Saudi perspective, the allegations in these reports should be reviewed with an objective analysis. Accordingly, we have probed facts for the benefit of those who are sincere in their hunt for the truth.

The U.S. State Department issued the 'International Religious Freedom Report 2005' on November 8, 2005. This report designated the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with

(1) *ibid*

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countries like Burma and China, as a 'Country of Particular Concern' as far as religious freedom was concerned, due to what it termed as, 'particularly severe violations of religious freedom.'

Some excerpts from the report specifically regarding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are as follows:

'Freedom of religion does not exist. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. Religious freedom is not recognized or protected under the laws, and basic religious freedoms are denied to all but those who adhere to the state-sanctioned version of Sunni Islam.

The Government publicly restated its policy that non-Muslims are free to practice their religions at home and in private; however, the Government does not always respect this right in practice.

Citizens are denied the freedom to choose or change their religion

Members of the Shi'a minority continued to face political and economic discrimination, including limited employment opportunities, little representation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of mosques and community centers.

The Government enforces a strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam... and discriminates against other branches of Islam.

The Government prohibits public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and

sometimes torture for engaging in religious activity that attracts official attention.

... all public school children receive religious instruction that conforms to the Salafi tradition of Islam.

While there was an improvement in press freedom during the reporting year, open discussions of religious issues were limited.’⁽¹⁾

To evaluate the verdicts arrived at by the American report in a manner more just and meticulous, one must keep the following facts in mind:

The (Native) Saudi Populace is Entirely Muslims

All citizens of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, whether Sunni, Jafari, Shi’a, or Isma’ili Shi’a, claim, without exception, to be Muslim. And all Muslims in the Kingdom submit to Islam as a system that governs their beliefs, moral values, and the laws according to which they conduct their dealings – in addition to governing the political, economic and social aspects of their lives.

All Saudis submit to the fact that the fundamental source of Islam and the principal means of its understanding are the texts of the Qur’an and the Sunna, or traditions authentically attributed to the Messenger of Allah (may peace and blessings be upon him).

(1) Ibid

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For verily, Allah has decreed in the Qur'an that:

{But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and then find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and submit (before them) with full submission.} [4 65]

Moreover, He also states that:

{It is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allâh and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should (thereafter) have any choice in their affair. And whoever disobeys Allâh and His Messenger, he has certainly strayed into plain error.} [33: 36]

Thus, there is no Muslim in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, be he Sunni, Jafari, Shi'a, or Isma'ili Shi'a, who would openly reject the authority of revelation (the Qur'an and the authentic Sunna from the Messenger of Allah – may peace and blessings be upon him) as the primary sources for Islam.

Therefore, just as Islam determines the laws that intricately govern the life of a Muslim, so too does it specify shared civic values, or what is known as regulations relating to public order or, public decorum.

Muslims Belief in all Prophets before Muhammad (PBUH)

Allah the Exalted states in the Qur'an:

{He (Allâh) has ordained for you the same religion which He ordained for Noah, and that which We have revealed to you (O Muhammad), and that which We ordained for Abraham, Moses and Jesus was to establish the religion and be not divided therein.} [42:13]

Moreover, He further states that:

{Say (O believers), "We believe in Allâh and that which has been revealed to us and that which has been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and to the descendants of Jacob, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and that which was given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted."} [2:136]

Similarly, there are many other verses which carry parallel meanings.

The reason behind these verses is to establish that a Muslim cannot be a Muslim unless he or she believes in Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and all the other prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. If a Muslim were to entertain doubts about any one of these prophets, then he

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or she would not remain a Muslim. However, if he or she were to even doubt the prophethood of any one of them, or not treat them with the reverence, honour and respect due to them as prophets, then he or she would also not remain a Muslim.

Saudi Arabia is the Centre of Islam.

Based on what has been mentioned under the last two headings, and as a natural consequence of it, does the Muslim concept regarding freedom of religion within Saudi or any other Muslim society take root.

This concept is not purely theoretical; it has consistently been applied throughout Islamic history. From the passing of the Messenger (may peace and blessings be upon him) to the end of the Ottoman Caliphate, Muslim leaders ruled in all regions of the earth. From the border regions of China to the south of France, from Indonesia to the central Europe, Muslims invariably granted non-Muslim groups and communities the complete freedom to practice their religion and worship as they wished. They also gave them the right to have their own courts and legal systems. Their laws were not based on the standard Islamic penal code, and Muslim rulers recognized that certain acts, even some criminal acts, which violated Islamic law were not always applied to non-Muslims.

However, of all the vast territories under Muslim political rule, an exception was made in one specific, limited area of land known as the centre of Islam – territory which jurists delineated as Makkah, Madinah, Yamamah and their surrounding areas – lands currently within current

boundaries of Saudi Arabia. Only in this region did Islam expressly prohibit the permanent presence of any religion antithetical to it, whether this presence took the form of a person, organization, or institution.

Moreover, in the Holy Sanctuaries or Haram areas, it even forbade the temporary presence of another religion, this prohibition taking the form of an explicit text in the Noble Qur'an:

{O you who believe! Verily, the polytheists are impure. So let them not approach Al-Masjid-al-Harâm after this year, and if you fear poverty, Allâh will enrich you from His bounty if He wills. Surely, Allâh is All-Knowing, All-Wise.} [9:28]

In addition to the aforementioned prohibition mentioned in a text of the Qur'an, the same prohibition occurs in authentic traditions attributed to the Messenger (may peace and blessings be upon him). These authentic traditions serve as his final advice before his virtuous soul departed his noble body. In them, he prohibited allowing two religions to simultaneously co-exist in the Arabian Peninsula.

As mentioned previously, Islamic jurists have since understood the Arabian Peninsula to comprise the areas that are included in the present day boundaries of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Thus, just as the previously mentioned general rule was upheld across all Muslim lands throughout history, so too has this exceptional status been maintained since the time of the Messenger (may peace and blessings be upon him).

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It is not only the Saudi Muslims who subscribe to this ruling; rather, every Muslim on earth agrees with it. Proof was seen during the Second Gulf War in 1991, when a satellite television channel showed a fake film showing a picture of non-Muslim soldiers in the holy city of Makkah. Furious protests erupted against the Saudi government across the Islamic world, which showed no signs of abating until the masses had learned the film was forged.

Thus, the exception Islam makes for the lands comprising the current boundaries of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, when compared to legal treatment of other religions in Islamic-ruled areas across the globe, is actually an exception that proves the general rule and is not contradictory.

Because it is specifically characterized as an exception, this indicates the logic upon which it stands. This logical foundation is starkly different than how other cultures have developed their definitions of ‘freedom of religion’. The underpinnings of these definitions, mostly if not in all cases, include factors such as bigotry, hate, and a superiority complex.

If the motivation behind the Islamic exception was based on one of the aforementioned factors, then in Muslim-ruled lands throughout Islamic history the peoples of other religions would not have been granted religious freedoms and rights – rights often denied to them today.

One can compare the example set by Muslim leaders with the widespread outcry the Archbishop of Canterbury faced in the United Kingdom when he reportedly called for some Islamic Sharia laws to be implemented among British Muslims. The overwhelmingly negative reaction was notable

because in actuality he had not called for implementing Sharia.⁽¹⁾

The acceptance by modern nation states of the notion of superiority, uniformity in adjudication, and equality before the law, does not afford the majority of these states the flexibility to grant ethnic minorities the right to their own laws, legal systems, or exemptions from the application of the general penal code. By contrast, this flexibility is enshrined in Islam.

But to truly grasp the true motivation behind the Arabia exception, it is essential to conceptualize the fundamental difference between this relatively small area of land where the exception applies and other regions of the world where Muslims reside. One must also appreciate that the region exempted is in fact the Qiblah, or the focus towards which all Muslims turn to in their prayers – in addition to being the place where Islam was revealed, originated, and continues to serve as a point of reference to where every Muslim returns.

Moreover, the overwhelming majority of Muslims feel a sense of affection, loyalty, and honour to this place which exceeds even what they hold for their own countries.

This concept leaves the sound and just intellect unable to reconcile the presence of other rival religions, antithetical to Islam, in this centre. Sound and fair logic dictates that the establishment of places of worship for a religion in a location where no followers of that religion exist either as citizens or permanent residents – its establishment in a place where there is no practical, indigenous need for it – can only

(1) BBC News. Williams under fire in Sharia row
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7233335.stm>

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be due to malicious intent. The intent being to oppose Islam and launch an onslaught against it in its own lands. This conception especially holds true for the establishment of missionary centres for religions antithetical to Islam.

The fact is that the centre of Islam is the exception to the rule applied wherever Muslim authority is established, a very limited exception. The general rule requires co-existence with other cultures and grants religious freedom to such an extent that no other culture even comes close to displaying a similar degree of tolerance. Accordingly, sound logic establishes the impossibility of the motive behind this exception being that of restricting religious freedom – a motive that is, and has been, behind the logic of others, to varying degrees, in all corners of the world.

If what has been discussed is given due consideration, then the uproar that has arisen against Saudi Arabia – due to the its application of a basic Islamic principle that all Muslims believe in – is a reaction that does not have any footing in sound logic, justice, or, in fact, human nature.

If we add to this the fact that the application of the ruling banning the permanent presence of individuals or organizations that do not accept Islam is a matter beyond the discretionary power of the Saudi government, or any other ruler ruling this territory, it becomes clear that the allegation against the Saudi government are unfair, untruthful, and illogical.

Varying Perspectives Regarding Freedom of Religion and Personal Freedom

Differences regarding freedom of religion and personal freedom occur because the term ‘freedom of religion’, just

like other forms of freedom, does not convey an absolute meaning. People differ in their perceptions as to what type of conduct really constitutes a violation of freedom and what doesn't. However, there are certain common norms agreed upon by people. For instance, If an attitude which restricts the freedom of one person or group in an action that obliges by this person or group's religion, be regarded as a violation to freedom, then an attitude which imposes, on that person or group, an action unlawful in their religion should also be considered as a violation to freedom.

Moreover, discrimination against a certain group due to its religion, by subjecting it to distressing procedures other groups are not subjected to, or denying them the rights that are enjoyed by other citizens, is also a violation of freedom.

However, preventing an individual from encroaching upon the freedom of another does not constitute a violation of one's freedom – even if that individual's conduct conflicts with society's larger interests. For example, preventing an individual from breaking the law, disrupting public order, violating public decorum, or compromising national security would not be considered violations of personal freedom.

Of course, whether an act violates public order or public decorum is matter of relative perception, which varies by culture and experience.

Accordingly, false accusations that public order, public decorum, or national security has been violated are often based on the need for vindication or justification. In such cases, the surrounding circumstances often uncover the truth of such claims.

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To clarify the concepts mentioned above with real life examples, let us refer to the following:

a) From the abolition of the Public Inquisition Court in 1835 to the beginning of the 21st century, the people of Europe considered a 16th century Spanish law prohibiting Muslim women from wearing the Hijab as a violation of religious freedom. This was based on the understanding that Muslim woman considered it a religious obligation to wear the Hijab in front of men who were not family members. In fact, until recently French and German courts recognized that the right of Muslim woman to wear the Hijab was based on religious freedom.

b) Subsequently, at the beginning of this century, a law was passed in France limiting the freedom of Muslim women to wear the Hijab. This law, shaped by secular French values, was based on the perception the Hijab compromised public order. Thereafter, similar laws were passed in eight of the sixteen German states, again based on the perception that wearing the Hijab violated German moral values.

Thus, it becomes clear in the preceding two examples how surrounding circumstances show that the intent behind the claim that wearing the Hijab is against public order or decorum justifies a violation of religious freedom. In neither France nor Germany were claims about the Hijab based on events, nor real public order or decorum concerns.

Similarly, when governmental authorities in the Muslim world have prohibited Muslim women from wearing Hijab by arguing it is against public order or decorum,

their argument is equally invalid. The general culture adopted by the majority of the masses in these lands does not see its values clashing with Muslim woman wearing Hijab.

Also, it is not always necessary for what is understood to be public order or decorum to be consistent with common sense. The former is related to what is prevalent in culture, not common sense. For instance, if a Western country tolerates polygamy (gay and lesbian marriage) and does not consider it as violation to its public order or morals, this country should also not consider polygamy in natural marriage as violating public order or morals.

c) The influence public order or decorum has in limiting religious freedom varies in strength from one context to another. It may be very effective in certain situations, like in the United States, which prevents American Mormons from holding the office of judge if they practices polygamy. In this instance, an individual claim that his or her religious freedom has been infringed upon is not been accepted. However, public order or decorum could not justify depriving an individual of their other civil rights.

d) If a country passed a law limiting the rights of its citizens in certain aspects of life, but that all citizens were treated equally under this law, then no particular citizen or group would be justified in claiming the law discriminated

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specifically against them because of their religion. Any claim of discrimination would not be accepted so long as no evidence emerged showing the intent to target a particular group. This would be true even if the equal application of the law resulted in this group being deprived of some material or ethical benefits granted to other citizens. For example, if American Muslims claimed the use of specific judicial procedures like ‘Secret Evidence’ or ‘Guilty by Association’, or legislation like the ‘Patriot Act’, violated their freedoms as Muslims or discriminated against them due to religion, then their claim would not be accepted if statistics did not show the percentage of Muslims upon whom the law was applied was significantly greater than the population at large.

Conversely, if it was statistically demonstrated that all or the majority of those upon whom the law had been applied were Muslims, then it would be justified to claim these specific laws as unfairly discriminating against them due to religion.

In reality, in the last decade the ‘Guilty by Association’ policy and the use of ‘Secret Evidence’ have discriminated against Muslims in the U.S. Their application has been almost exclusively limited to Muslims, with the exception of rare cases like that of a non-Muslim Kenyan woman – and even then her husband turned out to be Muslim.

e) During the last few years in Europe, many Muslim Imams have been questioned because of critical statements they made about gay and lesbian behaviour. On February 17, 2009, *The Guardian* revealed the British government intended to draft several new laws which would brand thousands of Muslim citizens as ‘extremist’, which could lead to their societal

isolation. The newspaper explained that those responsible for security operations were devising a new initiative, entitled ‘Contest 2,’ which would help classify as terrorists Muslims who opposed views the government deemed ‘Shared British Values’. According to the newspaper, the draft version of this new policy included a provision that would deem any person affirming that alternative sexual lifestyles/anomalous sexual behaviour as perverse – a belief held by Muslims – would be counted as an extremist.⁽¹⁾

In 2009, the Pope pardoned British Bishop Richard Williamson, who had doubted whether six million Jews – more than half living in the world at that time – had perished during the Holocaust. The Vatican later stated the Pope was unaware the Bishop had committed this ‘sin’ when his exclusion order was originally issued. But German Chancellor Angela Merkel demanded the Pope clarify the Vatican’s position on the Holocaust. At a Berlin press conference she stated that while it was not her business to interfere in the internal affairs of the Catholic Church, she believed Holocaust-denial was a particularly sensitive matter. ‘The Vatican and the Pope must re-affirm very clearly that the denial of the Holocaust is not viable here,’ she noted.⁽²⁾

The reader will thus observe how the definition of religious freedom varies with culture, as well in ideological and political motives.

It should also be noted that during the last 44 years, the concept of sexual perversion in Britain has been transformed

(1) Anti-terror code ‘would alienate most Muslims’, The Guardian Feb. 17, 2009

(2) Merkel attacks Pope for Holocaust-denier’s pardon. The Independent newspaper, 4 Feb., 2009

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from a crime punishable by law to one of common social values – having a level of protection and sanctity that questions whether a law, which puts freedom of speech on the altar, which covers such a debateable issue should be passed.

One will also notice how a particular historical narrative is afforded such protection and sanctity as to raise it beyond the level of certain truth, so that the judiciary condemns and punishes anyone doubting its merits. The ‘offender’ being required by law to comply to such an extent that the German government interferes in the internal affairs of the Vatican.

In light of what has been presented, the reader might now reconsider the basis of the State Department’s findings about Saudi Arabian violations of religious freedom. The accusations are based on the fact the Saudi government does not allow foreign missionary organizations to propagate their beliefs inside the Kingdom. This despite the fact that it is antithetical to Islam, the religion the Saudi people have chosen by consensus as a comprehensive guide for their lives; that Islam governs every law passed in the Kingdom, even its essential law/constitution; and that allowing missionary activities – which claim Islam to be a false religion, its Prophet false, its holy Book forged and apostasy – to take place in the Kingdom would lead to a popular insurrection against the government.

Islam: No Compulsion in Religion

One of the basic, well known dictates of Islam – established in the Qur’an – is:

{There is no compulsion in Religion.} [2:256]

Further elaborating on this principle, from what has been stated in the texts of the Qur'an, is:

*{Say (O Muhammad): "Dispute you with us about Allâh while He is our Lord and your Lord? For us are our deeds and for you are your deeds. And we are sincere to Him (in worship and obedience.}" [2:139]
{And say: "I believe in whatsoever Allâh has revealed of scripture and I have been commanded to do justice among you, Allâh is our Lord and your Lord. For us our deeds and for you your deeds. There is no (need for) dispute between us and you. Allâh will assemble us (all), and to Him is the final return.}" [42:15]*

{And argue not with the people of the Scripture, unless it be in (a way) that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say (to them): "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we have submitted (as Muslims).}" [29:46]

{Say (O Muhammad) "You will not be asked about our sins, nor shall we be asked about what you do.}" [34:25]

Now compare the impact of these verses upon Muslims with the reaction that occurred in the United States when its President, in an effort to flatter Muslim citizens for a political end, said, 'Our God and your God is One.'

As far as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is concerned, one is not prohibited from changing their religion in an unrestricted manner. The Hindu is not questioned if they convert to Buddhism, nor the Hindu or the Buddhist if they convert to

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Christianity. A person can believe whatever they personally believe or hold as the truth. Similarly, no one judges non-Muslims beliefs, nor are there inquisition courts examining non-Muslims beliefs, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

However, a Muslim is forbidden from declaring apostasy from Islam. Such a declaration would imply proclaiming Islam as a false religion, the Qur'an as a forgery and fable, and that the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him) was either a liar or mentally compromised individual.

Islam for the people of Saudi Arabia is not merely a law passed by the majority of those representing the people, but is the law upon which all of the people have unanimously agreed. It is, in fact, a constitution that – with respect to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – holds more legal weight than other constitutions. Thus open apostasy of any Saudi Muslim (Allah forbid) would be the very worst form of treason or belligerence towards one's fellow countrymen.

Thus, for any Saudi citizen to declare apostasy from Islam is far more significant in its implication for the Saudi people than what the American people might sense if a citizen called for a revolt against democracy, glorified the perception spread by the American media about the Taliban's ideology, or doubted the number killed during the Holocaust.

Thus, it is the Saudi people who have chosen Islam as their religion, determining the higher moral values amongst them and the supreme law governing how they rule themselves. Every law or human dealing contradicting Islam is then automatically considered void within the territory of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

This means that who he considers Saudi Arabia's implementation of Islamic rules on its citizens as a violation

of religious freedom, is in reality denying the Saudi people's right of free choice of taking Islam as a religion or regard Islam as a comprehensive way of life.

In light of this, and after assessing the current state of affairs, one can safely claim that there does not exist, nor will there ever be a situation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where an individual or group will be forced to do or say anything that forbidden by their religion, or prohibited from doing or saying something that is obligated by it.

Similarly, there does not exist, nor will there arise, a situation where an individual will be prohibited from changing their religion, with exception of prohibiting Muslims from open apostasy from Islam.

There does there not exist, nor will there ever exist, a situation where an American Christian will be discriminated against as compared to an American Muslim – or a Filipino Christian to a Filipino Muslim, a Muslim or Buddhist from Thailand, or an Indian Muslim or Hindu. This kind of discrimination has never occurred in the law, employment contracts, governmental dealings, or during everyday interactions with common people.

The only exception is the prohibition on non-Muslims from entering the two Holy sites, this being an Islamic ruling that all Muslims accept, not just Saudis.

Saudi Arabia Does not Allow non-Islamic Worshipping and Preaching

The U.S. State Department's religious freedom reports criticize the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia because it does not

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allow the establishment of places of worship dedicated to religions other than Islam on its territory. Nor does it allow foreign missionaries (especially Christian missionaries) entry into the Kingdom, grant them permission to reside, or establish centres for the propagation of religions other than Islam. Accordingly, religious books are also banned from being imported into the Kingdom.

These criticisms are repeated as fact in religious circles outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudis are constantly asked by outsiders why, if Europeans and Americans allow Muslims to build mosques and propagate Islam, won't the Saudis allow the building of churches or missionary activity inside the Kingdom?

The specific characteristics of the centre of Islam have already been explained (Section 3. Saudi Arabia is the Centre of Islam), along with the fact that this special status is based on both logic and justice.

It has also been made clear that throughout Islamic history, and in different parts of the world, Muslims rulers have invariably allowed and supported the establishment of non-Muslim places of worship and granted other religions a wide range of freedoms. So much so, in fact, that it is difficult to find another system which comes close to Islam in this respect.

Thereafter, it was made clear that the general rule followed by Muslims was tolerance towards and protection of other religions, with the exception to this rule the centre of Islam in which the permanent existence of other religions was not permitted—whether in the form of an individual, an institution, or a centre for the propagation of a religion antithetical to Islam. This condition was maintained throughout the ages,

from the time of the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) to the present.

This particularly limited exception was considered by most intellectuals as one that proved the general rule. It is not reasonable to state that the tolerance shown by Islam towards other religions collapsed due to this exception. Nor that it transformed into bigotry and violations of religious freedom. Rather, this very limited exception shows us that there were, in fact, just and logical reasons for the centre of Islam being treated in a special manner. And these reasons differ from what conventionally has led to the curbing of religious freedom, or their violation, by other cultures which, in most cases, are based on bigotry, hatred, a sense of superiority, or fear. To varying degrees, these violations have occurred throughout history, and continue to occur, across the planet.

The claim that Muslims in America and Europe are free to build mosques and religious centres as they please – to the same degree as other religious groups – is highly dubious. The difficulties faced by Muslims in America and Europe, even for citizens, are well known. When American and European Muslims request permits to build mosques, they are routinely met either with an immediate denial from administrative circles or told that the presence of a mosque will be socially unacceptable.

Why then, is there an insistence that all areas within the Muslim world – even the centre of Islam –allow the permanent existence of other religions? Why the claim that equal treatment cannot be fulfilled until even this exception is eliminated?



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Without a doubt, the permanent existence of religious institutions or organizations antagonistic to Islam are not allowed within the territory of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a ruling derived from Islam and accepted by all Muslims. The fact that it is an Islamic ruling, in and of itself, justifies the implementation of this principle.

However, it can also be said that requiring non-Muslim places of worship or a missionary organizations in the Kingdom – where no non-Muslim citizen or permanent residents reside – can only be construed as offensive to Islam. It suggests to Saudi Muslims that Islam is a false religion and that another religion, antithetical to Islam, is the true religion; which would essentially amount to propagating that religion. Collectively, reason, logic, and justice suggest this would be a sure way to destroy national harmony, and transgress against public order and decorum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In light of these arguments, the reader can accurately evaluate the accusations about religious freedom in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They can determine whether it is a country that violates religious freedom and deserves to be categorized alongside countries like Burma, with its treatment of Burmese Muslims, and China, with its treatment of Uighurs!

The reason for exploring and clarifying this topic is to provide the truth about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis freedom of religion. The intent has never been simply to refute the U.S State Department. However, the report provided an opportunity to discuss religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, based on the actual situation rather than theory or conjecture.

Saudi Arabia and its Peculiar ‘Version of Islam’

The State Department report also states that the Kingdom subscribes to a particular school – a particular interpretation– of Islam, and that those who ascribe to other schools are not tolerated.

Now, no Western country has had as extensive presence in the Kingdom as the United States of America over the last seventy years. During this time, tens of thousands of Americans have set foot in the Kingdom, including numerous company representatives, technical experts, executives, and many others. None of whom have been subject to limits on business opportunities, travel, interaction with people, or legal protections – with the exception, of course, of non-Muslims entering the two holy sites.

No culture has been able to influence the prevalent culture of Saudi Arabia more than American culture – a result of this continual American presence, combined with the experiences of tens of thousands of Saudi students who have studied in America. This means that despite the substantial influence of American culture on the Kingdom over the past decades, the local culture did not largely change.

During all these years of interaction, Saudis never heard any accusations from American organizations or American citizens who have lived in the Kingdom and consequently understand its culture. No one claimed that they were prevented from worshipping, performing religious duties, or forced to carry out acts against their conscience, morality, or religion.

It is not then possible to claim that that Americans in the past

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were ignorant of the prevalent culture and social practices in the Kingdom, or that this culture somehow transformed in the last few years in a manner more antagonistic to the American way of life.

With this accusation, the State Department only repeats a well known falsehood that was first spread more than two hundred years ago. For this accusation in truth implies that Saudi Arabian culture is based on a school of thought that was invented, and merely added to the four well known Sunni schools of thought.

A famous proverb states that, ‘If you are to lie, then be on your guard as to that which you lie about.’

In the past, this unfounded rumour gained a degree of credence among the people due to ineffective means of communication and the absence of news and information media. Today, we have experienced a communication revolution. Moreover, four million pilgrims visit Saudi Arabia for either the Hajj pilgrimage or the lesser ‘Umrah’ pilgrimage annually (in addition to those who come here to visit, for tourism, to work, or for business). Yet despite increased access to information and Saudi Arabia hosting growing numbers of visitors, no one has observed anything peculiarly different in how the Islamic religion is practiced in the Kingdom as compared to how it is practiced elsewhere.

Similarly, the visitors do not see a fifth school of thought, nor experience a religion with which they are unfamiliar. They see a familiar Islam. Because religious rites and Friday sermons are transmitted, via satellite, to all corners of the globe, they do not see different religious methodology nor hear or see any act being performed differently than what

all Sunni Muslims have practiced throughout the ages in all corners of the Muslim world.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia differs from other Muslim countries in the absence of graves, religious sites to which the uninformed among the Muslim laity might visit with the intention of having their needs fulfilled – seeking blessings from these sites or to worship by them. However, no one disagrees that in the earliest of Islamic periods, this is how the state of affairs actually was in the Hijaz and throughout the Muslim world.

For example, presently none of the graves in the ‘Baqee’ graveyard have any structures built over them. However, does anyone dispute the fact that the ‘Baqee’ graveyard is, without these structures, actually closer to the condition it was in during the time of the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him), his companions, and many generations after that?

This is in addition to what Muslims have reported, throughout the ages, from the Prophetic traditions that forbid the building of structures upon graves.

The report further asserts,

‘The Government enforces a strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam... and discriminates against other branches of Islam’

On the contrary, I would like to state that one of the biggest achievements of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is that Allah blessed it with the role of ending the fanaticism that existed between various schools of Islam. There used to be four separate prayer niches within the Grand Mosque in Makkah itself, in which four Imams would lead the prayers separately, dividing Muslims in their prayers as each Muslim would pray

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behind the Imam who followed the school of Jurisprudence to which he belonged to. This anomalous situation, which is contrary to the very basis of Islam and was criticized by all the major scholars and thinkers of Islam whenever they would come for the Hajj (pilgrimage), was finally abolished.

Muslims were then united in their prayers in the Grand Mosque and the Mosque of the Prophet behind one Imam, who could equally be from the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i or Hanbali schools of jurisprudence with the particular school they ascribed to having no bearing on their being selected as Imams. Ignoring the school to which Imams belonged helped end the inter-school fanaticism.

Subsequently, association to one of the four schools (which consisted of a person exclusively adhering to the rulings of a particular school) was further moderated until the ascription of a person to one the four Sunni schools came to mean that he or she had studied the legal rulings of this school, or had been raised in a land where a particular school was prevalent – like Ethiopia as far as the Shafi'i school is concerned, Burma to the Hanafi school, or Morocco to the Maliki school.

If one were to meet any person on a street in the Kingdom today and asked, 'Are you a Hanafi, a Maliki, a Shafi'i or a Hanbali?' most probably, they would not understand what was meant by the question. If they were better informed, they most likely would say, 'I ascribe to all of these schools.'

Over forty years ago, the Council of Senior Scholars was established as the premier source of religious authority – a reference for scholarship, and reference point within these lands consisting of scholars who ascribe themselves to all

four schools according to the meaning discussed above.

Similarly, within the Saudi Judiciary, a judge is at liberty to refer to the opinions of any of the four schools as a basis for rulings, without the fear of being over-ruled, even by the opinions of Al-Thawri, Ja'far Al-Sadiq, Al-Auza'i or others from the rightly guided Imams whom the whole Muslim nation recognizes as authorities. Similarly, the Mufti is at liberty to choose from the opinions of any of the aforementioned Imams as the basis of his fatwa, or religious verdict, without the fear of his fatwa being criticized.

Accordingly, the Council of Senior Scholars has issued many religious decrees without restricting themselves to any particular school.

Similarly, when university students in the Kingdom conduct juristic research, they work with the opinions of all of the four schools, as well as those of the Imams Al-Thawri, Al-Auza'I, Ja'far Al-Sadiq and others, on an equal footing. Each of these authorities is given the same respect and deference and when at variance, their opinions are weighed according to uniform criteria.

When jurisprudence is taught at the Grand Mosque in Makkah, or the Mosque of the Prophet in Madinah, the textbook used is always by an author ascribing to one of the four schools. In the Islamic University of Madinah, where students come to study from a wide variety of backgrounds in terms of the juristic school prevalent (the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i or Hanbali schools), a 'Comparative Jurisprudence' textbook is used – a text by the name of 'Bidayat Al-Mujtahid' by Ibn Rushd which uses all four schools.

Regardless of background, the students are nurtured

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to respect all of the Imams and develop academically by considering all the schools without bias.

Prohibiting Non-Muslims from Publicly Practicing their Religious Rites

The report in question also alleges that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

‘...prohibits public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture for engaging in religious activity that attracts official attention.’

It is undisputed fact non-Muslims in the Kingdom – and there are many of them – come of their own free will. While it is true that come to the Kingdom on a temporary basis, some end up staying for extended periods of time, including American Christians. Upon arrival, they are expected to be aware of the Kingdom’s laws, and conduct themselves accordingly. Thus, it becomes inconceivable for anyone to claim thereafter that they, due to their compliance with the law, have suddenly become victims of religious persecution, or that they are officially forced to accept what is morally against their conscience. Had anyone really felt they were being persecuted because of their religion, or forced into an uncomfortable situation, then that person would have left the country of their own volition and would not be compelled to stay in the Kingdom.

Thus their voluntary presence within the Kingdom – in and of itself – is the clearest evidence invalidating the accusation

that the Kingdom persecutes non-Muslims on the basis of their religion. It also invalidates claims that religious freedoms have been violated.

As for individuals who violate the laws of Saudi Arabia after voluntarily agreeing to respect them, then penalization under the law cannot be counted as a violation of freedom.

The reality, however, is that the arrival of non-Muslim expatriates – including American citizens – in Saudi Arabia, and of their remaining in the Kingdom of their own free will, is clearly indicative of the fact that they do not feel their religious freedom has been appreciably violated by the public or government.

Historically, there has not been opposition to the temporary presence of non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia, the only exception being public opposition to the presence of an American military base in Dhahran in the 1950's, which resulted in the dismantling of that base. Even this opposition lacked a religious dimension, for it did not occur because the American troops were non-Muslim; the opposition was rooted in liberal nationalist sentiment. Surely, the U.S. State Department must not be oblivious to this fact.

Discrimination Against the Shia Minority

The report goes on to allege that the Kingdom,
'discriminates against the Imami Ja'fari/Shi'a minority due to their religious beliefs. This also occurs on the economic front and in employment especially employment in the oil companies.'

There remains an on-ground reality that counters this

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accusation. Aramco has long remained the largest employer in the Kingdom. In the 1940's and 1950's, the number of employees and workers in Aramco exceeded the total number employees and workers in the rest of the Kingdom – in the public and private sector.

Interestingly, the Eastern Province – where Aramco is based and where most of its activities take place – is also where the largest concentrations of the Imami Ja'fari/Shi'a reside.

Initially though, the administration of Aramco was under American control, and none of the previous American heads of the company ever admitted to discriminating against those who ascribed to the Shi'ite faith. Neither did any locals, or anyone else, accuse Aramco of discrimination. In fact, Americans heading the company never complained about any issue relating to employment. This was not a source of trouble except for the opposition they faced in the past from some employees who were influenced by the Arab secularist movement and liberal socialist thought.

In addition to providing employment, Aramco participated in a vast array of economic activities at the local level. The company entered into contracts with various local suppliers, contractors and service providers. In all of these activities, as far as the Saudi Shi'a population was concerned, the rules of engagement were the same as the general employment policy.

Even after the transfer of Aramco from American to Saudi control, no one ever claimed any change in the employment policy or financial management within Aramco towards the Shi'ite faction.

This testimony from this actual, on-ground situation gives

us an idea about the degree of objectivity – or the lack thereof – exhibited by the State Department and the reliability of the information contained in its report.

The U.S. State Department was unable to quote any statistical evidence proving that the average income of an individual from a predominantly Shi'ite population centre was less than in other population centres. One will not be able to find in the indices of the trade archives at the Ministry of Commerce, or in the indices of social organizations at the Ministry of Social Affairs, evidence which suggests the existence of discrimination between Saudi citizens on the basis of gender or religion.

The civil service and the labour laws within the Kingdom, with the exception of some distinctive clauses for women due to their inherently different needs (like maternity leave), do not differentiate between Saudi citizens on the basis of gender or religion.

Nevertheless, there are certain aspects of job allotment governed by special circumstances. For example, when a Shi'a citizen is chosen to be a judge for the faction which ascribes to his faith. In this case, he need not be disconcerted, nor have a troubled conscience, when applying the principles of Shi'a law while discharging his judicial responsibility. However, if chosen as General Mufti or judge for the entire population, he would feel troubled, religiously speaking, if to applied Shi'a principles of jurisprudence that conflicted with those of the Sunni majority. Now, do these aspects of Saudi job allotment – which are blown out of proportion and cited out of context – really indicate the existence of discrimination based on religious beliefs?

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The report further goes on to allege that the Kingdom puts,

‘...restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of mosques and community centers’

To uncover the reality behind this allegation, it is enough to refer to the well-known fact that Shi’a in the Eastern province have always excelled in their ability to setup voluntary, charitable institutions. In fact, they pioneered this process to the benefit of other regions of the Kingdom.

As for the American citizens residing in Saudi Arabia, now or in the past, there is no restriction on travel to any part of the Kingdom. They have the freedom to observe mosques in Shi’ite and Sunni areas. Not one American has ever claimed to have witnessed any imbalance in the number of mosques by faction, nor are there any statistics to prove this.

As far as various forms of worship are concerned, the most obvious forms of worship among Muslims are the five daily prayers and the Hajj pilgrimage. Acts of worship are usually performed by Muslims either at home or in mosques. Accordingly, there are tens of thousands of mosques within the Kingdom, the most sacred of which are the Grand Mosque in Makkah and the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah, to which Muslims, Saudis as well as non-Saudis, hailing from all schools of thought and factions, flock to with the intention of offering rites of worship – even if these acts differ slightly in their outwardly form from school to school. Still, no one criticizes anyone else regarding the manner in which they worship.

The witnessing of this reality is open to anyone concerned about these matters. Witnesses are free to judge the degree

of objectivity exhibited by the State Department report, as well its reliability.

It well known within Saudi Arabia that mosques constructed with funds from the public exchequer are built to cater to all Muslims in the Kingdom, whether they are citizens, residents, or expatriates. But most mosques are made with the financial support of local philanthropists, whether Sunni or Shi'a. There has not been, to the best of our knowledge, any situation in which the building of any mosque was restricted, except in adherence to the requirements of general regulations governing the building of mosques within the Kingdom. None of these regulations can reasonably be claimed to be, or interpreted to be, discriminatory.

The ardent desire of the U.S. State Department and some of the imprudent among Saudi citizens to carry the lantern of Diogenes in a quest to seek isolated incidents – taken out of context and separated from normal circumstances – with the intention of using this information to harm national unity is destined to fail because of the awareness by Saudi citizens of shared benefits and advantages. This has resulted in their liberation from a state of anarchy, disunity, and division to a state of national unity. An environment of cooperation, mutual responsibility, and national brotherhood between the citizens has thrived. Without doubt, this discernment on the part of the citizens is enough to alert them to the designs of their enemies. Moreover, with the benefit of hindsight, as well as the current reality, there are sufficient examples from which to take heed and warning.

International Religious Freedom Report 2005 Lacks Accuracy and Objectivity

It is sufficient to cite just one example under this heading to examine the validity of conclusions drawn by the 2005 report.

The report mentions that in some mosques, Imams have used anti-Jewish and anti-Christian language in their sermons and pray for the death of Jews and Christians.

The report, by implication, holds the government of Saudi Arabia responsible for incitement – a violation of religious freedom – because it did not take punitive action against these preachers.

An obvious observation is that what emanated from these Imams does not constitute even a drop of water when compared to the sea of the onslaught of defamation, insults, and contempt for Islam and Muslims gushing forth from opinion-makers in the United States. These include depictions made in the cinema, television, print media, or in statements emanating from politicians.

For example, the former head of the Baptist Church – the largest sub-sect of Protestantism in the United States – said, ‘The Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessing be upon

him) was possessed by the devil.’⁽¹⁾ Similarly, a predecessor described him as being, ‘a terrorist.’⁽²⁾ This was in addition to yet another Baptist leader describing the Qur’an as a book, ‘comparable to Hitler’s Mein Kempf’ and Islam as a, ‘religion that was mischievous/evil by its very nature.’⁽³⁾

These statements were not issued during the Middle Ages, but at the beginning of this century. They did not emanate from ‘common people’, but from those considered leaders in politics, religion and the media.

Thirty years ago an opinion poll in the United States revealed a stereotyped image of Arabs and Muslims. About half of the American public saw Muslims as a bloodthirsty enemy who was deceitful, untrustworthy, anti-Christian, and anti-Semitic.

Obviously, the American image of Muslims did not arise in a vacuum. Rather, it arose from the sources that feed and shape American intellectual thought. Yet no one asked the American government to take punitive measures against these sources, who protect themselves under the cloak of ‘freedom of expression.’

To be fair, let me state that the negative perception of Islam and Muslims is not solely an American phenomenon, but is widespread among the masses of what constitutes Euro-America.

The following examples corroborate this fact:

(1) Vines calls founder of Islam a ‘demon-possessed pedophile’
http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/content/news/2002/6_14_2002/ne140602vines.shtml

(2) Ibid

(3) Ibid

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In April, 2005, and not during the crusade era, a statement in 2005's authorized biography of Queen Margrethe of Denmark consists of several comments full of scorn and ridicule towards Islam and Muslims, including statements like,

‘We are being challenged by Islam these years - globally as well as locally. It is a challenge we have to take seriously. We have let this issue float about for too long because we are tolerant and lazy. We have to show our opposition to Islam and we have to, at times, run the risk of having unflattering labels placed on us because there are some things for which we should display no tolerance.’⁽¹⁾

Sadly, Euro-American culture, when it relates to Islam, has simply not been able to distance itself even now from the sway of sentiments and emotions prevalent at the time of Pope Urban II.

Thus, as a result of the censure the State Department report levels at Saudi Arabia, as well as how it depicts some preachers in the Kingdom as denouncing other religions and inciting Muslims against Jews and Christians, one cannot help but remember the anti-Islamic statements emanating from politicians, media moguls, and religious leaders in America. These widely circulated statements have resonance among the masses and profoundly impact public opinion around the world, the magnitude of which is not comparable to the sermons of preachers in Saudi Arabia.

Everyone still remembers when President W. Bush tried to flatter Muslims for his own political ends by describing Islam as a, ‘religion of peace.’ In response to this he faced

(1)<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/denmark/1487909/We-need-a-counter-balance-to-Islam-says-Danish-queen.html>

a storm of opposition, not only from religious leaders but from politicians like Kenneth Adelman. Adleman, a member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, noted, that for Mr. Bush to call Islam a peaceful religion «is an increasingly hard argument to make». Islam is «militaristic» in the eyes of Mr. Adelman. «After all, its founder, Mohammed, was a warrior, not a peace advocate like Jesus.»⁽¹⁾ Another member of the Defense Policy Board, Elliot Cohen, wrote in an editorial published in the Wall Street Journal that,

“The enemy in this war is not “terrorism” – a distilled essence of evil, conducted by the real-world equivalents of J. K. Rowling’s Lord Voldemort, Tolkien’s Sauron or C. S. Lewis’s White Witch – but militant Islam. The enemy has an ideology, and an hour spent surfing the Web will give the average citizen at least the kind of insights that he might have found during World Wars II and III by reading “Mein Kampf” or the writings of Lenin, Stalin or Mao.”⁽²⁾

Bigotry in the United States is not solely directed toward Islam. In fact, it is also directed at other religions, even Christianity itself. For example, tens of millions of humans have received the testimony from the spiritual leader Pat Robertson through his famous television programme ‘The Club 700.’ Robertson, who adheres to the conservative southern Baptist sect of Protestantism, is quoted as saying about other Protestants,

“You say you’re supposed to be nice to the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians and the

(1) <http://www.counterpunch.org/fisk1204.html>

(2) ELIOT A. COHEN. The Wall Street Journal, Nov. 20, 2001

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Methodists, and this and that. Nonsense. I don't have to be nice to the spirit of the Antichrist. I can love the people who hold false opinions but I don't have to be nice to them."⁽¹⁾

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter was appalled when he heard the following declaration from the elected head of another large Christian faction: 'God does not listen to the prayers of a Jew!'

It goes without saying that no one could even imagine the American government calling any of the aforementioned personalities to account for their comments, or acknowledging that if it didn't do so it would be deemed as violating religious freedom.

On the contrary, Muslims – Saudi or otherwise – would never say, 'God will not listen to the prayers of a Jew,' like the aforementioned Christian, nor claim that 'God only listens to the prayers of the chosen people' as some Jews assert. They would only state what they were taught in the Qur'an, that 'Allah hears and responds to the call of the needy if they call out to Him and removes all ill' irrespective of the category, class, or nation the supplicant might belong. Moreover, they are taught by the Prophet (peace be upon him) that the supplication of the one who has been wronged – even if Jew or Christian – reaches Allah directly, without hindrance or barrier.

In light of this background, the reader should evaluate for himself whether the report draws its conclusions from accurate information.

(1) Pat Robertson, The Club 700, January 14, 1991

The reader should also assess the political objectivity behind the report, which presents a stereotypical picture of the prevalent culture within Saudi Arabia, deeming it a rigid culture biased against and hostile toward other religions.

Motivations become clear when one compares the contents of the report regarding Saudi Arabia with the deliberate propagandist campaign the American administration launched against the Kingdom at the end of 2003. It was at this point, shortly after U.S. forces defeated the Iraqi army, when the Bush Administration summoned numerous witnesses – consisting of management specialists described as experts in a variety of fields – to congressional hearings with the objective of convincing Congress that Saudi Arabia has a fundamentalist culture, is bigoted against other religions, encourages violence and terrorism, and thus is a threat to international peace.

Ironically, in light of the following facts, the reader might be closer to the truth if they compared the prevalent culture in Saudi Arabia to the prevalent culture in America:

1- Over the past few decades, millions of Palestinian refugees have been created due to expulsion from their lands. They have been replaced by a wide variety of people who have come from various countries, where they enjoyed the blessings of freedom, wealth, security, and influence. Thus, the only factor driving them to this land – Palestine – is the religious belief that God, three thousand years ago, gave them His word that they would have this ‘Promised Land’ upon which they would establish a state for themselves.

2- In a poll conducted in 1996, the highly respected University of Akron found 31% of adult Christians in the United States believed or believed strongly in Armageddon –

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a war that would span the entire globe, with its central battle taking place about 200 miles from Jerusalem in which 200 million disbelievers (Muslims) would be put to the sword.

Moreover, more than 70 million inhabitants of the United States believe their redemption and the second coming of Jesus is dependent on the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, the rebuilding of the Temple of Solomon, and finally the occurrence of Armageddon itself.

3-Conservative Republicans are not alone in basing policies and the interests of the United States on the fulfilment of the promise made by the Jewish God regarding the Promised Land. Even a liberal Democratic President, Bill Clinton, stated in his October 27, 1994 address to the Israeli Knesset, “If you abandon Israel, God will never forgive you.” He said it was God’s will that Israel, the biblical home of the people of Israel, continue in perpetuity.⁽¹⁾

In his address to the Israeli Knesset on May 15, 2008, President George W. Bush announced:

“We gather to mark a momentous occasion. Sixty years ago in Tel Aviv, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed Israel’s independence, founded on the ‘natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate.’ What followed was more than the establishment of a new country. It was the redemption of an ancient promise given to Abraham and Moses and David – a homeland for the chosen people Eretz Yisrael”⁽²⁾

(1)<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Archive/Peace+Process/1994/ADDRESS%20BY%20US%20PRESIDENT%20BILL%20CLINTON%20TO%20THE%20KNESSE>

(2)http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/doc/speech_bush_2008_eng.htm

Ultimately, from the practical fruits of this ‘tolerant’ culture was the virtual consensus, in the 21st century, of the people of the United States – at least as represented in their legislative bodies – to wage a war, and lead a 40-member coalition of nations, against a poverty stricken land worn out by politico-economic sanctions. Iraq was a land which did not constitute a threat to the U.S. or any of the allied nations. This was a foolish, cruel war without historical precedent.

Thus, in the first years of the 21st century, many analogous wars were launched under the pretext of a Global War on Terror. If numbers are to have any meaning, one cannot disagree that the amount of innocent blood that has been shed, the degree to which life-sustaining utilities and services have been destroyed, and the manner in which human dignity and freedom has been trampled far exceeds the magnitude of destruction perpetrated by terrorists – from Robespierre through today.

In his May 15, 2008 address to the Knesset, President Bush stated:

“The fight against terror and extremism is the defining challenge of our time. It is more than a clash of arms. It is a clash of visions, a great ideological struggle. On the one side are those who defend the ideals of justice and dignity with the power of reason and truth. On the other side are those who pursue a narrow vision of cruelty and control by committing murder, inciting fear, and spreading lies.”⁽¹⁾

If a neutral, unbiased person was neither aware of the

(1) Ibid

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circumstances in which these expressions had been used nor knew who spoke them, who would be able to guess the identity of the speaker? Moreover, in which group would they place the United States of America and its allies in their declared war on terror?

People were preoccupied with what happened to prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison and Guantanamo Bay. But the human behaviour at these facilities should be considered ‘civilized’ and ‘humane’ when compared to the abduction of a large number of those classified as suspicious personalities who were shipped to notorious ‘Black Sites’, regarded as the most horrific centres of torture in the world.

Our knowledge regarding human nature since Cain and Abel helps us understand the natural context in which American culture has been shaped, as well as the fruits it has borne. However, what is difficult to comprehend is how the American government, despite everything, can deem itself judge and preacher – and give us lessons in morality!

Singapore’s president expressed similar thoughts when America objected to punishing an individual, a youth, who had violated the law by caning. The U.S. president, Bill Clinton, said this was an immoral act. The Singaporean President replied by saying, ‘Singapore is in no need of receiving lessons in morality from America.’

Of course, Singapore was not alluding to Clinton-era sex scandals, but to the moral conduct of the United States as demonstrated in events such as the missile attack on a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum – a factory which supplied 40% of percent of Sudan’s medical needs. Even after the world learned that the justifications for the attack

were false, the ‘morality’ of the act did not permit the Americans to utter a word of regret to the families of those adversely affected by its destruction.

If intolerance, aggression, religious mania, barbaric behavior and freedoms violations shall be taken as a standard for judging a culture, then what is included in the previous three paragraphs is the fruit of the American culture. This culture, all praise be to Allah, has no equivalent in the Saudi or Islamic culture.

Conclusion

In analyzing the 2005 U.S. State Department report on religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, we would like to re-emphasize, once again, what was mentioned in the introduction to this book. This report, and other similar reports, was issued due to political motivations. The true picture about the issue of religious freedom should have emerged to the reader in this book. Undoubtedly, these annual U.S. reports are used as opportunities to discuss religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, is the centre of Islam for every Muslim who turns towards Makkah five times a day to offer his daily prayers, in all parts of the world.

Thus, these reports gave me a chance to present the truth about this issue, which emerges whenever the West speaks about global religious freedom.

Moreover, it is only fair for anyone sincerely searching for the truth to hear a first-hand account from one who knows the real situation before reaching a valid conclusion and just ruling.

Some last words to link the beginning of this paper with its conclusion:

The ideological and material war the West is waging against Islam, from the time it labelled Islam as the ‘Green enemy’

immediately after they had defeated the ‘Red enemy,’ will not result in a victory. In a struggle involving all religious and non-religious cultures, Islam undoubtedly is the most potent force.

In one of his last books, in which he incorporates the essence of his thought, knowledge, and political experience, former U.S. President Richard Nixon referred to fundamentalist Islam and how it represents a potent theology. He wrote that secular values in the West cannot overcome fundamentalist Islam and the fact that we are the most powerful and the richest nation in history is not enough, for what eventually rule the world is great thoughts.

Thus, if non-religious cultural thought cannot overcome Islam, then religious cultural thought is even more incapable of doing so. People are deterred from believing in contemporary religious philosophies which, in contrast to Islam, fail to persuade the hearts and minds.

Muslims, supported by numerous authentic recorded proofs, know more about the general life of the Prophet of Islam with certainty than about their neighbours. And they know more about his personal life than they would about their own father and mother. Similarly, the holy book of Islam has not changed from the original form the Prophet taught. Nor has anything been found in it over the many centuries which contradict common sense, factual reality, or the truthful information discovered by the modern world. As has been stated by Allah:

{Had it been from other than Allâh, they would surely have found therein many contradictions.}
[4:82]

{Falsehood cannot come to it from before it or behind it...} [41:42]

In Afghanistan and Iraq, the heads of the American, British and Italian governments stated that the objectives of these wars were in fact ideological.

So it is that we see Islam – although facing a war waged against it with the might of all military, economic and media forces available to the adversary – constantly advancing in winning the hearts and minds of people, prevailing without the aid of Tomahawk missiles or cluster bombs – and without a quarter of a million missionaries and evangelists supported by hundreds of millions of dollars each year, armed with plans, programs, experience, and state support.

Another observation to be made generally is that Islam does not spread as rapidly amongst the uninformed and desperate, who can be easily ‘bought’ by food, health services, or the promise of satisfaction in worldly life. It is the erudite, who are kept awake at night due to their ardent desire to discover the truth, amongst whom Islam spreads.

According to a European intellectual who was guided into believing Islam after careful study, noted that:

“Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other; nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking; and the result is a structure of absolute balance and solid composure. Probably this feeling that everything in the teachings and postulates of Islam is “in its proper place” has created the strongest impression on me. A logical consequence of this attitude is a further difference between Islam and all other religious systems known to me. It is to be found in the

fact that Islam, as a teaching, undertakes to define not only the metaphysical relations between man and his Creator but also -and with scarcely less insistence- the earthly relations between the individual and his social surroundings. Islam, we have every reason to believe, has been fully vindicated by the positive achievements of man and indeed pointed them out as desirable long before they were attained. Equally, it has been vindicated by the shortcomings, errors, and pitfalls of human development, because it loudly and clearly warned against them long before mankind recognized them as errors. Quite apart from one's religious beliefs, there is, from a purely intellectual view-point, every inducement to follow confidently the practical guidance of Islam."⁽¹⁾

Thus how could it be possible for the darkness of ignorance in our times to cover the light of Islam?

{They want to extinguish Allâh's Light with their mouths, but Allâh will not allow except that His Light should be perfected even though the disbelievers hate (it).} [9:32]

Thus, Islam will eventually triumph due to the laws of predestination, as well as what is actually occurring on the ground.

As for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it will not be worse off due to its adherence to Islam and application of its fundamental principles, even if the U.S. State Department continues to issue reports like this.

(1) Muhammad Asad. Islam at the Crossroads. Fourteenth Revised Edition 1982, Dar Al-Andalus Ltd. Gibraltar.

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