

Section V

NEW AND CONTINUING RELIGIOUS
REALITIES IN AMERICA

POST 9/11: AMERICA AGONIZES OVER ISLAM

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The terrorist attacks on several American cities on 11 September 2001, by Muslim militants linked to al-Qaeda negatively affected the disposition of many Americans toward Islam.¹ These seismic events have also engendered a surge of latent religion into the public square. All the major religious traditions in the United States gained more visibility in national politics, ranging from tacit endorsements for presidential candidates and fervent debates over morally divisive issues, to aggressive evangelical activities at home and abroad. This surge in religious momentum raised questions whether America was heading toward a postsecular society, given debates about America as a Christian nation and the religiously inflected moral debates in public.

Internationally, the United States-sponsored wars in Afghanistan and then Iraq, followed by worldwide security sweeps, negatively affected America's once-credible global image. In the non-West, especially in large swaths of the Muslim world, but also in parts of Europe, America's image as a superpower morphed into that of a resented imperial power. Not since the Vietnam War had domestic and international politics become so intensely intertwined, but with one crucial difference. If the scourge during Vietnam was the red peril of Communism, then in the minds of significant sections of the U.S. public the threat in the first decade of the new century stemmed from Islam generally, and militant Islam, in particular.

BEFORE 9/11

Prior to 11 September 2001, there was a sense of optimism and jubilation at the collapse of Soviet Communism and the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, for which the United States

¹ Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Lanham, MD, 2008), 43.

took the bulk of the credit. Yet few people noticed that while the threat posed by the USSR to the West was extinguished, many smoldering embers were left around the globe. In far-off places such as Somalia, Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories, and in countries identified as America's allies, such as the oil-rich Arabian Gulf states, Egypt, Pakistan, and Israel, there was discontent arising from the collateral fallout of the Cold War. Large sections of the globe were in the thrall of rapid economic growth since new technologies created visions of a capitalistic world without borders and with free trade.

Two landmark books that turned their authors into celebrities with unquestioned cachet in policy and media circles captured that post-Cold War mood in a mixture of triumphalism and caution. In 1992 Francis Fukuyama, to much acclaim, published *The End of History and the Last Man*.² It was a learned book that mined the canons of Western political thought, especially Hegel, in order to understand the nature of human beings, societies, and institutions in a new time – the era of liberal democracy and capitalism. Fukuyama examined the complexity of human nature in the late twentieth century and was less prescriptive than some of his critics suggested. Nevertheless, he did hold out that liberal democracy and capitalism were ideals and the final destination for all nations. This book gave a massive boost to the United States' foreign policy prescriptions in urging nations to subscribe to liberal democracy with its implicit capitalist overtones. Fukuyama offered recipes for constructing notions of a Western self and forming attitudes that were grounded in the will to triumph and to be better than others. Fukuyama imagined the world's nations on the path of liberal democracy as a long wagon train heading toward their pre-ordained destination. Sure, some wagons might fall off, but they would try to join the train again, while others might decide to make home where they landed.

Samuel Huntington followed in 1996 with *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Noting the optimism invested in liberal democracy and the triumph of Western civilization as it leapt off the pages of Fukuyama's book, Huntington showed the downside of such globalization. He identified the fault lines between civilizations and their potential for future conflict. Huntington went on to show that some wagons that did not, could not, or refused to join the train might be the source of trouble for the West. Each of the wagons had defined characteristics, which placed it within the log of civilizations. The fault lines between civilizations that had the potential to implode included China and the Islamic world. Huntington showed the possible perils lurking in Muslim countries and

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London, 1992).

put Islam more strongly into the consciousness of the United States' policy makers and analysts. To be fair, Huntington recommended that it was wise for the United States to abstain from intercivilizational conflicts, to seek international mediation instead of conflict, and to build on commonalities among cultures and civilizations. All three pieces of useful wisdom were unfortunately squandered on U.S. policy makers, while the media clung to the sensational aspects of Sino and Islamic fault lines.³

ISLAM AND 9/11

When 11 September 2001 happened, it was the scale of the attack and the audacity of America's terrorist Muslim adversaries that shocked most observers and surprised security experts. Prior to 9/11, the low-intensity war between America and a range of militant Muslim actors amounted to encounters on foreign soil with minimal loss of American life and treasure. The nature of the encounter changed and took the shape of paralyzing terror attacks on the U.S. homeland.

America's political leadership identified 9/11 as a defining point, if not a messianic moment, in the life of the republic. Ideologues within the George W. Bush White House, together with their supporters in a vocal and highly organized neoconservative movement, immediately pounced on this event. They identified the Islamic terrorists as a totalitarian foe like Communism or fascism in scale. For this reason the United States launched a global war against terror in order to save civilization. From that moment onward the nation's foreign policy would pivot on a culture war against "barbarian" militant Islam and its allies. In pursuit of this goal the United States treated this moment as a state of exception, where any amount of overwhelming force, coded as shock and awe, and disregard for international law, would be justified in order to defeat the terrorists. A new term, "Islamofascism," was coined to describe the enemy. While a few people objected to the overreaction, it was especially Fukuyama who cautioned key government strategists not to treat jihadist terrorism as a great totalitarian foe like fascism or Communism. "The important thing was not to overreact," in Fukuyama's view, according to Peter Beinart, "not to take military action that alienated Muslims, thus strengthening Al Qaeda's inherently weak hand."⁴ "Instead America should rely on diplomacy, intelligence gathering, law enforcement, and patience," Fukuyama suggested,

³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996), 310.

⁴ Peter Beinart, *The Icarus Syndrome: A History of American Hubris* (New York, 2010), 352.

as reported in Beinhart's book. "History was on its side," he argued, "but history could not be rushed."⁵ But an indignant and wounded America not only rushed into Afghanistan, but in 2003 also invaded Iraq, a country that did not pose a threat to the United States or its Western allies, on the pretext that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.

On 7 September 2003, President George W. Bush, after the war in Iraq was well under way, explained the purpose and mission for the war of civilization. "We have carried the fight to the enemy," Bush triumphantly announced. "We are rolling back the terrorist threat to civilization, not on the fringes of its influence, but at the heart of its power."⁶ What was once a terrorist threat to the strategic interests of the United States now inexplicably morphed into a threat to "civilization." Needless to say, in President Bush's view, America was the perfect embodiment of civilization. The words "enemy" and "civilization" were the key lexical terms that shrouded the new ideology that replaced anti-Communism, namely, militant Islam.

Since American hegemony was receding after the Cold War, plans to wage a global war against Islamic terror meant that America was going to intensify its existing effort to shape non-Western societies culturally by randomly identifying a few Muslim societies. As the chief White House security expert Richard A. Clarke noted, the U.S. leadership already had Iraq in its sights before the smoke and dust of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon had even settled. America's political leadership ignored Huntington's critical admonition. "If non-Western societies are once again to be shaped by Western culture," Huntington insightfully warned five years before 9/11, "it will happen only as a result of the expansion, deployment, and impact of Western power."⁷ Political and cultural imperialism were the natural outcome, he warned, that posed dangerous risks as the West's adversaries would offer resistance. And resist they did, not only in Afghanistan and Iraq, but in an expanding theater of terrorism shading into Pakistan, Indonesia, Yemen, as well as in Spain and Britain. Writing after the 9/11 attacks, Huntington held the United States culpable for its conduct in world affairs.⁸ Commenting on the nation's pariah status in the world, he added:

To a considerable extent we ourselves have generated these attitudes by our efforts to impose our values and institutions on other countries. We suffer from what can be called the universalist illusion that people of other countries have the same values and culture that we do; or if they do not have

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ "President Bush's Address to the Nation," *New York Times*, 8 Sept. 2003.

⁷ Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 310.

⁸ *Ibid.* Huntington lamented that the Western world was attempting to impose its universality on the rest of the world.

them, then they desperately want to have them; or if they do not want to have them, that something's wrong with them, and we have the responsibility to persuade or coerce them into adopting our values and culture.⁹

In the months and weeks preceding and following the beginning of the war in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq, an intensified culture war was waged in the media against militant Islam. This war was in part executed by sections of the U.S. government, members of the Bush-Cheney White House and their neoconservative allies, certain elements in the intelligence agencies, politicians, and sections of the independent media, especially the pro-Bush-Cheney electronic media. While the perpetrators of 9/11 were undoubtedly Muslims of a radical stripe, the symbol that subliminally became associated with "the enemy" for many was just simply "Islam." Despite the attempts by political leaders in America and Europe to distinguish between Islam as a religion and the radical Muslim fringe group of terrorists, such nuance did not matter much. An unprecedented number of media productions conflated the two. Soon "Islam" and "terrorism" became synonymous. An amorphous entity called "the Muslim world" stretching from Jakarta to Jersey City was summarily indicted. As Edward Said, the Palestinian American professor of literature, described the pre- and post-9/11 writings about Islam, "The personification of enormous entities called 'the West' and 'Islam' is recklessly affirmed, as if hugely complicated matters like identity and culture existed in a cartoon-like world where Popeye and Pluto bash each other mercilessly, with one always more virtuous pugilist getting the upper hand of his adversary."¹⁰

Muslim moderates both in the United States and abroad were suffocated by the deluge of anti-Islam sentiment. In a paranoid media environment, it was difficult to express a rational point of view, suggest nuance, and caution against overkill, without being charged with giving comfort to terrorists. The media frenzy fed on the psychological need of the American public for security and for identification of all potential enemies. Over time, for most Americans the culprit of 9/11 was Saudi Arabia since seventeen of the nineteen hijackers were Saudi nationals. The simplistic conclusion deposited in the minds of many was that the source of terror stemmed from Saudi Arabia, where it was nurtured by a fundamentalist puritan Wahhabi ideology. Wahhabi ideology dated back to an eighteenth-century reformist figure in Arabia, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who combated what he believed was superstition and idolatry in the name of Islam. Many in America believed this brand of Islam was exported to Pakistan

⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, "America in the World," *Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Culture* 5:1 (2003): 18.

¹⁰ Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, 22 Oct. 2001.

and Afghanistan, from whence terrorism was exported. As an ideology, Wahhabism was marginal to terrorism. Central to Muslim-inspired terrorism was a disturbing new theology that translated Muslim grievances into a justification for violence, contrary to the established canons of Islamic law, in order to redeem Muslim societies from their slide into subservience to Western powers. If 9/11 was an act of vengeance by al-Qaeda for American culpability in a host of political grievances reaching back to decades of the Cold War, then it started a chain reaction. It inaugurated a new moment in global political warfare and ideological contestation on an unprecedented scale involving America, but largely the West, against countless groups of Muslim adversaries.

America became the supporter of a moderate Islam, which would serve as an antidote to militant Islam worldwide. Huge amounts of resources were ploughed into creating media outlets intended to promote Western culture and moderate interpretations of Islam overseas. Undisguised in its cultural objectives, several high-profile U.S. representatives also explained that the nation-building project in Afghanistan was necessary, with one of the goals identified to be cultural – to liberate Afghan women from the oppressive yoke of the Taliban, the orthodox religious group that governed Afghanistan before it was unseated by the United States' invasion. The second was to install a democratic political order in Kabul as a security blanket against future possible attacks against the United States. The same was true about the invasion of Iraq when the mission switched to installing a democratic order in Baghdad once nuclear weapons proved elusive.

Many Americans saw 9/11 as an attack on their way of life and their purpose as Americans in the world. This might also be the reason why so few of them demurred at the scale of the wars America launched and the atrocities committed in their name. Only the bravest mourned the loss of Afghan and Iraqi lives as well as American lives. Violations of the civil rights of thousands of Muslim Americans and those captured on foreign battlefields were ignored by the larger American society. Most Americans saw themselves as being invited to stand up for a higher purpose as global peacekeepers and to vanquish evil.

Religion, too, was summoned to resist the threat terror posed to civilization, just as America's adversaries also invoked religion, namely, Islam. Before the dust settled, many people felt that both the diagnosis and the solution to 9/11 were hyped and distorted. Some clear minds, such as the British Pakistani writer Tariq Ali, called the confrontation between America and its militant Muslim adversaries a clash of fundamentalisms.¹¹ But the wagons to save civilization had by then already set out for

¹¹ Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jibads and Modernity* (London, 2002).

Mesopotamia and the Hindu Kush mountains, and there was no early turning back. After taking office in 2009, the new American president, Barack Obama, promised to tone down this confrontation between Islam and the West.

AMERICA AS A CHRISTIAN NATION?

The post 9/11 period witnessed energetic attempts to baptize America as a Christian nation. Questions around the political theology or the political philosophy that underwrote America's constitutional democracy were frequently raised in the history of the republic. In theory, secular constitutional democracies did not refer to some divine authority when imagining or referring to the basic political structures of society. Nevertheless, the Protestant and religious inspiration at the base of governance in the United States was undeniable. Despite the secular nature of statecraft, the early religious history of America, coupled with the increased public role of religion in the twentieth century, made it hard to accept the claim that political theology was drained from American political thinking. Even if it were arguably true, then the aftermath of 9/11 showed that political theology might have been merely sublimated, for it quickly resurfaced at a time of crisis.

It had been observed with increasing frequency that America might be heading for a postsecular society. This meant that secularism would no longer be the master narrative that explained everything, but just one particular tradition. In that sense the postsecular allowed for a plurality of public discourses, which would give newer traditions such as Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism a respectable place at the table. If postsecular means that the state took no stand for or against religion in privileging or proscribing religion, then in that sense America was postsecular. But it was the realm of divisive moral and ethical issues, such as abortion and sexual choice, frequently freighted with a ballast of religious convictions, that gave credence to specters of the postsecular. As compared to Europe, religion performed visibly and publicly in America. And for the last quarter of the twentieth century, religion, especially evangelical Christianity, was on the rise in the United States with the growth of megachurches.

Post 9/11, certain strands of Christianity gained a sharper political edge and became increasingly virulent against other religious traditions. This might, in part, have been related to the fact that 9/11 happened on the watch of a very devout president who embraced an evangelical version of Methodism. Not only did President Bush's religious convictions interfere with the legislative arena in his opposition to stem-cell research and in promoting religious-based social programs, but he waged the post-9/11 wars

in a crusading spirit. In fact, 9/11 was skillfully used as a pretext to exercise imperial power stylized in messianic rhetoric.¹²

On 1 May 2003, President George W. Bush, speaking from the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, after his much publicized media spectacle of landing by fighter plane, pledged, “We have not forgotten the victims of September 11, the last phone calls, the cold murder of children, the searches in the rubble.” “With those attacks,” he continued, “the terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States. And war is what they got.” Jim Wallis, a conscientious Christian, analyzed Bush’s statements as an attempt to cast himself as a messianic Calvinist intent on ridding the world of evil. Wallis also noted that President Bush’s former speechwriter, David Frum, said of Bush that “war had made him . . . a crusader after all.”¹³ After the catastrophic events of 9/11, during which time the term “terrorist” became synonymous with “Islam” and “Muslim,” it was difficult to suppress public perceptions that the target of Bush’s messianic war was “Islam.” For those with longer historical memories, the temptation to go to war with one of the world’s largest intracultural religious systems called “Islam” would turn out to be fateful to America. In a fit of overkill and hysteria, the United States went to war with two Muslim countries – one in the Middle East and the other in South Asia – and became entangled in regions fated with complex histories from which few imperial powers left with their reputations intact.

Kevin Phillips, a Republican strategist, took a more critical line, arguing that the legacy of the Bush administration was “to manifest a higher and higher level of outright deception: saying one thing and meaning another.”¹⁴ But it was the noted scholar of religion Bruce Lincoln who made the most convincing argument for the doublespeak of President Bush, following a close analysis of the president’s address to the nation in October 2001. By the end of the president’s speech, “America’s adversaries have been redefined as enemies of God,” noted Lincoln, “and current events have been constituted as confirmation of Scripture.”¹⁵ President Bush spoke to his Christian audiences, Lincoln observed, “indirectly, through strategies of double coding.”¹⁶ To his supporters, President Bush provided reassurance, urging them to enlist specialized reading, listening,

¹² See Jim Wallis, “Dangerous Religion: George W. Bush’s Theology of Empire,” *Sojourners Magazine*, Sept.–Oct. 2003, 20–6.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Paul R. Krugman, “The Wars of the Texas Succession,” *New York Review of Books*, 26 Feb. 2004, 6.

¹⁵ Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago, 2003), 32.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

and interpretive skills, said Lincoln, so that they could probe beneath the surface of his text.¹⁷ These same echoes could be consistently heard in the president's subsequent speeches laced with thunderous vendetta and subliminal religious rage.

The declarations made by President George W. Bush and the British prime minister Tony Blair that the "war against terrorism" was not a war against Islam might as well have been the mutterings of soothsayers since they gained very little traction among their intended audiences. What they both failed to comprehend was that Islam was a complex and diverse religious tradition with multiple histories, value systems, and civilizational achievements. To speak about "Islam," or "Christianity," for that matter, was to hide more than to reveal. One had to be concrete when talking about societies, cultures, religions, and histories. Sweeping characterizations of macroentities were often misleading and resulted in caricature.¹⁸

But the proclamations of Bush and Blair were by most recent accounts a fig leaf to hide the carnage that they wreaked in Iraq. Self-justifying strategies were not unknown to Americans. The historian Leo Damrosch wrote that the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville very shrewdly observed America's moral sanctimony in what it did to Native Americans "tranquilly, legally, philanthropically, without spilling blood, without violating a single one of the great principles of morality in the eyes of the world."¹⁹ This statement rings as true today as it did centuries ago, for America's wars in the opening decade of the twenty-first century were also ironically prosecuted with the highest philanthropic purposes in mind. The reality on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan told a different story. Widespread devastation of human life and property, insecurity, and anarchy prevailed. With the deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan numbering in the tens of thousands caused by the United States, nothing could convince Muslims around the world that the United States and Britain were not fighting Islam. Furthermore, there was a long record of torture, wrongful imprisonment, and humiliation of innumerable victims in scores of countries around the world that remained unaccounted for. Especially, the invasion of Iraq, Richard C. Clarke, a former Bush White House security czar, noted, only served to "further radicalize Muslim youth into heightened hatred of America."²⁰ Clarke, with his keen sense of security matters, accurately summed up the damage done by the Iraq war to the United States' prestige and security. "Nothing America could have done

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹ Leopold Damrosch, *Tocqueville's Discovery of America* (New York, 2010), 161.

²⁰ Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York, 2004).

would have provided al-Qaeda and its new generation of cloned groups a better recruitment device than our unprovoked invasion of an oil-rich Arab country,” he wrote. “Nothing else could have so well negated all our other positive acts and so closed Muslim eyes and ears to our subsequent calls for reform in their region. It was as if Usama bin Laden, hidden in some high mountain redoubt, were engaging in long-range mind control of George Bush, chanting ‘invade Iraq, you must invade Iraq.’”²¹

Individual members of the American armed forces associated with fundamentalist brands of Christianity also framed their participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as their Christian duty. This not only impacted on the professional conduct of soldiers on the battlefield, but also became a headache for the civilian leadership. During the Bush presidency the now-retired general William Jerry Boykin made certain pronouncements that betrayed his professional status and offended the many hundreds of Muslim soldiers in the United States army.²² Boykin, who aired his controversial views long after America’s engagement in Somalia had ended, told a journalist that when he responded to the boast of the fugitive Somali warlord Osman Atto, who claimed he would not be apprehended, he, Boykin, said he told himself, “My God was bigger than his. I knew my God was a real God and his was an idol.”²³ In an attempt to defuse the controversy, Boykin later clarified that he meant the warlord Atto’s “god” was money. Boykin, who was charged with the special operations’ plan to hunt down Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda operatives, was known to take his religious commitments into the battlefield, and he truly believed he was engaged in a holy war against Islam. In 2002 Boykin told a church audience in Oregon that Muslims hated America “because we’re a Christian nation. We are hated because we are a nation of believers.” Our “spiritual enemy,” Boykin continued, “will only be defeated if we come against them in the name of Jesus.”²⁴ On another occasion, Boykin warned that “there is no greater threat to America than Islam,” and he asked patriotic Americans to get educated, get involved, and pray.²⁵ Subsequent developments suggested that Boykin’s views were not isolated ones.

Spearheading the movement to reclaim America as a Christian nation, until his death in 2007, was the televangelist D. James Kennedy, founder of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. Coral Ridge was a sizable national operation with an extensive budget of \$37 million annually and

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Gottschalk and Greenberg, *Islamophobia*, 85.

²³ <http://www.commondreams.org/views03/1016-08.htm>.

²⁴ <http://www.commondreams.org/view03/1016-08.htm>.

²⁵ http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-5346428-503544.html.

access to an estimated audience of 3.5 million. Kennedy championed the cause of restoring “the standard of good behavior” in judges according to the Constitution and said judges invited impeachment if they refused to acknowledge “God as the sovereign source of law, liberty, or government.”²⁶ Apart from opposing abortion and the teaching of evolution in schools, Kennedy also cosigned the famous “Land Letter” sent to the president by Richard D. Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. In the letter the evangelical authors controversially asserted that a preemptive invasion of Iraq was justified in terms of “just war” theory.

The battle cry of Kennedy’s plea for restoring the Christian nation was taken to a more visible level in 2001 when Roy Moore, chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, caused a national furor when he commissioned a state-sponsored granite monument of the Ten Commandments.²⁷ He was catapulted into national prominence by his determination to show that God was the basis of the American government and that the Founding Fathers intended the United States to be a Christian nation. Although Moore and his rock were both tossed out of the Alabama courthouse, his ideas gradually gained momentum. The vice-presidential candidate and former Alaska governor Sarah Palin also believed that America was a Christian nation and argued that it was “mind-boggling” to suggest otherwise.²⁸

GOVERNMENT ACTION AGAINST MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED STATES

Law enforcement agencies in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 kept thousands of Muslims under surveillance and closely monitored the actions of major Muslim organizations, especially charities suspected of having links with outlawed organizations abroad. In the weeks after 11 September law enforcement agencies rounded up more than a thousand Arab or Muslim men, according to some figures. Roughly eighty-three thousand people from predominately Muslim nations were forced to register with the government, and nearly fifty thousand people of mainly Muslim backgrounds were deported. Intimidated by scurrilous charges that assailed their patriotism to America, many Muslims endured hostile sentiments directed at them on a daily basis.²⁹ Workplace discrimination for women wearing Islamic

²⁶ Max Blumenthal, “In Contempt of Courts,” *Nation*, 25 Apr. 2005.

²⁷ Joshua Green, “Roy and His Rock,” *Atlantic Monthly* (2005): 70–82.

²⁸ <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/sarah-palin-sparks-church-state-separation-debate/story?id=10419289>.

²⁹ “Immigration Crackdown Shatters Muslims’ Lives,” *Chicago Tribune*, 16 Nov. 2003.

attire and other forms of harassment became more frequent. Islamophobia ran rife to the extent that a member of President Bush's own personal security detail was hauled off an airplane months after 9/11 because he was an Arab Muslim.

A prominent Muslim army chaplain, Captain James Yee, who served at the special prison in Guantánamo Bay, was detained for espionage and held in solitary confinement for seventy-six days. When his indictment failed, Yee was charged with mishandling classified documents, charges that were also later withdrawn. He faced vexatious charges for downloading pornography on a government laptop and adultery, and he was subject to nonjudicial punishment according to army rules.³⁰ His appeal against the sentence was granted, and he received an honorable discharge from the army. Captain Yee pled his innocence and awaited an apology from the government. In his book, *For God and Country*, Yee raised many questions.³¹ He suspected that Muslim servicemen were used as pawns to ratchet up anxiety associated with the war on terror. Yee's case was similar to that of the French captain Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish army officer who was framed for espionage for the Germans in 1894. Yet no one drew attention to the similarities. Dreyfus at least had the courageous novelist Émile Zola on his side; Zola wrote a public condemnation in a famous article headlined "J'accuse," emblazoned on the front page of the major newspaper *Aurore*, in which he charged the French army with a cover-up. Captain Yee received no such visible support, save for some brave columnists who periodically pleaded his case. Yee wrote poignantly:

Maybe I was considered a traitor because I was not afraid to tell my commanders that many of the things we were doing at Guantánamo were wrong. . . . Maybe it was because I was not willing to silently stand by and watch U.S. soldiers abuse the Qur'an, mock people's religion, and strip men of their dignity – even if those men were prisoners. . . . There are times when I fear that my ordeal simply stemmed from the fact that I am one of "them" – a Muslim. I am a soldier, a citizen and a patriot. But in the eyes of a suspicious, misguided minority who have lost touch with America's national inclusiveness, above all else I am a Muslim.³²

The U.S. government successfully prosecuted a number of Muslims in terrorism-related cases. Several people were charged for what appeared to be *prima facie* cases of intention to commit violence or join terrorist

³⁰ Juliette Kayyem, "Military Justice System a Self-Inflicted Casualty in Terror War," *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 Feb. 2004.

³¹ James Yee, *For God and Country: Faith and Patriotism under Fire*, ed. Aimee Molloy (New York, 2005).

³² *Ibid.*, 220–1.

groups. The most famous was that of John Walker Lindh, a Californian convert to Islam, who in 2001 was detained in Afghanistan and designated as an “enemy combatant” for being a supporter of the Taliban. Similarly, in 2008 Jose Padilla, a New York–born convert to Islam, was also successfully prosecuted for conspiracy to murder, kidnap, and maim people overseas. A major Muslim charity, the Holy Land Foundation, was shut down for supplying funds to the Palestinian group Hamas, which had been listed as a banned group by the U.S. government. After fifteen years of investigation and two trials, the government succeeded in imprisoning the organizers of the charity for illegally funneling funds to Hamas. The case of Sami al-Arian, a Florida engineering professor charged with supporting a banned group, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, before it was outlawed, lingered in the courts for nearly a decade. After several extended spells in jail, al-Arian was out on bond and under house arrest. Some of these prosecutions fell into the crosshairs of divisive Middle Eastern politics that played out on the national political scene. Support for Palestinian groups, even humanitarian support, became suspect, thanks to the monitoring and influence of the pro-Israeli lobby among legislators in Washington, D.C.

MEDIA AND HYSTERIA

For some time, negative stereotypes of Muslims prevailed in all forms of media. Hollywood films, television serials, and cyberspace cast Muslims as simplistic characters – either villains or do-gooders as they were portrayed in the 1998 film *The Siege*.³³ But none of this helped to educate the public what it meant to be Muslim in all its complexity in America when cardboard images served as substitutes. Talk shows and twenty-four-hour news cycles often simplified complex issues of politics, let alone religion. Any fair and sober discussion about Islam was too high a bar. Immediately after 9/11 Muslim representatives could hardly make a comment before editors, publishers, and anchors, from *Larry King Live* to hosts of highbrow National Public Radio shows, demanded that Muslim and Arab spokespersons accept communal guilt for the crimes committed by radical Muslims. It became a pattern across the media industry that the first question asked of Muslim interviewees was whether they condemned the actions of the terrorists. As did a section of the American public, these journalists presumed the Muslims interviewed were guilty by association. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 anything that was said about Islam and Muslims was considered to be believable, especially when someone who had the thinnest credentials on Islam made such a claim.

³³ Gottschalk and Greenberg, *Islamophobia*, 61.

Perhaps the most craven conduct was displayed by some high-profile journalists and columnists and talk show hosts who occupied bully pulpits and whose views the public trusted. They uncritically fell behind the Bush-Cheney line in favor of the Iraq war by sugarcoating the intelligence misinformation that was being circulated. Public commentators like William Safire and Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* and Charles Krauthammer of the *Washington Post* indecorously played the role of cheer-leading chatterers who cajoled a frightened American public to war with scary rhetoric. Friedman brazenly advocated and justified an American military invasion of Iraq, in his words, into the “heart of the Muslim world . . . going door to door” in retaliation for 9/11 in order to puncture the “terrorism bubble.”³⁴ Vacuous, if not deceitful, claims linking Muhammad Atta, one of the 9/11 plotters, to meetings with Iraqi intelligence prior to 9/11 were frequently laundered in Safire’s columns as fact. Some of the media pundits disclosed what the Bush administration lacked in courage to say, namely, that the invasion of Iraq was to teach “Muslims” everywhere in the world a punitive lesson for the terrorist attacks against the United States.

It was only after military setbacks in Afghanistan and Iraq began to be reported back home and the Bush administration’s intelligence misdeemeanors became widely known that sections of the media did strike back.³⁵ Hollywood films and television shows started to portray the Bush administration as the villains while showing that the terrorists were mere pawns in their machinations. The film *Syriana* showed the assassination of an Arab prince trying to free his country from America’s grip, and *Mission Impossible III* showed a smuggler who was a neoconservative front man trying to provoke war in the Middle East. And even the TV serial *24*, which sided with the war on terror in some of its earlier episodes, in later shows was skeptical

³⁴ Thomas Friedman, a *New York Times* columnist who viewed himself as a moderate, in an interview with Terry Gross on her program, *Fresh Air*, on 21 Apr. 2003, <http://freshair.npr.org/>, unequivocally confirmed that the war on Iraq had an underlying message. The message was going into the “heart of the Muslim world and going door to door” in order to teach Muslims a lesson in response to 9/11 as a way to puncture what he called the “terrorism bubble,” even though there was no evidence of Saddam Hussein’s supporting terrorism or possessing weapons of mass destruction. The difference between Friedman’s viewpoint and those of the neocons, from William Kristol to Doug Feith and others, was that he presented the neocon agenda in a velvet glove. See Robert Worth, “The Deep Intellectual Roots of Islamic Terror,” *Arts & Ideas*, *New York Times*, 13 Oct. 2001; Holland Cotter, “Beauty in the Shadow of Violence,” *Arts & Leisure*, *New York Times*, 7 Oct. 2001. In these samples of press articles and countless others, everything in Islamic history from the Prophet Muhammad to Muslim art was associated with violence and criminality in a sleight of hand that could only be described as a sinister form of Islamophobia.

³⁵ Beinhart, *Icarus Syndrome*.

of the government line. The mainline electronic and print media marginally recovered their critical apparatus compared to the post-9/11 hyperpatriotic goodwill of the press toward the government, but still not entirely when it came to talking about Islam and Muslims.

AMERICAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Much of the anti-Islam narrative or the culture war continued energetically in organs of civil society. Religious organizations and watchdog groups emerged to monitor the actions of Muslim groups as part of a political vigilantism to keep America white and Christian. Soon after 9/11, a textbook suggested for freshmen summer reading became a point of contention at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The book by Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*, made national headlines when the Family Policy Network, a watchdog group, sued the state-funded university in 2002 for breaching the constitutional separation between church and state. In the glare of media frenzy, the outraged Family Policy Network claimed the prescribed text was partisan to a favorable view of Islam and did not contain parts of the Qur'an considered offensive. While the university stood firm in support of academic freedom, the North Carolina legislature cut off funds for anything related to the freshman reading program that year.

Blaming academics for being too tightly wedded to leftist causes or sympathetic to Arabs and Muslims gave rise to another watchdog group called Campus Watch. Denying Campus Watch's strong pro-Israel cause, its founder, Daniel Pipes, claimed that its goal was to promote "rigorous, objective scholarship untainted by political, ethnic, or religious agendas."³⁶ Yet all of its monitoring of academics, college programs, and the writing of academics linked to Middle East studies strangely ended up siding only with conservative causes. David Horowitz, a former leftist turned rightist, also furiously campaigned against a range of Islamic causes, channeling his energies through conservative student bodies on college campuses. Through his David Horowitz Freedom Center he popularized the term "Islamofascism" as shorthand for terror sponsored by Muslim actors. A number of writers and authors who made Islam and Muslims their pet project found it hard to avoid the temptation to insert snarky comments about Islam. Christopher Hitchens, an émigré British writer and commentator, was possibly the most representative of this trend. Not only was militant Islam the target of his comments, but in his broad-brush commentary an

³⁶ <http://www.campus-watch.org/blog/2010/07/campus-watch-setting-the-record-straight-2010>.

entire history and culture of Islam spanning centuries were often denigrated and dehumanized.

From within Christian circles, provocations against Muslims became a regular feature. Franklin Graham, a prominent evangelical figure, and others identified Islam to be essentially evil, resurrecting medieval suspicions and invective against Islam crafted in Europe centuries ago. Fulminations against Islam and Muslims continued as part of the self-indulgent hysteria mounted by the media organs of Christian evangelical churches. A small sample of this occurred when the Rev. Jerry Falwell called the Prophet Muhammad a “terrorist,” while the Rev. Jerry Vines, a pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida, called the Prophet a “demon-possessed pedophile.”³⁷ And in most cases organizations and individuals making these charges were not subject to rebuke or held accountable. Often civic watchdog groups countering hate speech and bigotry paid insufficient attention to anti-Muslim statements, failing to hold violators of civic norms accountable. In this respect, the Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) did excellent work in monitoring such anti-Muslim offenses.

Even building mosques became controversial, stoking anti-Islam sentiment. In summer 2010 the construction of a proposed mosque in an Islamic cultural center two blocks from Ground Zero in New York City generated a storm of controversy and virulent opposition. Opponents claimed situating the mosque so near the scene of terrorist activity was offensive to feelings of the families of those killed since the terrorists shared the same irredeemable Muslim faith as the organizers of the Islamic center. Opponents claimed that it was a victory mosque celebrating the destruction on 9/11. For the sponsors of the Cordoba House Initiative, named after the *convivencia*, or shared existence, prevalent among religions in Muslim Spain centuries ago, this center was meant to be the very antithesis of what the terrorists did in the name of Islam. The proposed center planned to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue and strongly eschewed the ideology that fostered terrorism. The issue became so polarizing that it required the mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, and President Barack Obama, publicly to affirm the constitutional right of Muslims to build a mosque. Despite calls to respect freedom of religion and efforts to quell the ill-informed anxieties of the public regarding the proposed Lower Manhattan mosque, a few other cases of local communities’ opposing mosque applications were reported around the country. Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association went on record to say that no more mosques ought to be allowed to be built in the United States. Islam, in his

³⁷ <http://www.nccusa.org/news/02news56.html>.

view, was not a “religion of peace,” but rather a religion of war and a totalitarian political ideology masquerading as a religion.³⁸

Cyberspace was where a great deal of anti-Islam propaganda circulated. It appeared that the wave of anti-Islamic sentiment that surfaced in summer 2010 was fed on a diet of toxic caricatures and deliberate misinformation campaigns about Islam that circulated in Internet chat rooms, blogs, and Listservs. Right-wing and evangelical groups were extremely successful in circulating their propaganda. A professionally made YouTube documentary with twelve million hits called *Muslim Demographics*, for example, showed with false and skewed statistics that Muslims were poised to overwhelm Christian populations in Europe and North America unless they procreated faster than Muslims.³⁹ To the uninformed it gave the impression that America was to be overrun by a Muslim majority by the year 2050, and that Shari’a, Islamic law, would replace the U.S. Constitution. Given the virility of some of the opposition to mosque building in 2010, it was altogether probable that this documentary and others similar to it fueled some of the fears.

RESPONSE FROM THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The very diverse American Muslim community weathered the post-9/11 encounters with remarkable resilience and creativity. Some of the major religious organizations, such as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), launched new programs to introduce Islam and Muslims to the American mainstream. There was a conscientious desire to integrate Muslims into public life while advancing core Islamic values. The constant act of reconciliation between inherited Islamic values and American values occasionally proved to be challenging, but American Muslims demonstrated that they were able to manage such tensions. Some, such as Muzaffar Chishti, called 9/11 a “Muslim moment” in America, and he defined it as “a period of rising Muslim self-consciousness, new alliances outside their own communities, and a generational change. . . . The notion of a distinct ‘American Muslim’ identity has gained new currency. It is an identity that seeks to assert its independence from forces abroad, one that combines the essential elements of Islam and the values of American constitutional democracy.”⁴⁰

What Chishti pointed to were developments in the realm of Muslim ethical practices. On some moral issues ranging from sexuality, gender, the

³⁸ Anderson Cooper, A360.com, 16 Aug. 2010.

³⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-3X5hIFXYU>.

⁴⁰ Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond* (Berkeley, 2009), 220–1.

mixing of sexes, to reproductive issues and stem-cell research, the Muslim community was grappling with complex matters as much as any other faith community. Specifically challenging to Muslim Americans was the fact that immigrant Muslims imported with them cultural baggage that clouded some of these contentious moral issues. For example, women's head covering for the majority of African American Muslim women was often incorporated into their dress style, a cultural practice, rather than simply a religious symbol. On gender relations, African American Muslims also led the way in demonstrating that healthy moral boundaries could be maintained without offending the individual dignity of men and women by viewing the mixing of sexes as a disease-ridden activity. Instead, people were taught how to conduct respectful relations between the sexes. Only when the experiences of American Muslims became part of the renewed moral fabric could one claim that an indigenous "American" tradition of Islam was born.

One genuine "American" tradition of Islam was the one practiced by African American Muslims, who made up one-third of the American Muslim population but were understated in the public representation of Islam.⁴¹ Despite occasional tensions and rifts with immigrant Muslims, the typical newcomer versus old-timers syndrome coupled with racist streaks among some immigrants, the African American experience of being American, black, and Muslim provided enduring lessons from which immigrant Muslims could learn. But the African American Muslim community was as diverse as the immigrant community. Pockets of political radicals among African American Muslims were as evident as they were among immigrant Muslims. Among some African American Muslims, Islam was often seen as more than a faith, an ideology of social salvation from decades of white racial discrimination, exclusion, and economic deprivation. Immigrant Muslims, on the other hand, were animated by grievances experienced by Muslims in their ancestral homeland, be it in Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia, Kashmir, or Iraq, and they resorted to Islam as an ideology of social and political salvation. The reasons why people sought political and social salvation in religion instead of in political venues were manifold. Yet one cannot discount the fact that if the reigning cultural and political venues were not capacious enough to fulfill the aspirations of minorities, then they would indeed turn to narrower and less helpful brands of ideology, radical notions of Islam not excluded.

A survey shows that the incidence of terrorist-related violence among Muslim Americans was relatively low. Studies done in select American

⁴¹ Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford, UK, 2005).

cities showed that American Muslim communities were vigilant against individuals who might contemplate terrorist activities, and they worked closely with law enforcement agencies to combat such acts.⁴² Mosques and community centers engaged in self-surveillance realized that homegrown terrorism could jeopardize their communities' hopes and aspirations to be part of American life. Despite that heightened vigilance, a small number of American-born Muslims slipped through the net and attempted to join militant jihadi groups abroad. While most of such individuals were apprehended even before they could execute their plans, concerns about the remnants of such strains within the Muslim community remained. The fact that an American-born and once Virginia-based cleric, Anwar Awlaki, could recruit young people over the Internet from his hideout in Yemen and communicate with Major Nidal Malik Hasan, an army psychiatrist who killed thirteen fellow soldiers in a rage at Fort Hood in 2009, gave credence to the concern that disgruntled and disenchanting militant Muslim individuals could wreak havoc with national security.

For many Muslims, the post-9/11 period served as both a steep learning curve and an opportunity to fast-track their assimilation and shed some of the early reservations they might have fostered to integrate fully into American society. The major challenge was how to grow indigenous Muslim cultural resources. Recall that prior to 9/11, groups of Muslim Americans, other than the mainline representative agencies, were focused on their parochial agendas, whether as mystical (Sufi) communities, educational organizations, or religio-cultural institutions, all with limited and self-defined goals. After 9/11, Muslims learned how to create a corporate identity while retaining the internal diversity of Islam. Some Muslim clerics were quickly shaken out of their parochial pursuits and seemed genuine in their search for a more inclusive theology that meaningfully engaged with diversity in America.⁴³

As one person observed, "We found that there is a need to establish an American Muslim culture, a need to develop American Muslim [institutions] . . . that will address issues of Muslims here – not to import answers and edicts and rulings from the Muslim world because it does not respond to the realities of our environment here."⁴⁴ It was one thing to instill Islamic teachings among Muslim Americans; the greatest challenge was

⁴² David Schanzer, Charles Kurzman, and Ebrahim Moosa, *Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim-Americans* (Durham, NC, 2010).

⁴³ Jack O'Sullivan, "If You Hate the West, Emigrate to a Muslim Country," *Guardian*, Oct. 2001, quotes the California-based Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, who days before 9/11 made a speech warning that "a great, great tribulation was coming" to America. Showing remorse for his pre-9/11 utterances, Yusuf seemed also to have changed his own theology.

⁴⁴ Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, *Backlash 9/11*, 222–3.

to package those teachings in a culturally sensitive manner. Once the Islamophobia was unveiled from the objections to the proposed Lower Manhattan mosque, there might well have been some salient lessons of cultural sensitivity that Muslim Americans could learn from that episode. And cultural sensitivity, many would argue, was a two-way street. If cultural America did not embrace Muslim Americans, then the future looked bleak and daunting.

Stephen Franklin, surveying the Muslim population in the Chicago area, described how many American Muslims were confused by the mixed messages American society seemed to be sending them.

On one hand, [America] reaches out and implores them to become part of society. But at the same time it stereotypes them as religious fundamentalists and views many of their traditions as out of step with American culture and politics. Every violent act by militant Muslims anywhere in the world haunts them, forcing them into public and private denials that they are somehow linked to it. They live with the queasy feeling of being watched, and being judged differently from others.⁴⁵

RESISTANCE TO ISLAM IN THE ERA OF OBAMA

President Barack Hussein Obama's election in 2008 created a surge in ultra-right-wing sentiment, creating a noxious combination of forces from tax protesters, fringe conspiracy theorists, and anti-immigrant groups, to radical Christian evangelicals. Prime among such groups were the sophisticated Tea Party protesters who played to strong nationalist sentiment with close links to elements within the Republican Party. Sarah Palin and other high-profile Republican figures regularly were featured at their events and served as ventriloquists for the movement. While there were fringe conspiracy theorists who doubted President Obama was a U.S. citizen at birth, the real target was Obama's middle name "Hussein." As confusing as it might sound, many of the public debates angled on the place of Islam in American life were also directed at Obama, who was suspected of being a Muslim. For fringe and not-so-fringe groups who managed to get airtime on popular radio and television talk shows hosted by Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck, the subtext was clear: President Obama's birth and by implication his citizenship were suspect, and he was "America's first Muslim president," Limbaugh declared.⁴⁶ Speaking about President Obama, the evangelist Franklin Graham told CNN, "I think the president's problem

⁴⁵ Cited by Sam Afridi, "Muslims in America: Identity, Diversity and the Challenge of Understanding," *Carnegie Challenge 2001 Report* (2001): 8.

⁴⁶ <http://mediamatters.org/research/201008190045>.

is that he was born a Muslim. His father was a Muslim. The seed of Islam is passed through the father, like the seed of Judaism is passed through the mother."⁴⁷ Graham's erroneous claims that the seed of faith is passed from father to child aside, he grudgingly accepted the president's Christian bonafides. In the run-up to the 2008 elections, Barack Obama was the frequent target of a rumor mill fueled by his rivals, accused of being a Muslim or of studying at a madrasa, a Muslim school, during his childhood growing up in Indonesia. After Obama's election, other hot-button political issues also layered the Christian national discourse, such as anti-immigration sentiment coupled with xenophobia. As unemployment figures rose and the effects of the unprecedented economic recession grew worse, it seemed likely that immigrants and minorities were also convenient scapegoats for the nation's pathologies.

A grand coalition including Republicans, Democrats, and neoconservatives and their respective institutions strongly resented Obama's reversal of the Bush doctrine of the war for civilization. The desire to install democracy at gunpoint in the Middle East and to save Afghan women from the Taliban was now a shattered goal as Obama attempted to draw down those wars. In his 2009 Cairo speech Obama essentially held out the olive branch to the Muslim world and pleaded for a new start in relations, a prospect that certainly disappointed many hard-liners in political circles, the armed forces, and civil society. If the war for civilization involving Islam had failed on foreign shores, then clearly in the minds of a host of actors who still clung to the messianic ideology of a war for civilization, this war had to be prosecuted against Muslims in the homeland.

CONCLUSION

The post-9/11 period indelibly changed the way many Americans saw Islam, through the lens of the ideology of a terrorist group al-Qaeda. America's subsequent actions in the homeland and abroad also changed its image in the view of most Muslims around the globe. If some Americans could not think of Islam without conjuring up terrorism, then many Muslims too were unable to imagine America without associating it with rapacious imperialism and a cruel occupying power that caused the deaths of tens of thousands of people. In fact, America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq managed to radicalize large sections of the Muslim world and imperiled American allies such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. It was difficult to predict how this mutual suspicion would be corrected as long as

⁴⁷ <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/08/19/graham-obama-born-a-muslim-now-a-christian/>.

military engagements remained the primary vehicle of communication. Reconciliation remained remote, and efforts to foster dialogue were necessary and had to continue despite the odds.

The strategy to cast Islam not as a religion but as a totalitarian ideology was bound to result in confrontations, conflicts, and intense public debates, whether they involved the building of mosques, the freedom of Muslim Americans to express themselves in public, or treatment of representatives in government and civil affairs as being suspect because they were Muslim. All of these pathologies were bound to increase. But the civic energy invested in engaging these debates might not be entirely futile. This was a second opportunity for Muslim Americans to engage and educate the rest of America about their faith and in the process to find their own feet in an American culture in ways that countless other religious minorities had successfully used. This would not be easy, or without costs, but it was inevitable.

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