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Article 1.

The Wall Street Journal

A New Course for the Middle East

Mitt Romney

September 30, 2012 -- Disturbing developments are sweeping across the greater Middle East. In Syria, tens of thousands of innocent people have been slaughtered. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has come to power, and the country's peace treaty with Israel hangs in the balance. In Libya, our ambassador was murdered in a terrorist attack. U.S. embassies throughout the region have been stormed in violent protests. And in Iran, the ayatollahs continue to move full tilt toward nuclear-weapons capability, all the while promising to annihilate Israel.

These developments are not, as President Obama says, mere "bumps in the road." They are major issues that put our security at risk.

Yet amid this upheaval, our country seems to be at the mercy of events rather than shaping them. We're not moving them in a direction that protects our people or our allies.

And that's dangerous. If the Middle East descends into chaos, if Iran moves toward nuclear breakout, or if Israel's security is compromised, America could be pulled into the maelstrom.

We still have time to address these threats, but it will require a new strategy toward the Middle East.

The first step is to understand how we got here. Since World War II, America has been the leader of the Free World. We're unique in having earned that role not through conquest but through promoting human rights, free markets and the rule of law. We ally ourselves with like-minded countries, expand prosperity through trade and keep the peace by maintaining a military second to none.

But in recent years, President Obama has allowed our leadership to atrophy. Our economy is stuck in a "recovery" that barely deserves the name. Our national debt has risen to record levels. Our military, tested by a decade of war, is facing devastating cuts thanks to the budgetary games played by the White House. Finally, our values have been misapplied—and misunderstood—by a president who thinks that weakness will win favor with our adversaries.

By failing to maintain the elements of our influence and by

stepping away from our allies, President Obama has heightened the prospect of conflict and instability. He does not understand that an American policy that lacks resolve can provoke aggression and encourage disorder.

The Middle East is a case in point. The Arab Spring presented an opportunity to help move millions of people from oppression to freedom. But it also presented grave risks. We needed a strategy for success, but the president offered none. And now he seeks to downplay the significance of the calamities of the past few weeks.

The same incomprehension afflicts the president's policy toward Israel. The president began his term with the explicit policy of creating "daylight" between our two countries. He recently downgraded Israel from being our "closest ally" in the Middle East to being only "one of our closest allies." It's a diplomatic message that will be received clearly by Israel and its adversaries alike. He dismissed Israel's concerns about Iran as mere "noise" that he prefers to "block out." And at a time when Israel needs America to stand with it, he declined to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In this period of uncertainty, we need to apply a coherent strategy of supporting our partners in the Middle East—that is, both governments and individuals who share our values.

This means restoring our credibility with Iran. When we say an Iranian nuclear-weapons capability—and the regional instability that comes with it—is unacceptable, the ayatollahs must be made to believe us.

It means placing no daylight between the United States and

Israel. And it means using the full spectrum of our soft power to encourage liberty and opportunity for those who have for too long known only corruption and oppression. The dignity of work and the ability to steer the course of their lives are the best alternatives to extremism.

But this Middle East policy will be undermined unless we restore the three sinews of our influence: our economic strength, our military strength and the strength of our values. That will require a very different set of policies from those President Obama is pursuing.

The 20th century became an American Century because we were steadfast in defense of freedom. We made the painful sacrifices necessary to defeat totalitarianism in all of its guises. To defend ourselves and our allies, we paid the price in treasure and in soldiers who never came home.

Our challenges are different now, but if the 21st century is to be another American Century, we need leaders who understand that keeping the peace requires American strength in all of its dimensions.

Mr. Romney is the Republican Party candidate for president.

Article 2.

NYT

Waiting for an Arab Spring of Ideas

Tariq Ramadan

September 30, 2012 -- DURING a recent visit to the United States, I was asked by intellectuals and journalists: Were we misled, during the Arab awakening, into thinking that Muslims could actually embrace democratic ideals?

The short answer is no. Participants in the recent violent demonstrations over an Islamophobic video were a tiny minority. Their violence was unacceptable. They do not represent the millions of Muslims who have taken to the streets since 2010 in a disciplined, nonviolent manner to bring down dictatorships.

Many Americans were nonetheless shocked by the chaos and bloodshed across Muslim countries, believing that they had come generously to the aid of the Arab peoples during the uprisings. But Arabs, and Muslims in general, have a longer memory and a broader view. Their mistrust is fueled by America's decades-long support for dictators who accommodated its economic and security interests; by the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan; by the humiliating treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay; and by America's seemingly permanent and unconditional support for Israel.

The United States and its European allies would be well advised to examine why Muslims are seething. Withdrawing from Afghanistan, respecting United Nations resolutions and treaty

obligations with regard to Palestine, calling back the killer drones and winding up the “war on terror” would be excellent places to start.

However, the time has come to stop blaming the West for the colonialism and imperialism of the past. Muslim-majority societies must jettison their historic posture as victims and accept that they are empowered actors, as millions of Arabs demonstrated last year by coming out into the streets and changing the course of history.

The timeworn dichotomy of “Islam versus the West” is giving way to an era of multipolar relations. The world’s economic center of gravity is shifting eastward. But the growing prominence of China, India and Russia, and of emerging powers like Brazil, South Africa and Turkey, does not automatically guarantee more justice and more democracy. Some Muslims are too quick to rejoice at the decline of American power. They seem unaware that what might replace it could well lead to a regression in social and human rights and to new forms of international dependency.

The Arab peoples, like those throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia, cannot, and do not want to, disregard the cultural and religious traditions that have long defined and nurtured them. As they pursue values like freedom, justice, equality, autonomy and pluralism, and new models of democracy and of international relations, they need to draw on Islamic traditions. Islam can be a fertile ground for political creativity — and not an obstacle to progress, as Orientalist thinkers in the West have so often claimed.

The Arab world, and Muslim-majority societies, need not only political uprisings, but also a thoroughgoing intellectual revolution from within that will open the door to economic change; to spiritual, religious, cultural and artistic liberation; and to the empowerment of women. The task is not an easy one.

A struggle for political and religious authority is taking place in these societies. There are deep divisions among Sunnis — traditionalists, secularists, reformers, Sufi mystics — and also between Sunnis and Shiites.

At the moment, Arab thought has been hindered by a barren ideological construct that pits secularists against Islamists, making it impossible for either to indulge in in-depth reflection about the intellectual limitations that afflict both of them.

Westernized secular elites, for all their talk of democracy and human rights, often are carrying over former colonial agendas and are deeply disconnected from the people they claim to represent. Or if they aren't — like some grass-roots movements on the left — their influence is marginal at best. Some have collaborated with dictators, accepted cronyism or benefited from official corruption. Others have remained close to the inner circles of the military (as in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Iraq). By standing against any overlapping of religion and politics, they have put forward a vision of democratization that is incoherent and disconnected from Islamic memories and traditions.

The Islamists have legitimacy, having paid a heavy price in opposing dictatorships for decades. They have made electoral gains in Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia by adapting to the shifts in power brought about by the protesters and cyberactivists. Yet

they are facing contradictory expectations: they must remain faithful to their Islamic credentials while facing foreign pressure with regard to democratic processes, economic policies and relations with Israel. No figure embodies these contradictions more than Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's new president, who tried last week to forcefully rebut President Obama's absolute defense of free speech at the United Nations. But calling for limits on offensive speech is no solution. We don't need more laws. We need courageous scholars and intellectuals who are willing to discuss topics their fellow Muslims don't want to hear: their failings, their tendency to play the victim, the need to take responsibility for their actions. Only that sort of leadership will halt the tide of religious populism and emotionally driven blindness of the masses.

While the example of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, known as the A.K.P., is interesting, it cannot be a reference for the entire Middle East. Turkey has a unique history; its challenges are not the same as those of the Arab world. The Arab Islamists, even as they celebrate their electoral successes, may well be entering a far more sensitive period of their history. They may lose the Islamic credibility they had as opposition forces, or be obliged to change and adapt so much that their political program is abandoned. Winning might be the beginning of losing.

Meanwhile, Salafi and Wahhabi groups with literalist interpretations of Islam have become more visible and politicized over the last five years. Having for decades refused political participation — equating democracy with kufr (rejection of Islam) — they are now slowly engaging in politics.

Some of these groups (known as salafi jihadists) have turned to violent radicalism. Others, financed by Islamic institutions in Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf oil monarchies like Qatar and Bahrain — supposed allies of the United States — have entered mainstream politics, where they promote a religious, anti-democratic populism that plays on emotions, demonizes the West (especially America) and actively undermines the struggle for democratic reform. There is a danger that the model of Afghanistan — where in the 1980s the Taliban, supported by the Saudi and American governments, became the main force of resistance to Russian domination — may be repeating itself.

There can be no true democracy in the Middle East without a profound restructuring of economic priorities, which in turn can come about only by combating corruption, limiting the prerogatives of the military, and, above all, reconsidering economic relations with other countries and the gross inequalities of wealth and income within Muslim countries. The emergence of a dynamic civil society is a precondition of success. Concern for free and critical thought must take the form of educational policies to build schools and universities, revise outdated curriculums and enable women to study, work and become financially independent.

The Arab world has shaken itself out of its lethargy after decades of apparent resignation and silence. But the uprisings do not yet amount to a revolution. The Arab world must confront its historical demons and tackle its infirmities and its contradictions: when it turns to the task, the awakening will truly have begun.

Tariq Ramadan, professor of contemporary Islamic studies at Oxford University, is the author, most recently, of “Islam and the Arab Awakening.”

Article 3.

The Daily Beast

Muslim Rage Is About Politics, Not Religion

Husain Haqqani

October 1, 2012 – Thousands of cellphone subscribers in Pakistan received an anonymous text message recently announcing a miracle: an earthquake on Tuesday, Sept. 18, had destroyed the Washington, D.C. movie theater that was exhibiting *Innocence of Muslims*, the controversial film that has triggered violent protests in several Muslim countries. An email version of the text message even included a picture of a mangled structure. Allah, the texter claimed, had shown His anger against the movie’s insult to Islam and Prophet Muhammad, and with Him on their side the faithful should not be afraid to vent their anger against the West, which belittles Islam and abuses Islam’s prophet.

There was, of course, no earthquake in Washington, and no movie theater had been destroyed. In fact, the movie has never made its way beyond YouTube. But for several days, the fabricated text message and email made the rounds, forwarded and reforwarded around Pakistan and in some cases to

Pakistanis living in the diaspora. It was part of a campaign to arouse Muslim passions by what author Salman Rushdie has termed “the outrage industry.” Similar false mass messaging convinced millions after 9/11 that Jews had been warned to stay away from the Twin Towers, implying a conspiracy that many still believe without a shred of evidence. Last year, after U.S. special forces killed Osama bin Laden, anonymous messages suggested that the raid in Abbottabad was a staged event and bin Laden had been killed months earlier.

Such well-organized manipulation of sentiment belies the notion that orchestrated protests are spontaneous expressions of Muslim rage. Like followers of any other religion, Muslims do not like insults to their faith or to their prophet. But the protests that make the headlines are the function of politics, not religion. Hoping to avoid being accused of siding with blasphemers, the Pakistani government tried to align itself with the protesters’ cause by declaring a public holiday and calling it “Love of the Prophet Day.” Although 95 percent of Pakistan’s 190 million people are Muslim, only an estimated 45,000 actually took part in that Friday’s demonstrations around the country against Innocence of Muslims. The protests mattered largely because of their violence: as many as 17 people were killed and scores injured.

Men of religion have often slandered each other’s faiths. Islam has endured its share of criticism and abuse over the centuries, especially from Christians, against whom they fought for control of the Levant and the southern corners of Europe during the Crusades and the Ottoman wars. The 14th-century Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaeologus hurled the ultimate insult at Muslims when he declared that everything Muhammad brought

was evil, “such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” Historically, Muslims returned the favor by pointing out the flaws in other religions and outlining their own perfect faith. Muslim emperors ruled over large non-Muslim populations while Muslim preachers and Sufi mystics worked to proselytize and win converts to Islam. But there is no record in those days of mob violence against foreign envoys or traders in retaliation for blasphemy against Muhammad or Islam allegedly committed by Islam’s enemies in distant lands.

The phenomenon of outrage over insults to Islam and its final prophet is a function of modern-era politics. It started during Western colonial rule, with Muslim politicians seeking issues to mobilize their constituents. Secular leaders focused on opposing foreign domination, and Islamists emerged to claim that Islam is not merely a religion but also a political ideology. Threats to the faith became a rallying cry for the Islamists, who sought wedge issues to define their political agenda. To this day, Islamists are often the ones who draw attention to otherwise obscure attacks on Islam and then use those attacks to muster popular support. The effort is often aided by Islamophobes hoping to create their own wedges by portraying Islam as a threat to Western civilization. Conservative and practicing Muslims who are not Islamists are caught in the middle, along with scholarly commentators on Islamic history and tradition who are not Islamophobes.

The past two decades have seen periodic outbreaks of protest over insults to Prophet Muhammad and Islam. In each case, the protesters were not reacting to something they had seen or read in the ordinary course of life. With the exception of The Satanic Verses, none of the objects of complaint were even widely

accessible until the public was whipped into a fury. The Islamists first introduced the objectionable material to their audience and then instigated the outrage by characterizing it as part of a supposed worldwide conspiracy to denigrate Islam. The emergence of social media and the swiftness of international communications have made it easier to choreograph global campaigns, and in Muslim-majority countries, Islamists tend to be among those who are most effectively organized to take advantage of technology for political ends.

An early prototype of these mass-mobilization campaigns centered on *Rangeela Rasool* (Playboy Prophet), a salacious version of Muhammad's life. Published in British India in 1927, the controversial book was hardly a bestseller. In fact it went mostly unnoticed until Muslim politicians encountered it two years later and complained. The British authorities arrested and tried the book's publisher, Rajpal, only to acquit him. Agitation by Muslim groups encouraged a young illiterate carpenter by the single name Ilmuddin to stab the publisher to death in Lahore. Ilmuddin was given the title of ghazi ("warrior for the faith") by Islamist political groups and was defended in court, albeit on technical grounds (and unsuccessfully), by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who would later become the founder of Pakistan. The British amended the Indian penal code to add punishment for blasphemy and incitement of religious hatred.

The *Rangeela Rasool* controversy polarized Hindus and Muslims, particularly in the Punjab. The region eventually had to be parceled out between the two religions in the 1947 Partition, and the two Punjabs suffered the most brutal communal violence of that horrific time. Pakistani leaders sometimes cite the book's publication as an example of how the

Islamic faith would have been threatened under non-Muslim rule had the British left the subcontinent undivided. It does not matter in that political argument that there are roughly as many Muslims today in India as there are in Pakistan.

“Defending the honor of the prophet” is widely regarded as a worthy cause, not to be opposed or criticized even by secular Muslims. If a secular politician dares to point out that the faith of 1.6 billion people can scarcely be threatened by a book with a print run of only 1,000 copies, he can easily be targeted as a defender of blasphemers. The governor of Pakistan’s Punjab province, Salmaan Taseer, was murdered last year by his own bodyguard for questioning the reasonableness of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. The country’s Islamist media described Taseer’s killer as a latter day Ilmuddin, and lawyers showered him with rose petals.

Like all modern political tactics, religious protests tend to be timed for best effect. The Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz first published *Children of Gabalawi*—an allegorical novel in Arabic that allegedly belittled Islam—in 1959. And yet the book didn’t become the target of significant protests until 30 years later, after Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for literature, and Omar Abdel-Rahman, the “Blind Sheik,” currently in U.S. prison for instigating terrorism, condemned the 1959 book. The publicity surrounding the 1988 Nobel Prize provided an ideal opportunity for Sheik Omar to rally his base and advance the cause of polarizing Egyptian society. His fatwa finally caught up with Mahfouz in 1994, when a knife-wielding Islamist stabbed the novelist in the neck, leaving him hospitalized for several weeks and suffering from permanent nerve damage.

Obscure books and writers can be just as useful. Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami ("Islamic Party") has never done well in elections, but it has a long record of seeking, publicizing, and capitalizing on perceived insults to Islam in hope of flexing its political muscle. Its activists are trained in street protests and choreographed demonstrations, and the party was one of the main organizers of the protests against Innocence of Muslims in Pakistan. Back in 1971, in the midst of the civil war that led to the creation of Bangladesh (and soon after Jamaat-e-Islami had suffered a humiliating defeat at the polls), the party discovered and loudly denounced *The Turkish Art of Love*, a sex manual containing derogatory references to Prophet Muhammad that was published in 1933. During the ensuing riots, Christian churches were attacked, and liquor shops (which were legal at the time) were looted. The British Council building in Lahore was also attacked.

Ironically, all the books that have been targeted for protests over the years remain available to this day. *Rangela Rasool* can be downloaded from the Internet. *Children of Gabalawi* continues to be read in many languages. Even *The Turkish Art of Love* can be easily bought almost anywhere in the world. The Satanic Verses protests of 1989, culminating in Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against author Salman Rushdie, only increased the book's sales.

If the protests were really supposed to silence insults against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, their failure should by now be obvious. Instead of being shut down, objectionable books and movies have gained publicity. Obscure publications—and, in the latest case, Internet posts—have become internationally known. Rather than ending dissemination of material offensive to

Muslim sensibilities, the protests have almost always had the opposite effect. In the case of Innocence of Muslims, the video was posted on YouTube in June, but hardly anyone paid attention to it until Egyptian Islamists broadcast it in early September.

There is nothing in Islamic tradition that requires Muslims to come out in the streets and throw rocks or set things on fire every time they hear of someone insulting their faith. Like Jewish and Christian scriptures, Islam's sacred texts speak of divine retribution as well as of God's mercy. References to holy war are interspersed with exhortations to charity, kindness toward others, and respect for life. Every chapter of the Quran begins with the words "In the name of Allah (God), the most compassionate, the most merciful," encouraging believers to practice mercy over retribution.

In fact, the Quran refers to Prophet Muhammad as "Rehmatul-lil-Alameen" or "the one bringing compassion for all worlds." After announcing his prophethood, Muhammad prayed for those who insulted or opposed him. In one famous episode, he once went to inquire about the health of an old woman in Mecca who had thrown garbage on him every day. When she failed to show up to deliver her daily insult, he was concerned. Such compassion won converts to Islam and contributed to the faith's expansion.

But a religion is what its followers make it, and the demands of Islamist politics in recent times have helped to stamp Muslims as being prone to anger and susceptible to violence. Meanwhile, bigoted nobodies have been made influential when their anti-Islam provocations have succeeded in unleashing the fury of tens of thousands around the world. But to the orchestrators of

the protests, none of this matters. Their target is not the perpetrators of the insults and abuse. Instead they are only looking for ways in which to mobilize Muslims against the West, if only to present themselves subsequently as the mediators who can bridge that divide.

Since falling under Western colonial rule, the Muslim world has developed a narrative of grievance. The view is shared by Islamists, who consider Islam a political ideology, and other Muslims who don't. Like all national and community narratives, it has some elements that are true. It is a historical fact that the Muslim world spent centuries in ascendance before Western influence rose, and Muslim power declined. And there is no question that Western imperialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries was far from benign. It divided Muslims, denigrated them, and used modern technology—from the printing press to electronic media and the moving image—to render a caricature of a once-preeminent civilization and the faith that rests at its heart.

The current weakness of the Muslim world, however, is not entirely the fault of Western colonialism and postcolonial machinations. For a century or more, overcoming that weakness has been the driving force behind almost every major political movement in the Muslim world, from pan-Arabism to contemporary Islamism. Nevertheless, Muslims have made practically no serious effort to understand the causes and remedies of their decline over the past 300 years. Outrage and resentment—and the conspiracy theories that inform them—are poor substitutes for comprehending why Islam's lost glory has proved so difficult to resurrect.

Islamists see the world as polarized between the Ummah (the community of believers, whom they describe as one nation) and the rest. The West's rise, rather than the Ummah's decline, receives far greater attention from Islamist scholars and leaders. Their worldview is summarized in the Arabic-language title of a book by the Indian Islamist scholar Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi. Its English-language version is unremarkable enough—*Islam and the World: The Rise and Decline of Muslims and Its Effect on Mankind*. But the Arabic edition's title translates literally as: *What the World Lost by the Decline of Muslims*. The civilizational narcissism is clear. "Our decline is the world's loss," it suggests. "We do not need to change anything. The West needs to fix things for us so that it does not lose the benefits of our civilization."

The outrage industry ensures that Muslims continue to blame others for their condition, raging over their impotence instead of focusing on economic, political, and social issues. At the same time, successive civilian and military governments in Pakistan have chosen to appease the dial-a-riot Islamist hardliners rather than confront them. A multitude of Islamist groups has sprouted, including jihadi militants battle-hardened in Afghanistan and Kashmir, and a competition of sorts now takes place among them over who is the greater champion of the honor of Islam and its prophet. A similar development is evident in the rivalry between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists in Egypt and in other Arab countries.

Even strategically pro-Western rulers find it convenient to perpetuate the Ummah's narrative of Islam being under siege and Muslims being the targets of an insidious global conspiracy. Morale is kept up by bogus stories of miracles, such as the

destruction of the theater that showed a blasphemous movie, or the one claiming that Neil Armstrong converted to Islam after hearing the call to prayer while he was on the moon. (He didn't.) It is rare to find mention of hard negative facts in the general discourse within the 57 member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which collectively account for approximately one fifth of the world's population but only 7 percent of global output.

The economic dysfunction in the 22 Arab countries, several of them blessed with oil reserves, highlights how Muslim scholars and politicians have failed to understand and explain the waning power of the Ummah to their people. The Arab countries had a combined GDP of \$1.9 trillion in 2010, compared with the European Union's GDP of \$17.5 trillion. Spain alone produced \$1.43 trillion in GDP, without the benefit of natural resources such as oil and gas. The wealth of Western nations comes from manufacturing and innovation, neither of which has found much favor in Muslim-majority countries.

A real debate among Muslims about their decline might identify why the Ottoman and Mughal empires refused to accept the printing press for more than two and a half centuries after Johannes Guttenberg invented movable type. It might also explain why Muslims failed to embrace the Industrial Revolution, modern banking, insurance, and the joint stock company, even after these had emerged in Europe. Instead, most of the discussion focuses on real or perceived historic injustice. "We are weak because we were colonized," Muslims tend to say, instead of recognizing that Muslim lands were colonized because they had become weak.

The “knowledge deficit” mentioned in the Arab Development Report of 2002 continues to worsen. Roughly half the world’s illiterate adults are found among Muslims, and two thirds of that number are women. Greece, with a population of 11 million, translates more books from other languages than the entire Arab world, which has a cumulative population of 360 million. Since the 9th century, when the Abbasid rulers of Baghdad patronized learning and built a huge library for its time, only 100,000 books have been translated from other languages into Arabic. The same number of books are translated from other languages into Spanish every year.

A thousand years ago, Muslims led the world in the field of science and mathematics. Today they are noticeably absent from any list of recent inventors and innovators in science and technology. Since 1901, only two Muslims have won a Nobel Prize in the sciences, and one of them (Pakistan’s Dr. Abdus Salam, Physics, 1979) is not deemed a Muslim in his home country because of his association with the Ahmadiyya sect. Not coincidentally, only a handful of Muslim-majority countries fulfill the criteria for freedom set by the independent group Freedom House. Even the “Arab Spring” seems unlikely to change that harsh reality.

Decline, weakness, impotence, and helplessness are the words repeated most frequently in the speeches and writings of today’s Muslim leaders. All four are conditions that feed outrage—the response of people lacking real power to change their circumstances. Ironically that response is cultivated by leaders who could channel their people’s energy toward real solutions. Instead of orchestrating hate on the pretext of even the most insignificant provocation, Muslim leaders could extend literacy,

expand education, and make their nations' economies more competitive. But as in Western democracies, the politics of wedge issues is always easier to pursue. Rising Islamophobia in Europe and North America helps Islamists keep things on the boil. "Us versus them" is always a useful distraction from "us versus our problems."

Husain Haqqani, Pakistan's ambassador to Washington from 2008 to 2011, is a professor of international relations at Boston University and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute.

Article 4.

The Daily Star

Hamas corruption weighs heavily on Gaza

Tamir Haddad

October 01, 2012 -- Recently, an official of the Finance Ministry in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip announced that since 2006

the office had not received a single report of corruption. Whether or not this is true, the fact is that Hamas corruption is not only pervasive in Gaza, it has also been detrimental to the greater social and economic good. The principal vehicle of Hamas corruption is excessive taxation. One of Gaza's biggest revenue cows, tunnel smuggling into Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, has borne the brunt of this graft. For the over 1,200 tunnels, tariffs of up to 15 percent are imposed on the thousands of tons of goods being brought in daily. Yet most are collected off the books, and of the 2,400 near-millionaires in Gaza, most are Hamas affiliates responsible for monitoring tunnels, according to Palestinian Authority officials. This is why when private tunnels began drawing business away from tunnels run by those close to Hamas, the movement declared them illegal, and implemented a mandatory \$3,000 license to continue operation. Excessive levels of taxation and licensing are not unfamiliar to Gazans. The Peace Research Institute Oslo reports that in the last six years municipality taxes in Gaza have quadrupled, reaching up to 60-70 percent. Fees on birth certificates have been instituted, and vocational licenses have become mandatory for all small business owners. Water, electricity, and other basic goods also continue to be taxed. So when Palestinian parliamentarian Jamal Nasser claimed that of the \$540 million in spending in Hamas' 2010 budget, only \$60 million would come from taxation, analysts raised red flags. Unfortunately, taxation is only a part of the story of Hamas corruption. Fraud is just as prevalent in Hamas institutions. One of the main avenues for financial assistance to Gazans, personal finance programs offered by banks, is entirely run and regulated by the Palestinian Monetary Authority in Ramallah. In fact, the authority has barred these banks from doing business with Hamas.

Nevertheless, Hamas officially takes full credit and responsibility for these important services, according to various intelligence sources. No different is the case of electricity. Since 2007 the Palestinian Authority has footed the bill for creating and distributing power in Gaza, and yet Hamas collectors continued to go door-to-door demanding bill payment from constituents. According to a July 10 U.S. House of Representatives hearing, titled “Chronic Kleptocracy: Corruption within the Palestinian Political Establishment,” this practice has existed for some time. However, Hamas continues to convey the message that electricity is a Hamas-provided service, and it continues to pocket bill payments that Ramallah has already footed. Aside from the excessive taxation and fraud, Hamas is also guilty of large-scale bribery. While more than a third of the Gaza population remains unemployed and below the poverty line, sources report that between 40,000 and 77,000 Hamas loyalists are on the party’s payroll. According to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, these employees often do not work, but receive paychecks nonetheless. Meanwhile, Hamas continues to sell land exclusively to Hamas members, further alienating any prospects of civilian economic development. So what are the consequences of this rampant graft? For one, the public sector is deteriorating. Since 2007, educators have been on strike as their paychecks were cut (1,500 employees have stopped receiving pay altogether). Experienced and qualified Fatah supporters have been replaced with Hamas loyalists. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency has intervened, offering an annual \$200 million for education services that reach one in three Gazans.

Health care is not much better off. In 2007, 50 percent of

doctors and nurses went on strike, with Palestinian Authority-bankrolled employees primarily holding down the fort. Despite exorbitant taxation and a per-capita budget about equal to that of the Palestinian Authority, Hamas continues to find itself unable to pay its most important employees. The social services that it is purported to provide are meanwhile being bankrolled by outside entities.

Perhaps most importantly, as fraud goes unheeded and Hamas continues to take credit for any social successes that foreign parties provide, the party continues to remain in power. Through bribes, Hamas buys Palestinian support through its 77,000-large bureaucratic army and fraudulently takes credit for the good that is provided by outside organizations or the Palestinian Authority. Many continue to believe that public funds are actually being used in their favor, while others find no advantage in speaking otherwise. Hamas has been known to stifle not only business competitors, but those who speak out against it. Three months ago, 57 percent of Gazans reported to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research that they perceived widespread corruption in their governing institution. So when the Finance Ministry announced that it had no recent corruption reports, maybe it was telling the truth. After all, despite the corruption that has shattered Gaza, the authoritarian state does not leave latent whistle-blowers many options. And Gazans continue to pay the price for it.

Tamir Haddad is a recent graduate of the University of Michigan. He wrote this commentary for The Daily Star.

TIME

Why India's 'Muslim Rage' Is Different from the Middle East

Krista Mahr

October 1, 2012 -- On Thursday, thousands of protesters marched toward the American Centre in Kolkata, demanding a ban and apology for the “Innocence of Muslims” film trailer that has sparked anti-American protests around the world. It was one of the larger spasms of unrest that have erupted in India since the storming of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo on Sept. 11, with Muslim protesters taking to the streets in Kashmir and the southern city of Chennai earlier in the month as well.

And though the American Centre and other U.S. government facilities have been forced to temporarily shutter — the U.S. consulate in the southern city of Chennai closed for a week — the tenor of this month's protests in India has been markedly different from other parts of the world. Part of that is because a protest here doesn't capture as much attention as it might in other parts of the world; at any given moment, somebody is raising a fist in India over anything from nuclear power to the price of onions. Last week, for instance, the day before over two dozen people were killed in anti-American protests in Pakistan, an India-wide strike was held over a recent diesel price hike and allowing foreign brands like Tesco and Walmart into in India's

retail sector. As Mujibur Rehman, a professor at Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi, told the Global Post last week: “If you compare the current protests with the protests against President Bush’s visit in 2008, those were far more widespread.”

Another important distinction is who has been behind the handful of demonstrations that have happened. Or, to put it another way, who has not been behind them. As Bobby Ghosh writes in this week’s magazine, a worrying development that has come to the fore in the last month is the emergence of the street power of radicalized Salafi Muslims who have instigated some of the fiercest demonstrations in Libya and Tunisia. “In the two weeks following Sept. 11, Muslims of various sects and political groupings launched dozens of protests around the Muslim world,” he writes. “But it was the Salafis, at the heart of the largest and most violent demonstrations, who won the more-outraged-than-thou contest.”

There are between 20 and 30 million Salafis in India, according to Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadees Hind, an India-wide Salafi organization. And while they may have taken center stage in the violence elsewhere, Salafis played a less pronounced role in India’s protests, with some leaders outright condemning the action. Near Jamia Millia Islamia University, in a quiet, grassy compound dominated by a large new mosque, Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadees Hind holds a very different view on how to react to disparaging depictions of their prophet. “When the Koran is burned, or this kind of film is made, we don’t like it, but we don’t support what [the protestors] are doing,” says Maulana Ashgar Ali, the general secretary of the organization. “We are strict followers of the Prophet’s teaching. All the things the protesters are doing — taking to the streets, destroying things —

the Prophet has not taught us.”

Ali says his group has come under criticism from other Muslim groups in India for not joining in. The sizeable Salafi community in the southern state of Kerala also eschewed the protests, instead calling meetings at which followers could air their frustration over the infamous film. “If we are able to be good Muslims, the propaganda will not succeed,” says Dr. Hussain Madavoor, general secretary of Indian Islahi Movement, a Salafi group in Kerala. “More efforts should be exerted among intellectuals and media [to disseminate] the true picture of Islam so that these willful attacks would be staved off.”

Even in Kashmir, where tensions have been brewing between Salafists’ fundamental interpretation of Islam and the beliefs of Sufi Muslims who have lived in the valley for centuries, it was not the Salafis who were the first to join the call to protest. A conglomeration of Sufi organizations says it was the first group in Kashmir to react to the spreading news of the anti-Islam trailer, and that the Salafis and other Islamic groups followed.

So can India consider itself immune to the worrying trend of Salafis growing more assertive — and dangerous — in other parts of the world? Obviously not. India is as vulnerable to the perils of extremism as any nation, and large-scale violence gets sparked here faster and fiercer than in most parts of the world. But India is also vast, both physically and psychologically, and the inherent diversity even in one religious minority may be helping prevent the same kind of tinder box we’ve seen elsewhere from forming.

Whether than can last, particularly in charged places like Kashmir, is unclear. “We’re not anti-U.S., but it is so painful for us that people [in the U.S.] make fun of our prophet,” says Maulana Gulam Nabi Shah, a senior Salafi leader in Kashmir. Maulana Shah said his organization called on followers to protest peacefully this month, but their strike quickly devolved into thousands of people throwing stones, burning U.S. flags and shouting anti-U.S. slogans. Police eventually dispersed the crowds with tear gas. “When it comes to our beloved Prophet we all are together. We’ll sacrifice our lives even to protect the honor and holiness of Prophet Muhammad’s shoe.”

Article 6.

Project Syndicate

The Vagina Chronicles

Naomi Wolf

1 October 2012 -- Has there really been a sexual revolution? One of the themes that I explore in my new book, *Vagina: A New Biography*, is that the West’s supposedly sexually liberated societies, in which sexual images and content are available everywhere, have not really been all that liberating for women. Many of the reactions to my book tend to confirm that belief.

Many responses were positive: the book is Publishers Weekly’s

top science book of the fall. But the tone of some of the criticism – from “mystic woo-woo about the froo froo” to “bad news for everybody who has one” – suggests that even a culture in which millions of women are devouring a novel about sadomasochism, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, still has problems discussing women’s sexuality in a positive, empowering way.

We need to have that conversation. Around the world, many women are targeted because of their sexuality: they are genitally mutilated, married off as children, raped with impunity, stoned for “fornication” and other sexual offenses, and told that their desire makes them sinful and worthy of abuse. Natasha Walter, who works with refugee women in London, reports that most of the persecution they are fleeing is sexual – and that the law does not validate the grounds for their asylum applications. Our societies do not take seriously women’s sexual integrity or crimes against it.

The modern history of female sexuality has been plagued with misinformation, embarrassment, and sexual frustration. When Shere Hite published *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* in 1976, about one-third of the US women surveyed reported that they did not have orgasms during sex when they wished to. Hite’s important assertion that there is more to female sexual response than penetration triggered a wave of information about female sexuality. Although *The Hite Report* initially spurred great controversy, in the end it was broadly accepted that women’s pleasure and sexual well-being mattered and deserved respectful inquiry.

But, in the past four decades, we have veered from informed discussion about women and their bodies into a raunchy culture

of celebrity sex videos and zipless hookups in which women's desire, arousal, and satisfaction – let alone their (or men's) emotional needs – rarely play a part. Even in this “enlightened” age, many find it difficult to acknowledge new scientific data showing that female sexuality does not diminish or weaken women, but strengthens them in some ways – whoever they are, of whatever age or sexual orientation, whether alone or in relationships.

Some critics have been upset by my argument that the neurotransmitter dopamine, which is related to motivation, focus, and reward, is part of what can make sexual pleasure empowering for women. This argument is based on the latest science about dopamine's role in arousal (as James Pfaus and his team at Concordia University in Montreal have documented), as well as on well-established summaries of the literature, such as David Linden's *The Compass of Pleasure*.

This research indicates that positively experienced mind states are boosted when women are supported by the society in which they live and allow themselves to think about and anticipate rewarding sexual experience. (They are inhibited, of course, when women fear being stoned, mocked, shamed, raped or brutalized in response to their desire).

Similarly, a rich body of data, including many important studies by Alessandra Rellini and Cindy Meston, now links women's arousal to their autonomic nervous systems (Rellini and Meston have even found that rape can affect women's baseline ANS years after the assault). These and other studies link female arousal to women's freedom from “bad stress” and support in relaxation – and in their having some sense of control over

events affecting them. In other words, if you want a woman to wish enthusiastically to sleep with you for the rest of her life, you must act as a teammate on the issues that affect her stress levels. That is nothing if not a “feminist” validation of many women’s intuitive experiences and needs.

In fact, female and male sexual response differs in important ways: the length of response cycles, the role of “bad stress,” and the complexity of pelvic neural wiring (which in men is fairly standard, but in women is highly variegated and individualized). This finding should help women be less judgmental about the unique nature of their sexual responses.

Here is one statistic that says it all: The Association of Reproductive Health Professionals claims that 30% of women do not reach orgasm regularly when they wish to, a proportion that has not budged since The Hite Report. Moreover, while findings vary, some estimates put the prevalence rate of “hypoactive sexual desire disorder”— a loss of libido – at about one-third of American women.

The fact that science is finding connections between women’s sexual experience and their emotions and perception should not be cause for mockery, but for curiosity and respectful investigation of the facts. There are plenty of data on male sexuality and the male brain, and sound new science on the mind-body connection is transforming medical practice, from cardiology’s use of meditation to the use of talk therapies in treating breast cancer. If we respect both female sexuality and the female mind, surely we should not fear discussing the connections between the two that scientific research is uncovering.

It seems odd to me that one would have to make a case for this in 2012. But, as we should know by now, the next sexual revolution – the one that actually values women as leaders, intellectuals, and sexual beings – is long overdue.

Naomi Wolf played a leading role in so-called “third-wave” feminism and as an advocate of “power feminism,” which holds that women must assert themselves politically in order to achieve their goals. She advised the presidential campaigns of Bill Clinton and Al Gore. Her books include The Beauty Myth, The End of America and, most recently, Vagina: A Biography.