

## *Islam and Antisemitism: An Interview with Dr Andrew Bostom*

Dr Andrew Bostom is Associate Professor of Medicine at Brown University. He is the author of *The Legacy of Jihad: Islamic Holy War and the Fate of Non-Muslims* (2005) and *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism: From Sacred Texts to Solemn History* (2008). The interview took place on November 14, 2008.

### **Personal and Intellectual History**

**Alan Johnson:** How does a medical doctor come to produce books on Islam, Jihad and antisemitism?

**Andrew Bostom:** It's pretty straightforward. The stimulus was 9/11. Until then I was an average citizen trying to keep abreast of world events. I am not particularly religious as a Jew though I certainly support the state of Israel. But I grew up in New York, living in Queens most of my life, and I went to medical school in Brooklyn. My wife and I still have family in New York City, so the day of 9/11 itself was traumatic, trying to make sure everyone was OK. A colleague's wife was in the second tower. She was very lucky, barely getting out before it collapsed. On the way home I grabbed a book by Karen Armstrong about Islam. I was reading it and commenting to my wife that it just didn't seem to jibe. (I learnt later that Armstrong is a notorious apologist.) As I read it out loud my wife was just laughing. I didn't find it particularly funny. Nor the news reports over the next days that were transparently apologetic. And I was alarmed at stories that appeared in the New York Times (and other New York area newspapers) about an Egyptian Imam who was preaching at a large Mosque in Manhattan, and spreading conspiracy theories about Jews leaving the world trade centre in advance of the attacks, due to their 'prior knowledge.' So I started reading independently. A small book by Yossef Bodansky, a terrorism expert, discussed Islamic antisemitism as a political instrument, and referenced the work of Bat Ye'or on the Dhimmi. I got that book by Bat Ye'or, and everything else she has written in English – all her books, essays, and published lectures. I met Bat Ye'or after a correspondence with Daniel Pipes and brought her to Brown to give a guest lecture. She became a very close mentor, and introduced me to Ibn Warraq and that's how things started. I had begun writing short essays within a year of 9/11. Ibn Warraq resided with us in 2003, for a time,

and he encouraged me to consider a book project. I was increasingly interested in the Jihad and it was with Warraq's support that I put that first book together.

### Part 1: 'Islamic Antisemitism'

**Alan Johnson:** Your new book, *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism*, is a 766 page collection of primary and secondary sources, some translated into English for the first time, about the relationship of Islam and antisemitism. It is prefaced by a 200-page interpretive essay written by you. Let's begin with your controversial conclusion. Here it is:

A widely prevalent conception of Islam's doctrinal and historical treatment of Jews rests on two false pillars ... (I) In Islamic society hostility to the Jew is non-theological. It is not related to any specific Islamic doctrine, nor to any specific circumstance in Islamic history. For Muslims it is not part of the birth-pangs of their religion, as it is for Christians. (II) '...'dhimmi'-tude [derisively hyphenated] subservience and persecution and ill treatment of Jews... is a myth.' (...) [This] sham castle of glib affirmations – must be swept away if the enduring phenomenon of Islamic antisemitism is to be properly understood.'

This claim is unusual. Yes, anyone paying attention knows antisemitism is widespread in the Arabic and Islamic world. Holocaust denial is rife, blaming 'the Jews' for 9/11 is common, and as MEMRI has shown, annihilationist sentiments against Jews are routinely expressed in sermons, cartoons, and in the Arabic mass media (even if the mainstream western media is by and large uninterested and uncomprehending about all this). However, most commentators think Islam is a religion of peace that has been hijacked by extremists. Most think the surge in antisemitism is a legacy of modern European antisemitism and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

For example, Esther Webman, of Tel Aviv University's Dayan Center, has written that 'antisemitism did not exist in the traditional Islamic world.... antisemitism is, in fact, a relatively new phenomenon in the Arab world.' Lawrence Wright, in his Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Looming Tower*, claimed that 'Until the end of World War II...Jews lived safely – although submissively – under Muslim rule for 1,200 years, enjoying full religious freedom; but in the 1930s, Nazi propaganda on Arabic-language short-wave radio, coupled with slanders by Christian missionaries in the region, infected the area with this ancient Western prejudice [antisemitism].'

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Matthias Kuntzel, talking to Democratiya, stated that it was '[d]uring the Thirties and Forties [that] Islamist anti-modernism was poisoned by the Nazi antisemitic mind-set.'

But you reject all this. You claim contemporary antisemitism in the Muslim world is rooted in the foundational texts of Islam itself. Can you please set out your case?

**Andrew Bostom:** Well, you hit the nail on the head. I do think those conceptions are the heart of the problem. They are – how can I put this? – factually-challenged conceptions. They are usually affirmed without substantive proofs being given. The actual data, I think, provides a negative proof. It reminds me of a scene in Woody Allen's film *Sleeper*. Allen portrays Miles Monroe, the owner of a health food store in Greenwich Village who is cryogenically frozen and he wakes up 20 years in the future. In one scene he is confronted by two doctors, one of whom is very authoritative and claims to be possessed 'of what we know to be true.' He offers Miles a cigarette saying 'Here, smoke this, and be sure you get the smoke deep down into your lungs. Its tobacco, one of the healthiest things for your body.'

There are incontrovertible and overwhelming hard data – pathological and epidemiological – which demonstrate a major causative role for smoking in both the predominant form of lung cancer (i.e., adenocarcinoma), and premature coronary heart disease. I believe smoking is to these diseases as the Islam in Islamic antisemitism is to this scourge of Jew-hatred, past and present. It is as destructive to our social and moral health to deny this reality, as it is to human public health disease prevention efforts to deny the causative link between cigarette smoking and adenocarcinoma of the lung, or premature coronary heart disease. That's what I came to conclude from doing my own research for *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism*.

**Alan Johnson:** And how did you come to write the book?

**Andrew Bostom:** I had not intended Islamic antisemitism to be the subject of my second book. After finishing my book on the Jihad, I wanted to do a book about all the subject peoples under Islam – what Bat Ye'or has accurately called the 'civilisation of dhimmitude.' So I began analysing writings about the condition of Hindus and Buddhists subjugated by Jihad on the Indian subcontinent. I looked at the relatively progressive period, under the Mughul ruler Akbar the Great. He began as a pious Jihadist and waged very bloody campaigns against the Hindus,

but something changed in the course of his rule. He became much more tolerant of Hindus, abolished the Jizya (the Koranic poll-tax, pace Koran 9:29; jizya means, 'the tax paid in lieu of being slain') appointed Hindus to administrative positions, and seems to have become a Muslim-Hindu syncretist in his personal religious beliefs. This led to a brief flowering of Hindu society. His reforms were violently opposed by the Muslim ulema, and I was reading an anti-Hindu tract by an Indian Sufi Muslim theologian named Sirhindi who died in 1621. The tract contained a line that just jumped out at me. 'Whenever a Jew is killed it is for the benefit of Islam.' I tried to get whatever biographical materials I could on Sirhindi and I could find no evidence that he had had any physical contact with Jews. This astonished me.

I wanted to understand where the anti-Jewish animus came from, and that led me to the project on Islamic antisemitism. And as with the project on Jihad, I was led back to the sacred texts – the Koran, the Hadith and the Sira (the earliest pious Muslim biographies of the Prophet) – and to the juridical texts. I began to see clearly that alongside the general attitude to non-Muslims there was a specific anti-Jewish animus, which comes from the foundational texts.

**Alan Johnson:** And you think that is not widely understood?

**Andrew Bostom:** Well, I discovered to just what extent this truth is still not understood when I sent round the anti-Jewish sections of a polemic written by Arabic writer al-Jahiz, who died in 869, to a range of writers, think tank denizens, activists and others. Here is the extract I sent round, with the questions, 'In your opinion would this quote reflect racial or at least ethnic antisemitism?' and 'Would you please hazard a guess as to where and when it was written?':

Our people [the Muslims] observing thus the occupations of the Jews and the Christians concluded that the religion of the Jews must compare unfavourably as do their professions, and that their unbelief must be the foulest of all, since they are the filthiest of all nations. Why the Christians, ugly as they are, are physically less repulsive than the Jews may be explained by the fact that the Jews, by not intermarrying, have intensified the offensiveness of their features. Exotic elements have not mingled with them; neither have males of alien races had intercourse with their women, nor have their men cohabited with females of a foreign stock. The Jewish race therefore has been denied high mental qualities, sound physique, and superior lactation. The

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same results obtain when horses, camels, donkeys, and pigeons are inbred.

The responses were remarkable, reflecting the power of the two false pillars (i.e. the belief that Islam is somehow devoid of theological antisemitism, and the belief that dhimmitude is a myth). One said, 'Of course its antisemitism of the most vile racist stripe which leads me to think it dates from the 19th century at the earliest. It also sounds like the sort of thing one would read in the popular antisemitic literature of the Edwardian period, so my guess is c 1830-1920.' Another wrote, 'I imagine this was written under the influence of modern theories of racial superiority. I'd say a sermon in a Gaza mosque this past Friday.' Here is what some of the others wrote: 'How about The Mufti of Jerusalem c 1940?' 'How about last week from one of the Mullahs in the UK?' 'It's the usual modern boiler-plate from the Middle East.' And so on.

In fact the author, al-Jahiz, died in 869. The background to the passage is interesting. Al-Jahiz had been commissioned by a notoriously bigoted Caliph al-Mutawakkil (who crushed the Mutazilite experiment – itself wrought with brutal intolerance, and returned to a more traditional, 'revelation-based' Islam) to write an anti-Christian polemic. Due to the presence of neighbouring Christian kingdoms, most notably Byzantium, al-Mutawakkil saw the Christians as a potential threat, not the Jews. However, the Caliph noticed that the Muslim masses harboured much more hatred for the Jews than they did for the Christians. So he commissioned Al-Jahiz to write a polemic against the Christians. But in the polemic Al-Jahiz wrote about why the Christians were more liked than the Jews. He highlighted the Koranic verse 5:82, Muhammad's interactions with the Jews of Medina, and the anti-Jewish motifs of the Sira, the early pious biographies of Muhammad. Verse 5:82, he thought, was the most important anti-Jewish Koranic motif – the idea that it is the Jews who harbour the greatest hatred for the Muslims. It is this, he thought, which was inspiring the Muslim masses to hate the Jews. I found corroboration of al-Jahiz's opinion from his Sufi contemporary al-Muhasibi, who died in 857. He also observed that the Jews were more hated by the Muslims than the Christians, but thought it was because of their stubborn denial of Muhammad's message.

All this occurred a millennium before serious colonial penetration of the region. My correspondents – who were educated and respected people – were pathognomonic of this lack of understanding about the real roots of Islamic antisemitism.

Another piece of evidence comes from the greatest scholar of Muslim-Jewish relations in the high Middle Ages, S.D. Goitein. He is our leading authority of the famous Geniza record, an important collection of letters, sacred texts, etc., stored in Cairo and first brought to scholarly and public attention by Solomon Schechter. The Geniza is a particularly detailed and important record of the period from 950-1250 CE. Goitein's remarkable scholarship demonstrates that the Jews of this era had coined their own terms for hatred directed at them, specifically, by Muslims in the high Middle Ages. Goitein argues cogently that this is *prima facie* evidence that there was already a unique form of Islamic anti-Jewish hatred a millennium ago. I agree with him, and I link Goitein's work on what the Jews were experiencing then, including the unique terms they coined – *sinuth* for Muslim hatred of Jews, and *some* for the Muslim hater – with what the Muslim masses themselves were expressing, *pace* al-Jahiz and al-Muhasibi. These are independent, confirmatory pieces of evidence from Muslim and Jewish sources.

**Alan Johnson:** Which are the most important antisemitic motifs in the foundational texts, as you see it?

**Andrew Bostom:** I think 5:82 is an important motif but it is hardly the most important. The central anti-Jewish motif in the Koran is found in verse 2:61, repeated at verse 3:112. This is where the Jews are accused of slaying the Prophets and transgressing against the will of Allah, and so they are condemned and cursed *eternally*. Verse 2.61 says 'shame and misery' are 'stamped upon them.' And this verse is coupled to verses like 5:60, and other verses about the Jews being transformed into apes and pigs, which is part of their curse. Verse 5:78 describes the curse upon the Jews by David and Jesus, Mary's son. There is a related verse, 5:64, which accuses the Jews of being spreaders of war and corruption, a sort of ancient antecedent of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. (Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas cited this verse during a diatribe against the Jews of Israel, in 2007.) More generally, the Koran's overall discussion of the Jews is marked by a litany of their sins and punishments, as if part of a divine indictment, conviction, and punishment process.

**Alan Johnson:** Some would say the seventh century is a long time ago.

**Andrew Bostom:** These central motifs are still being taught. That's the point. There is no large and respected corpus of reformist doctrine that has given alternative ways to understand these verses. I'll give you an example. Maulana Mufti Muhammad

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Shafi (d. 1976) was one of the founders of the fundamentalist Deoband movement, now touted by some as 'moderate' following its recent issuance of a faint hearted condemnation of terrorism. Mufti Muhammad Shafi was also a seminal figure in what became Pakistani jurisprudence and wrote one of the most important Koranic commentaries of the 20th century. In Shafi's commentary he shows that verse 5:78 and its related verse 5:77 are directed at the Jews who have strayed from the right path. And that theme is there in the opening sura of the Koran, verse 1:7, which pious Muslims recite five times daily. The Jews have strayed from the path of Allah, must bear His wrath, and they are eternally cursed. That's the classical exegesis.

Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafi outlines the following 'temporal' arrangements, and specific associations with the Biblical figures David, Jesus, and Moses, culminating in a curse upon the Jews by Muhammad himself (albeit Muhammad's curse would be a reference to the sira, specifically): Sha-fi wrote:

Firstly, it [the Koranic curse] came through the tongue of Dawud [David] as a result of which they were transformed into swines. Then, this curse fell upon them through the tongue of Isa [the Muslim Jesus] the temporal effect of which was that they were transformed into monkeys...the fact is that the curse on them began with Musa [Moses] and ended at the Last among Prophets [Muhammad]. Thus, the curse which overtook those, who were hostile to prophets or were guilty of acting excessively by making prophets sharers in Divine attributes, was wished verbally by four prophets one after the other.

These antisemitic motifs are very consistent in classical scholarship, and are not just some modern aberrant interpretation of Islam.

**Alan Johnson:** So why, in your view, is this doctrine (and related history) so little understood?

**Andrew Bostom:** One reason is that some respected modern historians have minimised it, or ignored it entirely. For example, Bernard Lewis, in a recent essay ('The New Antisemitism,' *American Scholar*, 2006) claims that '...'dhimmi'-tude [derisively hyphenated] subservience and persecution and ill treatment of Jews... is a myth.' One of my concerns, Alan – and this is why the book had to be so long, as was the Jihad book before it – is that, with all due respect to Professor Lewis, his real expertise is not the study of Jihad, or the Dhimmi condition, and certainly not

the study of Islamic antisemitism. His major scholarship is about how Ottoman Turkey emerged into the modern Turkish republic. He also did an interesting analysis of the Ismailis. But he came to study Islamic antisemitism and dhimmitude in the twilight of his career, and in my humble opinion, his examination of these subjects is very superficial, and apologetic.

So we need to attend to other voices, to the real historians of the interrelated subjects of antisemitism and dhimmitude. And that's why Vajda's magisterial 1937 essay on the antisemitic motifs in the hadith – which is translated into English for the first time in *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism* – is so important. Vajda, and before him Hartwig Hirschfeld, who wrote seminal essays during the 1880s on Muhammad's interaction with the Jews of Medina as depicted in the sira, are the serious historians of this subject matter, but they have a very different take than Professor Lewis. And if we fast forward to more modern times, there is an important essay from Haggai Ben-Shammai on Koranic Jew hatred that also flies in the face of Lewis' rather simplistic, bowdlerized summary. As for the historical evidence of both specific Islamic antisemitism (mentioned earlier), and dhimmitude, S.D. Goitein, the greatest scholar of Muslim-Jewish relations, also disagrees with Lewis' trivializing, summary conceptions. Contra Lewis, here is Goitein's summary assessment of the dhimmi condition, from 1970:

...in general, taxation [by the Muslim government] was merciless, and a very large section of the population must have lived permanently at the starvation level. From many Geniza letters one gets the impression that the poor were concerned more with getting money for the payment of their taxes than for food and clothing, for failure of payment usually induced cruel punishment... An Islamic state was part of or coincided with dar al-Islam, the House of Islam. Its treasury was mal al-muslimin, the money of the Muslims. Christians and Jews were not citizens of the state, not even second class citizens. They were outsiders under the protection of the Muslim state, a status characterized by the term dhimma, for which protection they had to pay a poll tax specific to them. They were also exposed to a great number of discriminatory and humiliating laws...As it lies in the very nature of such restrictions, soon additional humiliations were added, and before the second century of Islam was out, a complete body of legislation in this matter was in existence...In times and places in which they became too oppressive they lead to the dwindling or even complete extinction of the minorities.



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I paid careful attention to the writings of these great Jewish scholars – Hirschfeld, Vajda, and Goitein – and discovered they *all* have a very different understanding of Islamic antisemitism, and dhimmitude relative to Professor Lewis, based upon much more serious scholarly analyses than Lewis ever undertook. Yes, there is a mere passing citation of Vajda in Lewis' book *The Jews of Islam*, but Lewis ignores all of the specific details of Vajda's remarkable scholarship. He doesn't give Vajda's work anywhere near its due. Lewis simply failed to do his homework.

**Alan Johnson:** In your view, the canonical Hadith – the authoritative record of the doing and sayings of Muhammad – updates 'the Koranic curse upon the Jews' with 'perfect archetypal logic,' and these archetypes 'sanction Muslim hatred towards the Jews.' Can you explain?

**Andrew Bostom:** Yes. In the canonical Hadith (*Sunan Abu Dawoud, Book 37, Number 4322*) you have Muhammad himself reiterating this curse on the Jews. But this central Koranic motif is linked to a whole litany of the Jews sins and punishments – tantamount to a divine indictment, conviction, and punishment process. Of course, the ultimate punishment is condemnation to the hell fires. It's much more of an in-your-face antisemitism than some of the allusive antisemitism in the gospels. Following the Muslims conquest of the Jewish farming oasis of Khaybar, the Hadith tell us that a vanquished Jewess gives poisoned mutton or goat to Muhammad, eventually causing his protracted and agonising death. Ibn Saad's sira account maintains that this poisoning of Muhammad resulted from a well-coordinated Jewish Conspiracy.

**Alan Johnson:** Let me offer some pretty standard objections to your reading of the foundational texts, and invite your response.

First, can't we contextualise the Koran and see those verses as part of a particular historical moment when the new Muslim community and the Jews clashed over land and power?

Second, can't we look back on a long tradition of resistance to interpretive literalism within Islam, going back to the debate between the rationalist Mu'tazilites and the literalist ahl al-hadith in the eighth century? The literalists may have won but the rationalists have always maintained a voice. Are we not dealing with a tussle over meaning within Islam rather than a unified and antisemitic Islam?

Third, can't we distinguish Muhammad from what came after Muhammad? Reza Aslan, in his book *No God But God*, argues that Muhammad saw Christians, Jews and Muslims as sharing a single divine scripture composed of several books, and constituting one Ummah – a 'monotheistic pluralism.' He claims Muhammad initially aligned his community to the Jews, adopted Jewish rituals, married a Jew and, at first, directed prayer towards Jerusalem. And in the first two centuries of Islam, he points out, Muslims regularly read the Torah. It was the scholars of the following century who rejected the notion of a single Ummah of which Jews and Christians were a part, reclassifying them as 'unbelievers.' When these scholars taught that the Koran superseded rather than supplemented the Torah and Gospels, Aslan claims they were 'in direct defiance of Muhammad's example.'

**Andrew Bostom:** I'm not persuaded by any of these flimsy apologetics. And that's why in my book I didn't just include the texts, and their interpretation by the most important Muslim theologians and Jurists in commentaries, and legal opinions. I also included the great Jewish historians compared to whom, frankly, people like Reza Aslan can't hold a candle. And these historians cannot be dismissed as Zionists, attempting in any way to 'justify the Zionist project,' certainly not Hartwig Hirschfeld writing in the 1880s, or Vajda in 1937.

First, in brief, I disagree entirely with the oversimplified characterization of the Mutazilites as 'rationalist freethinkers.' The Mutazilites were pious Muslims motivated by Islamic religious concerns, first and foremost. One of the pre-eminent scholars of Islam, Ignaz Goldziher, has demonstrated that the Mutazilites exhibited no real manifestation of liberated thinking, or any desire '...to throw off chafing shackles, to the detriment of the rigorously orthodox [Islamic] view of life.' Moreover, the Mutazilites' own orthodoxy was accompanied by fanatical intolerance – they orchestrated the 'Minha,' the Muslim Inquisition under the Abbasids. Goldziher has shown how the Mutazilites advocated jihad in all realms where their doctrine was not ascendant, and were fully prepared to assassinate those who refused to abide their formulations.

Returning to the crux of these apologetic arguments, they ignore the nature of the Koranic revelation which includes abrogation, and the evolution of Muhammad's attitude: from being a proselytiser, to waging defensive war, to becoming a pious and open Jihadist for whom the conquest and subjugation of the Jews was an aim – because they rejected his message as he saw it.

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Hartwig Hirschfeld is a more reliable guide. He wrote that Muhammad's interaction with the Jews was one of 'mutual disappointment,' and the results were predictably disastrous for the latter. He wrote:

The Jews, for their part, were singularly disappointed in their expectations. The way in which Muhammad understood revelation, his ignorance and his clumsiness in religious questions in no way encouraged them to greet him as their Messiah. He tried at first to win them over to his teachings by sweetness and persuasion; they replied by posing once again the questions that they had already asked him; his answers, filled with gross errors, provoked their laughter and mockery. From this, of course, resulted a deep hostility between Muhammad and the Jews, whose only crime was to pass a severe judgment on the enterprise of this Arab who styled himself 'God's prophet' and to find his conduct ridiculous, his knowledge false, and his regulations thoughtless. This judgment, which was well founded, was nevertheless politically incorrect, and the consequences thereof inevitably would prove to be disastrous for a minority that lacked direction or cohesion.

There is such clarity and intellectual honesty in Hirschfeld's presentation compared to the objections you raise (by Aslan et al), which are very much part of this Islamic apologetics that is belied by Islam's own texts, as I demonstrate in detail in the book. I'm afraid I just can't buy these flaccid arguments.

**Alan Johnson:** With Muhammad in charge, all males of the Medinan Jewish clan, the Banu Qurayzah, were beheaded, and the women and children of the clan were sold into slavery. You take this event to express 'Islamic antisemitism.' But, as you know, it has been subject to differing interpretations. Tariq Ramadan, in his book *The Messenger*, argues that this event was not antisemitic as such, but was a response to 'treason ... so serious ... it would have led to the extermination of the Muslims.' Muhammad, writes Ramadan, had to send 'a powerful message to all the neighbouring tribes that betrayals and aggressions would henceforth be severely punished.' Reza Aslan, a secular and progressive writer, in *No God But God*, accepts it was 'a dreadful event' but denies it was antisemitic. Karen Armstrong, has said, '... (the massacre) cannot be seen as antisemitism ... Muhammad had nothing against the Jewish people ...or the Jewish religion. The Koran continues to tell Muslims to honour the People of the Book.' In contrast, you think the massacre of the Medinan Jews and the expulsion of the Khaybar Jews under the Second Caliph, 'epitomised

permanent archetypal behaviour patterns Islamic law deemed appropriate to Muslim interactions with Jews.' Can you explain why you reached that conclusion?

**Andrew Bostom:** Muhammad's failures or incomplete successes were consistently recompensed by murderous attacks on the Jews. The Muslim prophet-warrior developed a penchant for assassinating individual Jews, and destroying Jewish communities – by expropriation and expulsion (Banu Quaynuqa and B. Nadir), or massacring their men, and enslaving their women and children (Banu Qurayza). Just before subduing the Medinan Jewish tribe Banu Qurayza and orchestrating the mass execution of their adult males, Muhammad invoked perhaps the most striking Koranic motif for the Jews debasement – he addressed these Jews, with hateful disparagement, as 'You brothers of apes.' Subsequently, in the case of the Khaybar Jews, Muhammad had the male leadership killed, and plundered their riches. The terrorized Khaybar survivors – industrious Jewish farmers – became prototype subjugated *dhimmi*s whose productivity was extracted by the Muslims as a form of permanent booty. (And according to the Muslim sources, even this tenuous vassalage was arbitrarily terminated within a decade of Muhammad's death when Caliph Umar expelled the Jews of Khaybar.)

Muhammad's brutal conquest and subjugation of the Medinan and Khaybar Jews, and their subsequent expulsion by one of his companions, the (second) 'Rightly Guided' Caliph Umar, epitomize permanent, archetypal behavior patterns Islamic Law deemed appropriate to Muslim interactions with Jews. Vajda's seminal analysis of the anti-Jewish motifs in the hadith remains the definitive work on this subject. Vajda concluded that according to the hadith stubborn malevolence is the Jews defining worldly characteristic: rejecting Muhammad and refusing to convert to Islam out of jealousy, envy and even selfish personal interest, lead them to acts of treachery, in keeping with their inveterate nature: '...sorcery, poisoning, assassination held no scruples for them.' These archetypes sanction Muslim hatred towards the Jews, and the admonition to at best, 'subject [the Jews] to Muslim domination,' as *dhimmi*s, treated 'with contempt,' under certain 'humiliating arrangements.'

Two particularly humiliating 'vocations' that were imposed upon Jews by their Muslim overlords in Yemen, and Morocco – where Jews formed the only substantive non-Muslim *dhimmi* populations – merit elaboration.

Moroccan Jews were confined to ghettos in the major cities, such as Fez (since the 13th century) called *mellah*(s) (salty earth) which derives from the fact it was here

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that they were forced to salt the decapitated heads of executed rebels for public exposition. This brutally imposed humiliating practice – which could be enforced even on the Jewish Sabbath – persisted through the late 19th century. Yemenite Jews had to remove human faeces and other waste matter (urine which failed to evaporate, etc.) from Muslim areas, initially in Sanaa, and later in other communities such as Shibam, Yarim, and Dhamar. Decrees requiring this obligation were issued in the late 18th or early 19th century, and *re-introduced in 1913*.

**Alan Johnson:** How about Muslim Spain?

**Andrew Bostom:** When the Jews were perceived as having exceeded the rightful bounds of this subjected relationship, as in mythically ‘tolerant’ Muslim Spain, the results were predictably tragic. The Granadan Jewish viziers Samuel Ibn Naghrela, and his son Joseph, who protected the Jewish community, were both assassinated between 1056 to 1066, and in the aftermath, the Jewish population was annihilated by the local Muslims. It is estimated that up to four thousand Jews perished in the pogrom by Muslims that accompanied the 1066 assassination. This figure equals or exceeds the number of Jews reportedly killed by the Crusaders during their pillage of the Rhineland, some thirty years later, at the outset of the First Crusade. The inciting ‘rationale’ for this Granadan pogrom is made clear in the bitter anti-Jewish ode of Abu Ishaq, a well-known Muslim jurist and poet of the times, who wrote:

Bring them down to their place and return them to the most abject station.  
They used to roam around us in tatters covered with contempt, humiliation,  
and scorn. They used to rummage amongst the dung heaps for a bit of a filthy  
rag to serve as a shroud for a man to be buried in...Do not consider that  
killing them is treachery. Nay, it would be treachery to leave them scoffing.

Abu Ishaq’s rhetorical incitement to violence also included the line,

Many a pious Muslim is in awe of the vilest infidel ape.

Moshe Perlmann, in his analysis of the Muslim anti-Jewish polemic of 11th century Granada, notes,

[Abu Ishaq] Elbīrī used the epithet ‘ape’ (qird) profusely when referring to Jews. Such indeed was the parlance.

Perlmann then cites the related Koranic passages (i.e., 2:65, 5:60, and 7:166) upon which such 'nomenclature' was based.

The Moroccan cleric al-Maghili (d. 1505), referred to the Jews as 'brothers of apes' (just as Muhammad, the sacralised prototype, had addressed the Banu Qurayza), who repeatedly blasphemed the Muslim prophet, and whose overall conduct reflected their hatred of Muslims. Al-Maghili fomented, and then personally led, a Muslim pogrom (in ~ 1490) against the Jews of the southern Moroccan oasis of Touat, plundering and killing them en masse, and destroying their synagogue in neighbouring Tamantit. An important Muslim theologian whose writings influenced Moroccan religious attitudes towards Jews into the 20th century, al-Maghili also declared in verse, 'Love of the Prophet, requires hatred of the Jews.'

These specific antisemitic and/or anti-dhimmi motifs applied to Jews, and the anti-Jewish violence they engendered, date to well before the modern period. To argue they are a purely a modern phenomenon is absurd.

**Alan Johnson:** Some will point to anti-Christian sanctions and say we are talking about anti-Dhimmiism not antisemitism.

**Andrew Bostom:** Of course it is true Islam does have general anti-non Muslim, anti-infidel sanctions. Koran 9:29, for example, is not just directed at the Jews but also at the Christians, and probably the Zoroastrians as well. And other verses are directed at the non-scriptural peoples, the Pagans. And yes, all these other people have suffered from Jihad depredations. But you have both operating at once – general anti non-Muslim motifs that are complemented by, or in some cases superseded by, specific antisemitic motifs.

**Alan Johnson:** You argue that an 'Islamic eschatology' is carried in the hadith which 'highlights the Jews' supreme hostility to Islam.' What do you mean?

**Andrew Bostom:** In the Hadith the Jews are associated with the Islamic Anti-Christ, or Dajjal. The Dajjal is even identified as being Jewish in some hadith, and regardless, is always accompanied by Jewish minions. It is the slaughter of the Jews that is mandated for the end of times to be ushered in, which is central to both Shiite and Sunni eschatology. During the modern era [1] the canonical hadith containing this annihilationist motif was consistently invoked by the ex-Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin el-Husseini, since the 1930s, was incorporated into Hamas'

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Covenant in 1988, and at present, as Professor Moshe Sharon has observed, ‘Not one Friday passes without this hadith being quoted in sermons from one side of the Islamic world to the other.’

**Alan Johnson:** You argue the concept of ‘jihad war’ is at the heart of Islam. Let me put to you two views about jihad which are at odds with your own.

First, many have argued that ‘jihad’ has always meant an internal spiritual struggle and that the word and the idea have been twisted by modern extremists to justify their actions. For example, Khaled Abou El Fadl, Professor of Law at UCLA, and author of *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, claims that ‘Islamic tradition does not have a notion of holy war. Jihad simply means to strive hard or struggle in pursuit of a just cause.’

Second, Reza Aslan argues that Jihad emerges in the Koran as a means to ‘differentiate between pre-Islamic and Islamic notions of warfare,’ to introduce an ethical dimension, for instance, introducing a distinction between combatants and non-combatants, and the prohibition of all but defensive wars. He accepts that the classical doctrine of Jihad formed by legal scholars did ‘suggest that Islam advocates fighting unbelievers until they convert, and did separate the world into the house of war and the house of Islam,’ but he offers this apologia: the doctrine was developed ‘partly in response’ to the Crusades, and, anyway, the doctrine was challenged by other Muslim scholars, as soon as the Crusades drew to a close – for example, Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) argued that the classical doctrine contradicts the Koran when it proposes fighting unbelievers to force conversion and killing those who won’t convert. As for the massive resurgence of the classical doctrine in the 20th century, well, that’s a backlash against colonialism. How do you respond to these arguments?

**Andrew Bostom:** First it is important to mention El Fadl’s pseudo-academic deceit, one point is particularly relevant: El Fadl, in what amounts to self-parody, wrote the following in 1999: ‘There is no doubt that Muslim jurists do equate just war with religious war (jihad)’ [parenthetical insertion of the word jihad by El Fadl himself] His footnote for this quote cites the classical Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya, as well as two authoritative modern scholars of jihad, Professors Majid Khadduri, and Rudolph Peters.

In direct answer to your question, yes, these are Sufi notions but *they don't have textual authority*. The Islamophilic Jewish scholar, Reuven Firestone, wrote a book on Jihad in 1999 attempting desperately to find an authoritative foundational Muslim textual source (i.e., hadith) for the idea that Jihad really meant an inner or spiritual Jihad, and that this was the 'greater' jihad. Well, in a footnote – though it should have been placed prominently in the middle of the book – Firestone had to admit to his chagrin that he could not find this motif in any canonical hadith collection; 'Its source is not usually given, and it is in fact nowhere to be found in the canonical collections [of hadith].' And by the way, this is exactly what Qutb and Khomeini argued was the case! They said the Sufis were wrong, that there was nothing canonical about this notion of inner spiritual jihad, and that the Sufis essentially made it up! And you know, to give them their due, Qutb's and Khomeini's knowledge of Islam's foundational texts was encyclopaedic.

**Alan Johnson:** Some Muslims look to the scholar Ghazali as an alternative.

**Andrew Bostom:** Ghazali (d. 1111) was a towering figure in Islam, someone the renowned Islamophilic scholar William Montgomery Watt maintained was perhaps the second most important figure in Islam, after Muhammad himself. Yes, Ghazali is often cited as the central figure in Sufi 'spiritual' Islam. It turned out that in addition to his more mystical writings, Ghazali was a jurist, and had written an important treatise on Islamic jurisprudence. I wanted to know what he said about the Jihad and the Dhimmi condition. So I had Ghazali's writings on the Jihad translated from the Arabic into English by Michael Schub, a Professor of Arabic, and respected translator who has worked for the government of Qatar. I'll just give you a few samples of what Ghazali says about Jihad. 'One must go on Jihad at least once a year,' 'one must use a catapult against them when they are in a fortress even if among them are women and children,' 'one may set fire to them and drown them,' 'if a person of the Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book, i.e. Jews and Christians) is enslaved, his marriage is automatically revoked,' 'one may cut down their trees, one may destroy their useless books,' 'jihadists may take as booty whatever they decide,' 'they may steal as much food as they need.' And so on. There is nothing less bellicose here.

**Alan Johnson:** So you don't see Sufism as a pacific spiritual alternative?

**Andrew Bostom:** Historically, Sufi Jihadists were of importance to the expansion of Islam. Around the period of Ghazali himself, Sufis played a major role in the Jihad



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in Asia-Minor. There were important Indian Sufis who inspired Jihad campaigns on the Indian subcontinent. We see the same phenomenon in Africa. And there are Sufi jihadists in Chechnya today. Sufism has never been an inoculation against Jihadism in the classical sense. [2]

Actually, it turns out – and Qutb knew this too – that while there is no canonical hadith which would have supported the primacy of the so-called spiritual Jihad, there is a canonical Hadith, in one of the two most important collections of Sunni Islam, which reverses the priority. This Hadith (Muslim-Book 001, Number 0079) states Jihad by the sword is primary, Jihad by propaganda secondary, and, oh yes, if one can't perform either of those, then a sort of personal Jihad is of some, albeit much more limited value:

...with the help of his hand (i.e., by force); and if he has not strength enough to do it, then he should do it with his tongue (i.e., by preaching or propaganda), and if he has not strength enough to do it, (even) then he should (abhor it) from his heart (i.e., soul), and that is the least of faith.

The so-called 'Sufi priority,' is thus completely reversed in a canonical, readily identifiable hadith.

### Part 2: Islamic Exceptionalism?

**Alan Johnson:** But is Islam exceptional? Don't each of the monotheisms have violent and vengeful verses in their sacred texts? Growing up I attended a Protestant church for a time, and my older brother studied at a Protestant Bible Training College. Our bedroom was lined with books by Calvin, Luther, and other Protestant theologians. I can still recall my confusion when I became aware of Martin Luther's views on Jews ('The milder insults were 'devilish,' 'miserable,' 'blind,' 'senseless,' 'shameful,' 'liars and bloodhounds.' Their synagogues should be burnt, their property confiscated and their freedom taken away. In fact 'We are at fault in not slaying them.' Himmler was an admirer.)

And what about the Jewish law? Deuteronomy (20:13-14) states, 'And when the Lord your God gives it into your hand you shall put all its males to the sword; but the women and the little ones, the cattle, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourselves.' Deuteronomy's (21:18. 21) guidance concerning the disobedient son is plain enough: death by stoning. And what of

Leviticus (20:10) and the call for the putting to death of adulterers? What of Timothy's (2:12) on the need for women to be silent and under the authority of men, or Peter's (2:18) injunction that slaves submit to harsh masters? Don't all monotheisms have holy texts in which much is monstrous? Are you claiming there is an Islamic exceptionalism?

**Andrew Bostom:** Obviously there are toxic texts, and there have been toxic behaviours, by other religious groups. There is no question about that. But there really are differences. For example, going back to the texts and the doctrines, Muhammad is a very different figure than Jesus. Muhammad is a Jihadist. He is a political leader and a military leader, as well as a spiritual leader. There is nothing like that in Jesus. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a major contemporary Muslim theologian for the Muslim Brotherhood, head of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (now based in Dublin), and popular Al-Jazeera television personality whose broadcast sermons reach tens of millions of Muslims, gave a sermon (on Al-Jazeera TV in June, 2001) entitled '*The Prophet Muhammad as a Jihad Model*', and he was referring to jihad as warfare. So that's a fundamental difference.

Another fundamental difference is that in the Koranic revelation tolerance has been formally abrogated by intolerance (p. 69).

There is no way this can be brushed aside other than by a pure apologetics. The final abrogating revelation, Sura 9, is a chapter of open-ended war proclamations, and it's not confined to specific historical instances. Some of the initial Koranic revelation is related to specific events, yes. But Sura 9 is about a *timeless* Jihad. We are not talking about circumscribed events and accounts when the Israelites conquered Canaan. What you have in the most warlike and bloody sections of the Old Testament, such as Joshua, are really history-bound descriptions. They are not timeless injunctions.

This difference really matters. Take the question of Paganism, and compare the Koran to the Old Testament. The Old Testament condemns Paganism but it does not invoke an eternal war against all the world's Pagan peoples, like Koran 9:5. The bloody Old Testament campaigns relate to a very specific piece of real estate. They are not open-ended and they don't look to the entire world.

Now, of course Christianity was spread, in part, by the sword. It was linked to imperial powers, no question. But there were always competing strains within Christianity. At the same time as we had imperialistic campaigns with religious motivations, we

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also had, even in the New World, Christians decrying what was being done to the indigenous peoples, and creating a body of self-criticism in Christianity (which is also present in Judaism). To this day, there is no comparable body of ideas in Islam. Islam never spawned an indigenous slavery abolition movement, nor did Muslim societies voluntarily dismantle the system of dhimmitude for non-Muslims vanquished by jihad, and incorporated into Islamic states. It took the European powers to end the institutions of slavery, and dhimmitude in Muslim societies, and rather ineffectually in many cases. Slavery persisted by law in many Islamic societies through early to the mid 20th century. Chattel slavery never really disappeared in Mauritania, and we have seen its recrudescence – via jihad – since 1983 in Sudan. Also following the temporary delimiting of the Sharia under European colonial rule, at least a forme fruste of dhimmitude has steadily reappeared in these Islamic societies across Africa and Asia, following decolonization. We do have to look at these differences.

**Alan Johnson:** Hasn't Christianity also been invoked to justify imperialism?

**Andrew Bostom:** Yes, of course. But Ibn Warraq pointed out to me how instructive it was to compare the impact of British imperialism and Muslim Imperialism on the Subcontinent. The devastation that was wrought by the waves of Muslim Jihad over almost a Millennium was incomparable with what the Europeans did on the same continent. Lord Curzon gave a remarkable speech in 1900 at a meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, while engaged in a campaign to preserve India's ancient monuments. This is what he said:

If there be any one who says to me that there is no duty devolving upon a Christian Government to preserve the monuments of pagan art or the sanctuaries of an alien faith, I cannot pause to argue with such a man. Art and beauty, and the reverence that is owing to all that has evoked human genius or has inspired human faith, are independent of creeds, and, in so far as they touch the sphere of religion, are embraced by the common religion of all mankind. Viewed from this standpoint, the rock temple of the Brahmans stands on precisely the same footing as the Buddhist Vihara, and the Mohammedan Musjid as the Christian Cathedral...To us the relics of Hindu and Mohammedan, of Buddhist, Brahmin, and Jain are, from the antiquarian, the historical, and the artistic point of view, equally interesting and equally sacred. One does not excite a more vivid and the other a weaker

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emotion. Each represents the glories or the faith of a branch of the human family. Each fills a chapter in Indian history.

This is not the way either Muslim conquerors or rulers treated the Indian subcontinent. Thousands of Hindu temples were destroyed. The Buddhist temples were also destroyed, and the Buddhists – wiped out all together from India – had to retreat into other parts of Asia.

And if you think that Curzon is not a reliable source, listen to the Indian historian, R.C. Majumdar, who was not terribly sympathetic to the Brits. When he compared Hindu advancement under British and Muslim colonial rule, he concluded:

Judged by a similar standard, the patronage and cultivation of Hindu learning by the Muslims, or their contribution to the development of Hindu culture during their rule...pales into insignificance when compared with the achievements of the British rule...It is only by instituting such comparison that we can make an objective study of the condition of the Hindus under Muslim rule, and view it in its true perspective.

I agree with the compelling argument that there are generic evils in imperialism and conquest. But on the other hand, we live in 2008 and we are stuck with an *unreformed and unrepentant* Jihadist ideology. Take Muhammad Taqi Usmani, the son of the Pakistani Jurist whose exegesis on the Koranic curses upon the Jews we discussed earlier (Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafi). Usmani was a Pakistani Supreme Court Judge, and is currently a Deputy of the Jurisprudence Council of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC – the 57 member global association of Islamic nations, exclusively). He gave an interview to *The Times* of London on September 8, 2007. *The Times* extracted that interview, along with statements from his own most recent book entitled, *Islam and Modernism*. Usmani is very candid about what Jihad means in the modern era, defending the idea that open-ended warfare is still sanctioned. He says: ‘the question is whether aggressive battle is by itself commendable or not.’ ‘If it is, why should the Muslims stop simply because territorial expansion in these days is regarded as bad? And if it is not commendable, but deplorable, why did Islam not stop it in the past?’ And then he answers his own question as follows: ‘Even in those days . . . aggressive jihads were waged . . . because it was truly commendable for establishing the grandeur of the religion of Allah.’

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Muhammad Taqi Usmani winds up arguing that Muslims should live peacefully in countries such as Britain, where they have the freedom to practice Islam, but only until they gain enough power to engage wage jihad. The Times interviewer was appalled. Now Usmani is not a minor figure. He is not a 'Wahhabi.' Usmani is travelling all over the world, is respected, is giving advice on Sharia finance, advising the OIC, and no major Muslim religious or political institution (Usmani works for the major one, the OIC!) one is condemning his views!

Another example is Sheik Tantawi, the Grand Imam at Al-Azhar University in Cairo – the leading Muslim religious institution – since 1996, and so the nearest Muslim equivalent to the Pope. When I had virulently antisemitic extracts from his 1968/69 PhD thesis translated I was overwhelmed. Here is a representative sample of his mainstream, Koranic Jew-hatred entirely consistent with classical exegesis of the Koran:

[The] Koran describes the Jews with their own particular degenerate characteristics, i.e. killing the prophets of Allah [Koran 2:61/3:112], corrupting His words by putting them in the wrong places, consuming the people's wealth frivolously, refusal to distance themselves from the evil they do, and other ugly characteristics caused by their deep-rooted lasciviousness... only a minority of the Jews keep their word.... [A]ll Jews are not the same. The good ones become Muslims [Koran 3:113], the bad ones do not.

Tantawi still publicly affirms all the anti-Jewish statements he wrote in that PhD and is proud to restate them! When Egyptian TV ran a long series recently on the antisemitic forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Tantawi said there was nothing wrong with it, and that antisemitism was just something the Jews invoked to distract people from their own crimes. Usmani and Tantawi are hardly marginal figures. They represent the pinnacle of the mainstream religious hierarchy of modern Islam.

### Part 3: Answering the Critics

#### One Islam or Two?

**Alan Johnson:** Correct me if I am wrong, but I think you endorse Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis. You have written that 'What Samuel Huntington aptly termed 'Islam's bloody borders' around the globe – flow from the timeless logic of jihad.' Let me put an alternative view. Stephen Schwartz, in his

book *The Two Faces of Islam*, contrasts 'the fascistic Wahhabi cult that resides at the heart of the Saudi establishment' to another and competing Islam that is 'pluralist, spiritual, and committed to coexistence with the earlier Abrahamic revelations, Judaism and Christianity.' Schwartz points to the example of the Ottoman Balkans where, from the middle of the 15th to the middle of the 18th centuries, a forward-looking culture of 'multi-faith cooperation and civility' prospered. He notes there have been 'long periods of commercial and cultural interchange, in Spain and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, above all in the Ottoman Balkans whose society was uniquely European and Islamic.' (xiii) He believes the possibility of a Europeanised Islam remains viable. (xiii) I guess the London-based Quilliam Foundation would be sympathetic to this view of Islam and of what remains possible today. How do you respond?

**Andrew Bostom:** I've read his book. It's bowdlerised nonsense to be blunt. There was no period of tolerance in Muslim Spain – rather there was continuous jihad-imposed dhimmitude. I've documented that fact meticulously in both of my books. And Jane Gerber's scholarship has further debunked lingering notions of a 'golden age' in Muslim Spain She refers appositely to the 'gilded moments of a selected elite.' That does not comprise a golden age in Muslim Spain, or anywhere else! What Schwartz does not wish to recognize is that we are talking about a remarkably consistent application of the Sharia across space and time, which yields a predictable outcome. Yes, there can be some minor ethnic variance to it, given the nature of the various subject populations – Hindus or Jews or Christians – and the nature of their Muslim overlords. But in the end Sharia is Sharia.

Schwartz further argues there was no problem until the Wahhabi movement arose. Well, this is ridiculous. The Wahhabis don't come into existence until the mid to late 18th century! How do you account for a thousand years of Jihad and Dhimmitude prior to the rise of the Wahhabi movement? How do you account for Jihad and Dhimmitude among the Shia, who are the Wahhabis arch-enemies, to this day? The degradations that non-Muslims experienced under the Shia were often worse than what they experienced under the Sunni because the Shia found Jews and other infidels physically impure (They take verse 9:28 literally. So literally that once Iran became a Shiite theocracy at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Jews could be beaten, sometimes to death, for going out in the rain. Why? Because their impurity could wash off on to Muslims!)

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Compared with the other Muslim empires, dhimmitude under Ottoman rule was not substantively different, as can be gleaned from excellent analyses referenced in my summaries. [3] Yes, there is a reformist movement in the mid-19th century which begins to take hold, but the reforms are passed grudgingly and are referred to as ‘capitulations.’ The European powers, western and Russian, were intervening primarily to improve the plight of the Christian minorities (very little was done for the Jews). But these reforms were never fully implemented because they went against the Sharia. There have been many scholarly analyses of the failure of these reforms, literally up until the Ottoman empire dissolved. There are several essays written by the Ottomanophile Roderick Davison (which I refer to in both books) that are honest about the failure of the Tanzimat reforms. He notes that these reforms were not appropriately implemented as late as 1912. And of course, in its final convulsive years during World War I, the Ottoman Empire committed a Jihad genocide against the Armenians, and other Christian populations. So how Schwartz can make these claims I don’t know. Regardless, his claims have no merit.

### **The relation of European antisemitism to Islamic antisemitism**

**Alan Johnson:** On the one hand, there are ancient sources of antisemitism based, as you see it, in the foundational texts of Islam. On the other hand, there is modern European antisemitism. How should we best characterise the relationship between the two?

I should explain the something of the context of my question for the reader. You have been critical of Matthias Kuntzel’s book *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism, and the roots of 9/11*, and I discussed those criticisms in my interview with Matthias in *Democratiya 13*. You find the argument that Nazism introduced antisemitism to Islam ‘awkwardly forced, and ahistorical’ and one which ‘realign[s] the Nazi cart in front of the Islamic steed.’ You point out that ‘even if all vestiges of Nazi militarism and racist antisemitism were to disappear miraculously overnight from the Islamic world, the living legacy of jihad war against non-Muslim infidels, and anti-Jewish hatred and violence rooted in Islam’s sacred texts – Koran, hadith, and sira – would remain intact.’ In this judgement you are influenced by Bat Ye’or’s 1973 book *The Jews of Egypt* [in Hebrew]: ‘The primary, core antisemitic and jihadist motifs were Islamic, derived from Islam’s foundational texts, on to which European, especially Nazi elements were grafted.’

When the Hudson Institute's Hillel Fradkin responded to your thesis on C-Span, he warned that the notion of an unbroken and uniform Islamic antisemitism could stop us seeing that there have been times when antisemitism has had greater and lesser vitality. (Even Bat Ye'or writes of 'some brighter intervals.') There have been periods in Muslim history when contempt is found but not violent hatred, and there have been periods and places when the contempt itself has been diminished, sometimes radically. Fradkin argues it is surely a mix of tradition and innovation that explains the Muslim reaction to Israel. Yes, Jewish self-rule was 'a completely unexpected event,' inexplicable within those Muslim traditions which see the Jews as contemptible, God-cursed, and wandering. But it was modern European antisemitism that offered a 'more serviceable' conception of 'the Jewish problem' once a God-cursed people had set up a state and defeated the Arab armies. This more serviceable conception was summed up by Matthias Kuntzel: 'Mediaeval Jew-hatred considered everything Jewish to be evil. Modern antisemitism, on the other hand, deems all 'evil' to be Jewish.'

Benny Morris seems to concur, observing that 'the Nazi view of the Jews' world-embracing powers [was] entirely lacking in Koranic and early Islamic antisemitism, which, if anything, belittled the Jew.' Isn't that notion of the world-embracing power of 'the Jew' – which is at the core of contemporary antisemitism – a modern European idea?

**Andrew Bostom:** I think the conceptions you have admirably summarized by Kuntzel, Fradkin, and Morris are in the end, confused and ahistorical.

First of all, as I have already demonstrated, conspiratorial Jew hatred is readily identifiable in Islam's core texts – the Koran (for eg. 5:64), as well as the hadith and sira (Muhammad's poisoning to death). And there is another conspiratorial motif from the most important early Sunni historiography by al-Tabari (d. 923): the story of Abd Allah b. Saba, an alleged renegade Yemenite Jew, and founder of the heterodox Shi'ite sect. He is held responsible – identified as a Jew – for promoting the Shi'ite heresy and fomenting the rebellion and internal strife associated with this primary breach in Islam's 'political innocence,' culminating in the assassination of the third Rightly Guided Caliph Uthman, and the bitter, lasting legacy of Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian strife.

Anti-Jewish riots and massacres by Muslims accompanied the 1291 death of Jewish physician-vizier Sa'd ad-Daula in Baghdad – the plundering and killing of Jews,



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which extended throughout Iraq (and likely into Persia) – were celebrated in a verse by the Muslim preacher Zaynu'd-Din 'Ali b. Said, which begins with this debasing reference to the Jews as apes: 'His name we praise who rules the firmament. These apish Jews are done away and shent [ruined].' Another contemporary 13th century Muslim source, noted by historian Walter Fischel, the chronicler and poet Wassaf, '...empties the vials of hatred on the Jew Sa'd ad-Daula and brings the most implausible conspiratorial accusations against him.' These accusations included the claims that Sa'd had advised Arghun to cut down trees in Baghdad (dating from the days of the conquered Muslim Abbasid dynasty), and build a fleet to attack Mecca and convert the cuboidal Kabaa to a heathen temple. Wassaf's account also quotes satirical verses to demonstrate the extent of public dissatisfaction with what he terms 'Jewish Domination.'

Now suppose we are in 1922 and there is a joint resolution from the US Congress which has endorsed the mandate for Palestine, supporting the Jews right to settle in Palestine. Assume the Brits pack up and leave. This is, note, six years before the advent of the Muslim Brotherhood and a decade before the Nazis come to power. Here's my question: what would have been the plight of the Jews? I'd say the Jews would have been slaughtered. And what would that have had to do with modern European ideologies? The destruction of the Yishuv could be contemplated without European ideology.

In *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism*, I have elaborated on how the earlier tragic mass killings – in Bat Ye'or's accurate parlance, these decimations by Jihad – for 'breaching' the dhimma, which afflicted the Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire (Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Armenians) throughout the 19th century, culminating in the jihad genocide of the Armenians during World War I (and documented, by historian Vahakn Dadrian (pp. 403ff) to have inspired Hitler to express the notion of predictable impunity with regard to future genocides), were nearly replicated in historical Palestine, but for the advance of the British army. During World War I in Palestine, between 1915 and 1917, the New York Times published a series of reports on Ottoman-inspired and local Arab Muslim assisted antisemitic persecution which affected Jerusalem, and the other major Jewish population centers. For example, by the end of January, 1915, 7000 Palestinian Jewish refugees – men, women, and children – had fled to British-controlled Alexandria, Egypt. Three *New York Times* accounts from January/February, 1915 (reproduced in the book) provide details of the earlier (i.e., 1915) period.

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By April of 1917, conditions deteriorated further for Palestinian Jewry, which faced threats of annihilation from the Ottoman government. Many Jews were in fact deported, expropriated, and starved, in an ominous parallel to the genocidal deportations of the Armenian dhimmi communities throughout Anatolia. Indeed, as related by historian Yair Auron,

Fear of the Turkish actions was bound up with alarm that the Turks might do to the Jewish community in Palestine, or at least to the Zionist elements within it, what they had done to the Armenians. This concern was expressed in additional evidence from the early days of the war, from which we can conclude that the Armenian tragedy was known in the Yishuv [Jewish community in Palestine]

A mass expulsion of the Jews of Jerusalem, although ordered twice by Djemal Pasha, was averted only through the efforts of [the Ottoman Turks World War I allies] the German government which sought to avoid international condemnation. The 8000 Jews of Jaffa, however, were expelled quite brutally, a cruel fate the Arab Muslims and the Christians of the city did not share. Moreover, these deportations took place months before the small pro-British Nili spy ring of Zionist Jews was discovered by the Turks in October, 1917, and its leading figures killed. A report by United States Consul Garrels (in Alexandria, Egypt) describing the Jaffa deportation of early April 1917 (published in the June 3, 1917 New York Times), included details of the Jews plight, and this ominous warning:

The same fate awaits all Jews in Palestine. Djemal Pasha is too cunning to order cold-blooded massacres. His method is to drive the population to starvation and to death by thirst, epidemics, etc, which according to himself, are merely calamities sent by God.

Yair Auron cites a very tenable hypothesis put forth at that time in a journal of the British Zionist movement as to why the looming slaughter of the Jews of Palestine did not occur – the advance of the British army (from immediately adjacent Egypt) and its potential willingness ‘...to hold the military and Turkish authorities directly responsible for a policy of slaughter and destruction of the Jews’ – may have averted this disaster.

**Alan Johnson:** And you believe Kuntzel, Fradkin, and Morris do not appreciate this history?

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**Andrew Bostom:** Frankly, I find all this obsessive conjecturing – pace Kuntzel et al – about non-Islamic ideological motivations for Jew annihilation, curious. Bat Ye’or who grew up in Egypt, witnessed that after the Nazi movement arose they certainly taught the domestic anti-Semites lessons in how to package their propaganda. But these motifs of conspiratorial Jew-hatred (both Nazi motifs and Protocols motifs) fitted very neatly into domestic antisemitism, based upon traditional Islamic motifs. The point Bat Ye’or makes – which is apparently lost upon those of Kuntzel’s mindset – is a simple, irrefragable one. To widely disseminate and intensify antisemitism among the masses the Egyptian anti-Semites had to rely upon the *Islamic* sources. When Matthias Kuntzel comes up with a glib formulation, and you repeated it – ‘Mediaeval Jew-hatred considered everything Jewish to be evil. Modern antisemitism, on the other hand, deems all “evil” to be Jewish.’ – as a scientist I find it to be nothing other than pretentious gobbledegook. As an epidemiologist I want to look at body counts. I’m sorry, maybe I’m morbid, but I think you can achieve the same body count regardless of those kinds of European motifs which, quite frankly, the Muslim masses could not care about. All those imported motifs do is confirm in a larger context things that mean more to them. If they were not interested in the religious motifs then I’d say, ‘Ok, let’s look at the non-religious motifs.’ But even the propaganda ministries in the Arab countries realised that what you could learn from the Nazis was not new motifs, but new means of disseminating old motifs. And it’s incredible to me that this insight has ignored.

**Alan Johnson:** You don’t think the contemporary rise of annihilationist antisemitism in relation to Israel is based on the European influence?

**Andrew Bostom:** The rise of Jewish nationalism – Zionism – posed a predictable, if completely unacceptable challenge to the Islamic order – jihad-imposed chronic dhimmitude for Jews – of apocalyptic magnitude. Again, as Bat Ye’or has explained,

...because divine will dooms Jews to wandering and misery, the Jewish state appears to Muslims as an unbearable affront and a sin against Allah. Therefore it must be destroyed by Jihad.

This is exactly the Islamic context in which the widespread, ‘resurgent’ use of Jew annihilationist apocalyptic motifs from the hadith, discussed earlier – exemplified by the Hamas charter, and the messianic beliefs of Iranian President Ahmadinejad – would be an anticipated, even commonplace occurrence.

But I'm not saying there are no European influences. Of course there are. How significant they are, that's the question. The infamous 1840 Damascus blood libel represents a classic Christian antisemitic motif transferred to the Islamic world. One cannot simply affirm (while grossly exaggerating) the 'catastrophic effect' of Christian motifs 'at work' in Islamdom, relative to Islam's own intrinsic antisemitic motifs – the impact of the former has to be proven, and the historical 'proof' is a negative proof, by any objective standard.

For example, morbid as such comparisons may be, the actual body count from the 'watershed' 1840 Damascus event was paltry in comparison to the numerous Muslim anti-Jewish pogroms precipitated by purely Islamic motifs, like Koran 2:61/3:112, and the related apes (2:65 and 7:166) or apes/pigs (5:60) verses used to incite great massacres in Granada (1066), Baghdad (1291), and Touat, Morocco (~1490). Hundreds to thousands died in these earlier pogroms; despite the heinous accusations of the Damascus blood libel, only four of the thirteen Jews imprisoned for the 1840 Damascus blood libel died during their incarceration and torture. The other nine were released unconditionally, and one of these survivors, Moses Abulafia, became a Muslim in order to escape his torture.

Historical analyses of the 1840 Damascus blood libel by Tudor Parfitt and Jonathan Frankel emphasize these two key features which were independent of Christian anti-Jewish motifs, per se: the general support that the persecution of the Jews was given by the Arab Muslim population at large, in reaction against the various reforms introduced (under Muhammad Ali) which sought to ameliorate some of the most oppressive aspects of dhimmitude; the fact that this negative reaction by the Muslim masses to these reforms had much more serious repercussions – against Christians – during the anti-Christian pogroms which marred Damascus in the 1860s. Indeed as Frankel observes, despite their own bigoted anti-Jewish attitudes, it was the European consuls who drew the line in 1840,

... when it came to the threat of wholesale massacre...advising that the Jewish communities receive military protection. Just how real that danger was would become apparent twenty years later, when the Christian population of Damascus was decimated in a Muslim, primarily Druse, slaughter.

**Alan Johnson:** What is at stake in this dispute?

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**Andrew Bostom:** Well, there is something that troubles me about this obsessive focus on the so-called ‘Nazi roots of 9/11.’ I am concerned because we have already developed tools to debunk Nazism. And there is also an ongoing Vatican II process to combat Judeophobic motifs in Christianity, especially the Deicide allegation. Yes, tragically, it took a Holocaust to initiate these reforms, but they have been addressing the Deicide allegation for 40 years now. We may be dissatisfied with the pace of progress, but a real mea culpa-based reconciliation is underway. At present, the Islamic religious hierarchy is not even at the point where it is willing to acknowledge any of its hateful and destructive doctrinal, and historical legacy. Thus I believe it is seriously misguided to focus minds exclusively upon hateful motifs imported into Islamic societies from Europe, and never even discuss all the purely Islamic material that I have copiously documented in my book. In reality, this means one is too concerned with political correctness to actually deal with the main problem – the Islam in Islamic antisemitism. The bottom line is that if all those imported European motifs disappeared overnight from Muslim societies you’d still be left with what have been, demonstrably, the most destructive motifs in the region, i.e., those that come from Islam itself.

### Part 4: What is to be Done?

**Alan Johnson:** Let’s talk about denial. You have argued denial of Islamic antisemitism runs wide and deep in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Why is denial so prevalent?

**Andrew Bostom:** The worst audiences to address about Islamic antisemitism, quite frankly, are Jewish audiences! One of the reasons for this, I believe is almost primal. As physicians we deal with denial as a strategy all the time. Denial is one of the most profound psychological mechanisms by which patients try to ignore their own disease status, because potentially fatal illnesses are terrifying. And who does not get a chill when they sit down and watch the sermons at the MEMRI website, whether they come from the Palestinian Authority, or from Saudi Arabia, or are recorded surreptitiously in a mosque in the UK? These are terrifying things, Alan, for a Jewish audience to hear. People are openly calling for their annihilation in a religious context. Who wouldn’t want to pretend that ‘they can’t really mean that?’ Fear is a major factor.

It’s also human to persevere upon things we have already understood, and for which we have developed strategies of response. I am referring particularly to the

deicide allegation, the Protocols, and the standard racist Nazi propaganda. We have agencies that are constantly vigilant for these familiar antisemitic themes, and rush to the fore whenever any real or imagined example of these hatreds emerges. But there are precious few groups, other than MEMRI, who are highlighting hate-mongering antisemitic sermons based on Islamic motifs. It's more comfortable dealing with familiar and, at this point, better tamed, enemies.

**Alan Johnson:** And how about the denial of intellectuals in the West?

**Andrew Bostom:** I think it has to do with the western left's sympathy for third world cultures, and its extreme tendency toward self-flagellation. The West has an imperialistic past and many wrongs were committed, yes, but that baggage has led many to ask 'who are we to comment on this Islamic phenomenon?' What follows is the rationalization of Islamic jihadism and Jew hatred etc., as coming from the 'oppressed third world,' and therefore somehow (perversely) liberating, or at least understandable and acceptable. Also, a vicious circular argument comes into play: Islamic antisemitism *really* derives from Europe, being nothing but the detritus of the western colonial enterprise. So responsibility is always laid at the doorstep of the West.

**Alan Johnson:** How hopeful are you of the Turkish Hadith Project which seeks to gather 10,000 Hadith in one volume and present a more moderate face of Islam? Isn't it hopeful that we have voices like Hidayet Tuksal, a feminist theologian in Ankara saying, 'I can't imagine a prophet who bullies women. The Hadiths that portray him so should be abandoned.'

**Andrew Bostom:** I have colleagues who were initially optimistic about the Turkish Hadith Project but it seems there was an immediate retreat by the Project designers. Now we hear the Project will not challenge any of the canonical Hadith. There is only discussion of the validation of Hadith from the collections of lesser repute. But if a decision has been made not to deal with the very hateful motifs against Jews and others that are in the canonical Hadith, or all the support therein for violent, aggressive Jihad, than this is a rather puny effort that offers no pathway toward the wrenching reforms needed.

**Alan Johnson:** Reviewing your book in *The New Republic*, Benny Morris called it 'important and deeply discouraging.' You have no obligation to be encouraging of course; you only have an obligation to the truth. Still, it is deeply discouraging.

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Reading your work, one gains the impression that mainstream Islam is the problem not the solution, that the violent extremists have the sacred texts on their side, and that the very idea of a pluralist democratic mainstream Islam, while greatly to be desired, is something of a myth. Are you deeply discouraged?

**Andrew Bostom:** It may be that an accident of geology which enriched the Saudis has facilitated the mass dissemination of Wahhabi propaganda, some of the worst of the worst, in mass translations, often cheap or free, all over the world, usually accompanied by Wahhabi Imams, grants, scholarships and mosques. If the recipients of the Saudis largesse don't have the benefit of a particularly enlightened Imam to contextualise these texts in a pacific and tolerant way –and I'm sure such Imams exist, although I remain dubious they are in plentiful supply at this point – then the people are left to interpret these texts on their own. But the present toxic environment has other aspects quite independent of any particular gloss, 'Wahhabi,' or other, on Islam's foundational texts. Ibn Warraq is convinced that the phenomenon of extremism is so widespread today in good part because of the flood of straightforward, accurate translations of the foundational Islamic texts themselves, which Muslims in historically unprecedented numbers can now read in local languages they fully understand. Having carefully studied these texts over the past six years, as well as their classical, 'non-Wahhabi' exegeses by Islam's greatest pious Muslim luminaries, I agree with Ibn Warraq's assessment.

On the other hand, there are some positive developments. The MEMRI site is seriously committed to reporting about voices of reform in Islamic societies, not just the hate speech. At MEMRI, I've seen Muslim reformers from Kuwait, Tunisia, and elsewhere – unbelievably courageous people often speaking out without the support of a formal movement. For example, MEMRI highlighted a Tunisian intellectual, Iqbal al-Garbi, a professed believing Muslim, not an agnostic such as Ibn Warraq, who recently wrote a remarkable mea culpa for the Jihad, Jihad slavery, and the imposition of dhimmitude, which appeared on an Italian website. It was exactly the kind of statement Muslims need to make to other Muslims.

Ibn Warraq recently persuaded me to read Jonathan Israel's book *Radical Enlightenment* and I think Islam needs to undergo such a process. And we see its possibilities in a person like Ayaan Hirsi Ali. A mass movement of enlightenment amongst Muslims is required. Ibn Warraq's book, *Leaving Islam*, had a very interesting concise history of the real freethinkers within Islam. I don't mean the Mutazalites who were not really comparable to the Enlightenment thinkers. They

introduced some elements of reason, yes, but they also waged their own inquisition and were very brutal (see my earlier comments). No, Warraq unearthed a series of genuine freethinkers who lived within Muslim communities, figures we would recognise as enlightened. But to this day such figures suffer from persecution. This notion that you can't be born into an Islamic society and contribute to the society as a whole if you don't profess to be a believing Muslim, must change.

**Alan Johnson:** What are you working on now?

**Andrew Bostom:** I became fascinated (if alarmed) by some excellent polling done in the Spring of 2007 in collaboration between the University of Maryland, and World Opinion Dynamics. The survey sample was quite extensive (encompassing some 4000 individuals) and comprised of face to face interviews in local languages of Muslims from Morocco, Egypt, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Data from two questions jumped out at me. The first asked about the strict implementation of Sharia law in Islamic countries. 65 percent of Muslims were moderately or strongly in favour of this proposition. The second was about desire to establish / re-establish the Caliphate. Again, 65 percent of the Muslim sample was supportive of this goal. I began to ask myself a series of questions. How has the idea of the caliphate been actualised in the past? Why has it survived to this day? Why is the notion of a Caliphate so popular among Muslims, and what are implications of its popularity, for Muslims, and non-Muslims?

Thus I have started to collect a tremendous amount of information for my next book project, for which is entitled *The Legacy of Islamic Totalitarianism*, with the subtitle *Islam's Caliphate Dreams*. I will show how the Caliphate operated as a uniquely Islamic form of despotism, or totalitarianism. I suspect that if we take a larger historical perspective about the nexus between Islam and European totalitarianism, this dalliance will turn out to have been a mere epiphenomenon of a much longer-running historical narrative about the Caliphate. It seems to me, Alan – and maybe it's my medical training – that if we don't point out such unpleasant realities we cannot even begin to chart a course toward reform.

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### Notes

[1] Bostom 2008.

[2] Bostom 2009.

[3] Bostom 2005 and 2007.

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**Alan Johnson** is Editor of Democratiya.com and Professor of Democratic Theory and Practice at Edge Hill University.

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