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**SPECIAL NUMBER
AKBAR AHMEDS' JOURNEY INTO ISLAM
PLUS REGULAR FEATURES**



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Islam and Muslim Societies is primarily a forum for scholars across the disciplines of Sociology/ Social Anthropology, Economics, History, Political Science, Law, Philosophy and other related streams and provides open space for research and dialogue on Islam (except theological debates/issues) and Muslim societies across the globe.

The Journal invites contributions in the form of original articles- theoretical, empirical and policy analysis- short notes, review articles, book reviews, news relating to research and academic/professional fora and communications. A detailed note for contributors is given on the back cover.

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Editor
NADEEM HASNAIN

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ABOUT THIS NUMBER

This is the first special number of this journal. The main motivation behind this special number was the thought that, usually, journals devote special numbers to the contribution of scholars not in their life time. This journal feels strongly that such contributions should be recognized while the scholar is alive and still productive. This is the first special issue in the series of such numbers we have planned to bring out in future. The primary objective behind this project is to provide to those who are interested in Islam and Muslims, especially in the South Asian setting, and especially to the younger and new entrants to the field, the material on the life and work of the leading scholars writing with social science perspective.

Prof. Akbar Ahmeds' name does not need any introduction to those interested in Islam/Muslims. His work on the Pakhtuns of Pakistan and the way it challenged the research of a great anthropologist, Fredrik Barth earning the accolades of sociologists, anthropologists and others is too well known to be repeated here. His entry into the field of Islam was a whiff of fresh air and within a span of twenty five years or so he is able to produce remarkable work not only in academia but also in theatre and film making. Presently, he is a strong and sane voice spreading the message of peace and harmony in the din of religious intolerance and fanaticism. The material in this number has been chosen in such a way that the readers are able to know and appreciate not only the multi faceted personality of Akbar Ahmed but also the amazing range of his contributions.

We acknowledge with thanks and gratitude reprinting the following material in this number: 'A Young American in the Islamic World' from Pakistan Link; 'Our Journey into the Islamic World' from Pakistan Link; 'The Challenge of the Moderates' from Beliefnet; 'Sharing a Universal Message with very Different Audiences' from Beliefnet; 'A Journey of Understanding: Reflections from Indonesia' from Pakistan Link; 'Journey into the United Kingdom' from Pakistan Link; 'Journey into Islam' from Washington Times; 'Labour of Love' from Dawn; 'A Subtler Take on the Clash of Civilization' from The Times Higher Education Supplement; 'Islam in Today's World : A Conversation with Akbar Ahmed' from Anthropology Today; 'Across the Great Divide' from Washington Post Magazine; 'Foreword to Akbar Ahmeds' Resistance and Control in Pakistan' from Routledge; 'Foreword to Akbar Ahmeds' Discovering Islam' from Sage India Publications Pvt. Ltd.; 'The Pukhtun Deromanticised' from The Muslim; 'Post modernist Perceptions of Islam' from Asian Survey; Reviews of 'Journey into Islam' by Tamara Sonn and Tony Blankley from The Washington Times; and 'On Two Views on Swat Pashtun' from Current Anthropology.

Editor

AKBAR AHMEDS' "JOURNEY INTO ISLAM": BROOKINGS INSTITUTIONS' PROJECT

A YOUNG AMERICAN IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Hailey Woldt

"In traveling through the Muslim world, I learned that compassion and dialogue is the only way to build a lasting relationship." Top of FoBottom of Form

Hailey Woldt, a sophomore at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., went on a 10-week, eight-country, trip as an assistant to Islam scholar Professor Akbar S. Ahmed, who was gathering research for his upcoming book, "Islam in the Age of Globalization." (now published-Editor)

As they traveled through Turkey, Jordan, Pakistan, India, and Indonesia, Woldt used her status as a young American to promote dialogue and friendship with Muslims in the Middle East, South Asia, and the Far East. Here she chronicles her journey and the lessons she has learnt.

Sitting in Indonesia as we near the end of our tour of the Muslim world, I'm reminded of the poem "Ulysses," which my favorite professor read to me two months back to explain the nature of an epic journey in search of truth. The poem speaks of an "untraveled world whose margin fades forever..." Back then when I was beginning this life-changing experience, I foolishly thought I was mentally and emotionally prepared for every margin I was to encounter.

This trip really began in Washington, D.C., as a student in Prof. Akbar Ahmed's "Clash or Dialogue of Civilizations" class at American University. He had inspired me to reach out and understand the Muslim world as a necessary step toward peace and understanding. I began to do research for his project, and then he offered me the chance of a lifetime: A spot on his research team traveling through the Muslim world for his project.

I jumped at the chance before I thought about finding funds, time, and consent from my parents. But I knew this was *the* chance to expand my horizons and challenge my inner strength.

My parents objected on the basis of safety, of course. A young American girl in the Muslim world? Then they objected on the basis of my college career. But I was firm, and I promised to pay for the trip myself.

Now here I am at the last stage of our exhausting but exhilarating journey, with two parents proud of me at home and a world of inconceivable adventures under my belt. I have many stories to tell—things that I cannot myself believe I have experienced.

Perhaps my greatest test and most important lesson came during our stay in India, when we traveled to Deoband. Deoband is the center for conservative Islamic thinking, dating back to the nineteenth century when it led the *jihad* against the British. Today that perspective—and Deoband's university—are flourishing despite the “war on terror” and globalization.

Prof. Ahmed assured us that there was no danger in traveling there for research, but our Deoband tour guide, who was a leading Indian-Muslim radical, began our four-hour journey by describing his latest, best-selling book, “Jihad and Terrorism.” I asked him about the nature of the book, and he then looked away to describe his thesis, as it is custom in his orthodox tradition not to look directly at a woman.

He said that it was a justification of the usually un-Islamic fighting tactics such as those used by Osama bin Laden and other terrorists in response to what he called “American barbarism.” He argued that because America's tactics against his people—like those seen in Abu Ghraib—were so horrific, “freedom fighters” could use extraordinary measures to combat them.

This was an Unsettling Conversation

But I settled in for a long journey to Deoband, passing through villages many miles from India's capital of New Delhi and finally bumping along a rough road to our destination. We were received by the head cleric himself upon our arrival and were immediately escorted to the front of the mosque for Prof. Ahmed's speech. I sat in the front, in the place of honor rarely given to a woman, much less a foreign, non-Muslim woman. My head was respectfully covered in a white veil, and I avoided eye contact with the hundred or so boys facing us from the audience.

They all sat enraptured throughout the speeches. The cleric began a severe-sounding introduction in Urdu, periodically pointing a discouraging finger toward Frankie Martin—the other student accompanying Prof. Ahmed on this trip—and me. The students stood up as they asked questions of Prof. Ahmed, mostly about Iraq, Afghanistan, President Bush, and “Amerika”—the only identifiable words to me. However, they were not hostile or out of order; they sat calmly and respectfully throughout the answers.

The professor spoke of dialogue, of reaching out, of his friendships with other religious leaders, like Bishop John Chane of the National Cathedral in Washington and Rabbi Bruce Lustig of Washington Hebrew Congregation. He said these were extraordinary Americans who want to reach out to Muslims, just when Muslims think all Americans are against Islam. His answers really seemed to affect the young Muslims at Deoband.

The speeches were over, and we had made it through unscathed. In a flurry of Urdu we were invited to the cleric's home for lunch. We came into the courtyard of his home, and I was escorted to the ladies' section. I met his three young granddaughters, ages 15, 13, and

7. I asked all three in English what they wanted to be when they grew up, and they answered ambitiously: doctor, journalist, and civil servant. We had a nice chat and then I came into the men's quarters for a fantastic lunch served with warm smiles from the family.

As we left their home we took some pictures as a group, and the girls asked when I was going to come back to Deoband. The youngest motioned for me to lean down and surprised me by giving me a kiss on the cheek. We finally left trailed by waves and smiles.

Our team took a tour of the university at Deoband. The facilities were well-established and advanced, with a computer science department, thousands of books, and hundreds of students. I was surprised by the organization and pervasive sense of discipline there. It was not really the amateurish *madrassa* [Islamic religious school] that I had envisioned.

We passed by a classroom filled with 500 students in white robes and white caps with their heads down reading the Qur'an and then entered the English class where we distributed our questionnaires for our study. The students quietly filled them out—without any cries for blood as I had been expecting that morning on the ride in. As we left the class, they asked us for words of wisdom to be written on the board. I wrote something to try to help bring the United States and the Muslim world together in peace:

"Learning and education are the most important things for world peace. Let us all continue to work for peace with all. *Salaam alaykum*."

Salaam alaykum is the Arabic phrase for "peace be with you," their standard greeting, which unexpectedly gave rise to shouts of delight and friendship. We parted as friends—two Americans, a Muslim professor, and students of the most conservative *madrassa* in India.

I had survived what I thought was going to be a frightful day in Deoband by capitalizing on human connections and mutual respect rather than hiding behind security guards or armies. I bumped along the road home as a traveler who had not just seen the margin but continued beyond it. I learned that the most important thing was "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" when it comes to peace and understanding.

The experience of that day was truly revealed when a week later, the same radical author who had accompanied us to Deoband introduced Prof. Ahmed at a *madrassa* in New Delhi as the model not only for Muslims, but for all religions because of his dedication to dialogue and peace.

That same man who had written "Jihad and Terrorism" decided to translate Prof. Ahmed's most recent book on dialogue himself. That same man who had called for the death of Americans now desired understanding between civilizations and wanted to extend that sentiment. It was like changing the rotation of the earth in terms of ideas. Through compassion and dialogue our team managed the impossible.

This truly was a margin I could not have seen in Washington at the start of my journey. I had gained, in the words of Tennyson, "knowledge like a sinking star beyond the utmost bound of human thought."

OUR JOURNEY INTO THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Hailey Woldt & Frankie Martin

Frequently on the journey we would turn to each other and ask, "Is this really happening?" Only one year ago exactly we had been sitting in an honors lecture class taught by Professor Akbar Ahmed on the "Clash or Dialogue of Civilizations" as virtual strangers, but as the three of us were together in a car in India for hours, hot, hungry, and tired. It seemed like we had been family for ages.

Last year at the American University, Frankie Martin, then a junior, and Hailey Woldt, a freshman, had no idea that we would be challenging the very "clash of civilizations" concept that we had discussed so much in class. Professor Ahmed hinted to both of us that he would be doing a project with the Brookings Institution, the Pew Forum, and American University called "Islam in the Age of Globalization," a topic both of us had become very interested in. We offered our devoted assistance free of charge and thus began our long journey to what became the best trip of our lives and the greatest learning experience we have ever had.

As the research in the office continued, Professor Ahmed argued that he needed a field trip into the Muslim world for his study and it would not be complete without his students, despite the sponsoring institutions' protests. Once offered to us, both of us jumped at the chance, genuinely shocked that we were about to be given an unbelievable gift. The trip would give us a chance to take our ideas outside the classroom and be "goodwill ambassadors" on behalf of the United States and the West, listening intently to what Muslims had to say about their lives and perceptions of Islam's relations with the rest of the world.

The prospect of taking the trip was tremendously exciting, but also filled us with trepidation. Our families were very wary of the idea that their American children were about to disappear for months in dangerous parts of the Muslim world with their Pakistani professor, but it was the chance of a lifetime, worth all of the money that we did not have and the time that we sacrificed from our university careers. Before long, February arrived, and we were off. The trip took us to Qatar, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In taking this trip, we put our complete trust in Dr. Ahmed, and during the course of our journey he became a father to us, always making sure he knew where we were at all times and sometimes correcting our every move like a "father hen" to make sure we were behaving respectfully so as not to be in harm's way by inadvertently offending local culture. Along the journey we got to know our professor so well that Frankie and I would often bet on his next moves. On a PIA flight from Lahore to Delhi, Frankie and I bet on whether or not he would eat his sandwich when he came back from the restroom; as usual, Hailey guessed it right.

The trip, although infinitely rewarding, was sometimes difficult. Every day was jam-packed with activities, from early morning to late at night where we were usually attending functions, listening to speeches, visiting universities, or interviewing people who could help us with our study. We talked to public officials, taxi drivers, professors, sheikhs, women, children, and anyone interesting. We, the young college students, sometimes dropped out

for a day because of exhaustion which we thought we were immune to or fell ill due to bad kebabs, but Dr. Ahmed never missed a beat, and it was actually difficult for us to keep pace with him. However we always helped each other and often got involved in deep hours-long discussions ranging from everything like the essence of time to the thesis of the book.

Traveling with Dr. Ahmed opened more doors for us than we ever would have imagined possible, and were very surprised at the warm welcomes we received from everyone we encountered, regardless of their ideologies or political positions. Even those who Americans would deem "Islamic extremists," like those traditional and orthodox scholars in Deoband, welcomed us because of our relationship to Professor Ahmed and engaged us in discussions. High-profile politicians we met also greeted Dr. Ahmed with great respect, including President Musharraf, who referred to him as "Akbar Sahib," a term of high esteem in Pakistan. We were shocked when, after a speech at a hotel in Islamabad, Dr. Ahmed was mobbed by a throng of people wanting to speak to him, as if our favorite professor were some kind of rock star. We began to realize that Dr. Ahmed had a global reach that we were unaware of sitting on campus in Washington, which was integral to connecting us with people across the political spectrum and cultural disparities in such different parts of the world.

Although we received warm welcomes everywhere we went, we were frequently confronted with intense levels of Anti-Americanism. Professor Ahmed, always the diplomat, helped to generate positive discussion about Western-Islamic world relations and he always referred to his dear friends Senior Rabbi Bruce Lustig, head of the Washington Hebrew Congregation, and Bishop John Chane of the National Cathedral of Washington, DC, or us — he would introduce us proudly as his "star students" — in defending the United States as an understanding and accepting country for Muslims. Most everyone we talked to was thrilled that American students had come to the US to improve Islamic relations with the West and better understand the Muslim world, and this personal warmth through the avenue of a Muslim gave us hope that with better dialogue on a macro level great strides could be made in improving communication and cultural acceptance between the Western and Islamic worlds.

During our trip we came to believe that many of the problems the United States is having with the Muslim world stem from a lack of cultural understanding, and we hope that we can use our experiences with this project to continue to act as a bridge between the Western and Islamic worlds. When Dr. Ahmed offered us a chance just three weeks after our arrival home to attend a conference in New York with Karen Armstrong and Thomas Friedman we didn't even think twice. Our adventure when we thought it had ended had really only begun.

...

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MODERATES

Jonathan Hayden

"If we really support moderate Muslims in their fight for Islam, then the world has a chance against dangerous extremists."

Jonathan Hayden is an assistant to noted Islam scholar Professor Akbar Ahmed. Hayden spent more than a year organizing Ahmed's 10-week, eight-country trip through the Middle East, South Asia, and the Far East, and is conducting research for Ahmed's forthcoming book, "Islam in the Age of Globalization."

Hayden joined Ahmed on the last stage of his journey in Malaysia and Indonesia, during which he learned first-hand about the complex realities for moderate Muslims. Here he offers advice and chronicles his experiences for Beliefnet.

In Jakarta, Indonesia, I handed out a questionnaire to a class of 50 college students at an Islamic University that was designed reveal their feelings toward the West, globalization, and changes within Islam. The class was about 70 per cent women, ages 19-23. Their hijab was mandatory, but if the women were to take it off, they would've looked like any college class in America.

They were sweet, funny kids who wanted to take pictures afterward and ask questions about the U.S.. Why, then, did roughly 75 per cent of them list as their role models people like Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, Ayatollah Khomeini, Yousef al-Qardawi (of Al-Jazeera), Yassir Arafat, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad? We obviously have a problem.

If these young students are choosing as heroes people who are hostile to the US., what can we do to change this? What has led to this? Who can help us? And where are the moderate Muslims? We must try to answer these questions if we are to build bridges with countries with a largely Muslim population and avert the "clash of civilizations."

The answers obviously do not come easily and will take much time to answer. But one of the things I noticed in Malaysia and Indonesia is the vital role that moderate Muslims will play. I hesitate to use the word "moderate" because of its negative connotations. From what I've gathered, moderates are viewed as people who are unwilling to stand up for anything.

But the people that I am talking about when I use the term "moderate Muslim" are those who are standing up for the true identity of Islam while actively living in this "age of globalization." From what I've learned in this trip, moderate Muslims are practicing the compassionate and just Islam that is taught in the Qu'ran without rejecting modernity and the West. They are, as I learned, hardly weak.

There were two people that I met who were particularly impressive. Through them I began to understand the challenge that moderate Muslims are up against: Dr. Ismail Noor of Kuala Lumpur and Dr. M. Syafi'i Anwar of Jakarta are Muslims fighting against formidable odds to create a dialogue between Islam and the West. They are facing a

monumental task with their hands tied behind their backs. And I am ashamed to say, we are not helping them.

The strong anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world is fueled by such things like the U.S.'s hawkish foreign policy, incidents like the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, the desecration of The Qu'ran at Guantánamo, our relationship with Israel, and the fact that (accurately or not) we are seen as nascent imperial. Coupled with poverty, joblessness, and hopelessness—which affect Muslims in many Islamic countries—these factors create the possibility for any Muslim to turn radical.

We must realize that each mistake directly marginalizes moderate Muslims throughout the world who are arguing for interfaith understanding, pluralism, modernity, and democracy. So which group will the masses follow after their religion, or their Prophet is attacked—the ones talking about peace and reconciliation or the ones fighting back? This may seem like a simple point, but it is essential in understanding why more Muslims are looking to the extremists as their leaders.

This point was driven home for me as we conducted our interviews in the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. When we asked Muslims to identify a role model from the past, the name Omar frequently emerged. Omar, a fierce warrior, initially fought against the Prophet Muhammad before he converted to Islam. He became the second Caliph after the Prophet's death.

When asked why Omar was the choice, the response always was "because of his strength and because he fights for justice." It stands to reason that when Muslims feel attacked, they will gravitate to the Omar-like leaders—not so much for their extremist rhetoric, but because they are fighting for them and some kind of justice.

In Washington, D.C., where I work with Prof. Akbar Ahmed, who is considered the foremost moderate Muslim in the U.S., we receive threats, complaints, and pressure from all sides. Muslims look to Prof. Ahmed to stand up for them and defend Islam when he is called on for knowledge and advice by the State Department, Department of Homeland Security, policy makers, or leaders from all religions. Similarly, the government looks to Prof. Ahmed to calm Muslims when any incident occurs. How is he to walk this line?

The radicalization of Islam has been slow and steady. The response will take time. We cannot bomb the problem away. This only exacerbates the problem. We have to meet the enemy, face to face. We have to rediscover the art of diplomacy and realize that everything we do as a nation matters on a global scale.

The West must support moderates. They may be our only hope of isolating the extremists. They have something that American diplomats do not have: legitimacy within the Muslim world. They can reach people through the teachings of Islam. They can remind Muslims that Omar was not only a strong and just defender of Islam, he was also the one who, after capturing Jerusalem, banned Muslims from destroying the church and ordered the respect of all houses of worship.

Since 9/11, the United States government has spent billions of dollars trying to defeat the enemy. Meanwhile, the people who can really change the minds of the Muslims on the brink—like those students who admire Osama Bin Laden—toil with no support.

With world seemingly poised on the threshold of disaster, there are people who can make a real change with the right kind of support. After meeting college students and moderate Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia, I see the situation much more clearly. There is hope. And a big part of hope lies with the warrior Muslim moderates and our ability to support them.

...

SHARING A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE WITH VERY DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Frankie Martin

This spring I was offered the opportunity by my favorite professor at American University in Washington, DC, Dr. Akbar Ahmed, to take a trip that changed my life. I traveled with Dr. Ahmed and his research team on the Middle East and South Asian sections of a trip conducted as a part of the Brookings Institution, Pew Forum, and American University sponsored project "Islam in the Age of Globalization." I was very aware after the attacks of 9/11 that it was more important than ever for Westerners to understand the Islamic world, and saw this project as an opportunity to change negative perceptions of Islam in the West and foster greater understanding between these two great world civilizations.

The project allowed me to travel to the Muslim world and speak to people about issues they were concerned about, including their interpretations of the Muslim faith, internal economic and political issues, and perceptions of the West. During the trip, I traveled to madrassas, mosques, and universities and spoke to many people including students, professionals, and politicians like Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf. Throughout the journey, from the Middle East to Pakistan and India and on to Southeast Asia, Professor Ahmed and our team delivered a message of peace and understanding and encouraged inter-religious and intercultural dialogue as the only way forward for Muslims, Christians, and Jews to avert a seeming collision course.

The response to this message, as I witnessed personally, was universally very strong. Muslims of all ideological persuasions spoke to us after our talks, telling us of their joy that I and the other American student that accompanied me, Hailey Woldt, had come to their countries and communities to learn more about the Muslim world. In a time of such high tension, it was a relief for us that we had been welcomed so warmly in areas where we as Americans had been fearful to travel. Following a speech by Professor Ahmed in Islamabad, an old man, who said he had traveled a long way to reach the event, presented me with some papers he had written on interfaith dialogue and asked if there was anything he could do to help reach out to Christians and Jews. I had interactions like this constantly throughout the trip, many people asked us for suggestions as to how they could help bridge the gulf between Islam and the West; from engineering students at Jordanian universities to the religious scholars of Deoband, India.

The trip left me optimistic that relations between both the Western and Islamic worlds and Muslims and Jews, which at times seem so toxic, could be improved with human interaction and conversation. Upon our return to Washington, Professor Ahmed continued giving speeches, and when he invited me to attend a dialogue with Karen Armstrong in New York hosted by the US Council on Foreign Relations, an American think tank that publishes the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, I jumped at the chance. Ms. Armstrong, a prolific writer on religious affairs, has written many of my favorite books, so I was very excited to meet her. The speech was a sold out, standing room only event in New York filled with many journalists and American foreign policy makers in which both Professor Ahmed and Ms. Armstrong spoke of the necessity for the Western and Islamic worlds to better know and understand one another. It was certainly a different audience from the madrassas we addressed in India, for example, but the result was the same. Recognizing the importance of the message, we were again mobbed by people asking how they could help.

Last month Professor Ahmed became the first Muslim ever to address the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC in a sold out event attended by an overflow crowd of 500 that addressed the growing problems of anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism in the Islamic world. The event was attended by many prominent Muslims, including the president of ISNA and several ambassadors from Muslim countries. Dr. Ahmed's friend Rabbi Bruce Lustig, the head of the Washington Hebrew Congregation and son of a Holocaust survivor, was unable to attend but sent his regards in a letter read before the event began. Rabbi Lustig wrote that Professor Ahmed's voice is one of "moderation and reason which reminds us that God's teaching calls upon us to eradicate all prejudice, hatred and bigotry. His unfaltering moral compass has led him to many nations to speak on behalf of religious tolerance and human dignity." Rabbi Lustig, along with Bishop John Chane of Washington's National Cathedral, has joined Professor Ahmed in many interfaith dialogue initiatives.

The event carried an important message of religious tolerance I knew was sorely needed. Despite the warm welcome our team received in the Muslim world, I was keenly aware of challenges that anti-Semitism, and also anti-Americanism posed to the kind of dialogue we, and most people we met, believed we needed to have. In his speech, Professor Ahmed spoke about the dangers posed by anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism and the need to use compassion to ensure that nothing like the Holocaust ever happened again. He also spoke out against "Islamophobia", the hatred of Muslims by Westerners, which had reached dangerous levels after 9/11.

This event, like the others, provoked a very positive response, with Professor Ahmed receiving a standing ovation at its conclusion. Inspired by the event, a Jewish woman about to depart for Israel told Professor Ahmed she was nearly moved to tears by the talk and asked if she could do anything to facilitate meetings with Palestinians in an effort to foster goodwill.

My experiences speaking in the Muslim world and here in the United States to Christians, Muslims, and Jews, have taught me much. In very different parts of the world, people responded in the exact same fashion when given the same message. People understand that there is far too much hatred between people of different faiths and cultures and want tensions

to diminish. Almost everyone I spoke to on my trip to the Muslim world sought to reach out to the West, but hoped that in turn Westerners would reach out to them, a sentiment echoed by Americans here in the US. They seem to believe, as I do, that only with greater understanding and knowledge of the "other side" will our problems diminish. It is, after all, very difficult to understand the position of someone you don't know anything about.

I've repeatedly seen first hand what this kind of dialogue can do. At a madrassa in New Delhi I spoke to 200 young students who told me they prayed for insurgent attacks on American troops in Iraq, a statement which gave me pause. Given the political context of our discussion, would we be able to converse in a meaningful way? After a somewhat icy start, however, the students and I began speaking freely. I answered many of their questions about the role of Islam in the United States, responding that there were mosques in America and that Muslims could worship freely. By the end of the meeting I was mobbed by the students and signed quite a few autographs. I don't know if any political opinions were changed as a result of our dialogue, but at least the students got a chance to see a different side of the United States and learn from me, as I learned from them.

Despite the prevalence of serious political problems in the world, most people have rejected the path of death and destruction as the way forward. In this environment I am hopeful that more people can adopt the spirit of compassion and engage in greater dialogue with the "other side," whoever they may be. Only through sincere conversation, human interaction, and an open mind can we begin to strip away much of the hatred that so often threatens to overtake us. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to accompany my professor to help bring this universal message to people in both the Islamic and Western worlds.

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A JOURNEY TO UNDERSTANDING: REFLECTIONS FROM INDONESIA

Amineh Ahmed Hoti

Today we live in a world that is struggling hard to maintain its natural as well as its socio-religious balance. Polemics and academic debates never fail to raise the alarm about the ever-growing threat of the clash of civilizations. A few contend that the recent series of natural disasters (hurricanes, tsunami, and earthquakes) that have wiped out human lives in such large numbers are the signs of the wrath of God.

As a Muslim woman on my journey through this particularly imbalanced world I am grappling with debates and current questions of identity: what does my religion say about other people, other religions, and humanity as a whole; what does Islam say about the sanctity of life in the face of so much human loss?

The quest for understanding has drawn me to a part of the Muslim world that is not fully appreciated and included in debates about Islam. This is Indonesia.

The author (fourth from left) is seen with Dr Akbar Ahmed (second from left), Hailey Woldt (extreme right) and a group of Indonesian artists

I have come to Indonesia to join "the world's leading authority on contemporary Islam", Professor Akbar Ahmed, according to the BBC, on his last stop of his journey to ten Muslim countries. His journey is being filmed for Sky's Raj TV (Channel 187). This journey is part of a project, which is in partnership with Brookings Institute, and PEW Forum, and is called "Islam in the age of globalization".

Sharing a parallel anthropological passion as Professor Ahmed's, and joining him while he was inducted into Anthropology's Hall Of Fame at King's College Cambridge by Professor Alan Macfarlane (see the Anthropological Ancestors website), and now in the field with him, I seek to gain insight into this part of the Muslim world, so little known in the West. Consider some facts: Indonesia is located in South-Eastern Asia, between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and neighbors East Timor, Malaysia, and Papua New Guinea. With a population of 245,452,739, Indonesia has an 88% Muslim population, 5% Protestant, 3% Roman Catholic, 2% Hindu, and 1% Buddhist and others. Indonesia is a polyglot nation with people speaking many languages. Unemployment, corruption, an inadequate infrastructure, unequal resource distribution, poor level of foreign investment, and a fragile banking sector characterize the economic nature of the country. In December 2005, the Indian Ocean tsunami took 131,000 lives causing an estimated \$4.5 billion dollars in damages and losses. Terrorist incidents, in Bali for instance, where we made our last stop and where the project came to an end, have been a major blow to tourism. Such a climate is fertile for the conversion of angry unemployed and frustrated individuals into hard-line suicidal extremists according to a moderate Muslim academic Dr. Syafi'i Anwar whom we met in Jakarta. Dr. Anwar has been threatened with his life by extremists for talking about inter-faith dialogue and for running an organization promoting understanding and dialogue. Dr. Anwar, like other middle-path believers (the moderates) across the Muslim world, maintains that dialogue is the essence of Islam and the message of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and it is the only way forward to avoid the clash of civilizations.

Indeed, let us set the likes of Dr. Anwar in a wider context. It may be argued that there are three general models of contemporary Muslim thought and expression: the extremist, the middle-path believers (or the 'moderates'), and those inclined towards the West (sometimes labeled as 'the Westernized'). Drawing upon Professor Ahmed's conclusions of his journey across the Muslim world and after discussions with his American students, I gathered that they had identified three Muslim models from South Asia. I will explore my argument in the context of these models. The first model is Deoband – this is hard-line extremist and its expression is often in the form of confrontation or clash. Yet on a closer look even with this model there is a range and some here may be persuaded to engage in some form of dialogue. This model has come to drive the common Muslim all around the world (examples of organizational expressions of this model are Hamas, The Taliban, Hizbut Tahrir, etc.). This is also the only model that the West and the media in general talk about and therefore are engaged with, albeit in a negative way, through war, with little or no dialogue.

The second, little known model, is Ajmer which emphasizes synthesis or the Islamic notion of Sulh-e-Kul, Peace With All: as in multi-faith India the shrine of the saint at Ajmer Sharif draws crowds from not only the Muslim community but also the Hindu and others – all are welcome; all are heard; and all are at peace, in an ideal world. The third model is Aligarh based on Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's University: it is progressive Islamic yet willing to engage with, learn, and adopt from the West. It is the modern Muslim metaphor and Pakistan is the consequence of those who believed in this model.

The fact of the matter is that both the latter models that practice inclusiveness and acceptance have become marginalized with the first model—the hard-liners—in a characteristic confrontational manner taking the spotlight. As a result we have the hardliners in the forefront bringing to the world-stage their own stringent interpretation of Islam. Leaving people like Dr. Anwar who talk about inter-faith dialogue at the periphery.

The situation may not be helped if some Western governments and the media allow the spotlight to fall only on the hardliners. To expand on Dr. Anwar's point, frustrated, unemployed, and angry viewers watching extremists on television may mimic their pattern of behavior causing a snow-ball effect of extremism. The other middle-path groups must especially be brought to the fore—there should be more dialogue with those willing to engage in dialogue. Positive contact between the Muslim and outside world should also be highlighted. There are plenty of examples here that can be explored.³ In this very trip to Indonesia, for example, I saw how one of Professor Ahmed's 19 year-old female American students, Hailey Woldt, who we considered like a valued member of our family, had shifted ground. She told me how she had "changed and become a better person" after her journey to the Muslim world. She also told me that she realized how little Americans generally know about the Muslim world. This journey had allowed her to understand Muslims better and to see Islam in a more sophisticated light. The point is that a balanced, more complex view of the world, especially the Muslim world, is what is needed; not just shades of black and white.

The dwindling moderates and growing extremists is a dangerous and challenging development that lies not only on the Muslim side, ordinary people in the West I have spoken with hold many negative and often false perceptions of Islam, Muslims, and Muslim women. Being Arab for example is immediately associated with being Muslim and Muslim with being Arab. Yet the present Bishop of Jerusalem in a fascinating talk at Cambridge pointed out that he was an Arab Palestinian Israeli Christian and that Jesus himself was not a blonde blue-eyed Hollywood looking figure but that he originated from the Middle East.

Similarly, Dr. Anwar in Indonesia pointed out that Indonesian Muslims are a diverse community. Indeed, I would agree with him: Islam is inclusive and accepting of others and it shares many common beliefs with Christians, Jews and other monotheistic faiths; Islam gave human rights to men and women as early as the 7th century; all life is sacred in Islam and suicide or murder is *haram* (absolutely forbidden); Muslims have many colors, faces, and behaviors; women are given many benefits, sometimes more than men. This is what needs to be recognized. Not accepting to recognize the positive side of Islam and the diversity of Muslims only fan the flames of the rising population of the extremists who also need to

recognize and respect their connectedness to their fellow citizens of this world. The important point is that Muslim Indonesia—about the length of Europe with almost as many people as the United States—is “a sleeping giant” in Professor Ahmed’s words that, I believe, should not be stirred or provoked towards any clash of civilizations. ...

JOURNEY INTO THE UK

Frankie Martin

In summer 2007 I accompanied Dr. Akbar Ahmed, my favorite professor at American University in Washington DC, on an extraordinary trip to the United Kingdom. In 2006 I had accompanied Dr. Ahmed as a member of a team of young American researchers on a tour of the Muslim world to better learn about the lives of Muslims and explore ways of bridging the growing gap between the West and the Islamic world. The trip took us to nine countries in the Middle East, South Asia, and Far East Asia. We handed out questionnaires and interviewed people from all parts of society, from politicians like Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to students in rural madrassas. A year later, in London, I was again traveling with Dr. Ahmed, this time promoting the resulting book *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization*, to which I and my fellow researchers had contributed. Discussing Islam in the United States had been difficult after 9/11, but I was beginning to find an audience more willing to consider changes in policy toward the Muslim world: there seemed to be a greater desire to understand the diversity and complexity of Muslim politics, culture, and religion, and a realization that our current path wasn’t working. I expected to find something similar in the UK, and I did, for about a week.

I hadn’t spent much time in London before, so I delighted in exploring the city and seeing the tourist sites. Strolling through Hyde Park one afternoon I was surprised to find myself almost completely surrounded by Muslim families out enjoying a rare sunny afternoon. I saw Pakistani curry restaurants on nearly every corner. It seemed as if Muslims and non-Muslims were coexisting well in this vibrant and diverse international city.

On June 29 I awakened to shocking news. Early that morning police had defused two massive truck bombs near Piccadilly Circus, close to where I was staying. I walked outside to see police cars racing down the street, confused, frightened commuters attempting to find alternative modes of transport, and screaming tabloid headlines from the newspaper stands. If not for the heroic efforts of the police, the newspapers said, hundreds would have died. The next day, a car rammed into Glasgow airport in Scotland in an attempted suicide bombing.

Britain exploded in fury, outrage, and confusion. Quickly the details began to emerge. The suspects being arrested in connection with the attempted bombings were doctors, whose very profession implored them to save lives. These “Doctors of Death,” as the tabloids dubbed them, were not poor, ignorant “Islamists” trained in radical Pakistani madrassas, as

the 7/7 bombers had been perceived, but educated, wealthy professionals. How could this have happened in our country, TV newsmen asked from their perch in front of the Glasgow bomber's suburban home. What turns a brilliant, successful family man into a cold-blooded killer? One suggested answer came up again and again in the media: the religion of Islam.

The discussion in the UK began to resemble that in the US after 9/11. I could feel the same anger and confusion simmering among the British. Familiar questions were asked: Why do they hate us? Is Islam an inherently violent doctrine? Is there a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West? Ambiguous terms used to describe the terrorists and their ideology (jihadis, Islamists, Islamofascists) abounded. It was in this atmosphere that Dr. Ahmed and I attempted to promote a book calling for dialogue between the West and the world of Islam. After the events in Glasgow and London Dr. Ahmed made constant appearances in the media in an attempt to make sense of the week's events and explain our book to an alarmed public, including the BBC, both radio (Start the Week), and TV (Newsnight), ITN, and Channel 4—where I was privileged to meet anchor Jon Snow. I was interviewed along with Dr. Ahmed on the BBC World Service, which was tremendously exciting as I'd been an ardent listener for many years. The same week, I opened an issue of the Guardian and was thrilled to see that *Journey into Islam*, a book to which I and our whole team had devoted so much time and energy, was declared "Book of the Week" and given a glowing review. I felt that our message of dialogue was having an impact.

Through media appearances, meetings with journalists, diplomats, religious figures, academics, and university students we were able to interact with a wide range of people in the UK and hear their opinions. Dr. Ahmed and I had dinner with prominent Pakistani doctors in Liverpool, a rare opportunity to see inside a community that was under so much pressure. We also spoke with many politicians, including former Pakistani cricketer and current Pakistani Member of Parliament Imran Khan. People had many questions about my trip to the Muslim world, as well as about the United States.

I also got to enjoy the very traditional side of English culture in a visit to Cambridge University, where Dr. Ahmed had gone to school and later taught. The grounds were stunning, a true academic paradise complete with 700 year-old cathedrals, boats, ducks, and grass that I'm convinced couldn't get any greener. One day following a conference at the university we went for tea at the Orchard in Grantchester on the river Cam. It was a beautiful afternoon, and Dr. Ahmed, his family, and I were joined by top professors at Cambridge and prominent members of both the Muslim and Jewish communities. As we sat chatting in deck chairs under low lying trees, Dr. Ahmed slipped me a brochure describing the history of the Orchard and some of its illustrious patrons. To my surprise I learned that the poet Rupert Brooke, the author Virginia Woolf, the economist John Maynard Keynes, and E. M. Foster, author of *A Passage to India*—one of my favorite books—all took their tea in the very same spot. As a student of philosophy in school I was excited to learn that Lord Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein debated in the Orchard, as their rivalry helped push both to stratospheric heights in the discipline. Walking along the river Cam, I could think of no place I would rather be.

Dr. Ahmed and I also visited the University of Southampton where we attended a conference on the 60th anniversary of Indian and Pakistani independence. Dr. Ahmed gave the keynote address about the common bonds between Nehru, Jinnah, and Gandhi and what their example means for South Asia today. Over three days I met with academics from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan; Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim, and was amazed that despite such vast differences in their views of history and partition and the presence so much ill-will among their peoples in the past, everyone was cordial to each other. They were able to sit down and talk about their differences, as were representatives from the other power involved, Britain. I learned much about the history of South Asia going to the seminars and eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner with the scholars every day.

From Cambridge to London, from Liverpool to Southampton we traveled speaking about our book and its message. Throughout, we linked our conclusions in the field to the current tense situation in Britain. Based on our fieldwork, we had divided the Muslim world into three models: the mystic, universal Sufi model, the modernist model which synthesizes Islam and the West, and the orthodox, traditionalist model. These three had been in play not since 9/11 but since the 19th century when Muslims first confronted sustained European colonization.

In my travels to the Muslim world, I found that people were angry, confused, and frustrated. They feel the religion of Islam is under attack in a war waged by the West. They feel Americans hate Islam and that their religion is being deliberately distorted. When we asked people what the number one threat to the Muslim world was, a strong majority in every country said: "Western negative perceptions of Islam." In this environment, the orthodox traditionalists, which would include groups like the Taliban, are ascendant because they are seen to fight against social injustice and "stand up" for Islam. Only a small number of people in this group are violent, but almost everyone wants to preserve Islam in the face of perceived aggression and injustice. In Karachi, a high school student threw up his hands, and told me in desperation, "There is so much injustice in the world, I don't know what to do about it." The modernists, like those in the model of the first President of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, as well as the Sufi mystics are marginalized in part because they seem unable to provide this sense of justice and pride.

We explained that this orthodox model, which was so apparent in our travels, also seems to be gaining ground in the UK. Muslims in the UK are a minority in a Western democracy and often have a difficult time holding on to their culture and religion and at the same time living as modern British citizens. Many are economically disadvantaged. Racism and discrimination abound. When these problems are combined with the perception that the world body of Muslims, or the *Ummah*, is under global attack from the West it can create a lethal mix.

The seriousness of the challenges facing Islam in the West was confirmed for me at a lecture Dr. Ahmed gave at the London School of Economics. I felt that there was a certain tension, even hostility in the audience, which surprised me because LSE has a reputation for being a liberal institution. The house was absolutely packed; over 200 people had to be turned away. This was an indication of strong interest in the discussion about Islam, although

much of the audience came with hostility and skepticism. I was amazed at some of the questions and how directly my professor was confronted, including one man who said he respected Dr. Ahmed's talk but in the end he believed there could be no co-existence with the Muslims, all had to be converted to Christianity for Britons to live in peace. Many other questions and comments reflected a similar theme. Something would have to be done about the Muslim "problem." I was familiar with the intensity at which Islam is discussed in the US but the tone of this lecture at one of the UK's premier universities was surprising.

The subject of the lecture, the three models of Islam we wrote about in *Journey into Islam*, were coming alive before my very eyes in the UK. One day, Dr. Ahmed asked a British Pakistani cab driver while traveling home from a television interview what he thought of the current situation. The driver replied that times were very rough. Dr. Ahmed left and we resumed driving. I told him I was in the UK to discuss a book I had completed with Akbar Ahmed and an American team of researchers on understanding Islam. The driver was very surprised to learn that it was Dr. Ahmed that he had just dropped off, and spoke of his admiration for Dr. Ahmed and the work he had done for the Muslim community. With this knowledge, the driver began to see me not as an American visitor but as Dr. Ahmed's assistant, someone who he could talk to.

As he spoke about the Muslim situation in Britain, his voice grew louder and more passionate. He told me he believed in Britain and its justice system so much he wanted to be a lawyer, but dropped out because the other students were so vicious in their racism. He had been driven to desperation at what he was seeing inside the British Pakistani community. He was torn. He condemned the bombers who had tried to strike the week before, but said they were "misguided" Muslims who needed to be helped. He knew there was a problem because he is active inside the community. He was not about to dismiss the palpable fury of many Muslims Britain was seeing on its television screens as representing only a few "extremists." He lamented that the Muslims had no leaders, and he named some of his Muslim heroes, including Americans I was sure to know like Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali. No one these days, he said, has the courage to take the first step in a world of pain and injustice like the Prophet Muhammad once did and exhibit true leadership. When he mentioned Muhammad, I saw his eyes swell with tears, so great was his love and admiration for the Prophet of Islam.

In all, British Muslims seemed to be in a state of shock. This was apparent at a *Journey into Islam* book launch at the House of Commons attended by MPs including Lord Nazir Ahmed and David Anderson. I was surprised when an audience member disputed a claim in my speech that some Muslims in places like Pakistan had named Osama bin Laden as their role model in our study, saying that they must have been joking. The reality is somewhat different.

There is a considerable amount of anger today in both the Muslim world and in the West, and we need to be doing whatever we can to bring the temperature down. This was our message throughout our trip. Speaking to City Circle, a gathering of prominent Muslim leaders in London at which I had shared my experiences in the Muslim world, Dr. Ahmed

called on Muslims to make their voices heard, to get in the media, and join the debate. If they don't, he warned, they may be negatively spoken for. Muslims have to integrate while explaining where they are coming from, he said. They need to reach out.

Dr. Ahmed asked non-Muslims to avoid seeing Islam as a monolith and to make efforts to reach out and understand Muslims, including the orthodox traditionalists who are ascendant throughout the Muslim world. Even the most conservative Muslims welcomed me on my trip once I listened to them and made an effort to understand their religion and culture, a fact reaffirmed in the UK. This was message we took to Parliament, where Dr. Ahmed testified at the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Tackling Terrorism, and to the US Embassy, where we met with US Ambassador Robert Tuttle and later over thirty top intelligence, defense, and State Department officials. The Embassy staff was extremely helpful, especially Cultural Affairs officers Jennifer Harris and Michael Macy, who showed us around parts of London and organized several events for us, including this one with top officials serving in the London Embassy, one of the most important in the world.

At the talk one official commented that he had just seen Dr. Ahmed on CNN that morning discussing the standoff at the Red Mosque in Islamabad and was honored that he had come to the Embassy. I felt my American colleagues were responding to the material in our talk in a serious, somber way. It was thrilling to speak to this audience because this was one of the reasons I joined the *Journey into Islam* project, I wanted to experience the Muslim world so I could assess some of the problems and make suggestions to our government on how the situation could be improved. Here sitting before so many high-ranking officials who were responding very positively to what we had to say, I again felt that we had accomplished something significant. One of the officials asked me how dialogue and understanding towards the Muslim world could be converted into US policy. I replied that during my trip I was taken at how successful simple efforts at understanding could be. US diplomats and other Americans, I said, should be in the markets, mosques, and madrassas of the Muslim world, making connections with influential religious and community leaders, and most of all listening to Muslim grievances. There is an unsatisfied demand for dialogue with the West, I explained, that Americans must meet. Dr. Ahmed added that extensive US programs to fund education initiatives in the Muslim world would be successful because of the focus on *ilm*, or knowledge, in Islam.

Despite the prevalent atmosphere of gloom on the trip, we did witness some incredibly important work being done to reach across religious and cultural divisions in the UK. In Cambridge, Dr. Ahmed spoke of the commonalities between the Abrahamic faiths at the first ever center of Jewish/Muslim relations headed by his daughter, Dr. Amineh Hoti. I saw an example of reaching across cultures and religions when Professor Ahmed was introduced by Professor Julius Lipner, an Indian professor of theology and head of the divinity department at Cambridge. Dr. Lipner remarked that he's known Dr. Ahmed for decades and always respected his work, his high academic standards, his constant courage in the face of difficult circumstances, and the fact that Dr. Ahmed always gets to the heart of the problem in his analysis. It was a significant gesture of goodwill, especially given the often hostile relations between India and Pakistan.

In Liverpool, Dr. Ahmed addressed graduates at the University of Liverpool after receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws. The Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, who received us graciously in both Liverpool and London, is spearheading a campaign to restore Britain's oldest mosque, founded in Liverpool in 1889. This is a powerful example of a prominent Christian reaching out to the Islamic community. The Bishop invited us for lunch at London's famed Athenaeum club to discuss the mosque project. Sitting across the banquet table from me was Clive Alderton, Prince Charles' Deputy Private Secretary, who was delighted I was enjoying London so much. He said that Britain's cultural and religious diversity made the country stronger and that the Prince of Wales was committed to reaching out to Britain's Muslims. After the turmoil of the past few weeks, it was refreshing to know that there were prominent public figures who shared my initial impressions of London. Alderton also told me that the Prince of Wales loves Dr. Ahmed's work and couldn't wait to read *Journey into Islam*, which of course really impressed me.

Traveling back to Washington, I marveled at the once in a lifetime experience I had just had and the unparalleled access I had been given. I felt we had accomplished a lot trying to promote understanding to very different audiences, but there was much left to do. Efforts at dialogue like the Bishop's are what are needed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. High levels of anger on both sides can be brought down by a mutual exchange of ideas and symbolic gestures showing that one is interested in understanding another's culture or religion and living in harmony, as I saw in my trip to both the Muslim world and the UK. These gestures can have a huge impact. This is the only way to live in a truly pluralistic society, and the most effective way to fight the kind of hatred and suspicion I witnessed in Britain.

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"JOURNEY INTO ISLAM" LAUNCHED

Craig Considine

To say that the tumultuous relationship between the West and the Muslim world needs an injection of enlightenment is an understatement. The War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rise to power of Islamic fundamentalists in Sudan, and the ethnic conflict in Chechnya are just a few examples of the rise in global tensions surrounding the Muslim community and the uncertain role of the United States as a part of the solution, or part of the problem.

World leaders must take a step back from the political spectrum of international affairs and make the necessary anthropological and sociological investigation into misunderstood areas to search for understanding and common ground. The US in particular needs daring individuals to exhibit the courage and patience to carefully and clearly hear the ordinary voices of the Muslims world and to directly and honestly witness their anger and frustration. This journey and these human emotions were experienced by Professor Akbar Ahmed as he and his team of young Americans commenced their journey into the heart of Islam.

Journey into Islam is a new book published by the Brookings Institution Press about a unique expedition to nine different nations in the Middle East, South Asia and into Southeast Asia. Two leading Washington DC institutions recently invited Ahmed to launch his new book and to anchor panel discussions with overflowing crowds. On two separate but related events at the Brookings Institute and at the Washington National Cathedral, prominent leaders throughout the community attended Ahmed's launch and emerged with an enlightened sense of truth, compassion and hope after coming to better understand the worldwide Muslim community.

Ahmed was joined at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institute by Ambassadors, Congressman, professors, businessmen and young Americans. At the outset of his journey, Ahmed realized that the best ambassador for the US is the young generation because they hold the keys to a peaceful future. The large and vibrant group of attendees engaged in an enthusiastic dialogue regarding the past and present relationship between the West and Islam.

Steve Grand, the Director of the Project on US Relations with the Islamic World, moderated the session. He praised Ahmed for "taking us on a fascinating and exceedingly educational tour of the Muslim World". Grand said the book is "an usual, compelling...comprehensive book". After his introductions, Grand gave way to the distinguished panel.

Congressman Keith Ellison's appearance at the launch of this book was particularly noteworthy as he is the first Muslim congressman ever elected to serve on Capitol Hill. Ellison thanked Ahmed "for your excellent book and your work to advance human knowledge and understanding. A very important, a very timely work, and I applaud you for

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it.” In commenting on his reflections of the book, Ellison agreed with Ahmed that the Muslim world feels vulnerable but that American Muslims are pleased with the US society and for their future in their country.

Ahmed’s insightful suggestions for new policy initiatives and his team’s rejection of all previous stereotypes about the Muslim world were encouraging words for Dr. Stephen Cohen, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. Cohen lauded the method of the study and called the result “the ultimate journey or road book” adding that the book really penetrates to...the core of the civilization, a very complex civilization”. For Cohen, Ahmed’s anthropological journey should be the norm rather than the exception when trying to better understand a culture that is not American. He concluded that Ahmed’s book should be read by all US policy makers and that anthropological studies should play more of a role in analyzing the Muslim world.

The third and final member of this event that was lucky enough to experience the breakthrough that Ahmed has encountered for US policy makers was His Excellency Ambassador Aziz Mekouar of Morocco. Ambassador Mekouar felt extremely encouraged by Ahmed’s findings and believes that the book itself is extremely interesting for American citizens because “it goes against all the negative stereotypes that have run rampant regarding Muslims in the post 9-11 era.” His Excellency spoke of his friendship with Ahmed saying, “We have known each other for five years since I arrived here and I immediately appealed [his] thoughts in what he writes.”

In dealing with international affairs surrounding the Muslim world on a daily basis, His Excellency believes that this book is the best approach to understanding the feelings of Muslims worldwide. He concluded his thoughts by praising Ahmed for opening an important avenue of bridge building and that the book has created a bridge between the West and the Muslim world. It is now simply our obligation to cross it.

The events that unfolded at Brookings could play a role in revolutionizing policy ideas when the US deals with the Muslim world in the future. In contrast to the discussion at the Brookings Institution that focused on policy and international relations, the Washington National Cathedral held a book launch focused on more spiritual matters. The contrast between these two events was evident but the similarities were still clear. Just as it was at Brookings, this discussion was filled with hope for a peaceful future between the West and Islam. Joining Ahmed were his two good friends, Senior Rabbi Bruce Lustig of the Washington Hebrew Congregation and Bishop John Chane of the Washington National Cathedral and moderator Reverend Canon John L. Peterson from the Center of Global Justice and Reconciliation at the Cathedral. Over the years, these three figures have represented their own faiths in public interfaith dialogues but have also built an extremely tight bond together that serves as an inspiration for all.

Canon Peterson’s opening comments about Ahmed’s books gave evidence to the timely manner of the release of *Journey into Islam*. Peterson stated that the book gives a “fresh perspective of the misunderstood religion of Islam.” To Peterson, Ahmed’s voice in the book is gentle, calm and is filled with wisdom and hope. In this imbalanced world where globalization has created a much smaller and faster paced world, the book gives a

vision of a global community where all humans can engage in dialogue to solve their discrepancies.

Ahmed's latest book serves as an idea for other Americans to do what Ahmed has done: search for understanding other cultures rather than colliding with them on a consistent basis. Rabbi Lustig believes that Ahmed, who he called "a brilliant anthropologist and my teacher and friend", has written a "fascinating" book that is a "valuable tool to shorten the distance between the West and the Muslim community." If we do not break the barriers between the West and the Muslim community, Lustig believes that people will continue to live in fear and will continuously worry about the future of their children.

The sense of a true bond in friendship between Ahmed, Lustig and Chane was evident as they joked with one another throughout the night. When the Bishop began speaking, it was obvious that both Ahmed and Lustig truly appreciated and understood his meaningful words of wisdom. To Chane, *Journey into Islam* offers hope and peace to members of the Abrahamic tradition in their broken relationship. For Chane, Ahmed's book is a "powerful statement about hope for the future". He concluded by stating that "all people must accept the book because it serves as a gift to learn about the Muslim world in an unprecedented manner."

At the outset of both of these magnificent and inspiring events, several common themes emerged. The most important theme that was felt by each and every panelist after reading Ahmed's book was the great sense of responsibility to engage with the Muslim world in search for understanding and knowledge. The second theme was the true power of a Muslim, Jew and Christian coming together in peace in the National Cathedral for Christians to flirt with the idea of religious tolerance, compassion, and more importantly, peace.

Also present at both events were Ahmed's team of young Americans who traveled with them. At the National Cathedral, Frankie Martin, Hailey Woldt and Jonathan Hayden were asked to come onto the stage to enthusiastic applause. Ms. Woldt, on behalf of the entire team which also included Hadia Mubarak, thanked Ahmed for being "a father and friend to each one of us".

On a touching note, two of the parents of members of Professor Ahmed's team were able to listen to these three religious figures discuss the idea of coexistence. Mrs. Zuckerman, mother of a member of Ahmed's team Lauren, was literally moved to tears, like many others in the audience, due to the power and the scale of the event. Never before has she ever listened to such powerful figures discuss ideas like peace and hope. Terry Woldt, on the other hand, was the father of Hailey Woldt, a research assistant that journeyed with Ahmed and featured in the book. Terry was awestruck at the thought that young Americans and students of Ahmed have the ability to change the world as we know it. Ahmed's book is one that touches the heart of every human soul, regardless of affiliation. It forces one to search their soul of compassion and truth. When one is finished with the book, he is almost certainly to feel enlightened at the thought that compassion and friendship, rather than guns and bombs, can solve the problems of the world.

**"JOURNEY INTO ISLAM:
THE CRISIS OF GLOBALIZATION"
BY AKBAR AHMED**

Tamara Sonn

This year the world marks the 60th anniversary of the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan. But the celebrations are muted as the region appears to be at the epicenter of global terrorism, and the world trembles in fear of spreading violence and fanaticism. In this context, Akbar Ahmed, one of Pakistan's most brilliant intellectuals, has produced a work of such remarkable wisdom and clarity that it should be required reading for all those gifted with the privilege of democracy.

Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization is, in many ways, a field guide to the Muslim world. It elucidates its complexities and contradictions with excruciating honesty, addressing the fears of fanaticism and violence shared by non-Muslims across the globe. But in the process it demonstrates three points of critical importance. First, the violence and fanaticism emanating from the Muslim world reflect very real pain and suffering that is the product of policies, many of which are generated or supported by Western powers. Second, the fear of violence and fanaticism is shared by Muslims as well, the majority of whom suffer in silence the indignities that motivate the extremists, lacking access to the political and economic tools required to change their circumstances. Finally, those who do have such access bear the responsibility to address these realities, and exercise their democratic rights for their own well-being and for all those who depend upon them.

Journey into Islam began as a student centered anthropological inquiry into Islamic societies. Ahmed led a group of American students on an extended study tour across the Muslim world: from the Middle East through South and Southeast Asia. Ahmed allowed the students to interact with a broad range of students, scholars, professionals, religious activists and leaders, government officials, and heads of state, in a variety of contexts including interviews and formal surveys. The study was designed to determine "how Muslims are constructing their religious identities—and therefore a whole range of actions and strategies" in view of their current situations. But given that their current situations are irrevocably enmeshed with global socioeconomic and political currents—that is, in the context of globalisation, what began as an academic inquiry became a quest. As Ahmed explains, it became "in essence, an attempt to identify the global problems societies face, to suggest solutions, and above all, to appeal to the powerful and prosperous to join in creating wider understanding and friendship between different communities through compassion, wisdom, and restraint."

Readers accompany Ahmed as he prepares and then accompanies his students, beginning with exquisitely distilled doses of the anthropological and historical background necessary

to benefit from the experiences of the journey. In his first two chapters, Ahmed explains the issues under scrutiny and the methodologies used to explore them. Students focus on the question of role models in their surveys to pursue questions elegantly crafted to elicit motivating perceptions and core values. By identifying the individuals most admired, past and present, informants reveal their ideological orientations within the broad spectrum of Islamic viewpoints as well as their own self understanding and perceptions of the world around them. Ahmed identifies three archetypes—"Ajmer" to refer to Sufi orientations that stress spirituality and universalism; "Deoband" to refer to "mainstream Islamic movements, characteristically activist and reformist but largely conservative socially and sometimes associated with extremism; and "Aligarh" to refer to modernist approaches. He acknowledges that these distinctions are approximate, broad, that they often overlap, and that not all Muslims fit into any of them. But they provide a useful compass to navigate the often confusing array of Islamic movements in the world today.

With characteristic candour, Ahmed points out the reciprocity of fear. While the average American may live in fear of terrorists attempting to destroy their way of life, the average Muslim feels that the most important problem they face is the West's overwhelming hostility toward their religion. Especially palpable when Muslims speak out on the issues of violence in Iraq and the worsening plight of Palestinians, "Islamophobia" predictably leads to rising anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism. Again, globalisation is the key factor. Not only are people in the West benefiting enormously from the internationalization of the West's corporate culture, but thanks to one part of it—instantaneous global communications—the rest of the world is aware of the "greatly increasing asymmetry in living conditions" reflected in the fact that "358 individuals own more financial wealth than half of the world's population collectively." The suffering resulting from war and poverty accounts for Muslims' perception of the West as motivated by greed, anger, and ignorance.

Chapter three, "Tribes, Women, and Honor in the Age of Globalization," provides anthropological insights into nature and functioning of tribal identities, essential for those seeking to understand the difference between Islamic values and the atrocities committed by people who happen to be Muslim. The chapter provides analyses that shed light on ongoing developments in Pakistan, such as President Musharraf's "ill-fated bombardment of Waziristan in search of terrorists." Ahmed points out that the campaign resulted in Musharraf's "ignominious retreat and the establishment of a new variety of Taliban with its own territory and flag, known as the Islamic Emirate of Waziristan." Among the book's most dazzling passages is the analysis of the potent mix of religious and tribal identity—"fusing Islamic order [and] tribal custom." Believing their religion is under attack, tribesmen are convinced that their vengeance is justified. In the same context, Ahmed explains the phenomenon of women serving as symbols of tribal honour—and some of its hideous repercussions.

The real core of the book appears in the fourth and fifth chapters. Chapter four, "Who Is Defining Islam after 9/11 and Why?" explains what appears to many Muslims to be a deliberate effort by Washington neoconservatives to replace their former nemesis, the USSR, with "radical Islam," in order to protect the vast wealth produced by their hold on the

military-industrial complex. This entails not only waging ongoing wars, but also vilifying those who speak out against policies discriminatory to Muslim communities and valourising critics of Islam – none of which goes unnoticed in the context of global e-communication. “The Clash of Civilizations?” then describes the standoff in the Muslim perception, epitomizing the US occupying Iraq and Afghanistan; supporting Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Syrian territory in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions outstanding since 1967; placing forces in the Arabian peninsula and Persian Gulf, and supporting undemocratic regimes in Egypt and Pakistan, whilst all the while beaming vapid and vulgar video culture around the world. This of course includes anti-Islamic vitriol in Hollywood blockbusters and even video games, such as “Eternal Forces” in which players fight on behalf of Christ’s army against the anti-Christ army. Ahmed shows that these realities are the source of a range of reactions throughout the Muslim world—Arab and non-Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim, Sunni and Shi’a, religious and secular—but they are all negative. They lead to anger, resentment, depression, despair, and suicide even among the general populace. The channelling of such sentiments into deadly terror plots among the radicals, while remaining heinous, becomes at least comprehensible.

In the dramatic close of the book, chapter six, “Lifting the Veil,” Ahmed gives testament to the transformative effects of knowledge and compassion. Readers are introduced in chapter one to Aijaz, who calmly explained, “The actions of Osama bin Laden, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Taliban, even if they kill women and children, are perfectly justified in Islam.” Through his interaction with Ahmed and his cadre of earnest students, Aijaz came to recognise that his perceptions of the West were inaccurate, and that his Islamic faith demanded the search for peace. That example and others lead Ahmed to conclude, “Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, young and old, men and women, American, Pakistanis, and Indians—countless examples illustrate the capacity of human beings to attain moral heights in the most difficult circumstances.” The epilogue confirms that people of all faiths share essential values. He quotes colleagues in his extensive interfaith efforts, Rabbi Bruce Lustig and Bishop John Chane, who agree that the “goodness and vitality in individuals of every race and religion” must be called upon for the service of our shared humanity. The book ends with a plea: “To transcend race, tribe, and religion and cherish our common humanity, every individual must become the message, conveyed by one simple word: that is the hope of the world.”

In many ways, this book is an abbreviated memoir of an exceptional life lived in the service of his religion and country, in pursuit of the core Islamic values—justice (*‘adl*), compassion/ goodness (*ihsan*), and knowledge (*‘ilm*)—which Ahmed believes are universal. At the same time, it is a call for help in that very pursuit. It is therefore, a deeply moral work, informed by profound commitment to universal values of knowledge, justice, and compassion, all of which work to confirm Ahmed’s position as preeminent Muslim public intellectual. Ultimately, a generous and empowering work which allows the kind of understanding that is transformative, *Journey into Islam* is as an extraordinary venture for its readers as it was for the students involved in its making. ...

REVIEWED BY TONY BLANKLEY

I have just finished reading a deeply disheartening book by my friend Professor Akbar Ahmed. Dr. Ahmed is the former Pakistani high commissioner to Britain and member of the faculties of Harvard, Princeton and Cambridge, current chair of Islamic Studies at American University—and is in the front ranks of what we Westerners call the moderate Muslims, who we are counting on to win the hearts and minds of the others.

I first met Professor Ahmed shortly after Sept. 11. He, his friends and I broke bread several times and discussed the condition of Islam and the West. He graciously agreed to share a stage with me at the National Press Club to debate with me the merits of my book, "The West's Last Chance: Will We Win the Clash of Civilization?" As my book was very harshly received by many Muslims around the world, I don't doubt that Dr. Ahmed shared that stage with me at some risk at least to his reputation—if not more.

We even considered doing a weekly cable TV show on the clash of civilization from our different (but respectful) points of view—although nothing came of it. Dr. Ahmed is a worldly man of letters who profoundly believes that collective good can be accomplished by individual acts of good conscience—that each of us (Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu) must connect with others and live out our convictions for our common humanity in the face of tribalism, religion and other dividing forces. Thus, he reached out to me, a fiery American nationalist TV commentator and editor to find if not complete common ground, at least common friendship.

His new book, "Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization," is thus particularly heartbreaking for me. As a trained anthropologist, he took three of his students on a six-month journey around the Muslim world to investigate what Muslims are thinking.

His conclusion: Due to both misjudgments by the United States and regrettable developments in Muslim attitudes, "The poisons are spreading so rapidly that without immediate remedial action, no antidote may ever be found." And Dr. Ahmed has always been an optimist.

He divides Muslim attitudes into three categories named after Indian Muslim cities that have historically championed them: Ajmer, Aligarh and Deoband.

Ajmer represents peaceful Sufi mysticism, Aligarh represents the instinct to modernize without corrupting Islam, Deoband represents non-fatalistic, practical, action-oriented orthodox Islam. It traces to Ibn Taymiyya, a 14th-Century thinker who lived when Islam was reeling from the Mongol invasions. He rejected Islam's prior easy, open acceptance of non-Muslims.

In short, Dr. Ahmed is an Aligarh. As a young man he was one of new Pakistan's best and brightest, led by Pakistan's founding father and first president, Dr. Jinnah. They hoped to build a modern democracy, overcome tribalism and the more obscurantist aspects of Islam while still being "good Muslims." The Deobands are the Bin Ladens and all the other Muslims we fear today.

Even one or two years ago, I think Dr. Ahmed was reasonably hopeful that his views had a fighting chance around the Islamic world. So, my jaw dropped when I got to page

192 of his new book and he described his thoughts while in Pakistan last year on his investigative journey: "The progressive and active Aligarh model had become enfeebled and in danger of being overtaken by the Deoband model ... I felt like a warrior in the midst of the fray who knew the odds were against him but never quite realized that his side had already lost the war."

He likewise reported from Indonesia—invariably characterized as practicing a more moderate form of Islam. There, too, his report was crushingly negative. Meeting with people from presidents to cab drivers, from elite professors to students from modest schools (Dr. Ahmed holds a respected place in the Muslim firmament around the globe), reports that 50 per cent want Shariah law, support the Bali terrorist bombing, oppose women in politics, support stoning adulterers to death. Indonesia's secular legal system and tolerant pluralist society is being "infiltrated by Deoband thinking ... Dwindling moderates and growing extremists are a dangerous challenging development."

Although I dissent from several of Dr. Ahmed's characterizations of the Bush Administration, Washington policymakers and journalists should read this book because it delivers a terrible message of warning both to those who say things aren't as bad as Bush says, and we can rely on the moderate voices of Islam—with a little assist from the West—winning; and for those who argue for aggressive American action to show our strength to the Muslims (because, in Bin Laden's words, they follow the strong horse).

To the first group he says that the "moderate" voice is in near hopeless retreat across the Muslim world. Don't count on them. To the second group he says, whatever Bush's intentions, our aggression only strengthens our enemies.

I think he knows his solution is forlorn: "Although the planet's societies are running against time ... [we must] transcend race, tribe and religion and cherish our common humanity, every individual must become the message." Let us pray.

But for those of us who don't expect the milk of human kindness to suddenly start flowing, it behooves us to read Professor Ahmed's honest assessment of the real state of Muslim world attitudes and coldly re-assess our various policy prescriptions in its light.

These are grim times, but we must resist indulging ourselves in hopeful fantasies. Every piece of our national security calculations must be realistically assessed against the available facts. What is working, what isn't, what to do?

*Journey into Islam:
The Crisis of Globalization by Akbar Ahmed, 2007. Brookings Institution Press.
Courtesy: The Washington Times*

WEST 'MUST STOP LOOKING AT ISLAM THROUGH THE LENS OF TERROR'

Anthea Lipsett

Tony Blair would do well to listen to Akbar Ahmed when he takes up his new role as Middle East envoy in earnest.

One of the world's leading authorities on Islam, Prof Akbar says education, rather than violence, is the way to smooth relations between the Muslim world and the west.

And it is imperative that it happens sooner rather than later, he told EducationGuardian.co.uk.

"Europe is going down in population, whereas the Muslim world is rapidly rising. By the middle of this century a quarter of the world's population will be Muslim.

"If that's the case, we can't afford an unending clash between the Muslim world and the west. The world will be consumed by religious turmoil. We are facing a major breakdown in the 21st century. Unless we begin to change now, the chances of us surviving are limited," he said.

The 65-year-old anthropologist and Ibn Khaldun chair of Islamic studies at the American University in Washington is in the UK to give a series of speeches to academics and religious leaders ahead of receiving an honorary doctorate from Liverpool University on July 6.

"How do you bring sanity or rationalism, or people to sit down to talk to each other to overcome this huge chasm between the west and Islam?" Prof Akbar asks.

His answer is to get as much information about Islam into the public domain as possible.

He has just published a new book, *Journeys into Islam*; a 12-part lecture series for the internet; an audio series about Islam; and a new play.

"I'm hoping that in time in the west, particularly in the US, where misunderstanding is growing worse, [my work] may help people to understand the culture better, and bring more sanity and good sense all round, so we can face the real issues facing us in the 21st century-like population and climate change rather than ethnic and religious violence," he said.

"It's not just 9/11. It started in the 19th century when the first clashes between the west and Islam took place. We're seeing the same patterns being played out today."

But it is the west's obsession with Islam, and the tendency to look at Islam "through the lens of terror or security", that worries Prof Akbar most. "That creates alarm, resistance and further distortion," he said.

"It's not the best way of looking at a culture which has a long history, 57 nations and 1.4 billion people.

"Islam is going through a great period of turmoil and change. Any continued aggression [from the west] will encourage more and more people to join the queues to blow themselves up."

Rather than pour all its money into containing Islam, the west should spend more money on schools and education, Prof Akbar says.

He advocates the "Aligarh" model, named after a university modelled on Cambridge that was established in British India in the 19th century. Aligarh "took the best from the west but kept the faith and integrity of Islam".

Britain and the west should strive to strengthen this moderate, modernist model, he argues.

The government is planning to reform Islamic studies in the UK after publishing the Siddiqui report earlier in June. The Higher Education Funding Council for England has £1m to allocate to improve research and teaching of Islamic studies in universities.

For Prof Akbar, it is not about the money, but the approach the government takes that is key. "The [UK] government has to be looking at the long term. Who are the people of substance in this country who can bring change, and how can we work with them to bring change so the [Muslim] community maintains its integrity and yet lives comfortably in society," he said.

He admits it's a challenge for both sides and the onus cannot fall solely on the west.

"Muslim leaders need wisdom, vision and compassion, and I don't see that in Muslim leadership. There's nothing but mediocrity and military leaders in power," he said.

He hopes his efforts to explain Islam will also reach misinformed Muslims.

He has a long history of trying. In 1999 he became the first Muslim to be invited to speak at a Jewish synagogue. "It triggered a debate within the Muslim community very close to fatwa territory-but it changed the landscape.

LABOUR OF LOVE

Karamatullah K. Ghorl

Globalization, a blessing or curse, is the hottest debate of our times. It is an issue that remains pending—the jury on it would be out for a long, long time. The strident mantra of the 21st century may be manna to the aggressively-enterprising corporate cabal in the West; however, in the East, it is mostly perceived as another deceptive version of the 19th-century Western colonialism that looted and plundered the rich-in-resources Asia, Africa and Latin America, filling Western treasuries until they overflowed.

In the Islamic world, spanning from Morocco to Indonesia, comprising 57 sovereign states and one-fourth of humanity, globalization is being increasingly associated with the 'War on Terror', which in itself is seen as a war against the Muslims, wherever they may be.

The template to this Muslim mindset, irrespective of whether it is right or wrong, is the global scenario unfolding since the cataclysmic events of 9/11 and all that has transpired in its wake. Muslim masses have a point in arguing, with facts to back up their hypotheses, that the Western leaders and ideologues—men like George W. Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard, among others—have cleverly exploited the post-9/11 sense of hurt of their people to unleash a vengeful war of attrition against Muslims. The events in Afghanistan, Iraq and occupied Palestine speak for themselves. George W. Bush's so-called 'War on Terror' is assuming the tone of a new crusade as he himself had initially christened his onslaught on the heels of 9/11.

The only difference between the classical crusades and their latest version is that contemporary Western armies are being resourced by a combination of corporate mafia and neo-con evangelists, whereas in the past the brew was a mix of royalty and church. Another innovation is the corporate-owned Western news media whose services and expertise are being harnessed, globally, in the dissemination of varnished and 'kosher' truths.

Prof. Akbar S. Ahmed is one of the few voices pleading for course-correction in a blind pursuit of agendas set, largely, in ignorance and based on half-truths. From his academic perch at the American University in Washington, Akbar has been waging a one-man's resistance in the academic domain.

Akbar's has been a rare voice of reason amongst West-based Muslim scholars operating in largely unhelpful and hostile surroundings. He has been at it, patiently and diligently, since the day-after 9/11 because of his conviction that an open-ended war, with obviously hostile intent and agenda, waged by the West against Muslims, is the wrong tool, given the hugely yawning religious, racial and cultural divide between the West and the Islamic world.

But Akbar's own *modus operandi* is not geared towards finger pointing entirely at the West. His plea for reason is focused equally in the direction of the Islamic world. He holds both responsible for operating in ignorance and not trying to understand each other with the intent to narrow the gulf currently dividing them. He's also critical of the Muslim mode of denial, which, to his mind, isn't doing a service to any Muslim or Islamic cause.

Akbar woke up early to the ineluctable need of bridge-building amongst the followers of the leading Abrahamic faiths of the world in the wake of 9/11. His book *Islam Under Siege* (2003) was a passionate plea for reason and sanity all around, especially to the beleaguered Muslims of the West who, even after six years since 9/11, are still not being allowed to disappear from a microscopic radar screen, with all their moves minutely scrutinized and deduced.

But *Islam Under Siege* was largely the intellectual product of an armchair analyst, no matter how clinically researched and brilliantly argued. And that was also before the American armies went rampaging into Iraq to lay waste a country, which had nothing to do with 9/11, and was in no way responsible for the evil perpetrated in its guise.

Iraq veritably hit the Islamic world like a ton of bricks, convincing even those otherwise inclined to give all the benefit of the doubt to the West that it was a war against the world of Islam, the protestations to the contrary of its authors notwithstanding.

Sensing the new mood swing in the Muslim world, Akbar discarded his own armchair to venture out into the field to take the pulse of the throbbing heartland of the vast arc of Islam and its Muslim masses, and the intelligentsia felt the impact of this latest Western onslaught against them. But he did something unprecedented, too: he decided to take along some of his young students, both male and female, in lockstep with him to see and experience the post-9/11 and post-Iraq invasion Muslim world, first hand and draw their own conclusions.

Why did Akbar think of this maverick move? Because he seems close to being convinced that the crop of think-tank ideologues and brainy gurus hogging the Washington beltway can no longer be relied upon to be reasonable, or give up their pre-conceived mindset of disbelief of everything Islamic. But the younger generation of Americans isn't saddled with the kind of baggage dragging down their forebears and stilling them into intellectual stupor.

It isn't only an intellectual torpor; influential voices in the pantheon of American intelligentsia and journalism—like a rabidly Muslim-baiting Charles Krauthammer of *The Washington Post*—have also been belligerently propagating their concoctions of hate against the Islamic world with unrelenting zeal. They are provocatively hawking their bellicosity and telling Washington's obliging ruling elite that the time for talking is over; it's now the moment of action. These merchants of doom are one reason for an exacerbating trust-deficit between the West and the Muslims of the world.

So Akbar took his young acolytes along on a journey of discovery, visiting in the process a swath of Muslim countries, including Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Qatar, India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. One surprise to this scribe, however, is the glaring omission of Iran. Why was one of the most important Muslim states in the world left out of the itinerary

of Akbar's team? Wouldn't its inclusion have given a greater balance to the study of contemporary Islamic world, particularly because it's the epicenter of contemporary Shia revivalism as a political force in the Middle East? Any study of the contemporary Muslim world is incomplete without an empirical study of Iran.

Akbar's field study of the Islamic heartland is pegged like a tripod, surveying the three most defining models of Islamic thought and action: the Sufi model of total devotion to Allah and peaceful co-existence—*Sulh-i-kul* (peace-with-all)—with His creations, epitomized by Ajmer, renowned for the shrine of the great saint and mystic Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Ajmeri; the Aligarh paradigm steeped in modernity and liberalism of Islam and the Deoband template anointed by an orthodox and atavistic interpretation of Islamic dogma and ritual.

Akbar's painstaking and innovative research clearly establishes the fact that partisans of all three models are, by and large, inclined to co-exist in peace and harmony with the West and cannot be stigmatized—as is currently fashionable in the West—for being hotbeds of radicalism. All three, however, have this strong sense that there's little effort in the West to understand Islam and its followers, which isn't the way to peace or bridge-building among universal faiths.

Akbar S. Ahmed's *Journey into Islam* is, no doubt, a labor of love. Akbar has made a sterling contribution to the inescapable need for a rational, cool and un-phlegmatic dialogue between the denizens of the Islamic world and their Western detractors. His is a voice of reason and rationality. However, the question remains: is anyone listening? Is this moderate voice going to be heard or will it be drowned in the cacophony of jingoistic shibboleths baying for the blood of Muslims? Take your own pick for an answer.

For a punch line, however, it should be said that if the intellectual transformation of Akbar's team of young and inquisitive researchers and observers is any guide, then one could say with some confidence that there's light at the end of the tunnel.

A SUBTLER TAKE ON THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Huw Richards

Akbar Ahmed, long a critic of US foreign policy, has now been invited to the White House. So what, asks Huw Richards, will he tell the President?

Akbar Ahmed should have been in the Oval Office. Instead he was at his daughter's house in Cambridge talking to *The Times Higher*.

The invitation to talk to US President George W. Bush came as Ahmed, the Ibn Khaldun professor of Islamic studies at the American University in Washington DC, was on his way to the airport. He had to explain, doubtless with the patrician courtesy that appears to be second nature, that he was already committed on the other side of the Atlantic.

Ahmed has met the President before, "generally on occasions when there have been 40 or 50 other people in the room". He has had more frequent meetings with administration figures such as secretaries of state Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. The White House knows he is no admirer of their foreign policy.

This invitation, though, seemed a breakthrough, with its implication that he would be getting the President's undivided attention. Ahmed had little doubt the invitation was linked to a highly positive review of his book *Journey into Islam* in *The Washington Times* by influential neoconservative commentator Tony Blankley.

Blankley, a frequent adversary in public and broadcast debates over the past few years, said journalists and policy-makers should read the book as an "honest assessment of the real state of Muslim world attitudes and coldly reassess our various policy prescriptions in its light".

It is not as if Ahmed's message has changed. He has been arguing for conciliation and dialogue between faiths-earning the scorn of radical preacher Omar Bakri as an "Uncle Tom who wants dialogue with Jews and Christians" more than a decade ago-and for a more nuanced Western approach to the Islamic world long before he arrived in Washington in the summer of 2001.

A prominent presence on the Washington scene, conducting that interfaith dialogue with figures such as Judea Pearl-father of murdered journalist Daniel-and in non-Muslim locations such as the Holocaust Museum and the National Cathedral, Ahmed had to go to considerable lengths to produce a book whose message would be taken seriously by the people in power in the US.

Journey into Islam chronicles a trip, with a research assistant and two of his American students, across the Muslim world - taking in the Middle East, Ahmed's native Pakistan, Indonesia and, in particular, three Indian cities linked with the distinctive streams of Islam

he identifies: Ajmer, the home of mystical Sufism; Aligarh, identified with the modernising version he exemplifies; and unyielding, first-principles Deoband.

One of Ahmed's favourite quotations from the Prophet Muhammad is: "The ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr." His concern, underlined by the findings of opinion surveys that he and his students undertook as part of the book, is that such an attitude is seen as dated and out of touch in much of the Muslim world.

Ahmed is not a cloistered figure in either the academic or religious sense. Scholarly interests developed in parallel with his career from 1966 in the Civil Service of Pakistan - an elite chosen by examination, descended directly from the British Imperial Civil Service, through which he rose to become High Commissioner in London. Posts he has held include political agent in Waziristan: "This is the only area that Lord Curzon administered directly as viceroy. It tied up more British troops than the rest of the sub-continent and an entire brigade was wiped out there in the 1920s. It is where Osama bin Laden is now believed to be hiding."

Academic research-writing what he self-deprecatingly calls "dry anthropological studies"-was Ahmed's periodic relaxation from the considerable pressures of such work. This essentially lonely pursuit was seen as slightly eccentric by colleagues: "If I had simply wanted to advance my career, it was important to socialise and be seen. Pakistan is a gregarious society."

There were few complaints from his peer group when he went off as an academic visitor to Cambridge or Harvard-"It meant that there was a vacancy in a good job for a few months"-but Ahmed recalls the incomprehension of a military superior when he turned down a highly prestigious post to take a fellowship at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study. "I was only the second Muslim to be invited to where people like Einstein and von Neumann had worked, but he shouted at me: 'You could have been Commissioner for Refugees and instead you want to be a bloody teacher.' He never forgave me."

That career, though, left him with a formidable range of contacts among the Pakistani elite. He was able to interview President Pervez Musharraf for the book, while an earlier project-a film he made in the 1990s as part of a multimedia project on the life of Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah-was allowed to use much of the army as extras for crowd scenes, although the commander-in-chief refused the reinforcements he requested for one scene on the grounds that, "If I let you have any more troops the Indians will think we're pulling out of the areas they claim, and launch a surprise attack."

Among the messages Ahmed is certain to convey to President Bush when they meet is that Pakistan has the potential to create problems dwarfing any created by Iran or Iraq: "It is one of the leaders of the Muslim world with a population of 165 million, nuclear weapons and an established pattern of command and control in its army."

The very fact that Ahmed received the invitation means that a second part of his message is getting through - that the policy-makers need to hear a wider and more nuanced range of voices concerning the Muslim world.

Recent years, Ahmed argues, have been heavily informed by the hardline views of Princeton historian Bernard Lewis, who coined before Samuel Huntingdon the phrase "clash of civilisations". "Before 9/11 he was merely a very important historian, but then he became

the guru of Islamic studies in the US. You have a world in which the media wants 30-second soundbites and he offers a simple thesis," Ahmed says.

Failure to understand the subtle variations of Islam has, Ahmed argues, helped ensure the current ascendancy of the uncompromising Deoband strain. To march into Iraq proclaiming democracy an exclusively Western virtue was not only counterproductive—"It ensured that many Iraqis would reject it as an imposition by an imperial occupier"—but showed an ignorance of Muslim history and in particular the democratic, modernising strain represented by his own hero, Jinnah.

The West needs also to avoid the "He's a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch" reasoning traditionally applied by the US to pro-US dictators in Latin America, extended to the Saudis and, since 9/11, to Musharraf. Its own ends - and that of the Muslim world—would be much better served, Ahmed argues, by falling back on three basic tenets of Islam: "These are *adl*, meaning justice; *ilm*, the second-most used word in the Koran, which means knowledge; and *ihsaan*, meaning compassion or balance. Muslim leaders need to rediscover the finest tenets of their own faith.

"The West also needs to understand this tripod of values, each indispensable to the other, and to understand and treat Muslim governments according to their lights. Without them the Aligarh [modernising] model collapses and [the mystical Sufism of] Ajmer is irrelevant."

He adds the rider that, while recognising the danger of the Deoband model, it would be equally mistaken automatically to equate adherence with violence and terrorism.

If such an alignment occurs, he argues—and influential circles in the US may agree—the future is bleak: "There are 1.4 billion Muslims in the world, and the demographers tell us that one quarter of the population of the planet will be Muslim. If they continue to suffer as they do at the moment, murder and mayhem on a massive scale are inevitable."

We, and George W. Bush, have been warned.

ISLAM IN TODAY'S WORLD

A CONVERSATION WITH

AKBAR AHMED

Gustaf Houtman/Anthropology Today

How do the many Muslims find their place in the world today? In the context of the 'war on terror', how do Muslims define themselves and their faith? What can anthropologists do to further better understanding of Islam and promote dialogue between Muslims and the West? ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY asked Islamic scholar and filmmaker Akbar Ahmed to reflect on the place of Islam and the role of the anthropologist studying Islam in the 21st century. Akbar S. Ahmed holds the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at the American University in Washington, DC. He was formerly Visiting Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and Iqbal Fellow at Cambridge University. He has also been High Commissioner of Pakistan in Great Britain. His email is: akbar@american.edu. For more information, see www.akbarahmed.org.

ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY: *Much of the media depicts Islam as a monolith. As an anthropologist, how does one challenge such stereotypes and how do you see diversity in Muslim society today?*

Akbar Ahmed: Since 9/11 the Western media has depicted Islam not only as a monolith but even as a shorthand term for terrorist or extremist. This is of course, to any anthropologist, nonsense. The Muslim world consists of about 1.4 billion people and some 57 Muslim-majority states. There are differences in society that arise out of region, sect, ethnicity, local custom and political developments. So while there may well be an overarching and unified identity as 'Muslim' there are nonetheless significant differences between Muslim societies. In my forthcoming book *journey into Islam*, which is based on an anthropological excursion to the Middle East, South Asia and the Far East, I suggest three distinct categories of Muslims today: the universalist mystic who is inclined to accept those not of his or her tradition; the orthodox literalist who draws boundaries around Islam and is inclined to see it under attack; and the modernist who wishes to synthesize with the outside world and be part of it. In one significant sense the battle you see in the world of Islam is the struggle between these categories. The only way to challenge stereotypes is to have dialogue and create understanding, to write and appear in the media as frequently as possible. This I have tried to do.

AT: *What can anthropologists do to help forge new paths for dialogue and reconciliation between the West and the Muslim World?*

AA: Anthropologists can do a great deal to bring better understanding between the West and the Muslim world. They need to play their part in the world today which is riven with religious, sectarian

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and ethnic conflict. But they can only do so if they rid themselves of the belief that somehow their discipline is so 'pure' that it needs to be restricted to the four walls of a classroom. They need to overcome their aversion to what is called 'applied' science. After 9/11, I imagined that the time of anthropology had arrived. Much of what I saw around me, between the West and Muslim societies, rested on ideas of group loyalty, revenge, suicide and tribal codes of honour. People were, of course, not aware that these were the interests that anthropologists had been looking at since the origins of their discipline. Because people wanted quick and simple answers and because anthropologists were slow in providing them what we saw was the emergence of a new breed of instant media expert. Overnight we saw people who were clueless about society, culture and religion giving lectures on precisely these subjects in Islam. Those who called themselves 'security experts' and 'terrorism analysts' were everywhere. Much of what they had to say was little more than a concoction of prejudice, ignorance and sometimes plain stupidity. The result was that a great opportunity for an effective contribution of anthropology to world affairs was missed. Much of the growing antagonism between the West and the Muslim world could have been minimized or even avoided if anthropologists had been heard in the early days. Anthropologists could have pointed to the sensitivity Muslims feel around the mosque, the honour of women and the respect for the Prophet. If the West needs to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world it needs to be sensitive to these particular features. At a time of war—there are after all American and British troops now in Iraq and Afghanistan—cultural misunderstandings make things worse for soldiers. The response of local people then becomes much more personal and intense. It then encourages widespread brutality. Societies begin to descend into anarchy. This is what is happening.

AT: *You have made many documentaries on Islam worldwide. Why is making documentaries important? What have you discovered in making these films?*

AA: Documentaries and films are important because they reach a far bigger and broader audience than books. Decades ago I was fortunate in becoming friends with and partner to Andre Singer, a truly outstanding filmmaker and anthropologist. I was able to work with him on several films on the tribes that live along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. These were award-winning documentaries. In the early 1990s I spent time and effort helping the BBC make its six-part series *Living Islam*, which was broadcast in 1993. It was based on my book *Discovering Islam* and I was asked to present it. The film helped change the climate around Islam. Prince Charles saw it before his seminal lecture at Oxford later in the year and indeed there are echoes of the film in his speech. I spent much of the 1990s completing a project called the Jinnah Quartet—films and books. The project was based on the life of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the extraordinary founder of Pakistan. He embodied human rights, civil rights and civil liberties. To me he was the quintessential modernist leader. Yet few people knew his story and he had been demonized in the film *Gandhi* which is how most people saw him. What I discovered was the controversy that can be created around films. Everyone has his or her own way of looking at the character on the screen. Sometimes they have an intense sense of ownership. People challenge or reject a different interpretation. This rejection can sometimes take the form of protest. In the case of someone like Jinnah there can be strong emotions. While making the film in Pakistan I was threatened, taken to court and faced huge demonstrations in the streets. Some people did not like the depiction of Jinnah as a tolerant, accepting and modernist leader. They wished to see him as a straightforward orthodox, literalist figure. Others objected to showing his daughter in the film. The British were not happy because they felt we were revising history and exposing the role of Mountbatten in his unfair bias towards Nehru and the Congress and against Jinnah. I am hoping that the present series I have narrated and presented for Channel 5, *The glories of Islamic art*, will make

a contribution to the debate on Islam. Because Islam is such a hot topic this will bring a new perspective. It is an outstanding British production and is based on interviews with top professionals. We see the sophistication and splendour of the architecture of Islam of a thousand years ago. We also see the complexity of that civilization. For example, the great Hassan mosque in Cairo was not only a place of worship; it was also a hospital, a hostel and a university. It was open to everyone, not just to Muslims. The series also has a message for Muslims. I hope that they discover the importance of learning and knowledge in their own tradition. That will help them move away from those who encourage them towards violence.

AT: *Do you make a distinction between Islamic scholars and scholars of Islam? Which do you admire and why?*

AA: No I don't. Some of my favourite scholars of Islam are not Muslim. In particular I admire some outstanding anthropologists. Some of them, alas, are no longer with us. Clifford Geertz who worked in Morocco and Bali, Ernest Gellner who worked in Morocco, Louis Dupree who worked in Afghanistan, are great names. You can pick up Geertz's *Islam observed* or Gellner's *Muslim society* or Dupree's *Afghanistan*—written decades ago—and find the discussion as fresh as if composed yesterday. Their depth and understanding is far superior to much superficial stuff we have by the so-called experts today. The present generation of anthropologists has also produced some excellent scholars of Islam, like Professor Lawrence Rosen who is the head of department at Princeton University. Other outstanding scholars of Islam include Tamara Sonn at William and Mary College, and John Esposito and John Voll at Georgetown. For an example of a Muslim anthropologist in the young generation let me proudly mention my daughter, who obtained her PhD in anthropology from Cambridge University and has a book called *Sorrow and joy among Muslim women*, published by Cambridge University Press. She has just been appointed the first director of the recently established Jewish-Muslim Centre at Cambridge. Unfortunately even these top-notch scholars are not making the kind of impact in the mainstream media that they need to. We need to hear their voices and see them on our screens. Instead of their balanced opinions we often get the view of some 'expert' who has little idea of what he or she is talking about.

AT: *What are your views on depiction of the Prophet of Islam and the cartoon controversy?*

AA: This is not a simple question. It is complicated by history, culture and religion. It is as old as the confrontation between the Western world and Islam. It is the classic situation of the irresistible force meeting the immovable object. Offensive depictions of the Prophet go back to the earliest European history. Dante shows the Prophet being burned in the lower depths of hell in the *Divine Comedy*. This tradition has survived into modern times. What has changed, however, is the advent of what we call globalization. Modern media information means that an image in Bradford of protesters burning a book can be flashed across the Muslim world and Muslims rioting in Islamabad can inflame Muslims in Nigeria and Indonesia. This is exactly what happened when the Salman Rushdie crisis erupted around his book *The Satanic Verses* almost two decades ago. I had just arrived at Cambridge to take up the Iqbal Fellowship and was drawn into the debate. I recall thinking to myself that this is a complicated situation and so difficult to explain to both sides. The West correctly treasures the freedom of the press, of writing, of thought etc. These have been won with great sacrifices. They must be preserved at all costs. On the other hand traditional societies—like Muslim ones—hold their religious figures in high regard. For Muslims the Prophet of Islam is considered the '*insani-kamil*' or perfect person. For every range of Muslim—whether Sufi or modernist or orthodox—the Prophet is the ultimate source of inspiration. He is described in the Qur'an as a 'blessing for humanity' and

Muslims see him through the eyes of love. For someone so highly loved and revered to be seen to be reviled and humiliated is offensive. However, Muslims have to—and I have been saying this now for almost two decades—express their emotion through debate, discussion and writing. Death threats, burning embassies and becoming violent are neither in the Islamic spirit nor do they have any effect but could make matters worse. Because we are living in the age of globalization, with different societies overlapping, juxtaposed and interacting with each other through the media and travel, we need to be much more sensitive to each other's cultures, beliefs and customs than we were even a generation ago. We cannot plead ignorance of each other any more. This is not only a conclusion I have come to on the basis of the common courtesy that is required to deal with different peoples of different backgrounds, but the reality of the fact that we are living in a world which is truly reflective of diversity and therefore needs to be more accepting.

AT: Many write about Islam as repressive of women: how do you view this characterization?

AA: There is a negative miasma around Islam regarding women. Yet Islam is perhaps the first religion to give women rights to inherit property, divorce, lead armies, write poetry and participate fully in life. The injunction to be modest applies to both men and women and helps create an environment of balance and decorum in society. It is not meant to be repressive. Unfortunately many Muslims have not treated women with the respect and honour that Islam tells them to. In many parts of the Muslim world women are deprived of their property and treated with brutality. 'Honour killings'—which are not Islamic but tribal—are associated with Islam. The good news is that women are active in fighting for their rights. There have even been women presidents and prime ministers. I am optimistic in the long run.

AT: In Europe, the veil is raised as an issue of freedom of religion. What is your view on the British and French ways of dealing with this issue, and where would you draw lines, if any?

AA: I believe that individuals should be allowed freedom of choice to dress in the way they want to as long it is not impinging on anyone else's freedom. If a woman wants to wear a veil she should be allowed to do so. I find it both hypocritical and ludicrous that a young teenager is penalized for wearing the veil and demonized in the media, whereas politicians who may be responsible for the deaths of thousands of people are able to live in apparent comfort and security. We need to be much more tolerant of each other than we are. We must understand the nature of the world we live in. It is much more multicultural than ever before in history. I am constantly amazed at how rapidly British society has absorbed foreign influences. The curry, when I was an undergraduate in the 1960s, was an exotic Indian dish. Today it is the number one choice of the British who eat it as part of their own diet. We need to have a similar tolerance towards custom and culture. By banning the veil we are not only signifying our own closing of the mind but putting further pressure on a young girl who may be wearing it in order to create a sense of identity and dignity for herself in a difficult social environment.

AT: 9/11 and 7/7 have transformed the world we live in, and the blame is often placed on radical Islam. Do you believe this is correct?

AA: 9/11 and 7/7 have transformed the world and those Muslims who want violence are partly to blame. The rest of the blame falls squarely on the shoulders of those who are not Muslim and who could have responded with a different strategy. Instead of alienating the vast body of the Muslim world they could have reached out through dialogue and understanding and thereby marginalized the extremists. By failing to do so they only swelled the ranks of those Muslims who believe that they are standing up to defend their faith, which they see as being under attack.

AT: *What are your views on the 'war on terror'? Does al-Qaeda 'exist' in the way official government sources would have us believe, and to what extent has the West created its own enemies?*

AA: The 'war on terror' has become a war on human civilization. It has no boundaries and therefore involves the entire planet—we have seen explosions and killings across the globe whether in Madrid, London, Karachi, Delhi or Bali. The objectives of the war on terror are vague and its timetable is unknown. People talk of a war that is going to last 'decades'. On 12 September 2001 99% of the Muslim world sympathized with the Americans for what happened the day before. Many said public prayers in public places. But several years on—and after the killings and scandals in Iraq and Afghanistan—we now have the reverse situation. There is little sympathy for the United States. The enemies of the United States—al-Qaeda or any other group—have now, it appears, an unending line of volunteers waiting to blow themselves up in the cause. Al-Qaeda itself seems as shadowy as it did a few years ago. Many in the Muslim world doubt whether it exists—or ever existed. It seems to have become a convenient whipping boy not only for the United States but for many local Muslim tyrants. They can label someone al-Qaeda and arrest him without anyone batting an eyelid. Tyranny and injustice are being implemented in many parts of the Muslim world in the name of the war on terror.

AT: *How compatible is Islam with academic life in a secular Western society? In what ways do you practice Islam yourself, and how do you personally reconcile it with doing anthropology?*

AA: Islam is compatible with academic life in Western society. Working in different societies is rooted in Muslim history. In our discipline one of the earliest anthropologists was Al Beruni, who lived a thousand years ago. He lived in the court of Mahmud of Ghaznavi in Afghanistan and worked on Hindu India. His methodology was rigorous. He arrived in a different culture, learnt the language and ended up studying—perhaps the first Muslim to do so—the Hindu classical texts. His view was that the anthropologist needs not to give his or her opinion but to 'simply relate without criticizing'. He also presents us with a wide range of crosscultural comparisons referring to Jews, Christians and the ancient Greeks for whom he had much admiration. The problem is not so much whether Muslim scholars can work in Western society but whether they can survive in their own. The story of modern scholars in Islam is a sad one. Scholars have been persecuted, hounded and killed in Muslim societies across the world. Rulers do not take kindly to criticism. Even the few Nobel Prize-winners in the Muslim world faced physical attacks or verbal abuse. In all cases they needed police protection from violent critics. The paradox is that Islam holds knowledge in high esteem. The word for knowledge—*ilm*—is used more often than any other word except the name of God in the Qur'an. The Prophet urged his followers to go to China to acquire knowledge. China in the seventh century would have been a different and distant world. The Prophet's saying that the ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr clearly places the importance of scholarship in Islam in its correct perspective. Muslim rulers need to accept this fact and restore scholars and scholarship to their rightful place.

AT: *What important Islamic ideas have been least understood in the West?*

AA: Many important Islamic ideas have not been understood in the West. Perhaps the most important Islamic idea of genuine acceptance has been lost in the tidal wave of Islamophobia that has now engulfed many commentators in the West. It is easy to forget that there is a verse in the Qur'an, sura 2, verse 256, which says 'There is no compulsion in religion'. The Qur'an also underlines the diversity of human society. It talks of different tribes and states all created by God. God is underlining the need for us to know one another and respect each other on the basis of our differences.

AT: *What is your view of the anti-terrorism research projects proposed recently in the UK? How do*

you view anthropologists who accept funding from the military or security services for the study of terrorism, whether overt or covert?

AA: The question assumes that somehow anthropology is pure and pristine. It is easy to forget that some of the great names like Evans Pritchard were part of a colonial administrative structure. Yet they produced excellent ethnography. As long as we understand that these colonial officers were working in a certain cultural and political context we can learn much from their narrative of local tribes and peoples. When I became Political Agent of South Waziristan Agency (where Osama bin Laden is supposed to be hiding) I discovered a moth-eaten copy of *Mizh* written by Evelyn Howell when he was Political Agent half a century before me. I had met him just a few years before his death at Selwyn College in Cambridge. I had no idea then that I would one day be filling his shoes in one of the most difficult and turbulent postings in the subcontinent. I found *Mizh* both objective and useful. There were great insights into tribal society. It was also sympathetic to the tribal peoples. I asked Oxford University Press to republish it and to my delight they did so. In my foreword I acknowledged the contribution that even colonial officers could make. What we are seeing is a rush to support all security-and terror-related scholarly activity at the cost of disciplines like anthropology. An already marginalized subject like anthropology then risks being further marginalized. Anthropology needs to reclaim its ground in today's world and needs to point to its relevance. It can and must lead the way to genuine bridge-building through its understanding of other cultures and societies. In that sense it has a role to play at a critical time in world affairs. It can either shape history or become history. However, lines must be clearly drawn at shopping informants, spying on academic colleagues or damaging the people anthropologists work with. At no time must moral boundaries that we universally uphold be compromised. This is particularly true in the 'anything goes' atmosphere that has been encouraged by the security and terror masters, who even argue for 'torture'.

FIVE YEARS AFTER 9/11, 'DIALOGUE' WITH ISLAM CAUSE FOR HOPE

Mark O'Keefe

A native of Pakistan who served as his country's high commissioner to Great Britain, Akbar Ahmed offers the unique perspective of an anthropologist who has lived in and studied both Islamic and Western cultures. The BBC has described him as "the world's leading authority on contemporary Islam." He is the principal investigator for the "Islam in the Age of Globalization" research project at the Brookings Institution, with support from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and American University.

The central thesis of Ahmed's work is that dialogue is required to reduce conflict between the U.S. and Islam. For his traveling dialogues with Judea Pearl, the father of slain Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, Ahmed was nominated as a 2005 finalist for Beliefnet's "Most Inspiring Person of the Year" award.

Ahmed, 63, was interviewed in the living room of his home, just outside Washington, D.C.

Featuring: Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, professor of International Relations, American University, Washington, D.C. His books include *After Terror: Promoting Dialogue among Civilizations* (2005) and *Islam Under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World* (2003).

Interviewer: Mark O'Keefe, Associate Director, Editorial, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

QUESTION & ANSWER

Where were you when you first heard of the Sept. 11 attacks and what went through your mind?

I was in class at American University, where I had just begun teaching, a few miles from the Pentagon. As the news started coming in, I began to see the look of shock and horror on the faces of my young students. At that moment, I realized very clearly, without hesitation, doubt or ambiguity, that the coming time would be the greatest challenge for me, both in a personal sense as a Muslim and as a scholar on campus, teaching Islam as a subject.

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For the last decade I had been trying to create interfaith dialogue in the United Kingdom. I knew this would be challenging because, unlike the United Kingdom, the United States did not have a long history of interaction with the Muslim world. The United Kingdom, with its South Asian colonies and its colonies in the Muslim world, had already had this kind of experience. The relationship with Islam was negative and positive, but there was a lot of richness in that interaction. There was knowledge of the same books, languages and cultures, and there was even some affection in that interaction. But this was not the case with the United States.

This is the 10th anniversary of Harvard professor Samuel Huntington's influential book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, in which he predicted increasing conflict between civilizations, most notably Islam and the West. You have rejected his thesis, and co-authored a book, *After Terror: Promoting Dialogue among Civilizations*. In light of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, conflict in places such as Lebanon and the anti-Semitic and anti-American rhetoric we are hearing from the president of Iran, do you still reject the clash of civilizations paradigm?

I am a scholar. I don't look at what is coherent, strong and historical, which is the idea of the clash of civilizations, and simply say it doesn't exist, because that would not only be inaccurate and untrue, but it would not be cognitive. We have to take an idea and grapple with it, understand it, engage with it. The clash exists because it has existed for a thousand years, exactly as Huntington has stated. We have had the centuries of the Crusades and then of European colonization spanning over a thousand years of history, which has made for a complex and difficult relationship between Islam and the West.

But we have also had—this is my criticism of Huntington, because he leaves it out — great periods of harmony, cultural synthesis and interaction of ideas. For example, the entire corpus of Greek thinking of the great philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, lay unknown and forgotten until the Muslims translated them in Muslim Spain a thousand years ago and allowed Europeans to discover them in Arabic, translate them into Latin and from Latin they were translated into French and then English. Over the centuries, the process of rediscovering the Greeks came to Europe via the Muslims. This cycle, in turn, triggered the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment. When you talk about Jeffersonian ideals of the Enlightenment and Jefferson's Greek heroes, we invariably omit the Muslim contribution to this cycle.

There was also the development, which Huntington missed in his thesis, of the mass migration of Muslims to the West in the past couple decades. I'm not talking about a couple thousand immigrants; I'm talking about millions of Muslims actually living, interacting with and becoming citizens of the West. For example, the United States has several million Muslims. It has included American and Muslim icons, such as Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X. Rumi, the 13th century mystic poet, born in Afghanistan, is the number-one, best-selling poet of the United States. Americans love his mystic poetry of compassion and acceptance. Another historic fact: The first country in the world to recognize the United States of America was Morocco, a Muslim country. So it isn't quite a clash of civilizations that has

been going on. While there may be an element of clash, there is a larger element of synthesis, understanding and sporadic dialogue.

But, after 9/11, the right wing in the U.S. and the media have made Huntington's thesis popular, and now, all over the world, people are talking about the clash of civilizations—Huntington's clash. But to be accurate, we need to acknowledge that Bernard Lewis came up with the concept and Huntington picked it up from Lewis' article. Moreover, people have been writing and talking about opposition between the West and Islam for a long time.

From February to April, you traveled with research assistants to nine Islamic countries and found that the emotional intensity of anti-Americanism is at an unprecedented high. What were people most upset about?

The intensity is extremely high, perhaps the highest levels of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism I have ever seen. We went to mosques and madrassas. I spoke at the Royal Institute in Amman. I met President Musharraf, as well as students and scholars. I really covered the full range of meetings, lectures and seminars. The negative feeling in the Muslim world against Americans and Jewish people is very acute.

People are extremely upset about several things: the ongoing crisis, as they see it, in the Muslim world, the crisis around the Palestinian-Israeli crisis and the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, they see an attack on Islam in the Western media, ridicule of the Prophet Muhammad, as in the Danish cartoons, for example, and the disrespect shown to the prophet when he is called a terrorist by people like Jerry Falwell. People in the Muslim world really believe that Islam is under attack.

In light of this perception that Islam is under attack, what type of Islamic leadership do you see emerging?

My analysis of the Muslim world reveals that there are three distinct kinds of leadership in play, completely missed by the West, missed by Huntington and missed by the analysts here who see the Muslim world more or less as a monolith.

The first kind of Muslim leader is the enduring and endearing model of the mystic Sufi. I'll give you the example of Rumi, the most popular poet in the Muslim world. The second model is that of the modernist Muslim who wants to synthesize Islam with Western ideas. Muhammad Ali Jinnah is my favorite example because he founded Pakistan. He wanted to model Pakistan on Westminster democracy to include women's rights, human rights and minority rights. He believed in a proper democracy and wanted to run Pakistan with respect for law and order, according to the constitution. This was in the 1940s. He dressed in Western suits and spoke English. Yet he was elected and adored by millions of Muslims who looked up to him as a leader of great integrity, courage and principles.

The third model is the Muslim who says, "We want to be exclusivist. We want to draw boundaries around Islam. Islam is being threatened and is in danger. We must preserve the purity and tradition of Islam. We must go back to the time of the seventh century." In this third model, you have a whole range of activity from the Taliban in Afghanistan to the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia.

Among these three models, there is clash, conflict and opposition. This is the reality on the ground of the Muslim world today; it is not just a 9/11 phenomenon. It has been taking place for the last two centuries and is now reaching a climax. It is being pushed and accelerated by the event following 9/11—the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, the scandals about the treatment of Muslim prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay and the abuse of the prophet in these cartoons. It all feeds the perception that Islam is under attack and must fight back. These events encourage and reinforce not the mystic, not the modernist, but the exclusivist.

Why? Because when your own society is under attack and in crisis, and a Sufi shows up and says, "Let us talk about mystic love; I love Christians; I love Jews; we're all part of the same human race," they will respond: "What world are you living in? My house has just been blown up. My wife has been dishonored. My children have been killed. I want revenge. I want violence. I want to speak the language of an eye for an eye."

If you're a modernist, you say, "I'll respond by writing a letter to *The New York Times* or hold a debate with the opposition." They will respond, "This is not the time for civilized behavior!"

But if you are an exclusivist, you say, "Brother, they have killed your family and destroyed your home. Let me take revenge. I will inflict the same pain on them as they inflicted upon you." This type of rhetoric, in turn, gains legitimacy in the Muslim world, because it addresses the core grievances of society. The aggrieved will then respond, "Praise be to God. You are my leader."

United States policy should be directed toward supporting and encouraging the first two models because support for the exclusivist model has never been greater, mainly because of the growing anger and emotion now in the Muslim world.

Many Islamic terrorists in recent years have not been poor and uneducated, but highly educated with seemingly bright careers in front of them. Yet they choose what they consider martyrdom. What does this tell us?

It tells us that analysts of the West still think in terms of poverty as a factor in violent action. You look at the world through your own cultural context. In the United States, people talk about certain ethnic groups, and they claim these groups are more likely to be inclined toward crime. Then they impose this supposition on the Muslim world. It isn't the case at all. In *Islam Under Siege* (2003), I argue that notions of honor and revenge—almost tribal traditions of taking revenge and redeeming honor—are driving a lot of these young men. And as you point out, many of them are educated and well off. Bin Laden is the classic example—a multi-millionaire, who could have lived a very comfortable life. But he is living in the caves somewhere, hiding, and leading, by all accounts, a very nomadic existence. Why is he doing this? Why are these young men blowing themselves up? Something is driving them that is beyond economic factors.

If you read bin Laden's statements, you will find he is constantly using the word honor. He's talking about American troops getting out of Saudi Arabia, but he's also talking about

the honor of Muslim peoples being violated. The words—honor and dignity—appeal to the entire Muslim world. A lot of Muslims will totally reject bin Laden's violent methods. The vast majority would say they totally disagree when he says it's acceptable to kill women and children, but they would identify with his sympathy for the loss of Muslim honor.

Even if they're successful and affluent, they still have the sense that the world is not quite in control and they feel under siege. They feel their honor is being threatened. That's why I use the title *Islam Under Siege*. And I argue that it's not only Muslims feeling under siege. I argue that after 9/11 Americans also feel under siege. Israelis feel under siege, surrounded by the Arabs. It's a time in history when several societies are feeling under siege.

You live in cosmopolitan Washington, D.C., a big, multicultural and multi-religious city. Many Americans don't live in such a city. They may not even know a Muslim person. What can they do to promote the dialogue you are advocating?

My advice not only to Americans but to Muslims—is to make an effort to visit each other's places of worship, to understand each other's festivals. Muslims have several major festivals during the year. We have what is called Eid to end the month of fasting. We have a great celebration where we commemorate Abraham, a very respected figure in Islam. Once Christians and Jews begin to understand this common connection with Abraham, and Muslims in turn begin to understand something of Judaism and Christianity, friendships grow.

I would encourage Americans to visit Muslim homes, countries and their institutions. If you are an American living abroad, get out of your high-security, guarded compounds. Americans abroad are not very visible and that's why they're not very popular. Go out there as I did with my wonderful American students who joined me in mosques and madrassas. I saw the impact they made just being alone with 300 bearded men who would talk to them fearlessly and cordially on the carpet of the mosque. Within one or two hours, the entire atmosphere was changed to one of welcome.

You have traveled around North America with Judea Pearl, the father of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, who was beheaded by terrorists in your native land of Pakistan. What impact has this travel and dialogue with a Jewish man had on you, a Muslim?

It was a very difficult dialogue at first and a very uneasy one because I was aware that I would be sitting onstage and I would be seen as a symbol of a civilization that had produced the killers of Judea Pearl's son, Danny Pearl, in Karachi, the city where I grew up. And yet the goodwill that Judea and I had toward each other, which was very apparent even early on, then blossomed into a friendship that helped us overcome the initial awkward patches of the dialogue. The momentum grew and we have conducted about 12 of these dialogues. We went to the United Kingdom, Canada and all over the United States. We are meeting again shortly in San Francisco. We have hundreds of people coming to listen to us and participate.

The success was twofold: Judea is able to keep alive the memory of that remarkable young man, his son, and I am able to pay tribute to that memory. Both of us are able to transform that into a bridge between Jews and Muslims and between American and Muslim civilizations.

The second success was more functional: In the United States, we were specifically asked to come to Duke University, where there were tensions between Jewish and Muslim students. They asked us to have a dialogue and involve these kids. Both groups came. As the day progressed, we saw them becoming friends. By the end of the dialogue they were all chatting quite amiably and ended the day going out to dinner together.

This has made an impact because it has been widely reported in the Middle East, in the Arab press and in the Pakistani press. Not everyone was happy. There was a headline in a Pakistani paper that said "Akbar Ahmed, Sole Muslim Voice Wanting Dialogue with the Jews." I got a lot of threats and nasty emails from people saying "I don't approve of what you're doing," "you're selling out" and I was even called an "Uncle Tom." It was not very encouraging.

But I made a commitment to dialogue after 9/11 and I stuck by that commitment. Dialogue by itself is empty. It's rhetoric, it's a cliché. Two people talk, they go home and nothing happens. But dialogue that leads to understanding leads to the idea of actually getting to know each other, of understanding. I've gotten to know Judea. I've come to know the pain, the history and the traditions of his people. From this dialogue we have seen the possibility of friendship and friendship changes everything. When people become friends, they don't think of blowing themselves up and killing each other. They are prepared to make compromises, to change, to accommodate.

You publicly recommend Karen Armstrong's book, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, which argues that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all going through a period of intense internal debate between their "fundamentalists" and "moderates." Based on your study and travels, who is winning in the Muslim world, and who will ultimately win?

I would answer by saying, look at the trends in the polls. In Somalia, in the Arab states, in Pakistan and Iran, Muslim religious parties are very much ascendant. The exclusivist model is on the rise. But where are the mystics and the pacifists? Where are the modernists? Where are the Jinnahs of our time?

Who wins in the future will depend largely on the United States of America and its political leaders. If they continue what they are doing now, then the success of the religious party is guaranteed, because the blunders being made by the United States in its foreign policy ensure the emergence and consolidation of the exclusivist groups. The continuation of grievances in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and now Lebanon expands the breeding ground for terrorists to recruit more people to their cause. This would be at great cost to Islam because it is ultimately a religion of balance and compassion. But all this is now being affected by the men of violence and emotion.

If the United States is able to understand this equation, maybe it will change its policy and help Islam regain its balance, which will calm the Muslim world and, therefore, the rest of the world. If that doesn't happen, if we see the continuation of the clash of civilizations theory and its implementation, we will almost certainly see the emergence and consolidation of the exclusionists. Then, we will all be in for a violent, troublesome and uncertain future in the 21st century.

So we really need to ask: Has the clash theory, which has so far dominated foreign policy in the United States, really succeeded? Has it gotten us what we wanted or should we now explore an alternative paradigm?

This transcript has been edited for clarity, spelling and grammar.