

# The Long View

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## Resistance and Leadership Against Hegemonic Power

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To Engage or Not to Engage with the Establishment: That is The Question

SALINA KHAN

Leading by Example: Some Notes on Contemporary Ulema

JOÃO SILVA JORDÃO

The Islamic Sleeping Giant and the Arena of Resistance

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Hybrid War and Solidarity: Iran and Venezuela in the Context of Imperialist Aggression



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## In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

We are at a stage and a state that the need to resist the current hegemonic powers is not debateable. With economic and social injustice rife in a globalised world, where oppression travels faster than the ability to mobilise against it, the only question that remains is how should we – whether Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, of different faiths or none – affect the change we so long for?

This issue of The Long View contains some responses to this question, from the particulars of the leadership qualities of Muslim scholars to the possibilities of nation to nation and tradition to tradition solidarity. Our first writer, **Saeed Khan** raises the thorny issue of whether it is possible for Muslims specifically but by extension oppressed peoples in general, to work with the very establishments that oppress them. His article, and indeed the annual IHRC 'Islamophobia conference' that will follow later this year, begins with a discussion of the different theological approaches to this question. Can Muslims in any event – as Muslim majorities or minorities – work with governments that are not based in some way on Islamic teachings? Whatever the response to that question – the follow-up is of course what then? What precedents are there from other movements regarding this question? As the title recalls Hamlet's crucial dilemma, the stakes could not be higher for those of us pondering this issue right now.

**Salina Khan** writes to shed light on the qualities of certain contemporary Muslim scholars, including Imam Muhammad al-Asi, Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky and the martyred Sheikh Nimr, alongside her focus on Ustad Syed Jawad Naqvi now based in Pakistan. She looks at the ability of these ulema to connect with the political and social problems of the age. It is perhaps therefore no surprise that they have been attacked, slandered, in two cases imprisoned and in the case of Sheikh Nimr, executed. However, Khan asks, why is it that Muslims themselves seem to prefer 'celebrity'

ulema, who speak abstractly about religion and either do nothing to counter or at worst actively promote sectarian narratives.

Many observers within and without the Muslim world have stated that Islam is in crisis – the political and developmental disarray of majority and minority Muslim groupings in a world demarcated by nation states, is coupled with the active loss of believers turning to other faiths or simply leaving faith altogether. **João Silva Jordão**, looks at this critique and argues that rather than being a sign of decline, these factors point to the possibilities of the rise of Islam as one of the new global futures. With the current world order collapsing under the weight of climate degradation and spiralling wealth inequality, the aspects of Islam that challenge the causes of these meta-crises, are becoming more apparent and attractive to potential new adherents, who will in turn alongside existing movements, drive the rise of Islam as a force for global change.

Finally, **Ramón Grosfoguel** looks at the commonalities of the attacks on Iran and Venezuela by the US Empire. Describing how hybrid war has been launched against both states in attempts to overthrow their governments and impose US friendly regimes on the peoples, Grosfoguel argues that many lessons can be learned from these ongoing brutalities for other movements. Despite the immense economic and social pressures caused by the sanctions regimes on both countries, he argues that the solidarity between the two countries, notably the supply of technological expertise and aid by Iran to Venezuela, is an example of a new world dawning.

Making sure that this new world is one that is more just and equitable, is a responsibility on all our shoulders. Understanding what the challenges are, and where progress has already been made is critical. Discussing and setting our own red lines on what we can do to make this future a reality, is essential.

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# To Engage or Not to Engage with the Establishment: That is The Question

The political and social aspirations of Muslims in Westernised settings, whether as minorities or majorities, raises the thorny question of engagement with non-Islamic governments. Settling the question of whether or not this is possible, and what the alternatives are, is the key question Muslims must face, writes **Saeed Khan.**

**T**he Muslim world continues to reel under the continuing trauma that it has experienced, especially over the past century with the institutionalization of colonialism and its myriad systems of occupation and oppression. The legacy of these impositions, from without and from within, is exacerbated by a consistent record of military intervention that has wreaked havoc on Muslim societies in dozens of countries, unleashing generational trauma and devastation. The power imbalance between Muslim and so-called 'Western' countries, and between Muslim communities living in the so-called 'West' as minorities vis-à-vis the respective dominant societies, coupled with the constant pressures on these countries and communities alike by way of geopolitical impositions and Islamophobia, has spawned considerable soul searching within the Islamicate.

The question that consumes Muslims caught in these quagmires is one of engagement: should Muslims interact with the very establishment that may be responsible for their marginalization, discrimination, securitization and even incarceration. In other words, can Muslims work with the Western(ised) establishment? If so, are there conditions and what are they? If not, why not?

Neither the Islamicate nor the 'West' is a monolith. The Muslim world has undergone tremendous and often traumatic transformation, particularly over the last century, as decolonization, migration and establishment of Muslim communities in the 'West' have paralleled the disruptive and frequently destructive impact of Western intervention in and on Muslim countries, whether militarily, economically or politically. Treating the 1.8 billion person-strong 'Muslim world' as a static, uniform entity is obviously imprudent and unproductive.

At the same time, both the 'West' and those Muslim communities affected by it must resist the temptation and delusion of regarding the 'West' as being either fixed or even progressively advancing. There are in-

cisive signs that the 'West' may be experiencing a decline in geopolitical power, influence and even a coherent sense of self-identity. These shifts of previously presumed pillars of stability and strength will and are impacting the way the 'West' conducts itself, both internationally and within its own borders. Muslims, regarded by the 'West' as inferior, incompatible and exploitable, within and without, become an easy target to scapegoat for the emergence of systemic flaws in the 'Western' project. Policies like Prevent in the UK or Combating Violent Extremism (CVE) in the US have had profound explicit and implicit consequences on Muslim communities, by problematizing them as security threats, a sentiment internalized by many Muslims and taken as dictum by younger generations.

Whether due to ideological fallacies and contradictions or logistical deficiencies, as evidenced by the dubious and troubled management of the Covid-19 pandemic, the 'West' is at an inflection point as its own weaknesses and vulnerabilities are met by the rise of other countries, such as China as major actors on the world stage. With 'Western' power seemingly on the wane, how will that impact both the decision by Muslims to work with and the forms of engagement with their respective governments, their institutions and policy and legal processes? Is there a difference between working with Western establishments and Westernised establishments? What about alternative establishments arising e.g. China, India, Russia, etc. that may argue their credentials as non-Westernised and yet have problematic policies toward Muslims? Finally, if cooperation with the establishment is not permissible, what then are the alternatives for those Muslims seeking social justice and change?

## Theological Considerations

As Muslims, the principal inquiry for any form of conduct and decision-making is whether such action is permissible, per-

haps even obligatory, under Islamic precepts. The focus on the theological is normatively, and often empirically, the point of departure for if and/or how to engage with the establishment. Given the considerable impact of government policies on the Muslim communities they target directly or indirectly, there is the understandable inquiry and concern whether complicity in creating or causing harm to the community is an unacceptable, proscribed act in Islam.

Currently, there are some heated debates that span the spectrum of permissibility and extent of engagement with the establishment. Some contend that any engagement with a government or institution that has values, policies and/or outcomes that are inimical to Islamic sensibilities should be shunned altogether, as such interaction would be *haram*, per se. Certainly, Quranic injunctions admonish the Ummah from taking certain groups and entities as its *auliya*, as there will invariably be a divergence in intentionality and objective.

Some Muslims contend that any level of engagement is an endorsement, normalization and legitimization of the government or entity with which the interaction is occurring. This becomes highly problematic if that entity is engaged in *haram* action, irrespective of whether it affects Muslims solely or as part of a broader collective. For those who maintain such a perspective, even participating in the democratic process by voting or holding public office might be seen as out of bounds, Islamically.

By contrast, many Muslims living in minority communities in the 'West' are of the view that engaging with the establishment is not only Islamically permissible (*halal*), it approaches an obligation, whether *wajib* or even *fard*. Much of the rationale for this viewpoint rests upon interpretations and assessment of the Prophetic tradition and other examples where necessity warranted such engagement, even with the acknowledgment of potential harm to the Ummah. The notion of a potential net positive impact from such engagement,



coupled with a perceived categorical imperative as Muslims to endeavour to improve their locale, with passivity and disengagement being deemed as unacceptable options, drives the idea that Muslims are both ambassadors and change agents wherever they are. In addition, there is an argument made that especially for Muslims living in the 'West,' and noting the impact that Western policies have on Muslims worldwide, it is mandatory for Muslims in those societies to engage with the establishment, as perhaps the best and possibly only advocates for aiding their brethren in the Ummah elsewhere.

Between the two Muslims perspectives that regard engagement with the establishment as either "*halal*" and "*haram*" is a broad range of opinion based upon a presumption of engagement being permissible, yet subject to certain criteria being met before it can occur. For Muslims living as minority communities in the so-called 'West,' the development and application of "*minority fiqh*" is an emerging and dynamic field of scholarship, as Muslims are made to adapt to the various challenges they face in scenarios where they are outside an Islamic state or societal paradigm, as well as ones that make their *fiqh* a reactive rather than a proactive phenomenon.

### Academic Perspectives

Notwithstanding the theological exploration, what does a historical assessment teach us about the permissibility and propriety of engagement with the establishment? Recent history is replete with Western interaction with the Islamicate that can hardly be characterized as symbiotic or even mutually beneficial. More accurately, western engagement can be framed as parasitic, with both economic and social disruption and pillage the norm. Realities in power differentials have certainly led to pragmatic approaches by Muslim communities and countries alike in their efforts to mitigate the negative effects of such Western action. These have often assumed the manifestation of either the

proverbial carrot or stick. Military resistance has proven to be a futile campaign, dating back at least three centuries. In its place has been a variety of interventions that have sought to assert Muslim agency and influence. These efforts offer a chronicle of the causal impact of colonialism, western imperialism and its manifold consequences, both long and short-term in legacy.

Muslims still bear the memory and scars of certain forms of cooperation and collaboration with western forces during the colonial period, either as part of a transmitted history or through the tangible and visible legacy of those decisions. Context is critical in understanding not only the impetus for such engagement but also the mechanics of colonialism and imperialism as they were imposed on Muslim societies. With the continuing processes of decolonization, there is an evolving body of scholarship that analyses and develops the theoretical constructs that explain not only western motivations and strategies, but Muslim responses to them. These studies are highly instructive in gauging why Muslims would ostensibly choose, or feel compelled, to cooperate with their oppressors and occupiers. They also provide fertile source material to examine in determining which initiatives were successful in helping the Muslim community and which had more adverse consequences than anticipated.

### Military Involvements

War has been a terrible and seemingly constant lens of engagement between the 'West' and the Islamicate. It is a continuing trespass that has arguably intensified since the end of the colonial era. In many cases, Muslim countries and communities have been pitted against one another for support, cover and justification to intervene in western ambitions for dominance and hegemony. This was a hallmark of the Cold War and has intensified in the 30 years since the battle of the superpowers concluded into first a unipolar world and now

a multipolar reality. Whether in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria or their posture against Iran, western forces have zealously co-opted regimes either to furnish material support or do their bidding by severing Muslim unity for ephemeral benefits. At the same time, subaltern realism, the recognition of asymmetric power dynamics, and existential threats to sovereignty have forced Muslim countries into taking militarized stances against fellow Muslim regimes.

Muslim communities in the 'West' have similarly been co-opted to support wars against Muslim countries by fomenting and amplifying sectarian, ethnic and nationalistic differences, ones often created by the 'West' itself. During the 2003 Iraq War, for example, Sunni and Shia Muslims were placed on opposite sides of the debate by an American administration seeking to push its military ambitions in Iraq, a fissure that has more recently been similarly exploited and deepened due to the Syrian conflict. At the same time, the Balkan wars of the 1990s were an example of European regimes depriving Bosnians of the necessary weapons to defend themselves against Serbian brutality and offset by American airstrikes against Belgrade exposed the complexity of a 'West' that is far from monolithic, and the prospect of Muslim engagement in leveraging internal division to benefit Muslims under distress.

### Counter-Extremism Measures

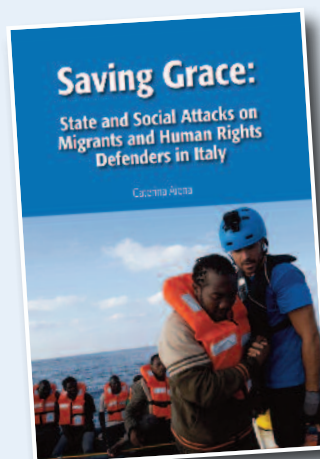
Perhaps one of the most contentious areas of Muslim engagement with the establishment has been concerning so-called counter-extremism policies. Notwithstanding the cooperation and complicity of Muslim regimes in securitizing their populations, there is a genuine cleavage in western communities as to whether Muslims should work with governments and other entities that seek to securitize and place their Muslim communities under a state of constant and perpetual surveillance. While certainly amplified since 9/11, the problematization of Muslim communi-

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ties predates 2001. In fact, it is the latest incarnation of a system of oppression that has been deployed at communities before Muslims.

Some Muslims contend, to borrow from an oft-cited adage, that if they do not have a seat at the table, they will appear on the menu, i.e. if they do not participate in the discussions about policies that target the community, those policies, especially blanket measures like anti-terror laws, will be implemented without any community pushback or input; worse, those seats will not go vacant, but will be occupied by Islamophobes or others that may be ambivalent or insensitive to Muslim concerns. This perspective is usually countered with the argument that policies will be enacted irrespective of Muslim involvement and that the Muslim participants are cynically used as window dressing and tokenism by the powers seeking cover from criticism of detachment from Muslim communities.

### The Tone of Current Debate

While the probity of engaging with the establishment may be a matter of genuine disagreement based upon the merits of likelihood of success of such engagement, the current social and political climate has caused the questioning of motives to dominate, even pre-empt debates on differences of opinion in approach and strategy. The so-called “cancel culture” that pervades much of public discourse, in person or via social media, has created a toxic environment that has consequences for individuals, organizations and movements based on perceived personal opportunism, hypocrisy, disloyalty or even treachery. Allegiance to a select group of institutional or activist acronyms has become a litmus test of being “woke” to acceptable causes, tactics and authorities within those movements; those unwilling or unable to subscribe run the risk of alienation, demonization or even adverse impact to their lives and livelihoods.

Such scrutiny extends beyond direct engagement with the establishment institutions. They may also involve association

**Some Muslims contend, to borrow from an oft-cited adage, that if they do not have a seat at the table, they will appear on the menu**

with the establishment from a position of two to three degrees of separation. This phenomenon of “guilt by association” is now a function of proxy relationships and interventions, and serves to further affect the community in negative ways. While there is certainly the existence of individuals and organizations within the Muslim community that profit, financially and politically, by positioning themselves as the self-appointed spokespersons of the community, the line of demarcation becomes blurred when Muslims are engaged within the establishment, as elected officials, career bureaucrats or as academics and those with expertise in relevant fields. While the underlying and highly problematic actions of Western engagement with Muslim communities and countries has daily repercussions for the well-being of hundreds of millions of Muslims, the intra-Muslim dynamics of policing engagement with the establishment has palpable and potentially destructive effects.

This December 11-12, the IHRC will host its annual Islamophobia conference

(virtually) on “Working with the Western(ised) Establishment: Yes, No, Maybe?” This conference is organised to address the questions posed by Muslim participation in civic and political life in the so-called ‘West,’ including countries like the UK, the US, the European Union, Australia and Canada. Of course, these are regions where Muslims reside as minority communities, oftentimes as scapegoats for pre-existing social ruptures and as targets of discrimination. But these questions are not just for Muslims living in the ‘West’ as countries that are Muslim majority or have large Muslim populations bear the burden of being institutionally ‘Westernised.’ These nations, including Nigeria, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Malaysia and others, face the reality of asymmetric power dynamics with the ‘West’ as well as with those within their respective countries that are colonized and westernised from within. The scheduled panels will address the various issues that arise on the always timely question of how much engagement with the establishment of the ‘West’ and its vestigial forces is prudent, acceptable and necessary, if at all.

For Muslims, the theological, academic, communal and strategic considerations are complex and often convoluted, intertwined, and currently creating fissures within the Islamicate that are either exploited by external forces or at the least, making any sense of Muslim pluralism, let alone unity, highly elusive. A conversation that assesses all of these factors, their parameters and offering strategies moving forward is an essential intervention for Muslim communities whose agency and viability in the societies where they reside is in constant question by the establishment of and in the ‘West.’

### Saeed Khan

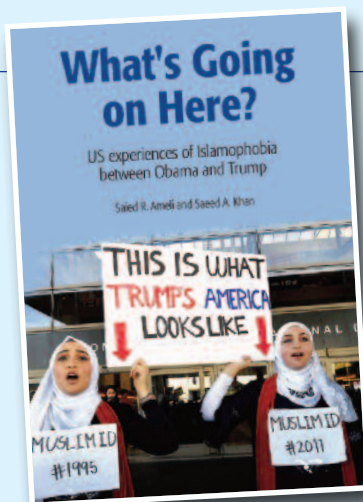
is Professor of Near East & Asian Studies & Global Studies and Director of Global Studies at Wayne State University, Detroit, USA. His most recent publications include “*What’s Going on Here? US Experiences of Islamophobia between Obama and Trump*”, co-authored with Saied R. Ameli for Islamic Human Rights Commission publications.

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## What's Going on Here?

US Experiences of Islamophobia between Obama and Trump

By Saied R. Ameli and Saeed A. Khan



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# Leading by Example: Some Notes on Contemporary Ulema

With the phenomenon of celebrity scholars proliferating in the social media age, **Salina Khan** argues that justice oriented leadership of Muslim communities needs to be properly appreciated and respected.

About a dozen years ago when I first started listening to Islamic lectures online, I would tuck my kids into bed, grab my laptop and a cup of tea and tune in to my favourite scholar. He would be sitting in a simple room somewhere in Pakistan. The video would be fuzzy and his Urdu fancy for an American-born like me. I would have to pause frequently and ask my husband to translate.

I didn't care, though. The gift of knowledge, understanding, practical guidance, and political analysis I got from Ustad Syed Jawad Naqvi's Islamic lectures—which covered everything from instructing wives to dress up for their husbands only, to urging Muslims to decolonize their minds—I never found in any of the “popular” imams. His solutions-oriented approach to understanding Islam—stripped of the corrupting forces of dynastic, cultural, and sectarian influences—was invigorating. And his emphasis on collective awakening, self-determination, and Shia-Sunni unity to propel Pakistan into prosperity reminded me of Imam Khomeini and gave me hope.

Pakistan needs a leader like this, I would think to myself but laugh at the notion because few in my circle knew him, and I didn't either, other than that he had

inspiring ideas and enlightening talks. I didn't know then that Ustad was an Ayatollah specialising in philosophy, sociology, and fiqh nor that he had studied and taught in Qum, Iran, for three decades before moving back to Pakistan. Moreover, I had no clue I would become the first American journalist to interview him and spend time with his family in Lahore, Pakistan.

Indeed, since those early days of transiency, Ustad Syed Jawad Naqvi has demonstrated that he can also walk the walk, both in his personal life and public endeavours. In 2010, with the help of a few local donors, he built from ground up a university campus on 22 acres in Lahore. It houses 1700 students in the Jamia Urwat ul Wusqa boys and Jamia Ummul Kittab girls Islamic seminaries where students receive both Islamic and secular education from grades six through twelve.

The Jamia complex is almost a city within a city with its own 40,000 capacity Masjid Bait ul Ateeq, brand new four-floor research library comprising 500,000 books, a 50-bed hospital, poly-technical school teaching plumbing, electrical work, and art, Bethat television channel, Deen ul Qayyim virtual school, an organic dairy farm, and a multi-storey residential building for teachers (where Ustad lives with his family in an apartment in the basement).

Considering Ustad's depth of Islamic knowledge, accomplishments, and political insight, one would expect Pakistan's cricket player-turned Prime Minister Imran Khan, who campaigned on making Pakistan into a model Islamic state, to seek guidance from him on how to exactly do that. Ustad Syed Jawad Naqvi openly discusses his political ideas during his lectures, Friday khutbahs and weekly *Halaat e Hazira* (Current Affairs) talks. His ideas are so powerful that American strategic think tanks such as the Hudson Institute, publications like Foreign Policy, and graduate students at universities like Tufts and Clemson keep a critical eye on Ustad's movement.

Tragically, Pakistan is not taking advantage of Ustad Syed Jawad Naqvi, often referred to as the “Khomeini of Pakistan” in some international media outfits, to implement changes at the national level. The truth is that the power structure is threatened by revolutionary scholars like Ustad who call for systemic change and not just cosmetic reforms. The existing ruling class is benefitting from the system as-is and does not want to lose those advantages. In fact, some of the powers-to-be, both inside and outside Pakistan, promote hate campaigns against him on social media to discourage people from making Ustad their religious or political leader.

## The Ascendant Qur'an: Realigning Man to the Divine Power Culture

Tafseer by Imam Muhammad al-Asi



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## Substance over celebrity

This phenomenon is widespread in the Muslim world. There are other hidden gems scattered around the globe who also preach pure Islam as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (s). These men of God, who wield the knowledge and strength to get rid of corrupt and oppressive systems, also suffer the consequences of their commitment to Islam's revolutionary principles. One has already been publicly executed.

A few:

- Imam Muhammad Al-Asi in America. Until Covid hit last year, Imam Muhammad Al-Asi had been leading Friday prayers on the sidewalk in front of the Islamic Center in Washington, D.C., for nearly four decades. That's because he and his family were kicked out of the Islamic Center, where Imam Al-Asi was the elected imam, before fajr prayers one Spring day in 1983. The mosque was shut down for three days and when it re-opened he was no longer allowed to continue in his role. Imam Al-Asi was forcibly removed from his position because the Saudi embassy disapproved of his criticisms of the Saudi regime and Zionist State as well as his support of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Since then, Imam Al-Asi has written the first tafsir of the Quran directly into English called "The Ascendant Quran: Realigning Man to the Divine Power Culture," and has had a translation of the Quran published this year.

- Shaykh Ibrahim Zakzaky in Nigeria. Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, and his wife were released from detention in July after undergoing six years of torturous imprisonment. They were arrested in 2015 after the Nigerian military brutally attacked their compound, killing at least one thousand supporters, including three of the couple's sons, and then bulldozed the Husseinia, a graveyard where members of the family and the movement were buried, the Sheikh's house and other sites. Shaykh Zakzaky's three other sons had been killed by the Nigerian army in the previous year in

an attack on one of the many Al-Quds Day processions held across the country. Shaykh Zakzaky founded the Islamic Movement with the [Funtua Declaration](#) in 1980, which opposes the oppressive rule of the secular Nigerian government and promotes an Islamic system in the country.

- Shaykh Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia. Shaykh Nimr was executed by the Saudi government in 2016 for his criticism of the oppressive Saudi monarchy. He was arrested many times over his lifetime but continued to call for elections in the country as well protest discrimination against Shias in Saudi Arabia, most of whom live in the Eastern Province. His execution was met by protests throughout the world, including Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, United Kingdom, and Australia.

## Meeting Ustad

In July this year, I had the opportunity to finally come face-to-face with Ustad Syed Jawad Naqvi, who has been such a strong influence in my life day in and day out, from personal worship to family matters to political perspectives. I was incredibly nervous but as I sat down, introduced myself, and apologized in advance for my mediocre Urdu (according to Ustad, my Urdu was fine but my accent was off!), I felt right at home with him. Partly, I'm sure, because I virtually spend every morning with him, lugging my laptop from room to room listening to his lectures as I do my housework. But more so because he listened intently to my queries and answered them honestly and completely, being careful to pause when he sensed I had a follow up question. Though we were under studio lights and in front of cameras, I felt like I was chatting with a family member or old friend where the conversation just flowed.

I was surprised to hear what a humble background Ustad came from. He was born in 1952 in Thipra (a village of mostly descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)), in the Haripur district of Khyber Pakhtunkwa, Pakistan. He was the only son of his mother, a simple woman with no formal education. He lost his father at the age

of four after which his mother struggled to provide for him and his siblings in their one-bedroom house. Ustad said she served the role of mother and father, tending crops in the small family plot and taking up whatever odd job she could find like scrubbing dishes or washing clothes to fulfil the needs of her four children.

"Her love for me was intense and known throughout the village," Ustad said. "Whenever it rained and our roof started dripping, she would run and grab me, protecting me in case the roof collapsed."

Though there was no major religious influence in his life, Ustad yearned for a formal Islamic education from a young age. His doting mother was reluctant at first but finally gave him permission to move to Islamabad for religious training after he finished tenth grade. Ustad took his mother with him when he moved later to Qum, Iran, for further studies. That's where he married and had four children, two sons and two daughters.

Since returning to Pakistan in 2010, Ustad has given more than 10,000 hours of lectures and attracted millions of Sunni and Shia Urdu-speaking followers in Pakistan, India, and Kashmir as well as around the world through numerous channels on social media, including [Islamimarkaz](#). Some of his overseas supporters have even returned to Pakistan to help with Ustad's movement. True to his words, Ustad has kept Muslim unity and inclusion front and centre in all his endeavours, from selecting nonpartisan names for his institutions to hiring Sunni and Shia teachers, to providing students books from all Islamic schools of thought. He routinely brings together top Shia and Sunni scholars, thinkers, and academicians at Wahdat e Ummat (Muslim Unity) conferences to not only fend off sectarian tension but also to find Islamic solutions to Pakistan's political, educational, and socio-economic problems. Many participating Sunni organizations, such as Jamaat-e Islami and Minhaj ul Quran, have been involved in unity efforts for decades and have recently invited Ustad to speak at their events. The mutual respect is heartwarming.



## NIGERIA APPEAL

Currently there are thousands of children, women and men suffering as the result of the violence of the Nigerian police and army. Members of the Islamic Movement have been routinely targeted, with over 1500 killed in the last three years alone. They have left behind dependents who are often destitute and shunned. Families are left without enough income for basic necessities like food and clothing, children loose out on education.

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"I consider (Ustad) my imam but today he made me his imam," said Maulana Manzar ul Haq Thanvi, grandson of esteemed Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi of the Deobandi school of thought. Ustad had asked him to lead congressional prayers at a recent Wahdat conference held at Jamia Urwat ul Wusqa.

The relationships fostered at these conferences have already germinated in joint projects beneficial to all Pakistanis, including new educational federation boards and a makeshift Covid quarantine centre with a one hundred percent recovery rate. No doubt much more can be done under the leadership of scholars like Ustad.

But the power structure has other ideas. They repress true scholars while promoting apolitical reformist-type religious figures who focus on ritualistic or personal aspects of Islam without addressing the root problems in society. For example, despite having a Shia scholar like Ustad present in his country, in 2018 Prime Minister Imran Khan invited a Shia scholar from overseas, Iraqi-born Sayed Ammar Naqshwani, to speak at the Rahmatul lil Alameen (Mercy to the Universe) Conference held annually in the country's capital of Islamabad. Naqshawani is a popular orator and was listed as one of The 500 Most Influential Muslims in 2014. At the conference he talked about things like "not wasting food" and "getting into jannah" and ended his talk by assuring the audience that their current leader is this generation's "source of Rahma (Mercy)" and **should be appreciated.**

The promotion of religious figures—who won't even rock the system let alone uproot it—is a huge detriment to the Muslim ummah, which remains misguided and unable to fulfil its true potential. These popularised scholars preach what Iran's Supreme Leader Imam Khamenei categorizes as "American Islam," a depoliticised perversion of the true faith devoid of any revolutionary sentiment. As Imam Khamenei said in 2010, "American Islam means ceremonial Islam, an Islam that is indifferent in the face of oppression."

Indeed, agencies of imperialism have no qualms publicly touting their plans to manipulate religious leadership amongst Muslims. Many of today's "rock star imams" with huge social media followings and guest speakers at all the big Islamic conventions and fundraisers in America, for example, were handpicked almost a dozen years ago by the US global policy think tank RAND Corporation. In a 2013 paper titled '**Promoting Online Voices for Countering Violent Extremism**' RAND discussed plans to more deeply infiltrate, co-opt and subvert popular sources of online Islamic information — websites, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and more — by promoting scholars willing to preach Islam in a way that aligns the political views and behaviour of Muslims with imperialist interests.

Some of RAND's recommendations:

—Build alliances with existing "rock star imams" that already have huge online followings. "US officials should identify both established and up-and-coming social media personalities and incorporate these individuals into interagency engagement strategies."

—Create new "Web sensations." This is to be done by developing leaders who have "scholarly credentials, understand and are able to work in an American context, and can speak to young American-born Mus-

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lims who may feel disenfranchised from local religious institutions."

—Disseminate political information through popular online magazines, virtual masjids, blogs and other portals that cover all aspects of Islamic life.

—Fund technology, public relations and marketing training for "Muslim influencers" at home and abroad.

While it's easy to blame governments and agencies like RAND for Islam's leadership problems, the Muslim ummah has to realize that they ultimately decide their own leadership. Each and every one of us has to make a decision as to who to turn to for guidance and who to cancel. Do we want to follow someone like Ustad who asks us to get out of our comfort zones by demanding courage, sacrifice, and commitment in the social sphere to make the world a better place? Or would we rather submit to scholars who only preach ritualistic obligations and personal growth while letting us wallow in the oppression surrounding us?

Allah calls this a "test" in the Quran and helps us understand its importance through a narration about the Bani Israel. When the Prophet Musa retired to be in communion with Allah for forty days, the

people had a choice as to who to take as their leader. One option was his brother Prophet Haroon, who had been appointed by the Prophet Musa and offers guidance in accordance with Allah's pure religion. The other is Samiri, a religious and knowledgeable person from amongst them, who preaches a way of worship that is in line with the Pharaonic system.

Allah (swt) says in the noble Book,

"Said He [Allah], 'Then [know that], verily, in your absence We have put your people to a test, and Samiri has led them astray'" (20:85).

The early Muslims underwent this examination as did every succeeding generation, including us.

Imam Ali said: "I warn you about the munafiqs [dual-loyalists]. They are misguided and they misguide as well. They have appeared in society in different colours and with different faces. Their speech is eloquent, profitable and is even a cure for pain. But their actions are like incurable diseases."

Imam Khomeini, leader of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, sheds light on how to identify the Samiris amongst us. In an open letter he wrote to Hussein Ali Montazeri, Imam Khomeini informed him that he will no longer be the imam's successor.

"Can you see what valuable services you have offered to arrogance?" Imam Khomeini asks him.

We can identify some characteristics of false leaders through this letter.

—They have poor choices in advisors or "bureau."

—They are "gullible" and "provoked easily."

—They ridicule scholars truly committed to Islam.

—They are the "mouthpiece" of the oppressors.

One person who took this test and insha-Allah passed it is Agha Syed Arif Rizvi, who recently moved back to Pakistan from the United Kingdom to support Ustad Syed Jawad Naqvi's movement and now supervises the Jamia's hospital, media and IT.

"After Iqbal, God has once again given us a blessing [in the form of Ustad Syed Jawad Naqvi]," according to Agha Rizvi. "If we don't respect and value him while he is among us, who knows how many centuries we will suffer that loss."

"One thing is for sure," Rizvi added. "God will bring forth a nation that will appreciate him."

## Salina Khan

is a reporter for the Islamic movement magazine *Crescent International* and also blogs at [www.thepurificationists.blogspot.com](http://www.thepurificationists.blogspot.com) Previously, she worked as a business travel reporter at *USA Today*. She has a masters degree from Northwestern University and lives in the U.S with her husband and three children. This article is adapted from a previously published article in *Crescent International*.



# The Islamic Sleeping Giant and the Arena of Resistance

**João Silva Jordão** argues that the problems Muslim face, real or perceived, are in fact a point of radical departure that bodes well for the future of Islam as a model for social change and justice.

## The Islamic Sleeping Giant

Muslims are being butchered and oppressed worldwide. The ummah is divided and demotivated. In some countries, many children raised in Muslim families are abandoning the religion as they grow up to become adults who no longer see Islam as a source of inspiration for their daily lives. Some just want to distance themselves from Islam so as to avoid any negative treatment and the potential damage to their social status and reputation that being a Muslim may result in. Islam is often depicted as being backwards and a potential stumbling block to the development and evolution of the nations who adopt it. Above all, Islam has come to be associated with 'Terrorism'.

But despite all of this, or perhaps because of this, Islam is also often seen as the ideology with the highest potential in the world today.

With the so-called War on Terror, the United States Federal Government and its allies targeted Muslims and Islam on several levels, with the West mobilizing its military, media and academia so as to try to demean and undermine the position of Islam in the world. Regardless of your view of what really happened on September 11, 2001 it is undeniable that the now infamous key foreign policy document 'Rebuilding America's Defenses' by the Project for a New American Century think-tank was prescient in saying that, "Further, the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event – like a new Pearl Harbor". September 11 was that "new Pearl Harbor". And Muslims were blamed. And for a relatively short period of time, the US really did 'rebuild its defenses' allegedly so as to stave off the 'terrorist threat', but in doing so, also reasserting its military dominance globally.

It may even seem like the US military needed someone to bully so as to reassert its dominance in the world, and that someone, somewhere, chose to go pick on the Muslims. And if someone did really make that choice, it probably was, in hindsight, a terrible choice.

What could at first seem like a very

achievable target, in the form of a very vulnerable victim, turned out to be a much more troublesome opponent than one would have thought.

Instead of subduing Muslims and defeating Islam, the enemies of Islam seem to have ended up unwittingly awakening a sleeping giant of unimaginable potential. In addition to strengthening the attachment of existing Muslims to their religion, the 'War on Terror' also paradoxically resulted in higher rates of non-Muslims converting to Islam and increased the interest and even fascination that the general non-Islamic population has towards Islam.

As Muslims we must take this in our stride and unapologetically affirm ourselves as an emergent, global force within the Arena of Resistance (Silva Jordão, 2021)- this also means that we will have to be less shy in debating, competing and eventually coming into some degree of conflict against other subversive forces, such as New Age beliefs, Communism and the left in general.

## The Beginning of History

Islam's unexpected emergence as the main engine of global political resistance is clear for everyone to see. Many ideologies and religions have temporarily had this opportunity or held this title in the past. But globalization and its dynamics mean that Islam has risen to the position of prime alternative ideological force at a perfect time, as it now can potentially emerge as a truly global force of resistance and revolution. Modernity is increasingly weakening borders and physical limitations that previously held back the reach that any given ideology could have. This could lead to a paradoxical situation whereby Islam, usually seen as being technologically backwards, could be in the best position to take advantage of modern media and communication structures and the tremendous capacity and potential that they carry.

The rise of global media means that stories can and are now told at a global level. Key events have taken on a new dimension of theatricality insofar as single events can often take on a larger importance in their ability to tell stories, change perspectives

and have geopolitical impacts rather than being confined to their own insular meaning and importance. And Muslims seem to have been pushed into playing the role of the villain in this new global play. The world, for the first time in history, has truly become a stage, and there are wheels in motion to ensure that it is Muslims that are cast against their own will to play the role of the villain. This role seems, to the untrained eye, to be a wholly undesirable one... But is it really?

At best, it is an uncomfortable role to play. At worst, it costs us our very lives.

But it is not without its wonders and opportunities. But before we can fully appreciate and take advantage of the opportunities that this situation brings, we must make some difficult observations and decisions.

## Is Islam an Arab Religion?

Islam is being held back by many factors, and one that is not often mentioned is that it is still overly associated with Arabic peoples and cultures. This facilitates its portrayal as a *foreign* agent in the West, but not only, and perhaps most importantly it limits its potential as an *ideologically transformative* force rather than something that is associated with the expansion of one culture. It also prevents it from acting as a truly *global* religion and ideology that is not held back by borders or the presence of different cultures, languages and customs. And it *prevents* a lot of non-Muslims from even *considering* converting to it as converting to Islam is still all too often seen as an act of betrayal of one's culture and people.

Strategic measures and programs must be adopted to change people's perspective worldwide, targeting Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to counter this. *The strategic importance of this particular task will become clearer as this piece develops.* Furthermore, it is completely in line with Islam's vision of itself as a universalist religion that is meant to be of benefit to everyone regardless of culture or ethnicity.

*In the age of globalization, Islam's universal appeal and ambition is an asset that*

*is being all too often tragically overlooked by Muslims themselves.*

### Christianity was once considered an exotic, peculiar, foreign and detestable religion in the West too

Tacitus' commentary on Christians and their troubles at the hands of Nero is most often used as an illustration of early Christians' plight and horrible persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. Tacitus allegedly said of the Christians that: "Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a *class hated for their abominations*, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a *most mischievous superstition*, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things *hideous and shameful* from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, *as of hatred against mankind*" (Tacitus, 1852, originally written in 62-65 A.D.) But there are other fascinating elements that can be easily identified in this short quote, the first being the decidedly negative adjectives that Tacitus uses to describe early Christians, but also the very obvious attempt to try to make them out to be the product of the nefarious influence of foreign ideologies. The parallels between how Tacitus described early Christians as a disruptive, foreign, detestable and unwelcome influence and how many mainstream media and political apparatuses throughout the world try to depict Islam are painfully obvious. It is also painfully obvious that this hatred and attempt to depict Christianity along the lines of an unwanted foreign ideology did not in any way stop Christianity from becoming dominant within the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire itself came to adopt, or at the very least partially usurp, the Christian religion so as to then go on to claim it as its own.

Therefore, in hindsight, the depiction of early Christians as detestable foreign agents and ultimately, the horrendous persecution that Christians suffered was only a prelude to a long-lasting period of near-global hegemony, to the point where the three-century long ordeal that Christians suffered at the hands of the Roman Empire is now a detail of history unknown to many, and at times is not even mentioned at all, whilst even on occasion being overlooked by even some of the most erudite contemporary Christians. Christians, in particular Catholics, struggle to name Christians that were persecuted in these troubled times other than those made famous by their

presence in Biblical texts. Try to mention the name 'Perpetua' to even the most academically proficient Catholic and you will generally receive a look of bafflement. And yet her botched public execution played an incredibly important role in the rise of Christianity to the very top of the plethora of cults, religions and subversive movements that were active at that time in the Roman Empire, with this multitude of groups being referred to indirectly in Tacitus' previously mentioned quote.

What set Christianity up for millennia of dominance was its ability to stand out, in the very heart of Rome (the most powerful empire of the time) from every other cult and resistance movement. Christianity eventually became the principal standard-bearer for the disenfranchised and oppressed peoples of the Empire.

**...the wide scale of Muslims' oppression is directly proportional to their potential as a force of global resistance...**

The Empire that so detested Christians was brought to its knees by Christians' glorious resistance and faith- so much so that it ended up converting to it, though this 'conversion' is of course not without its particular complexities and paradoxes. Christians went from the catacombs to the palaces, and the system that oppressed it quickly became the vehicle that it then used to generate a lengthy period of virtual global dominion. *Because of this turn of events, Christianity stands to this day as the most powerful and influential revolutionary movement of all time, and is still, officially, the largest religion in the world.*

Islam must, and will naturally and inevitably, follow a similar route.

The difference is that if Islam follows a similar pattern, its eventual rise from the catacombs to the palaces will be seen by everyone, and will represent a much more global event than what was possible in Roman antiquity. This means that its rise as the prime force of resistance will possibly not only be felt in the West, but globally, and will be witnessed globally also. Whereas Christianity used the Empire's roads to spread, Islam has more than roads- it has highways, airports and perhaps most importantly, mass media and the increasingly ubiquitous reach of the Internet.

It must also be noted that Muslims are not only oppressed in the West, but also

within its three main geopolitical rivals- Russia, India and China. And though one should certainly not seek to augment nor much less to celebrate Muslims' oppression globally, we must still not ignore the possibility that *the wide scale of Muslims' oppression is directly proportional to their potential as a force of global resistance as well as the possibility that Islam may then come to be seen as a legitimate political alternative to the present system.*

### Muslims Leaving Islam

However, some Muslims are leaving Islam. As a convert who has worked with refugees, I see this first-hand, but also get to see some dynamics that others do not have the privilege of witnessing. I have often witnessed how many 'Muslims' stop practising Islam, and sometimes stop identifying as Muslims, as soon as the influence of state or family is removed. This means that we can now move into a future where more and more Muslims identify as such not because they are socially forced into it, but because they actually believe. The current predicaments could well reduce the Islamic constituency, but it might also make it a more motivated, genuine one. The Internet plays a part in disseminating a buffet-like array of ideologies and ideas that people can access and adopt at will. The Internet, and global media at large, will definitely play a role in making many Muslims leave Islam... But it will naturally also become the vehicle through which many more non-Muslims come to love and adopt it.

The rise of the Internet therefore also means that anyone, anywhere can find out about Islam, and adopt it. What this means is that we have the very real possibility of having a slightly reconfigured contingent that is not marked by Islamic nations and non-Islamic nations, but rather, as a global group of loosely affiliated people who adhere to an ideology, with a more geographically fractured disposition. Thus this fractured disposition of ideologies is not necessarily a component of Islam, but rather the pattern that we can predict all ideologies will soon follow, much more so because of the characteristics of modernity rather than because of the inherent qualities of the ideologies themselves.

### Preparing Muslims for an Urban, Global Future

If we don't make good use of global mediums of communication, most importantly, the Internet, our revolutionary potential will be greatly diminished, and perhaps even extinguished. *This means that we simply cannot accept any attempts at censorship, whether it be external, or internal, and for this we must leverage our huge presence in the marketplace, amongst other things.* Muslim communities are often lacking in vision and can often be overly con-

servative, which makes them deficient in their capacity for invention and participation in ideological debates, and sometimes also results in an incapacity to use news tools and technologies to their advantage. The capacity for the production of a truly Islamic culture, that is, a culture that serves as the conduit for Islamic principles, rather than superficially, loosely-Islamic themed cultural output (and this is quite an important distinction) has been increased, but needs to advance at a much faster pace. Internal forces of obscurantism and irrational conservatism must be sidelined and the more irreverent, tech-savvy sections of our youth have to be given the space they need to work. This will inevitably lead to conflict and a certain reconfiguration of power relations within Islamic communities, but it remains absolutely necessary. *If this results in a slight increase in inter-generational conflict, so be it- it is preferable to cultural insignificance and the certain defeat this will bring upon Islam as a whole.*

## The Arena of Contestation

For every action, there is a reaction. For all power, there is counter-power. And for all States and systems, there is an Arena of Resistance (for a more extensive set of explanations and analogies relating to this concept, see Silva Jordão, 2021). It is a widely-held fallacy that political struggles act along binary configurations whereby 'the noble oppressed people' fight against 'the Evil power'- however, *the ability to contest power is power in and of itself*. It follows naturally, and this is easily verifiable, that those who are oppressed and/or opposed to political power fight each other more than they actually fight the powers that be, not least because they are gathered in the Arena where they oppose the system, but often for different reasons, with different ideologies, and ultimately with completely different

objectives. *It is for this reason that civil wars often follow revolutions- once the revolution is complete, these all too-often cynical, opportunistic alliances which were temporarily necessary in order to defeat a powerful enemy are broken- the struggle to see who takes the reins of power then becomes virtually inevitable.*

The capacity of Muslims to build their own narrative and use their own concepts within the Arena of Resistance, particularly in the West, is fairly limited. This has to change. The agency of the Left has been, whether intentionally or not, particularly perverse in this regard. We must reject any attempt to be dragged into guilt-trips and false debts just because the political Left *seems* like it is our ally. Furthermore, the Left is undergoing a painful, vertiginous and sometimes pathetic period of ideological and cultural degeneration, which in turn is leading to a series of embarrassing defeats. As if we Muslims didn't have enough problems of our own, we are often being dragged into these defeats, instrumentalized and manipulated by both Left and Right spectrums of the Western political apparatus, whilst obtaining little to no political gain.

We must stop being politically, naive and cowardly and start being strategic about our role and potential within the Arena of Resistance. On a final note, most revolutionary political forces of the past and present had and have to work very, very hard in order to take up favourable positions within the Arena of Resistance. The fraudulent and unjust "War on Terror" has practically handed the envious mantle of prime force of political resistance to a community that clearly, for the most part, did not want it, and perhaps still does not want it- Muslims. But the incessant attempts to fight Islam worldwide seem to have no end in sight- and so too there is no end in sight to its ability to assert itself as the prime

global alternative political and religious force.

Should we beg on our knees for our oppressor's mercy, perhaps appealing to their good conscience? Or should we perhaps accept our role as second-class citizens, to be ridiculed, beaten, robbed, maimed, killed and bombed whenever our oppressors see fit?

That will clearly not happen. Islam looks like it is more than capable of holding its own in the face of what may be its toughest challenge yet.

The irony of this all is that Islam could very well have been destined to go through a period of agonizing degeneration and disaggregation starting precisely in and around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Instead, someone particularly foolish chose to make Islam into an enemy, completely misunderstanding the nature of Islam, and in doing so, seems to have unwittingly awakened a sleeping giant.

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## João Silva Jordão

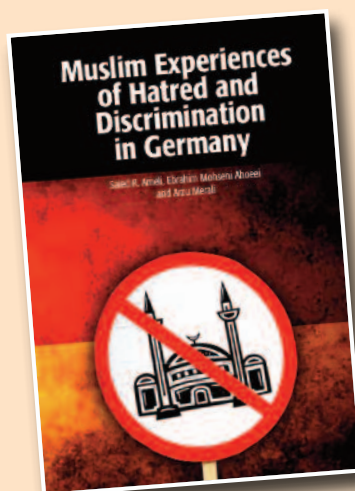
is a Muslim convert and PhD candidate in Urbanism as well as a political activist usually based in Lisbon.

## NEW PUBLICATION

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## Hybrid War and Solidarity: Iran and Venezuela in the Context of Imperialist Aggression

Both Iran and Venezuela have been the subject of unprecedented attacks from the US in the form of sanctions, aggressions (including military) and propaganda. Despite this both revolutionary countries have not only survived but become the key players in the axes of resistance in their regions and models of solidarity for a nascent South at the end of the American Empire, argues **Ramón Grosfoguel**.

It is really interesting to see how US imperialism deploys very similar tactics to destroy the Venezuelan Bolivarian revolution and the Iranian Islamic revolution, by a combination of strategies known as hybrid war or fourth generation war. This is a kind of strategy to weaken the revolutions, expecting people from within those countries to rebel against their government, by means of a combination of economic sabotage policies.

### The How

These strategies include, firstly trying to affect the sale of oil from both of these oil producing countries. In doing so they are [trying to stop or restrict the oil revenues](#). Secondly there is an effort to block their access to loans in the international arena, with US power used to curtail or block access to international organisations like the [IMF and World Bank](#) and the

[SWIFT wire service](#). The third one is to blockade them from trade with many countries, by applying sanctions on anyone who trades with them, and by sanctioning [individuals and businesses](#) who trade with those countries. The fourth prong is to devalue the currency of these countries thereby creating hyperinflation. Therefore, prices soar and this has the effect of limiting imports, because their access to hard currencies becomes almost impossible and the currency of the country becomes almost worthless. The imperialist manufacture of hyperinflation affects people's everyday lives including access to medicine, food, and products of primary necessity. Fifthly, they use propaganda or 'information warfare' to render these governments and political forces as criminals or terrorists. Accusations made by Donald Trump against President Maduro as being a drug trafficker or against the late General Soleimani of Iran as a terrorist are prime

examples of this.

Richard Nephew, one of the architects of the Obama sanctions regime policy vis a vis Iran, has [openly boasted](#) in his book 'The Art of Sanctions' about how he led the process to reduce Iran's oil revenue during the 2012 JCPOA negotiations, pushing Iran's hitherto growing economy into a sudden contraction, causing the value of its currency to tumble. He further boasted about causing the rise of food prices, notably the trebling of the price of chicken. He has spoken openly on public platforms, as noted by Max Blumenthal, of the policy of trying to drive up unemployment as a means of pushing for regime change:

While discussing his book, "The Art of Sanctions," @richardmnephew boasted with a wide grin that the economic warfare tactics he devised drove up unemployment rates in Iran.

### ON OFFER

#### Political Islamophobia at American Policy Institutes: **Battling the Power of Islamic Resistance**

by Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria

Available from [shop.ihrc.org](http://shop.ihrc.org)  
and [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk).



Looking at the RAND corporation, the Brookings Institute and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Saghaye-Biria overviews these three think tanks' obsession with Islam and Muslims since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. She discusses the implications for Muslim societies of the direction of travel proposed.

**Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria**

is an Assistant Professor at  
University of Tehran, Faculty of Islamic  
Knowledge and Thought.

Nephew was just appointed as Biden's deputy Iran envoy.

My full story here:  
<https://t.co/FWTYO7Ab4G>  
[pic.twitter.com/m5431czF8i](https://pic.twitter.com/m5431czF8i)  
 — Max Blumenthal  
 (@MaxBlumenthal)

These are strategies employed against governments that US imperialism wants to topple. Usually, this is done prior to a military intervention, or as a precursor to a counter revolution in those countries with the support of many external forces. The aim is to get the peoples of these countries confused about the cause of their problems, so that they immediately begin to blame the government for what they are suffering, instead of seeing the broader picture, which is that the economy is being destroyed by the “invisible” hand of imperialism.

The attempt to install Juan Guaidó as unelected President of Venezuela in early 2019, after Nicolás Maduro won the 2018 Presidential election is a case in point. Long running sanctions against Venezuela caused, among other things, shortages of food and other daily supplies, disrupting healthcare and causing turmoil in the country. During this period US imperialism attempted to provoke the overthrow of the government internally by recognising Guaidó as the President of Venezuela thus giving him access to Venezuelan resources that had been previously seized by the US government as part of its economic sabotage of the Venezuelan revolution. Guaidó was then sent back to Venezuela in the hope he could rally enough support to overthrow the government. Various military incidents on the border with Venezuela and Columbia, huge pressure not just from the US but its allies in the UK, Israel and EU, as well as internal machinations failed to achieve the desired result. As many observers including [Ahmed Kaballo](#) and [Max Blumenthal](#) noted, the Venezuelan government re-

tained its popularity and legitimacy, particularly amongst the poorest in society who were in fact suffering the most from the various economic attacks orchestrated by the US. [Myself](#) and Sandew Hira reported from Venezuela in early 2019 on this failure.

The issue of ongoing asset seizure is a major part of this policy. In the case of both countries the US and many other Westernised countries have seized assets of both countries that were deposited in banks abroad. According to Matt Pearce at the LA Time, [in the case of Iran](#):

“The result is that Iran has been “almost completely isolated from the international financial system,” David S. Cohen, former Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, told Congress last year.

“Iran lost access to tens of billions of dollars worth of funds in foreign banks. Exactly how much money was locked up is hard to pin down. Some American experts believe it reached more than \$100 billion — enough, Cohen noted, to limit Iran’s ability to stabilize its currency and conduct foreign trade.”

This money is a combination of assets frozen at the time of the revolution in 1979, and money earned from oil revenue under the government of the Islamic Revolution prior to the toughening of sanctions in recent years. It also includes assets seized as a result of Iran specific laws enacted in the US, interference in judicial processes by US administrations, using in effect that fifth pillar of hybrid war – propaganda and misinformation – to claim that Iran is a ‘terrorist’ threat and its assets can be seized in pre-emptive punitive measures (see the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012) or in payment of damages in cases where spurious claims of Iranian involvement have

been made (see *Bank Markazi v. Peterson*, 2016).

Venezuela, has been similarly targeted. In 2019, the Trump administration froze \$342 million, passing much of it to Guaidó. [Speaking that year](#) Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs Jorge Arreaza stated that some \$5 billion of Venezuelan assets were frozen in foreign accounts, and the Minister of Communication and Information Jorge Rodríguez stated that Washington has stolen more than \$30 billion from the country’s accounts from foreign banks recently.

## The Why

In the case of Venezuela and Iran the agenda is very clear, which is above all else to recover the oilfields from these two countries. These oilfields were in the past in the hands of western – especially US – international oil companies. The other reason is to create an example for the rest of the respective regions – in the case of Venezuela this means Latin America and with regard to Iran this means West Asia/Middle East/South Asia. It is like a message to the rest of the countries that if you are anti-imperialist and follow this route, this is what will happen to you. If you look carefully, both the Venezuelan and Iranian cases are anti-imperialist revolutions that put their country’s resources in the hands of the people. In the case of Iran they nationalised the oilfields, and in the case of Venezuela they nationalised the royalties of oil production. These countries put their revenues back into education, health and welfare for the people. They set a ‘bad’ example for the rest of the region, so the next thing you have is US imperialist intervention to destroy these countries.

With Iran, if you recall within a year or so of the revolution in 1979, US imperialism organized a war of aggression by a neighbouring country led by what was at that time the [CIA’s man in Iraq](#), Saddam Hussain. He was using weapons of mass destruction, in [particular chemical](#)



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weapons, every single day against Iran for a total of eight years between 1980-1988: destroying the economy, destroying the country in order to give an example to the rest of the region.

The Persian Gulf is a place with many monarchies. These monarchies are well known to be very oppressive against their own people, and their oil fields are in the hands of US transnational corporations. So, for the Iranians to nationalise oilfields set a very bad precedent for the rest of the region and required the US to get involved. This involved sanctions and aggressions including many military aggressions over the years against Iran. This also includes repeated threats of invasion, and aggressions and incidents like the killing of General Soleimani.

### The Now

Despite these overwhelming aggressions, Iran has managed to carry on the resistance. This resistance includes organising the resistance against the takfiris – the so-called Islamist fundamentalist groups – organised by the [USA](#), the [Zionists](#) and Saudi Arabia to destroy governments and to destroy the countries opposing the US. They have been successful in organising an axis of resistance from Lebanon to Syria to Iraq, and now have been able to defeat these aggressions. What people generally don't know is that the people on the ground fighting these groups e.g. against Daesh and Al-Qaeda, the people putting their blood on the ground were the Iranian revolutionaries alongside the revolutionaries of all the countries that Iran organised. So, if there has been a country fighting terrorism in the region and has been successful in defeating these terrorist groups, it is Iran and its allies in the region. This is important to emphasise because the war has been presented upside down, with Iran portrayed as a source of terrorism because of its critique and criticism of Zionism. Iran is paying a heavy price for its criticism of the genocide against the Palestinian people by the Israeli state, and their moral and other support for Palestinian resistance. Today, the only country that has been materially and in principle in solidarity with the Palestinians, like no other country, is Iran. Iran is fighting imperialism, it is fighting the representatives of colonialism in the region, that is, the Israeli racist state. While Israel is working for the imperialist system, Iran has been a successful example of resistance against imperialism for more than 40 years.

We know very well that the [regional terrorists](#) such as Al-Nusra and ISIS, were organised by US imperialism, with the active support of Israel and Saudi Arabia to destroy governments that they don't like. Iran has been at the centre of organizing the resistance against these imperialist aggressions using terrorist mercenaries disguised as Islamists to fight proxy wars for

the empire.

With Venezuela we can also see that the resistance to US imperialism has been very strong, in particular with democratic elections. We can see that the type of regimes that the US was supporting in Iran for many years was a dictatorship. The Iranian revolution installed a democratic government there, which elects its parliament and its President. The US does not of course want to recognise that there is democracy in Iran. It is of course based on an Islamic constitution. Nevertheless, it is still a democratic government where they have elections for representatives, a president, Parliament and an electoral democratic process that works. If you com-

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pare this to US democracy, you can see that the US has a plutocracy, where in order to be elected candidates either have to be very rich or have millions of dollars in support from corporations. It is clear that in Iran this doesn't exist. In Iran you have more than 100 candidates wishing to be considered for the position of president. The time given in the press and the media is equal for everyone and nobody can be financed by corporations to get elected. This is why many times in Iran you have people who are elected that are not rich. The process of the election allows for a multiplicity of candidates, equal access to media time, meaning that there is some level of equal opportunities in the presidential process.

Compare this to Western plutocracies,

where corporations finance the candidates that support their agendas. The ones that are elected are frequently those successful candidates who win corporate support. This puts into question what it is that democracy actually needs today. Liberal democracy is not working. On the contrary, it has been corrupted by transnational corporations. Basically, in Western plutocracies, all you are doing is choosing between different candidates already committed to the agendas of different corporations and financial capital.

Compare this to Venezuela. There have been 26 democratic elections in Venezuela since 1998. I don't think there has been another country in the world that has had so many democratic elections in that period of time. And the Bolivarian Revolutionary parties have won 24 of the 26 elections. Why is it that people keep voting for them? It is obvious to the people that the agenda of the opposition has been financed by the US to sabotage the economy and everything else. The people know what is coming, namely repression. Moreover, the people know that if the pro-US opposition win the elections, they will subordinate the country to US interests – oil, gold, minerals, water and many other resources. This is why US imperialism is so interested in overthrowing Maduro and the Bolivarian government. They even tried to kill President Maduro in 2018. In this attempt, a drone was sent to target him while he was giving a public speech but the attempt failed. He remains under threat of being killed by US imperialism.

Alongside these aggressions we have Colombia becoming the Israel of Latin America. We see the US using its territory for military bases and as a base to commit military aggressions in the region against neighbouring countries and particularly against Venezuela.

### Solidarity

Therefore when you look at the countries of Iran and Venezuela, you can see that there are many similarities in the way that this hybrid or fourth generation war is being deployed by the US. What is amazing is the solidarity between these two countries. We need to call attention to the fact that despite all the difficulties and with high risk, [Iran sent from the Persian Gulf](#) through the Atlantic to the Caribbean waters, several ships full of resources for Venezuela. Not only did Iran help to bring some much needed material for [the everyday lives](#) of Venezuelan people, but it also helped to bring the Venezuelan oilfields back into production by fixing some of the technical difficulties that had interrupted oil production due to the blocking of access to technology and materials by the US. It is crucial support, as production has dropped to very low levels in Venezuela due to the blockade and sanctions on the country causing an economic depression and lack of access to machine parts in the



international market. Iran has been very strong in its solidarity with Venezuela sending boats full of food, tools, technological material and resources.

## The failure of the Westernised Left

Of course, we can make criticisms of these anti-imperialist governments. They are not perfect and have all sorts of problems. However, that does not mean that whatever criticisms we have should be used as destructive criticisms. We do not need more criticism of the kind engineered in the international press to bring these governments down. It is unfortunate what has happened in certain parts of the left today. The Westernised left looks at Iran and Venezuela and just reproduces the imperialist discourses on these countries. They do so in a very opportunistic way to win votes as otherwise any support they may show will entail them having to make public arguments in support of those anti-imperialist governments. This opportunism therefore requires them to reproduce the hegemonic discourse and rhetoric in order to be or remain part of the imperialist hegemonic system.

It is really unfortunate that a huge part of the left today is taking the side of imperialism in the cases of Iran and Venezuela. This bankrupt left is arguably now part of the right by way of taking up these positions. This is the challenge for the left. They could make an important contribution in solidarity with these countries, standing up to the aggressions that are coming from the West and US imperialism. They do not even have to support the governments per se but clearly they can support the people of these countries, their desire for independence, their aspirations, and their resistance against US imperialism and

**This bankrupt left is arguably now part of the right by way of taking up these positions. This is the challenge for the left.**

aggression.

Intellectuals, media platforms, academics and politicians both inside and outside these countries have been removed from social media platforms and subjected to different types of ostracism, including arrests and harassment in the US and other allied countries. The left has not shown any effective solidarity or support for those affected by this type of censorship.

Despite these obstacles you see solidarity between Iran towards Venezuela and vice versa. You also see solidarity from Venezuela for other movements in Latin America. You can see a process of resistance right now in Latin America which is very important. Just as you have an axis of resistance led by Iran in West Asia and the region, you can arguably say there is an axis of resistance in Latin America led by Venezuela.

An example of this is the end of the Lima Cartel against Venezuela. Peru was formally part of the coalition of countries (Lima Cartel) that were supported by and

supporting the US particularly in its aggression against Venezuela. This has now been dissipated as a result of elections which returned a government in Peru that is in support of progressive causes and movements, including indigenous people and peasants. Pedro Castillo won the Presidential elections in June 2021 and so the Lima Cartel against Venezuela is now dead. They are not involved in this game to form part of the squad cartel against Venezuela. As a result of this, we can argue that the US military aggression and diplomatic aggression against Venezuela has failed. However, there remains an economic aggression because of the US's role in the flow of financial capital throughout the world. Any sanctions that the US imposes on a country, in this case both Iran and Venezuela, has the effect of scaring off any company or other countries for fear of being economically penalised. At the level of the superpowers of the world, there is also an internal conflict that makes them take sides with some of these anti-imperialist governments such as Iran and Venezuela. This creates a positive environment for these countries to break the blockade created by US imperialism. In the case of Iran, for example, we can see how China agreed a huge trading pact that will last many decades and work to break the US blockade against Iran.

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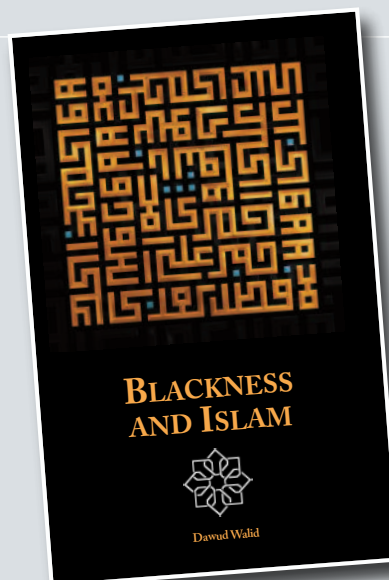
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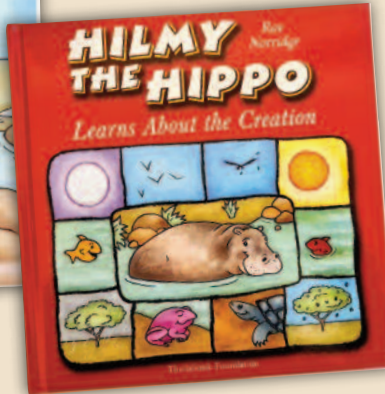
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