

Gideon Rachman and the Financial Times On “Suspicion and Hatred of the Muslim World”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Gideon Rachman, a columnist for the *Financial Times*, is horrified at the “suspicion and hatred” of the Muslim world that, he claims, has not abated since September 11, 2001. Under the title “[Islamophobia and the new clash of civilisations](#),” he delivered himself of some thoughts on how the “Muslim and non-Muslim worlds are becoming increasingly intolerant of each other.”

Rachman’s use of the word “Islamophobia,” rather than the correct Islamocriticism, already alerts us that he believes that antipathy toward Islam must surely be the result of a

“phobia,” that is, an irrational fear of Islam, when many of us beg to differ, and believe that the observable behavior of Muslims today, the past 1,400 years of Jihad, and the texts of Islam – Qur’an and Hadith – certainly give rise to a rational fear of Islam. Rachman does not admit of this possibility.

It is now getting on for 20 years since the attacks on New York and Washington of September 11 2001, and the idea that international politics should be organised around a “war on terror” is no longer fashionable. But suspicion and hatred of the Muslim world, inflamed by 9/11, has not faded with the passage of time. On the contrary, Islamophobia, as it is often called, is now a central part of politics in most of the world’s major power centres – from the US to the EU, China to India.

Here again, Rachman uncritically uses the word “Islamophobia” – which is now, he claims, “a central part of politics in most of the world’s major power centers.” He does not offer evidence that there is an irrational fear and hatred of Islam; he merely assumes that such fear and hatred must perforce be irrational. In the US, and even more in the EU, for the first time large groups of Muslims are now present. There are now 3.5 million Muslims in the U.S. and 44 million Muslims throughout Europe. Especially in Europe, these Muslim immigrants have displayed little desire to integrate into the larger society, and are the source of much disruption, mayhem, and crime in the countries they now live in. Rachman makes no mention of the rates of criminality of Muslims all over Europe, which are much higher than those of either the indigenous population or of other, non-Muslim immigrants. Nor does he mention the value, and variety, of the benefits that Muslim migrants have managed everywhere to exact from the generous European welfare states, including free or highly subsidized housing, free medical care, free education, family allowances that rise according to the number of children. He also fails to mention the very high rates of unemployment

among Muslim migrants, which reflects two things: most of the Muslim migrants are ill-prepared for employment in an advanced economy, and many of them are not eager to work when they can – when unemployed – receive so many benefits.

At the same time, countries that were once seen as strongholds of moderate Islam – in particular Turkey, Indonesia and Pakistan – are witnessing a rise in radical Islamism. The overall picture is that both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds are becoming increasingly intolerant in their attitudes towards each other, with politicians more and more inclined to pander to fear-driven views of the world.

When was Pakistan ever a “stronghold of moderate Islam”? Only during the first year of its existence, under the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who served as Governor-General from 1947 to 1948. Since Jinnah’s time, the Pakistani government has been uncompromisingly Islamic. One indication of this is how non-Muslims have been treated. Because of persecution, the percentage of Hindus in the general population has steadily decreased, from 12.9% in 1951 to 1.6% today. Christians have registered a drop to the same level, 1.6%, today, but figures for earlier years are not available. Christians have clearly suffered greatly, as the case of Asia Bibi shows. A despairing John Joseph, the Archbishop of Faisalabad, committed suicide in 1998, in order to bring attention to the persecution of Christians in Pakistan. The mistreatment of Hindus and Christians in Pakistan began long before any display of anti-Islam animus in the West.

As for Turkey, its re-islamization did not begin with Erdogan, though he has continued, and sped up, a policy that had begun under one of his predecessors, Necmettin Erbakan, in 1996-97. It thus could not have been a “response” to the Western “war on terror” that began after 9/11.

In Indonesia, the current Prime Minister, Joko Widodo, insists

that Indonesia remains “moderate” in its Islam, while acknowledging the appearance of more devout, less tolerant Muslims at rallies. Religious and political tensions spiraled at the end of last year when Islamists led protests by hundreds of thousands in Jakarta against the capital’s then governor, Ahok, an ethnic Chinese Christian who was charged with insulting the Koran. Will the “moderates” prevail, with Widodo, who remains the President, or will the Islamists take over ? Gideon Rachman assumes that this “rise in Islamism” is a response to the growing Western antipathy to Islam after 9/11. But in two of the three countries he cites, Pakistan and Turkey, the greater role for Islam began years before the “war on terror” in the West. In Indonesia, the insistence on a greater role for Islam appears to have been a response not to Westerners, but rather to Muslims like Widodo, who appear to some Muslims to be dangerously sympathetic to non-Muslims, such as the Christian former governor of Jakarta, Ahok.

The most startling recent development has been China’s decision to imprison more than 1m Uighur Muslims in the northwestern province of Xinjiang in mass internment camps, in an effort to “re-educate” them. This policy seems to be a wildly exaggerated response to a relatively minor threat of domestic terrorism, combined with the Communist party’s increasing paranoia about social, political and regional conformity. The internment process has been unfolding since early 2017 and is belatedly attracting international condemnation. A UN human-rights panel has called on China to release illegally detained Uighurs. And, this month, Turkey became the first major Muslim nation officially to condemn Beijing’s policy towards the community.

The outside world’s slowness to respond to China’s actions in Xinjiang stems partly from a reluctance to antagonise the emerging superpower. But it may also reflect an increasingly hostile attitude to Muslim minorities in other parts of the world.

For the Chinese, the Uighurs are a threat to the Chinese state not just because, as Muslims, they do not subscribe to the official atheism of the Communist Party, but because they could, some fear, potentially attempt to make Xinjiang independent, and that region is very rich in mineral resources. Gideon Rachman says that the “outside world” has been largely indifferent to the re-education camps for Uighurs because of an “increasingly hostile attitude to Muslim minorities.”

This is nonsense. The U.S. has roundly condemned China’s re-education camps for Uighurs. So has the E.U. What’s more, at the U.N., the U.K., the U.S., the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Norway, Germany and Belgium have asked about Xinjiang in questions submitted for China ahead of the process known as the universal periodic review. What Rachman should have focused on is the more deplorable silence of Muslim states. Why has only one Muslim state, Turkey, finally criticized the Chinese government? Is Turkey the exception because the the Uighurs are, ethnically, a Turkic people? And why doesn’t Rachman note the silence of the 56 Muslim-majority states – all except Turkey – on the re-education camps for Uighurs? That silence certainly couldn’t “reflect an increasingly hostile attitude to Muslim minorities,” as Rachman claims. And why doesn’t Rachman admit that it was the Western powers, with the U.S. in the lead, that first protested the mistreatment of the Uighurs? He doesn’t mention it because it wouldn’t fit his claims of an “increasingly hostile attitude to Muslim minorities” in the West.

India, Asia’s other emerging superpower, has been governed by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata party for almost five years. BJP militants make little secret of the fact that they regard Islam as alien to India. About 14 per cent of the Indian population is Muslim, but there was not a single Muslim among the 282 BJP members elected to the national parliament in 2014. The fear of Islamist terrorism in India

has surged following a suicide-bombing in Kashmir that killed 44 paramilitary police. With elections looming, an increase in communal tensions seems likely.

It is obvious why “there was not a single Muslim” among the 282 BJP members selected for Parliament; the BJP is a party of Hindu nationalism. The absence of Muslims in the BJP is no more surprising than discovering that there are no Hindus in an Islamic party. Furthermore, Hindu fear of Muslims has not suddenly “surged” after the latest attack on Indian soldiers in Kashmir. Fear of Muslims has been part of the Hindu consciousness for centuries, a normal reaction to mistreatment and mass murder. During the nearly 300 years of Mughal rule, tens of millions of Hindus – the historian K. S. Lal believes the figure is 70-80 million – were killed by Muslims. Wouldn't that be enough to make Hindus fearful, long after the actual threat had decreased? In any case, there have recently been several high-profile attacks by Muslim terrorists, as those on the Parliament Building in New Delhi in 2001, and, over four days in November 2008, at many sites in Mumbai, including the Taj Mahal Palace, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station, Nariman House, the Leopold Cafe, and the Cama Hospital. 174 people were killed, and more than 300 were wounded in Mumbai.

In Kashmir itself, where 44 police were killed last February, around the time Rachman's article appeared, continuous acts of Muslim terrorism, from 1990 on, have led to a colossal drop in the Hindu population. In 1990, there were an estimated 300,000-600,000 Kashmiri Pandits (Brahmins) in Kashmir; now there are 3,000, the result of terrorism and murder by local Muslims.

Anti-Muslim sentiment has also flared up in Myanmar, where more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims were forced to flee the country by army offensives, amid reports of rape and murder. Most are now living as refugees in neighboring Bangladesh.

The plight of Muslim refugees, however, is not a particularly popular cause in the west.

Rachman is again flatly wrong: the “plight of Muslim refugees” from Myanmar has received enormous attention in the Western media, and Western governments have hastened to denounce the Burmese government, the Buddhist monks, and, especially, Ang Sang Suu Kyi, who has been stripped of all of her awards save the Nobel Prize. Far more attention has been given in the West to the 700,000 Rohingya refugees, it should be noted, than to the 300,00-600,000 Hindu refugees who fled from Muslims in Kashmir.

Since 9/11, many more American civilians have fallen victim to school shootings than to Islamist terrorists, but anti-Muslim rhetoric by politicians has become more pronounced. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, then US president George W Bush visited a mosque and asserted that “Islam is peace”; 15 years later, Donald Trump won the presidency after campaigning to ban all Muslims from entering the US.

Rachman is again wrong. Since 9/11, 248 people have died in school shootings in America. 2,977 Americans died in the terror attacks on 9/11 alone, and several hundred more since then. Rachman, of course, wants to start counting victims of Islamist terrorists only after 9/12/2001. He then leaps from one Islam-friendly quote by George W. Bush (“Islam is peace”) to a quite different one from Donald Trump (calling for a ban on Muslims entering the U.S.), in order to show that anti-Muslim rhetoric has – steadily – increased. But it hasn’t. He leaves out Barack Obama, whose Islam-friendly quotes continued uninterruptedly for eight years. And he makes it seem as though Trump’s “ban on Muslims” represents a “more pronounced anti-Muslim rhetoric by politicians.” Aside from Trump, which American politicians are those who Rachman claims offer that “more pronounced anti-Muslim rhetoric”?

In recent years, Islamist terrorism has hit Europe far more frequently than the US, with France suffering particularly badly. The fear of terrorism, combined with the arrival of refugees from the Middle East and north Africa, has produced a surge in support for nationalist and Islamophobic parties. Parties that campaigned against Muslim immigration are now in government in Hungary, Austria, Italy and Poland – and they are powerful opposition forces, shaping the debate, in Germany and France.

Rachman seems to think this reaction in Europe is deplorable. But why? There have been terrorist attacks by Muslims in Madrid, Barcelona, Paris (many times), Toulouse, Nice, Magnanville, St. Etienne-du-Rouvray, London (many times), Manchester, Brussels, Antwerp, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Wurzburg, Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Malmö, Turku, Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Beslan. And these are only the most-publicized attacks. There have been many smaller attacks, and hundreds of planned attacks that were foiled in time by Western security services. These, according to Rachman, have led to a rise in support of “Islamophobia.” He continues to misuse this word. All of these terror attacks, carried out by people crying “Allahu akbar” and, in some cases, waving their Qur’ans or even quoting verses, have increased the fear of, and deep antipathy toward, Islam. But this is a rational response, not “Islamophobia.” Rachman continues to describe this as “Islamophobia,” though no “irrational fear and hatred” of Islam is either felt or expressed.

The anti-Islam radicalisation outside the Muslim world is coinciding with the rise of intolerant Islamism in some Muslim countries that used to be relatively immune from that ideology.

So “intolerant Islamism” is, according to Rachman, a new

phenomenon, which “coincides” with “anti-Islam radicalization” among non-Muslims, with the hint that these phenomena feed off one another. “Intolerant Islamism” might, in other words, be viewed as a “reaction” to that “anti-Islam” feeling. But Muslims have been exhibiting what Rachman calls “intolerant Islamism” for 1,400 years; they call it “Islam.”

The word “radicalization” has recently been used to describe what Muslims undergo who become “extreme” in their views of what Islam requires. Here Rachman deliberately applies the word to non-Muslims, in order to suggest a specious similarity between “extremists on both sides.” He calls their views “anti-Islam radicalization,” as if they have morphed into something deeply disturbing. It requires no “radicalization” to become anti-Islam; anyone of sense, reading the Qur’an and Hadith, and observing how Muslims behave, will be anti-Islam.

And what Rachman calls “intolerant Islamism” is nothing new, as he wants us to believe. The 1,400 year-old history of Islam is largely a story of such “intolerant Islamism,” with a few brief interludes of tolerance under enlightened rulers such as Akbar the Great, who, precisely because of their tolerance of non-Muslims, were viewed with dismay by other Muslims.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the president of Turkey, once lauded in the west as the model of a modernising democrat, is increasingly despotic and given to bitter conspiracy theories about the west. Turkey’s secularists are on edge, fearing an Erdogan-driven effort to Islamise their country.

I do not find corroboration of Rachman’s claim that Erdogan was “once lauded in the West as the model of a modernizing democrat.” Perhaps he has in mind Erdogan’s limiting the power of the Turkish generals, who have always been the guarantors of Kemalism. Some in the West may have misinterpreted that as an attempt to “democratize” Turkey by making military coups more difficult. Rachman is correct that Erdogan, who has built

himself a residence, the White Palace, with 1100 rooms, has been “increasingly despotic” and “given to bitter conspiracy theories about the West.” He is enraged at the refusal of European countries to admit Turkey to the E.U.. He is furious with the United States for two reasons: first, for failing to extradite Fethulleh Gulen from his Pennsylvania estate back to Turkey; second, for continuing to support, and protect, the Kurdish forces in Syria that Erdogan regards as “terrorists,” in league with the “terrorist” PKK, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, that seeks greater autonomy for the Kurds in Turkey.

The situation has been worsening in Pakistan for decades. Islamists are using blasphemy laws as a weapon to persecute religious minorities and political opponents. Salman Taseer, a former governor of the province of Punjab who spoke out against the blasphemy law, was assassinated in 2011. His murderer has become a hero of the Islamist movement. Imran Khan, the current prime minister, defends the blasphemy law.

Since the death of Mohammed Ali Jinnah in 1948, Pakistan has become ever less secular and more Islamic, receiving its biggest push in that direction under the rule of Mohammed Zia ul-Haq. Muslims – whom Rachman calls “Islamists” – in Pakistan have used blasphemy laws not just recently, as Rachman implies (“the situation has been worsening...for decades”), but for the past 70 years, to persecute religious minorities, especially Ahmadis and Christians.

Campaigns against blasphemy have also become a political weapon in Indonesia, the world’s most populous majority-Muslim country. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), a Christian and former governor of Jakarta, was imprisoned in 2017 after being convicted of blasphemy. Ahok was a protégé of the Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, known as Jokowi. But, running scared of the rising tide of Islamism, Jokowi has selected a conservative Muslim cleric as his running mate in April’s presidential election.

Campaigns against blasphemy are not new in Indonesia, either. Such charges have been raised, intermittently, for decades. President Widodo continues to insist that Islamism has been contained. But perhaps more telling than that claim, which may have been made partly with Western investors in mind, is the fact, as Rachman notes, that Widodo felt compelled to select a conservative cleric as his running mate. He may feel as if he owes the Muslim conservatives something, and change his policy on blasphemy, which has heretofore been to defend the accused. Until now he has opposed the use of that charge to destroy non-Muslim politicians, such as his own friend and protege Ahok, a Christian and the former governor of Jakarta.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, there were endless discussions about a "clash of civilisations" between the Muslim and the non-Muslim worlds. It is no longer quite so fashionable to discuss the concept. But something that looks strikingly like a "clash of civilisations" is emerging nonetheless.

There is no "clash of civilizations" if by that one means that both Muslims and non-Muslims are equally guilty. I think that is what Gideon Rachman wants us to think. Islam is on the march, Muslims have been conducting Jihad by any means that present themselves; Islam is at war not just with the West, but with all the Rest, as it has been for the past 1,400 years. The increase in anti-Islam feeling is not due to an irrational phobia but to a rational assessment of what Muslims are doing to non-Muslims, including the terrorist attacks all over Europe. It has taken a while for Europeans to disabuse themselves of the belief that is only Islamic "extremists" who are a menace and to understand, further, that the aggressive and violent behavior of many Muslims arises naturally from what they read in the Qur'an and Hadith.

Europeans are responding, at long last, to several decades of terrorist attacks by Muslims. What is different from the past

history of Muslim conquests, of many lands and many peoples, is that now there are, within the historic heart of the West – Europe – some 40 million Muslims. They have been allowed in by Western leaders, most notably Angela Merkel, who made Pollyannaish predictions about the benefits of “diversity”; she failed to study Islam before welcoming its adherents, in such great numbers, to Germany. She is an extreme example of a wider phenomenon. Western leaders have mostly failed to understand the nature of the Muslim threat, and of how Muslims view non-Muslims; they have failed, too, to understand that the present Jihad in Europe is primarily a matter of demography; Muslims are simply outbreeding the Unbelievers. To an unusual degree, Muslims in Europe live off the largesse provided by generous welfare states. Because of all these benefits, Muslim women find it easier not to work, but to remain at home as breeders. Muslim families are very large, while European fertility rates are now below the replacement level. Thus does the West help pay for its own demographic degeneration.

Among those who now recognize the Jihad threat, who understand that Islamocriticism is not Islamophobia, and who share the growing anti-Islam sentiment in Europe that is an intelligent response, at long last, to relentless attacks from an implacable enemy, you will not find Gideon Rachman.

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