

Hisham Melhem: He Still Can't Bring Himself To Recognize The True Source Of The Problem

[Here](#).

He sees Arab countries disintegrating – Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen – with others possibly to follow. He mentions, in passing, the Islamic State, but cannot identify Islam as the source of the many failures – political, economic, social, intellectual, moral – of Muslim peoples and polities. He can't discuss the habit of submission to the Ruler, that makes of Muslims natural subjects but never citizens. He can't discuss Muslim political theory, that locates the legitimacy of government not, as in the Western democracies, because they reflect the will expressed, however imperfectly, by the people in elections, but in the will of Allah, as expressed in the Qur'an, and glossed by the Sunnah, and codified in the Shari'a. He can't discuss the amazing spectacle of Muslim Arabs having received 25 trillion dollars, since 1973 alone, and yet always and everywhere unable to create even a semblance of modern industrial economies. They rely still on revenues from oil (and gas), which are the result of an accident of geology, and not the fruit of entrepreneurial flair, or work, by any of the recipients of that unearned wealth –the oil was discovered, lifted, transported, distributed in world-wide networks, all by non-Muslims, while the Muslims took in fantastic sums which have been spent on gigantic armories (see Libya, see Saudi Arabia), planes and tanks and guns, on palaces at home and estates abroad, on yachts and private 747s, on daily deliveries of food from Hediard and Fauchon, on boatloads and planeloads of poules de luxe, and on armies of wage-slaves, from Europeans and

Americans at the top, to Indian and Nepalese construction workers, to Thai and Filipino domestic workers who are so often abused as sex slaves. The Islamic hostility toward *bida*, innovation, because all ye know and all ye need to know is in the Qur'an (as glossed by the Sunnah), limits the ability of Believers to cultivate entrepreneurial flair. The inshallah-fatalism that sees Allah as a whimsical deity who can give or take away, and one cannot plan securely for the future because it is all in the hands of an unpredictable and inexplicable god, discourages the kind of economic activity that in countries with stable legal systems, a well-developed code (for example, the Uniform Commercial Code), a tax system upon which one can rely not to be transformed overnight, a political system that acts as a guarantee against sudden seizure of assets by a grasping ruler or regime, in lands where despotism comes naturally, and wealth is traditionally acquired through seizure of political power, and then the nation's wealth, or much of it, whether derived from oil revenues or from foreign aid (which go directly to the government unlike, say, revenues from tourism), controlled by the government, is in part diverted to be divvied up among one's family members, cronies, and tribe. In the Sunnah, Muhammad – the Model of Conduct (“uswa hasana”), the Perfect Man (“al-insan al-kamil”) – set down, and demonstrated in his life, rules for dividing up loot. He was entitled to 20% of the loot seized from the inoffensive Jewish farmers of the Khaybar Oasis, attacked not because they had opposed Muhammad (they had not even heard about him or his followers), but because they had property that could be seized. One wonders how much the members of the Al-Saud, or the Al-Thani, or the Al-Maktoum, or the Al-Nahyan ruling families, or the members of the Assad dynasty, or the family and friends of Muammar Qaddafi and Saddam Hussein, or the corrupt rulers of the PLO (from Arafat to Abbas, with dozens of courtiers also needing to be taken care of, along with jobs for the boys) have been taking as their cut of the national wealth.

The inferior position of women, seen as sex slaves and breeders (at this point we always have raised the usual absurd remark about how Khadija, one of Muhammad's wives, was a "canny businesswoman" and that the position of women in Islam has thus been proven to be unassailable), and the effects of polygamy, and the absence of women from what is, literally, the public square (look at those demonstrations of men, always and only men, all over the Muslim lands – a non-Muslim seeing these things televised always wants to ask "Where are all the women"?), the legal inferiority of Muslim women, most obviously in inheritance and property law, and in the lesser value of their testimony, is part of what can be called the "social" failures of Islam. The treatment, or mistreatment, of women has economic and political consequences.

Another of Islam's many failures is the inculcated hostility toward non-Muslims. This is expressed in small ways – prohibiting even the mildest of recognitions of others' religious holidays (Muslims should not wish "Merry Christmas" to anyone) – and in large, as in the textbooks in many Muslim lands that essentially repeat what is in the Qur'an, about not taking Christians and Jews as friends, and that are full of viciousness about non-Muslims that have been reported on, here and there, intermittently, but have not received the relentless attention from non-Muslims that they deserve.

The intellectual failure of Islam is explained by the willingness of so many Muslims – and the primitive True Believers far outnumber the others, and are capable of cowing them – to believe that the Qur'an contains all of knowledge, including all of the scientific knowledge acquired in the Western world, by slow degrees, over more than two millennia. It's amusing, and horrifying, to watch as Muslims attempt to prove that the geological history of the earth, quantum mechanics, fractals, string theory, global warming, whatever you want – is already contained in the Qur'an, and only needs to be teased out by a careful and close reader. Several

celebrated professors of chemistry, biology, physics whom I have known, and who spoke in Cairo, or Damascus, or Baghdad, or gave lectures in the Gulf, have told me that their Muslim audiences displayed no interest in basic science, but wanted simply to know how they could acquire the technology, the gewgaws, that were developed from that basic science. For them science was technogogy, engineering.

Another intellectual failure of Islam is the result of the discouraging of skeptical inquiry. Islam famously means "submission." You submit, and once you have submitted, that's it. No questioning of Islam is allowed. And the greatest questioner of all, the apostate, is regarded as a Defector from the Army of Islam and to be punished, if he does not relent when called upon to do so, with death. For Islam is brittle, and fragile, and if you start to display an independent and questioning spirit in a Muslim context, it is likely that that mental independence and questioning will lead to questioning of Islam itself. And that cannot be allowed. And if things go wrong, there must be a conspiracy by Enemies of Islam. It may be something they do. Or it can be something they don't do – for example, many Muslims now blame the Americans for not overturning Assad, as if the Ameridcan government has a duty to do so, it "owes" this to the world's Muslims. But why does the West "owe" this? Has the Assad regime been a puppet of the West, the recipient of American support, American military or financial aid? No. No matter what goes wrong in Muslim countries, Islam is never to be found at fault, nor Muslims. It's always the Infidels, Tmaneuvering and manipulating behind the scenes.

The discouraging of any questioning of Islam also discourages the very spirit of skeptical inquiry that is needed in the entrerprises of science, economics, politics, life. This questioning of authority– not to be confused with the bumperstickers saying "Question Authority" pasted on the cars of so many mental lemmings)– helps explain Western progress,

Western success; its absence, Muslim stasis, Muslim failure.

Then there is the moral failure of Muslim societies. The hysterical rants from all over the Muslim lands, especially those by imams – you can find them readily at www.memritv.org – the willingness of so many to embrace the Islamic State, including all those Muslims, from all over the West, eager to join the nascent Caliphate, and apparently induced to do so because of those recruiting videos that show mass beheadings, or to endorse the killings in Paris of the cartoonists and the shoppers at a kosher market, and the honoring of terrorists, from Bin Laden to Imad Mughniyeh to the PLO and Hamas murderers after whom schools and streets and public squares are named – what is this if not moral failure on the widest of scales? In Turkey, Ataturk's systematic constraints on Islam helped to create a secular class that exists on the same planet, more or less, as that of non-Muslims. But those who are not secular, the supporters of Erdogan, exhibit the same dismal, crazed, vicious worldview as is to be found in the Arab lands, and that would-be Arab land, Pakistan.

None of this can be said or written by Hisham Melhem. I suspect he's been thinking about this, perhaps privately, perhaps with a few freethinking Arab friends, who among themselves dare to talk about such things. So he will continue to report on the Arab collapse, continue to call for Western intervention to overthrow Assad, and continue, I am sure, to refrain from discussing the texts, the tenets, the atmospherics, the attitudes, of Islam. He can't do it. But we can.