

The Confusions of Tony Blair, Part II

by Hugh Fitzgerald

Recognizing that something's wrong with Islam is an advance. Assuming it can be made right smacks of Pollyanna. Tony Blair has said that the educational systems in countries where [Muslim] extremism had taken hold must be overhauled.

And just how will this be done?

We've got to use our negotiating power and might with these countries to say, "You're going to have to reform the education systems that are educating millions of young people day in and day out to a view of the world that's narrow-minded, bigoted and hostile to those who are different."

Now why didn't the rest of us think of that?

This dreamy belief that any Muslim country or people would change its teachings about Islam, because some Infidels consider those teachings "narrow minded, bigoted, and hostile to those who are different" shows a deep miscomprehension of Islam and of Muslims. If Blair thinks pressure from Infidels will force the likes of Saudi Arabia to rewrite its textbooks (which, unsurprisingly, contain the more rigid, Salafi version of Islam, that Salafists believe to properly reflect the time of Muhammad and the two generations of "pious ancestors" that followed him), he misunderstands the hold that Islam has over such adherents. He has only to look at the reports on Western attempts to have the Saudis overhaul their textbooks, to discover how many hopeful tales of Saudi compliance were not supported by what Western investigators subsequently found in the teaching materials that are used not only in Saudi Arabia but all around the Muslim world, and in mosques in the West,

where Saudi money, for mosques, for madrasas, for payment of clerics' salaries, calls the ideological tune.

In a State Department report on the Saudis from 2004, it was clear that despite all the reformist fanfare of former Ambassador Turki al-Faisal and other Saudis, no major overhauling of Saudi textbooks was actually undertaken. And the State Department's 2016 report, "The State of Tolerance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," came to much the same conclusion. In other words, in a dozen years, no progress has been made in the attempt, a very slight one at that, to clean up the Saudi textbooks. Why should Tony Blair think that things will now somehow be different?

Blair simply does not grasp how wide and deep in Islam is the inculcated hostility toward non-Muslims. He seems surprised, even after 15 years of reading the Qur'an "every day," to discover, as he said on March 27, 2016, that "*many millions of Muslims hold views that are fundamentally incompatible with the modern world.*" He talks about the need to change these Muslim minds, but never asks the critical question: are these views so much a part of mainstream Islam that no Muslim will be willing to give them up just in order to placate non-Muslims like Blair? What makes him think that all Muslims want to be part of the modern world, when so many look back to their Golden Age as the time of Muhammad and the Companions? Is it not presumptuous to assume that all peoples want to inhabit the same – i.e. modern, Western – world? Haven't the Salafis shown that they really mean what they say about spreading the uncompromising Islam of their "pious ancestors"?

All the evidence suggests that they do. But can Tony Blair grasp this, or is his constant reading of the Qur'an getting in the way of his grasping its essential meaning? Is he missing the forest *and* the trees? He's a well-pleased pleaser, proud of himself for reading and rereading the Qur'an – he mentions it all the time – but not understanding exactly what it is he is reading, or how Muslims read, take in, understand,

believe, and especially, act on the same texts.

Tony Blair has at least made some progress from the period when he would stoutly declare that Islam is “beautiful,” that Muhammad was “an enormously civilizing force,” that “there is not a problem with Islam. For those of us who have studied it, there is no doubt about its true and peaceful nature.” Doubts have crept in to Blair’s description of Islam. He no longer calls it beautiful, or Muhammad an enormous civilizing force, no longer insists there is “no problem with Islam,” or describes its “true and peaceful nature.

Now he is willing to concede that the “violence” and “extremism” in Islam is a big problem, a matter not of a handful but of “millions of Muslims.” But even up to late 2015, Blair blamed a “**perversion of Islam**” as “the source of a lot of the problems in the Middle East.”

What perversion? He never tells us what the perversion is. Did someone twist the accepted meaning of the Qur’an? Of the Hadith? Whenever this word “perversion” is used about Islam, we have a right to demand that the person making that claim be able to explain to us exactly what is being “perverted” in the texts of Islam. One would like Tony Blair, terminally confused as he has been, to explain how Islam is being “perverted” by, say, the members of the Islamic State, or Al-Qaeda, or the Muslim Brotherhood. He won’t, because he can’t. Nor has anyone else provided an explanation of what such a “perversion of Islam” would look like. The texts so carefully cited by the Islamic State, to justify their every move, are lifted verbatim from the Qur’an and Hadith; no distortion of the texts, no “perversion” of Islam’s teachings, have been necessary.

The majority of people within Islam do not support either the violence or the ideology.

How does Tony Blair know this? Or is it merely what he would

like to believe? It's not "the violence or the ideology" but, rather, the "violence of the ideology" that Tony Blair should be highlighting, but his word choice suggests he doesn't grasp this. The "violence" is not part of some imagined "extremism," but is, rather, part of mainstream Islam. The Qur'an and Hadith are overflowing with violence; they are in many ways akin to manuals of war. And it appears from the opinion polls in the West that a great many Muslims do support "the violence," and that if there is any underreporting, it is surely because some Muslims will deliberately refuse to admit to their support of violence. A polling error in the other direction Muslims claiming to support violence but in truth not doing so – is highly unlikely. Even Blair seems to recognize the popularity of what he calls "extremism" in Islam:

*You've got these broad ideological strands that lie behind a lot of this extremism. If you take, for example, some of the organizations in the Middle East, some of those clerics that are **putting out the most extreme stuff – they'll have Twitter followings that go into millions of people.***

If they have Twitter followers in the many millions, just how can these clerics be labelled as "extremists"?

*These people are **saying things about Jewish people** – about even those in their own religion who are different **that we would regard as completely unacceptable** – and it's those waters of extremism in which the violent extremists can swim.*

Query: **what do "these people" say about Jewish people that is not in the Qur'an or Hadith?** Does Tony Blair not know what is written in those Islamic texts about Jews? Or Christians? Or non-Muslims in general?

Blair is certainly inching his way toward a more realistic view of Islam. It's taking an interminably long time. He's

focusing now on the problems in the Middle East that are the result of Islam; he hasn't yet taken on the question of what the burgeoning Muslim population in Europe will mean for our civilization. But even if he is less gushing about Islam than he was ten years ago, his confusion will continue as long as he refuses to grasp the inner essence of Islam, an aggressive faith based on an uncompromising division of the world between Believer and Unbeliever, Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb.

And having grasped that, will Blair dare to admit not just to himself, but to those whom, as Prime Minister, he presumed to instruct and protect, but misled so grievously about Islam, what he has learned? Anything is possible; even a Tony Blair can come to understand Islam if he tries to make sense of what he reads, and does not shy, either, from drawing conclusions from the observable behavior of Muslims over the last 1400 years, and states his new understanding without holding anything back in order not to offend Muslim sensibilities. And that, surely, is an outcome, and not just in the case of Tony Blair, devoutly to be wished.

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