Islam and The New Totalitarianism
fundamentalism's threat to world civilisation

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Robert Corfe is well-qualified as the author of this book on the problem of contemporary Islam. As a businessman working in the Middle East, he has long had successful contacts with Gulf Arabs and other Islamic peoples in the region as well as back home in Britain. As an established author of repute he is well known for his books, *Deism and Social Ethics, The Democratic Imperative, Populism Against Progress, The Future of Politics,* and his works on social capitalism. The present book is a penetrating study of Islamic society and the psychosis that can arise through excess religiosity. Comparisons are made with other societies in the past that have found themselves in a similar situation with Islam today, and in this the author finds hope for a harmonious settlement in the future between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds.

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Robert Corfe

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PREFACE

The Islamic threat is possibly the most disturbing political issue in the world today – disturbing in the sense that the fear of consequences impacts more directly on the lives of ordinary people than any other problem. The issue is unusual in that the grounds for conflictual differences are unclear and undefined, but they nonetheless exist in actuality.

It is not as if a war had been declared between two parties and each comprehended the enmity of the other. The origin of the *conflict* (for it is that) is the cultural incompatibility between two civilisations, and the pretence of the deferring party that all differences may be dissolved simply through a policy of multi-culturalism. If the latter arose through benevolent conviction as the only perceived path towards peaceful coexistence, leading hopefully to cultural absorption, after a number of years it changed into doubt and then into an illusion, and finally today it is little more than polite pretence.

The issue is more commonly described as "religious," which it is, but in a stricter sense it is cultural. This is because Islam, especially through the propagation of Wahabism, the most powerful force within the faith today, makes no distinction between the secular and the divine. The entire thinking and life-style and behaviour of Muslims is directed by religious demands to the exclusion of anything that may be defined as secular or profane – the latter being the preferred pejorative term for what is not authorised by the faith. Such a mindset established by the

Prophet Mohammed and his followers, is long enshrined in tradition, and remains to the present day. God is therefore the one authority, and his commands are interpreted through text alone in conjunction with the recorded traditions of the Sunnah or Hadith.

The above conditions, particularly as manifested through the strict puritanical Islam as imposed by Saudi Arabia on a worldwide scale, ensures that the faith is a totalitarian movement. This means that secular reason, or that not taken from holy script is taken as irrelevant and undesirable as a basis for discussion. All totalitarian societies have a fear of contamination and usually take extreme measures to safeguard their internal security. When these do not take the form of barring the entry of foreigners, as in Saudi Arabia, they take the form of arresting and imprisoning dissidents and other suspects. There is consequently no working Islamic democracy anywhere in the Middle East.

The problem in the non-Islamic world, especially in Western Europe, is the penetration of nation states by a religious totalitarianism attempting to impose its proselytising ideology on democratic societies. The variety of means in attempting to achieve this, and the subtlety of the methods, are described in this book. One rationale of Muslims in attempting to justify their approach is the false assumption that Europe is "no longer Christian," and hence the assumed right to imposing the priority of their own religion within a vacuum. The greatest objection of non-Muslims, however, to the penetration of their culture is the creation of alternative legal structures, or a state within the state, as their own "parliament," or internal consultative committees, or the announcement of no-go zones in major cities of the north, or the establishment of Sharia law and Sharia courts as if they held legal authority.

It is only in the wake of terrorist outrages that peoples across Europe have suddenly awoken to the above factors, and are now intent on regaining or defending what might be lost in the near future. If Muslims resist the idea of integration – which they are – then only two alternatives remain: they must either create their own mini-states within the state, or else attempt by subtler means to seize control of leading administrative institutions. Their failure to assimilate can drive them in no other direction. Muslims in Britain are actively engaged in both the above alternatives, as witnessed by their numbers and close

cooperation in both the Commons and the Lords, and their power in local government councils nationwide.

The need to associate the identity between the problem of terrorist outrages and that of cultural integration into the nation state is becoming increasingly apparent. This is because of the process of radicalisation of young people and their flight to Syria to join Isis or similar groups, and the recent attempts of European governments to counter these moves. Most shocking of all is the silence of Muslims in response to terrorism. It is as if they were fearful of speaking out on the grounds of compromising the credibility of Islam, or purely through embarrassment at the incidents themselves. In a more perfect world I would expect leading Muslims to speak out loud and clear against terrorist acts, and to openly admit there is something *very wrong with Islam* that allows and encourages such outrages. I would expect such leaders to initiate an open discussion on the criticism of Islam in inviting proposals for necessary reform as a minimum gesture.

This is an urgent book with a threefold purpose: firstly, to analyse the incompatibility between two contrasting civilisations and the consequences; secondly, to examine the possibilities for the cultural integration of Muslims into non-Islamic societies; and thirdly, to present tentative cultural and religious reforms for Islam at its centre for harmonious relationships in the future.

The approach is sociological and objective, and comparisons are made with other cultures in history that have experienced similar situations to that of Islam today. For example, the second chapter of this book is entitled, *Europe's Age of Religious Shame*. The root cause of Islam's problems is uncovered early in this book, and it is a question of excess religiosity and the psychosis resulting from such a condition. This immediately raises the issue of the author's religious stance in writing this book. Clearly such a book would be unacceptable in the Islamic world if it were written by an atheist or even by an agnostic.

The author admits to a modern approach to religion and a belief in God, and would best describe himself as a Deistic Anglican. That is, he adopts a figurative rather than a literal interpretation of the Bible and theological doctrine, which is probably already in alignment with the views of the majority of ministers ordained in the Church of England at the present day. He therefore supports a rational or Enlightenment

approach to religion with its social bonding benefits, whilst repudiating mysticism, revelation, or anything tending towards excessive religiosity.

In my view, moderate religion is not only benign but a social necessity in a sound society, whilst that bordering on fanaticism, although it cannot be expunged entirely, is harmful, and if widespread, can become a psychological poison in undermining the sanity of a people. The above may be dismissed as personal prejudice, but as issues for discussion they cannot be avoided in considering the problem of contemporary Islam, for the latter is pure religion without a secular dimension.

Lastly, and in support of my authority in writing this book, I must admit that through a long business career, I have had close and friendly relationships with Islamic people, mostly Gulf Arabs, for many years, and with whom I must have discussed religious issues for well over a hundred hours in total. If in the dissertation that follows, I have omitted to raise relevant aspects of the problem on one of the most disturbing political questions of our time, I would be grateful if these were eventually brought to my attention.

Robert Corfe

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CHAPTER 1
The Threat to World Civilisation

> "A religion that is jealous of the variety of learning, discourse, opinions, and sects, as misdoubting it may shake the foundations, or that cherisheth devotion upon simplicity and ignorance, as ascribing effects to the immediate working of God, is adverse to knowledge."
> Sir Francis Bacon, *Of the Interpretation of Nature,* chapter 25.

The Problem of Islamic terrorism is more deep-rooted than most of our political leaders are ready to admit. Added to this complexity is the

fixed response of Muslims to every violent outrage, in that it "has nothing whatsoever to do with Islam," as Islam is a "religion of peace."

This simple statement of denial, with all its suggested complacency, contradicts the reality for a host of reasons, for every act of terrorism has *everything* to do with mainstream Islam if not directly then indirectly. Until such time as Muslims are prepared to condemn, loud and clear, the extreme nature of Islamic religiosity as manifested at the present time, all must be held as in some way complicit for the horrors that have appalled the world in the present century. Passivity in the face of crime is alone sufficient for condemnation.

The perception which a people, or an organisation religious or otherwise has of itself, is always as it *should be*, or would like to portray itself, rather than as it actually is. When, therefore, accusations of outrage are made, the usual defensive response is to cite the "written word" from a hallowed constitutional document or a holy script to correct a wrong impression, but such a stance is invalidated when it is borne in mind that deeds override theories on what is right or wrong. The judgement of individuals or groups should be based on actions rather than on words. Hence when an organisation is responsible for a violent outrage, it is not sufficient for the individual to distance him- or herself by such disassociating statements as, "Not in my name," or, "This is not in accord with the principles of my religion." Exculpation of the individual can only be achieved through a close analysis of causes followed by the application of a practical and satisfactory long-term resolution of the underlying problem.

The outrages of the past 16 years are nothing new to the history of the Islamic faith, for Islam was born through violence and the use of the sword. Even the intentional destruction of cultural monuments has precedents from the earliest epoch. The desecration of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, or the burning of the irreplaceable library of the Ahmed Baba Institute in Mali, or more recently, the demolition of the major artefacts of Palmyra, are traceable to the earliest barbaric deeds of religious totalitarianism. As soon as the Islamic horde emerged from the sandy wastes of Arabia in conquering Egypt, in 634 AD they destroyed the greatest library of the ancient world.

The justification of the conqueror, Oman, who in the words of Gibbon, "was inspired by the ignorance of a fanatic,"[1]([1] *History of The Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire*, cap. 51.) in consigning the Alexandrian Library to the flames was that, "if these writings agree with the book of God, they are useless and need not be preserved; if they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed." Over a period of six months this priceless legacy of literature, philosophy, history and science was consigned to the furnaces heating the 4,000 baths of the city, and the greater part of the genius of the ancient world and our Western heritage was lost forever.

This is not to suggest that Islam continued as a force of barbarism throughout its history. Whilst its birth and early development was characterised by an uncompromising totalitarianism, the Arab conquerors became a minority amongst more advanced peoples in the Middle East and across North Africa and were soon culturally absorbed by influences that attracted their better instincts. During the Dark Ages of European history with the fall of the Roman Empire, they cultivated a superior civilisation, particularly in the fields of philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and science which eventually was inherited by the peoples of the West.

With the fall of Abbasid power in Baghdad, and that of the Moors in North West Africa, as Spain regained its lost territory, Islamic political power fell to the Turkic and Ottoman peoples. The latter achieved a glorious flowering in the 16th and 17th centuries before falling into a slow but irreversible political and cultural decline, as the "Sick man of Europe." From the end of the Crusades, in indecisive attempts by the West to recover the Holy Land for the Christian cause, i.e. from the closing decades of the 13th century to those of the 20th, it may be said that a confrontational but distant relationship existed between the European and Islamic worlds. This took the form of a political but not a religious confrontation even though broad cultural differences were recognised on both sides. This is partly illustrated by the fact that France, for example, cultivated a friendly relationship with the Ottoman empire during the period when she was in conflict with the imperial Habsburgs from early in the 16th century (in the reign of Francis I) to the 18th century; or when Germany cultivated friendship

with the Turks in seeking to counter-balance Britain's influence in the Middle East at the end of the 19th and start of the 20th centuries.

By the end of the 20th century a total transformation had occurred in the politico-cultural relationships between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds as a direct economic consequence of the internal combustion engine. The Arabian peninsula had been the birthplace and had always remained the true religious heartland of Islamic civilisation. In addition, Arabia had remained a closed and introverted culture, forbidding to those beyond the true "faith," whilst the Ottomans gained a superficial and uncertain grip on isolated urban centres of this remote imperial outpost.

With the search and exploitation of oil resources the new intruders were only allowed on sufferance to enter this empty and unfriendly land. Regarded as "infidels" and with suspicion, whose very presence polluted the holy soil, they were prevented from any move that might be interpreted as "ownership" or the colonisation of the desert land. By this means the great Sheikhs or Kings or Emirs of the Arabian peninsula quickly accrued huge wealth through the skills and labour of their Western visitors, but this was not reciprocated by any sense of gratitude towards those who had brought them the riches of Croesus. On the contrary, their presence ensured segregation and confinement to compounds and this distance exacerbated the fear and loathing of the foreign culture. If there was a sense of gratitude – and there was – it was to God alone, who was responsible for transforming and enriching the lives of the Arab people through the gift of oil. Oil, therefore, was not seen as an accidental fact of existence, but as God's intentional gift for the purpose of justly rewarding his faithful and deeply religious adherents.

There was, however, another and more significant force that transformed the Islamic culture of the Arabian peninsula. In the 18th century the powerful preacher, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab, launched a campaign against what he saw as the lax tendencies of contemporary Islam with the accretions and corruption that had developed in the medieval period. He called for the purification of the Sunni sect and a return to the earliest doctrines and practices of Islam as embodied in the Koran and the Sunna. With the support of the neighbouring prince, Muhammad ibn Saud, Wahabism expanded over

the next two and a half centuries to dominate most the peninsula, initially to confront Ottoman power based in Constantinople, and subsequently, as a militant religion aspiring to worldwide dominion.

It is impossible to over-emphasise the significance of Wahabism as the most powerful political-religious movement of our time. Its religious emotive force dwarfs the political power of Marxism and its opposing ideology Neo-Liberalism, as they have existed until the very recent past. The power of Islam as a threat to the advanced industrial economies has seemed to put the old left/right divide into the shade, and it is that divide that has dominated and split society over the past two centuries. New conflictual patterns are emerging that were unimaginable until yesterday. The intensity of these forces becomes most apparent on recollecting that few Marxists have turned themselves into living bombs and none amongst the Neo-Liberals.

It is difficult for those in the industrialised world to comprehend what seems the irrationality of such an ideology as Islamic fundamentalism seizing ultimate control. In this respect, only one comparison comes easily to mind, viz., the takeover of the Roman Empire by Christianity in the 4th century AD. In the eyes of the majority, for a period of 300 years, Christianity was regarded as an eccentric, intolerant and life-denying ideology on account of its hatred of classical values, art, and literature of the Romano-Hellenic civilisation. This hatred is most clearly expressed in the last book of the *New Testament*, being the book of *Revelation*. Early Christianity was driven by an underclass that was averse to reason and the accepted values of the time, and on those rare occasions when its adherents were subjected to persecution, torture, or death, there were few who came to their defence.

For a period of 200 years, the educated classes, and the greatest thinkers of the time (such as the Stoics) held them in askance. By the year 300 AD it was still considered unlikely that Christianity should take over the political control of the classical world. But by the year 330 AD the Roman Empire was firmly under the grip of Christian authority. Whilst the establishment of Christianity culminated in bringing a better moral environment to the civilised world, it was achieved through the sacrifice of free thought and the universal toleration of religious beliefs and practices. However, this better moral

environment was not extended to the abolition of slavery or the security of political rights for the individual. As the church strengthened as an organised power in league with a feudal military elite, it eventually mutated into a tyrannical and corrupt authority that was not effectively challenged for 1,200 years, i.e. with the Reformation early in the 16th century.

In the light of the circumstances surrounding the sudden and unanticipated emergence of Christianity in the 4th century, it is not entirely inconceivable that Islam might likewise seize control of the Western world, i.e., the North American continent and the Euro-Caucasian landmass before the close of the 21st century. There are other sinister comparisons between Christianity's seizure of power in the 4th century and the distinct possibility of Islam's seizure of power in the 21st century.

By the 4th century AD the birth rate of the ethnic Romano-Hellenic peoples of the central Empire had already collapsed generations beforehand. In the 1st century the Emperor Augustus had called for the strengthening of marriage and the encouragement of childbearing. At the present day the birth rate of Caucasian peoples across the entire Euro-Asian and North American landmasses and island outposts has crashed. So, too, has the birth rate of the Confucian peoples of China, Korea, and Japan – and so the comparison extends well beyond the racial dimension. In ancient Rome as in the modern world it is the most educated, innovative, creative, and cultured sectors of the population that have chosen not to reproduce themselves in maintaining the values of their civilisation.

Another significant comparison is the collapse of productivity in the Italian mainland by the 4th century. This began with the loss of smallholdings granted to the military after a lifetime of service. Eventually, due to the accumulation of property into ever fewer hands, those smallholders were dispossessed by a wealthy financial elite. Ever larger estates were then worked by the lesser efficiency of slave labour. Increasingly food production became dependent on imports from the fertile soil of North Africa and Egypt. In the 21st century both Europe and America have become dependent for most of their manufactured and industrial goods on the Far East, giving rise to a self-destructive economy dependent on usury and debts that can never be paid.

The last comparison to be made is the arrival of huge migrant populations. Over a period of centuries the Romano-Hellenic order was swamped with barbarian hordes at odds with the civilised rational values of the classical world. This initially occurred through the arrival of slaves, being the captives of occupied territories, and as soon as they had been manumitted, they chose to remain in the Italian mainland in enjoying the material benefits and security of a higher civilisation, so contributing to a higher birth rate than that of the ethnic population.

Meanwhile, the policy of extending Roman citizenship to those from distant territories encouraged the settlement of those introducing cults and superstitions clearly conflicting with the tradition of logical thinking, or commitment to constructive reason in building a better future. Leading historians have cited the rule of such foreign-inspired emperors, as Elagabalus as the most striking symptoms of cultural decline. The frequent invasions and occupation of the Italian mainland completes the picture of this sorry story, for Romano-Hellenic civilisation was virtually destroyed even though the ruling authorities may have remained in denial of a fact too painful to recognise as actuality. In the 21st century, the possibility of the migration of millions to Western Europe, with their higher birth rate confronting ethnic peoples with a low birth rate would lead inevitably to the collapse of the so-called "West" and all the cultural and ethical values it had cherished and defended for so long through times of war and peace.

In returning to the question of Wahabism, which ideologically is the greatest threat to our contemporary technological civilisation it should be noted that oil revenues alone have lit the spark enabling the worldwide spread of that particular form of Islamic fundamentalism.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and in its wake, the smaller Gulf States have invested billions of dollars worldwide in propagating the Islamic message. In Britain alone, for example, the Gulf States contributed £233.5m between 1995 and 2008 to the following seven universities for Islamic studies: Oxford, Cambridge, the UCL, the LSE, Exeter, Dundee, and the City University London.

In addition, the late King Fahad of Saudi Arabia contributed £75m to the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, and one of his nephews, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, gave £8m to Cambridge and Edinburgh; and the LSE's Centre for Middle Eastern Studies received £9m from the

UAE. Whilst these substantial funds have been contributed under the guise of, "promoting greater understanding of Islam," the recent research of Prof. Anthony Glees has concluded that their real agenda is to push an extreme ideology and act as a form of propaganda for Wahabism in British universities. They promote, he argues, "the wrong sort of education by the wrong set of people, funded by the wrong sorts of donor."[2]([1] See Stephen Pollard's article, "Are our universities selling themselves to the highest bidder,?" *Daily Telegraph*, 4th March 2011.) But the above contributions represent a small fraction of the huge sums distributed throughout the wider world in the cause of Islam.

A more sinister development than the propagation of Islamic fundamentalism by Arab States is that Wahabism has taken off as a power in its own right under its own terms. This has led to the ironic situation whereby it has rebounded on Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States that have found themselves in conflict with various offshoots of their own religious ideology. The Mujahideen of the 1980s and 90s in Afghanistan was initially financed by the US and the Saudis in the war to drive out Soviet forces occupying that country.

The movement – or a great part of it – was subsequently re-organised and financed by Osama bin Laden, and after it splintered into conflicting groups, there emerged the Taliban, a Pakistani promoted organisation. The Taliban comprised those who had grown up in Pakistan refugee camps where they were taught in Saudi-backed Wahabi madrassas. Within several years, these and other organisations as Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and later Isis or Daesh, all found themselves in opposition to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States.

Consequently, although the Kingdom and her close Gulf neighbours are seen as a moderate influence in Middle East politics, she is currently additionally in conflict with Shia forces in Yemen to her south east and Iran to the north west, as well as with a perceived heretical Shia sect, the Alawites, controlling Syria under the rule of Basher al-Assad; in addition to opposition from various Wahabi-influenced terrorist forces cited above. All this illustrates the entangled and chaotic nature of Middle East politics that is difficult to disentangle from religious differences that compound the intensity of an