



Brought Up To Hate

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The controversy regarding the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed completely misses the point. Of course, the cartoons are offensive to Muslims, but newspaper cartoons do not warrant the burning of buildings and the killing of innocent people. The cartoons did not cause the disease of hate that we are seeing in the Muslim world on our television screens at night - they are only a symptom of a far greater disease.

I was born and raised as a Muslim in Cairo, Egypt and in the Gaza Strip. In the 1950s, my father was sent by Egypt's President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, to head the Egyptian military intelligence in Gaza and the Sinai where he founded the Palestinian Fedayeen, or "armed resistance". They made cross-border attacks into Israel, killing 400 Israelis and wounding more than 900 others.

My father was killed as a result of the Fedayeen operations when I was eight years old. He was hailed by Nasser as a national hero and was considered a shaheed, or martyr. In his speech announcing the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, Nasser vowed that all of Egypt would take revenge for my father's death. My siblings and I were asked by Nasser: "Which one of you will avenge your father's death by killing Jews?" We looked at each other speechless, unable to answer.

In school in Gaza, I learned hate, vengeance and retaliation. Peace was never an option, as it was considered a sign of defeat and weakness. At school we sang songs with verses calling Jews "dogs" (in Arab culture, dogs are considered unclean).

Criticism and questioning were forbidden. When I did either of these, I was told: "Muslims cannot love the

enemies of God, and those who do will get no mercy in hell." As a young woman, I visited a Christian friend in Cairo during Friday prayers, and we both heard the verbal attacks on Christians and Jews from the loudspeakers outside the mosque. They said: "May God destroy the infidels and the Jews, the enemies of God. We are not to befriend them or make treaties with them." We heard worshippers respond "Amen".

My friend looked scared; I was ashamed. That was when I first realised that something was very wrong in the way my religion was taught and practised. Sadly, the way I was raised was not unique. Hundreds of millions of other Muslims also have been raised with the same hatred of the West and Israel as a way to distract from the failings of their leaders. Things have not changed since I was a little girl in the 1950s.

Palestinian television extols terrorists, and textbooks still deny the existence of Israel. More than 300 Palestinian schools are named after shaheeds, including my father. Roads in both Egypt and Gaza still bear his name - as they do of other "martyrs". What sort of message does that send about the role of terrorists? That they are heroes. Leaders who signed peace treaties, such as President Anwar Sadat, have been assassinated. Today, the Islamo-fascist president of Iran uses nuclear dreams, Holocaust denials and threats to "wipe Israel off the map" as a way to maintain control of his divided country.

Indeed, with Denmark set to assume the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council, the flames of the cartoon controversy have been fanned

by Iran and Syria. This is critical since the International Atomic Energy Agency is expected to refer Iran to the Security Council and demand sanctions. At the same time, Syria is under scrutiny for its actions in Lebanon. Both Iran and Syria cynically want to embarrass the Danes to achieve their dangerous goals.

But the rallies and riots come from a public ripe with rage. From my childhood in Gaza until today, blaming Israel and the West has been an industry in the Muslim world. Whenever peace seemed attainable, Palestinian leaders found groups who would do everything to sabotage it. They allowed their people to be used as the front line of Arab jihad. Dictators in countries surrounding the Palestinians were only too happy to exploit the Palestinians as a diversion from problems in their own backyards. The only voice outside of government control in these areas has been the mosques, and these places of worship have been filled with talk of jihad.

Is it any surprise that after decades of indoctrination in a culture of hate, that people actually do hate? Arab society has created a system of relying on fear of a common enemy. It's a system that has brought them much-needed unity, cohesion and compliance in a region ravaged by tribal feuds, instability, violence, and selfish corruption. So Arab leaders blame Jews and Christians rather than provide good schools, roads, hospitals, housing, jobs, or hope to their people.

For 30 years I lived inside this war zone of oppressive dictatorships and police states. Citizens competed to appease and glorify their dictators,

but they looked the other way when Muslims tortured and terrorised other Muslims. I witnessed honour killings of girls, oppression of women, female genital mutilation, polygamy and its devastating effect on family relations. All of this is destroying the Muslim faith from within.

It's time for Arabs and Muslims to stand up for their families. We must stop allowing our leaders to use the West and Israel as an excuse to distract from their own failed leadership and their citizens' lack of freedoms. It's time to stop allowing Arab leaders

to complain about cartoons while turning a blind eye to people who defame Islam by holding Korans in one hand while murdering innocent people with the other.

Muslims need jobs - not jihad. Apologies about cartoons will not solve the problems. What is needed is hope and not hate. Unless we recognise that the culture of hate is the true root of the riots surrounding this cartoon controversy, this violent overreaction will only be the start of a clash of civilisations that the world cannot bear.

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