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We stand for:

- *Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue*
- *Respect for the human race and rights*
- *Cooperation for the good of people*
- *Moderation*
- *Modernity*
- *High standards of spirituality*

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Beyond the culture of death and human annihilation

One of the most fundamental religious concepts is the vice-gerency of man on earth; ie, man is the image of God, His representative, trusted agent and executor of His laws. This is a noble status that must be upheld and respected. In every man or woman there is sacredness, being capable of upholding those values and functions. Man's soul is thus highly appreciated, respected and protected by God. The religious doctrines emphasised the sanctity of the human soul; unlawful killing is a heinous crime against humanity, according to the Holy Quran. "That who kills soul....". Killing of innocent people is a crime whether it is committed by an individual at a moment of rage, terrorists or military force of a country. Faith is meant to provide people with deep feelings of peace and security. This must not be shattered by man's violence. Islam has drawn legislations and rules that ban harming God's creation; humans, animals or plantation. A Muslims act of pilgrimage is ruined if he/she kills an insect while wearing the white shroud used for this worship.

It is a sign of moral retardation if killings become the norm in the human life; it deprives humans of their right of life. This angers God Almighty who prohibited those who practice violence and rob them of their peace. Terrorists are committing grave sins when they inflict indiscriminate killings of other, so are states who use their weapons of mass destruction (including missiles and bombs) to settle accounts with their adversaries. Reason is what distinguishes humans from animals. This must be used discretely to ensure that no harm may be inflicted on the others. The human community is instructed to legislate laws based on the notions of justice as prescribed by the divine. Grievances must be settled through legal agencies without resorting to violence. While the bureaucracy of modern statehood often hinders the ability of people to seek justice through the complex and often expensive court systems, no one is allowed to take the law in his/her own hand. This is the way to maintain peace in the human environment.

Creating a human community at peace with itself is one of the aims of the divine laws. Those who oppose the religious approach to justice, the rule of law and the right of man to establish productive and peaceful human environment do not contribute to the human welfare or peace. Stereotyping the religious justice system and the divine laws that regulate the human life does not serve peace or rights. Throughout the history of mankind evil forces have always worked to obscure the divine bounties especially the light that shows the way to happiness and peace. The human laws may work for a time within a short span of time and space but cannot compete with the divine laws prescribed by God Almighty to guide the people and regulate their affairs. Those who rule the powerful states today possess no divine light and are devoid of God's wisdom, light and guidance. These forces resort to exterminating the lives of their foes or those who resist their desire to dominate the world, impose their will on the people and enslave the masses. Those who terminate the lives of people are weak. God is the powerful; He give life; protect the weak and feed the hungry. He is the source of life; the others are enemies of life.

The recent events in the Middle East have shown how vulnerable the world is under the materialistic culture. Weapons of mass destruction are being used at will, with no regard to the loss of life among the innocent people. Arab and Muslim countries have no sovereignty; they are exposed to the evil powers which often act against God's wishes. The sanctity of the human soul has perished from their policies and political calculations. Evil has replaced divinity, goodness and the natural human nobility. There are monumental amounts of goodness and nobility in the human race but the minority evil forces aim at destroying anything sacred, noble or good in the modern human society. There is a need to re-visit the basics of all religions, especially Islam to discover the way forward for this agonised human race. Wars must be resisted by all means to enable the human race enjoy life.



Modern technology and the Soft War

The weekly meeting of Abrar on Thursday 16th January was addressed by Engineer Mohammad Al Assadi, to present his thoughts on Technology and its impact on our world. He also touched upon the use of this technology to impact on religious and cultural

Values in our world. He said that when he came to UK in 1987 he was advised to specialise in computing so he did. Even then it was said that we were entering the era of information revolution. The momentous amount of information that is bombarding us every hour has forced big companies to struggle to cope up with it. For example, 200 million emails are sent every minute. The amount of information that is produced every hour needs ten billion CD to store. If we put them together they would extend to the length of the earth's diameter. Twitter produces each day 6 billion page of information. From the beginning of history until 2003 the amount of information produced by the human race is equivalent to 5 billion books. In two days in 2011 this amount was produced. In 2013 the same amount was produced in ten minutes. Companies like IBM, Google and Facebook compete in this field. Big powers employed this technology in wars to secure its political and economic interests. The first computer was produced in 1945. In parallel with the hard war in which arms are used, the "soft war" aims at controlling minds and wills without compulsion. It is defined as the ability to achieve what you want by attraction not coercion. The use of technology in modern wars is a new development. One person sitting in the operations room, in possession with the coordinates of the targets can order an attack by pilot-



less drones. This development came after Iraq war. Trump has abandoned military war and replaced it with economic sanctions to bring the other side to its knees. Soft war is waged through the internet using the power of information to rob the person of the mind, the attention and concentration. You always have to use the SWAT analysis (Strength, Weakness, and Threats). The speaker then referred the use of the Soft War to influence culture and religion of the people. This is the main threat to the Muslims today as they are exposed to the modern soft warfare for which they are not prepared. While admitting that the information revolution has its own drawbacks, he conceded that Muslims are illiterate in modern information technology which is one of the main weapons of their enemies to target them. The new generation must be encouraged to take up these new challenges and excel in the modern information technology.

The Middle East crisis

On 14th January a seminar was held jointly by the Open Discussion and the Gulf Cultural Club about the situation in the Middle East. Titled "Leave well alone; prospects of war and peace in the Middle East" and chaired by Shabbir Razvi, the seminar debated the tension in the region following recent events.

Stephen Bell, of Stop the War coalition said the crisis must be presented in the framework of continuing decline of US economy and politics. He compared the rising power of China compared to US. He said that Iran since 1979 had become genuine independent state and refused manipulation by US. It is country with 3rd largest oil reserves. The Iranians are suffering but not buckling and the response by the American public to the crisis shows they are now convinced. The Impact of Brexit has made UK subordinate to US. There is no suggestion that crisis is over and the world will face great difficulty.

Sami Ramadani, an Iraqi academic said that the role of the two men who were killed by US (Qassem Soleimani and Abi Mahdi Al Muhandis) was decisive in defeating ISIS in Iraq as the US

was watching. They were in conflict with Maliki government for firstly buying arms from Russia. Today ISIS has started invading Iraq. Demonstrations that started in Iraq in October reflected people's anger against corruption, unemployment and poverty, US sent young Iraqis to US under the pretext of training courses. Then we get the ongoing protests. Until today, there is no representation of these movements. US role is destabilisation. It does not only invade countries, apply economic sanctions, it is a form of warfare. Half a million Iraqi children were killed by economic sanctions. Over one million died. Proxy wars were also waged. The second point is the rise of the Popular Mobilisation that became powerful force after defeating ISIS. They are recognised by Government. PM is supreme commander of Iraqi armed forces. Some are close allies of Iran. American Embassy is so large; that it can house 5000 soldiers. Abdul Mahdi's policies are hated by US. Iraq has also rejected the Deal of the Century. That has upset US. He signed massive deal with China which promised to rebuild Iraq. Trump personally called Abdul Mahdi asking him to scrap the deal. Iraq refused to apply sanctions on Iran.

Stephen Sizer, a priest and peace campaigner, said there are numerous wars in Middle East. And the US intervention does not help the cause of peace. There is a process of Proliferation and Escalation. I want to bring in Palestine as testimony to this. Netanyahu is facing corruption trial. Starting war with Iran is necessary for his election. He could initiate large conflict but it will not help Israel.

US gave Netanyahu the power to wage war. The common denominator is close relationship with America. Trump has recognised annexation of Golan heights by Israel. Many are convinced there will be ecliptic war. I am deeply critical of peace process and Trump's Deal of the Century, which is greatly controversial. I am pessimistic about its ability to lead to positive outcome and peace in the Middle East. The situation may spiral out of control.



Thunberg calls on world leaders to listen to young activists

Greta Thunberg, who has inspired a new generation of activists to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos this year, urged world leaders to listen to young people on Tuesday.



"I'm not a person that can complain about not being heard," she said, prompting laughter from the audience at a panel session titled "Forging a Sustainable Path Towards a Common Future" on the first day of the annual WEF meeting. "The science and voice of young people is not the centre of the conversation, but it needs to be."

Several young activists have travelled to the Swiss ski resort of Davos this year, following in Thunberg's footsteps.

Among the "climate heroes" being celebrated by the WEF are Irish teen scientist Fionn Ferreira, who created a solution for preventing micro plastics from reaching oceans.

They also include South African climate activist Ayakha Melithafa, 17, and Canadian Autumn Peltier, who has been advocating for water conservation since she was 8 years old. "It is about us and future generations and those who have been affected today," Thunberg said. "We need to bring the science into the conversation."

UN: occupied Palestinian territory must be supported

Following a six-day visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller, called on the international community to ensure continued commitment and consistent and sustained funding to help alleviate the challenges faced by Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

"My visit leaves me concerned," Ms. Mueller declared. "The challenges here are immense, but recent positive steps, along with the extraordinary people I met, give me hope that there are opportunities for improvement. We must seize them."

The Assistant Secretary-General was a keynote speaker at the sixth international conference on preparedness and response to emergencies and disasters, held in Tel Aviv. During her visit, she met with Israeli authorities, and commended Israel

on its contribution to global emergency relief efforts.

She also met with Palestinian authorities and Palestinian people to better understand the challenges of the crisis. She reaffirmed the UN's commitment to address humanitarian needs across the oPt, and advocate for longer-term solutions, including lifting of the blockade in Gaza and a fair planning and zoning regime, and more conducive living conditions in the West Bank.

British MPs call for UK to recognize Palestine State

A group of British MPs has called for the UK to recognize the State of Palestine ahead of a visit by Prince Charles to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

In a letter to The Times, the MPs, along with figures from think tanks and pressure groups, said the move was long overdue and would help fulfill Britain's "promise of equal rights for peoples in two states."

The call comes as the heir to the British throne travels on Thursday to Israel and the occupied West Bank, where he will meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The letter said since 2014, no meaningful progress has been made in the peace process, and Israel's actions are pushing a two-state solution beyond reach.

"Illegal Israeli settlements, described by the Foreign Office as undermining peace efforts, are expanding," the letter said.

Among the signatories are Emily Thornberry, a candidate for the Labour Party leadership, and Crispin Blunt, chairman of Conservative Middle East Council.

U.N. experts demand probe into Saudi hack of Amazon boss

U.N. experts have demanded an immediate investigation by U.S. and other authorities into allegations that Saudi Arabia's crown prince was involved in a plot to hack the phone of Amazon boss and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos.

The U.N. special rapporteurs, Agnes Callamard and David Kaye, said on Wednesday they had information pointing to the "possible involvement" of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the alleged 2018 cyberattack, which pre-



ceded alleged threats by the National Enquirer to publish intimate photographs of the billionaire tech tycoon.

Callamard, the special rapporteur for extra-judicial killings, and Kaye, special rapporteur for free expression, said in a statement that they believed the hack was carried out "in an effort to influence, if not silence, The Washington Post's reporting on Saudi Arabia" and called for an "immediate investigation by U.S. and other relevant authorities."

Their recommendation is not binding, and how quickly - if at all - U.S. officials might act on it was not immediately clear. The Wall Street Journal said an FBI investigation into the hack was ongoing. The bureau declined to comment. Saudi officials dismissed the allegations as absurd.

The rapporteurs based their call for an investigation on a 17-page forensic report drawn up by Washington-based FTI Consulting, which a source familiar with the matter said had been commissioned by Bezos. The report alleges with "medium to high confidence" that the billionaire's iPhone X was hijacked by a malicious video file sent from a WhatsApp account used by the crown prince on May 1, 2018.

Griffiths calls for de-escalation of military activities in Yemen

UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths expressed deep concern over the latest round of violence in Yemen which resulted in the death of many innocent civilians.

Griffiths has been in contact with the parties, reiterating his call for de-escalation, according to a statement issued by the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY)



The special envoy called on all the parties involved to take all necessary measures to de-escalate all military activities including movement of troops, airstrikes, missile and drone attacks, the statement said.

Griffiths also called on the parties to adhere to the implementation of the initiatives they have undertaken to de-escalate and to further enhance these initiatives. He pointed out that the reduction of violence is crucial for sustaining the progress made so far on de-escalation. "We all have to work towards advancing the peace process, not setting it backwards. Yemen has suffered enough," he said.

Taqī al-Dīn Ma'ruf: Father of Istanbul's observatory

Taqī al-Dīn Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Qādī Ma'rūf ibn Aḥmad al-Shāmī al-Asadī al-Rāsīd (1526-1585) was born in Damascus in 1526. After receiving his education in theology, he became interested in the rational sciences, which he studied with scholars in Damascus and Cairo, including his father Ma'rūf Efendi. Later, he worked at as a teacher at various madrasas (schools) and served as a qādī (judge) in Nablus (in Palestine), Damascus and Cairo. During his stay in Egypt and Damascus, he produced some important works in the fields of astronomy and mathematics. In 1570, he came to Istanbul from Cairo, and one year later (1571-2) was appointed chief astronomer (Munajjimbashi). Taqī al-Dīn maintained close relationships with many important members of the 'ulema and statesmen, chief among whom was Khojja Sa'ad al-Dīn Efendi (d. 1599), and was presented to Murād III (r. 1574-1595) by the Grand Vizier Sokullu Mehmed Pasha (d. 1579).

Taqī al-Dīn informed Sultan Murād, who had an interest in astronomy and astrology that the Ulugh Bey Zij contained certain observational errors, resulting in errors in calculations made on the basis of those tables. Taqī al-Dīn indicated that these errors could be corrected if new observations were made and proposed that an observatory be built in Istanbul for that purpose. Sultan Murād was very pleased to be the patron of the first observatory in Istanbul and asked that construction begin immediately. He also provided all the financial assistance required for the project. In the meantime, Taqī al-Dīn pursued his studies at the Galata Tower, which he continued in 1577 at the partially completed new observatory that he called Dār al-Rasad al-Jadīd (the New Observatory). This also housed a library, comprising mainly books on astronomy and mathematics.

The observatory, consisting of two separate buildings, one large and one small, was constructed at a location in the higher part of Tophane in Istanbul. Taqī al-Dīn had the instruments used in the old Islamic observatories reproduced with great care. In addition, he invented some new instruments which were used for observational purposes for the first time. The observatory had a staff of sixteen people—eight "observers" (rāsīd), four clerks, and four assistants.



As a result of the new methods he developed and equipment he invented, Taqī al-Dīn was able to approach his observations in an innovative way and produce new solutions to astronomical problems. He prepared trigonometric tables based on decimal fractions. He determined the ecliptic degree as $23^{\circ} 28' 40''$, which is very close to the current value of $23^{\circ} 27'$. He used a new method in calculating solar parameters as well as determining the magnitude of the annual movement of the sun's apogee as 63 seconds. Considering that today's known value is 61 seconds, the result he obtained appears to have been more accurate than that of Copernicus (24 seconds) and Tycho Brahe (45 seconds).

The observatory was designed to provide for the needs of the astronomers and included a library and certainly a workshop for the design and the production of instruments. The institution conceived as one of the largest observatories in the Islamic world was completed in 1579. The observatory continued to function until 22 January 1580, the date of its destruction. Religious arguments were put forward to justify this action, but it was really rooted in certain political conflicts.

A recently published report (talḥīs) of the Grand Vizier Sinān Pasha (d. 1596) to Sultan Murād III, indicates how the Sultan and the Vizier were trying to keep Taqī al-Dīn out of the hands of the 'ulama, who seemingly wanted to put Taqī al-Dīn on trial for heresy. The vizier informs the Sultan that despite the Sultans orders, Taqī al-Dīn insists on going to Syria and warns the Sultan that if he goes there, he might still be recognized by the 'ulama there and put on trial.

Despite his originality, Taqī al-Dīn's actual influence seems to have been very limited. The relatively

small number of surviving copies of his (most important) works indicates that his works did not circulate widely. Only a few commentaries on his works are known. Nevertheless, one of his works and a part of his personal library reached Western Europe relatively quick due to the manuscript collecting efforts of Jacob Golius, a Dutch professor of Arabic and Mathematics of Leiden University, who travelled to Istanbul in the early



17th century. In 1629, in one of his letters to Constantijn Huygens, the father of the well-known Christian Huygens, he mentions seeing Taqī al-Dīn's work on optics in Istanbul and complains about not being able, despite all his efforts, to acquire it from his

friends. He must have succeeded in acquiring it later, since Taqī al-Dīn's work on optics kept at the Bodleian Library as Marsh 119 was originally in the Golius' collection.

The rise and fall of Taqī al-Dīn and his observatory depended on political issues that surrounded him. Due to his father's occupation as a professor at the Damascene College of law Taqī al-Dīn spent much of his life in Syria and Egypt. During his trip to Istanbul he was able to make connections with many scholar-jurists. He was also able to use the private library of the Grand Vizier of the time, Semiz Ali Pasha. He then began working under Sultan Murad III's new Grand Vizier's, private mentor Sa'deddin. Continuing his research on observations of the heavens while in Egypt Taqī al-Dīn used the Galata tower and Sa'deddin's private residence. Although Murad III was the one who commanded an observatory to be built it was actually Sa'deddin who brought the idea to him knowing about his interest in science. The Sultan ultimately would provide Taqī al-Dīn with everything he needed from financial assistance for the physical buildings, to intellectual assistance making sure he had easy access to many types of books he would need. When the Sultan decided to create the observatory he saw it as a way to show off the power his monarchy had besides just financially backing it. Murad III showed his power by bringing Taqī al-Dīn and some of the most accomplished men in the field of astronomy together to work towards one goal and not only have them work well together but also make progress in the field. Murad III made sure that there was proof of his accomplishments by having his court historiographer Seyyid Lokman keep very detailed records of the work going on at the observatory. Seyyid Lokman wrote that his sultan's monarchy was much more powerful than others in Iraq, Persia, and Anatolia. He also claimed that Murad III was above other monarchs because the results of the observatory were new to the world and replaced many others.

'Muslim' Is Not an Insult

The president's recent tweet was personal for me.

Jasmine M. El-Gamal

Donald Trump recently retweeted a doctored photo of the Democratic congressional leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer wearing a traditional Iranian maghnaeh (headscarf) and amameh (turban), respectively, and accused them of sympathizing with Iran's supreme leader. The image was disturbing, confusing, and—given that hate crimes against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim are a growing concern—dangerous.

In response to the tweet, the White House press secretary told Fox News that the president was "making it clear that Democrats are ... almost taking the side of terrorists and those who were out to kill the Americans." But if the president simply wanted to link Democrats to Iran's supreme leader, he could have tweeted any number of images that did not include them wearing attire worn by millions of Muslims around the world, none of whom has anything to do with ayatollahs or terrorism.

The president's tweet was personal for me. I'm a first-generation American from a Muslim family and, until 2017, I spent my entire career in public service, including eight years as a civil servant at the Department of Defense, where I advised the department's leadership on Middle East issues. As the daughter of Egyptian immigrants, working at the Pentagon was more than a job—it was a way I could show my parents that their sacrifices through the years were worth it. I would see admiration, sometimes surprise, reflected in the eyes of officials from the Middle East when they saw a young woman of Arab descent sitting behind the secretary of defense at a meeting. So when I read about how my colleagues Rumana Ahmed and Sahar Nowrouzadeh were alienated or pushed out under the Trump administration for being Muslim or Iranian, I was devastated—not just for them personally, but also for the image and spirit of our country.

This is not the first time the president has twisted facts or conflated issues as they relate to Muslims to score political points with his base. Almost a year before he won election, Trump called for banning Muslims from entering the United States—a policy that evolved into what is now known as the "Muslim ban," with hugely detrimental effects. On the campaign trail in 2016, he stated that "Islam hates us," portraying Islam, and by extension Muslims, as an angry, monolithic "other" dead set on destroying the American way of life. With those three words, Trump set the tone for the years to come, fueling an "us versus them" narrative that has widened deep fissures within our society.

I grew up in both the U.S. and Egypt and have regularly been asked to explain each country's culture to the other. Like anyone bicultural, I was taught to be wary of generalizations. After college, I served as a translator with U.S. troops in Iraq, and I became acutely aware of the importance of symbolism. Speaking to Iraqis and Americans in their own language, I could see clearly their shared humanity; to me, they were more similar than different. They couldn't understand one another's words, so, at least initially, they focused on one another's clothes: a black veil, a checkered scarf, mirrored Oakley sunglasses, an orange jumpsuit, military fatigues, a suit and tie. Every garment and accessory evoked a stereotype and, based on the individual's perception, represented either safety or danger. I learned that without dialogue, breaking barriers or creating bonds between the two cultures was impossible.

If the right words can defuse tensions, the wrong ones can amplify them, as Trump seems to understand. He has proved adept at harnessing people's fears and grievances. He's not incapable of reaching out to communities to temper their anxieties, but he does so selectively. During his first address to Congress, the president denounced both racism and



anti-Semitism. He spoke about Black History Month and the then-recent vandalism of Jewish cemeteries. But in the same address, the president simply referred to "the shooting in Kansas" to describe an attack by a white American against two Indian men he had thought were Middle Eastern.

That the attacker yelled "Get out of my country!" before pulling the trigger did not warrant a mention in the president's address, nor did the fear that by then had begun to grip Muslim communities across the U.S. due to a rise in Islamophobic attacks.

Dehumanization is an easy trap to fall into. If you've never met a Muslim, it can feel impossible to relate. If the only time you hear about Muslims is in the context of a negative event, your mind begins to link Islam to such events. When the president tweets an image of two Democrats wearing Muslim clothing and his spokesperson pairs that image with words such as terrorism they are going well beyond criticism of Democrats' political positions; they are implicitly linking Muslims and their appearance to danger. For American Muslims, this means stripping away our identity as Americans and telling us that we don't belong "here," but rather in faraway lands and cultures that are different from, and dangerous to, "yours." This type of Islamophobia, like anti-Semitism, racism, and other dehumanizing biases, is harmful not just to Muslims, but to all Americans. The president's use of Islamophobia as a weapon has undermined our country's values, tarnished our image abroad, and weakened our ability to lead by example. Worst of all, it has made us scared of one another.

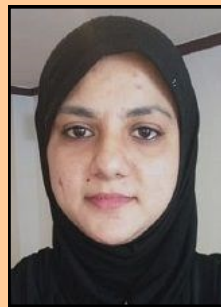
The day after Trump's election, I walked around Manhattan in the early hours of the morning in a daze, wondering what his presidency would mean for my family and the millions of other minorities in America. The streets were empty, other than the occasional police car or yellow cab. That night, it felt like something had changed. I walked into my hotel's lobby just as Trump was addressing the country. He said, "Now it's time for America to bind the wounds of division ... come together as one united people." I remember hoping that he meant it. I remember thinking that I would support his efforts if he did. Three years and many derogatory tweets later, it is clear he didn't.

Jasmine M. El-Gamal is a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and a former Middle East adviser at the Department of Defense. She is a co-founder of Only Through US, a nonprofit that counters fear-based policies following terror attacks

First Muslim woman mayor of Mysuru, India

Tasneem Bano, a Janata Dal (Secular) corporator, was elected as the first-ever Muslim woman Mayor of Mysuru on 18 January. The 31-year old is also the youngest person to be elected to the post. Arif Hussain was the first Muslim mayor of Mysuru (1996) and while many non-Muslim women have also held the post, according to a report in the Deccan Herald, Tasneem is the first Muslim woman to be elected as the first citizen of the city.

Tasneem, who was fielded by the Congress-JD(S) alliance, polled 47 of the 70 votes while her rival, Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Geetha Yoganand polled 23 votes, said a report in The Hindu. Her party colleague C Sridhar defeated BJP candidate Shantamma for the deputy mayor post, added the report.



‘Defense ninja’: One Muslim woman’s journey to empowerment

WHY WE WROTE THIS

When she faced harassment, Fauzia Lala couldn’t find training that would allow her to protect herself with both actions and words, so she founded her own self-defense school. Now, she helps dozens of other women.

Fauzia Lala was sparring with a teenage member of her taekwondo class a few years ago when she felt him touch her breast. A provisional black belt, she was well versed in the intricacies of sparring, so when it happened several more times, she knew it was intentional.

Ms. Lala finished the match but didn’t feel as though she could speak up about what had happened. A Muslim who grew up in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, she says she experienced harassment on the job several times when she worked for Microsoft, and had felt too frightened to speak up about it. “Here I am a black belt that ended up crying and leaving; that’s just crazy,” says Ms. Lala.

Over the next few years, she became increasingly aware of attacks against people – especially women – in the Muslim community, including a man who screamed anti-Muslim insults at two women on a train in Portland, Oregon, then stabbed and killed two men who intervened to help.

Unable to find training that would allow her to protect herself and speak up when needed, Ms. Lala developed her own. Today, she is head instructor of Defense Ninjas, a women’s self-defense school based in Washington. Training consists of 12 levels organized around technical moves and defense objectives, such as escapes, attack, and ground defense. The classes help to fill an important need for Muslim women who may feel especially vulnerable in the current political and social climate.

In just over two years, Ms. Lala’s reach has grown. She started by teaching a handful of students out of a mosque. Now she has 35 to 40 regular students, teaches workshops, and has expanded far beyond the Muslim community. Her classes have become a haven for women from diverse backgrounds to learn self-defense and, in the process, discover that what unites them as women is more important than anything that may divide them.

“Everybody everywhere needs to know self-defense, and currently it’s only being taught in forms of workshops or kickboxing, and that’s not effective,” says Ms. Lala.

“We need the whole curriculum. We need the emotional side. We need the therapeutic side, the meditation, the yoga – everything that women need.”

“An empowering experience”

On a recent Tuesday evening, five women gathered at Redmond Community Center, one of several locations where Ms. Lala offers classes. With Flo Rida’s

“My House” playing quietly in the background, Ms. Lala, dressed in jeans and a dark headscarf, stood in front of the group and asked a simple question: “Women don’t really want to punch. Why?”

“Because we don’t have as much hand strength,” answered student Jamie Brown.

Ms. Lala agreed that a woman’s punch may not be strong enough to help her escape a bad situation. But she went on to explain that since she is likely to be shorter than her attacker, she can more easily target the nose and jaw. Putting a palm under the jaw and pushing up and out, she said, could cause the attacker to pass out.

But self-defense is about much more than the physical side of things – like being able to speak up when necessary. Ms. Lala tries to get students together outside her classes once a month to give them more time to interact.

On one Saturday afternoon, she and a handful of women sat in a circle on the floor of a studio on Mercer Island to discuss fear. They spent three minutes jotting down things that scared them, and then shared patterns they noticed, including struggles with self-doubt, aging, and their appearance.

When Ms. Lala brought up a fight this past summer at Disneyland that drew widespread attention due to the seeming inaction of security, some questioned whether they could rely on anyone to watch out for them.

“It always makes me think, ‘What would I do?’” says one of Ms. Lala’s students, Tracy Bumgarner. “If I were in this situation, would I jump in?”

Amelia Neighbors, a Muslim IT project manager, was one of Ms. Lala’s first students. She says the classes quickly started feeling like a club, and that students bonded with each other regardless of their background. Students understand that their peers in class also want to be able to protect themselves, and that they might have had experiences that made them feel vulnerable.

Ms. Neighbors recalled a student who told her class about being physically attacked. “We immediately felt this compassion,” Ms. Neighbors says. “I think all of us have felt in our lives somehow disregarded or treated poorly.”

Learning how to protect oneself and others is “just kind of an empowering experience, and it builds that sense of camaraderie,” she says.

Ms. Lala learned from experience how difficult it can be to speak up. She moved to Seattle when she was 20 to study computer science at Seattle University. When she finished her junior year, she was offered a job at Microsoft. On the job, Ms. Lala says co-workers touched her inappropriately and threw things at her when they were angry. She says people told her that since she was in a modern country, she didn’t need to wear a headscarf. One person pulled at it. “Looking back, I was just too scared to speak up or say anything,” she says. “That’s how it escalates.”

That’s also part of what drew her to self-defense training.

Confronting harassment head-on

In her classes, she cites studies indicating that it’s very hard to know what you would do in a real situation. While many women say they would kick and scream if attacked, she told one recent class about a Swedish study that showed nearly half of women who were attacked reported experiencing extreme paralysis.

Which is why she wants her students to know they have innate strength, like leveraging their hips and core, to push away attackers. It’s just about knowing how to use it. “It’s also the vocal side of things and the emotional side of things, so when people are saying certain things or doing certain things, I can stand up and say, ‘Don’t be disrespectful,’” she explains.

Ms. Lala is working to convert Defense Ninjas into a nonprofit, which she hopes will allow her to hire more instructors and establish her own dedicated space for her classes. She also wants to expand throughout Washington state, and perhaps beyond.

Ms. Lala says when women initially start taking her classes, some feel intimidated. But she’s noticed that they quickly start to bond with the other students and develop strong friendships.

“They’re all going through the same thing,” she says, explaining that they want to know how to confront the harassment and abuse so many women face, or simply gain more confidence and control. “They all want something more in life besides whatever they have right now.”

This story was produced in association with the Round Earth Media program of the International Women’s Media Foundation.



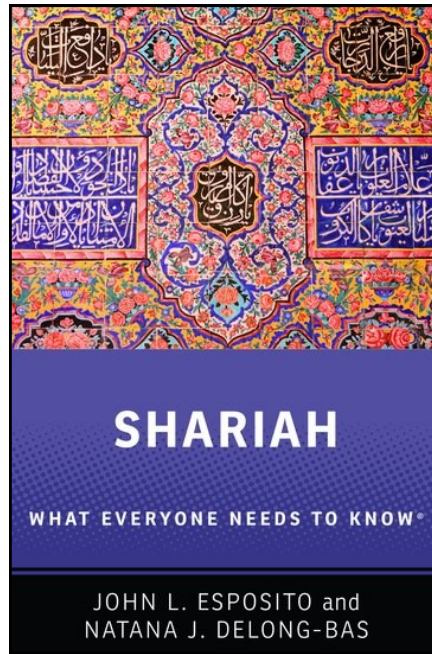
Shariah What Everyone Needs to Know

John L. Esposito and Natana J. DeLong-Bas

Sharia is by now a term that most Americans and Europeans recognize, though few really understand what it means. Often portrayed as a medieval system used by religious zealots to oppress women and deny human rights, conservative politicians, media commentators, and hardline televangelists stoke fear by promoting the idea that Muslims want to impose a repressive Sharia rule in America and Europe. Despite the breadth of this propaganda, a majority of Muslims—men and women—support Sharia as a source of law. In fact, for many centuries Sharia has functioned for Muslims as a positive source of guidance, providing a moral compass for individuals and society. This critical new book by John L. Esposito and Natana DeLong-Bas aims to serve as a guide for what everybody needs to know in the conversation about Sharia, responding to misunderstandings and distortions, and offering answers to questions about the origin,

nature, and content of Sharia.

This book could not be more timely. It provides a clear, lucid and scholarly



guide to Shariah which should shatter the ignorant myths that surround it with an aura of evil. If we wish to win hearts and minds it is essential that we learn what is actually in them and not rely on what we imagine might be there. This eminently accessible introduction will help people to do just that. - Karen Armstrong, author of *Islam: A Short History*
The clear writing and solid scholarship make it [Shariah] a valuable reference work. - Publishers Weekly

John L. Esposito is professor of Religion and International Affairs and of Islamic Studies at Georgetown University. He is the author or editor of more than 45 books, including *Islamophobia: The Challenges of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, and *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*. He is the Editor of the Oxford Islamic Studies Series.

Natana DeLong-Bas is Assistant Professor of Theology at Boston College and the author of *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*.

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The Muslim Brotherhood and the West

A History of Enmity and Engagement

Martyn Frampton

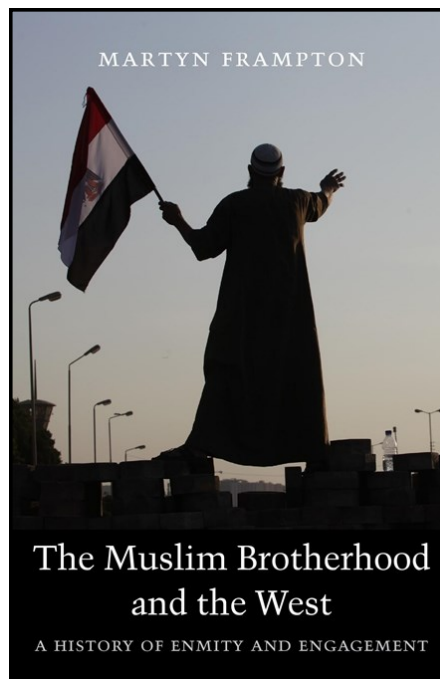
The Muslim Brotherhood and the West is the first comprehensive history of the relationship between the world's largest Islamist movement and the Western powers that have dominated the Middle East for the past century: Britain and the United States.

In the decades since the Brotherhood emerged in Egypt in the 1920s, the movement's notion of "the West" has remained central to its worldview and a key driver of its behavior. From its founding, the Brotherhood stood opposed to the British Empire and Western cultural influence more broadly. As British power gave way to American, the Brotherhood's leaders, committed to a vision of more authentic Islamic societies, oscillated between anxiety or paranoia about the West and the need to engage with it. Western officials, for their part, struggled to understand the Brotherhood, unsure whether to shun the movement as one of dangerous "fanatics" or to embrace it as a moderate and inevitable part of the region's political scene. Too often, diplomats failed to view the movement on its own terms, preferring to impose their own external agendas and obsessions.

Martyn Frampton reveals the history of this complex and charged relationship down to the eve of the Arab

Spring. Drawing on extensive archival research in London and Washington and the Brotherhood's writings in Arabic and English, he provides the most authoritative assessment to date of a relationship that is both vital in itself and crucial to navigating one of the world's most turbulent regions.

"Rigorous yet absorbing... [Frampton's] book fills a crucial gap in the literature



and will be essential reading not just for scholars, but for anyone seeking to understand the ever-problematic relationship between religion and politics in today's Middle East."—Malise Ruthven, *Financial Times*

"Breaks new ground by examining the links between the Egyptian Brotherhood's relations with Britain and, when it became the chief Western influence in the Middle East soon after the Second World War, with the United States."—

The *Times Literary Supplement*
"Frampton exhaustively chronicles the history of the Muslim Brotherhood from its founding in 1928 to the Arab Spring of 2011."—John Waterbury, *Foreign Affairs*

"The West and the Brothers will continue to have a complex relationship. To explain that relationship, one must go beyond the rhetoric of a modernizing secular West and a conservative anti-modern Islamist trend. Frampton provides ample evidence to suggest that collision may not be inevitable, showing how it can give way to engagement and dialogue... [Full of] rich historical details of intricate relationships and intrigues."—Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Times Higher Education*

Martyn Frampton is Reader in Modern History at Queen Mary University of London.

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Confessions of a modern Muslim girl

by Shazmeen Zahid

Are you this quiet because most Muslim girls are oppressed in their households?

My self-proclaimed guardians and well-wishers have often told me that if I'm more subdued, less opinionated and agreeable towards everything that a man says, I can be better Muslim woman and more favourable in Allah's eyes.

Growing up in a family that respected all religions, my parents never questioned my choice of friends and welcomed them all with the same love that any other family member would have received.

I am sure every non-hijabi Muslim girl has been asked why she does not wear a hijab and later advised to follow Islam completely by orthodox clans. It is also common for us to be told by non-followers how it's a sorry state that we have to wear one.

A woman who chooses to wear a hijab is in no way superior or inferior to anyone, nor does the presence or absence of a hijab play any role in enticing a man (a common argument used by patriarchs to justify the hijab).

I would like to clarify by saying that not all families impose their will upon women forcing them to wear a hijab. Most women wear it out of their free will and most Muslim families give their daughters the liberty to make that choice themselves. What happens is that you end up constantly educating and re-educating people about this, but, honestly, do you really have to? After a point, you just becomes numb with all the mindlessness around.

It also comes as a rude shock when your liberalism is questioned by orthodox clans who try to 'correct' your views, saying you are spoilt and blinded because you didn't have a Muslim female friend as a course corrector.

Most of the time I am too baffled to react to such statements where every argument is converted into a religious appropriation by people who themselves are no great examples.

If you ever try explaining to these wonderful people that in order to follow Islam, one does not always have to hate the world or atheists, you might end up being attacked with inappropriate remarks on your character and how your future is doomed if you don't mend your views. On top of this, all this may conveniently be garbed by hardliners as a means of showing love and care.

Whenever I have expressed my resentment towards such questions, people have often retaliated saying that they are just trying to have a healthy debate, and then laughed over it. It's difficult for them to accept that one cannot entertain such questions because they are extremely offensive towards the entire community. These people fail to understand that we already have a set of people whom we respect and as much as we try to respect their views, they should not attempt to impose theirs on us.

As women, we face gender disparity everywhere, irrespective of what religion or caste we belong to. We often end up being shamed for



everything that is wrong with the world. Often, sexist comments are hurled upon us based on our clothing or lifestyle just because it's considered that as women we should be okay with it. Sadly, religion is most commonly used as the basis to justify such arguments.

It's a struggle to follow your religion and still welcome the changing world and its views. When there are multiple ways to pull each other down, religion should

be the last of them.

Why make it toxic for others when everyone has their own battles to fight!

Honest Confession of a Hijabi

By Faaria Ansari

Hijab has always been a piece of cloth to me. An accessory. An accent to an outfit. Nothing more. Before I knew it, it became my passion. I became obsessed with hijab. The meaning behind it and more so, the empowerment it held. Hijab has saved my life in every aspect. It's changed my character, my personality, my behavior, my thoughts, my opinions, essentially my being. It has encouraged me to become the best possible human and Muslim I have the potential of becoming.

I've never been very religious. A few prayers when I remembered but for the most part, I was scared of Islam. I was scared of

all the things I've done wrong, I never thought to ever make them right. Wearing the hijab has taught me the beauty of Islam. It has handed me satisfaction in myself and for all the right reasons.

Hijab doesn't limit power or encouragement or success. It excels it. It teaches you to beat the odds that are set against you and even those beyond. It teaches you to never settle in being comfortable but stepping out in all different unknowns, remembering that Allah (swt) will only give you challenges He knows you can overcome. Hijab has given me a certain confidence I couldn't find in superficial or materialistic categories. It has granted me a proud shield I carry ever so gently in my daily life and I am forever grateful for it. I am humbled, I am grounded, I am fearless.

I am a proud Muslim and for the first time in my life, I can honestly say I mean it with every single atom that Allah has astonishingly created. I am human and I want the world to know, I'm no different than them. I have the same ambitions, dreams and fantasies. I want the world to see that Islam is not about fear. It's about love. So many different types of love, the most complex brain could not comprehend its realms. The only thing that makes us different is a piece of cloth. But if only they knew the virtue it holds.



105. AND HOW MANY SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH DO THEY PASS BY? YET THEY TURN (THEIR FACES) AWAY FROM THEM!

106. AND MOST OF THEM BELIEVE NOT IN ALLAH WITHOUT ASSOCIATING (OTHER AS PARTNERS) WITH HIM!

107. DO THEY THEN FEEL SECURE FROM THE COMING AGAINST THEM OF THE COVERING VEIL OF THE WRATH OF ALLAH, - OR OF THE COMING AGAINST THEM OF THE (FINAL) HOUR ALL OF A SUDDEN WHILE THEY PERCEIVE NOT?

108. SAY THOU: "THIS IS MY WAY: I DO INVITE UNTO ALLAH, - ON EVIDENCE CLEAR AS THE SEEING WITH ONE'S EYES, - I AND WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME. GLORY TO ALLAH. AND NEVER WILL I JOIN GODS WITH ALLAH."

(JOSEPH+)

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