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INTRODUCTION By Adam Parfrey

Muslim academics and clerics express alarm when the words “extreme” and “fundamentalist” are used to describe the more orthodox of their co-religionists.

Dr. Omar Abdul Rahman, the blind cleric jailed for his participation in the 1993 World Trade Center attack, wrote a paper about the media code words describing militant or orthodox Islamic belief. Says Rahman, the root word of fundamentalism is *fundamental*, meaning a structure, a foundation. If you are a fundamentalist, you cannot also be an extremist. Therefore the media code word is a distortion.

What the media wishes to do, says Rahman, is destroy Islam through its assaults and distortions. Other Muslims have posted essays on websites saying that the word “extremist” has served to brew the sort of hate taken up by the grotesque morons who used 9/11/01 as an excuse to brutalize anyone they imagined to fit the description of “Arab.”

So there really isn’t an “extreme Islam,” claims Dr. Rahman, since Islam is by definition centered upon a strict reading of The Qur’an. As Asaf Hussain explains in “Islamic Awakening in the Twentieth Century” in the April 1988 issue of *Third World Quarterly*:

The mainstream of fundamentalist thought (*al-salafiyya* or *al-usauliyya*) espouses a reading of Islam that is far from extremist. As expounded by Jamal el-Din, al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdu in the later part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, fundamentalism prides itself on being the epitome of “moderation.” The *umma* is a moderate or Middle Nation (*ummatun wasta*) among all nations. The “straight path” of Islam is the path that forms the geometric center between extremes.

The purpose of *Extreme Islam* is not to harm, but to understand. Understanding requires asking hard questions, and the reading of all relevant material. If the “epitome of moderation” has believers guiding jets into skyscrapers; if certain practitioners of the “straight path” force a woman, under penalty of death, to never go out in public unless she wears a stifling suit of wool armor that does not allow one hair or square inch of flesh to be seen; if the most desirable afterlife is achieved through sacrificing oneself through the mass murder of political enemies, then perhaps we should ask ourselves whether or not The Holy Qur’an is itself the voice of moderation, or an extremist document.

The Qur'an doesn't allow straggling. To question whether its verses and its commands are truly a supernatural statement by a higher power and, to ask whether Prophet Muhammad's marriage to a nine-year-old girl is worthy of emulation and respect, is to commit the unpardonable sin of elevating "self" above "God" — and in some moderate lands that is an apostasy worthy of execution.

"Moderate" Muslims, always regarded with deep respect by the western media, pick and choose from the Qur'an as if it were a buffet of ideas that allows verses to be adhered to or discarded, depending upon what's considered properly democratic. The "moderate" Reform Jew belongs to a branch so hated in Israel that he is not even considered Jewish. The "moderate" Christian, like a Unitarian, or a Quaker, is so despised by fundamentalists that he is thought of as being Satanic. Monotheism ≠ moderation.

The psychological security provided by fundamentalist absolutism must be quite a relief to troubled souls. I wonder, though, if belief is intensified by a queasy distrust of it lurking beneath.

Because the editor of this collection does not believe that flying aircraft into the World Trade Center towers can be defined as moderate, I've elected to use the words "extreme" and "fundamentalism" to suggest the type of Islamic belief that embraces the present-day jihad against America and its allies.

Perhaps use of the word "propaganda" in the title ought to be explained. Iran, the prophetic forefather of Islamic revolution, considers it important to have a "Minister of Islamic Propagation," or, as they put it in the west, propaganda. Most of the contents propagates a particular view. And not always Islam. A couple pieces also put across Zionist and Christian Zionist views of the Palestine crisis for contrast and perspective.

I must confess that I love Islamic propaganda. After putting my hands on a bound volume of Iran's English-language *Echo of Islam* magazines, so full of remarkable posters, including those making Jimmy Carter look like the veritable Antichrist, I spent a considerable amount of time trying to locate similar material. It's damn hard to find. Hardly anyone I knew possesses it. Americans would do well to study the arguments of those who despise us rather than parading around in a patriotic haze. Fearing that opposition propaganda is riddled with secret code unnecessarily gives it a lot more power.

The late '90s saw an explosion of militant Muslim websites. A few days after the War on Terrorism was engaged, many of these websites were abruptly shut down, unavailable to researchers or the curious.

www.taleban.org or www.azzam.com were not even accessible as cached material on Google.com. I feel lucky to have downloaded material from these and other sites before their unceremonious removal from the internet.

Knowledge, as they say, is power. I wish that our intelligence agencies, with their \$40 billion a year budgets, had enough sense to realize that after the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, the destruction of American embassies and Naval ships, and Usamah Bin-Laden releasing his 1998 fatwa urging the murder of all Americans, that he and his comrades were biding time before 9/11/01 could happen.

After viewing, like everyone in the United States, its surreal results on television, I began to wonder if the planners of the attack had thought of the following Qur'anic verses:

“That Day some faces will be radiant, laughing, rejoicing. That Day some faces will be dust-covered, overcast with gloom. Those are the dissolute disbelievers.”

(Surah Abasa: 38-42)

and

“Wherever you are, death will find you out. Even if you are in towers built up strong and high.”

(al-Nisaa 4:78)

Adam Parfrey
November, 2001



The theme of the bloody hand writing on the wall was taken up by the Islamic Republican Party of the city of Mashhad which in 1979 commissioned a poster commemorating the 15th of Khordad (5 June 1963) showing the date written in blood of a dying martyr. Here the Revolution pays tribute to its forerunner, the uprising of 1963.