

■ By Akhtar Mahmud Faruqi

How did an average Muslim perceive the United States of America in the pre-September 11 period? A country to envy and despise? A bulwark of Christianity? A sworn enemy of Islam? Undisputed leader of the West on a collision course with the Ummah?

The answer to all such questions is in the negative. Despite many misgivings about US foreign policy and Washington's ambivalent posture on crucial issues such as Palestine and Kashmir, Muslims have been generally appreciative of America - a country on the march.

I have vivid recollections of my childhood impressions of the United States. The stagecoach winding its way on a dusty trail, eager prospectors panning for gold, the rush for California, and entrancing characters - Buffalo Bill, Daniel Defoe, Kit Carson, Monte Hale, Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy, Lash Larue, Rocky Lane, bounty hunters et al. - stalking the 'Wild West'.

With time, I came to identify the US as the epitome of anything and everything quintessential with its glittering Ivy colleges that were soon to be the focus of all our pursuits. Not many of us could make it to Cornell or Harvard. But the unrivalled excellence of American institutions continued to exercise a magnetic pull on professionals, including the men in the khaki, who were keen to avail of an opportunity to train at Fort Benning or West Point. A closure exposure to American academics and Nobel Laureates had a singularly beneficent influence on my formative years. Professors Hans Bethe, Michael Moravcsik, Octave du Temple, Donald Glaser, Nicholas Negroponte, Hofstadter, et al. were fine human beings and outstanding achievers. Their wives seemed to complement their values and attainments.

Come September 11 and the scene dramatically alters. The media churns out story after story to suggest that Islam and the West are on a collision course! There is a concerted effort to lend credence to Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations.' A negative perception of Islam is aired day in and day out through newspapers, TV, radio, and films. We are more than familiar with the ridicule that Chuck Norris, Bruce Willis, Denzel Washington and a host of others hurl on the Muslim world without the slightest call of compunction.

Which brings us to the oft-debated debate: Are Islam and the West on a collision course? Professor Ralph Braibanti, an eminent scholar who has been on the faculty of Duke University since 1953, makes the incisive point in his illuminating essay "Islam and the West: Common Cause or Clash?" published by the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University. An excerpt:

"The ecumenical decree of Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Times) 1965 was a stunning repudiation of an attitude towards Islam regnant for more than half a millennium. It erased in a few poetically elegant sentences the imagery in Dante's char-

## Religious Affinities or Animosities?



acterization of Mohammed as seminator di scandalo e di scima. Its newly sensitive appraisal of Islam eclipsed the somewhat less

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felicitous but more potentially powerful final sentence of paragraph 3: 'On behalf of all mankind, let them [Muslims and Christians] make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom [et pro omnibus hominibus iusticiam socialem, bona moralia necnon pacem et libertatem communiter tueantur et promoveant].'

"This is clearly an exhortation to act. The errors of the past were acknowledged, animosities were to be forgotten, and points of agreement between the two religions were portrayed without animus or condescension," writes the erudite professor.

Nostra Aetate unequivocally spelled out the religious affinity between Muslims and Christians: "Upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem [respicit]. They adore [adorant] one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of Heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself.

Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere [venerantur] him as prophet. They also honor [honorant] Mary, his virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgment when God will give each man his due after raising him up... Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom."

Viewed in this context, the visit of Pope John Paul to the Omayyad Mosque in Damascus on May 6, 2001, was an event of singular importance. He was the first Pope to set foot on a mosque and his message on the momentous day was truly befitting for the occasion: religious conviction was never a justification for violence. The Pontiff who gave a new dimension to Judeo-Christian ties with his visit to Rome's synagogue in 1985, said it was time to open a new chapter in relations with the Muslims. "For all the times that Muslims and Christians have offended one another, we need to seek forgiveness from the Almighty and to offer each other forgiveness... Better understanding will surely lead to a new way of presenting our two religions, not in opposition as has happened too often in the past, but in partnership for the good of the human family."

Another news story emanating from the Vatican a few years later appeared equally heart-warming: Pope Benedict XVI expressed unreserved admiration for Muslims and Islam and called for freedom of religion and faith that rejects all forms of violence.

Returning from a four-day visit to Turkey that included an unscheduled stopover at Istanbul's Blue Mosque, the Pope discussed his trip during his weekly audience at the Vatican. "On one side, it is necessary to rediscover the reality of God and public importance of religious faith, on the other to assure that the expression of faith is free, devoid of fundamentalist degeneration, capable of firmly repudiating any form of violence. I, therefore, was given the propitious occasion to renew my sentiments of esteem for Muslims and the Islamic civilization ... At the same time I was able to insist on the importance that Christians and Muslims work together for mankind, for life, for peace and for justice."

The Pope described his visit to the mosque as "a gesture that was not initially planned but that turned out to have great significance. During a few minutes of reflection in that place of worship I turned to the only God of Heaven and earth ... May all believers see themselves as his creatures and bear witness of true brotherhood." Towards the end of his visit to the Blue Mosque, the Pope stood shoulder to shoulder with Istanbul's Grand Mufti Mustafa Cagrici for about a minute. He kept his arms crossed at his

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■ By Nasim Yousaf

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## Tribute to Khaksar Leader Hameeduddin Ahmed Al-Mashriqi

On January 10, 2010, Hameeduddin Ahmed Al-Mashriqi passed away after suffering a heart attack. His death is a great loss for the Khaksar Tehrik and the entire Pakistani nation.

Hameeduddin Ahmed was the son of Allama Mashriqi and Saeeda Begum (Mashriqi's second wife) and was born on November 16, 1958 in Lahore, Pakistan. He obtained his degree in Electronic Engineering from Mehran University of Engineering & Technology. Ahmed was inspired by his father's lifelong struggle for freedom and tremendous contributions to society; he vowed to carry forward Mashriqi's mission of uplifting poor masses, achieving justice, and uniting people of all provinces.

Following his father's example, Ahmed lived a life of simplicity, inhabiting his father's house in Ichhra (Lahore), wearing basic Khaki attire, and living amongst the masses; although he had the means to do so, Ahmed refused to live a life of luxury when the majority of his fellow countrymen were deprived of even basic necessities.

In 1993, Ahmed entered politics, upon the urging of the Khaksars, and was elected President of the Khaksar Tehrik. Subsequently, the Khaksars refused to accept anyone else as their leader and declared him to be President of the Khaksar Tehrik for life. The Khaksars' loyalty to Ahmed reflects the tremendous

respect he enjoyed among his followers. Under his guidance, the Khaksar weekly Al-Islah (originally started by Allama Mashriqi in 1934) continued its publication from the Tehrik headquarters in Ichhra, Lahore.

After entering politics, Ahmed remained active on a variety of social and political issues. He led marches, attended conferences, and held meetings with prominent political, military, and religious leaders, mobilizing the public in support of national issues.

In 2005, when a devastating earthquake hit Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Ahmed worked tirelessly to collect donations for the victims. Based on his efforts, many truckloads of supplies - some loaded/unloaded by Ahmed himself - were sent to affected areas. Ahmed also established Khaksar camps in the areas of the catastrophe, traveling there to supervise the rehabilitation process and distribute food and other essentials.

Later, Ahmed led countless Khaksar demonstrations to restore democracy, an independent judiciary, and freedom of the Press in Pakistan; he even went on a hunger strike to put pressure on the authorities. During his struggle, he was imprisoned and sent to Attock and Kot Lakhpat jails. He was also kept under house arrest. His struggle helped to bring

about positive change, including the removal of the ban on Geo Television transmissions and reinstatement of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

During his years in politics, Ahmed arranged or presided over a number of conferences, including conferences to mark Mashriqi's death anniversary. He also organized Khaksar rallies to pay tribute to the Khaksar martyrs of March 19, 1940. On April 11, 2009, Ahmed delivered a keynote address at the "National Peace Conference," attended by leading political and religious figures. And most recently, he and the Khaksars protested the price-hikes in basic consumer products. Ahmed was to lead another Khaksar rally in this regard, when he suffered his fatal heart attack. He died on January 10, 2010.

Throughout his public life, Ahmed worked for the downtrodden and underprivileged. He never hesitated to take to the streets if a national cause so demanded. Along with these efforts, one of Ahmed's great desires was to create an Allama Mashriqi Museum, with a research academy where individuals could learn about Mashriqi's services for the nation. Unfortunately, Ahmed was unable to complete this mission during his lifetime; hopefully, the Government of Pakistan can fulfill his dream by completing this project

on a priority basis.

Ahmed's death shocked followers and admirers and condolence messages were received from a number of prominent leaders. The Associated Press of Pakistan reported, "Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani has expressed deep grief and sorrow over the death of the head of Tehreek-e-Khaksar, Allama Hameeduddin Mashriqi. In a message, the Prime Minister lauded his role in creating political awareness among the masses and conveyed his condolences to the family members of the deceased. He also prayed to Almighty Allah to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss with fortitude." The Pakistan Press International also reported, "The Jamaat e Islami chief Syed Munawar Hasan, former chief Qazi Husain Ahmed and Secretary General Liaquat Baloch and deputy chief Muhammad Aslam Saleemi, have expressed deep grief over the sad demise of the Khaksar Tehrik chief Allama Hamiduddin Al-Mashriqi. In a condolence message here, they said that Allama Hamiduddin Al-Mashriqi, was a noble man and a patriotic politician who had always practiced politics of principles. They prayed that the departed soul may rest in eternal peace."

Other prominent personalities

who condoled Ahmed's death include Tehrik-e-Insaaf Chariman Imran Khan, Former President of Pakistan Rafiq Tarar, Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Former Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, Chief Minister (Punjab) Shahbaz Sharif, Former Chief Minister (Punjab) Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, and Justice Nasira Javed Iqbal (daughter-in-law of Allama Iqbal).

Individuals from all walks of life - politicians, civil and military officials, students, workers, laborers, lawyers, and journalists - attended Hameeduddin Ahmed's funeral on January 12. Jamaat-i-Islami leader Qazi Hussain Ahmad led the prayers. Dignitaries in attendance included Lt. General Hameed Gul, Former Federal Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique, Syed Zaeem Hussain Qadri (MPA), and Hafiz Noman (MPA). Hameeduddin was laid to rest next to his parents in Ichhra.

Hameeduddin Ahmed's ultimate dream was to see Pakistan grow into a strong and prosperous country where justice, equal opportunity, and quality education are available to all citizens and the deep-rooted corruption is eliminated. In his death, the people of Pakistan lost an invaluable spokesman and sincere statesman; his passing leaves a tremendous void that may never be filled.

Hameeduddin Ahmed Al-Mashriqi is survived by his wife, Dr. Hira Al-Mashriqi, two sons, Ahsanullah Aslam and Inayatullah Mateen, and daughter Saeeda Haika.

May God rest his soul in eternal peace.