

*Sunday September 23, 2012*

## **More than a single silly video**

By Jim Taylor

With all due respect to the innumerable pundits who have pontificated about the anti-American riots sweeping through the Islamic world – and beyond into Asia – I think they’ve missed the point.

They’ve been looking at the situation through the lens of American culture. Or at least through the lens of western European culture. Where our highest values are abstract concepts, fostered by The Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, concepts like freedom of speech, individual rights, thinking things through....

Those concepts do not adequately describe the Middle East. Or Pakistan. Or the Philippines.

The places where anti-American riots have taken place all have honour/shame cultures. Their primary motivation is the honour – more precisely, the dishonour -- of the entire family, the tribe, the clan, the nation. To dishonour any member of that culture is to dishonour the whole culture.

And obviously, to dishonour the culture’s iconic prophet is to dishonour everyone.

In that setting, there can be no moderate voices. You cannot distance yourself from the protest without being considered a traitor.

Although we in the western nations have theoretically moved past those honour/shame cultures, Federal cabinet minister Vic Toews invoked the same polarizing mindset against critics of his tough-on-crime bill: “You can stand with us, or with the child pornographers.”

So did G.W. Bush: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

## **Misleading metaphors**

I would also suggest that the aforementioned pundits have misread the pent-up fury of the riots. With a few exceptions, they have focussed blame on a YouTube video that mocked Mohammed.

They described the offending video as the spark that lit the woodpile, the leak that broke the dike, the trigger that ignited the explosives....

These metaphors misdirect our attention. They incline us to concentrate on the spark, the leak, the trigger. We should be looking at the wood pile, the floodwaters, and the dynamite.

The assumption seems to be that if the video had not gone viral, none of this would have happened. Or perhaps that if Obama had blocked the video, the hostility would fade away. As if sticking a finger into the dike would make flood levels on the far side recede.

Before a spark can ignite the woodpile, you need a pile of wood.

## **A lamentable history**

And that wood has been piling up for most of a century, in U.S. foreign relations. Consider some of the regimes that the U.S. has treated as its friends:

- Mohammad Rezā Shāh Pahlavī, the Shah of Iran.
- Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, in China.
- Ferdinand Marcos, in the Philippines.
- The land-owning oligarchies of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. The U.S. even trained their paramilitary death squads at the School of the Americas in Georgia.
- Fulgencio Batista in Cuba.

- The generals who seized power from elected governments in Pakistan, Brazil, Paraguay, and Chile.
- Francisco Franco in Spain.
- Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia
- Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu in South Viet Nam.

Bluntly put, the U.S. has a track record of backing regimes that were later overthrown by popular uprisings, whether peacefully or violently.

The U.S. has also shown itself to be a fickle friend.

It supported Saddam Hussein when he fought against Iran, then turned against him when he threatened U.S. oil supplies.

It backed the mujahedeen in Afghanistan while they fought the Russians; then turned against them when they became the Taliban.

It cozied up to military dictators in Pakistan, while cold shouldering democratic governments in India.

It devised the Monroe Doctrine to protect newly independent nations in Central America and the Caribbean from their former European masters. Then it used that same doctrine to justify intervening in the internal affairs of those nations.

It even suppressed information about Stalin's atrocities in Poland and the Ukraine to avoid offending a current ally -- who later became its enemy during the Cold War.

This kind of history does not incline non-Americans to trust American good intentions.

## **The central issue**

But for the Arab world, America's most offensive act has certainly been its unwavering support for the state of Israel.

Whether that support is right or wrong is beside the point. Right or wrong, America's financial and military backing of Israel is the primary cause of anti-American sentiment among Arab and Islamic peoples.

Before you accuse me of anti-Semitism, imagine a parallel situation. Suppose a consortium of foreign nations decreed that southern Texas was the ancestral homeland of Mexican people, and arbitrarily transferred ownership to them. Would Americans meekly accept their loss of territory?

And suppose those Mexicans thrived, and brought in more Mexicans, who kept expanding into the rest of Texas, displacing Americans who already lived there. Would Americans take it lying down?

Not bleeping likely!

Because of Israel, all the Arab peoples feel dishonoured. They feel like victims of a home invasion. Their birthright has been besmirched, their household vandalized.

Their resentment is not reasoned. Rather, it is a deep gut anger that has been simmering for generations.

In that situation, it takes very little extra heat to make the pot boil over.

\*\*\*\*\*

Copyright © 2012 by Jim Taylor. Non-profit use in congregations and study groups encouraged; all other rights reserved.

Please encourage your friends to subscribe to these columns.

To send comments, to subscribe, or to unsubscribe, write to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca)

\*\*\*\*\*

## **YOUR TURN**

Gosh, only one letter of agreement with last week's column about a civilization that denies its responsibility for everything.

That letter came from Cliff Boldt: Once again, you hold up a mirror that reflects back to us. Thanks."

Cliff then referred me to “some research that is of more than passing interest vis a vis your Sharp Edges and other things that are going bump in our world. <http://truth-out.org/news/item/11501-what-motivates-rejection-of-climate-science>”

Steve Roney suggested that it’s not so much denial as fear: “Whenever something new is proposed or appears, the natural human response is generally fear. So we suspect it of all sorts of things unjustly. There were early beliefs that travelling in a train would cause asphyxiation. That photography required the killing of children for their eyeballs. That electricity could bring the dead to life in some monstrous form (hence the story of Frankenstein).

“What horror story does not depend on the concept of science or technology going wrong? Most often, these fears prove unjustified. Only occasionally, one of them pans out.”

Ted Wilson expanded on the concept of blame: “And when it’s a [human] tragedy like Dawson College, École Polytechnique, Taber Ab., etc., we blame guns.”

Ron Quillian disagreed with my analysis. “I was ok with the use of ‘denial’ in your article until you referred to ‘denying global warming or climate change’. Many of us deny climate change when used within the context of anthropogenic GHG, mainly CO2. In terms of our contribution to climate change hydrocarbon, humans are a mere ‘pip-squeak’ compared with the energy and influence of natural forces such as solar radiation and its collaboration with the earth’s orbital eccentricity, axial variations and axial wobble -- not to mention a significant re-distribution of energy and influence by the North Atlantic Deep Water Current and its equatorial cousin El Nino’s Southern Oscillation.”

Ron’s theories sound quite rational compared to Paul Wichlinski’s: “you forgot to mention the daily aerial chemtrail spraying of aluminum and barium nan-particulates by pilotless planes that turn into artificial clouds and fill our valleys with a white haze of aluminum fallout(causing dementia) every day of the year---weather geo-engineering crimes are the worst crimes against humanity ever in history and Canadians are so scared they won’t even look up at the sky when you try to point out these horrendous crimes being done to us--- there is no chance of stopping or slowing down this assault on us because Canadians are cowards and our country is filling up with sodomites, lesbians and child molesters and murderers and liars and stealers and fornicators and the wrath of God is coming very soon... “

In a second mailing, Paul supplemented his views: “electromagnetic waves bounced off of the ionosphere are able to bend and steer the jetstream and the jetstream position controls all weather ---- in the late 1960s the Soviets and Americans agreed to melt the Arctic for oil and gas deposits and shorter shipping routes through NorthWest passage---in 1974 they met again in Vladovostok and agreed to promote global warming lies to cover their evil intentions....”

Oh, my....

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PSALM PARAPHRASES**

I have started including a psalm paraphrase for the coming Sunday with my Soft Edges column, on Wednesdays. Why not on Sunday, you ask? Well, partly because psalms seem to me to fit better with the general mood of Soft Edges, which is more likely to deal directly with faith-related matters than these Sharp Edges columns. And partly because Soft Edges is about 250 words shorter than Sharp Edges, and so including the paraphrase on Wednesday won’t make the e-mailing quite as long.

That does mean that if you want to receive the paraphrase, and are not on the Soft Edges mailing list, you'll need to subscribe. No charge, just send me a message, [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or you can subscribe automatically by sending a blank e-mail to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca).

\*\*\*\*\*

#### TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send me an e-mail message at the address above. Or you can subscribe electronically by sending a blank e-mail (no message) to [sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca). Similarly, you can un-subscribe at [sharpedges-unsubscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:sharpedges-unsubscribe@quixotic.ca).

You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

\*\*\*\*\*

#### PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com](mailto:isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

\*\*\*\*\*