



# Jewish-Muslim Relations <sup>11</sup>

## The Qur'anic View

By

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<sup>1</sup> Dome of the Rock, Temple Mount in Old Jerusalem.  
See Appendix 1.



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<sup>2</sup> Abrogation is an erroneous hypothesis and convention employed by some Muslim scholars to rationalize the meaning of Qur'anic verses that relate to the same topic, but which appear to be in contradiction. The formula presumes that verses in the Qur'an recorded most recently necessarily take precedence over those transcribed earlier.

We believe in God, and in that which has been revealed to us, which is that which was revealed to Abraham and Ismail and Jacob and the tribes [of Israel], as well as that which the Lord revealed to Moses and to Jesus and to all the other Prophets. We make no distinction between any of them; we submit ourselves to God.

HOLY QUR'AN Ch 3, v 85

## INTRODUCTION

*"As to Islam itself, intolerance is woven into its very fabric....  
The Qur'an's strong message is that Allah loves Muslims and hates everyone else. If you don't believe this, just read the Qur'an."*<sup>3</sup>

It is past time to separate the wheat from the chaff, and categorically refute such counterfeit assertions. The Holy Qur'an speaks for itself:

Those who believe [in the Qur'an], And those who follow the Jewish [scriptures], And the Christians and the Sabians, Any who truly believe in Allah and the Last Day, and do good deeds, shall have their reward with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.<sup>4</sup>

Further, the Qur'an addresses itself to the whole of mankind, and does not limit or restrict its message to Muslims of the Islamic faith.

There should be no compulsion in religion. Surely, right has become distinct from wrong; so whosoever refuses to be led by those who transgress, and believes in Allah, has surely grasped a strong handle which knows no breaking. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.<sup>5</sup>

In the Arabic language, *Muslim* translates as, "A person who submits their will to God and believes in Him."<sup>6</sup> Thus, anyone who *submits* to the Will of God (Allah) is *Muslim* by definition. In fact, the Qur'an refers to Adam and Eve as the first Muslims, and to Prophet Abraham<sup>7</sup>, as well.

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<sup>3</sup> M. Carlos, *Naming the Darkness: Religious Roots of the Middle East Conflict*, [www.peacewithrealism.org](http://www.peacewithrealism.org) [accessed August 26, 2011]

<sup>4</sup> Qur'an Ch 2, v 62

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Ch 2, v 257

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.islamic-dictionary.com>

<sup>7</sup> **PBUH**: *Praise Be Upon Him* is the traditional salutation of respect and reverence that is used whenever the name of Prophet Muhammad and the Hebrew and Christian Prophets are written or spoken by a Muslim.

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim.<sup>8</sup>

The concept that enmity between Jews (*a-Yahûd*) and Muslims is a religious tenet in Islam is fraudulent and debases the Holy Qur'an, as well as the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. However, the concept is a common misconception among many Muslims, Jews and others. Religious extremists and political demagogues reference Qur'anic verses taken out of context to support their anti-Semitic views, while ignoring the fundamental precepts of the Qur'an, as well as the *Hadith*.<sup>9</sup>

This intention of this monograph is to reveal the unity of faith that is at the heart of Judaism and Islam, and to articulate the common historical and theological ground shared by the two religions. To this end, this paper will:

- Document the abundance of references found throughout the Qur'an that venerate Israelites, Jews, Hebrew prophets, and the Torah, and which inform and illuminate Islamic history and teachings.
- Explore the history of Muslim-Jewish relations, including examination of the social, political and religious dynamics in Medina which circumscribed Muslim-Jewish relations when Prophet Muhammad and his followers migrated there from Mecca in 622 C.E.
- Probe the criticisms of Jews found in commentaries in the Qur'an that pertain to three wars that occurred in the 7<sup>th</sup> century between Medina's Muslim, Arab and Jewish tribes.
- Examine the contributions of Islamic scholars and jurists to Muslim-Jewish relations, with focus on the rules of governance concerning non-Muslims residing in regions under the jurisdiction of Muslims rulers.

This paper also will discuss the emergence of ethnocentrism and anti-Semitism in Arab Muslim societies following the passing of the Islamic Golden Age in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and which persists in more virulent forms in the present era of globalization.<sup>10</sup>

#### **ISLAMIC AND JUDAIC SHARED BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

The core belief of both Judaism and Islam is the absolute unity of God, which Muslims acknowledge in their five daily prayers, and Jews observe in prayer three times daily.

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<sup>8</sup> Qur'an Ch 3, v 67

<sup>9</sup> The Hadith are reports of Prophet Muhammad's [PBUH] statements and actions transcribed a hundred years or more following his death. The stronger Hadith were derived from the Prophet's companions, while the weaker Hadith were sourced 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> hand.

<sup>10</sup> Globalization: see Appendix 2.

And dispute ye not with the People of the Book [i.e. Jews, Christians, and Muslims] except in the best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong; But say, 'We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us [the Qur'an] and in that which came down to you [the Torah and the Gospels]; Our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we submit.'<sup>11</sup>

According to both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, Abraham was the forefather of many tribes through his sons Ishmael and Isaac, namely the Ishmaelites, Israelites, Midianites, and Edomites. Abraham was a descendant of Noah's son, Shem. Christians believe that Jesus was a descendant of Abraham through Isaac, and Muslims believe that Muhammad was a descendant of Abraham through Ishmael.<sup>12</sup>

Prophet Abraham is the preeminent religious figure for Muslims, second only to Prophet Muhammad. In Islam, Abraham is recognized as a prophet, patriarch, messenger, rebuilder of the *Ka'aba*, and archetype of the perfect Muslim. The Qur'an mentions Abraham by name at least 66 times. Perhaps, the clearest example of the reverence and respect that Muslims hold for Abraham is reflected in their daily prayers. Referring to Abraham and the People of the Book, Muslims entreat God to:

"Bless, O Allah, Muhammad and his people as Thou didst bless Abraham and his people. Thou art indeed Praiseworthy, the Exalted.

"Prosper, O Allah, Muhammad and his people as Thou didst prosper Abraham and his people. Thou art indeed Praiseworthy, the Exalted."

During their obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca, known as *Hajj*, Muslims commemorate Abraham's two supreme sacrifices made at the behest of God: that of leaving his wife Hager and infant son Ishmael in the desert, and his willingness to sacrifice his only son.<sup>13</sup> Although Jews and Christians differ with Muslims on the identity of the son to be sacrificed, the Scriptures of the three faiths share the same allegory, and interpret its meaning similarly. Muslims acknowledge Abraham and Hager's unwavering faith and obedience to God through ritual acts of devotion

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<sup>11</sup> Qur'an Ch 29, v 46

<sup>12</sup> PBUT: *Praise Be Upon Them* is the traditional plural salutation used when more than one of the names of the Hebrew and Christian Prophets are written or spoken by Muslims.

<sup>13</sup> According to Muslim tradition, Abraham left his wife, Hager, and their infant son, Ishmael, alone in the desert at the behest of God (Ishmael was Abraham's *only* son until the birth of Isaac). When Ishmael cried out in thirst, Hager ran seven times back and forth between two hills desperately searching for water. Miraculously, a spring – *zamzam* – gushed forth from the spot where Hager had placed Ishmael. Water flows from the Zamzam Well to this day, three thousand years after it first appeared. The well is located adjacent to the Ka'aba, the holiest place in Islam. Muslims throughout the world face in the direction of the Ka'aba during prayers, which they perform five times a day.

during the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, which is the fifth and final *pillar* of Islam.<sup>14</sup>

Moses is the most important prophet of Judaism, and is revered as a prophet and messenger in Islam. Moses is mentioned in the Qur'an 148 times by name, and his life is narrated and recounted more than that of any other prophet. The Qur'an corroborates several Jewish historical events, including the parting of the Red Sea to allow safe passage for Moses and his followers, Moses speaking with God and leading the Jews out of Sinai, and others.<sup>15</sup>

One of the clearest correlations between Jews and Muslims is their common belief that both Moses and Muhammad received Divine revelations containing the teachings of God's message. Muslims believe that God sent the Jewish people Scriptures containing the Divine teachings through their Prophets, and that the Muslims received the Qur'anic Scriptures in the same way through Prophet Muhammad.

It was We who revealed the Torah [to Moses]: therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the prophets who bowed [as in Islam] to Allah's will, by the rabbis and the doctors of law: for to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's Book (*Umm al-Kitab*) and they were witnesses thereto: therefore fear not men, but fear me, and sell not my signs for a miserable price. If any do fail to judge by what Allah hath revealed, they are [no better than] Unbelievers.<sup>16</sup>

There are several references in the Qur'an to "Allah's Book", the *Umm al-Kitab* or "Mother of Books", which is safeguarded in Heaven, according to the Qur'an.<sup>17</sup> The *Umm al-Kitab* is believed to be the original source of God's guidance from which the Torah, the Gospels, and the Qur'an were drawn.<sup>18</sup>

Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, the All-Sustaining. It is He who has sent down to thee (step by step) the Book containing the Truth, and confirming what went before it; And He sent down the Torah [of Moses] and the Gospel [of Jesus] before this; as a guide to mankind, He sent down the Criterion [the Qur'an]. Surely, those who deny

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<sup>14</sup> The *pillars of Islam* are five basic acts that are the framework for worship: (1) the creed (*shahada*); (2) daily prayers (*salat*); (3) almsgiving (*zakāt*); (4) fasting at Ramadan (*sawm*); (5) pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) at least once in a lifetime. These *pillars* are considered obligatory by Muslims, and a sign of their commitment to the faith.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Aisha Y. Musa, Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies, Florida International University, *Jews in the Qur'an: An Introduction*, [www.askmusa.org](http://www.askmusa.org) [accessed May 2012]

See also: [www.theamericanmuslim.org](http://www.theamericanmuslim.org)

<sup>16</sup> Qur'an Ch 5, v 44 [Yusuf Ali translation]

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Ch 43, v 5

<sup>18</sup> Salman Akhtar, Ed., *The Crescent and the Couch: Cross-Currents Between Islam and Psychoanalysis*, 2008, p 224.

the Signs of Allah shall suffer the severe chastisement. And Allah is exalted in Might, the Possessor of the power to requite.<sup>19</sup>

The Qur'an also affirms that God's message has been sent to all of mankind through the Prophets.

To every nation We sent a Messenger who told its people, 'Worship God and stay away from satan [i.e. evil; false idols].' Some of them were guided by God, and others were doomed to go astray. Travel through the land and see how terrible was the end for those who rejected the truth!<sup>20</sup>

As noted above, the Qur'an reveres all of the Jewish prophets, including Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Aaron, and Jesus. While Muslims believe that God sent a multitude of "messengers" (i.e. prophets), only about two dozen are named in the Quran. When joined with those prophets named in the Bible, approximately 50 prophets are identified by name, while others remain anonymous. The Qur'an affirms that all prophets were extraordinary people selected by God.<sup>21</sup>

The Qur'an does not merely recognize the similarity of Islam and Judaism, but identifies Jews with Muslims. While the overarching common heritage of the *Abrahamic faiths*<sup>22</sup> is affirmed repeatedly in the Qur'an, so too are the diverse communities of monotheistic "believers" who are referred to as *People of the Book*. In fact, the Qur'an mentions "People of the Book" more than 34 times.

The Qur'an speaks extensively about *Bani Isra'il*, the Children of Israel, and Chapter 17 in the Qur'an is titled, "Bani Isra'il." Excluding references to individual prophets, there are approximately forty-three references to the *Israelites* in the Qur'an, while *Jews* are referred to 19 times.

The Qur'an recognizes that, according to their lineage, Jews are descendants of Prophet Abraham through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. According to the Qur'an, Allah exalted the Jews over other nations of the earth:

O children of Israel! remember My favor which I bestowed upon you and that I exalted you above the peoples.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Qur'an Ch 3, v 3-5

<sup>20</sup> Qur'an Ch 16, v 36 [Muhammad Sarwar translation]

<sup>21</sup> "And We chose them knowingly above the peoples of their time." (Ibid. Ch 44, v 33)

<sup>22</sup> The Abrahamic faiths are those religions whose common heritage is Prophet Abraham: Judaism through Moses and the Torah; Christianity through Jesus and the Gospels; Islam through Muhammad and the Qur'an [PBU].

<sup>23</sup> Qur'an Ch 2, v 48



And remember when Moses said to his people, 'O my people, call to mind Allah's favor upon you when He appointed Prophets among you and made you kings, and gave you what He gave not to any other among the peoples.'<sup>24</sup>

O children of Israel! remember My favor which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill your covenant with Me, I will fulfill My covenant with you, and Me alone should you fear.<sup>25</sup>

Jerusalem is the holiest city for the Jews, and the third most sacred city in the Muslim world after Mecca and Medina. In fact, up until 624 C.E., the Prophet and his Muslim followers faced Jerusalem in prayer.

However, in the second year of the Prophet's residence in Medina, it was revealed to Him that Muslims were to face in the direction of the *Ka'aba* when praying.<sup>26 27 28</sup> In addition, early historians report that, during the first two centuries of Islam, Muslims read the Torah alongside the Qur'an.<sup>29</sup>

There are many common practices shared by the two faiths. For example, the traditional greetings used by Muslims and Jews throughout the world are identical. *Shalom aleichem* means "Peace be upon you", and is derived from the Talmud, the Judaic text concerning law and ethics. The Islamic greeting, *As-Salāmu `Alaykum*, also means "Peace be upon you." According to the Qur'an, the requisite greeting is from Allah:

But when you enter the houses, greet one another with a greeting from Allah, blessed and good (say: *Assalaamu `Aleykum*).<sup>30</sup>

The two faiths also share practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, as well as dietary laws. Jews traditionally wash their hands and feet before prayer, which is equivalent to the Islamic practice of washing before prayer, termed *wadu*. Allowed food is called *Kosher* in Judaism and *Halal* in Islam, and both religions prohibit the consumption of pork. Both Islam and traditional Judaism ban homosexuality, forbid sexual relations outside of marriage, and practice circumcision for males.

With such extensive references in the Qur'an to the principles of faith and common heritage of the monotheistic Abrahamic religions, the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Ch 5, v 21

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Ch 2, v 41

<sup>26</sup> The direction of prayer for Muslims is termed *Qiblah* in Arabic.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Ch 2, v 142-145

<sup>28</sup> The change in the direction of Muslims' prayers toward the Kaa'ba reportedly generated strong support among the pagan Arab tribes. Although the pagan tribes revered the Kaa'ba as an idol-temple, it was recognized, as well, as the sacred house of Abraham and Ishmael, the common ancestors of every Arab.

<sup>29</sup> Reza Aslan, *No God But God: The Origins, Evolution, And Future of Islam*, 2005, p. 100; and, Nabia Abbott, *Aishah: the Beloved of Mohammed*, 1933.

<sup>30</sup> Qur'an Ch 24, v 61 [Al-Noor translation]

Torah, the People of the Book, and veneration of the Jewish Prophets, it is incomprehensible how the Qur'an could be interpreted to propound anti-Semitic theses, or that bigotry and persecution of Jewish believers could be construed as a tenet of Islamic faith.

### **JEWISH-MUSLIM HISTORY**

There is a dearth of available material pertaining to Jewish-Muslim relations during the early period of Islam. Jewish-Muslim relations, which did not begin until the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina in 620 C.E., have not been examined in their full historical and socio-political contexts. A few fragmented, sometimes contradictory accounts, derived mainly from Muslim oral sources, were recorded long after the events occurred.

In the expanding world of Islam during the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E., the aggregation of the distinct cultures, languages and religions of non-Arabs and non-Muslims generated new ideas and created new problems which challenged Muslim rulers. Early Muslim historical recorders were preoccupied with the political issues of the early Caliphates, including the outbreak of the *fitnas* (i.e. civil wars), the early Shia-Sunni schism, the Shia conflict with the Syrian caliphate, etc. The early writers also were engaged in prevailing theological controversies, and advancing their own views.

Most European scholarship focused narrowly upon the influence of Judaism and Jewish teachings on Islam, the Prophet's disappointment at his rejection by the Jews, the expulsion of two Jewish tribes from Medina, and the execution of enemy combatants who were members of a third Jewish tribe. Syed Barakat Ahmad, a renowned contemporary scholar and diplomat, examined the early Islamic sources and Jewish writings dealing with the relationship between the Jewish tribes, Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims in Medina.<sup>31</sup> He found that, although historical research by Muslim historians and Orientalists contributed to an understanding of the Prophet's relations with the Jews of the *al-Hijaz*<sup>32</sup> and Medina, their work was compromised by its reliance upon questionable accounts compiled during the Abbasid Caliphate, more than 120 years after Prophet Muhammad's death.

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<sup>31</sup> Syed Barakat Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews: A Re-examination*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1979

<sup>32</sup> *al-Hijaz* was a barely habitable region located along the south-western coast of the Red Sea in what is now Saudi Arabia. The two most important settlements in the region, Mecca and Medina, developed around oases where water was plentiful, and pasture available for camel caravans.

## THE QUR'AN'S PORTRAYAL OF THE JEWS

From the 13<sup>th</sup> century, following the decline of Islam's Golden Age, the writings of Islamic scholars and jurists pertaining to People of the Book have eclipsed fundamental historical factors referenced in the Qur'an. Nevertheless, the migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E., known as the *Hijra*, and the complex relationships there among the Jewish tribes, Arab clans, the Prophet and his followers during this early period of Islam, are of far greater significance than jurisprudence and legend in deconstructing anti-Semitic interpretations of the Qur'an.

While there is no reliable historical evidence to establish the approximate date of Jewish settlement in Arabia, Arab legends trace their first settlements in Mecca to the time of Moses.<sup>33</sup> At the time of the Prophet's migration to Medina, historians estimate that there were more than twenty Jewish tribes and clans settled there.<sup>34</sup> However, these tribes were not Israelites; they were Arab converts. There is no evidence that they either spoke or read Hebrew, and therefore would have been unable to read Hebrew scriptures. Modern scholars, such as S. W. Baron<sup>35</sup> and D. S. Margoliouth<sup>36</sup> believe that the Medina Jews' knowledge of Hebrew Scriptures was limited to a few scrolls of law, and fragmentary Arabic translations of the Torah.

Early Muslim historians paid minimal attention to Muslim-Jewish relations in Medina, where Prophet Muhammad and his Muslim followers first encountered Jews directly. The basic source of Islam's early history is the Qur'an. However, while the Qur'an is contemporaneous with the Prophet's life, it is not a history book. Nonetheless, a running commentary of important events that occurred during the Prophet's lifetime is woven into the Qur'an. While the Qur'an does not provide specific dates or sequence of events, it plays an important role in corroborating many of the actual events which took place during the Apostle's lifetime.

Muhammad initially viewed both Christians and Jews as natural allies sharing the core principles of the Qur'anic revelations, and anticipated their acceptance and support.

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<sup>33</sup> Amalek, *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, 1965, p 27-8

<sup>34</sup> Al-Samhudi, p. 16

<sup>35</sup> Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 1937.

<sup>36</sup> David Samuel Margoliouth, *The Relations Between Arabs and Israelites Prior to the Rise of Islam*, 1924.

They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book there is a party who stand by their covenant; they recite the word of Allah in the hours of night and prostrate themselves before Him. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and enjoin what is good and forbid evil, and hasten, vying with one another, in good works. And these are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they shall not be denied its due reward; and Allah well knows the God-fearing.<sup>37</sup>

However, acceptance and support of the Prophet and His Message by Christians and Jews were not forthcoming.<sup>38</sup> In the early period of revelation, Jews were condemned in the Qur'an for rejecting Muhammad's prophetic status, and distorting their own scripture in order to discredit the message of the Qur'an.<sup>39</sup> The Qur'an also admonished Jews for failure to uphold the Torah, and for excessive legalism and exaggerated authoritarianism by some rabbis, issues which Jews themselves have addressed.<sup>40</sup>

Angry polemic was a common characteristic among the emergent Religions of the Book. Their anger was directed against the conjoined religious and political structures that opposed them. Hebrew Scriptures railed against idolatrous nations such as the Moabites, Midianites, Assyrians, Egyptians, and Babylonians. Christian scriptures directed their anger towards Greco-Roman pagans, Roman authorities and Jewish religious leaders. The Qur'an contains angry references to Arab idol-worshippers, as well as to People of the Book (mainly Jews) who rejected the Revelations. In each case, the prophetic revelations and religious movements that grew from them threatened the established social order, and were perceived as revolutionary in the regions where they emerged. The impact of these movements in their historic settings were secular, notwithstanding the fact that their roots were intrinsically spiritual and personal.

## **MEDINA DURING THE TIME OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD**

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<sup>37</sup> Qur'an Ch 3, v 114-6

<sup>38</sup> "Say, 'O People of the Book! you stand on nothing until you observe the Torah and the Gospel and what has now been sent down to you from your Lord.' And surely, what has been sent down to thee from thy Lord will increase many of them in rebellion and disbelief; so grieve not for the disbelieving people." (Qur'an Ch 5, v 69)

<sup>39</sup> "And how will they make thee their judge when they have with them the Torah, wherein is Allah's judgment? Yet, in spite of that they turn their backs; and certainly they will not believe." (Qur'an Ch 5, v 44)

<sup>40</sup> "And if they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and what has been now sent down to them from their Lord, they would, surely, have eaten of good things from above them and from under their feet. Among them are a people who are moderate; but many of them — evil indeed is that which they do." (Qur'an Ch 5, v 67)

The preponderance of epithets and criticisms of Jews found in the Qur'an and the early literature relate to friction between three Jewish tribes and the Muslim community in Medina during the time of the Prophet, and the three wars initiated by the Meccans against Medina's Muslim community.

Prior to the Hijrah,<sup>41</sup> the Jewish tribes in Medina allowed the pagan Arab tribe of *Banu Qaylah* to settle on uncultivated land around the small desert community. The Banu Qaylah was divided into two major clans – the *Aws* and the *Khazraj*. Various developments in the latter part of the 6<sup>th</sup> century weakened the Jewish community's hold on Medina, and the Banu Qaylah tribe became dominant. However, hostility among the Arab clans resulted in continual fighting. The Arab clans had allies among the Jewish tribes, who aided them in their conflicts. In a decisive battle fought just before the Prophet's migration, the victorious *Aws* clan became the dominant authority in Medina.

Ten years after Muhammad's first revelation on Mount Hira, a delegation consisting of representatives from Medina's Arab clans, including the *Aws* and *Khazraj*, invited the Prophet to come to Medina. They pledged to protect Muhammad if he would come as a neutral outsider and serve as chief arbitrator for the tribal community, which had been fighting with each other for decades. A few months prior to the Prophet's migration, Jewish converts to Islam from Medina also invited Muhammad to Medina. It is estimated seventy Jewish men and women from Medina accepted Islam while performing pilgrimage in Mecca. The significance of these events was the fact that Muhammad was esteemed and trusted by both Arabs and Jews, and that Islam's message was able to unite women and men from different regions, clans, social classes, and religious beliefs.

In 622 C.E., the Prophet migrated to Medina amid its contentious political environment, prepossessing a symbolic presence rivaling Medina's embattled leaders. Accordingly, his arrival was perceived as a threat to those in power, as well as to those benefiting from the status quo. The Jewish tribes were concerned about the Prophet's intentions, and were divided in their recognition of the similarities of Islam's monotheistic message with their own scriptures. Prior to the Prophet's arrival, Medina's Jewish leaders had spoken out in opposition to the claim that

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<sup>41</sup> Also Hijrat or Hegira – the migration or journey of prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina – to escape severe persecution in Mecca. This happened in 622 CE. This is also the first year of the Muslim calendar.

he is the “final” Prophet, and also questioned elements of the Qur’an which they thought contradicted Hebrew scriptures.

The amalgam of the political, social, and religious conflicts in Medina were destabilizing and fraught with danger. Given the terms of his invitation, Prophet Muhammad proceeded to create peace in the community upon his arrival. His efforts resulted in a tripartite agreement between Medina’s Muslim converts and those who had migrated from Mecca, the Arabs from the Khazraj and Aws clans, and Medina’s Jewish tribes. This agreement, known as the *Sahifa* in Arabic, is better known today as the *Constitution of Medina*.<sup>42</sup>

The *Sahifa* was based on an inclusive conception of *the rule of law*, with two basic principles: the safeguarding of individual rights by impartial judicial authority, and the principle of equality before the law. The terms of the agreement recognized the diverse ethnic, religious and secular affiliations of the signatories – Jews, Muslims, Medina natives, Meccan immigrants, the Arab Aws and Khazraj clans, and did not demand conversion to Islam. The community created by the *Sahifa* became known as the *ummah*, a term describing the totality of individuals living in Medina who were bound to one another by the *Sahifa*.

As a rudimentary basis of civil law, the primary purpose of the *Sahifa* was the resolution of conflicts without violence. Accordingly, blood feuds were abolished, and all rights were given equally to Medina’s citizens, regardless of religion, ethnicity or social position. The salient principles of the visionary Constitution of Medina included:

1. The signatories formed a common *ummah*, or *nationality*.
2. The signatories were to remain united in peace and in war.
3. If any of the parties were attacked by an enemy, the others would defend it with their combined forces.
4. None of the parties would give shelter to the Quraysh of Mecca, or make any secret treaty with them.
5. The various signatories were free to profess their own religion.
6. Bloodshed, murder and violence were forbidden.
7. The city of Medina was to be regarded as sacred, and any strangers who came under the protection of its citizens were to be treated the same as Medina’s citizens.
8. All disputes were to be referred to Prophet Muhammad for arbitration and decision.

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<sup>42</sup> [www.constitutionofmadina.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Constitution-of-Madina-Articles.pdf](http://www.constitutionofmadina.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Constitution-of-Madina-Articles.pdf)

Many Medians converted to the faith of the new Meccan immigrants, particularly amongst the pagan and polytheist tribes. However, the Jews were wary, although there were a few converts to Islam. The growing Muslim influence in Medina was not readily accepted by those among the Jewish tribes whose influence had waned in the face of the Prophet's growing authority. Their opposition was less about theological disagreement than political alliances and their attendant economic benefits. Many Jews in Medina had close links with the chief of the Khazraj clan, Abd'Allah bin Ubayy bin Salul. Bin Salul was partial to the Jews, and would have been Medina's prince if not for Prophet Muhammad's arrival.

A significant commercial dimension further contributed to Medina's turbulent socio-political scene. The Prophet's Muslim followers had established a tax-free marketplace that grew in competition with Mecca's existing market controlled by the ruling Quraysh tribe. The Quraysh had clashed previously with the Prophet and his followers in Mecca, and they began to view Medina's Muslims as a serious threat.<sup>43</sup> Mecca was the epicenter of major trade routes crisscrossing the al-Hijaz, and also the central place of worship for Arabia's pagan religious deities. Religion and trade were the Quraysh tribe's sources of power and influence across the al-Hijaz. The Quraysh could not allow their dominant position to be undermined by Medina's tax-free marketplace, nor Prophet Muhammad's monotheistic message.

In 624 C.E., the conflicts erupted into three wars between the Meccans and the Muslims. In the *Battle of Badr*, the small, ill-equipped Muslim army, led by Prophet Muhammad defeated the Quraysh army outside Medina. A second war, the *Battle of Uhud*, was fought in 625 C.E., and resulted in heavy Muslim losses, including injury to the Prophet. A third war, known as *Khandaq* or *Trench*, was fought in 627 C.E. when the Meccans, allied with Arab nomadic tribes and two exiled Jewish tribes, launched a final push to defeat the Muslims.

After the first Battle of Bad'r, the Muslims' relations with the Jewish tribes began to deteriorate. An isolated street fight between a few Muslims and Jews from the *Banu Qainuka*, a Jewish tribe openly hostile toward Prophet Muhammad, escalated in a series of volatile confrontations. The Muslims marched towards the stronghold of the Banu Qainuka and besieged them for a fortnight, whereupon they

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<sup>43</sup> The Quraysh headed a loose confederation of client nomadic tribes in the al-Hijaz who were dependent upon the lucrative caravan trade. Prophet Muhammad belonged to the Quraysh tribe.

surrendered on condition that their lives and property be spared. The Prophet accepted the Banu Qainuka's terms, and expelled the tribe from Medina.

Khazraj clan chief Abd'Allah bin Salul, whose power had diminished considerably with the rise of the Prophet's influence, conspired with the exiled Jewish tribe to assist the Meccans in their second war with the Muslims, the Battle of Uhud fought in 625 C.E. Bin Salul's clan and the Jewish tribe had formed a coalition known as the *Hypocrites*.

The conspiracy against the Muslims became evident when bin Salul deserted the Muslim army with 300 of his followers. The reduction in the Muslim army coalition was a severe setback, and they suffered defeat due to the Meccans' superior tactics and the betrayal of the Khazraj clan and the Jewish tribe.

This defeat emboldened bin Salul to conspire with another Jewish tribe, *Banu Nadir*, to kill the Prophet after he had rendered a decision against them in a dispute with a third Jewish tribe, the *Banu Qurayzah*. The Prophet escaped the attempt on his life, and ordered the Banu Nadir tribe to leave Medina. When the order was defied, the Muslims laid siege to their stronghold for two weeks, after which the Banu Nadir surrendered and were expelled from Medina.

Although the Muslims suffered defeat at Uhud, their efforts to spread Islam were somewhat successful. With the growth of Islam and the success of Medina's Muslim marketplace, the citizens of Medina began to enjoy status and prosperity rivaling Mecca. The Quraysh were losing revenue as desert trade caravans rerouted from Mecca to the Muslims' tax-free marketplace in Medina, and they viewed the growth of Islam and its monotheistic message with increasing alarm. To counteract the growing influence of Medina's Muslims, the Quraysh sought and received support from their nomadic tribal allies and the two Jewish tribes who had been expelled from Medina.

A third war began in 627 C.E., designated as *The Battle of the Confederates* by the Arabs. Led by the Quraysh, the Confederates attacked Medina with a large army and laid siege to the city. The Prophet and his Muslim army defended the city with roughly three thousand men. By digging a strategic trench around the vulnerable parts of Medina, the Muslims were able to hold the Confederates at bay.

In the midst of hostilities, which subsequently became known as the *Trench War*, the Quraysh sought an alliance with the Banu Qurayzah, a



Jewish tribe allied with the Prophet yet sympathetic with the Meccans. After being persuaded by the Meccans, the Banu Qurayzah agreed to support the Quraysh. When the Meccan-Qurayzah plot was discovered, the Prophet stationed people to guard against a surprise attack from the Qurayzah. The Confederates were unable to continue their siege without the support of the Jewish tribe, and they withdrew.

The Muslim army proceeded to lay siege to the Banu Qurayzah fortress. The tribe offered to surrender on the condition that one of their former allies determine their fate according to Jewish law. The Prophet appointed Sa'd bin Muadh, the chief of the Aws clan, to be the arbiter. Sa'd judged the Banu Qurayzah according to the Torah, for which the punishment for treason was death. The Aws chief's decision called for the execution of all fighting-age male members of the Banu Qurayzah tribe, and for their women, children and elders to be expelled from Medina. In passing the sentence, Sa'd reminded the Banu Qurayzah that if they had succeeded with their conspiracy, all Muslims in Medina would have been killed, including Prophet Muhammad.

As stories of the Trench War spread through the region, Prophet Muhammad came to be held personally responsible for the execution of the Jewish tribe's male combatants. The tale, which became known as "*The Massacre of Medina*", has been employed to support the portrayal of Islam and the Prophet as anti-Semitic. The falsehood of the accusation is self-evident, given the fact that the executions were the result of sentencing by a non-Muslim tribal chief according to the *Torah*, and under terms of surrender requested by the Banu Qurayzah. In fact, given the severity of the circumstances, the way in which Prophet Muhammad dealt with this issue demonstrated his commitment to justice and fairness under law. In any case, details of the 1,400-year-old event are limited, and extraneous to contemporary relations between Muslims and Jews.

The critical references to Jews in the Qur'an that are alleged to be anti-Semitic are embedded in those commentaries that pertain to Muslim-Jewish relations in 7<sup>th</sup> century Medina.<sup>44</sup> Although the Jewish tribes and Arab clans were signatories with the Muslims to the Sahifa, three of the Jewish tribes abandoned the Charter and engaged in conspiracies with the Meccans to defeat the Muslims and subvert the Prophet's authority.

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<sup>44</sup> The Qur'an similarly admonishes Muslims who fail to live up to their commitments. E.g., Qur'an Ch 104, v 1-10.

In view of the fact that the Jewish tribes were comprised of Arabs who had converted to Judaism, and were not Israelites, their shifting allegiances conformed to Arab nomadic tribal tactics during wartime. In the last analysis, the conflicts in Medina irrupted into war for same reasons that underlie most wars – money and political power. The basic issues driving these conflicts were secular, involving commerce and political relations among the Muslim, Jewish and Arab tribes of the al-Hijaz.

Nevertheless, these conflicts had religious connotations. Religious authority and political power were conjoined in virtually every ancient civilization. The Meccans led the Arab pagan and polytheistic tribes in the al-Hijaz, and they perceived Muhammad and Islam’s monotheistic message as a threat to their dominant position in the region. Medina’s Jews, on the other hand, did not recognize the prophet-hood of Muhammad, nor did they accept the Divine revelations received by Him, even though they were congruent with Hebrew Scriptures.

In summary, the conflicts with the errant Jewish tribes cannot be interpreted as evidence of religious persecution or anti-Semitism on the part of Prophet Muhammad and his Muslim followers, and any attempt to do so contravenes historical facts. The passages in the Qur’an critical of Jews and Medina’s Jewish tribes have been extracted out of context and manipulated to stereotype all Jews, and to characterize the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad as anti-Semitic. However, as has been shown, the critical passages cannot be understood or referenced out of their historical context. Most important, they cannot be employed to stereotype the contemporary Jewish diaspora, nor applied to current political events.

#### **MUSLIM JURISTS AND *THE RULES OF THE PROTECTED MINORITIES***

The record of Muslim-Jewish relations is found largely in the works of Muslim jurists, who expounded upon themes of social and political relationships with *dhimmis*, i.e. literally “the protected peoples”, or non-Muslim minorities. Within a generation after the birth of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E., Muslims found themselves in military and political control of vast populations of non-Muslim People of the Book and so-called *non-believers* in the Middle East, North Africa and west Asia. The challenges of governance and control of non-Muslim populations presented Muslim authorities with a myriad of legal complexities, including rights of citizenship, arbitration and settlement of individual

and family disputes, tribal conflicts, border and property disputes, broken contracts, betrayal of alliances, and even war. A policy of governance gradually evolved known as *ahkam al-dhimma*, or the “Rules of the Protected Minorities”, which became the means by which Muslim authorities addressed these issues.

The scriptural basis for the policy of *ahkam al-dhimma* is a single, controversial verse in the Qur’an:

Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden – such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book – until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled.<sup>45</sup>

The meaning and significance of this verse has been the focus of heated debate among Muslims and scholars for generations. The historical context of this verse, along with variability of the Arabic language when translated, including grammar, syntax, and definitions of specific words and phrases, have contributed greatly to the controversy surrounding it, as well as other verses in the Qur’an. For example, the word “fight” also translates in Arabic as “oppose”, which is a critical difference in both tone and substance. The reference to the “religion of truth” also has two plausible interpretations. One is that the “religion of truth” refers to the revealed Scriptures of the Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – *in toto*. A second interpretation argues that the phrase refers to Islam exclusively. Islamists, Jihadists, and other religious zealots believe that the “religion of truth” refers exclusively to Islam, and that the word “fight” provides Qur’anic legitimacy to violent acts committed against non-believers and those who oppose them and their interpretations of the Qur’an and Islamic law.

Muhammad was the Muslims’ political leader as well as the Prophet of Islam. During his lifetime, all Muslim law and spiritual practice proceeded from him. Upon the Prophet’s death in 632 C.E., religious and political authority passed, in succession, to four of His companions,<sup>46</sup> who served in the role of *Caliph* through 661 C.E.<sup>47</sup>

In 637 C.E., the second Caliph, ‘Umar bin al-Khattab, a respected jurist and companion of the Prophet, concluded a treaty known as the *Covenant of Umar* with the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius.

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<sup>45</sup> Qur’an Ch 9, v 29 [Arberry translation]

<sup>46</sup> *Companion*, from the Arabic term *aṣ-ṣaḥāba*, refers to the companions, disciples, scribes, and family of Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>47</sup> Caliph is the title given to the ruler or head of the *Caliphate*, which is the Islamic state ruled by Sha’ria (i.e. laws based upon ‘Qur’anic principles’).

The treaty, which outlined the rights and limitations of People of the Book and non-Muslims residing in Syria and Palestine, evolved into the *Rules of the Protected Minorities* eventually effecting non-Muslims in Muslim-controlled regions throughout the world. Of note, the Covenant of Umar allowed Jews to live inside Jerusalem for the first time in 500 years since their expulsion from the Holy Land. 1,300 years later, many Palestinian Christians and Muslims still regard the Covenant of Umar as having legal legitimacy.

Although the policy of *ahkam al-dhimma* cast non-Muslims minorities in a relatively inferior religious and political status to Muslims, People of the Book were not required to convert to Islam, and Muslim armies were ordered to preserve the Christian institutions they encountered, and also not to interfere with Jews in their practice of Judaism. In addition, non-Muslims were exempted from *Zakat* taxes, which were obligatory for Muslim citizens in this early period.

After 661 C.E., major changes occurred in the process of selecting caliphs. Some background to this transition is necessary to understand the political dynamics of the time. The murder of the third Caliph, Uthman, resulted in the selection the 4<sup>th</sup> Caliph, Ali, also a companion of the Prophet. However, Ali was not universally accepted as Caliph by the governors of Egypt, and later by some of his own guard. He faced two major rebellions, and was assassinated by his followers after a tumultuous rule of only five years. This period of Islamic history is known as the *Fitna*, or the first Islamic civil war. A relative of Uthman and governor of Syria, Muawiyah, overcame the other claimants to the Caliphate, and transformed the Caliphate into a hereditary office, thus founding the Umayyad dynasty. Following the Umayyads, the Caliphate was claimed by the Abbasids during the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and for relatively short periods by competing dynasties in Egypt, al-Andalus, and North Africa. The Ottomans held the last Caliphate during the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1924, the Caliphate system was abolished upon the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of the Republic of Turkey, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The Fitna politicized the Caliphate. As a consequence, the integrity of the Caliphate was compromised, and public trust in Islamic law abated. During the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750 C.E.), a rudimentary legal system was set up based upon the Qur'an, the Sunnah, local customs and traditions. However, many Muslims became concerned about the influence of Umayyad rulers on the development of the law. They

wanted to connect Islamic law more firmly to its revealed sources, and also make it less vulnerable to manipulation by secular rulers and their appointed judges.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, two Abbasid Caliphs proceeded to establish *Sha'ria*<sup>48</sup> as a uniform, Qur'an-compliant legal system to be implemented throughout Muslim-controlled regions in Asia, north Africa and the Middle East. However, the Qur'an provided only broad principles of justice upon which Sha'ria could be developed. The Qur'anic affirmations required elaboration for which supplemental sources were required. For this purpose, the Abbasid Caliphs supported the emergence of a distinct class of Islamic scholars.

The scholars began by referencing the hadith, whereby the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad could serve as additional guidance to legal decisions. However, even the hadith could not directly resolve legal problems that arose later. In such cases, legal problems were resolved by *reason*, *analogy*, and *consensus* among the scholars, whose opinions were given substantial weight. Thus, multiple legal interpretations were allowed, presupposing they conformed to Qur'anic principles.

Gradually, as the Caliphs' authority diminished, the power and influence of Islamic scholars – the *ulema* – grew accordingly. They began to determine what was legal and orthodox according to the Qur'an and hadith.<sup>49</sup> For example, controversy surrounds a second treaty defining the policy of *ahkam al-dhimma*. The *Pact [covenant] of Umar II* was concluded in 717 C.E. under the Caliph Umar II, a great-grandson of 'Umar bin Al-Khattab, with non-Muslims and People of the Book residing in Muslim lands. However, the document apparently exists in different textual forms, and some scholars believe that it may have been the product of later jurists who attributed it to Umar II in order to lend greater authority to their own opinions.

From the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E., the power to interpret and refine the *dhimma contract* was vested solely in the *ulema*. Since few laws are prescribed in the Qur'an, the *ulema* were free to issue their own *fatwas*, or legal opinions.<sup>50</sup> Whatever its original intent, the *ulema* came to interpret the

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<sup>48</sup> *Sha'ria* is the body of Islamic law based upon the Qur'an and Hadith, and the interpretations of Islamic scholars and jurists.

<sup>49</sup> Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

<sup>50</sup> Samuel Shahid, *Rights of Non-Muslims in an Islamic State*, [www.answering-Islam.org/NonMuslims/rights.htm](http://www.answering-Islam.org/NonMuslims/rights.htm) [accessed June 2012]; summarizes Islamic law (Sha'ria) according to the four principal

Qur'anic verse underlying the Rules of the Protected Minorities,<sup>51</sup> to mean that non-Muslims, including People of the Book and non-believers, were to be “opposed” until and unless they “submitted” to Muslim rule. To ensure the loyalty of indigenous populations under their control, Muslim authorities granted non-Muslim citizens religious and communal autonomy, protection from outside aggression, and exemption from military service in exchange for payment of the *jizya*, a per-capita “protection tax” in lieu of *zakat* (i.e. almsgiving required of Muslims as a pillar of Islamic faith). The *jizya* was levied on all non-Muslim adult males, and regarded as evidence of their submission to Muslim authorities.

The evolving body of interpretations and decisions of the ulema became integral to Sha'ria, and many of their legal opinions acquired theological affirmation. The ulema's interpretations concerning dhimmas residing in Muslim societies were perceived as Islam's theological articulation of the social and religious status of People of the Book, including Jews. Nevertheless, the decisions and opinions of Muslim jurists, of necessity, reflected localized secular conditions where Muslims held political power. Although they endeavored to interpret and apply Qur'anic principles to the issues brought before them, the jurists' opinions were circumscribed by prevailing cultural norms and biases. In any case, the jurists did not postulate anti-Semitism, as some of their writings have been characterized erroneously.

Nevertheless, intense controversy surrounds the practice of transposing the opinions and interpretations of Islamic scholars and jurists into Islamic theology, and applying them to all Muslim societies. The Qur'an is the primary source for Islamic law. As a general principle, references to the hadith and the opinions of the ulema are subordinate to the Qur'an, and regarded as *derived* sources (i.e. dependent upon human influences). If derived sources are contrary to Qur'anic teachings, they must be rejected. However, critics point out that doctrinal *approbation*<sup>52</sup> has been conferred upon some of the ulema's writings, notwithstanding the fact that the Qur'an pointedly prohibits alterations or additions to

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schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and the written opinions of Islamic scholars and *Muftis* (Muslim legal authorities).

<sup>51</sup> Fight those from among the People of the Book, who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, not hold as unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have declared to be unlawful, not follow the true religion, until they pay the tax considering it a favor and acknowledge their subjugation (Qur'an Ch 9, v 29)

<sup>52</sup> Abrogate def: (verb) to cancel, annul, repeal, or revoke formally or officially. As used in this context, abrogation refers to the power/right assumed by the ulema to modify or change previous interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith.

revealed text.<sup>53</sup> Critics also argue that it is unreasonable to generalize the work of jurists for all Muslims, given the linguistic, geographic, and cultural diversity of Muslim societies.

The practical problem today is that several generations of Muslims in Asia, Africa and the Middle East have been taught and have accepted controversial interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith concerning non-Muslims, in spite of the universality of Qur'anic teachings and the example set by the life of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>54</sup> Contributing to this misunderstanding is the fact that the majority of non-Arab Muslims are unable to read Arabic text, and therefore must rely upon others to translate and interpret the Qur'an for them. The proliferation of English-language translations, some of which are highly controversial, illustrate the inherent challenge in accessing unadulterated teachings of the Holy Qur'an. Additionally, some of the ulema's writings and fatwas have been exploited to advance sectarian political agendas and personalities, resulting in confusion and misunderstanding regarding the authentic meaning of the Qur'an, as well as the exemplary life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

### **ISLAM'S GOLDEN AGE**

“Whosoever follows a path to seek knowledge therein, Allah will make easy for him a path to Paradise.”<sup>55</sup>

Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge in high degrees; and Allah is Aware of what you do.<sup>56</sup>

The evolution of Sha'ria reached its zenith during the Islamic Golden Age. The period from 750 C.E. through 1257 C.E. was an era distinguished by unparalleled intellectual accomplishments in medicine, architecture, mathematics, astronomy, geography, engineering, hydrology, and chemistry. Although there were exceptions, Muslims, Jews, and

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<sup>53</sup> “We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption].” (Qur'an Ch 15, v 9); “Falsehood cannot approach it, neither from its front nor from its back; it is sent down by the Wise, the Most Praiseworthy.” (Qur'an Ch 41, vs 42); “Therefore woe be unto those who write the Scripture with their hands and then say, ‘This is from Allah,’ that they may purchase a small gain therewith. Woe unto them for that their hands have written, and woe unto them for that they earn thereby.” (Qur'an Ch 2, v 79). [Pickthal translation]

<sup>54</sup> The Muslim umma today is deeply divided regarding the content, meaning, and application of Sha'ria law. The views of Muslims regarding Sha'ria – Shias, Sunnis, Sufis, Ahmadiyyas, Islamists, Jihadists, political and religious moderates and extremists, et. al. – vary according to religious, family, and/or tribal identity, and geography, as well as education, economic, and social position. Consequently, it is not possible to generalize about how *all* Muslims' interpret Sha'ria.

<sup>55</sup> Prophet Muhammad according to *Sahih Muslim*, Book 35, No. 6518

<sup>56</sup> Qur'an Ch 58, v 11 (Shakir translation)

Christians throughout the Islamic world collaborated and coexisted in relative harmony without religious constraints within the inclusive framework of the policy of the *Rules of the Protected Minorities*.

The success of the policy was evident particularly in medieval Muslim Spain, where Muslims and Jews together built a civilization, known as *Al-Andalus*, which was more advanced than any in Europe at the time. However, when Muslim Spain fell to Christian armies in 1492, most of Spain's Jews were expelled. Many immigrated to Palestine, Syria, and Egypt, where they were given asylum by indigenous Muslims. The Catholic Inquisition eliminated those Jews who remained in Spain.<sup>57</sup>

Baghdad was the *raison d'être* and crowning achievement of the Golden Age of Islam. During the Abbasid caliphate from the 9<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Baghdad was the principal trading hub in the Islamic Empire. The Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur founded the *Bayat ak-Hikma* or House of Wisdom, a library and translation center which attracted the best scholars from across the Islamic world and beyond – Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and pagan.<sup>58</sup> Sharing their knowledge, literature, and language, the scholars compiled, translated, and critiqued all available scientific, philosophical, mathematical, astronomical, and medical knowledge of the ancient and then-contemporary world from Persia, India, Egypt, and from Greece which was regarded as the fountainhead of western civilization. The House of Wisdom rivaled the fabled ancient Library of Alexandria, which was destroyed by fire following the Roman conquest of Egypt in 48 C.E.

Muslim scholars and jurists were headquartered in Baghdad during this period, as well.<sup>59</sup> The cosmopolitan city became the cultural and intellectual center of the world, as well as the primary location for translation of classical and scientific texts from the Greek, Syriac, Persian and Indian languages into Arabic. The key technological breakthrough during this period was the introduction of hemp and cotton paper, which originated in China. As a result, books copied and produced in Baghdad filled libraries throughout the Islamic world, and facilitated the transition from oral to written communication throughout west Asia and the Middle East.<sup>60</sup> The published scholarship and scientific achievements

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<sup>57</sup> Even during the most oppressive periods in Islamic history, Jews under Muslim rule received better treatment, including tangible civil rights, than under Christian rule in medieval Europe, where the anti-Semitic *deicide* narrative prevailed (i.e. blaming the Jewish diaspora for the death of Jesus [РВУН]).

<sup>58</sup> Cooperson, Michael, "Baghdad in Rhetoric and Narrative", *Muqarnas* (1996), 13: 100

<sup>59</sup> Robinson, Chase, *Islamic Historiography*, (2003) New York: Cambridge UP, p. 27

<sup>60</sup> Gaston Wiet, *Baghdad: Metropolis of the Abbasid Caliphate*, Univ of Oklahoma Press, Ch. 5



of the Islamic Golden Age, in fact, became the intellectual foundation for the European Enlightenment, and the harbinger of our modern world.<sup>61</sup>

### THE “LONG TWILIGHT” OF THE LATE ISLAMIC MIDDLE AGES

During the 13<sup>th</sup> century c.e., the Abbasid Caliphate weakened as regional economies began to stagnate, and the Muslim Middle East entered a prolonged period of decline, which historians refer to as “the long twilight of the late Islamic Middle Ages.” While there were multiple causes for the decline, historians agree that the end of Islam’s Golden Age was precipitated by the Crusaders’ incursions into the Holy Land in 1091 c.e., and the devastating invasions into west Asia and Persia by Genghis Khan and his Mongol Turkic tribes in 1218 c.e.

The spark that ignited the Christian Crusades was the destruction in 1009 c.e. of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem by order of the Fatima Caliph, Al-Hakim. The Church was venerated by Christians as the location of *Golgotaha*, the Hill of Calvary where Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected. Christians regarded the Church with the same reverence that Muslims have for the Great Mosque at Mecca. Western Christian leaders urged the Catholic Papacy to undertake a crusade that would free Jerusalem from Muslim rule. When the Seljik Turks defeated the Byzantine army in 1071 c.e. and cut off Christian access to Jerusalem, Pope Urban II finally acceded, calling upon Europe’s Christian princes to “wage a holy war against the infidels.”<sup>62</sup> The first Crusade in 1099 c.e. resulted in the massacre of virtually everyone residing in Jerusalem – men, women, children, old and young, Jews and Muslims. These signal events are burned into the historical consciousness of Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and underlie the enmity that has characterized relations between the Religions and People of the Book that, tragically, persists to this day.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century c.e., Genghis Khan’s barbarian armies drove across western Asia, engaging in wholesale massacres of civilian populations, and leaving in their wake a swathe of ruined cities, libraries, and mosques throughout the Muslim world. They destroyed northern Iran, and decimated the ancient irrigation systems of Mesopotamia. Syria

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<sup>61</sup> See: *1001 Inventions: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Civilization, Third Ed.*, National Geographic, pub., 2012. See also: Barnard, Bryn, *The Genius of Islam – How Muslims Made the Modern World*, Alfred A. Knopf, pub. 2011

<sup>62</sup> *A History of the Christian Church*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., edited by Williston Walker, Richard A. Norris, David W. Lotz, and Robert T. Handy (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), p. 284.

and Turkey submitted virtually without resistance. As regional and local economies collapsed, people of all religions and ethnicities suffered immeasurably throughout the Islamic world.

The Islamic Golden Age along with the Abbasid Caliphate came to a tragic and abrupt end in 1258 C.E. Genghis Khan's grandson and successor, Mongke Khan (a.k.a. *The Great Khan*), regarded the Abbasid Caliph as a threat in view of the fact that his Muslim subjects held the Caliph in a higher position than himself. The Great Khan ordered his brother, Hulagu Khan, to attack Baghdad and overthrow the Caliph. The ensuing *Siege of Baghdad* by Mongol forces resulted in the execution of the Caliph and the massacre of more than 100,000 people. Virtually all of Baghdad's libraries, hospitals, laboratories, and schools were destroyed. It was reported that Baghdad's streets "ran red with the blood of scholars", and that the Tigris River "ran black with the ink of books."<sup>63 64</sup>

There is evidence of collusion between Shi'ite Muslims within the Sunni-controlled Abbasid Caliphate and the Mongols that enabled the Mongol invasion.<sup>65</sup> The Shi'ites, apparently, had hoped to take possession of the Caliphate following the Abbasids' defeat. However, such an outcome was not to be.

In 1260 C.E., the Mongols' advance ended in Gaza with their defeat by the Mamluks, a Muslim dynasty of mixed-race slave soldiers based in Egypt. Led by the Mamluk sultan Baybars, Mamluk forces also defeated the remaining Crusaders. For the next 200 years, until the advent of the Ottomans, the Mamluks dominated the Muslim world. As for the Mongols, Hulagu Khan's successor accepted Islam and restored Islamic law, and Mongol language and culture eventually were absorbed into the Persian Islamic culture.<sup>66</sup>

## **POLITICAL ISLAM AND ANTI-SEMITISM**

With the Crusader and Mongol invasions, empires fell and agrarian and trade-based economies in west Asia and the Middle East contracted. The growing political and social instability undermined religious certainty, and shattered traditional political and economic relationships.

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<sup>63</sup> Covington, Richard, *Rediscovering Arabic Science*, Saudi Aramco World, Vol. 57 No. 3: May/June 2007

<sup>64</sup> Ajram, Dr. K., *The Miracle of Islamic Science – First Ed.*, Knowledge House, 1992

<sup>65</sup> The Applied History Research Group, *The Islamic World to 1600*, The University of Calgary, 1998

<sup>66</sup> Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam In Context - Past, Present, and Future*, (Baker Book House, 2003), p. 104

Upon the irreplaceable loss of learning of the past resulting from the destruction of manuscripts and the slaughter of scholars, Muslim societies turned inwards and became more doctrinaire. The struggle by Muslim scholars to preserve knowledge and recover what had been lost impacted Islamic jurisprudence. Up to this point, the work of Sha'ria jurists had been characterized by independent legal reasoning, or *ijtihad*. Following the Siege of Baghdad, the jurists turned to the practice of *taqlid*, or imitation, arguing that there was less need to formulate new rules as all the rules of law had been expounded. The net effect was a virtual calcification of Islamic law and learning.<sup>67</sup>

With deteriorating economies and chaotic political environments in Muslim regions, the specter of religious fanaticism and intolerance proliferated, accompanied by persecution of non-Muslims, including People of the Book – *dhimmis*. For instance, in 1250 c.E., the last Abbasyid ruler issued a decree requiring all Jews and Christians living in Muslim lands to wear distinguishing badges and belts in public, and if they did not, they were to be executed.<sup>68</sup> Many Christian churches and Jewish synagogues were destroyed. In 1301 c.E., the color yellow was assigned to Jews and blue to Christians to ensure that they could be clearly identifiable in public. Inexplicably during this same period, similar decrees were issued in Christian Europe requiring Jews to wear a yellow circle on their garments, and later caps with horns.<sup>69</sup>

With the advent of mercantilism and the colonial period beginning in the 1500s c.E., the Middle East, Asia, and Africa gradually came to be dominated by British and European colonial powers pursuing markets and natural resources to fuel the engines of their rapidly growing economies. Industrialization, begun in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, transformed and reorganized Anglo-European agrarian societies into manufacturing economies. Muslim agrarian and trade-based societies, however, did not comprehend the impact that industrialization would have on their economies, and were ill-prepared to adapt. Muslim-majority agrarian societies blamed others – foreigners, outsiders, *dhimmis* – for their languishing economies, foreign domination, and diminishing independence. A prevailing perception of victimization resulted in an increase in ethnic and religious rivalry and conflict, and

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<sup>67</sup> Kareem Elbayar, *Reclaiming Tradition: Islamic Law in a Modern World*, International Affairs Review, Vol. XVII, No. 1: Spring/Summer 2008

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., *Islam In Context - Past, Present, and Future*, p. 105

<sup>69</sup> Simon Dubnov, *History of the Jews*, (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1969), 3:28

the status of both Jews and Christians in the Muslim world deteriorated accordingly.

Concurrently, Constitution-based political and legal systems were evolving in western societies that were able to respond and adapt to the unique requirements of industrialization. New manufacturing and trade systems together with new working and entrepreneurial social classes were generated by industrialization. These emerging commercial systems required new legal structures to facilitate reconciliation of competing and conflicting interests within their societies, as well as in international trade. At the same time, the new working and entrepreneurial classes formed loci of power demanding participation in political decision-making in their respective societies. Constitution-based systems of governance were responsive to these demands, and eventually prevailed in various forms throughout the developed world.

Significantly, Sha'ria was conceived and evolved in pre-modern agrarian societies, with correlative social, political and trade structures. Muslim agrarian societies were marginalized politically and economically by industrialization, and unable to accommodate the societal changes that industrialization required. Some were disempowered by generations of colonial rule, while others were delimited by entrenched socio-political structures rooted in culture, tribe, and religion.

It is noteworthy that similar barriers to socio-political progress and economic growth exist today in many parts of the world, including some Muslim societies. However, contemporary impediments in these regions have been recast in the context of *globalization*<sup>70</sup> as multi-national corporate *neo-colonialism*. In fact, the empire-building of the colonial period is approximated to the extent that geopolitical policies of industrialized nation states are interlocked with those of multi-national corporations. The evidence for this paradigm can be discerned clearly over the past century in Central America, Chile, Southeast Asia, west Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, where energy and natural resources crucial to modern economies are affected.

The evolution of *Islamism*<sup>71</sup> is an explicit reaction to these dynamics. When Muslim-majority societies were in their ascendancy, they were tolerant and welcoming, and became a sanctuary for Christians and Jews seeking refuge from persecution in their own societies. However, when Muslim societies felt threatened, either by external enemies or from

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<sup>70</sup> Globalization: see Appendix 2.

<sup>71</sup> Islamism: see Appendix 3.

within, the reaction was to close in and project a very different message from the Qur'an. Islamist political narratives first appeared in Muslim opposition movements to colonialism. Many Muslims today believe that they are living in similar times. The growing populist yearning for Shar'ia-based systems of governance in Muslim-majority societies that is occurring today can be interpreted as a reaction to the economic inequities and social disintegration generated by the forces of globalization.

Contemporary Islamist political narratives postulate idealized Muslim-majority states governed under Islamic law, and the resurrection of the Caliphate system. The paradox is that these ideations ignore the historical record of the dynastic Caliphates, which were primarily autocratic imperial systems with equivocal adherence to authentic Sha'ria tenets. In addition, many of the current manifestations of Islamism appear to ignore fundamental Qur'anic teachings,<sup>72</sup> as well as the magnanimity and tolerance exemplified by the life of Prophet Muhammed. This is the case particularly where Islamist narratives have devolved into bellicose supremacism,<sup>73</sup> dominated by the shrill voices of religious zealots and political demagogues who advocate violence and abhor dhimmis as *kafir*.<sup>74</sup>

Although anti-Semitism is not supported in the Qur'an, and contradicts the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad, the amalgam of the Crusades, the Mongol invasion, Anglo-European colonialism, and the industrial revolution generated ideal conditions – a *perfect storm* – for virulent anti-Semitism to gain a foothold in the Muslim world. It was left to Nazi Germany to propel anti-Semitic narratives in the Middle East. Pursuing hegemony in the region in the 1930s, Hitler's agents incited anti-Jewish hatred amongst Muslims in Egypt and Palestine with propaganda, weapons, and money. As WW II drew to a close, the core of anti-Semitism began to shift from Germany to the Arab world.

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<sup>72</sup> Qur'an Ch 5, v 8: "O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you (or your hatred of others) cause you to wrong others and to depart from integrity. Have integrity: that is next to piety: and fear Allah, for Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do."

<sup>73</sup> Supremacism (def.): the belief that a particular culture, religion or belief system is superior to all others, and therefore entitles those who identify with it to dominate, control or rule those who do not.

<sup>74</sup> Kafir: an Arabic term in Islamic doctrine that refers to a person who rejects Allah (God), and/or who denies or "covers" the truth; usually translated as "unbeliever" or "infidel." Notably, up through the 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E., the term was never applied to dhimmis.

With aggressive advocacy for a Jewish state by the Zionists (Judaism's political arm), the Balfour Declaration and the creation of the state of Israel, a new anti-Semitic narrative took root in various Islamist political movements. Muslim and Christian anti-Semitic narratives never were the same, however. Christian anti-Semitism is rooted in the infamous *deicide* narrative, which holds the Jewish people responsible for the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Islam's anti-Semitic narrative derived originally from the Medina Jews' refusal to accept the Qur'an as revelation from God, and Muhammad as a legitimate Prophet in the Judaic tradition. Nevertheless, Arab-Muslim enmity toward Israel today is not an expression of *religious* anti-Semitism, but derives rather from a dominant secular political narrative which views Israel as a *colonial* power unwilling to cohabit the Holy Land with the Muslim Palestinian people.

In the current environment of globalization, the specter of Islamist supremacism, conjoined with anti-western, anti-Semitic, and anti-Christian secular narratives, bedevils the religion of Islam. This phenomenon is the consequence partly of conditions similar to those that gave rise to the rancorous ethnocentricity that emerged toward the end of Islam's Golden Age, and later in the colonial period.<sup>75</sup>

As a general principle, racial, ethnic and religious minorities invariably are blamed, marginalized and attacked whenever and wherever there are conditions of political oppression, foreign supremacy, competition for power and scarce resources, widespread poverty, and ubiquitous unemployment (particularly among the youth demographic). Diverting attention from the actual, often intractable causes of social, political, and economic problems by projecting or transferring blame onto "others" -- those who are *different* by virtue of race, ethnicity, nationality, religious and/or political beliefs -- is a demagogic propaganda technique as old as civilization itself.<sup>76</sup>

Non-Muslim observers will be mistaken if they try to define and address the alienation and violence irrupting in Muslim societies, and related terrorist acts committed in non-Muslim societies, within a religious paradigm. Essentially, these conflicts have evolved over time from recent history when imperial Anglo-European powers carved up the

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<sup>75</sup> See: *Globalization: A Comprehensive Overview and a Proposed Definition*, by Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan and Ambassador Gérard Stoudmann, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Pub. June 19, 2006

<sup>76</sup> *The Other* and the process of *othering* are analytical concepts employed in the social sciences. See Appendix 4.

Middle East, Africa, and Asia between them, and imposed western law, values, and culture on Muslim societies. The long history of humiliation and injustice at the hands of western Christian societies, beginning with the Crusades, followed by colonialism and industrialization, the creation of the state of Israel (to the exclusion Palestinian Muslims), globalization, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, comprise the fuel that feeds militant Islamism.

The wry claim by Middle East Arabs that they have “the memories of elephants, and the endurance of camels” may hold a key to understanding the apparent widespread acceptance of extremist Islamist narratives. Exploiting the inherited memory of centuries of declining Muslim power and prestige for which the Christian west is held responsible, religious and partisan demagogues are able to impel the alienation and violence that is occurring now in many Muslim-majority societies.

Nonetheless, religion is inherent in this political maelstrom, given the fact that approximately 92% of the people residing in the Middle East and west Asia are Muslims believers. Muslims who commit violent acts against perceived enemies, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, justify their actions on the basis of a verse in the Qur’an that guarantees martyrdom in heaven for those who die fighting in a just cause to *protect* Islam.<sup>77</sup> This religious postulate also enables many Muslims to excuse and counter the evidence of corrupt governments, economic failure, and stolen natural resources wealth in Muslim-majority societies that are perceived to be controlled and sustained by western powers against the will of their own people (e.g. the Shah in Iran, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Mubarak in Egypt, et. al.).

### **ABROGATION OF THE TORAH, THE GOSPELS, AND QUR’ANIC VERSES<sup>78</sup>**

There are three incontrovertible axioms that demarcate Muslims’ understanding of the Qur’an. First, the Qur’an is a complete book. Second, the Qur’an is deemed to be free of inconsistencies. Third, no

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<sup>77</sup> Qur’an Ch 4, v 74: “Let those who fight in the way of Allah, who sell the life in this world for the hereafter; whoever fights in the way of Allah, then be he slain or victorious, We shall grant him a mighty reward.” In Islam, suicide is strictly prohibited. A Muslim who commits a violent act and dies “fighting in the way of Allah” is referred to as a *martyr*. The term “suicide bomber” is a western invention.

<sup>78</sup> Note: Abrogation is a hypothesis and convention employed by some Muslim scholars to rationalize the meaning of Qur’anic verses that relate to the same topic, but which appear to be in contradiction. The formula presumes that those verses in the Qur’an recorded most recently necessarily take precedence over those transcribed earlier.

part of the Qur'an can be changed or *abrogated*<sup>79</sup> by any human being. For Muslims, the Arabic text of the Qur'an is immutable and enduring till the end of time. Further, the Qur'an exists purely *only* in its original Arabic format. Translations necessarily involve human interpretation, and are viewed as intrinsic alterations of the original meaning.

Nevertheless, employing a device known as *abrogation*, proponents of anti-Semitic interpretations of the Qur'an assert that Islam's Holy Book *supersedes* the Torah and the Gospels. They further maintain that verses in the Qur'an that refute or contradict their propositions have been superseded and therefore nullified by subsequent verses. This abrogation formula references the time sequence in which the verses in question were recorded, giving preference to verses recorded most recently.

The most notable current example of the use of the abrogation formula is found in the "*Noble Quran*", a controversial translation by Dr. Muhammad Mushin Khan, a Pakistani religious scholar of Afghan Khattak heritage, and Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali, a Moroccan Islamic scholar.<sup>80</sup> Published in Saudi Arabia, the Hilali-Khan English translation has been distributed widely in mosques and Muslim communities throughout the world. Western Muslim scholars have enumerated numerous credible objections and exceptions to this translation. However, the pivotal issue is the translators' definition of "believer", a term found in passages throughout the Qur'an. According to comments in the translation by Drs. Hilali and Khan, true Muslim believers are "...those who believe in Allah and accept Prophet Muhammed as the last Messenger, and take the Qur'an as final revelation *replacing* all earlier revelations." Further, believers in the Oneness of God from other faith traditions are declared "non-believers" and "*kafir*" (i.e. infidels).<sup>81</sup> The extensive parenthetical comments contained in the Hilali-Khan translation are the principle source of the controversy, particularly those referencing anti-Jewish and anti-Christian hadith. This clearly myopic reinterpretation of the Holy Qur'an has resulted in a virtual theological war within the worldwide Muslim umma, as well as between Muslims and Christians, Jews, and other non-Muslims around the world.

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<sup>79</sup> Abrogate def: (verb) to cancel, annul, repeal, or revoke formally or officially

<sup>80</sup> "*Assessing English Translations of the Qur'an*", by Khaleel Mohammed, *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2005, pp. 58-71.

<sup>81</sup> "The Case of Misinterpretation & Abrogation Theory", by Iftekhhar Hai, United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance, [www.umaia.net](http://www.umaia.net) (accessed December 2012)



First, let us dispel the claim that the Qur'an abrogates the Scriptures and teachings of the Religions of the Book – Judaism and Christianity. The Qur'an states clearly:

Nothing of our revelation (even a single verse) do We abrogate or cause be forgotten, but we bring (in place) one better or the like thereof. Knowest thou not that Allah is Able to do all things?<sup>82</sup>

As noted previously, the Qur'an affirms that all revealed Scriptures are derived from the *Umm al-Kitab*, or "Mother of Books", which is concealed in heaven. Accordingly, the Torah, the Gospels, and the Qur'an constitute a sequential narrative of Prophetic revelations, wherein the Qur'an is the "confirmation"<sup>83</sup> of previous scriptures, and Prophet Muhammad being the "Seal of the Prophets."<sup>84</sup>

And before this was The Book of Moses [the Torah] as a guide and a mercy: And this book [the Qur'an] confirms [it] in the Arabic tongue; to admonish the unjust, and as glad tidings to those who do right.<sup>85</sup>

Indeed in their [the Prophets] stories, there is a lesson for men of understanding. It [the Qur'an] is not a narration invented but a confirmation of Allah's existing Books [the *Taurat* (Torah), and the *Injeel* (Gospel) and other Scriptures of Allah, and a detailed explanation of everything and a guide and a Mercy for the people who believe.<sup>86</sup>

Nowhere in the Qur'an is the claim made that the sacred writings of the Religions of the Book have been annulled or superseded; only that the Qur'an *completes* and *confirms* them. The profound respect and reverence for the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Gospel evident in the Qur'an are incontrovertible, just as the error of the abrogation hypothesis is undeniable.

Nevertheless, abrogation is alleged by its proponents to be a scholarly hypothesis. In practice, however, abrogation is a stratagem employed by some Muslims and scholars to rationalize the meaning of Qur'anic verses that relate to the same topic, but which appear to be in contradiction. The presumption that those verses in the Qur'an recorded most recently take precedence over those transcribed earlier precludes comprehensive examination of the actual meaning of the verses within their historical and metaphysical contexts. Rather than applying scholarly rigor to gain a fuller and more accurate understanding of the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Ch 2, v 106 (Pickthall translation)

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Ch 12, v 112

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Ch 33, v 40

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Ch 46, v 12

<sup>86</sup> Qur'an Ch 12, v 111 (HILALI-KHAN TRANSLATION)

verses in question, the abrogation formula has been used routinely to support particular viewpoints, secular political agendas, and various cultural practices.

Practitioners of abrogation cite four verses from the Qur'an to support the hypothesis:

Whatever Sign We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than that or the like thereof. Dost thou not know that Allah has the power to do all that He wills?<sup>87</sup>

The meaning of this particular verse should be self-evident. The statement, "Whatever Sign We abrogate...", was made by the Divine Source of the Qur'an. No human can choose to *abrogate* that which is revealed in the Qur'an.

And when We bring one Sign in place of another — and Allah knows best what He reveals — they say 'Thou art but a fabricator.' Nay, but most of them know not.<sup>88</sup>

Allah effaces what He wills and establishes what He wills, and with Him is the source of all commandments.<sup>89</sup>

And if We pleased, We could certainly take away that which We have revealed to thee and then thou wouldst find in the matter no guardian for thee against Us.<sup>90</sup>

These verses, cited by proponents of abrogation, do not identify which Qur'anic verses have been abrogated and which are to be retained, nor do they provide a procedure or authority to validate the abrogation hypothesis.

In view of the fact that Muslims view the Qur'an as sacred Scripture from Heaven, the practice of abrogation is a critical issue for believers to the extent that it effects their understanding and interpretation of Islam's primary source, as well as their daily practice of Islam. This is why the Qur'an expressly rejects this practice:

Verily, We Ourselves have sent down this Exhortation, And most surely We will be its Guardian.<sup>91</sup>

This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor upon you and have chosen for you Islam as religion....<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. Ch 2, v 107

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. Ch 16, v 102

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. Ch 13 v 40

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. Ch 17, v 87

<sup>91</sup> Qur'an Ch 15, v 10

<sup>92</sup> Qur'an Ch 5, v 4

With specific statements in the Qur'an declaring that Allah has "*perfected your religion*", and that "*We will be its [the Qur'an] Guardian*", the practice of abrogation defies both faith and reason. Abrogation of any part of the Qur'an is unnecessary, if not irrelevant, given the fact that the Qur'an testifies to its own purity and integrity.

In summary, the practice of abrogation implies either misunderstanding or mistranslation of the Qur'an, and amounts to little more than conjecture. Exposing the duplicity of the abrogation hypothesis is particularly important when political opportunists and religious extremists attempt to justify prejudicial and un-Islamic views or violent acts with selective references extracted from the Holy Qur'an out of context that reinterpret the sublime meaning and purpose of the Divine revelations.

### **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The Revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad took place in varying contexts over a period of twenty-three years. Literalist readings that extract text out of context to justify anti-Semitic interpretations of the Qur'an contradict the inclusive global message of Islam and the model of behavior set by the Prophet of Islam. This fact must be taken into account when examining anti-Semitic rhetoric growing out of the socio-political conflicts and violence occurring in west Asia, Africa, and the Middle East dating from the colonial period to the present, particularly with regard to the intractable Israeli-Palestinian hostilities.

Significantly, there are no authoritative bodies that represent a plurality of either Jews or Muslims who can resolve doctrinal disagreements. In fact, none of the Religions of the Book have institutional hierarchies who possess doctrinal authority over their respective communities of believers. Consequently, perceptions and relations between Muslims and Jews are influenced primarily by the shapers of public opinion, whomever and wherever they are.

### **EPILOGUE**

Islam has given the greatest respect that can be given to another religion. For no religion in the world has asserted that belief in the truth of another religion is integral to its own faith and witness.

We believe in God, and in that which has been revealed to us, which is that which was revealed to Abraham and Ismail and Jacob and the tribes [of Israel], as well as that which the Lord revealed to Moses and to Jesus and to

all the other Prophets. We make no distinction between any of them; we submit ourselves to God.<sup>93</sup>

Islam declares that the God of the Religions of the Book – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – is one and the same. Muslims believe that God sent the Jewish people scriptures containing revealed teachings through their prophets. As such, the Jewish people have the true religion. The Qur'an declares that Muslims are spiritual companions of the People of the Book in the fulfillment of Allah's purpose. To deny this is to contradict the Qur'an.

Nevertheless, differences and conflicts are inevitable and will persist between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. However, within the frame of revealed Scripture, historical context and culture, People of the Book are uniquely positioned to see the human and spiritual dimensions of *the Other*,<sup>94</sup> if they choose to do so.

The supreme message brought by all of the Prophets is the doctrine of *Tawhid*, also known as the *Doctrine of Unity*:

O People of the Book! Let us now come together under a fair principle common to all of us – that we worship none but God, that we associate nothing with Him, and that we take not one another as lords beside God.<sup>95</sup>

Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth; all obey His will.<sup>96</sup>

The Qur'anic doctrine of *Tawhid* (unity) as a world outlook implies the unity, coherence, and harmony between all parts of the universe. Everything in creation is related to the same source – Allah, and are part of a single whole. *Tawhid* also implies surrender or submission (i.e. *Islam*) of all beings to Divine will, and the laws governing the world.

The Doctrine of Unity is at the heart of the Religions of the Book – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is the common bond that unites all People of the Book, and serves as the start point for interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding. To the extent that those who worship God<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Qur'an Ch 3, v 85

<sup>94</sup> *The Other* and the process of *othering* are analytical concepts employed in the social sciences. See Appendix 4.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Ch 3, v 64

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Ch 2, v 116

<sup>97</sup> The names of God given in the scriptures of the Religions of the Book include: *Elohim, Yahweh (YHWH), I Am, and Yehovah* in Judaism; *God and The Lord* in Christianity; and, *Allâh* in Islam. According to the Qur'an and hadith, there are 99 qualitative names for God. In addition, both Judaic and Islamic teachings maintain that some of the names of God have been hidden from mankind, and therefore there are more names than have been revealed.

acknowledge this Truth, no differences and no disagreements are insurmountable and beyond resolution.

Today, the prayers of all people of faith are for world peace. The doctrine of Tawhid, revealed to Prophet Muhammad more than 1,400 years ago, may well be the answer to this universal prayer.

## APPENDIX 1

**Temple Mount**, located in Old Jerusalem, is layered in religious-political controversy, and a revealing metaphor for Jewish-Muslim relations. Today, Jerusalem is a divided city. It has been destroyed twice, besieged 22 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times. During the Christian Crusades, the Knights Templar made their headquarters on Temple Mount. Nevertheless, the Dome of the Rock, located on Temple Mount, has never been attacked or destroyed due to the veneration held for the site by the Religions of the Book – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Temple Mount is the holiest site in Judaism, and the third most important religious site in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. In the Middle Ages, both Christians and Muslims believed the site to be the biblical *Temple of Solomon*. The Dome of the Rock is an Islamic shrine, not a mosque,<sup>98</sup> built over the sacred stone where, according to both Judaic and Islamic traditions, Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son. Jews and Muslims differ, however, on which son, Ishmael or Isaac, was to be sacrificed. According to Judaic tradition, Temple Mount is the spiritual junction of Heaven and Earth – the *Holy of Holies*. Islamic tradition holds that the site is where Muhammad was taken by the angel Gabriel to pray with Abraham, Moses and Jesus, and from where He ascended to the proverbial *Seven Heavens*. While some Muslims believe this to be a physical journey, others believe it to be a spiritual journey where the Prophet was shown these places in a vision. Muslims also believe this is where the last judgment will take place. Jews face Temple Mount when praying, as did Muslims through the first two years of Prophet Muhammad's migration to Medina in 622 C.E.

Since the early Middle Ages, Islam protected the rights of Christians and Jews to worship here freely. However, in modern times, that relationship has been broken. Under both British and Jordanian rule, access to Jerusalem was severely restricted to Jews. In the 1967 war, the Israeli army seized control of Jerusalem and has maintained control ever since. Today, Jerusalem is a flashpoint for Muslims, who view their sacred city as being *occupied* by Israel. The sacred site of the tomb of Abraham, located in the west bank city of Hebron, has added fuel to this highly volatile issue. Abraham is regarded as the father to both the Jews

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<sup>98</sup> The al-Aqsa mosque – *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* – stands adjacent to the Dome of the Rock. The 7<sup>th</sup> century al-Aqsa mosque is the third most revered mosque in the Muslim world, after those in Medina and Mecca.

and Muslims through his two sons. Nevertheless, Hebron is on the front line in the conflict between Palestinians and Jewish settlers in the West Bank, and is guarded by the Israeli army like a fortress.

It is clear that a way must be found to assure the sanctity of these sacred sites, as well as unfettered access to them by all Christians, Muslims, and Jews. To this end, it is necessary to build a foundation of mutual understanding, respect, and trust among the People of the Book that acknowledges their common spiritual ground.

## APPENDIX 2

**Globalization** is a complex and controversial concept that denotes transformation in the organization of human affairs across regions, national borders, and continents. Globalization presumes the economic interdependence of national economies, transportation and communications infrastructures. The increasing economic interdependence of national economies has resulted in a rapid increase in cross-border movement of goods, services, people, technology and capital, leading to the emergence of a global marketplace or a single world market. Global trade, transportation, financial, information and communication networks that crisscross national boundaries facilitate multi-national corporate decision-making and strategic objectives.

However, globalization also has given rise to a multitude of interconnected negative structural consequences within and between nations. Foremost among these is the diminishing capacity for national governments to control their own economies and natural resources. Globalization has spawned an increasing concentration of economic and political power, widespread economic inequality and unemployment, particularly among the youth demographic, food insecurity, and the loss of individual cultural and religious identities. Many countries have experienced destabilizing political alienation and social disintegration in consequence of globalization, which in turn has generated military dictatorships, along with reactionary religious and political movements.



## APPENDIX 3

### Islamism

"If you understand the true character of a Muslim, you will be convinced that he cannot live in humiliation, abasement or subjugation. He is bound to prevail and no power on earth can overwhelm him."<sup>99</sup>

Abul A'la Mawdudi

Islamism, also referred to as *political Islam*, is a set of ideologies holding that Islam is a political ideology as well as a religion, and that Islam should guide not only one's personal life, but the social and political life of society as well.<sup>100</sup> Leading Islamists also advocate for pan-Islamic political unity, and elimination of non-Muslim (particularly western) military, economic, political, social, and cultural influences in Muslim-majority societies, which they believe to be incompatible with Islam.

Indo-Pakistani 'scholar' Abul Ala Maududi is regarded as the ideological father of Islamism, which is based upon his reinterpretation of the Qur'an.<sup>101</sup> Maududi hypothesized that the Qur'anic injunction to worship Allah and shun *taghoot* (i.e. Arabic for *evil* or *idol worship*) actually meant rejecting any non-Islamic form of governance and establishing a Sha'ria-governed state. In 1941, Maududi founded the *Jamaat-e-Islami* movement, which advocates for an Islamic state governed by Islamic law (Sha'ria). Subsequently, Islamist movements in Egypt, India, and Indonesia emerged, conflating the religion of Islam with nationalism for the first time. Ultimately, this alignment of Islamism with the nationalist ideologies of regional political movements in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East propelled the metamorphosis of former colonial empires in these regions into nation states.

Islamism is not a united or monolithic movement, and manifests in different forms and spans a wide range of strategies and tactics. *Militant Islam*, for example, is the term used when referring to Islamists who advocate/employ violence as a political strategy. *Radical* Islamists (e.g. al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad) entirely reject democracy, and preach violent jihad. *Moderate* and *reformist* Islamists

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<sup>99</sup> Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding Islam*. p.26

<sup>100</sup> Berman, S, "Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society, Perspectives on Politics", Vol. 1, No. 2, June 2003, American Political Science Association, p. 258. See also: Esposito, John L. (2003) *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. Oxford University Press, USA. (Dr. Esposito is Professor of International Studies and Director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University.)

<sup>101</sup> Central figures of contemporary Islamism include Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashid Rida, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Asad, Sayyid Qutb, Hasan al-Banna, as well as Abul Ala Maududi.

accept and work within the democratic processes of their respective societies, as in Turkey.

Westerners have assumed that the terms *Islam* and *Islamic* mean the same for Muslims as the terms *Christian* and *Jewish* mean in western societies. That is to say, in the west, these religious terms reference compartments of life that are regarded as inherently separate from other compartments, as in *church and state*, or *public and private*. Codification of the principle of *separation of church and state* in Western constitutions was the consequence of centuries of ruinous warfare among the Christian theocracies and secular monarchies of Europe and England. Today, Western multi-cultural, multi-religious societies are firmly committed to the democratic principle of *political and social equality for all*, which in turn mandates the separation of church and state. This commitment was affirmed when virulent anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany in the 1930s resulted in the monstrous crimes of the Jewish Holocaust, and western democracies went to war to end them.

Historically, for Muslims in the Islamic world, there was never a separation or compartmentalization of religious tenets from public life, as in the West. Nor was there a need to do so in the first centuries of Islam, where the vast majority of the empire's citizenry were Muslims. Tellingly, a comparable situation prevails today in the Middle East and west Asia, where more than 90% of the regions' residents are Muslim. For Muslim believers, Islam was and is a *complete way of life*, wherein there is no separation or distinction between public and private principles of conduct and personal behavior. The Western-inspired attempt to transform Islam by separating the principles of Islamic religious doctrine from governance, which began in the colonial period and continues today, is at the core of the controversy and conflict that has enveloped *Islamism*. The Islamic revolution in Iran resolved this conflict in favor of theology. With the so-called *Arab Spring*, the western Constitutional principle separating church and state appears to be increasingly academic in many Muslim-majority states.

#### APPENDIX 4

**The Other** is an analytical concept employed in the social sciences. The concept refers to the act of emphasizing the perceived weaknesses of marginalized groups as a way of stressing the alleged strength, superior morality and righteousness of a dominant group, or one competing for power or influence. The process of *othering* is employed to justify discrimination, exploitation, and domination of categories of people, such as those defined by race, ethnicity, religion, politics, gender, geography, etc. *Othering* is inherent within the theses of any expression of supremacism, including anti-Semitism, Islamaphobia, Islamism, racism, ethnocentrism, jingoism, sectarianism, imperialism, misogyny, homophobia, chauvinism, et al.