

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 6:41)

# 10:1

Our horizon is not the end of the world  
by Dr. Jürgen Todenhöfer



Security forces of the Italian colonialists take Libyan prisoners to the hearings, Tripoli, Libya, 1911/1912

credit: Ullstein Bild

"You would be surprised with what little understanding the world is ruled," said Pope Julius III. How right he was! And this ignorance is at least as dangerous as malice. Many of the bad decisions made in the "war on terror" have to do with ignorance of even the simplest facts. During my travels in Muslim countries, I have often felt ashamed of the irresponsible rubbish Western politicians say about the Muslim world. One can live with the shame but not with the terrible consequences of the ignorance of some politicians, both in the Afghanistan War and in the Iraq War. It has brought death to thousands of young Americans and hundreds of thousands of Muslims.

In the epilogue to my book *Why Do You Kill, Zaid?* I tried to present the world, for once, from the point of view of a Muslim. My theses will provoke a lot of criticism. I know and accept that. But I hope that they will perhaps open a window onto another way of seeing the Muslim world – or at least onto a fair discussion. Nothing makes us more vulnerable than our ignorance.

**The West is much more violent than the Muslim world. Millions of Arab civilians have been killed since colonialism began.**

The great French historian and politician Alexis de Tocqueville was a passionate champion of the freedom of the individual. For him, it always took precedence over equality. Inequality, he wrote, comes "directly from God." So it is no wonder that, like most of his contemporaries, this enlightened statesman did not think highly of racial equality.

In his major work *Democracy in America*, published in 1835, Tocqueville made a remark that characterized the era: "If we reasoned from what passes in the world, we should almost say that the European is

The Iraqis, colonized by Britain, did not fare much better. When they rose up against British oppression in 1920, Winston Churchill accused them of "ingratitude" and used chemical weapons against them – "with excellent moral effect," as he noted.

'Bomber Harris', the spiritual father of "moral bombing", reported proudly after a bombing raid: "The Arab and Kurd now know what real bombing means. Within 45 minutes an entire village can be practically wiped out." In Iraq, bombing raids were considered an effective method to collect taxes. One Royal Air Force officer, Lionel Charlton, resigned in 1924 after he visited a hospital and saw the mutilated victims of such a raid. He could not know that his country would again bomb Iraq 80 years later.

his 23-year rule.

Since fall 2007, the number of fatalities has declined in Iraq. But according to experts' conservative estimates, more than 6,000 Iraqi civilians are still dying each month in the chaos of the war. That is twice as many as perished on September 11, 2001, in the World Trade Center.

The people of Iraq are worse off now than they were under Saddam (according to Kofi Annan). There cannot be many Iraqis who say: "Great, our country has been destroyed; more than a million people have been killed; four and a half million have been made refugees; the child mortality rate is one of the highest in the world; electricity, water and medicine are scarce; unemployment and inflation have risen to more than 50 percent; one can hardly go out onto the street; in Baghdad people are living in walled ghettos since 'good fences make good neighbors'; as U.S. general David Petraeus put it – but it was worth it, Saddam is gone."

Over the past 200 years no Muslim state has ever attacked the West. The European superpowers and the United States have always been the aggressors and not those under attack. Since the beginning of the colonial era millions of Arab civilians have been killed. The West is clearly at the top of the league when it comes to killing, by a ratio of more than ten to one. The current debate about the Muslim world's alleged propensity to violence is a mockery of historical facts. The West was and is much more violent than the Muslim world. The problem of our era is not the violence of Muslims but the violence of some Western countries.

To understand Muslim extremism, one has to try to see the world, at least for a moment, from the point of view of a Muslim. Our horizon is not the end of the world. A young Muslim who follows the news on television sees day after day how Muslim women, children and men are killed by Western weapons, Western allies and Western soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon, Somalia and elsewhere.

It is cynical of great Western thinkers to furrow their brows and ponder the decline and fall of Arab civilization, which once was "militarily, economically and culturally far superior" (Hans Magnus Enzensberger). The West played a major part in making that happen. It plundered and ravaged the colonies and then withdrew. In 1830, when the colonization of Algeria began that country had a literacy rate of 40 percent, higher than that of France or England. In 1962, when the French occupying forces pulled out, it was under 20 percent. Colonialism stole from the Arab world more than a century of development. Seventeen years after the French conquest of Algeria, Tocqueville noted with resignation: "The lights have been extin-

In Libya, Italian colonialists dropped phosgene and mustard gas on rebels and civilians. Tribal leaders were taken up in airplanes and thrown out at dizzying altitudes. More than 100,000 civilians were deported to camps in the desert; half of them perished horribly. Libyan girls were kept as sex slaves for the colonial troops. During the Kabyle rebellions in Morocco the Spaniards also used chemical weapons with horrible effect here too.

The model for the treatment of the Arabs was the strategy adopted to wipe out the indigenous peoples of America. The mad ideas about racial and cultural superiority prevalent at the time knew no bounds. Gustave Le Bon, founder of mass psychology and opponent of the "superstition of equality," divided mankind into four classes: the native Australian and American



An Algerian boy is being arrested by French soldiers in the Casbah of Algier, 1954-1962

credit: Hamid Bousseham/ Editions Rahma-Alger Juin 2001

peoples he termed "primitive races," "Negroes" as "inferior," Arabs and Chinese as "intermediate" and the Indo-Europeans as a "superior race."

Since the Second World War as well, the West has often treated the Arabs as sub-human beings on a "level with the higher apes" (Jean-Paul Sartre). This is true of the wars against the colonial powers, interventions to secure supplies of raw materials, for the question of Palestine and for the sanctions against Iraq that were pushed through by the United States and Britain. According to UNICEF, these punitive measures against Iraq, which the Vatican called "perverse", caused the deaths of more than 1.5 million civilians, including half a million children.

The current Iraq war also shows a breathtaking contempt for the Muslim world. Thousands of civilians were killed as U.S.-led forces marched in. Countless numbers were crippled by bombs, including some containing uranium. A study conducted by independent American and Iraqi physicians and published in the medical journal *The Lancet*, estimates that more than 600,000 Iraqis had met with violent deaths by June 2006 as a result of the war and the chaos caused by occupation forces. It says 31 percent were killed by U.S.-led coalition forces, and 24 percent as a result of sectarian violence and suicide attacks. Responsibility could not be attributed in 45 percent of the violent deaths. According to *The Lancet*, the high number of gunshot victims suggests a "direct involvement of the U.S. military."

A study by the independent British research institute ORB in autumn 2007 estimates that more than one million Iraqis have been killed and around the same number injured. It reports that in Baghdad almost one in two households has lost a family member. According to Human Rights Watch, Saddam Hussein was responsible for the death of 290,000 Iraqi civilians in the course of

organizations classified as terrorist by the European Union in 2006, 36 have nothing to do with Islam. These "anti-imperialist," "anti-capitalist," "anti-Indian," or "anti-Singhalese" terrorist groups are responsible for the deaths of countless civilians in Latin America, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the West, they do not figure in public awareness. Because they do not kill people from our cultural sphere.

After the official end of colonial rule in the Mideast, the colonial powers were often replaced by financially and militarily dependent puppet regimes, pawns in the geopolitical game of Western superpowers.

Whoever did not play along was advised that a people only has a right to self-termination as long as it does not infringe Western interests. Freedom never meant freedom from us. One might call this "lex Mossadeq" in memory of the Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq, who was democratically elected in 1951 and deposed two years later by the CIA and the British.

Whoever fails to act in accordance with this law is ousted in a putsch or subjected to a concerted media campaign and branded a "rogue". Using the media to create "villains" is a specialty of Western foreign policy. As the example of Gaddafi shows, the title of "rogue" can be revoked at any moment.

Even Saddam Hussein, a "partner" who was renamed a "rogue," might still be doing as he pleases, even today, had he remained a partner of the United States. The massacre of Dujail, in which 148 people died and for which he was executed, occurred 26 years ago in 1982. At the time Saddam was, for the United States, an important player in the Mideast and waged war with Western support against Khomeini's Iran. Donald Rumsfeld visited Saddam in 1983, as special envoy of the U.S. president, even though he had been thoroughly informed about Dujail. Saddam was, after all, our anti-Islamist comrade-in-arms; he was supplied by Germany with components for chemical weapons, by France with fighter jets, and by the United States with satellite data on Iranian positions. In the Mideast, the West never showed any interest in human rights or democracy; it was and is fighting for oil.

Cynical dehumanization in the name of human rights, which the bloody images from Iraq, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries document daily, has left a deep and painful mark on the Muslims' cultural memory. Samuel Huntington was right on at least one point: "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion, but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact, non-Westerners never do." How can the Muslim world believe in our values of human dignity, the rule of law and democracy if all it sees is the way we oppress, humiliate and exploit it? Is it really surprising that extremists gain more and more support? Or that some people eventually hit back when their families are again and again mowed down by our machinery of destruction? Nobody is born a terrorist.

Despite all this, the kindness and hospitality still shown to Western visitors in oriental countries is overwhelming. One can visit religious sites with no problem, not only in secular Syria, but also in theocratic Iran – churches, synagogues and mosques. Most Muslims feel more respect towards Judaism and Christianity than we do. Despite their rejection of American foreign policy, they admire the West in many respects. Young Muslims like to wear (fake) Western trainers, jeans and T-shirts. While retaining their faith, they would like to be like us in many ways – free, modern and, on their terms, democratic. They would like to like America, once the great beacon of hope for oppressed people around the world, if it were not for its blood-drenched foreign policy.

The Muslim world is a far cry from the image depicted in the Western media. Western television broadcasters show a manufactured, distorted image of mobs raging against the West. In September 2001, after the attacks on the World Trade Center, many television stations showed Palestinian children rejoicing. But the footage had been staged. According to reports in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, the children had been given sweets so that they would rejoice in front of the cameras. "Spontaneous" anti-Western demonstrations in the Arab world usually take place only when they are carefully organized and staged in cooperation with Western broadcasters. As soon as the cameras are turned off, the "TV demonstrators" are given a little bakshesh and are taken back home in the same trucks that brought them. In contrast to the West, xenophobia is unknown in the Muslim world. We may be more economically and technologically advanced than these countries – but not in human terms. When it comes to kindness and love of one's neighbor, and a sense of family and hospitality, we could learn a lot from the Muslims.

This cordiality can, as in the case of Iraq, turn into raging anger when the West yet again scornfully tramples upon the rights of the Muslims. Jean-Paul Sartre described this self-destructive despair during the Algerians' war of liberation in 1961: "If this suppressed fury fails to find an outlet, it turns in a vacuum and devastates the oppressed creatures themselves. In order to liberate themselves they even massacre each other. The different tribes fight between themselves since they cannot face the real enemy – and you can count on colonial policy to keep up their rivalries; ... the torrent of violence sweeps away all barriers. ... It is the moment of the boomerang; it is the third phase of violence; it comes back on us, it strikes us, and as before we fail to realize that it is our own violence."

The "coalition of the willing" has taken from the Iraqis everything that might have given them the opportunity to be as "noble, helpful and good" as we like to perceive



credit: La Guerre d'Algérie, le temps des Léopards, par YVES COURRIERE, édition: FAYARD 1969  
Algerian peasant, injured by French napalm bombs, 1954-1962