As is clear from the previous pages, *The Empire and The Crescent* is a truly amazing compilation. Each article is able to stand alone, but taken as a whole the work enlightens readers to the danger of and destruction caused by leaving global affairs, specifically within the context of the Muslim world, in the hands of the hegemonic United States.

Jennifer Regan


Robert Spencer’s *Islam Unveiled* is one of the numerous works that have emerged during the past quarter century on the world’s fastest growing faith. However, unlike the emotionally charged and poorly researched works of several pseudo scholars of Islam and the Middle East like Robert Morey’s *The Islamic Invasion* and Daniel Pipes’ *Militant Islam Reaches America*, Spencer’s book is eloquently written, judiciously edited, and tactfully presented. Nonetheless, while Daniel Ali, founder of the Christian-Islamic Forum Inc., considers the book to be the “first successful attempt at revealing (the evilness of) Islam”, it would be more appropriate to label it the first serious rather than successful attempt due to its flagrant and innumerable errors in its greater part.

It is difficult to overlook and ignore the book’s seductive and fear-inspiring cover. Spencer’s tabloidial choice to publish close-up facial portraits of dreadful looking Muhammad Atta [Muhammad ‘Atā’] (one of masterminds of the 9/11 attack), along with the picture of an attractive-looking young woman with mesmerizing Arab eyes wearing the hijab, is an open invitation for people to form already negative images of the Islamic faith altogether. This prelude sets the stage for the rest of the play: Islam, the religion of hate and violence *par excellence*, promotes terrorism and suppresses human rights. His claim is further solidified by a foreword by an Arab-abhorrer, pro-Zionist and senior editor of the conservative *National Review*, David Pryce-Jones, along with a back-cover feedback by renowned Islam-basher, Dr Anis Shorrosh.

The entire book revolves around one basic premise: the evil actions, unethical practices, intolerant behaviour and promiscuous conduct that Muslims commit and believe in, are not the works of a few zealots falsely
claiming to adhere to Islam. Instead, they are inspired and ordained by unquestionably legitimate Islamic sources, abundantly found in the Qur’ān, the authentic Hadith collections, and the writings of mainstream Muslim scholars across the centuries. Hence, while Spencer states that his book is about Islam, and not about Christianity or the West, he does not hesitate to remind his reader that it would be inaccurate to compare Muslims’ mischievous actions to those committed by their Christian and Western counterparts. He argues that unlike Islam, evil actions committed by people claiming to adhere to the Christian faith and democracy, such as the Crusaders’ massacres, the Ku Klux Klan’s lynching of African-Americans, one cannot find any basis in the teachings of the Bible. Additionally, he contends that, in the event when Biblical verses do incite their followers to aggression, such as in Psalm 137: 9: “Happy shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rocks” (p. 23) (see also Psalm 101: 8, I Samuel 18: 7, Leviticus 24: 20 and Joshua), they are usually extracted from the Old Testament; yet the civilized western world which follows the “New Testament corrective of the gospel of mercy” (p. 34) as it is depicted in Matthew 5: 38–39 and 5: 44 along with Jesus Christ’s dovish teachings, according to Spencer, one cannot religiously justify any violent or immoral behaviour. While he may want to believe that the New Testament was not used to justify human destruction, historical records prove that both the Crusaders and Ku Klux Klan were theologically grounded in the New Testament and profusely used their understanding of Jesus to defend their actions.


In his misleading approach for thoroughness and cohesiveness, the author discredits Islam by following a tactic of discourse. Instead of outright attacking the Islamic religion, he describes the apparently condemnable events in Islamic history and beliefs, then, briefly presents parallel examples of how the West and/or Christianity committed similar mistakes. This book reflects the emergence of a new breed of 9/11 polemicist Islamophobes who interchange
the terms “the West” and “Christianity” — as if there has always been one single homogenous Christianity and one unified territory called the West. Spencer concludes that while the latter performed them in full violation of Christian and Western values, the Muslims accomplished them in full compliance and even observance of Islamic teachings.

Spencer’s articulate style and meticulous editing camouflages his argument’s weaknesses and flaws, swaying the novice reader to believe that what is presented is factually correct when the majority of his arguments are historically incorrect, flatly misleading, out of context, or at best, incoherent. For example, he states: “Most Americans got their first taste of contemporary Islamic terrorism at the Munich Olympics of 1972, when Muslim terrorists murdered Israeli athletes” (p. 1). Blaming this actual incident on Muslims is outlandish and a bizarre attempt to revise history for his own arguments. Never in the history of documenting this event has any side (Israeli, Palestinian, German, The International Olympics Committee, or anyone around the world) ever pinpointed the reason of the Munich attacks on Muslims. The attack, known as Black September, was conducted out directly or indirectly linked to the Fatah Group, one of the most secular organizations among all the Palestinian institutions, which even includes prominent Christian Palestinians. By making such an assertion in 2002, thirty years after the attack, the author has either deliberately mis-stated, or was grossly misinformed, or has uncovered secret documents that Israel’s sophisticated intelligence has not yet encountered.

While the Olympics incident is easily documented and swiftly refuted by anyone familiar with the basic history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Spencer presents numerous arguments in a carefully deceptive style, disguising them for the English-only apprentice reader to trace, understand within their proper context, and rebut. For instance, he subtly integrates three Qur’anic verses that permit Muslims to kill pagans (“When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield, strike off their heads and when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly” Qurʾan 47: 4), (see also 9: 5, and 2: 190–191) (p. 20) with a verse related to combating People of the Book: “Fight against such of those to whom the Scripture were given as they believe neither in God nor the Last Day ...” (Qurʾan 9: 29). While Spencer correctly informs the reader that the first set of verses applied only to idolaters, he totally fails to report the context and circumstances that led Muslims to retaliate against the pagans, i.e., the latter had breached pacts, conspired against, attacked and harmed the Muslims first.

When Spencer does not rely on lies, misinformation, and out-of-context citations, he uses other deceptive techniques by selecting less popular
interpretations of specific events that suit his critical agenda of Islam. It is astonishing that Spencer did not employ more alternative and more authoritative accounts of the same events that differ with his selected account. A case in study would be his account of the circumstances behind the first few verses of surah 66 (Surah al-Tahrim) in which God reprimands the Prophet Muḥammad for prohibiting something upon himself which God had made lawful. Spencer chooses the more sensual hadith reported by Tirmidhī that the Prophet Muḥammad promised to avoid Mary the Coptic after his wife Ḥafṣah became angry with him for having been with Mary at Ḥafṣah’s house. He fails to — or chooses not to — relate the stronger narration of Bukhārī with a totally different account in which the Prophet had pledged no longer to eat honey (instead of not seeing Mary) in order to please his two wives who, out of jealousy, had joined into a league and complained about the Prophet’s foul-smelling mouth created by consumption of honey.

These and hundreds of other fallacious, misleading, out-of-context and half-truth examples are not haphazardly chosen. Instead, from the start of his book until its end, they are carefully and abundantly implanted, are drawn from a variety of sources, including classical, contemporary, religious, social, political, international and regional sources related to Islam. This strategy accomplishes a very important objective: Exposing hundreds of shallowly discussed cases about the evilness of Islam forces the reader to conclude that, even if some of the examples are potentially debatable and refutable, there is still an overwhelming volume of arguments to condemn the faith and its followers. Since the book targets the mainstream, mono-lingual, unfamiliar, non-expert audience, it becomes difficult to discredit the author, unless a multi-disciplinary and linguistically-trained critic refutes him by documenting the authoritative sources and revealing the author’s true flimsiness.

The book’s main merit lies in its ability to address a wide variety of controversial topics that are of interest and relevance to the inquisitive Western public. It is relatively well written and edited, yet serves as a half-decent primer only for shallow pundits of Islam. The major failure does not only lie in what the author presents, but instead, in what he deliberately chooses to omit, which, had it been exposed adequately, would totally discredit his own premise and conclusions. This is mostly because of the fact that the author relies on haphazard events and statements throughout the Muslims’ history to prove his point instead of digging deeply into their roots, circumstances and causes. One feels confident to make this assertion against the author because he did have access to and often quoted — though selectively — some primary Islamic sources.
The other primary weakness of the book is the author’s microscopic knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of socio-political, economic, and cultural factors that affect any human behaviour, especially when it is not related to one’s faith. Blaming Muslims above behavioural weaknesses that are commonplace among all nations can hardly be looked upon as good scholarship. Oppression, economic exploitation, injustice, and cultural heritage, among many other factors, all impact a society’s development, its worldview and reactions to events. In addition, the author’s deification of Western culture, politics and value system reflect his considerable ignorance of the West’s own political history, which did in the past and still supports today, some of the most violent, cruel and brutal behaviour that the world has ever experienced, not only threatening the Muslim and the developing world, but also the entire humanity, including the West’s own existence. Adapting the words of the renowned author Phyllis Bennis’ assessment of the American publics’ knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we can safely state that Robert Spencer knows quite a lot about Islam. However, what he knows is completely incomplete.

Dany Doueiri


Few professors possess the credentials of Akbar Ahmed when it comes to discussing contemporary Islam. An anthropologist by training, he has served as Pakistan’s ambassador to the UK, has sat with kings and presidents, and now holds the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at the American University. He has delivered countless speeches, authored several books, journal and newspaper articles. Perhaps the most telling indication of the authority he commands can be seen in the fact that he has addressed ISNA, North America’s largest Islamic body, as well as the Jewish Anti-Defamation League (ADL), two entities that have diametrically opposed views, and both have hailed him as an exemplar of integrity. Yet, for all of these qualities, I approached his latest book with some cynicism, for Professor Tamara Sonn’s comment, printed on the book’s front cover: “This is the most important