with neighbouring countries as a result of US initiatives in Afghanistan and Iraq and its impact on Saudi Arab’s domestic policies; (c) The role of European Union countries and Russia in the Middle East and (d) Expectations of poor and developing Muslim countries and Muslim minorities in Africa and Asia and Saudi response. Had these areas been adequately covered in the case study, it would have made it a very comprehensive document.

An outstanding feature of the case study is the last paper written as “Conclusions and Outlook” by the editors. This paper is not an executive summary of the other 14 papers included in the book, but an overview of the findings and concerns scattered in these papers. Thus it is an attempt to correlate all the papers and integrate them into a well-knit discourse. One may agree, partially agree, or disagree with the outlook of the editors but there is likely to be a consensus on the conclusion drawn by them that Saudi Arabia is in a flux — in domestic politics, society, economy and foreign relations. Yet in such a flux, a number of patterns and trends can be identified. And, that “the reforms and liberalization (of Saudi economy and society) do not equate to democratization — nor do they necessarily lead to it.” This consensus can lead to further exploration of the dynamics of Saudi Arabian society.

The case study is a thought-provoking exercise and should motivate other institutions and stake-holders to undertake such exercises. It may also help in soul-searching by the Saudi elite about their past, present and future.

Ather Zaidi

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In the aftermath of 9/11, most writers on Islam can be classified into one of two broad classifications: they are either seen as apologists for Islam, or polemists against the religion. Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Professor of Islamic Studies at American University falls into neither classification. He stands in the vanguard of the extremely few that have transcended such labeling. He has been honoured by the Islamic Society of North America as well as the Anti-Defamation League: two entities that have diametrically
opposed views. And his latest book, *Journey Into Islam*, comes endorsed by such well-known figures as Judea Pearl, Elie Wiesel and Lord Anthony Giddens. Further evidence of the esteem in which he is held is evidenced by the fact that American University, the Brookings Institution, and the Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life funded the research for his book.

It is not difficult to understand why Akbar Ahmed is so well respected. The holder of a PhD in anthropology, he is not just an academic, but was also the former Pakistani High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. He was the Pakistani government agent to the Waziristan area of Pakistan, the stomping grounds of the Taliban. His experience in this particular area makes him an, if not the, foremost expert on the Taliban and their interpretation of Islam. In all of his writings and public appearances thus far, Professor Ahmed demonstrates an objectivity that is truly academic: he spares none in his insightful assessments. He points out the failings of the Muslim world and its leaders in the same eloquent manner that he criticizes the Bush administration and its handling of 9/11 as well as its subsequent dealings with the Muslim world.

Professor Tamara Sonn hailed his *Islam Under Siege* as “the most important book to date on life in the post 9/11 world.” *Journey Into Islam* is a magnificent follow-up, the fruits of research conducted with some American students in the summer of 2006. Professor Ahmed and a select group of students travelled to eight countries, going to some of the most dangerous places in the world, to observe and dialogue with Muslims. They visited Turkey, Qatar, Syria, Jordan, Pakistan, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. This undertaking, while noteworthy, could have been done by any group. What made the project unique was that Professor Ahmed, because of his standing and recognition in the Muslim world, was able to take his students to interviews with the highest authorities in the places he visited, ranging from presidents of countries, politicians, and spokespersons of probably the most fundamentalist Islamic institution in the world.

Despite the fact that the book is based on research and is apt for university usage, it is written in a style that allows for easy reading and comprehension. It should be a must read for any person wishing to get a deep understanding of the current confrontation between the Islamic and Western worlds. On this subject, Ahmed is very clear: we are in a crisis situation, one that is exacerbated by simplistic generalizations of the perceived “other.” Islamophobic ideas in the west have their counterparts in the Muslim world, where anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism are rampant, and where many are still in a state of denial, refusing to accept that the atrocities of 9/11 could have been committed by members of their faith.
In the Muslim world, one of the consistent views that came forth is anger towards the United States and the West for what is deemed to be a concerted effort to defame Islam and its Prophet. The United States’ unconditional support for Israel, and its turning a blind eye to the suffering of the Palestinians have created a situation that has festered, and will take careful monitoring and mending to heal.

Many writers discuss Islam under such labels as “fundamentalist” or “moderate.” In doing so, most of them focus on the Arab areas, such as Saudi Arabia and its Wahhabism, or Iran and its Shi’ite identity. The press reports on the Iraqi debacle have made us see the conflict in Islam as being one of moderate versus fundamentalist, one of Shi’ah versus Sunni. What Ahmed shows is that this is rather simplistic, and that the true picture is far more complex, and unfortunately, rather disturbing.

He uses three Indian institutions for categorization models: Ajmer, Deoband, and Aligarh. The characteristics of these three models can be used to characterize the different interpretations of Islam, regardless of geographic location. He notes that the fact that they are all in India is just coincidental, for once we understand their definitive worldviews, we can see how other movements might identify with them, regardless of the names and sectarian labels by which they identify themselves.

Ajmer, for example, represents the more mystic sufi-type perception of Islam, willing to accept the beliefs and practices of others, even to the point where some see the entire human community as God’s children, wherein there is no discrimination or terms like “infidels” (p. 34). The Deoband model is literalist, drawing upon mainstream tradition and thought. This would apply to the Wahhabis, as well as to those who identify with Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1386/1966), Sayyid Mawdūdī (d. 1399/1979), and Ḥamās, among others. The Aligarh model represents the position of Muslim modernists influenced by western colonialism.

Each of these models seeks to satisfy its idea of the Muslim worldview, but the criticism of Ahmed is that the Ajmer model may concentrate too much on mysticism while ignoring this world, while the Aligarh model may do the opposite. The Deobandīs show little in terms of tolerance while believing that their model is the best, for the Ajmer is too mystical, and the Aligarh too secular.

What Professor Ahmed found is that many Muslims in the eight countries he and his students visited are beginning to identify with the Deoband model, and in doing so, taking role models that would normally, not have been considered possible, based on their categorization. Many students at Aligarh, for example, in a vast departure from the liberal ideology of the
institution’s founder, Sir Sayyid Ahmad (d. 1315/1898), took Osama bin Laden as a model, because he represented someone who could defy western imperialism.

Professor Ahmed demonstrates something that evades the grasp of more Americans: Christian fundamentalism and anti-Islamic preaching by some American evangelists actually empower the fundamentalist Muslims. As Ahmed observes:

This trend can be seen even in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, which for the past century has maintained a fine balance between several political forces. The religious parties—collectively and somewhat contemptuously called the mullahs by others—never got more than 15 to 20 percent of the seats in the provincial assembly. After September 2001—when the increasing attacks on Islam began in the United States, led by prominent religious figures such as Franklin Graham, Pat Robertson, Jerry Vines and Jerry Falwell...the mullahs saw their chance. In the next elections, they entered the political fray by declaring that they would fight for the honor of Islam whereas everyone else had compromised. Anti-American sentiments were so strong that this time the mullahs won almost every seat in the assembly, sweeping away what were once unbeatable tribal chiefs and princely figures (p. 214).

In Palestine, Hamás, representing the Deoband model, have been seen as countering Israeli occupation. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have stymied the foreign military presence. The Deoband type organizations also provide social services, as exemplified by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Contrary to some of the material fed by the popular media, Professor Ahmed shows that even Christians in Lebanon are looking up to Hizbollah for being instrumental in repelling the Israeli invasion.

The cultural insensitivity that has become so characteristic of the American administration vis-à-vis Muslim mores is illustrated by a simple, yet moving, encounter. Because of the sensitivity that she displayed, a Christian student impressed people by refusing to enter the mausoleum of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (d. 1367/1948), the founder of Pakistan, until she could find a suitable headscarf. When one compares her behaviour—and the response it merited—with Massachusetts’ governor Mitt Romney denigrating Nancy Pelosi’s wearing of a scarf on her visit to Syria last week, it is simple to see why there is such a rift between the Muslim masses and those who are deemed to represent the American people. Sadly, most Muslims having access to CNN and satellite beamed television will be more aware of Romney’s idiotic comments, and few will know of the example of Ahmed’s student.

Journey Into Islam provides us with information that shows why the United States is deemed as untrustworthy by many Muslim countries.
Professor Ahmed has shown how the US government sold poisonous material to Şaddām, who used it against the Kurds. He also shows how the US administration has relied on the skewed theories of Bernard Lewis to shape American policy towards the Muslim countries, to the point where one hears of “the Lewis doctrine” (p. 129). The American intervention in Iran to derail the democratic government of Muhammad Mossadegh, and its later willingness to endorse Iran’s development of nuclear technology for the gain of US commercial interests are all detailed.

Perhaps what comes out as particularly painful in a society that prides itself on democracy, freedom and free speech, is the fact that after 9/11 Muslims have been defined and discussed entirely by non-Muslims. The rise of Islamophobia is something that is undeniable and Professor Ahmed points out the need for dialogue.

When attempting to review a book, I usually underline notable points and, for later reference, note the page number on the blank pages that precede the list of contents. It became evident to me, after reading the first ten pages of Journey Into Islam that this practice would not be of use for I would have had to record every single page. Ahmed keeps dropping little gems of wisdom that always seem to fit most aptly. On page 20, for example, he writes that, “the problem with hatred is that it thrives on falsehood.” Perhaps no statement more fully illustrates the situation of hate that now pervades western perceptions of Islam, and the view of those in the Muslim world about Christianity and the West. On page 209, he cites Benjamin Franklin’s statement that “whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.” When one reads that the US reaction to 9/11 was predicated on anger rather than pragmatic analysis, one wishes that the shapers of US policy would pay attention to Professor Ahmed’s words.

For many who seek to categorize a Muslim author, the focus is often on his position towards Israel. Here Ahmed does not disappoint. In the frankness that is so characteristic, he notes that too many Arab leaders have used Israel as a crutch, pretending to seek a solution to that issue before implementing democracy in their countries (p. 264).

A question that I often hear when addressing audiences about the situation of the West and Islam is “should we hope for something better?” Professor Ahmed answers this question astutely: US policy makers tend to focus less on long term objectives, instead giving attention to immediate emergency situations. This in turn encourages a more visceral approach (p. 261). The need for a more pragmatic dealing with the situation is beautifully illustrated by Ahmed’s narrative of how one of the most vehement anti-American fundamentalists from the Deoband school changed his views
after patient and respectful dialogue with the American students and their professor. This very person later oversaw the translation and publication in Urdu of *Journey Into Islam*. That essentially means that a book, which offers constructive criticism and fosters moderation and harmony between religions is being now promoted by one who was hitherto a most vociferous proponent of fundamentalism. Ahmed’s book is not just a treasure chest of information; it is also a how-to manual of fostering peace and mutual respect. Would that *Journey Into Islam* were essential reading for every government official, every university researcher, and every person interested in learning about Islam and finding a recipe for peaceful coexistence.

Khaleel Mohammed

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