

REVIEW ARTICLE

A Kick Up the 'Arris

Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, Free Press, 2006. Paperback, 336pp, £12.99.

Reviewed by Doug Lowe

Introduction

With tedious predictability some people continue to advance their careers (and, no doubt, bank balances) with works of this nature. Meanwhile around the world millions suffer misery, broken lives and death directly or indirectly as a consequence of the actions of the US government and its allies.

Of course, not only do people have to pay for the consequences of the supposedly disinterested and self-sacrificing generosity of American capitalism and its friends. As a minor but additional insult they also have to endure the criticisms of Harris and his comfortable and cosseted book-writing colleagues for actually resenting being attacked, bombed and tortured in the name of freedom and democracy. This resentment inevitably sometimes expresses itself in violent lashing out (or overt displays of sympathy for this). This inflames these intellectuals to berate them further, ignoring the real causes of these responses, in favour of more convenient explanations. To Harris the fundamental reason for attacks on the US and Israel is a profound loathing of “modernity” and a natural propensity of Muslims for violence fuelled by Islamic dogma.

Religious beliefs

In the first part of the book Harris outlines the fundamental irrationality of religious beliefs. Some of the phrases and examples he uses are telling and likely to warm the hearts of godless Bolsheviks everywhere. Where he differs from much of secularist thought is his refusal to exempt “moderate” religious practice from criticism. He is equally, if not more, scathing about this than about those who hold “extreme” fundamentalist views. He arg-

ues that the latter at least have the virtue of being honest, accurately interpreting the sacred text (of whatever religious persuasion) when dealing with those who do not follow its teachings, i.e. death to those who don't follow my god and his pronouncements. To Harris, moderates have adopted a “pick and mix” attitude to their own beliefs, combining the absurdities of religious faith, with a tacit acknowledgement that the world has changed substantially since the sacred texts were written. For Harris, these “moderates” provide a useful function as an ideological bedrock for their more extreme brethren. The credibility of “moderate” religious views remains mostly unchallenged, despite the fact that these are, at their core, the same irrational ones as the “extremists”, i.e. a belief in “God”.

This may well be the case but Harris eventually takes his initial argument well away from the innocent secular humanism that (at first glance) he seems to be championing. In addition, after spending so much time and effort ridiculing the irrationality of religious faith he then ends up championing some form of Buddhist mysticism. The temptation to point out that he lives in California is too great to resist.

Harris confuses cause and effect in his emphasis on the “sacred texts” as catalysts for “religiously” inspired violence. One reviewer of the book argued that “determined mass murderers can find a rationale for killing in any handy text that comes along.... Reasoning backward under the impression that the destructive results of this or that piece of writing invalidates its purchase on our serious attention could make ‘E=mc²’ the most taboo phrase in the language.”¹

The reviewer seems to be using this argument

to imply the continuing validity of aspects of holy books but the point he makes does have wider applicability in undermining generally the notion that mere words on a page have some magical ability to propel people into particular types of action, without any other mediating factors.

Mein Kampf might explain Hitler's mindset but it could hardly be held responsible for the eventual Nazi rise to power. Without the myriad political, economic and social circumstances that led to the (not inevitable) victory of fascism in Germany, that book would have been a mildly interesting but minor footnote in a 20th century history of Germany.

Islam and 'Western values'

Harris expresses concern about American Christian fundamentalists and their influence at the highest levels of government. But his attack on Islam is much more substantial and sustained. In addition, this is bolstered by evidence provided by people like Alan Dershowitz, Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis (right-wing pro-Israeli cheerleaders for American imperialism). Harris also cites Paul Berman as responsible for a "beautiful primer" on totalitarianism (p.134). Berman claims leftist credentials but his book *Terror and Liberalism* actually peddles ahistorical, crude and inaccurate comparisons between so-called Islamic "totalitarianism" and German Nazism (which is what Harris was referring to).

Incidentally, Bernard Lewis has recently been convicted by a French court for denial of the Armenian holocaust and (like Dershowitz) he still won't disassociate himself from the infamous Joan Peters book *From Time Immemorial*, a Zionist fiction that airbrushes the Palestinians from existence before the arrival of the Zionist settlers, an intellectual sleight-of-hand worthy of Uncle Joe himself.

Now, apparently, the greatest threat to mankind is a global bloc of fanatical Muslims. Set against this are the countries loosely termed the "West", deemed virtually the sole champions of the values of liberalism, freedom and democracy. This may come as a surprise to anyone over the last few centuries who has been on the receiving end of various "Western" imperialisms or been embroiled in two world wars, both of which began in Europe (as did the vilest ideology of all, fascism).

In practice, to the US rulers, terms like "liberal values" and "democracy" are directly equated with US society, in particular the glories of free market capitalism. The gross inequalities, poverty, endemic violence and racism are somewhat at odds with this flattering self-delusion.

In truth, these "liberal values" Harris refers to have been a moveable feast for US administrations, to be wheeled on when they suit the dictates of the American propaganda machine and its apologists. Or ignored when they are used against America in an attempt to restrain their military (and

other) interventions or close relationships with unpleasant regimes.

'Clash of civilisations'

Whilst hiding behind some pretence at objectivity, it is clear that Harris subscribes to Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilisations"/barbarians at the gates apocalyptic nonsense, cleverly associating Muslims automatically with Islam and all Muslims as part of a "civilisation".

He is quite explicit about this - "We are at war with Islam" (p.109). This follows soon after an outrageous assertion in passing: "terrorism of the sort that has become so *commonplace* [my italics] among Muslims" (p.109). Later, he states: "Whether or not one likes Huntington's formulation, one thing is clear: the evil that has finally reached our shores is not merely the evil of terrorism. It is the evil of religious faith *at the moment of its political ascendancy* [my italics]." (p.130) These absurd exaggerations are pre-figured by an earlier remark, "Millions among us, even now, are quite willing to die for our unjustified beliefs, and *millions more* [my italics], it seems, are willing to kill for them" (p.64).

Even more sinisterly he slips into "fifth column" arguments, where ostensibly "moderate" Muslims living in the West are hiding their true feelings (contempt for "Western" values) behind a convenient cloak of "liberalism". ("We should not mistake the 'tolerance' of political, economic, and numerical weakness for genuine liberalism", p.115.) It doesn't take much imagination to guess how these views might provide easy justification for any violence or intimidation meted out to Muslims (or those who just "look Arabic").

The logic of this for Harris is unequivocally spelt out: "Some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them.... There is, in fact, no talking to some people. If they cannot be captured, and they often cannot, otherwise tolerant people may be justified killing them in self-defence. This is what the United States attempted in Afghanistan, and it is what we and other Western powers are bound to attempt, and at even greater cost to ourselves and to innocents abroad" (pp.52-3).

Yes - that's what he said - it would be ethical to kill for just believing certain things, you don't actually have to do anything! Reading the first part of the quote, comrades might have started rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of Sam Harris leading a 21st century International Brigade of atheists to finish off Bush, Rumsfeld and US Christian fundamentalists. Sadly, the last sentence would clarify, and the disillusion would be complete when, in a recent interview, Harris lines up with Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell's assessments of the global situation!²

The idea that there is, or ever likely to be, some monolithic construct based on Islam is an absurd-

ity. Even less likely is a sinister global threat from such an entity.³

'Benign dictatorship'

Harris refers to a variety of problems in many countries: "This is not to deny that there are problems with democracy, particularly when it is imposed prematurely on societies that have high birth rates, low levels of literacy, profound ethnic and religious factionalism, and unstable economies", which might necessitate "a benevolent despotism ... [as] a necessary stage in the political development of many societies" (p.240). At no point does Harris suggest the role of Western nations and their businesses and banks in causing or exacerbating these problems – these countries seem to develop alone socially, economically and politically, isolated from external influences.

Harris asserts the "right" of the US to intervene in other countries – in his view the transformation of certain countries to a "democracy" will require a period of "benign dictatorship" – "if it cannot emerge from within a state, it must be imposed from without" (p.151). He adds: "While this may seem an exceedingly arrogant doctrine, it appears we have no alternatives" (p.151). To support this he approvingly cites an article by right-wing commentator Robert Kaplan ('Supremacy by Stealth'): "[Kaplan] has made a strong case that interventions of this sort should be entirely *covert* and will, for the foreseeable future, be the responsibility of the United States to carry out" (p.266). Ah, the burden of the liberal imperialist. In practice, I suspect that "benign dictatorships" and "benevolent despotisms" will closely equate to compliant local elites prepared to do Washington's bidding.

In the many cases of US intervention, the regimes it supported could hardly have been said to usher in eras of benevolent anything. Chile in 1973 springs to mind, but contrary to Harris's formula of transformations of societies *towards* democracy a parliamentary democracy there was replaced by a brutal dictatorship. Perhaps it doesn't count as a democracy if socialists are involved. That seems to be a common factor in motivating numerous instances of US interference in even the democratic processes of other countries.⁴

More recently, the US administration and people like Blair have been spouting lies about Chávez, elected democratically on several occasions. For hypocritical nonsense by the US and Blair about "flouting international law", read "don't help the poor with your oil, give it to the caring, socially concerned US oil companies". US and British criticism of Chad's recent nationalisation of its oilfields has been strangely muted. Perhaps not so strangely, since Chad's President intends to spend the proceeds on military supplies rather than helping to ease poverty in his own country. More importantly, unlike the Bolivian and Venezuelan cases, it is not detrimental to US oil

companies' interests.⁵

At odds with Harris's cosy view of the benign guiding hand of the US, there is the reality: "With its network of bases, America has extended an umbrella of 'protection' around the globe. But America's military protection comes with consequences. The military has been used to train local intelligence and counter-insurgency agencies around the world whose record of human rights abuses is notorious.... Wars between countries, civil wars and local martial law have all been facilitated by the global role of the American military in ensuring America's national security; surrogate wars, repression and denial of human rights become a necessary part of America's self-defence."⁶

For Harris the list of pretexts justifying American meddling elsewhere appears then to be fairly extensive. I hope anyone who beats an American team into second place in any world sporting competition is ready for the possible consequences if Harris had his way. Perhaps his parents wouldn't let him play Cowboys and Indians or Risk as a child and he never got it out of his system.

The willingness of the US to repeatedly act throughout the world in its own narrow interests is complemented by its refusal to engage in multi-national co-operation on key aspects of global concern – it has "consistently opposed ... human rights initiatives.... It is one of only two countries ... that has still not ratified the 1989 ... UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also held back ratifications on the treaty to ban landmines and the treaty to establish an International Criminal Court".⁷

America: the Muslims' friend

In a note (p.241) Harris approvingly refers to a remark made by Paul Berman: "[Berman] also points out that most of our conflicts of recent years have been fought in *defense* of various Muslim populations." Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and the Balkans are cited, as if America was solely motivated by altruistic concerns, rather than their own interests. It may be that sometimes people do benefit (directly or indirectly) from American involvement but that is likely to be incidental to strategic US aims.

In the Balkans their contribution included deliberate bombing of numerous non-military targets (including the needless destruction wrought on a heavily-populated Belgrade). Self-righteous justifications about humanitarian motives are contradicted by the price paid by innocent civilians there.

On the subjects of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia I've only one thing to say. Oil.

Harris adds to this list "our original support of the mujahideen in Afghanistan". He is rather coy, though, about revealing to his readers the key role of one Osama bin Laden in the American-financed and equipped mujahideen, extreme Islam-

ic fanatics who brutally ousted a Soviet-backed regime which, however imperfect, did attempt to modernise the country. America, for its own strategic/economic/political interests backed the alternative – which eventually paved the way for the Taliban regime. A lucrative pipeline deal with the Taliban subsequently became less secure. Only then did the Americans suddenly realise how unacceptable the Taliban were!

Chomsky and Sudan

Another country with a large Muslim population is Sudan. Referring to Clinton's bombing of the pharmaceutical factory there in 1998, Harris attempts to take on what he calls the "Left's unreason". To Harris the arch-exponent of this is Noam Chomsky (one of the most consistent and articulate critics of American foreign policy). Soon after this section starts, Harris says: "I would like to concede many of his [i.e. Chomsky's] points.... There is no doubt that the United States has much to atone for, both domestically and abroad. In this respect, we can more or less swallow Chomsky's thesis whole.... We have surely done some terrible things in the past. Undoubtedly, we are poised to do terrible things in the future. Nothing I have written in this book should be construed as a denial of these facts ..." (p.140). This stark acknowledgement of reality is unfortunately then followed by a diversion into the realms of fantasy and wish fulfilment. He actually agrees then with Chomsky's main criticisms, bar one!

The only criticism Harris throws at Chomsky is his unflattering comparison of the Sudan bombing to 9/11. Chomsky's argument was that the number of 9/11 deaths had "moral equivalence" with the likely effects of the destruction of so many vital medical supplies. Harris counter-argument rests solely on the assertion that the 9/11 bombers intended to kill thousands, Clinton didn't.

This ignores two key points. Firstly, in carrying out the bombing the US was flagrantly violating international law, again. Secondly, the bombing was not a result of flawed intelligence or a tragic mistake but a knowingly deliberate act of terrorism on a false pretext. It was a result of two factors – a cynical ploy by Clinton to divert pressures away from his domestic problems and broadly a crude threat to the Sudanese government to be more compliant to US interests in the region, not the least of these relating to Sudan's large oilfields. The bombing was not an isolated act but part of a concerted effort by the US to undermine the Sudanese government until it bowed to Washington's dictates. As with other countries that have dared to act independently, the fomenting of civil war and economic sanctions have also been used.⁸ So much for Clinton, erstwhile darling of gullible liberals everywhere (if that isn't an obvious tautology).

Apparently, Chomsky's political views "pre-

vent him from making the most basic moral distinctions – between types of violence, and the variety of human purposes that give rise to them" (p.139). Furthermore, he also chides Chomsky for not acknowledging "the difference between intending to kill a child, because of the effect you hope to produce on its parents (...'terrorism'), and inadvertently killing a child in an attempt to capture or kill an avowed child murderer (...'collateral damage'). In both cases a child has died.... But the ethical status of the perpetrators ... could hardly be more distinct" (p.146).

In the light of the real motivations behind American military interventions, this logic is utterly flawed. It is also closely followed by some irrelevant comparisons with the risks involved for children going on roller coasters, travelling in cars or skiing. Actually, in the light of a 1999 UNESCO report that estimated that half a million Iraqi children under five years of age died as a result of US-led sanctions on Iraq, Harris's remarks concerning children are flippant, callous and offensive beyond words.

The implications of Harris's remarks are that the invasion of Iraq and sundry other military actions by the US had the purest of motives and the most honourable of intentions. In fact, he had earlier made it quite apparent that this is what he thinks – referring to America as a "well-intentioned giant" (p.142). I kid you not. The national equivalent of the "Honey Monster" going to help someone who's fallen over, only to accidentally tread on their toes while doing so. This pathetic assertion is offered with no evidence at all. Contradictory evidence is overwhelming, of course.

Even then, after stating that "where ethics are concerned, intentions are everything" (p.147), in the attached note he adds a qualification: "Intentions matter, but they are not all that matters" (p.265). The only "unreason" that is going on here is not of the Left variety. Intellectually, his attack on Chomsky is like a kitten taking on a grizzly bear.

Nazis

It's quite a coincidence that American concern for human rights seems to be particularly acute when the countries concerned are where access to large quantities of oil have been most problematic for them.

On Afghanistan, Harris dutifully trots out the Bush administration line about freeing Afghanis from an oppressive theocracy. Of course, propaganda is most effective when a half-truth. The Taliban regime certainly was an oppressive one but, given their continued support for a variety of regimes world-wide with appalling human rights records, Washington's claims about an overriding concern for freedom and democracy lacks any credibility. The estimated 20,000 deaths in Afghanistan as a result of the US invasion are

a salutary reminder of the true price paid, as is the aftermath – the degeneration into factional jostling for power as civil society nears collapse. Way to go.

As the hostile gaze of US warlords and their willing stooges settles on each new *bête noire*, the shameless empty rhetoric and crude political abuse (devoid of any substance or basis in reality) pours out again and again. Milosevic, bin Laden, Hussein as the “new Hitler”; the Serbs, the Taliban⁹ and the Baathists as Nazis. In the *Sunday Telegraph* (4 April 1999) Blair talked of the NATO action in the Balkans as “a battle between good and evil; between civilisation and barbarity; between democracy and dictatorship”. Blah, blah, blah.

These new Hitlers have had better survival instincts than their apparent role model. As I write (May 2006), along with Bush and Blair, not one of them has been held accountable for their crimes. Milosevic went for years avoiding punishment before his death and Hussein continues to play to the gallery. Bin Laden is still at large – the US don't seem to be in any great hurry to actually catch him. Could it be that they'll let him remain free until his beloved Arsenal win the Champions League? Or, as old friends and supporters of both Hussein and bin Laden, they're less than enthusiastic to deal with them both for sentimental reasons. Maybe the Bush/Blair road-show has already moved on to the next Hitler/Dr Evil (certainly Rumsfeld has, comparing Chávez to Hitler at the National Press Club in Washington earlier this year).

American interference abroad

Harris acknowledges the less than honourable aspects of past American behaviour but for him these are largely outweighed by the Americans' motives – to him they have usually interfered in other countries affairs with the best of intentions! The grubby reality that this interference is due to the strategic economic and geopolitical interests of the US ruling class is never countenanced. In short: “If it doesn't like a country's economic policies, it crushes them using the WTO and IMF. And if that doesn't work, it imposes sanctions or simply arranges to overthrow its leaders in a coup (Iran, Chile, Guatemala). Authoritarian countries whose leaders are tyrants and brutes who trample on human rights are called friends and allies if they have the right economic policies (Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, El Salvador).”¹⁰

He refers to “the horrors that Americans perpetrated as recently as 1968, at My Lai.... This is about as bad as human beings are capable of behaving” (p.144). It doesn't even occur to him that the massacre would never have happened if the Americans hadn't been in Vietnam in the first place. Following this reference to My Lai, he quickly adds “But what distinguishes us from many of our enemies is that this indiscriminate

violence appalls us.” (p.144).

But perhaps not “discriminate” violence. Consider this: “in its role as ‘global policeman’ it [the US] targets civilian infrastructures: water treatment facilities, power plants, dams, flood control systems, irrigation, water storage, pumping stations, medical research centres, baby-food factories, sewage facilities, bridges, transportation facilities, petrochemical plants, fertiliser factories, auto-plants, as well as hospitals, schools, Red Cross buildings, residential neighbourhoods, embassies and, in the Afghanistan war, even a foreign news bureau. In one major campaign lasting over ten years – the Vietnam War – it carpet-bombed three countries (North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos), killing at least three million civilians.... At the end of the Gulf War, it bombed an Iraqi convoy and buried alive 150,000 conscripts when they had surrendered and were no threat.”¹¹ War Crimes Tribunal anyone?

More recent evidence from Iraq suggests though that the behaviour of some American troops has scarcely improved since My Lai. An article by Patrick Cockburn in the *Independent* (‘US troops investigated over Iraqi massacres’, 22 March 2006) refers to: “The growing evidence of retaliatory killings of unarmed Iraqi families, often including children, by US soldiers seemingly bent on punishing Iraqis after an attack.... US troops have been notorious among Iraqis for their willingness to shoot any Iraqi they see in the aftermath of an insurgent attack.”¹²

And so it has been for all imperialisms down the centuries. The truth is that, historically, the US military has been a dangerous cocktail of the most advanced technology, not infrequent displays of military incompetence and a penchant for excessive violence and mindless brutality. This is fuelled by racist fantasies about the inherent superiority of Americans.

Torture

Harris states that “if we are willing to drop bombs ... we should be willing to torture ... if we are unwilling to torture, we should be unwilling to wage modern war” (p.197). This argument is a double-edged sword. It could be used to strengthen a pacifist case but, equally, to justify the mistreatment of prisoners. In Harris's case it is the latter that holds sway since he has argued elsewhere that “collateral damage” could be justified because US intentions are for the best.

But Harris's argument uses a false dichotomy. The Geneva Convention was at least an acknowledgement that, although other spheres of war produced innocent victims on a much greater scale, this didn't excuse the maltreatment or murder of those taken prisoner. Now, of course, even the Geneva Convention (however limited) is deemed an unwarranted restraint on the brutal imperatives of US and British imperialism – by some

people in US ruling circles and British apologists for inhuman behaviour like the unspeakable Blair-ite Reid.

Lined up with these are people like Harris who states: "I believe that I have successfully argued for the use of torture in any circumstance in which we would be willing to cause collateral damage. Paradoxically, this equivalence has not made the practice of torture more acceptable to me" (p.198). This reservation gets short shrift, though, soon afterwards – he concludes: "Given what many of us believe about the exigencies of our war on terrorism, the practice of torture would seem to be not only permissible but necessary" (p.199).

You would be hard-pressed to come across a more convoluted mealy-mouthed pseudo-ethical argument for barbaric behaviour than Harris's thoughts on the ethics and morality of torture.

It's as if the purity of American intentions has only been sullied recently by the unfortunate and reluctant requirements of fighting dirty – Harris says "we are civilised, in large measure, *because* [his italics] we do not practice it [i.e. torture]" (p.198). In the interests of consistency he has to use the euphemism "coercion" to refer to torture by US and Israeli interrogators (p.287), in order to sustain the fiction that torture doesn't happen at the moment but is only a future option likely to be forced on the US by necessity. But direct and indirect American involvement in the use of torture has a track record of several decades in places like South America.¹³ The recent incidence of so-called "rendition" flights facilitating torture by others is merely the latest instalment in the complicity of the US (and pond life like Blair) in this barbarism.

To put in context the arguments of Harris, Dershowitz et al., "imagine an Arab ... arguing the case for torturing American prisoners; think of the explosion of comments about fundamentalist barbarism and disrespect for human rights that would cause".¹⁴

So this then is the moral high ground of "Western" liberal values? In reality these are readily dispensed with in the interests of American realpolitik. In practice, the philosophy is actually "might is right". The Geneva Convention, international law and UN resolutions only apply to America's enemies. Rights for prisoners of war can be circumvented by merely criminalising anyone that fights against them. Harris gives this attitude credence.

He makes a brief sneering reference to the "scrofulous young men" at Guantánamo Bay, "many of whom were caught in the very act of trying to kill our soldiers" (p.194). What, in a war, surely not? Harris refers to the likely guilt of most of them, which seems, for him, to legitimise their appalling treatment (despite the fact that the Americans seem reluctant to openly provide evidence of this guilt). Harris subsequently displays a lib-

eral conscience (in the notes section at the end of the book), indicating disquiet about their indefinite detention and lack of access to legal counsel (p.286). In the context though of much of what he says, this is a fairly discrete and ineffectual brake on his main train of thought.

Nuclear war

At one point (p.129) Harris morphs into Barry Goldwater, seriously raising the suggestion of a pre-emptive nuclear strike by the US against any "Islamic" country in possession of nuclear weapons (or, of course, claimed by the US/UK to have them!). As with the issue of torture, this is couched in terms of a supposed cool and rational discussion of options and scenarios. In effect, though, what this does is giving subtle credence to the unthinkable.

As if the stakes haven't been raised enough by the new and dangerous implications of "pre-emptive" strikes on Afghanistan and Iraq. Pre-emptive strikes are not entirely new, of course. They were the strategic military modus operandi of other rogue nations in the mid-Twentieth Century.

Despite the supposed contemporary nuclear threat from "rogue states" and "terrorist" groups replacing the USSR in US demonology, there has still been only one country that has ever used nuclear weapons against civilian populations (twice).

In a typical dramatic flourish Harris declares: "We can no longer ignore the fact that ... our neighbors are now armed with chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons" (p.14). Well, Mexico and Canada's neighbour certainly is. Apart from 30,000 tons of chemical weapons, the US "has the world's largest stockpile of smallpox, anthrax, and other biological weapons ... [and] has resolutely refused to support any UN initiative that would ban the development of biological and chemical weapons, or agree to any measures to strengthen a biological weapons treaty".¹⁵

It's difficult to avoid the conclusion that the main threat to the survival of the planet from nuclear (or, for that matter, environmental) devastation is the one country most paranoid about others on this matter.

And yet Harris also says: "I suspect that if our media did not censor the more disturbing images of war, our moral sentiments would receive a correction on two fronts; first, we would be more motivated by the horrors visited upon us by our enemies.... Second, if we did not conceal the horrible reality of collateral damage from ourselves, we would be far less likely to support the dropping of 'dumb' bombs, or even 'smart' ones." (pp.286-7).

On several occasions the notes section is used to express qualms about the general thesis he espouses in the core of the book. What causes this apparent contradiction? A cynic would suggest

that he can parade a conscience for the benefit of a more liberal minded readership in the section of a book traditionally the least frequented. Perhaps, though, these inconsistencies merely mirror the contradictory arguments and flaws that riddle the book. It may be a symptom of classic liberal “confusion” – after all, how do you square remarks like the above with the nuclear brinkmanship and comments in favour of torture?

Israel/Palestine

Presently, of course, the two main conflicts in the Middle East are in Israel/Palestine and Iraq. Harris’s coverage of both is through the distorted and restricted perspective of religion.

The book opens with a description of a suicide bombing, which we are meant to assume is being undertaken by a Palestinian in Israel. For Harris any other motive than religion is only worthy of passing consideration. After all, what other than a “religious impulse” could have possibly driven a young Palestinian to blow himself and Israelis up?! To Harris “the world is filled with poor, uneducated, and exploited peoples who do not commit acts of terrorism” (p.109) – an absurd point in itself but one that enables Harris to argue that Middle Eastern Muslims commit terror because of religious fanaticism. Not because Palestinians have been terrorised off their own land, forced into refugee camps, bombed, shot, tortured and bulldozed.

Harris concedes that there may be other possible causes for “Muslim violence” – the “painful history of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza ... the collusion of Western powers with corrupt dictatorships ... the endemic poverty and lack of economic opportunity that now plague the Arab world” (p.109). You would think there were plenty of very good reasons there but no, Harris believes that we should “treat them, only to place them safely on the shelf” (p.109). In other words casually and brutally dismiss the real cause of so much misery and the fact that Palestinians have the temerity to actually fight back, lacking as they do the much more acceptable killing tools of helicopter gunships, jets and tanks.

The history of Palestinian oppression is ignored, apart from that passing reference to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, although he forgoes to mention that not only is it an illegal one but largely the reason for Palestinian “terrorism”. This further damages the book’s credibility, although to acknowledge the Israeli behaviour as a key reason for the Palestinian response would fatally undermine his argument about the main motivation of Palestinian suicide bombers.

So the cause of Palestinian violence has to be shoehorned into the root/dual cause of Islamic faith/anti-semitism. After all, as he approvingly quotes Dershowitz: “no other nation in history faced with comparable challenges has ever adhered to a higher standard of human rights, been more

sensitive to the safety of innocent civilians, tried harder to operate under the rule of law, or been willing to take more risks for peace.” Yes, he’s talking about Israel. Harris adds: “The Israelis have shown a degree of restraint in their use of violence that ... no Muslim society would contemplate today” (p.135).

Both his and Dershowitz’s comments are grotesque and contemptible, bearing in mind the real record of Israeli behaviour towards the Palestinians.¹⁶ The vastly disproportionate deaths and injuries inflicted on Palestinian civilians compared with Israeli casualties, the estimated 17,500 killed as a result of the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (including the Sabra and Shatila massacres), the attack at Jenin, the widespread and deliberate killing of innocent civilians and routine torturing of Palestinian prisoners by the Israeli Defence Force (a chilling Orwellian misnomer). These are just the tip of the iceberg of countless acts logged by neutral human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights. The IDF’s contempt for human life merely mirrors Harris’s dehumanising of Muslims everywhere.

But as America’s special friend in the Middle East the Israelis have obviously been given dispensation (or, on occasion, given themselves sole dispensation) to flout any humanitarian rules, international laws and numerous UN resolutions.

Of course, by endorsing Dershowitz’s view of Israel, Harris implies that the Palestinians have really little to complain about – so their resorting to violence is unreasonable and irrational, the only possible motive therefore must be an irrational one. Hence the “religious” angle.

It is curious why so many Americans appear to turn a blind eye to the behaviour of the Israelis towards the Palestinians, despite the extensive evidence. Perhaps there is an uncomfortable confluence between the origins of the modern nations of the US and Israel, ones whose self-reverential myths disguise a dishonourable reality.

Native American writer Jimmie Durham has suggested that “America has from the beginning had a nostalgia for itself because of actual guilt. The United States, he argues, was the first settler colony to establish itself *against*, and through the *denial* of, its original inhabitants.... ‘The great myth’, as later Peter Mathiesson calls it, used to justify and sustain the seizure of America, is that what was ‘discovered’ was a vast wilderness.... The earliest settlers wrote they had found a new Eden, the land of Canaan.... The freedom that the settlers appropriated for themselves is directly related to the freedom that they denied to the original inhabitants ...”¹⁷

From the start, negative descriptions of Native Americans accompanied the self-mythologising. If there is a kernel of truth in this, how close this reflects the Zionist colonisation of Palestine – the

terrorist tactics and ethnic cleansing, followed by negative stereotypes of Palestinians and the subsequent distorted pseudo-historical justifications. The phoney “empty wilderness” assertions in the US case mirror the fallacies perpetrated by contemporary pro-Zionist historians about the virtual non-existence of indigenous populations in Palestine before the arrival of Zionists.

Anti-semitism

In Harris’s book examples of Arabic anti-semitism are emphasised, although anti-Arabic racism in the US and Israel is blithely ignored. I was waiting in vain for Harris to follow his own predilections and assert that the decades of suffering inflicted by the Israelis was due to an irrational religiously-motivated hatred of Arabs.

Harris points out some unpleasant manifestations of anti-semitism (see p.264, notes 33 and 35) but it’s revealing that these don’t refer to anti-semitism by Palestinians but from other Arabic countries. Also, his sources are M.B. Zuckerman’s *Graffiti on History’s Walls* and the Dershowitz book *The Case for Israel*. Both of these contain a variety of exaggerations and distortions relating to the extent of anti-semitism, which is cynically associated with any significant degree of criticism of Israel.¹⁸ Harris also repeats Dershowitz’s proven falsehoods about the Mufti of Jerusalem in the 1930s/1940s.¹⁹

The hostility expressed by Palestinians to Jews, i.e. their immediately identifiable oppressors, may well be sometimes expressed in terms that are anti-Semitic. Perhaps the experience of the past 60 years has led to some Palestinians being remiss in forgetting the niceties of political discourse. This is not to excuse this but an attempt to explain it. There is a difference, of course, between the understandable attitudes of some of the oppressed (and the way this is sometimes expressed) and Hamas’s shameful use of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a reference point.

Palestinian suicide bombing

Where is Harris’s concrete proof of Palestinian suicide bombers’ overriding Islamic imperatives? He presents just one case – a failed suicide bomber, quoted from an article in the *New York Times*: “I didn’t want revenge for anything. I just wanted to be a martyr”, adding, “... that his Jewish captors were ‘better than many, many Arabs’” (p.31). I don’t know about you but if I was a Palestinian with direct experience of Israeli “hospitality” and likely to be quoted publicly, for the sake of my future well being I would be inclined to give my recent captors a glowing reference and tell the world (well, the Israeli part of it) what it would like to hear. So, er, that’s it – one piece of “evidence”. Nor, unsurprisingly, does he provide quotes from other Palestinians which would suggest more earthly reasons for their hostility to Israel.

Unlike the victims of suicide bombings and the 9/11 attack, suicide bombers, their families and neighbours are not granted their own human feelings and thoughts, just Harris’s portrayal of their fanaticism (p.11 and p.127). Of course, dehumanising “the enemy” is a classic ploy of imperialisms. It makes it easier to justify any act of barbarism to those that may have some doubts or misgivings about slaughtering other people.

This is not to condone the use of suicide bombing as a “tactic” that kills innocent Israelis, merely to redress the balance of Harris’s one-sided analysis.

Also, in general, even if people do sometimes articulate their actions in religious terms, it doesn’t mean that the sole (or even main) cause of their actions can be defined narrowly as “religious”. In certain circumstances/societies cultural and social factors may mediate language/expressions of thoughts this way. In the real world exploitation and oppression won’t always be experienced, perceived or fought against in some cocoon of completely rational analysis, well-rounded logic or ideological purity.

Al-Qaeda

Harris attempts to head off one criticism, raised in an article by R.A. Pape (‘The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism’, *American Political Science Review*, 97, No.3, 2003). In response to this Harris stated: “The fact that terrorist groups have demonstrable, short-term goals does not in the least suggest that they are not primarily motivated by their religious dogmas” (pp.260-1).

Arguing against Pape’s point that “the most important goal that a community can have is the independence of its homeland ... from foreign influence or control”, Harris says that Pape “overlooks the fact that these communities define themselves in *religious* [his italics] terms” and that “Pape’s analysis is particularly inapposite with respect to Al Qaeda” (p.261).

Harris’s assertion doesn’t address Pape’s point when we consider the Palestinians as one of these “communities”. In fact, they fit nicely into Pape’s schema, as they use suicide bombing not as a “religious” act per se but as a tactic (with the “independence” of the “homeland” as the strategic goal).

Following on immediately from the quote above, Harris throws in a red herring – the (correct) refutation of territorial or nationalistic interests motivating Osama bin Laden (as opposed to the Palestinians, who he doesn’t directly refer to). This enables him to think he’s won the argument, triumphantly declaring: “Suicide bombing, in the Muslim world at least, is an explicitly religious phenomenon.... It is no more secular an activity than prayer is” (p.261).

To seamlessly associate suicide bombings by Palestinians and Al-Qaeda is a clever sleight-of-

hand but completely ignores their different political trajectories. Al-Qaeda are reactionary Islamic fundamentalists who originated amongst a section of the Saudi ruling elite (the same elite warmly courted by the US as fervent anti-communists with plenty of oil).

The Palestinians are people who, not unreasonably, would just like back the country from which they were ethnically cleansed in 1948. In Israel/Palestine suicide bombing is a relatively recent development that grew out of the despair and powerlessness felt in the face of increasingly aggressive military incursions by the Israelis towards the end of the last century. Perhaps if the Palestinians had the sophisticated weaponry available to the Israelis, Mr Harris would have had even less cause to make crass generalisations about religious motivations.

Finally, there is one key connection that Harris fails to acknowledge. The fact that Israeli aggression (and US complicity in this) has been a very fertile source of recruitment for Al-Qaeda from Muslims and Arabs angry at the brutal subjugation of the Palestinians (and, of course, the invasion of Iraq).

Muslims and suicide bombing

To provide tangible corroborating evidence Harris cites (pp.124-6) a global survey conducted in 2002 by the Pew Research Centre. The survey indicated large percentages of Muslims world-wide who deemed suicide bombings against civilian targets, "to defend Islam", justifiable to a greater or lesser degree. Pretty damning you would think, but this needs putting in context. We don't know what lies behind the raw figures.

They do not necessarily suggest approval of 9/11 although this is evidently Harris's interpretation – he concludes this section with: "We must not overlook the fact that a significant percentage of the world's Muslims believe that the men who brought down the World Trade Center are now seated at the right hand of God ..." (p.127).

Even if this is the case, this still does not mean a direct correlation between his statement and the degree of support for suicide bombing. That would only be true if the motivation for and/or approval of suicide bombing as a wholly "religious" act, which Harris clearly believes and I strongly contest.

Apart from 9/11, the 2002 survey results could also partly or mainly be attributed to a perception by Muslims that "suicide bombing" didn't refer to flying a plane into a building at all but to what the Palestinians did in their conflict with the Israelis.

What also undermines Harris's argument about a rising tide of Islamic extremism is a more recent survey conducted by the same organisation.²⁰ The subtitle to this report succinctly sum-

marises its content: "Support for Terror Wanes Among Muslim Publics. ISLAMIC EXTREMISM: COMMON CONCERN FOR MUSLIM AND WESTERN PUBLICS." In the relevant section (relating to the survey findings cited by Harris for 2002) the report concludes that "in most majority-Muslim countries surveyed, support for suicide bombings and other acts of violence in defense of Islam has declined significantly". There were substantial reductions in support of suicide bombing in every country surveyed, except for Jordan, the country closest to the Israeli/Palestine conflict. 'Nuf said?

In fairness, of course, the survey report was produced after the early 2005 publication of Harris's book. But my copy (published in 2006) contains no modification of the relevant section. Nor, to my knowledge, has Harris qualified his views based on the more recent survey.

'Secular' religions

In his "war against religion" thesis there are additional hurdles for him to overcome. Suicide bombing as a modern phenomenon began with the avowedly secular and leftist Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka.²¹ No problem for Harris: "While the motivations of the Tigers are not explicitly religious, they are Hindus who *undoubtedly* [my italics] believe many improbable things about the nature of life and death" (p.239). Plainly, the mere description of Harris as a neuroscientist is insufficient – mind-reader as well, surely? To summarise his main argument, deep down the Tamil Tigers are still Hindus and Hindus are prone to acts of self-immolation! Note, self-immolation – not blowing themselves up – but why let subtle differences like that spoil a flimsy argument?

Apparently, "communism was little more than a political religion.... Even though their beliefs did not reach beyond this world, they [Mao and Stalin's versions] were both cultic and irrational" (p.79). So now religion can also be assigned as a cultic, irrational and rigid ideology – the definitions get broader and broader to disguise the tenuousness of the association. This particular section reminded me of an old history lesson about ancient Peru. Some historian had called it the first socialist society, purely on the grounds that the Incas had instigated a rudimentary form of state planning.

Likewise, Harris claims that "At the heart of every totalitarian enterprise, one sees outlandish dogmas, poorly arranged ...", suggesting an even looser definition of religion. He acknowledges that "Nazism evolved out of a variety of economic and political factors", yet "while the hatred of Jews in Germany expressed itself in a predominantly secular way, it was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity" (p.101).

In a recent interview, Harris repeats the fanciful connections: "And what we find with Nazism

is a kind of political religion. We find this with Stalinism as well – where claims about racial purity [eh?] and the march of history and the dangers of intellectualism, are made in a fanatical and rigid and indefensible way.”²² Oh dear, oh dear. Back to the meditation, Mr Harris.

Harris also needs to explain why clearly secular China and North Korea fall into his snare. He attempts to circumvent this problem by arguing that these countries are dominated by a dogmatic ideology that *resembles* a religion. He says “... our [i.e. America’s] differences with North Korea ... are a direct consequence of the North Koreans’ having grown utterly deranged by their political ideology, their abject worship of their leaders, and their lack of information about the outside world” (p.242). The more mischievous amongst us might think that these criteria fit another country as well. Note also the clever insertion of “worship”, a word with strong religious connotations.

Iraq

Considering its contemporary relevance, Harris seems reticent to address the issue of Iraq, probably because he is on pretty weak ground. He still has a go though, tamely asserting that the only possible reason for widespread Muslim opposition to the invasion (or as Harris would interpret this, support for Saddam Hussein) is because it is “infidels” occupying Baghdad, “no matter what humanitarian purpose it might serve” (p.128) (!). He never considers an alternative possibility, i.e. an expression of support for Iraqis against foreign invaders. Harris is also curiously silent on why millions of non-Muslims world-wide have also expressed their opposition to the war from the moment it was mooted.

Tellingly, he studiously avoids putting the words “Iraq” and “oil” together. In fact, the question of oil is conspicuous by its almost total absence. The term “oil wealth” makes a brief appearance in the index but with no reference to Iraq. Harris also informs us that the American military have “taken ... care ... to minimise civilian casualties” (p.146) (!).

The mounting evidence from Iraq suggests the increasing influence of religious groups in the power vacuum left by the removal of Saddam Hussein. For Harris, though, cause and effect are interpreted through his own warped perspective. To him these developments support his main argument about the pernicious role of fundamentalist Islam. In reality the explosion of extreme religious sentiments has been unleashed as a direct result of the invasion and the cynical attempts by the invaders to play off various factions against each other to retain political control.

The well-worn Western powers’ propaganda about spreading democracy in the Middle East has reached its apogee here. Certain questions require answering, though: “... why were popular

demands for free elections resisted so fiercely by the occupiers for several months after the invasion, and agreed to only after Iraqis took to the streets in their thousands to demonstrate for democracy? Since there is no question the Iraqi public wanted the occupying troops to leave, as poll after poll has shown, and since the entire political class united in calling for a timetable for the withdrawal of occupying troops at two national conferences last year, why do Western political leaders continue to reject talk of any such timetable out of hand?”²³

Perhaps the extent of real concern for Middle Eastern democracy can be judged by listing some Middle Eastern countries that the US and UK have long had close ties with: Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. All of these are profoundly anti-democratic regimes whose repression of their own people is helped by plentiful military supplies from Britain and America.

Harris does admit that “... our collusion with Muslim tyrants ... has been despicable.... This situation must be remedied, but we cannot really force Muslim dictators from power and open the polls”, because “were democracy to suddenly come to these countries, it would be little more than a gangplank to theocracy” (p.132). In the light of details cited elsewhere about the extent of American willingness to “interfere” in other countries on any number of pretexts, this is pretty disingenuous. In addition, Harris doesn’t (can’t?) even begin to acknowledge the complexities of life in many countries with a large Muslim population. For example, Iran may have an authoritarian Islamic government but it is in many ways an extremely sophisticated society, a country with a long-standing secular tradition, burgeoning labour movement and a complex and fascinating cultural and social history.

Harris clearly fails to understand that concern for democracy elsewhere is pretty low down on an honest list of US foreign policy objectives. “Muslim tyrants” allow the West access to oil and their own repressive regimes spend vast amounts of money buying Western weaponry, so to hell with democracy. The theocracy argument, of course, provides a convenient excuse for this continued state of affairs.

So the Western powers’ talk about bringing democracy to unwilling, recalcitrant, backward Arabs is breathtaking hypocrisy but plausible propaganda to disguise imperialist ambitions. Likewise, the fiction of Israel as a beacon of democracy in the Middle East, which still has wide currency in the West despite the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and the systematic denial of their human rights (with the continued complicity of the US, UK and other Western countries).

Marxists and religion

For Marxists, the irrationality of religious beliefs

is a given, of course and we are naturally suspicious of any arguments that give undue emphasis to “ideas” as the basis of peoples’ actions. Where are the political, economic and social realities and relationships that determine in various ways the circumstances in which these ideas arise, if (and how) these affect (or don’t) the way people behave in their everyday lives.

The continued existence of religion and the fact that millions of the world’s poor still embrace it in some form or other signifies the failure of socialism (and socialists) to offer and support a viable alternative and address the needs of those millions. We should not condemn or dismiss as gullible those people for falling for religious doctrines. The contemporary local and global contexts in which religious beliefs apparently prosper in various parts of the world requires much deeper assessment and analysis than people like Harris are unable or unwilling to, constrained as they are by ideological viewpoints anathema to socialists.

The depth of real (i.e. revolutionary) working class consciousness is inversely proportional to their embracing of alternative ideological baggage, be it religion, nationalism, racism or other blind-alleys.

Any Muslims’ reactionary views are eagerly highlighted by some people who are certainly no friends of the working class and who themselves are usually unlikely to embrace any “progressive” views. To listen to or read some opinions, a visitor from another galaxy might be forgiven for thinking that violence and discrimination against women and gay people was virtually non-existent amongst white non-Muslims.

Muslims and socialism

Without a viable, class-based alternative working-class Muslims will have great difficulty resisting the blandishments of religious orthodoxy.

Reactionaries (both Muslim and non-Muslim) will readily wish to portray all Muslims (regardless of class or country) as part of some global Muslim “community”, united by a common religious belief. Resisting this association will be difficult.

As a result of propaganda, hostility and racism in the “West”, there will be ideological (and further coercive) pressure on Muslims (no doubt played up internally by reactionary Muslim “leaders”). The pressure from other Muslims to conform to some notion of an explicitly Islamic “community” in the face of external threats will make any attempt by individuals or even small isolated groups of Muslims to combat this extremely difficult/heroic.

Supporting and arguing for class politics amongst Muslims is vital. Pandering to reactionary communitarian politics or so-called “community leaders” for some spurious short term unity or (worse) for electoral expediency weakens the socialist cause. Without overt, practical and con-

certed attempts to undermine working class divisions (religious or otherwise), an organisation’s claim to be socialist is a hollow fiction.

American power

For people like Harris, Muslims have replaced Soviet-sponsored world communism as the latest global threat to the US. This is merely the most recent variation on a well-worn theme – the US ruling class’s need for a perceived powerful external/foreign threat to the “American way of life”. Accompanying this is a gross exaggeration of “enemy” capabilities/strength and blood-curdling descriptions of their megalomaniac plans. This tendency can be traced through American history all the way back to Salem and witchcraft hysteria. If the actual extent of the threat can’t be “talked up” sufficiently, then future (potential) ones can be with accompanying doom-laden scenarios.

According to US ruling class apologists, American power is now to be deployed to defend the supposedly crumbling walls of liberal democracy against fanatical Muslims hell-bent on world domination. With a mind-boggling inversion of reality, by far the most powerful nation on Earth is cast in the role of beleaguered defender. Compare the vast panoply of military hardware at the disposal of the US with the cheap and crude methods of suicide bombing.

Harris addresses the issue of fundamentalists arising in response to the overwhelming “hegemony” of American power. He can’t quite bring himself to directly refer to the depredations wrought world-wide by US-based international capitalism, so he refers to it obliquely by listing key associated organisations. He argues that “... we are confronted by people who would have put us to sword, had they had the power, long before the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization were even a gleam in the eye of the first rapacious globalizer” (p.265).

But the whole point is they didn’t and don’t have the power! I would have significantly more “romantic” opportunities if I looked like George Clooney. Also, who and where were these “people” before these international capitalist bodies were established? Why have these fundamentalists only relatively recently availed themselves of bombs and other weapons to kill themselves and others with? This technology has been around for decades. If bombs haven’t been handy before, why haven’t they used other means of venting their spleens on the infidel? As Harris never tires of telling us, Muslim extremists have had centuries to use justifications from the Koran, so why wait to the end of the 20th century to “kick off”?

American foreign interventions are usually accompanied by breathtaking double standards and hypocrisy. Harris clearly shares the delusions of some Americans about their country’s activities

abroad. The perpetrators of Fallujah, Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay have nothing to teach the rest of us about human rights or “liberal” values.

Conclusion

In recent times other “single issue” books, often with a “progressive” or “radical” veneer have hardly been unusual. Publications about religion, “globalisation”, world-wide poverty or the environment reach a willing audience amongst sections of the middle class in Europe and North America.

Variations on *The End of Faith* theme will no doubt also continue to be churned out in years to come, all with the same basic message and no doubt exhibiting the crude generalisations, dubious analyses, fallacious historical analogies and selective memories such authors clearly have.

A book that began as an acute dissection of the contradictions and irrationality of all main religions ended up as a cleverly re-packaged flag-waving exercise. I can't quite decide whether Harris is confused, naïve, cynical, a bad historian or a combination of all four. I can, though, easily imagine a version of him 40 years ago parading his pseudo-liberal credentials, then concluding that Vietnam was an unpleasant but necessary intervention to save the Vietnamese people from the Red Menace. Napalm, with a note attached: “Sorry, but it's for your own good.”

Thanks to my son Jim for his helpful comments and suggestions

References

1. Chris Lehmann, ‘Among the Non-Believers’, www.reason.com/0501/cr.cl.among.shtml
2. On the question of faith motivating suicide bombers, Harris says: “Our own religious demagogues, the fundamentalists like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, will call a spade a spade and observe that there is a link between Islam and the kind of violence we see in the Muslim world. While I don't agree with these people on anything else, they are actually offering a much more candid and accurate diagnosis of the problem, vis-à-vis Islam, than anything that's coming from the Left” (Blair Golson, ‘Sam Harris: The Truthdig Interview’, 3 April 2006, www.truthdig.com/interview/20060403_sam_harris_interview).

This interview suggests that Harris's view of the world has changed little since *The End of Faith*. As an aside, at one point there is a reference to an essay he wrote at the end of 2005 – ‘An Atheist Manifesto’. Harris says “I'm not a big fan of the term atheist. In my Atheist Manifesto, the first thing I argue is that we really don't need the word and probably shouldn't use it”. Mmm. A bit like the story, ‘My Yellow Trousers’, in which I reveal at the beginning that I actually don't have any

yellow trousers.

3. The following summary of the deranged perspective of sections of US society could equally apply to Harris: “America has constructed a vision of an ‘axis of evil’, a hostile, inimical perversion, endemic and hiding not just within a few nations but in communities spread across much of the world. Terror, terrorism and terrorists have become one single, simple, indistinguishable scourge of all humanity, *shorn of political, social, historical or cultural roots and distinctions*” (my italics, to emphasise the key point), Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?* (Icon Books, 2002), p.13.

4. In every continent and in a broad cross section of countries. For a comprehensive list see William Blum, *Rogue State* (Zed Books, 2001), pp.168-178.

5. See George Monbiot, ‘A Well of Hypocrisy’, 16 May 2006 (www.monbiot.com/archives/2006/05/16/a-well-of-hypocrisy).

6. Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *American Dream, Global Nightmare* (Icon Books, 2004), p.182.

7. Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?*, p.70.

8. For a detailed analysis of the bombing and the context in which it occurred see Institute for Policy Research & Development, *United States Terrorism in the Sudan: The Bombing of Al-Shifa and its Strategic Role in US-Sudan Relations*, at www.globalresearch.org/view_article.php?aid=545338566

9. “The political analogy for the Taliban [as Nazis] ... is not only a little too convenient but also totally absurd. For one thing, the Taliban were not racists – indeed, racial equality was a basic tenet of their outlook” (Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?*, pp.24-25).

10. *Ibid.*, p.86.

11. *Ibid.*, p.113.

12. See also the follow up article by Raymond Whitaker, ‘Did American Marines murder 23 Iraqi civilians?’ (*Independent*, 26 March 2006).

13. “According to the UN Committee against Torture ... the US has consistently violated the World Convention against Torture: the Green Berets routinely tortured their prisoners in Vietnam during interrogation, the CIA frequently tortured suspected infiltrators of Soviet émigré organisations in Western Europe, the US trained and maintained SAVAK, the notorious secret service of the Shah of Iran, and trained and equipped the intelligence services of Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil and Israel with techniques and technologies of torture – to give just a few examples” (Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?*, p.70).

14. Slavoj Žižek, ‘Are we in a war? Do we have an enemy?’, *London Review of Books*, 23 May 2002. Žižek also makes the point that “once we let the genie out of the bottle, torture can be kept within ‘reasonable’ bounds, is the worst liberal illusion, if only

because the [Dershowitz] 'ticking clock' example is deceptive: in the vast majority of cases torture is not done to resolve a 'ticking clock' situation, but for quite different reasons (to punish an enemy or to break him down psychologically, to terrorise a population etc)".

15. Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?*, p.113.

16. See Norman Finkelstein, *Beyond Chutzpah* (Verso, 2006), pp.277-278, for a meticulous dissection of Dershowitz's malignant fairy tales.

17. Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?*, p.152.

18. For a more balanced view of contemporary anti-semitism, see Brian Klug, 'The Myth of the New Anti-Semitism', *The Nation*, 2 February 2004 (www.thenation.com/doc/20040202/klug).

19. See Norman Finkelstein, *Beyond Chutzpah*, pp.277-278, which debunks the myths about this.

20. The Pew Global Attitudes Project, 14 July 2005 (<http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248>)

21. As a website review of the book points out: "Suicide bombing was in fact the invention of revolutionary communists.... I have never read a communist eschatology [i.e. the motivating end reward], but I doubt if it would include a supply of renewable virgins. This leads me to assume that heaven is not the only trigger for suicide bombing, any more than Moslems are the only people capable of it" (Noel Rooney, 'The critical bias to faith', www.nthposition.com/thecriticalbiasto.php).

22. Blair Golson, 'Sam Harris: The Truthdig Interview', 3 April 2006, www.truthdig.com/interview/20060403_sam_harris_interview

23. 'Are Muslims from Mars and Europeans from Venus?', 17 February 2006, www.democratsdiary.co.uk

Islamophobia Watch

Islamophobia Watch was initiated in January 2005 as a project to document material in the public domain which advocates a fear and hatred of the Muslim peoples of the world and Islam as a religion. Islamophobia Watch has been founded with a determination not to allow the racist ideology of Western imperialism to gain common currency in its demonisation of Islam.

"... does some stirring work in collecting and aggregating the rancid and putrid rantings of anti-Muslim bigots and racists" – Under Progress weblog

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