

The Words of Muhammad (PBUH)

When confronted with an American convert to Islam who has studied overseas, it's hard not to think today of the celebrated case of John Walker Lindh, "the American Taliban" captured by U.S. troops in Afghanistan and brought back to the United States to stand trial. "Abdul" knows that, yet he's chosen to be brutally honest with Aaron and myself, admitting that, on his first trip overseas, he studied under Shaykh Usaamah Al-Qoosee, a follower of Sayyid Qutb, the most important leader in the history of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimin), an organization that practically defines radical Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood dreams of establishing a new caliphate, which would have the power to declare a *jihad*, binding on all Muslims, against the infidel.

Studying with Al-Qoosee was not Abdul's decision alone; he had relied, he says, on the advice of Magdy Kandil, one of the leaders of the Rockford mosque, who had helped guide Abdul's conversion. Kandil had studied under Yusuf al-Qaradawi, one of the most prominent ideologists of the Muslim Brotherhood. Qaradawi has even been offered the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood on several occasions, but he has always preferred to remain more of a religious leader than a political one. That's not to say that his religious actions don't have political consequences: During the Israeli attack on Lebanon in 2006, Qaradawi issued a *fatwa* declaring support for the Shiite Hezbollah mandatory for all Muslims, including Sunnis. (One does not have to regard the Israeli attack as just in order to recognize that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization.)

Barred from entering the United States since 1999, Qaradawi caused quite a stir in London in 2004 when he went on the BBC's *Newsnight* to defend Palestinian suicide bombing:

I consider this type of martyr-

dom operation as an evidence of God's justice.

Allah Almighty is just; through his infinite wisdom he has given the weak a weapon the strong do not have and that is their ability to turn their bodies into bombs as Palestinians do.

When asked about the killing of Israeli civilians by suicide bombers, Qaradawi replied that "an Israeli woman is not like women in our societies, because she is a soldier." The BBC did not report what, if anything, he said about children.

Qaradawi founded *IslamOnline*, the second-most popular Islamic website worldwide (according to *Alexa.com*), and he regularly issues *fatwas* in response to questions posted in the "Ask a Scholar" feature of the "Living Shari'ah" section of the site. One such *fatwa*, issued on April 14, 2004, declared that a boycott of both Israeli and U.S. products is morally obligatory on all Muslims (including those living in the United States):

"Israel's" unjustified destruction and vandalism of everything has been using American money, American weapons, and the American veto. America has done this for decades without suffering the consequences of any punishment or protests about their oppressive and prejudiced position from the Islamic world.

As Abdul tells us of Magdy Kandil's connection to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, I can't help but recall Aaron's and my conversation with Kandil in February 2002. Discussing the position of Muslims in the United States after September 11, Kandil argued that there has been a backlash against Islam, which came "from some minority in the U.S. who now feel threatened by a new mi-



nority." As I wrote at the time:

When I ask him whom he means by the older minority and add that politicians and religious leaders have seemed unusually eager to embrace Islam, Kandil looks at me in disappointment—and, perhaps, with a touch of annoyance. He knows that I know that he means Jews.

After several months in Egypt studying under Al-Qoosee, Abdul returned to Rockford. He intended to go back to Egypt to complete his license in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), but he had begun to have second thoughts about studying with an adherent of the Muslim Brotherhood. While pondering his next move, Abdul dated, his first marriage having ended a few years before. Soon, he met a woman a couple years younger than he. She was of Dutch extraction, and her family had settled in Winnebago County in the first decade of the 20th century. The East High running back had found his high-school cheerleader, from one of the small farming communities to the west of Rockford.

Abdul's future wife, a nursing student, knew nothing about Islam. The first time he broached the topic with her, Abdul says, "She thought it was a country." I laugh, recalling for Abdul and Aaron the time in the mid-80's when the girlfriend of one of my father's childhood buddies announced to us that she opposed Ronald Reagan's Central America policy because she didn't want her boyfriend dying in "some place like Guacamole."

The cheerleader's family was nominally Christian, but nonpracticing. That would change when she married Abdul and converted to Islam, adopting the *burqa*—the head-to-toe robes worn by traditional Muslim women. Her parents returned to church, and it would take some years—and grandchildren—before they made an uneasy peace with the religion of their daughter and son-in-law.

In 1997, Abdul returned to Egypt to complete his studies in *fiqh*, but this time, he avoided the Ikhwanis and studied under a Salafi scholar. (Salafis believe that they adhere to the earliest and purest form of Islam, as practiced in the days of Muhammad and the immediately succeeding generations. The word derives from *as-salaf*, “the worthy ancestors.”) Earning his license in *fiqh*, he returned to the United States; but the next year, he went overseas again, to study with a Salafi sheikh in Yemen.

As Abdul explains it, Salafism eschews political interpretations of Islam, focusing instead on the individual believer conforming his life to those of Muhammad and the first three generations of Muslims. The emphasis is on placing the various passages of the Koran and the *hadith* (the sayings of Muhammad) in historical context. That's not to say that all who are called Salafis agree with this interpretation, or even all who call themselves Salafis; in fact, some Ikhwanis use the term. But the general thrust of Salafism is away from the political action that characterizes the Muslim Brotherhood overseas and its related organizations in the United States.

That is not true, however, of the mosque in Rockford, as Abdul realized when he returned from Yemen. The *imam* (spiritual leader) at the time was Abdool Rahman Khan, a graduate of the school of *sharia* at the Islamic University of Medina. (The current *imam* graduated from the same university.) Rahman Khan had come to Rockford from Guyana, where he had

served as the principal of the Guyana Islamic Institute; and he was, Abdul tells us, an Ikhwani.

Abdul believes that the hiring of Rahman Khan was no coincidence. Rockford has a small but relatively wealthy Albanian Muslim population (many popular diner-style restaurants in the area are owned by Albanians), and, at that time, the violence in Kosovo was heating up. Inside the Muslim Community Center, which houses the mosque and the Rockford Iqra School, Albanians were raising funds for the Kosovo Liberation Army and attempting to recruit warriors for the Kosovo *jihad*—including, Abdul says, himself and two of his friends, all Caucasian converts to Islam. As far as Abdul knows, they succeeded in recruiting at least two, including a tall, well-built white guy named Mike, who had run the gamut of non-Christian religions before settling on Islam.

Mike wanted to be a good Muslim, but, he told Abdul, “I just can't keep away from the pork!” His weakness was likely made moot when he went off to Afghanistan to train in an Al Qaeda camp before joining the *jihad* in Kosovo. Abdul never saw him again.

Around the same time—1999—the Rockford mosque, Abdul says, was raising funds from local Muslims to support the Pakistani *jihad* in Jammu and Kashmir. A friend of his, another Salafi, tried to convince the leadership of the mosque to give the money to indigent local Muslims. When they refused, he stole the cash and distributed it himself. The mosque had him arrested, but the charges were dropped.

By now, tensions were running high between the local Salafis—mostly Caucasian converts—and the leadership of the mosque, primarily Pakistani, Albanian, and Egyptian immigrants. When Aaron and I spent a day at the mosque and school in February 2002, we noted in the community library radical Islamic books and videotapes, many from the Islamic Propagation Centre International, an organization funded, in part, by the Bin Laden family and whose founder had met several times with Osama bin Laden himself. What we didn't know,

at the time, was that there had once been many more.

Sometime in late 1999 or 2000, Abdul and a few of his Salafi friends learned of a *fatwa* issued by a Salafi scholar, declaring that materials that advocated offensive *jihad* and the Ikhwani political version of Islam were to be destroyed. Putting their faith into action, they “removed” as many as 400 to 500 books from the library—and burned them. The reaction of the mosque's leadership, not surprisingly, was anger and outrage—yet this time, they did not contact the police. It's not hard to guess why.

No longer welcome at the mosque, Abdul and his friends attempted to start a Salafi *masjid* of their own. They secured a location on Broadway Avenue—once one of Rockford's most impressive shopping districts, but now a struggling neighborhood dominated by Fort Turner, a former public school turned abortuary. They developed plans to make their *masjid* the center of a neighborhood revival, but the leadership of the mosque wasn't interested in competition. According to Abdul, they threatened him and his friends, and one prominent member of the mosque—a local doctor—was caught slashing the tires and busting the windows on a car owned by one of Abdul's fellow Salafis.

More dangerous than threats of physical violence, however, were the political connections of the mosque's leadership. While Muslims in America frequently vote Republican because of their stance on social issues, the local leadership had been very supportive of Rockford's three-term Democratic mayor. A necessary zoning change was denied, and the Salafi *masjid* never opened its doors. Eventually, Abdul and his friends were allowed back into the mosque to worship, and Abdul even enrolled his children in the school. Despite continuing tensions, an uneasy truce had been reached.

Then, at 8:46 A.M. Eastern Time on September 11, 2001, American Airlines Flight 11 plowed into the 94th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center, and suddenly, everything changed. ☐

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Letter From Australia

by R.J. Stove

Two Cheers for Howard



"It ain't over till it's over," said Yogi Berra at his most Chestertonian. Charles de Gaulle, in more meditative style, observed: "*Les fins des régimes sont toujours tristes.*" Both maxims are relevant in the context of Australia's general election on November 24, 2007, which saw John Howard—prime minister since 1996—crushed by an untried but personally popular Australian Labor Party leader, Kevin Rudd. Mr. Howard thus followed into the sunset Tony Blair and Spain's José-María Aznar; his fellow lieutenants in the so-called War on Terror. He had the additional humiliation of being defeated in his own electorate, the first Australian prime minister since 1929 to suffer this punishment.

Drawing up a balance sheet for assessing Mr. Howard's reign (the longest of any Australian leader save for Sir Robert Menzies) is difficult, purely because its highlights bear no discernible relation to the rest of his actions and give the impression of having been brought about by a different person. These highlights, which deserve to be remembered amid the general scorn Mr. Howard now inspires, are two in number: the freeing of East Timor in 1999, and the *de facto* ending two years later of mass illegal immigration.

Perhaps one day, when the principal actors in Australia's political dramas of the 1970's, 80's and early 90's are all dead, it will be possible to discuss both temperately and lengthily that hoariest and most squalid of Australian political delusions: the belief—religiously upheld by Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, and Paul Keating—that Australia's basic survival depended on abjectly appeasing Indonesia. The more obviously immoral Jakarta's leading

mullahs and their nominally secular stooges became, and the more blatant their genocide against Catholics in East Timor (which they invaded with full Australian approval in 1975), the larger the blank checks that successive Australian governments signed over to them; and the more desperate the defenses of this Danegeld which the "Jakarta lobby" of think tanks and foreign-policy bureaucrats resorted to making. It is not as if we can even trace all of this craven behavior to Australian sectarianism. After all, the most degenerate and embarrassing apologist for Indonesia was a self-proclaimed Catholic—namely, Mr. Keating. Meanwhile successive Indonesian presidents merely took Australian money—and, in particular, Australian military training—as if it were their God-given right. In 1998, one such president (B.J. Habibie), more honest than the rest, explained in pellucid language to his country's militia what their own peacemaking role would be: "Your job

is to clean East Timor from the East to the West and leave nothing alive but ants."

No more. Once disgust among Australian voters at Jakarta's murder machine proved too great for even Mr. Howard to overlook, he sent Australian armed forces into East Timor. In so doing, he ended the quarter-century-old antipodean policy of craven groveling to Indonesia's tinpot tyrants. The threats of Indonesian *revanchisme*, with which that failed state's Australian toadies sought to terrify us, proved as insubstantial as dreams.

Mr. Howard's other worthwhile achievement had connections with the first. Indonesia, however humiliated, could still be a nuisance to Australia. Successive boatloads of Third World arrivals on Australian soil attested to this fact, as well as to other Third World nations' tendency to consider Australia a garbage dump for their own "wretched refuse." It seemed unimaginable that Mr. How-

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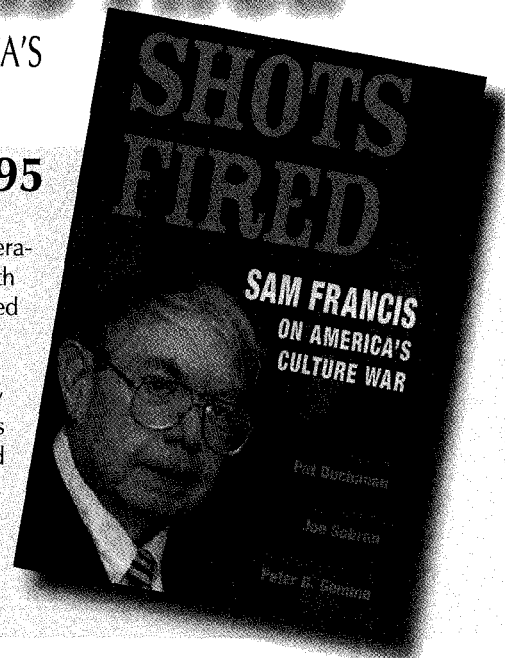
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