

THE RAGE OF MODERATE ISLAM

BOOK REVIEW BY HUSSAIN HAQQANI

Published in Foreign Policy Magazine

No. 140, pp. 74-76, Jan. - Feb., 2004

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By Husain Haqqani*

IN OTHER WORDS

[REVIEWS OF THE WORLD'S MOST' NOTEWORTHY BOOKS]

Amrika: Muslim Dunya ki Bey-Itminani (America and Unrest in the Muslim World)
By "Khurshid Ahmad 308 pages, Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 2002 (in Urdu)

Do they really believe we think all Muslims are terrorists?" a distressed George W. Bush asked his staff following a tense, hour-long conference with Muslim leaders in Bali last October. The U.S. president had just gotten an earful about his administration's policies, ranging from the occupation of Iraq to the support of Israel against the Palestinians. Such protests are routine in the grainy video diatribes of Osama bin Laden, but for Bush it was clearly unnerving to hear similar words from a handpicked focus group of moderate clerics. One of the attendees, Ahmad Syafii Maarif—the head of Indonesia's second-largest Muslim organization, with 30 million members—bluntly told the president that if he wants to "see a peaceful world," his foreign policy should be "more balanced, more just."

Since September 11, 2001, the Bush administration has taken pains to emphasize that the war on terror is not a war against Islam. And, in pursuit of that goal the U.S. government has spent millions of dollars on Madison Avenue-style public diplomat campaigns, including the distribution of *Hi*—a glossy magazine touting the virtues of the United States, targeted at young Arabs. But, just as Arab newsstand vendors report that stacks of *Hi* gather dust in their stalls, the popularity of published works with an entirely different view of the United States is clear proof that Bush's message of shared values has failed to make an impression.

A book by professor Khurshid Ahmad, a leading Pakistani intellectual of the Islamic-revivalist movement, offers insight on why the United States faces such a tough sell. In his collection of essays, *Amrika: Muslim Dunya ki Bey-Itminani (America and Unrest in the Muslim World)*, Ahmad argues that the United States "dreams of world domination, resolves to control the resources of other nations, wants to shape the world according to its ideas, and seeks to impose its values and ideology on others by force." Only the Islamists, he says, offer a political force capable of resisting this *Pax Americana*.

Ahmad's book is noteworthy because the author is neither a firebrand cleric nor a jihadist crouching in the caves of Afghanistan. He is a Western-educated economist, a senator, and deputy chief of Pakistan's largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami. Ahmad gained prominence in the 1950s and 1960s as the Islamic movement's international spokesman.

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Even while the Islamists became more radical during the 1980s and 1990s, Ahmad was considered a voice of moderation within political Islam. His genius lies in adapting Western political methods, ranging from creation of charitable foundations to the formation of a think tank seeking to purify Islam from external influences. The influential Islamist think tank that Ahmad heads, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in Islamabad, published his collection of essays on Muslim anti-Americanism.

Ahmad's book comprises nine essays, four written before September 11, and five after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. In the book, he condemns the attacks, but argues that the perpetrators are still unknown. "A glance at the history of Israel and [the] Zionist movement," he suggests, "gives credence to the suspicion of Mossad's role in the terrorist acts." Like all Islamists, however, Ahmad was suspicious of Western intentions long before September 11. Two of his essays on the "new world order," originally published in 1991 and 1993, extensively cite.

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