THE MUSLIMS I KNOW

Discussion Guide for the Film

Written and Compiled by Dr. Anthony Cerulli,
Dr. Aitezaz Ahmed and Mara Ahmed

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I. METHODOLOGY

1. Micro-Study

The Muslims I Know focuses on a small group of Pakistani Americans based in Rochester, New York. While presenting The Muslims I Know at universities, colleges, and theaters around the country, I have been asked a number of times why I chose to document the Pakistani Muslim community in Rochester only. Why didn't I look at the Muslim community in America at large, especially given the challenges that all Muslims face today following the events of September 11, 2001?

I chose to spotlight the Pakistani Muslim community in Rochester, New York, for several reasons. Above all, I did not want to fall into the trap of treating the Muslim community as a monolithic entity that is ostensibly definable or characterizable by sweeping claims and sound bites. Instead, I wanted to interview a particular group of people and in the process attempt to shed some light on general questions that often get asked in the media, in schools and at interfaith meetings, such as: What does it mean to be a Muslim? How do Muslims practice their religion? Is there such a thing as Muslim culture? The answers to these questions can differ so widely from one Muslim community to the next that it is meaningless to generalize.

American media sources frequently rely on stereotypes when they talk about Islam and Muslims. Thus their stories tend to strip away cultural and regional particularities that are fundamental to any group of people, Muslim or otherwise. While I certainly did not want to follow that same methodology, I am not inherently opposed to showcasing divergent Muslim communities both in terms of culture and belief. But such an extensive study, which would involve a much larger and more diverse sampling of people, is better suited to a PBS series broadcast in several independently themed episodes. For a self-funded, hour-long film, this panoptic approach was simply not tenable.

One of the most important goals I set for myself as the director of The Muslims I Know was to establish a level of intimacy between a non-Muslim American audience (the target audience for this film) and the Muslims I interviewed in the documentary. This is why we return to many of the same interviewees throughout the film. These people are shown in their homes, with their families, and in the context of the larger Muslim community in upstate New York. In this way our knowledge of the Muslims portrayed in the film is built up in increments via insights into education, culture, religion, politics, and personal worldviews. As we become more familiar with the people on screen, it becomes difficult to continue to view them as a generic group - namely, as just Muslims.

Of course, all of them are Muslims, but the point is that there is no intrinsic need to forefront this aspect of their lives, as the media, government agencies, and sundry pundits so often do nowadays.

I include this point after the characteristics listed above because people whom I call "mainstream Muslims" in the film are rarely given a voice in American media. What does it mean to be a mainstream or moderate Muslim? As I hope to show in the film, the Muslims I know represent different perspectives and walks of life than those that are frequently showcased in the media. The people I interview are socially, professionally, and religiously moderate by the standards of most Americans.

By studying a small community in a mid-sized American city, we can begin to create a space for dialogue about some underlying truths related to Islam and Muslims. These can then be used to query other Muslim communities in America and elsewhere. In short, I hope to show the indispensability of the micro-study methodology for delving deeply into difficult questions of religion, identity formation, social construction, and the production of knowledge. I know the Pakistani Muslim community in Rochester and I offer a portrait of this group of people in The Muslims I Know.

I also discuss certain events and people in Pakistan's history that are useful to understanding some of the more salient elements of the cultural heritage and memory that contribute to the discourses and worldviews of many Pakistani Americans. I do not pretend to speak for or about other Muslim communities in America, but I am confident that my theoretical and methodological approach in the making of this film, especially the questions that I ask, can be gainfully employed to enquire other Muslims.

2. Vox Populi

Vox Populi ("vox pop" for short) is a Latin phrase that means "voice of the people." In documentary filmmaking and other types of broadcasting, vox pop is an interview

technique that attempts to approximate public opinion. The standard procedure involves interviewing random members of the general public, in arbitrary locations, and asking each person to answer the exact same question. Once the lot of interviewees is aggregated, their responses are systematized and treated as a rough estimate of the public's reaction to a certain issue.

From the very first documentary script I ever wrote, I knew that I wanted The Muslims I Know to be a kind of icebreaker. I wanted the film to initiate dialogue between American Muslims and non-Muslim Americans. By presenting something alternative (perhaps even contrary) to the conventional representation of Islam and Muslims, perceptions which in large part permeate the television, radio, and newsprint media, I wanted to provoke thought, ask tough questions not being asked in the media, and facilitate discussion.

In order to initiate dialogue, naturally there needed to be non-Muslim voices in the film. Vox pop enabled me to put my finger on the pulse of the non-Muslim American voice in the Rochester area. By crunching data gathered from random interviews conducted during pre-production fieldwork, I was able to delineate the major topics that would be discussed in the film. In short, this approach allowed the questions and concerns of the non-Muslim Americans I interviewed to be the subject matter discussed by and commented on by the Muslims I know.

II. UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

1. A Brief Introduction to Islam

In America, Islam is the third largest religion, and it is quickly becoming the second. Internationally, Islam has roughly 1.3 billion members, called Muslims, the majority of whom are based in Asia and Africa. Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population, followed by India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nigeria.

Muslims worship the same God that Christians and Jews worship, and they call this God "Allah" (Arabic al-ilah, "the god"). Muslims also recognize the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament, starting with Adam and going all the way to Moses and Jesus. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam began in the Middle East. The prophet Muhammad (570 – 632 C.E.) was born in the Arabian city of Mecca.

The word islam means "to surrender" or "yield" in particular to the will of God. Thus an adherent of Islam, a Muslim, is a person who yields to Allah's will. Muslims are bound by a common faith in Allah and the prophet Muhammad.

The basic Muslim greeting is the Arabic, asalam alaikum, which means "peace be upon you." Like people of other religious traditions, Muslims believe in peace and compassion and are taught from a young age that these qualities are intimately associated with Allah.

The two major sects in Islam are Sunni Muslims (about 85% of Muslims worldwide) and Shia or Shiite Muslims (about 15%). Conflicts about the succession to the Muslim Caliphate, after Muhammad's death, resulted in this split in the Muslim community. The Sunnis represent the majority group that endorsed Abu Bakr, a much trusted and lifelong companion of the prophet Muhammad, while the Shiites supported Muhammad's valiant cousin and son-in-law Ali. Within each group there are numerous "denominations" or branches. For all of their differences, there are some similarities, or common threads, upon which all Muslims can agree. The following covers some of the major commonalities that run throughout the Islamic faith.

Islam is a resolutely monotheistic religion. Muslims believe that the will of Allah was revealed through a succession of prophets. Muslims believe that God's messages end with the prophet Muhammad. His message is the final "seal" of all of God's prophets.

Muhammad was born in Mecca, which during his lifetime was the commercial, cultural, and religious capital of Arabia. He was the son of Abdullah and Amina. Muhammad's father died from illness while Amina was pregnant with Muhammad. His uncle, Abu Talib, raised him until adulthood. At age 25, Muhammad married Khadija (age 40). She was the owner of the caravan company for which he worked. She decided to propose after hearing of his well-known honesty and good character.

The central religious text of Islam is the Quran (literally "the recitation"), which Muslims believe contains divine guidance and direction for humanity. The Quran recognizes the Torah and the Gospel as having been revealed by the same God. Jews and Christians are called People of the Book as they too have received God's revelation from previous prophets.

The Quran was revealed to the prophet Muhammad (in the language of Arabic) by the angel Gabriel. The revelations began when he was 40 years old, in 610 C.E., and continued in waves until his death in 632 C.E.. Muhammad dictated the messages that he received to his followers. Muhammad's life is also recognized as an example for believing Muslims to aim to emulate. In 633 C.E. the Quran was set to writing by some of Muhammad's companions. It was in 653 C.E. that the text was systematized and distributed widely.

Muhammad's message was a veritable revolution to those who heard him. It preached egalitarianism and social justice in a society divided deeply between haves and have-nots. Tribal warfare was the norm in Arabia, at that time, and the weak or disadvantaged were completely marginalized. Muhammad found some followers who believed in his message, but the majority of the leaders of Mecca did not accept him as an authority, and began to persecute him and his followers. Consequently, in 622 C.E. Muhammad and his followers moved to the city of Medina, where they established the first official Muslim community (Muslims start their calendars from this year). This journey to Medina is called the Hijrah or "the emigration."

Muhammad was at once a religious and political leader (i.e., a prophet and statesman). After his death, narratives about his life (called "traditions" or hadith) were preserved in the Sunnah (literally "the trodden path") which contains numerous narrative accounts of how he lived and what he said. The information in the Sunnah covers everything from Muhammad's advice about prayer, fasting, marriage and divorce, to diplomacy and jihad. Jihad means struggle. There are two types of jihad, the greater jihad which is the spiritual struggle to become a better human being, and the lesser jihad which is the fight for self-defense or war against tyranny and oppression. During the early centuries of Islam, compendia of these narratives blossomed into the thousands, and the Prophet's biography became a source of inspiration and an example for Muslims.

After the Prophet died and the Muslim community no longer had a central figure to lead and direct day-to-day activities, many Muslims felt a need to define as clearly as possible what it meant to be a Muslim and how Muslims ought to live in order to receive eternal reward in heaven (and avoid punishment in hell). The need to institutionalize the tradition became even more urgent as Islam spread across diverse regions of the world, meeting with new situations, problems, and questions. In terms of institution, Islam does not have a pope or a legion of authority figures (such as Catholic bishops) to help them determine what to do in certain situations. Questions about how a Muslim ought to act over time came to be the responsibility of the ulama or scholars "learned" in Islamic Law, which is known as Sharia (the "way" of Islam).

The Sharia concerns itself with law and governance derived from principles embodied in the Quran and Sunnah. Islamic Law covers all aspects of a Muslim's life. Depending on where a Muslim is from, she or he will follow a specific set of guidelines according to Sunni or Shia Law. However, in many Muslim countries of the world, legal systems are secular. For those countries which adhere to some form of Islamic Law, the application of Sharia is mostly confined to Family Law which deals with matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and guardianship.

In spite of all these differences, there are Five Pillars of Islam that all Muslims will recognize as critical to their surrender to Allah.

2. The Five Pillars of Islam

(1) Shahada (Profession of Faith)

"There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet (or messenger) of God." This statement articulates the essence of Islam—i.e., faith in the one true God, Allah, and recognition of Muhammad as the last Prophet of God, the final seal in a long line of God's messengers to the world of humanity. The pronouncement of the shahada formally makes one a member of the Muslim community.

(2) Salat (Prayer or Worship)

Muslims pray five times a day, at designated times throughout the day and night. When they pray, Muslims face Mecca to Worship God. Each prayer is preceded by a ritual ablution of washing the face, hands and feet. The ablutions are meant to symbolize both physical and spiritual purity before approaching (or engaging) Allah by reciting His holy words.

Muslims may pray alone or in groups. When in groups, e.g. at a Mosque, one of the worshippers will serve as the Imam, or prayer leader who guides the movements and recitations—stand, kneel, touch forehead to ground, and then stand again, all the while reciting verses from the Quran. On Fridays, Muslims are expected to perform a noontime prayer in the Mosque (i.e., with the congregation).

The concept of prayer is extremely powerful in Islam. It makes God accessible to Muslims at all times and in all places. Like meditation, prayers enable Muslims to get away from life's mundane concerns at least five times a day. It allows them to be quiet and centered, to focus on the spiritual rather than the worldly and materialistic. The five prayers also provide daily structure and instill discipline.

(3) Zakat (Almsgiving)

This pillar is meant to reinforce the importance of community identity and responsibility. Since according to Islam Allah created all things, all wealth on earth therefore belongs to Allah. The pursuit of

wealth is an acceptable aim in Islam - Muhammad was a businessman, and his wife, too, was a businesswoman. But with wealth comes responsibility, which should take the form of charity and care for others. What's more, it is the financial responsibility of Muslims who can afford it to pay an annual 2.5% wealth tax that goes toward assisting the needs of the less fortunate members of the community. Payment of the zakat is seen as an act of worship, and it represents a way that Muslims can thank Allah for their own prosperity and wellbeing.

(4) Sawn or Siyam (Fasting)

Once a year all adult Muslims who are physically capable fast during the month of Ramadan. This month-long fast is meant to be a special time of reflection and discipline; a time to thank Allah for one's blessings and to repent one's sins; a time to discipline one's body, strengthen one's moral character and think selflessly in order to help the poor and oppressed.

From dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food and drink. Because the Muslim calendar is a lunar calendar, Ramadan comes about at different times each year. Each evening, after sunset, Muslims come together to break the daylong fast. On the 27th night Muslims observe the "Night of Power and Excellence" which is the celebration of the night that Muhammad received Allah's final revelation. The month of Ramadan comes to a close with the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast (Eid al-Fitr).

(5) Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca)

Every Muslim who is physically and financially able to do so, must make the pilgrimage to Mecca once in his or her lifetime. Once a year roughly two million Muslims from across the globe travel to Saudi Arabia to journey to the cities of Mecca and Medina to perform the hajj. This pilgrimage represents a return to the Muslims' spiritual homeland. The Quran says that the prophet Abraham and his son, Ismail, built the Kabah or "House of God" in Mecca. The Kabah is a cube-shaped structure that lodges a black stone. Tradition says that the angel Gabriel gave it to Ismail as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham, and by extension with the Muslim community. Of course, Mecca is also the place where Muhammad was born, received Allah's revelation and died. All Muslims are considered to be equal on the hajj, irrespective of background or social standing. This egalitarian community is evidenced by the simple garments that the male pilgrims wear - two seamless white sheets. The women wear the hijab which means modest clothing, in a way that only their hands and faces are visible. The hajj ends with the Feast of the Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha), which commemorates God's initial command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham was later allowed to sacrifice a ram instead.

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3. Islam in the Sub-Continent

Islam came to South Asia in 712 C.E. when Muhammad bin Qasim conquered the regions of Sind and Punjab (in what is now Pakistan). Muhammad bin Qasim was an Arab general from the city of Taif (in present day Saudi Arabia).

With the advent of Islam, the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent came into contact with a religion and culture quite different from their own. Most Indians were Hindus at the time. Hinduism was polytheistic and accepting of various forms of worship. Islam was rigid in its emphasis on monotheism. Hinduism advocated a strict caste system while Islam was intrinsically egalitarian. Over the years, the influx of Muslim soldiers, traders, farmers and holy men led to some trade and religious exchange.

Muslim raids and invasions continued for centuries in South Asia, many of them launched from Central Asia, where a Turkish slave dynasty had garnered power. Muslim empires in the region included the Ghaznavid Empire, the Ghurid, the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire.

Although Muslims fought their way into the subcontinent their attitude towards the local population was often characterized by accommodation rather than forced conversion. Hence Hinduism and Buddhism remained the predominant religions of South Asia. Islam's influence spread mostly through trade and Sufi Mystics.

Sufism represents a mystical approach to Islam. Early forms of Sufism appeared about a century after the birth of Islam. However, another century passed before a woman from Basra (in present day Iraq) called Rabiah al-Adawiyah transformed Sufism from asceticism to mysticism. She articulated the Sufi concept of pure love of God, unadulterated by the desire for Heaven or the fear of Hell.

Sufis strive to use self-control, introspection and mental focus to attain selflessness and prepare for a rich spiritual life aimed at Divine Proximity. Mystical music and poetry are an important part of Sufism. In many regards, Muslim

Sufis were not much different from Indian ascetics and wandering holy men. As Sufism absorbed more and more of the local culture, its appeal grew stronger. People began to believe in the Sufis' healing powers and their tombs became shrines or places of pilgrimage where both Hindus and Muslims liked to congregate and pray. Sufi shrines thus became central to the spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. They are heavily frequented to this day and remain characteristic of the brand of Islam that swept across South Asia.

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III. HISTORICAL EVENTS

1. Colonial Powers in South Asia

India is home to one of the oldest civilizations in the world. The Indus civilization dates back to 3000 B.C.E. The Aryans invaded India in 1500 B.C.E. and the blending of Aryan and local Dravidian traditions gave birth to classical Indian culture. India was later conquered by Persian kings and also by Alexander the Great. King Chandragupta consolidated his rule in the subcontinent and established the extensive Maurya Empire in 322 B.C.E., which reached its peak under his grandson Ashoka.

Muslim rule in India began in 712 C.E. and continued with successive Muslim invasions and empires. The Delhi Sultanate refers to the various Muslim dynasties (either Turkic or Afghan) that ruled India from 1206 to 1526.

2. The Partition of India

The departure of the British Raj from South Asia and the subsequent partition of India produced the two nation states of India and Pakistan. Pakistan was born on August 14, 1947. Under the original design of partition, Pakistan was divided into two regions (see map right). The larger of the two regions was called West Pakistan (present day Pakistan). East Pakistan was situated on the Bay of Bengal and became an independent nation in 1971 (present day Bangladesh).

What were some of the critical factors that preceded the partition of South Asia and who were some of the decisive people and organizations involved in that process?

The fortunes of the British Empire began to decline by the end of World War II. Having barely succeeded in fending off the attacks of the Axis powers, the British were exhausted financially, morally and politically. Their ambitions for global empire and colonial rule had diminished greatly by this time, and public attitudes and opinions about the legitimacy of colonialism and the rights of subject nations had also undergone radical change. Even before the British exhausted their might in World War II, numerous anti-colonial revolutions were already underway across the Indian subcontinent. Their aim was to mobilize millions of people to resist British rule. Indian leaders had begun to deliberate possible scenarios for equitable political and religious life in South Asia after the British left.

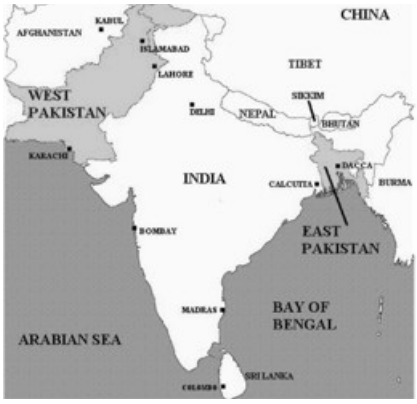

Figure 1: *Map of the partition of India to create Pakistan and India in 1947.*

At the time of its inception in the 1890s, the All India Congress Party (or simply the Congress Party) confined its modest demands to some political autonomy and more participation in the political process under ongoing British rule. But by the late 1920s and early 30s, this movement had been transformed into a drive for complete independence. Its leaders, such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and Sirojni Naidu, were mostly Hindus. There were some notable Muslims such as Abulkalam Azad and Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Throughout the struggle for independence, nonviolent ideals were mostly upheld and the idea of partitioning India into two countries was never entertained by any of these leaders until much later.

As a minority comprising roughly 25% of the Indian population, the Muslims of India became increasingly fearful for their future rights under Hindu majority rule, based on the principle of one man, one vote. Over a decade or so numerous compromises were proposed by Jinnah, Azad and various British viceroys to address the concerns of Indian minorities. Some of these proposals were reminiscent of the US Electoral College. Like the US Senate there would be a powerful legislative upper chamber where each state would have equal representation regardless of the size of its population.

These proposals were rejected by Gandhi and Nehru. The uncompromising attitude of the Congress leadership on the issue of safeguards for India's minority populations finally led Jinnah to embrace the idea of a separate country for Muslims. As Muslims became united behind the demand for Pakistan, they created their own political party, the Pakistan Muslim League.

The partition of India was not a foreordained event. It was a slow process which evolved over several years due to the failure of interested parties to come to a compromise. However, once partition became inevitable it precipitated fearsome communal bloodshed. Massacres and atrocities were committed by Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims against each other. Partition led to the largest population dislocation and migration in human history, with 10-12 million people struggling to reach the safety and sanctuary of their respective new countries over a few months. About one million people were killed in the violence.

Research and documentation by later historians reveal that a large part of the blame can be attributed to the last British Viceroy of India, Louis Mountbatten. Having been warned of the potential for massive rioting and asked to provide security and military presence, Mountbatten failed to follow through.

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3. General Zia ul-Haq

From its inception Pakistan faced a struggle for survival. Mountbatten is said to have called Pakistan a tent erected by the British whose long-term existence would be doubtful.

Having received a disproportionately low share of the resources of British India, including financial assets, industrial assets, educational institutions, military resources and above all human resources at that time, the very survival of the country demanded that its borders be secured. Thus, the military establishment and particularly the army were allocated a preponderance of national resources to allow them to develop a credible deterrent against perceived Indian designs on Pakistan and a reversion of the country's territories to a united India.

This strategy, perhaps misguided from the start, later became positively harmful to the national interests of Pakistan. It resulted in a distortion of civil society and its institutions and a lopsided militarization of the state at the expense of the crucial work of economic and human development. Education, infrastructure and healthcare which would have been the best means of ensuring Pakistan's long term survival, were grossly neglected.

This militarization also allowed the leaders of the army to assume the self-appointed role of the nation's saviors and guardians. They began to interfere in the governance of

the country through numerous military coups. Thus, from early on Pakistan was mostly ruled by a series of military dictators, the third being General Zia-ul-Haq.

A mediocre soldier appointed by then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for his meek demeanor, presumed loyalty and self avowed lack of political ambition, Zia-ul-Haq turned the tables on his benefactor by seizing power in a military coup in 1977. This coup was carried out under the cover of quelling civil unrest and disturbances created through recent elections in which Bhutto's victory was being contested hotly by the opposition parties with instances of electoral fraud, violence and vote rigging on the part of Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party.

Promising, like other dictators before him, to return democracy to Pakistan and relinquish power within ninety days after restoring law and order, Zia-ul-Haq ended up ruling Pakistan for almost 11 years. Fearful of Bhutto's well-known propensity to violent vengeance and his still extant support among the poor and illiterate masses of Pakistan, Zia-ul-Haq contrived to have him executed after a trial for the murder of a political opponent. While many Pakistanis felt that morally Bhutto was responsible for ordering the murder, legally and factually the trial was considered dubious and his execution resulted in Bhutto's elevation to the status of a martyr among his followers.

In view of the United State's well established track record of supporting military dictators in Pakistan for being strategic cold war era bulwarks against communism, Zia-ul-Haq turned to the United States for military and economic support. He was quickly rebuffed by the Carter administration especially on account of the international opprobrium attached to his execution of Bhutto.

Zia's fortunes changed dramatically after the Soviet invasion of neighboring Afghanistan in 1979 and the election of Ronald Reagan in the US in 1980, in whom he found a much more congenial ally. Pakistan and therefore Zia-ul-Haq became indispensable assets to the Reagan administration in its quest to deliver a crippling and humiliating blow to Soviet military power in Afghanistan. This blow was delivered successfully through a covert operation to arm, fund and train Islamic guerilla fighters in Afghanistan who became know as the Mujahideen. These operations were funded externally by the US and Saudi Arabia, and internally through narcotics trafficking and smuggling by various Afghan Mujahideen commanders. The logistics were managed by the CIA in coordination with the Pakistani military agency, the Inter Services Intelligence Directorate or ISI.

Previously a rather sleepy, neglected and minor backwater of the Pakistan army, the ISI now became a formidable institution under the close tutelage of the CIA. The ISI's tentacles began to grow and reach deep both inside and outside Pakistan.

Alone amongst all the other Pakistani military dictators and for reasons both personal and political, Zia-ul-Haq turned to religion as an instrument of domestic policy. He professed Islamic values and imported for the first time Islamic Sharia law and punishment into the secular legal codes of Pakistan. His embrace of Islam was meant to marginalize and exclude secular civilian opposition parties but it led to increasing religious polarity among the different Muslim sects within Pakistan.

He died in a mysterious plane crash in 1988 and his legacy of sectarian violence, religious fundamentalism and intolerance, the use of terrorism as a tool of national policy, and weapons proliferation funded by narcotics smuggling are still with us today.

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4. Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan

From the times of Russia under the Czars, the Soviet Union had always regarded countries in Central Asia (including Afghanistan) to be within their sphere of influence and important to their national interests.

Historically Afghanistan was a conduit for the wealth and resources of India and later on a way for the Russians to access the warm water Arabian Sea ports. It had also been of great interest to the British during their period of colonial rule in India.

Subsequent to partition and the creation of Pakistan, Afghanistan became a spring board for the Soviets, helping them maintain influence in South Asia. It was also a potential counterweight to Pakistan, a staunch US ally whose leaders were at best indifferent and sometimes even hostile to communism.

Due to all these factors, the Soviet Union always exerted influence on the policies of the Afghan government. For

many decades the Afghan King, Zahir Shah, tried to maintain a neutral attitude towards that interference. But this precarious balance was disturbed when Zahir Shah was deposed by his cousin Mohammad Daoud in 1973.

Wishing to maintain his own authority over Afghanistan, Daoud was alarmed by the inroads being made by the Soviet supported Afghan communists within Afghanistan and showed signs of a conciliatory attitude toward Pakistan and the US. As a result Daoud and his family were assassinated in a communist-backed military coup in 1978.

After the communist takeover there was a succession of Afghan leaders who were plagued by infighting within the various factions of Afghan communists. This infighting combined with a fear of losing control over their clients in Afghanistan, prompted the Soviet Union to invade and occupy Afghanistan in 1979.

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5. Education – Textbooks and Historical Representation

In the 1980s and 1990s, textbooks were published by the United States for Afghan school children. These books were meant to inculcate a culture and belief system of violent resistance to the Soviet occupiers of Afghanistan. Verses, illustrations and stories depicting the use of firearms, tanks, landmines and other weapons to maim, injure or otherwise bloodily incapacitate and kill Soviet soldiers were included. Some of the content of these books was extremely graphic and inappropriate for elementary school children. For example, there was the picture of a decapitated Afghan soldier, equipped with bandolier and Kalashnikov. A verse from the Quran was inscribed above the soldier's body. Text underneath the picture praised the dead soldier for having sacrificed everything in the way of imposing Islamic law on the government.

A generation of Afghan children absorbed these lessons and many continue to subscribe to similar ideas today.

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6. Islamization / Talibanization

The process of Islamizing Pakistani society started under General Zia-ul-Haq. Although his motives were couched in Islamic ideology and his personal devotion to the principles of the Quran, they were mostly actuated by reasons of realpolitik. Zia-ul-Haq's plan appeared to be to create a constituency of Islamists within Pakistan who would be beholden to him for political and economic patronage and provide a natural base of support to allow him to stay in power for life. This was a shrewd move to counterbalance and neutralize the traditional power centers of Pakistani society including the landed oligarchy, civil and military bureaucracies and secular political parties.

This strategy succeeded admirably and was embraced by Islamist political parties, the lower middle class and some middle class professionals and traders who provided most of the recruits to this cause. It transformed Pakistan's normally devout but secular society into one where considerable inroads were made by a particular brand and interpretation of Islam. This would have long lasting effects on Pakistan.

Talibanization was a natural outgrowth of this process whose aims were related to Pakistan's foreign policy as conceived and executed by the Pakistani army. The idea behind the creation of the Taliban (literally, students) was to gain "strategic depth" by having a friendly regime on the western borders of Pakistan with Afghanistan, where the Pakistani army could withdraw to regroup and continue fighting if Pakistan were to be over run by an attack through its eastern borders by its arch military rival, India.

With this aim the ISI launched a program in the early 90s to train and recruit Afghan youth studying in madrassas (religious schools funded mostly by Saudi money), in refugee camps, and elsewhere in Pakistan. These recruits were provided training in military tactics, guerilla warfare, the use of weaponry and sabotage. With the support of the Pakistani army, these recruits were able to overcome competing warlords and other remnants of the Soviet-era Afghan Mujahideen, after the departure of the Soviets.

The Taliban are followers of a strictly puritanical brand of Islam called Wahabism and they set up a harsh system of government that stripped away most civil rights and liberties particularly the rights of Afghan women.

They were initially welcomed and supported by the Afghan people, especially their ethnic Pashtun kinsmen, because of their ability to quickly restore security and law and order in Afghanistan. Their goals were limited to the control of Afghanistan and to providing recruits for a guerilla war against Indian security forces occupying Kashmir where they served as a proxy for the Pakistani army.

Web:
BBC News. *Will next US president rethink Afghanistan?* October 21, 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7674623.stm

Dreyfuss, Robert. *Obama's Afghan Dilemma*. The Nation. December 3, 2008. http://www.thenation.com/doc/20081222/dreyfuss

7. Pakistan and the War on Terror

Suggested readings:

Ahmed, Mara and Judith Bello. *An interview with Tariq Ali: Pakistan and the Global War on Terror. Counterpunch. November 30, 2009.* http://www.counterpunch.org/ahmed11302009.html

Polk, William R. *An Open Letter to President Obama*. The Nation. September 30, 2009.http://www.thenation.com/doc/20091019/polk

Editorial. *Obama's War*. The Nation. December 2, 2009. http://www.thenation.com/doc/20091221/editors

Scahill, Jeremy. *The Secret US War in Pakistan*. The Nation. November 23, 2009. http://www.thenation.com/doc/20091207/scahill

III. QUESTIONS FOR GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. The narrator expresses her discomfort with the term moderate Muslim: "The need to identify militant jihadists by distinguishing them from moderate Muslims had cast suspicion on all Muslims in America." Discuss.

2. The narrator claims that she cannot pretend to represent 1.3 billion Muslims all over the world and that is why the film focuses on a small community of Pakistani Americans. Discuss the validity/usefulness of this approach.

3. In the beginning of the film we are shown random people and places in Pakistan. How do those images compare to mainstream coverage of Pakistan by the media?

4. Talking about why he moved to the United States, Aitezaz expresses his life-long admiration for the U.S. by saying: *"I was an American citizen living in the body of a Pakistani."* What are some of the reasons Muslims immigrate to America? What freedoms do they enjoy here as compared to their countries of origin?

5. Bilal and Farah draw differences between their lives in America and Europe. Do you perceive any differences between life in America and Europe? What do those differences mean to them personally?

6. In the film, Farah describes how her 6 year old son was body searched at the airport simply because of his name. Is profiling solely on the basis of ethnic names discriminatory? Does it help prevent terrorism?

7. Aitezaz explains that "for a Muslim man to be politically active and outspoken is risky in America nowadays." What kinds of risks is Aitezaz alluding to? Have other groups of Americans faced similar fears in the past? Compare contexts.

8. Raheel Raza states that there was widespread stereotyping of Muslims in the media in the wake of 9/11. How did that media coverage work in tandem with government policy following the events of 9/11?

9. Dr. Thomas Gibson speaks about diversity in Islam as follows: "*For me what is most characteristic of Islamic civilization is tremendous diversity of belief, because it is so cosmopolitan. You can have a Moroccan and an Indonesian meeting in Mecca in 1550 and sharing the Arabic language to have a debate. You have huge empires, like the Mughal Empire where the Emperor sets himself up as a grand religious figure and you can have highly egalitarian nomadic groups, all referring to the same sacred text*." Discuss.

10. The Palestinian Ambassador to the United Kingdom explains in an interview that the footage of Palestinians celebrating 9/11 was shot in 1993 and misused in 2001. If that is correct, what could be the fallout from that footage being screened on 9/11?

11. Bilal talks about how Islamic militants don't represent mainstream Muslims just like the Ku Klux Klan doesn't represent mainstream Americans. Discuss this analogy. How can the media be more objective in representing Islam and Muslims?

12. Ibrahim says: "The media are a business and they have to make money like all businesses. And to make money, you sell stories that are wild and extravagant." Are American media owned by corporations? How does that impact news coverage? Is that true of other countries? Who owns the BBC?

13. Dr. Emil Homerin talks about the 5 pillars of Islam, which are: profession of faith, daily prayers, almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca if one can manage it. What are some of the broad principles underlying these pillars?

14. Dr. Gwendolyn Simmons expresses her love of Islamic prayers because there is direct communication with God and no need for a mediator. There is no concept of clergy in Islam. What does that imply? How does that compare to Christianity or Judaism?

15. Islam is an Abrahamic faith, a continuation of the Judeo-Christian tradition. What are some of the similarities between these three faiths, as explained in the film?

16. According to Dr. Carl Davila, colonialism meant that economic, political and legal systems generated outside, for the benefit of people outside, were imposed on colonized countries. What are specific examples of such exploitation? How do they affect colonizer and colony?

17. What are examples of post-colonial interference in countries which were once colonies? Consider trade, financial infrastructure, global power dynamics, internal politics, etc.

18. In the film, Dr. Carl Davila argues that the difference between violence committed by state actors vs violence committed by non-state actors is tenuous. What is the accepted definition of terrorism and how is it distinguished from war? Does this distinction hold up in real life?

19. The literal meaning of jihad is struggle. In the film, Bilal explains that the best kind of jihad is to struggle with one's own self, for self improvement." Is that concept similar to the Christian idea of examination of conscience? Discuss.

20. Dr. Carl Davila explains that jihad as advocated by today's jihadists is *"an innovation, nothing like this has existed in Islamic history before this time."* What are some of the factors that led to the creation of this new type of jihad?

21. The U.S. strategy of arming Afghan Mujahideen in their fight against the Soviets triggered the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. What were some of its unintended consequences? Was this an example of good foreign policy? Discuss.

22. Pakistan played an important role in partnering with the U.S. and supporting Afghan Mujahideen. How did the situation in Afghanistan affect Pakistan, in the short-term and in the long run?

23. The film delves into America's relationship with Pakistan during the Cold War, especially during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Since 2001, Pakistan has once again become an important American ally, this time in the War on Terror. Are there any similarities in how these partnerships worked? What lessons can be learned from the War on Communism in the 1980s?

24. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, school books teaching Islamic militancy to elementary school children were published in the United States and distributed to Afghan children. What was the logic behind this indoctrination? Discuss its pragmatic and moral implications.

25. Read the article "A is for Allah, J is for Jihad" by Craig Davis (*http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6669/is_1_19/ai_n28918749/*). The only coverage of this information in American mainstream media can be found in the Washington Post. Read the Washington Post article, "From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad" (*http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A5339-2002Mar22*). Is this news coverage adequate?

26. In the film Uzma talks about the concept of Hijab in Islam. It is a woman's way to cover her beauty and dress modestly. In France, supporters of a ban on "conspicuous" religious symbols in public schools say that the Hijab should be banned to preserve France's secular tradition. Opponents see the legislation as discriminatory, particularly against the country's large Muslim population. How would such a debate unfold in America?

27. Ruhi points out that Islam gave women the right to divorce in the 7th century AD. How does that compare to other religions?

28. Sabah makes the point that "there is a huge difference between an Islamic country and Islam. A country has its own tradition and tradition is something that can be changed over time." Discuss.

29. Bilal calls U.S. foreign policy "hypocritical" when it supports corrupt dictators in Muslim countries. How should America deal with foreign rulers who are not democratically elected?

30. Towards the end of the film, the point is made that whenever people interact one-on-one, labels begin to fall away and we realize that we are all human beings first. In the absence of one-on-one interaction what are some other ways to discard labels?

31. The narrator talks about how there can be no clash of civilizations for her, as that split would be internal and painful. Are today's world conflicts mostly culture wars? Are there other factors at work?

