

Why the Taliban Shot a Teenage Girl  
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The Pakistani Taliban roused the ire around the world with their latest horror, an attempted assassination on a teenage girl for promoted educating girls. They recently beheaded a 7-year-old girl and nobody noticed. But this time, mobs of Pakistanis demonstrated in support of the girl and in criticism of the Taliban. Is this issue about the status of women or is there more to it?

When, on 9/11/2001, President Bush was asked why these Islamists hate us, his answer was: \223They hate us for our freedoms,\224 which was greeted with derision by \223intellectuals.\224 They found this comment far too simplistic, but I never have. I remember the pitch of the Islamists that turned modernizing Iran into a smothering Islamic Republic. It was indeed those very freedoms that alarm Islamists. They obfuscate by going after the \223sexual looseness\224 of Western Women when the real target is western culture altogether.

Many assume that these fanatics are just misogynists, insisting that women be invisible in the street (under burqas), wear rubber soles so that they cannot be heard walking, and never laughing or (horror) sing in public. If these men could figure out how to produce babies without women, they would gladly do so. But this is only part of the story.

Women asserting themselves, after centuries of fierce suppression, is the threat to their entire system, religious and cultural. Women are the sharp edge of the wedge in the most divisive of all issues: tradition vs. modernization. This struggle is going on in Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and in every Muslim-majority country. The attack on the Pakistani teen reflected the utter terror of Islamists that they could be overrun by the seductive Western culture of movies and television, individuality, gender equality, participatory government, and replacement of a medieval religion by science and education.

Apologists for Islam blame all this loathing of women on culture, not religion. This is not so. The nastiest of Muslim practices (honor killing, enforced marriages of underage girls, and the decapitation of apostates or enemies) can be justified somewhere in the traditional Muslim texts. If it were just Arab custom, why are these practices also in non-Arab Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia? Bad practices are contagious, and when supposedly \223moderate\224 Indonesian fanatics bomb a nightclub full of young Australians, they defend their actions in court as justified by Islam and Allah.

We were not ruthless enough (nor could we be) during our occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan to extirpate medieval Islam and replace it with modern culture. We were over our heads; the Russians were ruthless enough, but we aborted their efforts prematurely in the name of anti-Communism. How does one deal with an enemy that car-bombs a marketplace and the next day bombs the funeral for the dead civilians? Even the Mafia sends wreaths to the funerals that they caused, but not Islamists.

When a young girl defies Islamists by insisting on the right for girls to be educated, she is taking on a number of institutions of long tenure: keeping girls ignorant and obedient, marrying them off before their first menstruation (this model in the Koran itself), and keeping them producing stupid and hapless boys who will sacrifice themselves as suicide bombers. What would the Taliban do without these baby factories?

The spate of demonstrations roiling the Muslim World today are the latest salvo on which way Islam will be going. Overturning secularizing dictators who failed to really change their societies has opened up the floodgates to chaos. Just under the surface of these recent modern nation states are centuries of sectarian, tribal, and ethnic hatreds. This is even true for Saudi Arabia, which is not the bedrock of stability we imagine.

Most Muslim states are overpopulated, undereducated, corrupt, and make nothing to sell that anybody wants. They do hate us for the very freedoms they most need but reject. Their religion and culture are bringing about their demise.

The sooner we recognize that this is a civilizational war with global implications, the better prepared we will be to fight it.

677 words

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