

THE WAR'S MISSING FRONT

We all learned a great deal from the events of Sept. 11. For me, the Turkish public's reaction to this tragedy was a lesson in itself. The Turkish government was quick to condemn the attacks and to announce its willingness to stand by the United States in the fight against terrorism. Yet the initial reaction of the Turkish people was not much different from that of many nations in the region. Turks from various cultural and ideological backgrounds basically said, "Yes, these attacks were terrible, but...." Implied in their response, along with their sympathy for the victims, was their belief that the United States had somehow brought these attacks on itself.

In Osama bin Laden's taped statement that was aired by Al-Jazeera on Oct. 7, 2001, there was one especially intriguing sentence, in which the terrorist mastermind made a reference to the "humiliation and disgrace" that Islam has suffered for "more than 80 years." As the historian Bernard Lewis pointed out, bin Laden was alluding to 1918, the year when the Ottoman sultanate, in Lewis's words, "the last of the great Moslem empires," was finally defeated, and its capital, Istanbul, was occupied (*The New Yorker*, Nov. 19, 2001). The Turkish republic, which eventually replaced the Ottoman Empire, represented a success that was, in its strong nationalism and secularism, foreign to the Muslim world.

Turks managed to liberate and modernize their country but they did not do this in the name of Islam. Bin Laden's words reflect a sentiment that has since been present throughout the Muslim world: regret for the loss of its power and influence, and blame of the West for this loss. What then prompts the children of the modern Turkish republic to look for ways to justify rather than outrightly condemn the attacks of Sept. 11?

Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk thinks it was sheer poverty that made one of his elderly neighbors in Istanbul react to the events of Sept. 11 by saying, "Sir, have you seen, they have bombed America. They did the right thing." Pamuk draws attention to the feelings of individuals in those societies where there is much poverty and not much democracy. These people are aware of how insubstantial their share of the world's wealth is; they know they live under conditions that are much harsher than those of Westerners, and that they are condemned to a

much shorter life. "The Western world is scarcely aware of this overwhelming feeling of humiliation that is experienced by most of the world's population," says Pamuk. "What prompts an impoverished old man in Istanbul to condone the terror in New York in a moment of anger, or a Palestinian youth fed up with Israeli oppression to admire the Taliban, is the feeling of impotence deriving from degradation, the failure to be understood, and the inability of such people to make their voices heard" (*The New York Review of Books*, Nov. 15, 2001).

To those who are familiar with the anger of the despondent,



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DESPAIR MUST BE UNDERSTOOD.

BY YASEMIN CONGAR

President Bush's definition of the problem as a "war between good and evil" sounds much too simplistic. There is no doubt bin Laden is an evil man and the suicide attackers who took innocent lives were evildoers. But to which side does the angry old man in Istanbul belong? Are those "yes, but" nay-sayers who fail to unequivocally condemn terrorism really the enemies of good? Are they against freedom, modernity, democracy and wealth? Or are they angry that their own lives are not free, not modern, not democratic, not wealthy and essentially not good?

For those of us who come from countries where millions of people despair, our countrymen's reaction to Sept. 11 reflects a more complex problem. Unwilling and unable to accept that their failures are their own responsibility rather than a result of the policies of the United States, many essentially good people express anger toward America rather than the terrorists.

To ultimately win its war against terrorism, the United States will have to find ways to understand this psychology of despair, whether it results from "the humiliation of Islam" or merely the lack of a good life. This requires opening a new front — not another theater to exercise American military superiority, but a moral and ideological struggle to end humiliation and lead Muslim societies toward the necessary changes to achieve wealth and democracy. The West won the Cold War because those who lived under the socialist system understood that their own system was responsible for their misfortune, not capitalism. That old system collapsed when it could not transform itself in a way to provide wealth and democracy. If a new world order is to be established in the post-Sept. 11 era, at the heart of this order will

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be the fate of the Muslim world. Will the Muslim societies be able to open themselves up to become partners in the global order? And will the West, particularly the United States, take the political steps to encourage such a change?

Islamic terrorism can only be defeated when the Muslim world manages to re-establish itself on principles of humanism and secularism. If the United States wants to win this war, it will need

to take a principled stance against the anti-democratic regimes in the Middle East which it has thus far embraced. Such a front would require the United States to make an effort to hear and be heard by the despairing millions. It will not be an easy task. ■

An Invitation For Summer Fiction

Once again the *FSJ* is seeking works of fiction of up to 3,000 words for its annual summer fiction issue. Story lines or characters involving the Foreign Service are preferred, but not required. The top stories, selected by the *Journal's* Editorial Board, will receive simultaneous publication in the July/August issue and on the *Journal's* Web site. The writer of each story will receive an honorarium of \$250, payable upon publication.

Submissions must be previously unpublished. Stories should be unsigned and accompanied by a cover sheet with author's name, address, telephone number and e-mail address.

**Deadline for submissions is May 1, 2002.
NO EXCEPTIONS.**

Please send submissions to the attention of:
Mikkela V. Thompson, preferably by e-mail at
thompsonm@afsa.org or by mail:
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