

ISLAM: RELIGION, CAUSE, STATE

We who pretend to be ordinary folk can relate to the term: Catch 22 -a paradox in a law, regulation or practice that makes one a victim of its provisions no matter what one does. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker seem caught in the tangling webs of Iraq, hands caught in the proverbial cookie jar with their character intact but the end-game in conflict with the definition of a never-ending war.

Waiting in the wings with a myriad of solutions are the three, one of whom will be Commander-in-Chief and the new caretaker of the tumultous times. None of them to date have a panacea for success as pertains to war-resolution, economy, and the enemy. And, even, if by good fortune, Iraq becomes stable, a semblance of draw-down of forces takes place, and a new strategy entertains the Islamic problems, both extreme and moderate, unless the real enemy is defined it will be all in vain. War against Terror is not a strategy and is meaningless, the Surge-an increase in troops to augment Counter-Insurgency tactics-is not a strategy. Catch-22 may be still part of the lexicon. As many say, this never-ending war is the product of false premises: no apparent connection to 9/11, void of alleged mass-destruction weapons, a cauldron of different ethnic and religious groups in opposition, and rationalized as an undisguised quest for oil.

Despite the vestiges of my brain, this old-timer believes the enemy is Islam, and we are in a War of Civilizations. If so, then this does require a new look: the essence and magnitude of Islam(portrayed by al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Hamas, Hezbollah, and others); the theorists: Taymiyya, Wahhab, al-Banna and Sayid Qutb to cite a few. All find no compromise with other religions, or states. Islam is beginning and the end for the true believer...in peace and war.

Islam, a mosaic of good and evil, of military advances, and prelude of astounding creative thought yet in continuing conflict with the West, always disciplined by its distinct culture and Koranic influence sometimes almost seemingly extinct, yet showing a semblance of honor and significance and undercurrent of desire to prevail, return and be heard. Osama bin-laden became that voice and Afghanistan the moment when true Islam again surfaced. One could almost imagine the ghost-like aura of the theorists in their robes, embellishing the meetings and campfires of what became the Taliban. Doctrine was king.

Osama was born in Riyadh in July of 1957 the last of Muhammed bin-laden's brood, his mother a Syrian. His father, a native of Yemen, came to Saudi-Arabia in the 1920s and through hard work and perseverance founded the company known as the Saudi Bin Laden group in 1931. Many Yemenis were hired as construction workers. Known for their close ties with the Saud family, the Bin Ladens prospered and built many of the mosques -in Medina and Mecca, and the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

From construction engineer, involved in many causes, an intellectual and religious scholar, Osama bin-Laden sought the true Islamic ideal with close ties with Saudi intellectuals, the Wahhabis. But his forte became as a freedom fighter with the Afghan insurgents fighting the Soviets. He brought his expertise in construction, wealth and ideas to the cause. Later he thought this is a noble calling.

"Like an Islamic Maltese Falcon, the Afghans' victorious jihad against the Soviet Union was for the Muslim world, 'the stuff that dreams were made of'-that a superpower could be defeated." Pride, latent, had returned to Islam and the Muslims celebrated.