

For Muslims, he's Hussein

Barack Obama is seen as part of the ummah



Daniel Pipes

How do Muslims see Barack Hussein Obama? They have three choices: Either as he presents himself as someone who has "never been a Muslim" and has "always been a Christian"; or as a fellow Muslim; or as an apostate from Islam.

Reports suggest that while Americans generally view the Democratic candidate having had no religion before converting at Reverend Jeremiah Wright's hands at the age of 27, Muslims the world over rarely see him as Christian but usually as either Muslim or ex-Muslim.

Lee Smith of the Hudson Institute explains why: "Barack Obama's father was Muslim and therefore, according to Islamic law, so is the candidate. In spite of the Quranic verses explaining that there is no compulsion in religion, a Muslim child takes the religion of his or her father... for Muslims around the world, non-American Muslims at any rate, they can only ever see Mr Obama as a Muslim." In addition, his school record from Indonesia lists him as a Muslim.

Thus, an Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Masri al-Youm*, refers to his "Muslim origins." Libyan ruler Mu'ammarr al-Qaddafi referred to Mr Obama as "a Muslim" and a person with an "African and Islamic identity." One *Al-Jazeera* analysis calls him a "non-Christian man," a second refers to his "Muslim Kenyan" father, and a third, by Naseem Jamali, notes that "Mr Obama may not want to be counted as a Muslim but Muslims are eager to count him as one of their own".

A conversation in Beirut, quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor*, captures the puzzlement. "He has to be good for Arabs because he is a Muslim," observed a grocer. "He's not a Muslim, he's a Christian," replied a customer. Retorted the grocer: "He can't be a Christian. His middle name is Hussein." Arabic discussions of Mr Obama sometimes mention his middle name as a code, with no further comment needed.

"The symbolism of a major American presidential candidate with the middle name of Hussein, who went to elementary school in Indonesia," reports Tamara Cofman Wittes of the Brookings Institution from a US-Muslim conference in Qatar, "that certainly speaks to Muslims abroad." Thomas L Friedman of the *New York Times* found that Egyptians "don't really understand Mr Obama's family tree, but what they do know is that if America — despite being attacked by Muslim militants on 9/11 — were to elect as its President some guy with the middle name 'Hussein', it would mark a sea-change in America-Muslim world relations".

Some American Muslim leaders also perceive Mr Obama as Muslim. The President of the Islamic Society of North America, Sayyid M Syeed, told Muslims at a conference in Houston that whether Mr Obama wins or loses, his candidacy will reinforce that Muslim children can "become the President of this country". The Nation of Islam's Louis Farrakhan called Mr Obama "the hope of the entire world".

But this excitement also has a dark side — suspicions that Mr Obama is a traitor to his birth religion, an apostate (*murtadd*) from Islam. Al Qaeda has prominently featured Mr Obama's stating "I am not a Muslim" and one analyst, Shireen K Burki of the University of Mary Washington, sees Mr Obama as "bin Laden's dream candidate". Should he become US commander-in-chief, she believes, Al Qaeda would likely "exploit his background to argue that an apostate is leading the global war on terror... to galvanise sympathisers into action".

Mainstream Muslims tend to tiptoe around this topic. An Egyptian supporter of Mr Obama, Yasser Khalil, reports that many Muslims react "with bewilderment and curiosity" when Mr Obama is described as a Muslim apostate; Josie Delap and Robert Lane Greene of the *Economist* even claim that the Obama-as-apostate theme "has been notably absent" among Arabic-language columnists and editorialists.

(The writer is director of the Middle-East Forum and Taube distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University.)

Azadi to terrorise India

The pro-azadi slogans we hear and the Pakistani flags we see in the Kashmir Valley are self-contradictory. Or are they? What Farooq, Malik and Shah dream of is no different from what Geelani hopes for: Kashmir becoming Pakistani territory

A lot has been written about the protests and the cry for *azadi* in the Kashmir Valley in the national and international media. The arguments and counter-arguments have been loud, often raucous, and almost rabidly emotional, clouding in the process certain important facts which the people of Jammu & Kashmir, and India, should know.

Of great urgency is to understand the conspiracy behind the violence and pro-Pakistani voices in the Kashmir Valley. The loud calls for *azadi* and more shrill pro-Pakistan slogans are contradictory in their very nature, and therefore betray the conflicting stands taken by the various self-appointed leaders of Kashmiris and the helping hand of Pakistani terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Tayyiba which have been the ISI's key instruments in propagating anti-India sentiments and violence.

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the key proponent of *azadi*, is a Pakistani stooge and has been playing the Islamabad tune for quite some time despite his secessionist rhetoric, which should have put any ordinary Indian behind bars without bail under the National Security Act. He wants Kashmir to become another 'federally administered' colony of Pakistan like FATA or Pak-Occupied Kashmir where people do not even have the fundamental right of expression — if someone dares to do so, as Mr Geelani and his acolytes indulge in with abundance on this side, they would be summarily shot or stand trial for treason.

So should be the case of All-Party Hurriyat Conference leaders Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, former Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front leader Yasin Malik and Shabbir Shah who have been misleading the people over the



issue of Sri Amarnath Shrine Board land allotment and inciting them to protest and indulge in violence against India. Umar Farooq, Yasin Malik and Shabbir Shah have been quick to scamper on to the Geelani bandwagon but espouse a different agenda of independence. As in the past, they are leading the gullible people of Kashmir on a path of violence, instigated by forces which are inimical to India.

One such potent force is the LeT, created by Osama bin Laden during the Afghan *jihad* and supported by the Pakistani Army and the ISI since then. All the Kashmiri leaders have been in constant touch with the LeT leadership during the past two months. Geelani, in fact, has been a frequent visitor to Islamabad and

other cities in Pakistan, taking part in bogus conferences on Kashmir. He has been particularly active in the ISI-LeT network before and during the renewed violence in Kashmir.

The LeT has been working, assiduously for several years now in Kashmir, marginalising the local militant outfits like Hizb-ul Mujahideen, taking over the responsibility of training and funding of terrorist activities, particularly after 2003, and making deeper inroads into the civil society by establishing mosques and *madarsas* in the area and front organisations like Kashmir Elder Council. It is well-known that the LeT has been instigating and leading protests over power breakdowns and security operations. Kashmir is the core agenda of the LeT and it has, in its

manifesto called *Why Are We Doing Jihad*, justified violent means to achieve its objective of 'liberating' 'Muslim' land from 'kafir' India.

The group has been consistently holding rallies and conferences on *jihad* in Kashmir, increasing the rhetoric and actions since early-2007. In February 2007, for instance, the LeT (see www.jamatdawah.org) organised a huge rally in Lahore where LeT chief Hafiz Saeed said: "India does not have any moral right to keep on occupying Kashmir. Pakistan firmly stands with their Kashmiri brethren in their legitimate struggle for the right of self-determination." He said Kashmir could be India's 'atoot ang' (inseparable part) but it is Pakistan's jugular vein.

A message was read out at this rally

from Syed Ali Shah Geelani, in which he said: "We will continue our struggle and achieve our freedom even if the whole world decides to oppose us."

In February 2008, the group organised 'Kashmir Solidarity' rallies in 32 towns of PoK. Shabbir Shah and Geelani addressed some of the rallies via phone. The 11-point resolution adopted at the biggest of the rallies, addressed by Geelani, declared that "Pakistan will remain insecure as long as its jugular vein is in the clutches of its arch enemy".

The evidence of the terrorist group's close coordination with elements on the Indian side of Kashmir was betrayed by the LeT's elaborate plans to welcome the 'Muzaflarabad Chalo' march. While a large section of the media projected the march, led by pro-Pakistani Kashmiri leaders, as a 'spontaneous protest', the LeT was clearly preparing for such an event. The group's members, workers and supporters had gathered near the Line of Control in thousands and were chanting, "Sabeeluna, sabeeluna; al-jihad, al-jihad" (Our path, our path; *al-jihad, al-jihad*) and "Kashmirioun say rishta kya? La ilaha ilallah" (Our connection with Kashmiris: There is no god but Allah). While Geelani said "India cannot crush the freedom movement of Kashmiris", Umar Farooq said the "relationship of bullet and hatred with India will continue".

It is also quite obvious that the renewed violence in Jammu & Kashmir and the repeated attempts to push in terrorists, trained in camps of Swat and Dir in North-West Frontier Province, are part of a script written by the LeT, often called an Al Qaeda clone, supported and sustained by Pakistan Army ever since its creation in 1993.



Wilson John

How not to halt progress

Don't violate patents as that will starve R&D of funds

More than a hundred countries met in Accra last week in negotiations for a new climate change agreement after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. Understandably, developing countries refused to sacrifice economic growth in order to cut emissions, so they want new low-carbon technology.

India, China and a variety of pressure groups have been campaigning for "compulsory licences" on low-carbon and renewable-energy technology, saying the developed countries are to blame for climate change and should underwrite the alleged solutions.

This will destroy any incentive to develop new inventions. Developing countries should instead remove the tariffs and other barriers that they impose on their own people and that increase prices dramatically.

Mr D Raja, the Environment Minister, has said he wants an agreement "paralysing" what he calls "the successful agreement on compulsory licensing of pharmaceuticals," which has undermined supply, quality and trade.

Some even claim patents confer a monopoly



that reduces competition and stops downward pressure on prices. But patents are not a monopoly on a market, they are an exclusive right over a specific product. Patents on existing products do not in any way prevent the development of other inventions.

Without the property rights that patents confer, many inventions that cost millions of dollars to develop can be copied. So without patents there are no incentives for investors and innovators to spend time and money researching and developing new technology.

This is especially counter-productive as low-carbon technology is still in its infancy and requires high investment for the next level of innovation.

The low-carbon or "renewable" inventions that would be undermined by removing patent rights include wind turbines, clean coal, solar panels and fluorescent lamps.

A 2007 United Nations

Development Programme study found compulsory licensing of low-carbon technologies would directly reduce investment. Similarly, a World Bank report from the same year found that weak Intellectual Property regimes act as a barrier to the transfer of low-carbon technology, meaning that patent owners are reluctant to transfer their technology to countries that do not respect patents and other property rights.

Attacking patents is a distraction when there are policies that require greater attention. For example, the top 15 greenhouse-gas-emitting developing countries impose hefty tariffs and other trade barriers that can drastically increase prices on "green" technology they claim is essential.

Zambia and Egypt have tariffs on solar panels at 30 per cent and 52 per cent respectively. In Nigeria, barriers against 'clean coal' technology add 160 per cent to the final product cost. In Egypt, the extra cost on fluorescent lamps is 87 per cent, in the Philippines 93 per cent, in Brazil 96 per cent and a staggering 102 per cent in India.

The egregious extent of tariffs and other barriers on low-carbon technologies has prompted the United States and the European Union to propose an Environmental Goods and Services Agreement in the World Trade Organisation, to encourage the transfer of technology. But since the collapse of the Doha Round last month, that seems unlikely.

By ignoring these self-imposed barriers, the anti-patent campaign is gaining traction because it is always more attractive to blame someone else.

That spells bad news for the poor. Companies that invest in low-carbon technology are dependent on capital to develop new products. If patents are waived investors will not see returns and the funding for new technology will dry up.

Forget patents: Governments in poor countries can make newer, cheaper and more efficient low-carbon technology available now by dropping their self-harming trade barriers.

(The writer is Director of the IP and Free Trade Unit at the Institute of Public Affairs, Melbourne)



Tim Wilson

Buried alive in Pakistan

Robin McDowell on how Baluch men protect their 'honour'

A Pakistani lawmaker has defended the decision by south-western tribesmen to bury five women alive because they wanted to choose their own husbands, telling stunned members of Parliament last week to spare him their outrage.

"These are centuries-old traditions and I will continue to defend them," Israr Ullah Zehri, who represents Baluchistan province, said. "Only those who indulge in immoral acts should be afraid."

The women, three of whom were teenagers, were first shot and then thrown into a ditch. They were still breathing as their bodies were covered with rocks and mud, according to media reports and human rights activists, who said their only 'crime' was that they wished to marry men of their own choosing.

Mr Zehri told a packed and flabbergasted Parliament on Friday that Baluch tribal traditions helped stop obscenity and then asked fellow lawmakers not to make a big fuss about it.

Many stood up in protest, saying the executions were 'barbaric' and demanding that discussions continue on Monday. But a handful said it was an internal matter of the deeply conservative province.

The incident occurred one month ago in Baba Kot, a remote village in Jafferabad district, after the women decided to defy tribal elders and arrange marriages in a civil court, according to the Asian Human Rights Commission.

They were abducted at gunpoint by six men, forced into a vehicle and taken to a remote field, where they were beaten, shot and then buried alive. One of perpetrators was allegedly related to a top provincial official, it said. Accounts about the killings have varied because police been uncooperative. (AP)

At last, freedom for artistes in staid Singapore

Censorship has taken a back seat and issues of race, religion and politics are no longer banished from public discourse, writes Alex Kennedy

Comedy pokes fun at the military. A drama depicts a local stripper from the 1950s. A satire portrays an ethnic Malay Muslim General who becomes a dictator.

The biennial Singapore Theatre Festival, which ended on Sunday, showcased how artistes are taking advantage of relaxed Government censorship to explore once taboo subjects — even, to some degree, the highly charged issues of race, religion and politics.

"There's a huge difference in what's allowed now compared to five years ago," said Gaurav Kripalani, who has helped stage *Rent*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Avenue Q* as artistic director of the Singapore Repertory Theatre.

There are limits. The Government banned a 2006 play for "portraying Muslims in a negative light," along with documentaries about Opposition political figures and even a couple of Janet Jackson CDs for racy lyrics. Still, the notoriously straight-laced Southeast Asian city-state is finally letting its hair down, a few strands at a time.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced recently that the Government would lift a ban on films with political themes, while maintaining one on political commercials and what he called "partisan stuff". "I don't think an outright ban is still sensible because this is how people communicate on the Web in daily life," Mr Lee said. "So we've got to allow political

videos, with some safeguards."

Another reason for loosening up is economic: Faced with a shortage of skilled workers and an aging population, the Government is trying to attract qualified foreigners to live here. It also wants to keep locals, who are becoming more sophisticated, from migrating abroad.

So Singapore, which still suffers from a reputation as a quirky place that canes vandals and bans chewing gum, is trying to become a hip and fun place.

Making the city of 4.6 million people an "arts and theater hub" is part of that drive. Singapore also will host the first nighttime Formula One race next month and unveil a casino resort next year.

The Government has poured money into theater, music and dance during the last decade. The number of theatre-goers has almost doubled since 2000, while registered theatre companies grew to 73 last year from 18 in 1997, according to the Government's National Arts Council.

Artists applaud the Government for establishing the Media Development Authority in 2003, which put in place a ratings system that can prohibit Singaporeans below the age of 16, 18 or 21 from attending certain performances.

"Now there's a buffer between the police and the artistes," said Alvin Tan, who has directed plays about capital punishment, paedophilia and marijuana use.

"Before the MDA came about, it was more high-handed. We would just get a letter that would say, 'Take this line out, take this paragraph out.' Now we can negotiate."

The authority requires playwrights to submit scripts for approval and bans plays that threaten the "stability and harmony" of the city, where Malays and ethnic Chinese clashed in riots in the 1960s.

"Race and religion remain powerful and emotional subjects, especially in our multiracial society," said Ms Amy Chua, the Media Development Authority's director of media content. "Such issues should continue to be dealt with and presented sensitively."

To avoid the censor's wrath,

playwrights often use satire or metaphor to discuss sensitive topics such as the People's Action Party, known as the PAP which has ruled Singapore since independence in 1965.

Some Singaporeans doubt the greater freedom given to theater will spill over into other media, such as television, radio and print. The Government did lift a ban on the *Sex and the City* TV programme in 2004. *Cosmopolitan* and the men's magazine *FHM* are allowed; *Playboy* and *Penthouse* are not.

"Over the past years, performance guidelines have changed in tandem with community needs and expectations," Chua of the Media Development Authority

said. "As our society matures, we can accommodate more debates and exploration of issues."

Since independence, Singapore, a tiny island with almost no natural resources, has grown into a developed nation. Gross domestic product per capita rose to US\$55,163 last year from US\$512 in 1965.

The general population thinks two things, said Prof Chua Beng Huat, who teaches sociology at National University of Singapore: The Government has done a good job economically, but there needs to be more public discussion about everything.

(Associated Press writer Shibani Mahtani contributed to this report.)