



JOHN FEEFFER

CRUSADE
2.0

THE
WEST'S
RESURGENT
WAR
ON
ISLAM

Crusade 2.0

The West's Resurgent War against Islam

John Feffer



City Lights Books | Open Media Series

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The Open Media Series is edited by Greg Ruggiero and archived by the Tamiment Library, New York University.

Cover design by Pollen

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Feffer, John.

Crusade 2.0 : the West's unending war against Islam / John Feffer.

p. cm. — (Open media series)

ISBN 978-0-87286-545-7

1. Islamic countries—Foreign relations—United States. 2. United States—Foreign relations—Islamic countries. 3. Islam—Foreign public opinion. I. Title.

DS35.74.U6F44 2012

303.48'2182101767—dc23

2011045458

City Lights Books are published at the City Lights Bookstore
261 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94133
www.citylights.com

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Introduction

Target: Islam

It was the Summer of Hate, and the target was Islam.

The television news coverage in the United States during the summer of 2010 was full of images of angry Americans waving signs that denounced the world's second largest religion. The fury seemed to come out of nowhere. Unfavorable attitudes toward Islam had been steadily dropping among people in the U.S.¹ In 2009, looking back at a two-year decline in hate crimes against Muslims, a prominent monitoring organization expressed "its cautious optimism that America may be witnessing a leveling-off of the post-9/11 backlash against Americans of the Islamic faith."²

The optimism was premature.

In June 2010, picketers began to protest the construction of Park51, a Muslim community center in lower Manhattan, and the media was aflame with the controversy. By the end of August, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, very real flames licked at the construction site of another Islamic center, courtesy of unknown vandals. It was only the latest in a series of attacks that included an attempted firebombing of an Islamic center in Florida in May and vandalism against

mosques in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Texas.³ Also over the summer, Florida pastor Terry Jones and his tiny fundamentalist flock decided to play with fire by vowing to burn copies of the Qur'an on the anniversary of 9/11. Concerned that this act of desecration would provoke attacks against U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq, President Barack Obama put pressure on the pastor to cancel the event.

The fearmongers employed other tactics that summer. Protesters brought in dogs because “Muslims hate dogs”—to demonstrate their opposition to a new mosque in Temecula, California.⁴ A group called Stop Islamization of America bought anti-Islamic ads on busses in San Francisco, Miami, and New York.⁵ Even in Oklahoma, where less than 1 percent of the population is Muslim, a movement coalesced around an improbable referendum to ban *sharia* (Islamic law) that passed decisively in the November mid-term elections.⁶

Meanwhile, public personalities were engaged in an informal competition to see who could make the most offensive comments about Islam. Presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich compared the organizers of the Park51 center to Nazis. Talk show host Rush Limbaugh called the interfaith center a “victory monument at Ground Zero.” Evangelist Franklin Graham repeatedly referred to Islam as an “evil” religion.⁷ When President Obama proclaimed at an *iftar* ceremony breaking the Ramadan fast that “Muslims have the same right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country,” former cold warrior Frank Gaffney responded that this remark proved that the president “sided with

shariah.”⁸ Indeed, the anti-Islamic sentiment bubbling up in the United States in 2010 was beginning to rival the anti-communist hysteria of the Cold War era, with figures like Gaffney indulging in the religious equivalent of red-baiting.

And it was having an impact on public opinion. The decline in unfavorable attitudes toward Islam made a sharp reversal that year.⁹ On August 19, 2010, *Time* devoted an article to whether “America has a Muslim problem.” By the end of the month, Islamophobia had graduated to the cover of the magazine.¹⁰

The situation was even uglier in Europe. Legislatures in Belgium, France, and Spain debated bills on restricting Muslim dress, which came on the heels of a move by Switzerland to ban minaret construction. Right-wing parties espousing anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic views were attracting wider followings. European publics simultaneously wanted to withdraw their troops from the allied war effort in Afghanistan and limit further European integration by keeping Turkey out of the European Union, and populists were exploiting these views to promote their own vision of Fortress Europe.

Islamophobia didn’t go away after 2010’s Summer of Hate. True, Park51 eventually opened a year later without any major incidents. But in other respects, the fury didn’t subside. Terry Jones followed through on his pledge, burning a Qur’an in March 2011 and generating a worldwide backlash that killed more than a dozen people.¹¹ Nearly two dozen states copied Oklahoma’s example by introducing anti-*sharia* legislation. Congress picked up on the

theme, with Rep. Peter King (R-NY) holding controversial hearings in March 2011 on the “radicalization” of American Muslims. Several Republican presidential candidates indulged in anti-Islamic sentiment, with Herman Cain going so far as to pledge not to appoint Muslims to office (a position he later recanted). Right-wing foundations were pouring more than \$40 million into anti-Islamic efforts.¹² And in Europe, anti-Islamic bestsellers, violent street protests, and even a mass killing in Norway all kept the fires of Islamophobia burning.

For some, the explanation for these anti-Islamic outbursts is simple. Americans and Europeans are still angry about 9/11 and the subsequent terrorist bombings in London and Madrid. They are still outraged over the 2004 murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan Muslim. They are fearful of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Gaza-based Hamas and the Beirut-based Hezbollah. They are concerned about the individuals who have instigated or planned recent attacks, including a shooting at Fort Hood in Texas, suicide bombings in Moscow and Stockholm, an attempt to explode a bomb in New York’s Times Square, and schemes to blow up the Washington DC metro and a Christmas ceremony in Portland, Oregon. The problem, for those who try to rationalize the anger in this way, lies with Muslims and their so-called penchant for violence.

Another simple explanation for the surge of Islamophobia in 2010 and after is the rise of the Tea Party move-

ment and its polarization of the electorate. The severe economic downturn following the financial crisis of 2008 allowed for the populism of resentment to flourish. The election of a president that nearly one-quarter of the U.S. electorate still falsely believed in August 2010 was Muslim provided a political opportunity for anti-Democratic Party activists to play the religion card.¹³ These same activists have intensified their efforts to discredit the president and his party in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections.

The mistaken belief that al-Qaeda and the Fort Hood shooter represent Islam and its more than 1.5 billion adherents worldwide has certainly played a role in maintaining high levels of fear and animosity in the United States and Europe.¹⁴ The anti-Islamic statements of politicians and the politically motivated organizing of far-right-wing activists have also strongly influenced media coverage and public opinion.

But anti-Islamic sentiment runs much deeper in Western culture and society. Rather than inhabiting only the lunatic fringe, Islamophobia is sustained by U.S. government policy, particularly its wars and counterterrorism efforts, and by analysts firmly in the mainstream. And it draws on myths and misconceptions that go back a thousand years and more. The hate that spiked in the summer of 2010 didn't come from nowhere.

The Geopolitical Context

The Middle East is embroiled in conflict. Islam is on the rise, yet again, and a new Islamic movement has emerged

in central Anatolia that challenges the established order. The West, divided by several different factions, is expending considerable resources on war in the region. Prominent Western voices warn of a Muslim take-over of Europe, of a violent attempt to create a global caliphate. Those of a more apocalyptic bent argue that the fate of Western civilization itself hangs in the balance.

Welcome to the twenty-first century? Actually, try the eleventh.

In 1095, in response to the Seljuk Turks seizing Jerusalem and other cities, Christendom launched its first Crusade against the Islamic world. More than half a dozen military campaigns followed over the next several hundred years in a conflict that defined not only the Middle Ages but the very contours of Western identity. This era of Crusade 1.0 lasted almost a thousand years until the fall of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey's subsequent abolition of the Islamic caliphate in 1924.

The wheel of history has circled around. Islam is again resurgent and again in the crosshairs of the West. We are now enmeshed in a second major confrontation, Crusade 2.0. The war in Afghanistan has already become America's longest military conflict. The other "overseas contingency operations" launched by the United States and its allies, which have replaced the "global war on terror," promise to last even longer and determine the shape of what has been called the post-post-Cold War era.

Today, as in the eleventh century, the West imagines that it's involved in a war without end and without borders,

a war of good against evil, a war that defines the very essence of civilization.

Although similar in important respects to the medieval holy war, Crusade 2.0 is not simply the Tenth Crusade.¹⁵ In 1095, there were no large populations of Muslims living in the West under Christian dominion, and the West did not shrink from declaring Islam the enemy. Today, by contrast, the U.S. government and its allies in Western Europe and elsewhere try not to mention the “c” word, at least in part because so many Muslims now live in the West. Alliance leaders instead insist that they are fighting terrorism, not Islam, and are committed to winning Muslim “hearts and minds” through military stabilization, economic development, democracy promotion, and public relations campaigns. Despite these efforts, however, many Muslims feel as though they are the victims of a coordinated campaign of air strikes from above and Islamophobic slurs from below.

For optimists, the U.S. election results of 2008 were supposed to bring this two-pronged campaign to an end. Newly elected President Barack Obama promised to draw down the war in Iraq. He pledged to close the Guantánamo detention facility and end torture. Within a few months in office, the Obama administration quietly retired the phrase “global war on terror,” and the president spoke in Cairo of reaching out in new ways to the Muslim world. Before it had even reached the ten-year mark, Crusade 2.0 looked to be heading for early retirement.

But the crusade marches on. The Obama administration has continued the wars started by its predecessor un-

der the new name of “overseas contingency operations.” Today, the United States and allies are still fighting wars in the predominantly Muslim countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. Under Obama, Special Forces operations have expanded to a broader swath of the Muslim world from North Africa to the Far East. His administration has launched eight times more CIA-directed drone attacks in Pakistan than its predecessor did over two terms.¹⁶ The targeted assassination program, which has killed Osama bin Laden and other top al-Qaeda leaders, has resulted in civilian casualties, popular outrage, and legal concerns. Although the administration has made much of a public diplomacy initiative to engage the Muslim world, U.S. favorability rating in most majority Muslim countries has only fallen further from its dismal levels during the Bush years. In Egypt, for instance, U.S. favorability fell from 30 percent in 2006 to 17 percent in 2010 and in Pakistan from 27 percent to 17 percent over the same period.¹⁷ Even U.S. support for the uprisings against authoritarian leaders in the Middle East in 2011—the Arab Spring that began in Tunisia and spread to Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere—has not fundamentally changed attitudes in the Muslim world. The United States only belatedly backed these democracy movements, and continued support for authoritarian leaders in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere has underscored the U.S. double standard on democracy in the region.

Within the United States, meanwhile, a vocal minority has successfully imposed its crusader mentality on a

credulous population. Some of the anti-Islamic sentiment has been partisan. According to an August 2010 *Newsweek* poll, a majority of Republicans believed that the president “definitely” or “probably” sympathized with Islamic fundamentalists and their goal to spread *sharia* law across the globe.¹⁸ But it’s not just Republicans. Two-thirds of the country confesses to being prejudiced about Muslims.¹⁹

This book is an attempt to understand the sources of this anti-Islamic sentiment. It will explore the enduring influence of the three unfinished wars of the last millennium—the Crusades, the Cold War, and the war on terrorism—on what we do and how we think in the West. These experiences have produced different types of Islamophobia in Europe and the United States. But the demographic anxiety of the former and the declining relative power of the latter have intersected to amplify the fear of Islam.

In the pages to follow, I argue that the new Crusaders are not primarily concerned about “Islamofascism” or however else they characterize the radical elements of Islam they dislike. The campaign that exploded in the headlines in summer 2010 and has continued to burn through society today has not been about terrorism. It has not been about Islamic extremists attempting to reestablish the caliphate or impose Islamic law on the unwilling. What really keeps Islamophobes up at night is the growing economic, political, and global influence of modern, mainstream Islam.

Consider the recent targets of anti-Islamic sentiment. Right-wing groups—and ultimately more mainstream organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League—singled

out a proposed Islamic center in lower Manhattan that is the brainchild of a proponent of interfaith dialogue. This, not a hotbed of radical Islam, stimulated their wrath. The Florida preacher and his followers announced their intention to burn not a book of Osama bin Laden's writings but the Qur'an itself. Liberal intellectual Paul Berman has devoted thousands of words to challenging the reputation of one of the foremost mainstream Muslim theologians, Tariq Ramadan, rather than one of the ideologists of al-Qaeda.

And the country that has caused the greatest fear and trembling in European capitals is not Saudi Arabia or Yemen. Rather, it is Turkey. Although it has moved decisively *away* from authoritarianism and *toward* liberal democracy under the leadership of an Islam-influenced political party, Turkey has become the *bête noire* of Islamophobes intent on "saving" Western civilization.

A New Crusade?

Crusade 1.0 was not a simple "clash of civilizations" between cross and crescent. Although religion certainly played a motivating factor, the Crusades were also about the more mundane objectives associated with war: power, territory, economic gain. These grubbier motives prompted Crusaders sometimes to attack other Christians and sometimes even to ally with Muslims for tactical reasons. But the *image* of the Crusade that comes down to us today is that of a concerted effort to save civilization from the infidel.

Our current crusade—Crusade 2.0—is similarly complicated. The United States has gone to war in defense of a

different professed faith, not Christianity but rather liberal democracy. But this professed faith also conceals less noble designs. Like the original Crusaders, the United States and its European partners have been concerned with geopolitical advantage in a strategically important area of the world. For the Crusaders, Jerusalem and its environs were an important pilgrimage site but also a vital trade route. Today's Crusaders have been more concerned about energy sources, whether the oil of Iraq or the natural gas pipelines that pass through Central Asia. To realize these more mundane goals, the West has made certain tactical alliances with actors in the Muslim world—the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, Sunni fighters in Iraq, and the illiberal governments of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Yemen. These Pentagon counterinsurgency efforts to partner with Muslim governments and Muslims on the ground often put the U.S. military at cross-purposes with Islamophobes. As *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich puts it, “How do you win Muslim hearts and minds in Kandahar when you are calling Muslims every filthy name in the book in New York?”²⁰

But few soldiers enlisted to fight in Afghanistan or Iraq to win Muslim hearts and minds or even to preserve Western access to oil and gas. To justify a war and to mobilize young people to fight, Western governments needed a flesh-and-blood enemy. Citizens would only tolerate a more paranoid national security state at home if it was arrayed against a major enemy in the neighborhood. The grander the war and the more intrusive the national security state, the more epic the enemy needed to be. Osama bin

Laden was not big enough. But bin Laden plus the Taliban plus Saddam Hussein plus Iran and Syria and Hamas and Hezbollah and radical imams in London, New York, and Hamburg raised the stakes considerably. To more closely approximate the world-historical enemies of the twentieth century—fascism and communism—the enemy had to pose a threat not just to territory but to civilization itself.

Like its medieval precursor, then, Crusade 2.0 has its paradoxes and complexities. But the *image* of Crusade 2.0—that of a liberal West battling unreasoning religious fanatics—has proven to be as enduring an ideological frame as the original “clash of civilizations” of the eleventh century.

The current conflicts between the United States and its allies on the one hand and so-called radical Islam on the other are not an inevitable outgrowth of earlier history. After all, with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the larger narrative of Islam versus the West largely disappeared in the nineteenth century. During the Cold War, as this book will explore in more detail, the United States and Israel actually sided with radical Islam against Arab nationalism. Perhaps more importantly, the religion of the parties arrayed against the United States is incidental, not essential. “The Iraqis have negative attitudes toward the United States because we are occupying their freaking land,” Iraqi-born blogger Raed Jarrar told me, “not because they are majority Muslim and we are majority Christian.”²¹

In other words, we are experiencing a clash of civilizations not on the ground but only in the violent jihadist

visions of warriors in the wild East and wild West. Islamophobes and the al-Qaeda leadership, like gunslingers in a terrorized town, share an apocalyptic vision and a preference for illegal violence that keeps Crusade 2.0 alive. “No negotiations, no conferences and no dialogues”—this slogan of Abdullah al-Azzam, Osama bin Laden’s mentor, could apply equally to both sides.²²

What is Islamophobia?

With their irrational fear of spiders, arachnophobes are scared of both harmless daddy longlegs and poisonous brown recluse spiders. In extreme cases, an arachnophobe can break out in a sweat while merely looking at photos of spiders. It is, of course, reasonable to steer clear of poisonous varieties like black widows. What makes a legitimate fear into an irrational phobia, however, is the tendency to lump all members of a group, spiders or humans, into one lethal category and then to exaggerate how threatening they are. Spider bites, after all, are responsible for at most a handful of fatalities a year in the United States.

Islamophobia, a term coined by a French Orientalist Etienne Dinet in 1922 and made popular by the London-based Runnymede Trust in a 1997 report, is similarly an irrational fear of Islam.²³ Yes, certain Muslim fundamentalists have carried out terrorist attacks, certain extremists inspired by visions of a “global caliphate” continue to plot new attacks on their perceived enemies, and certain groups like Afghanistan’s Taliban practice violently intolerant versions of the religion. But Islamophobes confuse these small

parts with the whole and then see terrorist *jihad* under every Islamic pillow. They break out in a sweat at the mere picture of a minaret or *imam*.

“Islamophobia” is an imprecise term. Most arachnophobes avoid spiders, they don’t declare war on them. What we see today in the media, at right-wing demonstrations outside of mosques, and in European legislation goes beyond fear of Islam and extends into anger and even hatred. Run-of-the-mill Islamophobes may well simply want to steer clear of Muslims. The organizers of the campaigns have a different, more Crusader-like agenda.

Some try to qualify their Islamophobia. “What I am is an Islamismphobe, or better say an anti-Islamist,” writes novelist Martin Amis, “because a phobia is an irrational fear, and it is not irrational to fear something that says it wants to kill you.”²⁴ But as this book will argue, much of the sentiment directed specifically at “Islamism” is ultimately meant for Islam as a whole. In an interview, Amis acknowledged that his animus is not just toward extremists. “The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order,” he said in 2006. “Not letting them travel. Deportation further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms. Strip-searching people who look like they’re from the Middle East or Pakistan.”²⁵ Amis seems to have forgotten the fact that the Muslim community has vigorously and repeatedly denounced terrorism. Meanwhile, blaming an entire community for the actions of a miniscule minority is unconscionable. Imagine the outcry if Amis made the same statement about the Irish after an IRA bombing.

Other writers do not even try to disguise the real target of their attacks. In her book *A God Who Hates*, Syria-born psychiatrist Wafa Sultan writes of the “evils of Islam,” which is not a religion but a “political doctrine that imposes itself by force.”²⁶ In *The Trouble with Islam*, journalist Irshad Manji, echoing the Cold War with her description of herself as a “Muslim refusenik,” criticizes the “desert mindset” of Islam.²⁷ Nonie Darwish, an Egyptian-American convert to Christianity, calls Islam “an attack on civilization itself by haters of civilization” in *Now They Call Me Infidel*.²⁸ These are not screeds published on blogs. All three books have mainstream publishers, and their authors have appeared widely in the media. Using these Muslims and ex-Muslims as their spokespeople, a well-funded network of activists, journalists, and think-tankers has turned Islamophobia into a cottage industry and a budding trans-Atlantic endeavor.

This anti-Islamic sentiment that challenges the very center of Islam, not just its radical fringes, is an outgrowth of a profound cultural anxiety in the West. Our major geopolitical foe, the Soviet Union, disintegrated in the 1990s; our chief geo-economic competitor, China, is also the leading holder of U.S. debt. What’s left to serve as an enemy, then, is a new geo-cultural threat that challenges our “way of life.” As Columbia University professor Mahmood Mamdani explains, “It is no longer the market (capitalism), nor the state (democracy), but culture (modernity) that is said to be the dividing line between those in favor of a peaceful, civic existence and those inclined to terror.”²⁹

In other words, according to the Islamophobic worldview, while al-Qaeda poses a military threat and the Muslim Brotherhood a political threat, Islam as a whole threatens the West with a fundamentally cultural threat.

And it isn't simply "their" culture that is at fault. Islamophobes have also taken aim at "multiculturalism," which they believe has allowed radical Islam to slip in through the back door of "moral relativism" to gnaw away at Western civilization from within. Muslim extremists are a rare commodity in the West, so Islamophobes expend as much or more of their venom on the "liberal apologists" who wittingly or not open that back door to the adversary.³⁰ In the most extreme case in July 2011, right-wing fanatic Anders Behring Breivik took aim not at Norway's Muslim immigrants against which he had fulminated at length but the country's Labor Party for encouraging multiculturalism and immigration. Just as the actions of al-Qaeda and Hamas and Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are part of a struggle within Islam, Islamophobia is part of a culture war between right and left in the West.

Why This Book?

This book is not designed to introduce readers to Islam or argue for its merits as a religion.³¹ Personally I am not religious. Religious movements and figures have indeed generated many admirable causes—Gandhi and the independence struggle in India, Martin Luther King and the civil rights effort, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his nonviolent movement among Pashtuns.³² But religious movements

and figures have also produced violent, uncompromising ideological wars. All religious beliefs seem to produce extremists, and all religions have at one point or another gone to extremes. Islam is not inherently, eternally, or uniquely violent, any more than the “Judeo-Christian” tradition that sometimes has insisted it to be so. And Islam the religion is only one small part of what takes place in the Muslim world, as Edward Said reminds us, for this world “includes dozens of countries, societies, traditions, languages, and, of course, an infinite number of different experiences.”³³

In the end, attacks on Islam are as much of a challenge to civilization—human civilization—as the threat of extremists carrying the banner of Islam. This challenge embraces all of us, Muslims and non-Muslims, believers and non-believers. Non-Muslims ask Muslims to individually and collectively denounce 9/11 and other terrorist acts. Many Muslims have done so, repeatedly.³⁴ Non-Muslims must similarly step up to denounce Islamophobia.³⁵

Al-Qaeda is real, of course, and so is its desire to inflict harm—not only on the West but on anybody who doesn’t agree with its extreme ideology, which includes most of the world’s Muslims. By denouncing Islamophobia, we stand with the vast majority of the Muslim world against the intolerance of al-Qaeda, its anti-Semitism and its imperial aspirations. Both al-Qaeda and Islamophobes embrace reactive ideologies that are ultimately on the decline. These belief systems burn bright even as they burn out. But they can both cause great damage as they exit history.

This book tells a different story about the relationship

between Islam and the rest of the world. It focuses on the United States and Europe where Crusade 2.0 rages most fiercely (though a similar book could trace these themes in South Asia, Africa, and the Far East). It is not just a description, however. It is an argument for a new way of engagement animated by genuine respect rather than pallid tolerance. War, division, and isolation are the tactics of Crusade 2.0. We can't effectively counter the ideology of al-Qaeda by adopting the tactics of al-Qaeda. Nor will a "separate but equal" ethos suffice. We need to engage Islam in a post-Crusade, post-Cold War, and post-war-on-terror manner.

We are at a critical juncture. After the polarizing policies of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the United States and Europe can fundamentally redefine their relationship with the Muslim world. This will require not only ending the "war on terror" and not just nipping a new cold war against Islam in the bud. It will require an end to the thousand-year hold that the Crusades have had on the Western imagination.

We are at the very beginning of Crusade 2.0, and it has already had a devastating impact in lives lost and historic opportunities squandered. But we are not doomed to repeat history. We can stop the policies of occupation that have produced such a powerful backlash. We can stop asserting a mythic "Judeo-Christian" tradition that deliberately excludes Islam. And we can stop the artificial division of "us" and "them" by bringing Turkey into the European Union and reaffirming that Europe is a home to Muslims as well.

Islamophobia is not an eternal prejudice that has somehow become a fixed part of the social genome of humanity. The sentiment has waxed and waned over time depending on very particular political projects. By shifting our current political trajectory in the three ways I discuss in this book's conclusion, we can bring Crusade 2.0 to a close. And we can ensure that no further crusades will follow.

ONE

The Myths of Crusade 1.0

The Muslims were bloodthirsty and treacherous. They conducted a sneak attack against Charlemagne's army and slaughtered every single soldier, 20,000 in all. More than a thousand years ago, in the mountain passes of medieval Spain, the Muslim horde cut down the finest soldiers in the Holy Roman Emperor's command, including his brave nephew Roland. Then, according to the famous poem that immortalized the tragedy, Charlemagne exacted his revenge by routing the entire Muslim army.

The *Song of Roland*, an eleventh-century rendering in verse of an eighth-century battle, is a staple of Western Civilization classes at colleges around the country. A "masterpiece of epic drama," in the words of its renowned translator Dorothy Sayers, it provides a handy preface for students before they delve into readings on the Crusades.¹ But the poem has also schooled generations of Judeo-Christians to view Muslims as perfidious enemies who once threatened the very foundations of Western civilization.

The problem is that the whole epic is built on a curious falsehood. The army that fell upon Roland and his

Frankish soldiers was not Muslim at all. In the real battle of 778, the slayers of the Franks were Christian Basques furious at Charlemagne for pillaging their city of Pamplona. Not epic at all, the battle emerged from a parochial dispute in the complex wars of medieval Spain.² The Franks were indeed battling Muslim armies in Iberia, but it wasn't a holy war and Charlemagne maintained rather good relations with his counterpart in Baghdad.³ The *Song of Roland* excised the Basque soldiers from history and conflated the complex politics into something far simpler.⁴ Later in the eleventh century, as kings and popes and knights and peasants all prepared to do battle in the First Crusade, an anonymous bard did a final repurposing of the text to serve the needs of an emerging cross-against-crescent holy war.

Today, the Crusades are often portrayed as the archetypal “clash of civilizations” between the followers of Jesus and the followers of Mohammed. In the popular imagination, a Muslim horde bent on swallowing Jerusalem and its environs as an appetizer before proceeding to the European entrée has replaced the very diverse adversaries of the Crusaders. These adversaries included Jews killed in pogroms on the way to Jerusalem, rival Catholics slaughtered in the Balkans and in Constantinople, and Christian heretics hunted down in southern France. In medieval Palestine, the Crusaders also fought against both the Christians and the Jews of the region who often took the side of their Muslim compatriots. Just as Charlemagne's attempt to capture the Moorish Iberian provinces of al-Andalus was more than a simple contest between Christians on one side

and Muslims on the other, the Crusades were a truly Byzantine contest of shifting political and religious alliances.

Throughout history, warring parties have turned complicated and often contradictory conflicts into Manichean struggles—to motivate soldiers, open the purse strings of financial backers, and ennoble the otherwise bloodthirsty. No medieval poet was going to feel a stirring in the blood to versify an attack by the Basques. No Crusader was going to sell his property to buy armor and a horse simply to conduct a pogrom against Jews in the nearby village. And the U.S. Congress was not going to authorize an attack against Saddam Hussein in 2003 simply because he was a nasty piece of work. In all three cases, the threat posed by a presumably predatory Islam in al-Andalus, in Jerusalem, and in Baghdad's imagined alliance with al-Qaeda kicked the conflict up several notches.

Similar mythmaking has continued into the Obama era with the transformation of Islam into a violent caricature of itself. We seem to be fixed in a perpetual eleventh-century battle of “us” against “them.” Indeed, we still seem to be fighting the three great wars of the millennium, even though two of these conflicts have long been over and the third has been rhetorically reduced to “overseas contingency operations.” The Crusades, which finally petered out in the fourteenth century, continue to shape our global imagination today. The Cold War ended in 1991, but key elements of the anticommunism credo have been awkwardly grafted onto the new Islamist adversary. And the global war on terror, which President Obama quietly

renamed shortly after taking office, has in fact metastasized into the wars that his administration continues to prosecute in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and elsewhere.

As long as our unfinished wars still burn in the collective consciousness—and still rage in Kabul, Sana'a, and the Tribal Areas of Pakistan—Islamophobia will make its impact felt in our media, politics, and daily life. The first set of Crusades pitted a frankly barbaric set of Europeans against a more advanced Islamic civilization and prevented a much more peaceable interrelationship from developing. Crusade 2.0 threatens to create an equally dangerous rift that will continue to consume many lives, waste much wealth, and distort our very understanding of our Western selves.

The Enduring Myths of the Crusades

Phobias have deep roots. The fear that arachnophobes have of spiders often stems from events in a dimly remembered childhood, such as a spider crawling into a crib or dangling above a bowl of curds and whey. Our irrational fear of Islam similarly seems to derive from events that happened in the early days of Western civilization. Several enduring myths inherited from the era of the Crusades constitute the core of Islamophobia today: Muslims are inherently violent, Muslims want to take over the world, and Muslims can't be trusted. These myths have been nurtured by some of the most prominent figures in the Western tradition. Marco Polo, who had praise for virtually everything he saw on his thirteenth-century travels eastward including the ruthless Kublai Khan, reserved harsh words only for

“the accursed sect of the Saracens, which indulge them in the commission of every crime, and allow them to murder those who differ from them on points of faith.”⁵ Voltaire, a leading figure of the Enlightenment, wrote a five-act play in 1736 entitled *Fanaticism, or Mahomet the Prophet*. Even the sober German sociologist Max Weber considered Islam a “warrior religion.”⁶ These are deeply entrenched myths, indeed.

It doesn't take a psychologist to realize that the characteristics ascribed to the devilish Muslim are precisely the ones that the finger-pointers, at some subconscious level, suspect apply to their sainted selves. After all, the violence of the Crusaders was legendary. Nor were the pope and his legions shy about their desire to spread Christendom to every corner of the globe. And the tendency of Crusaders to go back on their word created a deep impression on the Muslim world. The same mirror phenomenon applies today as well. Our modern-day Crusaders deploy extraordinary violence in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have promoted global campaigns on behalf of democracy, liberalism, or Christianity, and have lied to the public, for instance, about Saddam Hussein's nuclear program and his connections to al-Qaeda.

Analyzing these Crusader myths is not only an exercise in historical truth-telling. It is a crucial step in weaning the West off its current delusions. As all recovery programs insist, moving on can't happen without an acknowledgment of addiction. And we've been dangerously addicted to these myths about Islam and Muslims.