Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on Iraq as an example of ignorance driving foreign policy

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE OF IMAMAT SPEECHES, INTERVIEWS AND WRITINGS,

Don Cayo: You’ve become in many ways a bridge between the Muslim and the non-Muslim world. Can we talk about the relationships between those two large groups, and the difficulties and the prospects for improvement?

Aga Khan: I think there are real prospects for improvement. But I think it's a question of the two groups knowing each other better than they do at the present time, because if you don't know the people you’re talking to and you don't really understand the forces that are at play you cannot predict. You cannot look for areas of dialogue, and you cannot avoid areas where dialogue becomes impossible. So I think the first issue is what I would call the gulf or the crisis of ignorance, the clash of ignorance.

This ignorance is a source of very, very serious problems.

You can see it in Iraq. Frankly, much of the post-invasion of Iraq, many of the issues, were entirely predictable, Hundreds, if not thousands, of Muslim leaders would have told the Western world exactly what to expect when Saddam Hussein was eliminated. That's the sort of situation where predictability is absolutely critical. Because the single step of eliminating a regime is one thing, but then you live with the consequences. And you really have to think through very carefully the consequences of doing a thing like that. Certainly, from my point of view, that was a big, big, big failure.

So I would say the first thing is to understand the complexities of the Muslim world. The individualities of the communities in the Muslim world. The differences of interpretation of faith in the Muslim world. The relationship between faith and state, which is very, very sensitive in the Muslim world and where you see many, many formulae today which you
no longer know in the Western world. Those formulae aren't present in the Western world any more -- that's gone -- [but] they're still very present in the Islamic world.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Vancouver Sun Interview with Don Cayo (Vancouver, Canada)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9087/

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"The question I have is this: if these breakdowns in governance were predictable, why was the international community powerless to get engaged at the early stages to help arrest the deterioration and avoid the suffering that resulted? ...

"I suggest to you that a major problem is that the industrialised world too often is severely lacking in credible information about the forces at play in the developing world.... I am convinced that many of today's problems could have been avoided if there had been better understanding and more serious dialogue between the two.

"The issue of ignorance, or lack of solid information, and its impact on our world today, is illustrated by events in Iraq. No less deplorable is that the 9/11 attack on the United States was a direct consequence of the international community ignoring the human tragedy that was Afghanistan at that time. Both the Afghan and Iraqi situations were driven by lack of precise information and understanding.

"My fundamental point is this: since the collapse of the Cold War, the need has grown exponentially for the world's leaders to be able to understand, and properly predict, what is likely to happen in parts of the world in which they previously had no reason to be involved. The task of addressing this need cannot be met by the resources presently being engaged. I note that Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Petersen, spoke of this very problem just last week in Beijing. He called for the international community to provide assistance in governance for fragile states that is, and I quote: 'more systematic, more strategic, more persevering and more reliable.' My suggestion is to examine this question in depth."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 Keynote Address to the Nobel Institute's Seminar (Oslo, Norway)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7255/
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan explains the Clash of Ignorance: foreign policy compromised by ignorance and no foresight

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