

Spring 4-26-2012

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The Great Orientalist Bernard Lewis

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Spring 2012

Among the most highly-praised Western scholars on historical and contemporary religious and cultural issues in the Middle East has been British-American Professor Bernard Lewis, whose relatively recent works include *New York Times* bestseller *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* and national bestseller *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*. In *What Went Wrong?* Lewis highlights the deterioration of scientific discovery in the Muslim world as it occurred with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of Western intellectualism and the Enlightenment as it occurred with the rise of the European empires, and the subsequent failure of the Islamic world to modernize at the same rate as the West technologically, intellectually, and economically, allowing the West to hold dominance over the rest of the world in these aspects. In *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, Lewis discusses the causes and historical roots of anti-Western sentiments carried by today's radical Islamic groups and how these sentiments pertain to several problems prevalent in the Middle East and the Islamic world, such as poverty, economic imbalance, and oppressive, often Western-backed, rulers. The two writings convey information in an eloquent and scholarly manner, complete with citations of Ottoman sources, traditional Islamic narrations, and Quranic verses, so much so that some critics have named Lewis "the world's foremost scholar of Islam"²⁴.

Unfortunately, *The Crisis of Islam* and *What Went Wrong?* may not possess the amount of scholarly accuracy and objectivity that Lewis's eloquence and neat, formal citations would imply. A critical reading of the two works by anyone with an objective background on the history of the Middle East, its historical relationship with the West, and the various beliefs of the Muslim world reveals several flaws and fallacies in Lewis's books and puts to doubt the author's objectivity on several issues discussed in them. Examples of such facts and issues whose

accuracy and objectivity in the books are put into question include the views of Ottoman officials on learning from the West and whether this should be considered to be an unheard-of or inconceivable idea at the time, Lewis's statement that the "formative first generation of Muslims" suffered no persecution by a hostile state power, the views and statements of Ayatollah Khomeini on various issues, especially those pertaining to women's rights, and Lewis's views on the roles that the United States played in the Middle East following World War II. This critique aims to prove to readers that Orientalists do not always supply the most accurate information concerning their area of study, the Middle East, and that any seeker of the truth concerning the way Middle Easterners and their history are viewed today should look to reliable Middle Eastern historical sources in order to acquire the most objective understanding concerning these issues.

One of the objectionable claims made by Bernard Lewis in his book *What Went Wrong?* occurs when he attempts to attribute the fact that Ottoman scholars explain the "extraordinary deference given to women in Christendom" with the theory that women in Christendom are "respected out of love for Mother Mary". Lewis goes on to state that this theory "should not be dismissed as absurd", explaining that one should bear in mind that "according to Islamic tradition, the Trinity, worship of which Islam condemns as near-polytheistic blasphemy, consisted of God, Jesus, and Mary", and following this statement with a citation of Chapter 5 Verse 119 of the Quran, where Jesus rejects the idea of the Trinity, shown in an answer to a question from God: "Did you tell people: 'Worship me and my mother as gods apart from God?'"', to which Jesus replies with "unequivocal denial"²⁵.

Firstly, the Quranic verse that Lewis attempted to cite was Verse 116 of Chapter 5 and not Verse 119², and whether this mistake was due to a typographical error is irrelevant,

nevertheless, Verse 116 is often cited by Christians who attempt to refute the Quran as a book written by Prophet Mohammad rather than the revelation of God¹. If we, for the sake of argument, assume that this idea is indeed correct and that Prophet Mohammad simply wrote about what he perceived as true as he spread his religion through the Arabian Peninsula; that Christians believed in the Virgin Mary as the third member of the Trinity, does the fact remain that this belief was a misconception? One only has to look at the historical beliefs of the Christians of Arabia to know that this so-called misconception was not entirely unfounded. Apart from the Ghassanids who rejected the Trinity doctrine of the Nicene Council⁶, there existed other sects and movements in Christianity that propagated beliefs different from those of orthodox Christianity, such as the Collyridian sect, who preached the belief that the Virgin Mary was to be worshipped as a goddess and that offerings were to be made to her. In fact, there existed a group at the Nicene Council who held this belief in the divinity of the Virgin Mary, and who said that Jesus and Mary were two gods besides God the Father, earning the name "Marianites"¹⁴. Therefore, at some point in time and at some location, there existed groups of Christians who held the belief in the divinity of the Virgin Mary or that she was part of the Trinity, and thus to say that Prophet Mohammad was wrong in his alleged assumption would be incorrect. One may also make the observation that statues and images of Jesus Christ and his mother the Virgin Mary can be found and are venerated in most Orthodox and Catholic churches as sacred statues. It can also be observed that the congregations at these churches venerate Jesus Christ as God the Son and his mother Mary as the Mother of God, and that these Catholic and Orthodox congregations form the majority of Christians in the world. However, in these very churches, an image or statue of the Holy Spirit for congregations to venerate has not been established¹⁸.

If one, however, assumes that the Quran is indeed divine revelation and not the writing or invention of Prophet Mohammad, it follows that the very words that create the form of the verses are eloquent statements from God and that they accept neither addition nor substitution, as the verses already portray the teachings of God perfectly as they were meant to be portrayed. With this idea, one can read Chapter 4 Verse 171 of the Quran: “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion, nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not ‘Trinity’ (in another translation, “Say not ‘Three’”¹): desist. It will be better for you: For Allah is One God: Glory be to Him: (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs”². The verse is addressed to the “People of the Book”, in context an obvious reference to the Christians, and it describes Jesus Christ as the son of the Virgin Mary and a creation and apostle of God, and not the son of God. It also denounces the Christian belief in the Trinity explicitly with the word “Trinity” in some translations and “Three” in others. If one returns to the original verse in dispute (Chapter 5 Verse 116), it can be observed that the verse mentions the worship of Jesus and his mother Mary alongside God, but also that there is no explicit mention of a Trinity or a “Three”. It can also be observed that in the second verse cited (Chapter 4 Verse 171), Mary is mentioned only as the mother of the apostle Jesus, and the Trinity mentioned in the verse does not relate to her mention in any way. This is because the verse in dispute is not referring to the worship of God as three, but the worship of Jesus as the son of God and the worship of Mary as the mother of God, a doctrine followed by the majority of ancient and modern Christians, although the worship of

Mary as the mother of God was abandoned by the Protestants, who form a minority when compared to the Catholic and Orthodox majority worldwide¹⁸.

Following these arguments, Lewis's claim that "according to Islamic tradition, the Trinity... consisted of God, Jesus, and Mary" can be said to be founded on either incomplete interpretation or blatant misinterpretation that possibly caters to the Western Christian majority who may use the claim in attempt to refute Islam and the Quran rather than learn more about them, and therefore it is a claim of questionable objectivity that should not have been made in a supposedly objective historical work.

More objectionable claims by Bernard Lewis in his work *What Went Wrong?* occur when he speaks of the "most profound single difference" between Islamic and Western civilizations to be the "status of women", stating that "according to Islamic law and tradition, there were three groups of people who did not benefit from the general Muslim principle of legal and religious equality – unbelievers, slaves, and women", with women being the "worst-placed of the three", since "the slave could be freed by his master; the unbeliever could at any time become a believer by his own choice, and thus end his inferiority", but "only the woman was doomed forever to remain what she was". He goes on to tell of the struggle for women's rights in the Islamic world and how these efforts were targeted by "different schools of the militant Islamic revival. The Ayatollah Khomeini, in particular, gave it a prominent place in his indictment of the misdeeds of the shah and the crimes of his regime. From a traditional point of view, the emancipation of women – specifically, allowing them to reveal their faces, their arms, and their legs, and to mingle socially in the school or the workplace with men – is an incitement to immorality and promiscuity, and a deadly blow to the very heart of Islamic society"²⁵.

The wording that Lewis uses in these excerpts seems all too similar to the Orientalist stereotype of Muslim women where they are forced by their husbands and families to cover themselves fully from head to toe, including the face, and are only allowed to do what male members of their households tell them to do, playing a subordinate role to men of their society. This is not to say that this stereotype is entirely unfounded; unfortunately, this image is all too familiar in the minds of Westerners, as they have seen it not only in the works of Orientalists but also in real life, mostly due to the efforts of a certain oil-rich kingdom on the Persian Gulf that claims to rule by the laws of Islamic *Sharia*. Concerning the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it is a state that gained power and continues to maintain control over its citizens through the use and empowerment of the Wahhabi ideology originated in the 18th Century by the theologian Mohammad ibn Abdul Wahhab of Najd. Although the followers of the Wahhabi ideology form a minority in the international Muslim community, the thoughts and practices of the Wahhabi school of thought are publicized by Western media as traditional Islam much more than the thoughts and practices of the major, more traditional schools of thought, making the Wahhabis a very loud and prominent minority.

Unlike Saudi Islamic laws, which Egyptian scholar Mohammad Al-Ghazali is said to have described as “based on a Bedouin jurisprudence and as such can only offer a puerile understanding of creed and law”¹⁰, traditional Islam granted women rights beyond those afforded to Christian and Jewish women at the dawn of Islam. In pre-Islamic Arabia, women could “neither own property nor inherit it from their husbands”, in fact they themselves were considered property, and both a wife and “her dowry would be inherited by the male heir of her deceased husband”, and if the male heir was not interested in the widow, he could hand her over to a brother or relative “who could then marry her and take control of her dead husband’s

property”, but if the widow is too old to remarry, ownership of herself and her dowry returns to her clan⁶.

The advent of Islam brought with it efforts by Mohammad to provide women with some degree of equality and social independence by changing the traditional laws of inheritance and marriage and by removing “obstacles that prohibited women from inheriting and maintaining their own wealth”⁶. For the first time, women were given the right to keep their dowries as their own personal property and also the right to inherit property belonging to their husbands. Husbands were forbidden from using their wives’ dowries and were forced to use their own wealth to provide for their families, as evidenced in Chapter 4 Verse 34 of the Quran: “Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions. And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has [ordained to be] guarded. And as for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them (in another translation, “talk to them suavely; then leave them alone in bed [without molesting them] and go to bed with them [when they are willing]”⁶); and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great!”⁵

For the sake of clarification, the Arabic word “*adribuhunna*” which appears in the verse can be translated to “beat them”, “turn away from them”, “go along with them”, and even “have consensual intercourse with them”, depending on the translator’s interpretation⁶. If one chooses to follow the more widely used translation, “beat them”, they should be aware that many prominent Muslim scholars, including Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Da’ud, Nasa’i, Ibn Majah, Tabari, and Razi, agree that this “beating”, if it is resorted to at all, should be only symbolic and only for

the purpose of admonishment, to the extent that Tabari quotes early scholars to have said “with a toothbrush, or some such thing” and Razi quotes them to have said “with a folded handkerchief”, and if this beating leaves so much as a red mark on the woman’s body, she is entitled to report her husband to a jurist who would have him penalized for abuse⁵. The verse gives men authority of the women of their respective families only in issues where men are proven to be more able to conduct and for which men have had a higher affinity, such as judiciary affairs. According to the traditional explanation of this verse, a man has no authority or control over “the independence of a woman in her individual will and activities; she decides what she wants and acts as she wishes, and [he] has no right to interfere in any way – except when she intends to do something unlawful”, which is where the measures of admonishment mentioned earlier come into play. The purpose of the beginning of the verse is to maintain that the husband, as head of the household, must spend his wealth to support his wife and children³⁴.

This also includes wealth acquired from inheritance; although individual male heirs receive a larger portion of the inheritance than female heirs, as evidenced by the first portion of Chapter 4 Verse 11 of the Quran: “Concerning [the inheritance of] your children, God enjoins [this] upon you: the male shall have the equal of two females’ share; but if there are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what [their parents] leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one-half thereof...”⁵, this is only due to the fact that the male has the responsibility to spend his wealth to support his family, possibly including the female heirs, while the female heir is free to take her share of the inheritance and spend it on whatever she wishes. What is also noteworthy concerning this verse is the wording of “the male shall have the equal of two females’ share” rather than “the female shall have the equal of half of a male’s share” in both the translation and in the original Arabic text, in that it elevates the status of

women by treating their share the “yardstick”, so to speak, by which the share of the male heir is measured, and this trend of describing the inheritance of a male in relation to a female share is continued in the verses that follow³⁴.

As for the claim that traditional Islam in general and Ayatollah Khomeini in specific view “the emancipation of women – specifically, allowing them to reveal their faces, their arms, and their legs, and to mingle socially in the school or the workplace with men – is an incitement to immorality and promiscuity, and a deadly blow to the very heart of Islamic society”, one only has to examine the writings and declarations of Ayatollah Khomeini pertaining to the rights and responsibilities of women to see that it is unfounded and untrue. When asked about what a return to Quranic laws mean for women in the current Islamic Republic of Iran, Khomeini responded by saying that in an Islamic system, “women, in their role as human beings, can work alongside men to establish Islamic society, but not if they wish to act as mere objects. Women do not have the right to lower themselves to such a level, nor do men have the right to think of them as such”²¹. In an address made by Khomeini on March 6, 1979, to a group of women in Qum, Iran, Khomeini first praises the efforts the women made in revolting against the Pahlavi regime, stating that “in our revolutionary movement, women have likewise earned more credit than men”, even while they “fought shoulder-to-shoulder with the men, or even in front of them”, since it was “the women who not only displayed courage themselves, but also had reared men of courage”, and then concludes by explaining important rights of women in an Islamic system, specifically that, before a marriage contract is signed, the woman can “stipulate that if her husband turns out to be of corrupt moral character or if he mistreats her, she would possess the right to execute a divorce”, contrary to traditional Middle Eastern practice where only the husband holds divorce execution rights, and that once the husband accepts such a stipulation, “he

can never repudiate it”²⁰. Concerning women’s right to vote in the Islamic Republic, Khomeini is quoted to have said “I advise both men and women who are of legal voting age to take part in these election and vote for any of the candidates they wish. Participate they must”²¹, and concerning the rights of women to interact with men in either social or professional environments, Khomeini is quoted to have said in an interview with German reporters in Paris on November 12, 1978, “in the Islamic Republic women have complete freedom in their education, in everything that they do, just as men are free in everything”²⁶.

It is obvious from the quotes above that Ayatollah Khomeini was not against the freedoms given to women by the religion of Islam, as Lewis implied with his claim. However, there still remains the issue of women exposing their faces, arms, and legs in Muslim society. There are verses in the Quran describing modest dress for women and most noteworthy among them are Chapter 33 Verse 59: “O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons [when abroad]: that is most convenient, that they should be known [as such] and not molested. And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful”², and Chapter 24 Verse 31: “and say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what [must ordinarily] appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, (the list goes on)...; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! Turn ye all together towards God, that ye may attain Bliss”². As can be seen from the description given in the two verses, women are required to cover their bodies with an “outer garment”, called a “*jilbaab*” in Arabic, and must extend the veil that already covers their head so that it also covers the chest and neck area. There

is no mention of the veiling or covering of the face, as is customary in Saudi Islamic law, and many Islamic scholars, including Ayatollah Khomeini, agree that a woman's face remains uncovered when she wears the veil, or *hijab*. Many Islamic scholars also agree that the wearing of the hijab cannot be forced upon a woman and that it is up to them woman to do it of her own free will, as expressed by Khomeini in a 1978 interview with The Guardian newspaper in Paris, "women are free in the Islamic Republic in the selection of their activities and their future and their clothing"²⁶.

As for Lewis defining the public revealing of women's arms and legs as modernization and "emancipation", it must be stressed that the hijab was introduced to Islam as a protective measure for women and as something that helps women in elevating their status and keeping their dignity. The hijab was designed to protect women from being viewed by men and society in general as sexual objects, as is common in this day and age, where the number of reports of women raped in the highly modernized country of France in 2009 was 10,277²⁷. It may be argued that a more effective measure of protection would be to allow women to reveal their bodies as is practiced in the modern West and to simply educate the public about civilized behavior and self-restraint, but this would be a somewhat weak argument, as a fairly recent scientific study has shown that when the male brain is exposed to images of women who reveal more of their bodies than would be considered modest, the areas of the brain associated with handling tools become active, showing that the brain involuntarily depersonalizes the woman into a sexual object as an evolutionary response to the need to procreate and spread genes²³.

If this is Lewis's idea of "emancipation" and modernization, where human beings are reduced to animals bent on procreation, and where a democratically elected female representative of parliament can be insulted from the floor of parliament, dismissed from her

position, and even stripped of her citizenship simply because she wore a headscarf while taking the oath of office, as did happen in 1998 to Merve Kavakci of the Turkish parliament⁶, then it shows how much Lewis cares for the rights and dignity and women. From an Islamic point of view, this is not emancipation, but slavery itself. Therefore, the claims made by Bernard Lewis concerning the legal quality of women in Islam and the opinions of traditional Islam and Ayatollah Khomeini on women's rights to social and professional lives can be ruled as ignorant, unfounded, and lacking in objectivity, and are claims that should not have been made in a supposedly objective book of history.

Another objectionable claim by Bernard Lewis in *What Went Wrong?* occurs when Lewis discusses attempts by the Ottoman Empire to keep up with new technology and techniques made available by their Christian rivals. He states that in the 18th Century, Western visitors arrived in the Ottoman Empire to teach Ottoman officials new techniques. According to Lewis, “for Muslims, first in Turkey and later elsewhere, this [type of arrangement] brought a shocking new idea – that one might learn from the previously despised infidel”. He later goes even further with this claim when he describes the way the Ottomans began sending students to study in Western countries, stating that “it is difficult for a Westerner to appreciate the magnitude of this change, in a society accustomed to despise the infidel barbarians beyond the frontiers of civilization. Even travelling abroad was suspect; the idea of studying under infidel teachers was inconceivable” and calling it a “radical change” where “the scientific current had broken against the dikes of literature and jurisprudence”²⁴.

A careful examination of the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad and major Islamic scholars and also of the Islamic historical narrations and traditions reveals that the idea of learning from the “despised infidel”, by which Lewis refers to a non-Muslim, was neither as

shocking nor as inconceivable as Lewis makes it out to be. The seeking of knowledge is an area that both the Quran and the Prophet Mohammad emphasized on many occasions. In fact, such emphasis is placed in the very first word of the very first verse revealed of the Quran, Chapter 96 Verse 1, which commands the Prophet, “Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created”²². Many traditions quote the Prophet Mohammad where he encouraged and his Muslim community to seek knowledge without specifying limitations on the people or locations that can be a source of knowledge, and a few of them are: “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave”; “the acquisition of knowledge is a duty incumbent on every Muslim, male and female”; “that person who shall pursue the path of knowledge, God will direct him to the path of Paradise”; “to listen to the words of the learned, and to instill into others the lessons of science, is better than religious exercises”³²; and “a word of wisdom is an item the believer pursues; anywhere he finds it, he is worthy of it”⁴. More specific to the seeking of knowledge from sources outside a Muslim environment, the Prophet is also narrated to have said “seek knowledge even as far as China”, which, at the time and arguably to this day, was considered a non-Muslim source even more distant from the society that the Prophet lived in than the Persian Empire, who were also considered pagans at the time. “Knowledge” in this narration is also more likely to be a reference to scientific rather than religious knowledge, as China was known to have deep knowledge in the fields of medicine and literature, as well as the making of paper and the use of gunpowder⁹.

In addition to the Prophet Mohammad, there are important figures in Islamic history who also emphasized the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom without limiting the source of knowledge, such as Mohammad’s cousin and son-in-law Ali bin Abu Talib, who is narrated to have said “acquire wisdom and truth from whomever you can because even an apostate can have them but unless they are passed over to a faithful Muslim and become part of wisdom and truth

that he possesses, they have a confused existence in the minds of apostates”, and “knowledge and wisdom are really the privilege of a faithful Muslim. If you have lost them, get them back even though you may have to get them from the apostates”¹⁶. The Imam Musa ibn Jafar, a highly influential scholar who died around 799 C.E. and was a descendant of both Prophet Mohammad and Ali bin Abu Talib, also remarked on the importance of the acquisition of knowledge no matter where the source, and is narrated to have said “speaking to a scholar even at a dump-site is better than speaking to an ignorant person at a best furnished palace”³.

One can also examine the events after the Battle of Badr to discover that learning from the non-Muslim was not a new idea at all by the 18th Century. 313 Muslims from Medina led by Prophet Mohammad fought against around 1000 pagans from Mecca led by the tribe of Quraysh. The Muslims suffered 14 casualties while 70 Meccans were killed and around 70 were captured. The Prophet is said to have consulted two of his companions concerning the fate of the prisoners; one of them recommended executing them, and the other recommended freeing them after the payment of a ransom. The Prophet decided to ransom the prisoners whose families were wealthy enough to pay the ransom, and released those belonging to poorer families under the condition that they each teach ten Muslims how to read and write. Those who were both poor and illiterate were set free without ransom³⁰.

Therefore, upon study of these traditions and historical narrations, it can be concluded that the claim that learning from the “infidel” in the 18th Century was a radically new and inconceivable idea for Muslims in the Ottoman Empire is utterly false, as Islam had already established the attainment of knowledge regardless of whether the source was inside or outside of Muslim society during the time of Prophet Mohammad himself and this practice continued even after the Prophet’s death.

Yet another objectionable claim by Bernard Lewis occurs in *The Crisis of Islam*, where Lewis attempts to compare the beginnings of Christianity and Islam, claiming that early Christians were, in a manner of speaking, a persecuted opposition party to the pagan Romans. “In pagan Rome”, Lewis states, “Caesar was God. For Christians, there is a choice between God and Caesar, and endless generations of Christians have been ensnared in that choice”. Meanwhile, when he speaks of Islam’s beginning, he states that “in Islam, there was no such painful choice. In the universal Islamic polity as conceived by Muslims, there is no Caesar but only God, who is the sole sovereign and the sole source of law. Muhammad was His Prophet, who during his lifetime both taught and ruled on God’s behalf”. Lewis culminates the idea with the statement that, as opposed to what occurred at the beginning of Christianity, “for the formative first generation of Muslims, whose adventures are the sacred history of Islam, there was no protracted testing by persecution, no tradition of resistance to a hostile state power. On the contrary, the state that ruled them was that of Islam, and God’s approval of their cause was made clear to them in the form of victory and empire in this world”²⁴.

If, by “formative first generation of Muslims”, Lewis meant the Prophet Mohammad and his companions who began spreading Islam in Mecca then moved to Medina, then this claim not only puts to doubt the credibility of Bernard Lewis as an expert on Islam but also the credibility of critics who would praise him and call him “the world’s foremost scholar of Islam”. It does not take a scholar to read any work on the history of Islam and learn that the very first generation of Muslims did in fact suffer persecution because of their beliefs at the hands of the dominant force in the region at the time, the powerful Meccans of Quraysh. When Prophet Mohammad began to preach his religion, the leaders of Quraysh recognized it not only as a challenge to the religious beliefs held by the Meccans at the time, but also as a challenge to the social customs of Mecca,

and warned the Prophet's uncle Abu Talib that they will fight Mohammad until he ceases his message, and offered that if Mohammad sought leadership or wealth through this new religion they would grant them to him once he has desisted, to which the Prophet made his famous reply "I swear by God, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on condition that I abandon this course before He has made it victorious, or I have perished therein, I would not abandon it"²⁸. At this point, the Prophet and his followers became subject to persecution from the people of Mecca. The Quraysh prevented the Prophet and his followers from praying at the Kaaba; the Prophet and his companions were pursued and covered with dirt and filth, and the places they frequented for prayer and meditation had thorns scattered in them by the Meccans¹⁷. Notable among the Quraysh leaders for his persecution of the Prophet was Abu Hakam ("Father of Wisdom"), whose venomous attitude toward the Prophet and his followers resulted in his name being changed to Abu Jahl ("Father of Ignorance") in traditional Islamic narrations²⁸. In fact, Abu Jahl was known to be involved in the torture and death of Islam's first martyr, Sumayya bint Khubbat, the mother of the renowned companion of Prophet Mohammad, Ammar bin Yasir, and to whom the Prophet himself had given tidings of Heaven³³.

Another of the famous stories of persecution of first-generation Muslims by the people of Quraysh was the story of Bilal, the Abyssinian slave of the tribal leader Umayya. It is reported that Umayya would "have Bilal dragged to the hot Arabian desert, where he would place large stone blocks on Bilal's chest and threaten to leave him there until Bilal renounced God and accepted the [pagan] goddesses Lat and Uzza. Bilal simply repeated: '*Ahad, Ahad*' ('One, One')"²⁸. When the persecution intensified, the Prophet Mohammad began sending small waves of his followers to Abyssinia, to be under the just and tolerant rule of the Christian king Al-Najashi, known to the West as Negus¹⁷. When Abu Talib continued to protect the Prophet, the

leaders of Quraysh decided to extend their punishment over the entirety of Abu Talib's clan, the Beni Hashim. A decree to boycott the Beni Hashim was hung on the Kaaba stating that the tribe of Quraysh will "renounce all intercourse with the children of Hashim – neither to buy nor sell, neither to marry nor to give in marriage, but to pursue them with implacable enmity, till they should deliver the person of Mohammad to the justice of the gods"¹⁴. As a result of this boycott, Prophet Mohammad's beloved wife, Khadija, who had spent all of her wealth in support of the new religion, and his uncle Abu Talib, who had sponsored and protected the Prophet since childhood, died within the same year, a year that the Prophet named "the Year of Sadness"²⁸. The Prophet resolved to move to the town of Taif in an attempt to gain some followers there, but he was received coldly by the tribe of Thaqif, the inhabitants of Taif who refused to hear his teachings and even drove him out of the town, and thus the Prophet returned to Mecca a month later¹⁷.

After the passage of some time, the Prophet Mohammad was approached by travelers from the city of Yathrib (modern-day Medina) who offered their allegiance to him and asked him to settle the hereditary tribal disputes between the tribes of Aws and Khazraj. The Prophet began to send waves of his followers to Yathrib and stayed behind until he was prepared to flee Mecca as well¹⁷. But even while he prepared to leave and conduct his famous Hijra, the leaders of Quraysh, led by Abu Sufyan, plotted the assassination of Mohammad by sending a member from each of the major tribes of Mecca so that each assassin may strike the Prophet in his bed, spreading the guilt of Mohammad's blood throughout the tribes and baffling any attempt at revenge by the Beni Hashim. The Prophet was somehow made aware of this plot, however, and escaped secretly at night while his cousin Ali bin Abu Talib lied in Mohammad's bed as a decoy, to the surprise of the Meccan assassins¹⁴. As a result of the failed assassination attempt, the

leaders of Quraysh placed a bounty of one hundred camels on the Prophet's head¹⁷. Even after successfully reaching the city of Yathrib, the Prophet had to fight three major battles against the Meccans of Quraysh: the Battle of Badr, where 313 Muslims defeated 1000 pagans; the Battle of Uhud, where the Prophet lost his beloved youngest uncle Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib; and the Battle of Khandaq, where the city of Yathrib itself was besieged by ten thousand pagans²⁸.

After signing the Treaty of Hudaibiya, which guaranteed that hostilities between Mecca and Yathrib would cease for ten years, the Prophet Mohammad began to gather great numbers of followers from the surrounding Arab and non-Arab tribes, but when the Quraysh violated the agreement by attacking a clan that was allied with the Muslims, the Prophet marched on the city of Mecca with ten thousand Muslims, conquering it with minimal resistance. It must be noted that this was the first time in seven years the Prophet set foot in his beloved hometown, since he was forced to flee to Yathrib during the Hijra as a result of his persecution by the Quraysh¹⁷.

After this brief study of early Islamic history, it can be seen as fairly obvious that the first generation Muslims did in fact face persecution by the people in power at the time, and that the religion did not simply succeed without any hardship or resistance. It can therefore also be concluded that Bernard Lewis's claim that the first generation of Muslims suffered no persecution or resistance by a hostile state power is utterly false and blatantly ill-informed, and can also be viewed as an attempt by Lewis to emotionally distance his Western Christian audience from the early Muslims by making this false claim in a comparison with how much early Christians suffered persecution under Roman rule. Both Christianity and Islam were religions that challenged the customs and practices of the societies they reached and the powers that governed them, and thus both religions faced a great deal of resistance and oppression before they succeeded and became widespread.

In *The Crisis of Islam*, Bernard Lewis also makes some objectionable claims concerning the reasons and extent of interference of the United States in the Middle East during and after the Cold War. While commenting on the collapse of the Soviet Union, which “left the United States as the sole world superpower”, Lewis states that “it seemed that the era of imperial rivalry had ended with the withdrawal of both rivals – the Soviet Union because it couldn’t, the United States because it wouldn’t play the imperial role”, and that events such as the wars of Saddam Hussein and the Iranian Revolution “forced the United States to involve itself more directly in the affairs of the region”, which Middle Easterners saw as a “a new phase in an old imperial game”, while Americans “did not, and showed that they had neither the desire nor the aptitude for an imperial role”²⁴.

The word “imperialism” is defined by the *Dictionary of Human Geography* as “the creation and/or maintenance of an unequal economic, cultural, and territorial relationship, usually between states and often in the form of an empire, based on domination and subordination”¹⁵. With this knowledge, one can examine the policies practiced by the United States in the Middle East during the Cold War. In July 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower received a report from the National Security Council titled “United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East”. Under the section “Objectives” is a list that includes the following: “availability to the United States and its allies of the resources, the strategic position, and the passage rights of the area and the denial of such resources and strategic positions to the Soviet bloc”, “stable, viable, friendly governments in the area, capable of withstanding communist-inspired subversion from within and willing to resist communist aggression”, and “prevention of the extension of Soviet influence in the area”, among other goals pertaining to reversing anti-American sentiments in the region and bringing peace between the Arabs and

Israel¹³. After reviewing the definition of imperialism and then reexamining the first two items listed in the report, a critical reader may judge for himself whether the guarantee of the availability of the resources of another state that is supposedly sovereign for the advantage of the United States and the disadvantage of the Soviet Union through the placement and maintenance of a government that may or may not be efficient or just in ruling its population, as long as it is friendly and expedient to the United States and resistant to communism, can be seen as imperial rule based on dominance or subordination.

If these theoretical policies are not enough to reveal the imperialist tendencies of the United States during the Cold War, the *coup d'état* that occurred in 1953 Iran can provide a more practical example. In 1951, nationalist Iranian politician Mohammad Mosaddeq gained the leadership of the Iranian parliament, the Majlis, as the country's new prime minister. Because the British had maintained absolute control over Iranian oil production since the concessions given to William D'Arcy in 1901, any attempt by the Iranian parliament to increase Iran's share of the profits were hindered. The Iranian assembly under the command of Mosaddeq therefore voted to nationalize Iran's oil resources and remove them from the control of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company¹⁹. This move by Mosaddeq was part of his nonalignment policy of "negative equilibrium", where the Iranian government would not take sides in the Cold War by a method very different from that of the Qajar dynasty, whose nonalignment policy consisted of granting equal concessions to both Britain and Russia so that both are appeased¹³. In response to this bold move, Britain began persuading the world's oil companies to boycott Iranian oil, which, in the case of the United States, was successful since major American oil companies had recently suffered losses due to the nationalization of Mexican oil, making the idea of oil-producing countries "nationalizing 'their' assets" a particularly disadvantageous one¹⁹. Anti-Mosaddeq

sentiments began developing among the Iranian public because of this blow to the Iranian economy, and these sentiments intensified among the conservative elements of society with the help of British intelligence and one hundred thousand dollars from the CIA, who “claimed that Mosaddeq’s movement was being manipulated by communists”. In 1953, the army seized control of the country, ousting Mosaddeq and restoring the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah, an authoritarian despot who sentenced Mosaddeq to house arrest until his death and who would torment his people for more than 25 years, but who was allowed to maintain his power simply because he was friendly to the United States and Britain¹³.

Later in *The Crisis of Islam*, Lewis establishes that the “former colonial subjects in the Middle East” see America as “tainted by the same kind of imperialism as Western Europe”, but while the Soviet Union, “which retained and extended the imperial conquests of the czars of Russia, ruled with no light hand over tens of millions of Muslim subjects in Central Asia and in the Caucasus”, it “suffered no similar backlash of anger and hatred from the Arab community” as the United States did²⁴. Firstly, this interchanging of the terms “Muslim” and “Arab” can be very misleading to an uninformed audience, especially since it follows a reference to how America was named “the Great Satan” after the Iranian Revolution. The Arab world and the Muslim world are two distinct entities and must especially be treated as such if one is to discuss the Middle East during the Cold War and how secular Arab nationalist regimes formed. Secondly, this statement by Lewis is not entirely accurate, as countries that were both Arab and Muslim had conflicting views on who to side with during the Cold War. A good example of such a schism occurred during the civil war that was fought in Yemen from 1962 to 1967 between the country’s socialist Republicans and its royalists. Legitimizing their point of view with the fight against atheistic communism, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Jordan, and the Gulf countries used

Islamic rhetoric to back Yemeni royalists, even going so far as enlisting the help of the Muslim Brotherhood in the secular, Republican-backing, Arab nationalist countries of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq¹⁹. The civil war in Yemen served as a proxy war between the secular Arab nationalist republics in the region and the monarchies that claimed to rule by the laws of Islam, and this proxy war in turn served as a proxy war between the United States, which backed the monarchies, and the Soviet Union, which backed the Arab nationalists. Therefore it can neither be said that all of the Arab countries favored the Soviet Union, nor can it be said that all of the Muslim countries despised the United States.

A major factor in the current views that Middle Easterners hold concerning the United States has been its relationship with the state of Israel, which Lewis claims in *The Crisis of Islam* to be “a consequence, not a cause, of Soviet penetration” in the surrounding region²⁴. This claim is debatable in that the Soviet Union was known to be a nearly supporter of the state of Israel, as the local Jewish community, the Yishuv, had a socialist ideology that had led Russian leadership to believe that Israel would be more committed to Soviet goals. The Soviet Union had supported the UN resolution that promised the Jews 55% of the Palestinian land, and also supplied Israel with arms that helped it win its war of independence. In fact, the Soviet Union was the first country to give Israel “full de jure recognition”, and even though the United States had recognized Israel first, this recognition had been de facto and full recognition had not been extended by the United States until early 1949. The souring of relations between Israel and the Soviet Union was brought about by Israeli reliance upon American economic aid and its denunciation of North Korea during the Korean War, combined with Russian anti-Semitism and several policies that were starkly anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli, such as the detainment of Jewish “economic criminals” in 1952 and Jewish doctors accused of conspiring against the Soviet

government in 1953, resulting in Israel seeking a bilateral defense treaty with the United States. This in turn resulted in the Soviet Union supporting the enemies of Israel, the Arab nationalist states in the region, the most important of whom being Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, in an effort to challenge Western influence in the area, outflank NATO, and undermine the Baghdad Pact⁸. It can therefore be said that Soviet penetration in the Arab states of the region surrounding Israel was due to the United States' relationship and involvement with the state of Israel.

An exploration of the extent of Western interference in Middle Eastern affairs brings us to another of the objectionable claims made by Bernard Lewis in *The Crisis of Islam* where he describes a demonstration that took place in Islamabad, Pakistan, during the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The demonstration had been in support of the rebels who seized the Mosque and fought the Saudi security forces, and, due to a rumor that had been circulating and that was “endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini, who was then in the process of establishing himself as the revolutionary leader in Iran – that American troops had been involved in the clashes in Mecca”, “the American Embassy was attacked by a crowd of Muslim demonstrators, and two Americans and two Pakistani employees were killed”. Before continuing to describe how relations between Iran and the United States deteriorated after the Iranian Revolution, Lewis asks rhetorically, “why had Khomeini stood by a report that was not only false but wildly improbable?”²⁴

Before evaluating Lewis's claim that the report was false and improbable, one must first recount the events that surrounded the demonstrations that occurred in Islamabad, namely, the siege of Mecca. On the morning of November 20, 1979, after pre-dawn prayers had just been concluded in the Grand Mosque of Mecca, a group of rebels led by the Bedouin preacher Juhayman bin Sayf Al-Uteybi seized the Grand Mosque, armed with weapons smuggled in over

a period of time in coffins. The gates of the Mosque were chained shut and snipers were posted on the minarets, ordered to shoot government soldiers without pity or hesitation. Juhayman and his followers then proceeded to spread among the pilgrims and worshippers at the Mosque their message of how the Saudi government was unworthy of leadership of Muslims and how it has been supportive of Western interference and influence that would corrupt and promote heresy in Saudi society. The rebels then presented Juhayman's brother-in-law, Mohammad Abdullah Al-Qahtani, and began pledging allegiance to him as the awaited Mahdi, the prophesized savior of Islam who would restore justice to the world after it had been filled with corruption and injustice. The Grand Mosque was surrounded by Saudi security forces led by Princes Nayef and Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, and a strategic perimeter was formed³⁵. According to Lewis's brief report on the matter, "after some hard fighting, the rebels were suppressed. Their leader was executed on January 9, 1980, along with sixty-two of his followers, among them Egyptians, Kuwaitis, Yemenis, and citizens of other Arab countries"²⁴.

This was a very sensitive event in Saudi history, as the royal family of Al Saud legitimizes its right to rule as the pious followers of the Sheikh Mohammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi school of thought. If someone were to rise up while accusing Al Saud of impiety, with a ruler as legitimate as the awaited Mahdi, and while seizing the most holy site in Islam, no less, their legitimacy and religious authority would surely be questioned. Since the grand Mosque of Mecca was the holiest site of Islam, killing was strictly forbidden in on the premises. Desperate measures had to be taken, however. With backing from the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and thirty clerics, the Saudi Ministry of Interior publicly declared the rebels Kharijites, meaning "renegades" or "deviators from Islam". Lethal action was therefore taken

and lasted until the alleged Mahdi was slain and the rebels, along with their leader, were captured and publicly executed³⁵.

The demonstrations that occurred in Islamabad took place after rumors had spread that those who had desecrated the Grand Mosque were in fact Americans and Zionists. Obviously, it was not American troops who took over the Mosque on November 20, 1979, therefore this rumor can be concluded to be false, and since non-Muslims have historically to this day been forbidden entry to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, it is safe to say that the rumor is also “wildly improbable”. Recent reports, however, show that while it was not the troops of America who were involved in the clashes that occurred during those weeks, foreign intervention was sought and granted not only by the United States but also by France. According to award-winning journalist Yaroslav Trofimov’s *The Siege of Mecca*, which based its reports on recently declassified CIA documents, “a quick conversion” to Islam of the horde of CIA operatives who arrived in Mecca remedied the problem of non-Muslims entering the holy city, and “the agency’s spooks made a rapid tour of the battlefield” to evaluate the giving of tear gas and smoke equipment to Saudi security forces. This resort to chemical warfare, however, “proved to be a complete fiasco”, as the gas inserted into the Mosque’s basement system, known as the Qaboo, rose to the surface, meeting ill-prepared Saudi soldiers in the Mosque’s courtyard and incapacitating them³⁵. According to another report from Jeddah, the CIA had recommended that Saudi soldiers flood the Qaboo, resulting in any rebels that survive drowning being forced to the surface for immediate capture³¹.

The Saudi government later enlisted the help of the French GIGN, who sent a team of commandos led by Paul Barril to evaluate the situation and to train Saudi soldiers in tactics. After supplies for assault arrived from France, including 150 flak jackets and 300 kilograms of

CB gas, Barril, “by his own account, briefly sneaked into the holy city and into the Grand Mosque itself before the attack on the compound began”. As advised by the GIGN, crews of workers began to drill holes in the floors of the Mosque in order for CB canisters to be fired through them at rebels waiting in the Qaboo below. Saudi soldiers soon detonated their CB canisters, “stunning the rebels trapped underneath in a cloud of powerful toxins”. Around 100 soldiers descended into the Qaboo armed with motor-powered CB-spraying devices that pumped “rising clouds of gas into the narrow passageways”, followed by units armed with machine guns. The fighting in the Qaboo continued until Juhayman himself was captured and brought to the surface³⁵.

Though the report that resulted in the bloodshed that occurred at the American Embassy in Islamabad was false, the claim that Americans and other Western powers were involved in the conflict that took place in Mecca is not entirely unfounded, as members of the CIA were converted to Islam specifically to enter the holy city and supply Saudi troops with weapons and training, and a member of the GIGN admitted to entering the city secretly, a report agreed upon by some American officials. Since Trofimov’s report was published years after *The Crisis of Islam*, it is based on newly uncovered information, and newer editions of Lewis’s book, if they should be published in the future, should be updated with this information in order to give Lewis’s audience a better view of the extent of the involvement of the West in Middle Eastern affairs that reaches even a location such as Mecca, considered by the majority of Middle Easterners to be the least susceptible to penetration by foreign powers.

These have been just a few of the objectionable claims that Bernard Lewis makes in *What Went Wrong?* and *The Crisis of Islam*, and there are many others, such as the simplistic and baseless claim that “a significant number of Muslims – notably but not exclusively those whom

we call fundamentalists – are hostile and dangerous not because we (the United States) need an enemy but because they do”²⁴, but these claims are left up to the truth-seeking reader to research and critique for himself. Instead the Orientalist scholar Bernard Lewis himself will be critiqued through what other scholars and analysts have reported about him.

Fouad Ajami, a senior fellow at Stanford’s Hoover Institute and a self-proclaimed disciple of Bernard Lewis claims that Lewis is “the great Orientalist of our time, and we shan’t see the likes of him again” and that Lewis had foreseen the advent and effects of Islamic fundamentalism before it occurred. Ajami, however, is part of a “tight circle of admirers”, composed of “influential policymakers, many of whom served in the administration of President George W. Bush”, including “former Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Defense Policy Board Chair Richard Perle, Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and National Security Council for Near East and North African Director Elliott Abrams”⁷.

Much of this admiration can be attributed to the situation in the United States following the events of September 11th, 2001, when “American foreign policy under George W. Bush was conducted by a group of men with whom Lewis was well-acquainted”, giving him “rare access to the White House” and a chance to develop what he reported to be a “quite friendly relationship with Cheney”. In fact, President Bush himself reportedly read a copy of *What Went Wrong?* given to him by Condoleezza Rice, “who also met privately with Lewis, according to reports”. Former Senior Advisor and Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove is said to have invited Lewis to “address White House staffers, military aides and staff members of the National Security Council in a closed meeting, where Lewis reportedly discussed the failures of contemporary Arab and

Muslim societies and shared his opinions about the origins of the Muslim world's anti-Americanism”⁷.

The types of admirers Lewis has should help the reader decide whether Lewis is a scholar seeking a truthful and objective understanding of another culture's history or a mercenary hired by people of power to legitimize their points of view when they are challenged by the other culture. Michael Hirsh, author of the 2004 article “Bernard Lewis Revisited”, claims that Lewis's credentials as an expert in Oriental studies gave the policies of the Bush administration “intellectual credence”, adding that “it was a mistake to say [that 9/11] was an expression of anger that represented the mainstream of the Arab and Muslim world... really, the U.S. had to just wipe out Al Qaeda, but instead, they took on the entire Arab world. That's where people like Lewis led us astray and I don't think anyone would cite him today without some sense of irony... by his own volition, he left the academic world to become a political figure and that was the beginning of the end of his reputation”⁷.

Bernard Lewis is also known to have drawn much controversy with his remarks on the severity of the Armenian genocide. In the first edition of his book *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, published in 1961, and in the second edition published seven years later, Lewis “had termed the Armenian genocide a ‘holocaust’”. In the third edition published in 2002, however, “he had a change of heart, replacing ‘holocaust’ with the word ‘slaughter’ and adding a reference to Turkish deaths as well”. Prior to this, in 1985, he went so far as to urge “the U.S. Congress to refrain from passing a resolution that would condemn the event as ‘genocide’, and after he published a 1993 article on the subject in *Le Monde*, he was fined a symbolic one franc by French courts under the country's Holocaust-denial laws”. Remarking on the matter, Lewis states

that “there is no doubt the Armenians suffered a terrible massacre, but to compare it to what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany is an absurdity”⁷.

The Jewish death toll in Nazi-occupied Europe during the Final Solution is estimated to be around 5,933,900, amounting to 67% of the total Jewish population in the Nazi-occupied territories of Europe¹¹. During the deportations organized by Turkish Minister of the Interior Talaat Pasha, which came to be known as the Armenian Massacres of 1915, “hundreds of thousands of Armenians eventually succumbed or were killed; Armenian sources have put the figure as high as 1,500,000”, and although the exact figures are still under dispute, “there can be no disputing the result: Turkish Armenia was destroyed, and about half of its people perished”¹². While it cannot be denied that the Holocaust that occurred in Nazi Germany had a much higher death toll, making it one of the most appalling tragedies of the 20th Century, as it should be remembered, why should it be considered an “absurdity” to allow another people who had been victimized severely unjustly to remember their victimization as another appalling tragedy? Since when was it considered moral to exploit the remembrance of one tragedy at the expense of another? Some sources have attributed Lewis’s “change of heart” concerning the Armenian genocide to his close ties to the State of Israel; it is claimed that this relationship caused Lewis to change his opinions about Turkey when it became the first Muslim state to recognize Israel and also its longtime ally⁷. If this attribution is true, it shows the extent of Lewis’s credibility as a competent and objective historian.

Speaking of Bernard Lewis, Middle East expert at the University of Denver Nader Hashemi has remarked that “Lewis’s reputation within the community of Middle East scholars has really sunk to an all-time low”, to the extent that students of Middle Eastern studies believe that attending guest-lectures of Lewis may harm their career. While Hashemi includes one of

Lewis's works in his teaching syllabus, it is included "mostly as an example of the kind of Orientalist scholarship students should learn to avoid". Hashemi also claims that "Lewis is a medievalist and he tries to interpret contemporary Islamic politics by going back to an earlier time period where an 'essential' Islam allegedly existed. He uses this framework to explain events that happen half a millennium later. He plays into a neoconservative right-wing agenda that wants to control, manipulate and dominate the Middle East. His apocalyptic narrative fits well with a Fox News audience, but it's not serious political analysis or scholarship", adding that "he assumes there is a fossilized Muslim core that determines the way Muslims will always behave and ignores changing social conditions in the Middle East"⁷.

But perhaps the most famous of Bernard Lewis's critics was the late Columbia University professor Edward Said, who accused Lewis of "demagogy and downright ignorance"⁷ and claimed that his writing was "full of condescension and bad faith"²⁹. He also claimed that Lewis's writing can be used as a "perfect exemplification of the academic whose work purports to be liberal objective scholarship but is in reality very close to being propaganda against his subject material". Said has also made the claim that "according to Lewis, Islam, does not develop, and neither do Muslims; they merely are, and they are to be watched", a claim that is similar to one made by Nader Hashemi. Concerning Lewis's objectivity when speaking of matters pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Said stated that "he will, for example, recite the Arab case against Zionism... without at the same time mentioning – anywhere, in any of his writings – that there was such a thing as a Zionist invasion and colonization of Palestine despite and in conflict with the native Arab inhabitants. No Israeli would deny this, but Lewis the Orientalist historian simply leaves it out", along with any mention of the Emergency Defense Regulations used in Israel "to rule the Arabs", the preventive detention of Arabs by Israel, the

illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza, and the absence of human rights for Arabs, “principal among them the right of immigration, in former Palestine”. Said’s views on Lewis may be summarized with his statement that “Lewis’s verbosity scarcely conceals both the ideological underpinnings of his position and his extraordinary capacity for getting nearly everything wrong”²⁹.

Following these reports and following a critical look at some of the claims made by Bernard Lewis in his relatively recent works *What Went Wrong?* and *The Crisis of Islam*, it can be concluded that even with Lewis’s eloquent and scholar-like writing ability and his neat citations, there are severe flaws in his writing and his ability to convey historical facts in an objective manner. The aim of historical study is to be able to observe the actions and reactions that made the world as it is today, and from these observations gain a better understanding of other peoples, cultures, and belief systems in order to allow them to coexist in peace and harmony. Lewis’s writing does not offer this understanding, rather, it drives his Western Christian audience to see Arabs and Muslims as an ancient opponent, as an “other”²⁹ that rivals the Christian world in an epic “clash of civilizations”⁷, and in this way Lewis seeks to legitimize the policies and military campaigns of his benefactors, the influential men of power who seek what is arguably imperialistic control and hegemony in the Middle East. Therefore, the critically-thinking truth-seeker should pay no heed to the claims of such mercenary scholars, and should instead gather knowledge of other cultures from those other cultures in order to gain full appreciation of them and be able to critique them in an honest manner after gaining an objective understanding of them.

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