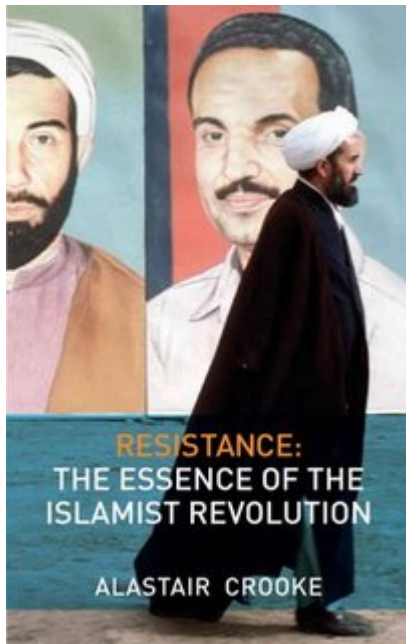


Alastair Crooke, *Resistance: The Essence of the Islamist Revolution*, Pluto Press, London 2009.



With the failure of the 'war on terror' and the mess into which the Bush administration has led the United States, it is time for the new President Barack Hussein Obama to revise US policy from scratch. All the decisions which Obama has taken regarding Guantanamo (not to speak of Bagram), torture, extraordinary renditions, secret prisons, and random surveillance of emails and telephones, have been half-hearted. Obama does not talk constantly about the war on terror anymore, he just keeps on waging it. The new President appears increasingly as a Bush-light version: much rhetoric but little real change. <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10576.shtml> "Looking forward" should not be Obama's sole concern but also "looking back" to assess the damage the Bush-warriors have done to the heart and soul of the United States and to bring the instigators to justice starting from the man in charge, downward. In the ongoing debate on torture Obama has already lost out to former Vice-President Dick Cheney, the person primarily responsible for the whole malaise and the Kafkaesque situation in the country.

Just as important as restoring the rule of law to America and repairing the ruined reputation of his country, is the normalization with the Islamic world. Widespread anti-Muslim obsessions, not only among the ruling elite and the media, but also within the American population, must be repudiated and stigmatized as racist. In his Cairo speech he has pledged to do it. Muslims want to be treated on a par with everybody else. And they want the US to withdraw its occupation forces from Muslim countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Arab peninsula. America's Muslims doubt about the seriousness and ability of the American political elite to understand and address the real causes of the conflict between the West and the Islamic world.

Alastair Crooke's book "Resistance" captures very well this huge conceptual gap between both "worlds", a book Obama and his wife Michelle might find useful to read. For sure, they will understand it, because it addresses Western arrogance, domination, hypocrisy, and racism towards non-whites. And it highlights what Frantz Fanon talked about in his famous book "Black Skin, White Masks", or what Edward Said called "Orientalism" which was replaced by the "New Orientalism".

Alastair Crooke, director and founder of "Conflicts Forum", traces the essence and spirit of the Islamist revolution from its origins in Egypt, via the Iranian Revolution to Hamas and Hezbollah. Having talked to many Islamists, he states "that the conflict between Islam and the West is at core a religious one", even if the policies pursued by the West are secular. The ideas which underlie Western policies can be traced as a linear continuum from the Protestant and puritan struggle with Roman Catholicism. The same processes and the same discourse used against Catholics were later applied to Islam. Crooke cites an Iranian cleric who explains the nature of the conflict between Islamism and the West, according to whom the core of the conflict is about the "essence of Man". The West, says the cleric, has not thought about the consequences that have flowed from its ideas and how they have affected others. The core of the problem lay in the Western process of thinking, i.e. how it "thinks about thinking". This mode of thinking distorted the West's view of the human being. Thus, the West had lost the centrality of the human person as a guide to how we should live in the future. "Only from such introspection", says the Iranian cleric, quoted by Crooke, "can we begin to address what went wrong".

"Resistance" tells the story of how the Muslim world embarked upon a journey to discover new confidence and self-esteem; to find a solution to Muslims' feelings of victimhood and to end the humiliation brought upon by continuous contempt and demonisation. Islam has nothing to do with terror or suicide bombings, says Crooke, but with the daily fight for justice, for human respect and compassion. Islamists dispute the essential claim that Western modernity offers real human welfare. They reject the process of instrumental Western thinking and the abuses of power to which it has given rise, says Crooke.

The author states further that armed Islamist resistance is not, as misconstrued by Western media, reactionary violence directed against modernity against which Islamists resist or which they are unable to assimilate. The purpose of Islamist resistance is not to kill Westerners, as the crusaders did to Muslims, but "to force the West to change its behaviour". One main object of the book is to try to explain the essence of the Islamist revolution and the quest for the essence of Islamism and its message. It is not a book about Israel and Islam, because Israel is viewed by Muslims as a sub-set of Western Weltanschauung, but about the Islamist resistance and the West. In this narrative Israel plays only an incidental role. Crooke's views on Islamist resistance are rather strange and contrary to Western perceptions.

Crooke mentions numerous parallels between Islamist political and philosophical thinking on one side and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School on the other. It is no surprise, therefore, that second generation Juergen Habermas is widely read in Teheran. The exponents of the Frankfurt School were the first to approach questions of morality, religion, science, reason and rationality from a variety of perspectives. Like the Islamists, they argued that by the eighteenth century, Western instrumental rationality had tipped the balance of Western thinking, allowing knowledge derived in this manner to claim a false unassailability. Like the Shiite clerics, adepts of the Critical Theory claimed that the reification of scientific (or rational) thought had become so radical that it had become a means of dominance and control of the environment, nature and of Man himself. In the end, this development would lead to a de-politicisation of politics. Although culture survived, it became a privatised modus, a lifestyle, and not a public network of norms and rules.

The book asks what went wrong in the West after the Enlightenment. Crooke sees one major flaw in the functional instrumentality of Reason. This canon pervades Western politics, economics and science, and it antagonizes Islamic thinking. The westernisation and secularisation of Turkey, and the brutality pursued during the building of its nation-state, have become symbols of the worst aspects of secular modernism. The myth of a free market operating through an invisible hand, leading to optimal human welfare, is incompatible with the tenets of Islam and poses an existential threat to it. Another cause of conflict lays in differing religious insights: The foundations of the Christian world-view are said to underlie Western economic doctrine, the concept of the nation-state and the principles around which society is organised, writes the author. He distinguishes also between the "emancipatory resistance of movements such as Hamas or Hezbollah and the 'burn-t he-system-to-build-anew' philosophy of al-Qaeda and the eschatological leanings of some Salafi groups". The failure of the West to make this distinction empowers the more extreme movements at the expense of the mainstream, so Crooke. The demonisation of Islamism is not the result of poor understanding by the West, but rather a "deliberate ideological operation" in order to weaken liberalism and to strengthen America's scope to take "decisive action" like the interventions in the Middle East in pursuit of the neo-liberal agenda, so the author.

In the light of history, America's self-perception of being a nation of moral ideals has to be corrected. Real history tells a different story. Obama's friendly speech to the Muslim world in Cairo, using the usual rhetoric and announcing "business as usual" policies, did not bear concrete results. He said that "Palestinians must abandon violence", but did not say a single word about Israel's brutal 42 year old occupation, not to speak of the recent horrific onslaught on the Gaza strip. Alastair Crooke has written a

political strategy for the West in dealing with the Muslim world. It should not be ignored. The message is strong and inconvenient and much more realistic than what Obama outlined as a new beginning towards the Muslim world.

Ludwig Watzal