

## PAX CHRISTIE, AGM, 9 MARCH

Edmund Rice Centre, 15 Henley Rd, Homebush

### WHO IS HELPING ISIS?

How foreign policy and Islamophobes inadvertently provide free recruitment that feeds directly into ISIS propaganda.

### ISIS PREDICTED

Exactly four years ago, Syrian youth started a revolution with graffiti in Dar'aa – the regime must fall (18 March 2011).

Three years ago, Mother Agnes Miriam visited Australia from Syria and warned about the *emptying* of Christians in the Middle East. She predicted that Christians would be the casualty of the Arab Spring. Enough beheading videos have been posted online to bring home this tragic truth.

She also warned that the “Arab Spring” had been “hijacked by foreign Islamist mercenaries, with strong support from Western countries.”

The civilised West helping the uncivilised jihadists? No way!

And over the last three years, what have we witnessed? The young Syrian revolutionaries *hijacked* by the Free Syrian Army, who were in *turn* hijacked by the non-Syrian Salafists, who were in turn *hijacked* by the foreign fighters of al Qaeda and their offshoot the ‘Islamic State.’ And now we see that there is nothing *civil* about the war in Syria.

Having met this courageous woman during her two visits to Australia, I penned many newspaper columns and warned that these Salafists were exploiting the sectarian fault lines. They were hiding underneath the jasmine fragrance of the Arab Spring canopy, to sow seeds for a *theocracy*, *not* a democracy.

When I was blowing the whistle on this undergrowth, newspaper editors were reluctant to publish my pieces. Any critics of the Free Syrian Army were assumed to be apologists for Assad. My counter narrative to the Arab Spring fantasy was *not*

welcome, and many editors politely emailed me with: *Dear Joseph, sorry we have no space.*

My predictions were detailed in my book by that exact and ironic title, *Sorry we have no space*, long before these militants morphed into the monster we now know as ISIS.

The US-Saudi-Qatar alliance intended their *pipelines* of weapons and funds to reach the Free Syrian Army in order to degrade Iran's greatest ally in the region. But their 'intelligence' must have known what local Arabs already knew: these *pipelines* were *leaking*.

These dangerous toys would land in the hands of Al Nusra boys, the Syrian franchise of al-Qaeda, and ultimately be confiscated by ISIS.

## **BBQ METAPHOR**

A useful metaphor to understand western foreign policy and interventions in the Middle East is a BBQ.

Knobs are turned up or down to achieve the desired temperature, the desired balance of power.

Within Arab conversations, cynicism prevails about the cyclical and sickening pretext to war: "We in the West will save you from the monster (that we created)".

Consider this contradiction: when the Sunni Salafists took up arms in Iraq against the US-backed al Malaki government, these fighters were condemned as *insurgents*.

If those *same* Salafists stepped across the border into *Syria*, they were suddenly hailed as heroes and rebels fighting a dictator, fighting on the same *side* as the US.

Hence the West aids and abets mercenaries to emasculate a monster, until the mercenaries *become* the next monster that the West needs to "degrade and ultimately destroy". Consider how Libya was ostensibly liberated from dictator Gaddafi, yet now we witness staged beheadings of Christians on Libyan shores.

On the eve of Sept 11 last year, US President Barack Obama condemned ISIS and its “acts of barbarism”, referring to it as a “terrorist organisation, pure and simple.” So why vow to *gradually* degrade rather than *immediately* destroy?

Do American presidents suddenly subscribe to the ancient Arab adage: the enemy of my enemy is my friend? If ISIS are fighting Assad, are ISIS are defacto allies with the US?

Initially, our *Western* coalition increased the Salafists’ flame to decrease *Syria’s* flame. Now we need to *degrade* the Salafists’ flame as it is burning out of control and may soon reach our two best friends in the region who have an *impeccable* human rights record: Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The US backed coalition, including Australia, will keep adjusting the BBQ knobs to ensure that these two countries remain protected. We won’t talk about how many people they put to death, quickly and slowly.

Too often, the US and its allies speak of peace, diplomacy and democracy *above* the table, but they funnel aid and arms *under* the table. Then they wash their hands and call it civil war and sectarian war.

This was highlighted in a cartoon last July when the US Congress approved \$225 million for Israel’s Iron Dome anti-missile defense system, while Barack writes a letter: ‘Dear Benjamin, stop bombing Gaza.’

There is one question that *so-called* terrorism experts have failed to answer: why have al Qaeda and all its offshoots, jihadists and mercenaries flocked to fight alongside their Sunni brothers in Syria, in Iraq, in Libya, and in the Levant; but they have *never* rushed to rescue their Sunni brothers in Palestine, especially in Gaza?

Let’s see how the knobs on this BBQ are manipulated and twisted:

On 20 December 1983, US special envoy Donald Rumsfeld does a handshake deal with Saddam Hussein when Iraq fought against Iran after the Islamic revolution. Let’s upgrade Iraq.

On 2 August 1990, Hussein flexed his muscles into Kuwait and had to be degraded and ultimately destroyed.

Between 1986 and 1989, the CIA funneled \$500 million in weapons into Afghanistan when Osama bin Laden fought with his Mujaheddin militants to expel the Communist Russian invasion during the Cold War. Let’s upgrade Afghanistan.

On 11 September 2001, Bin Laden's militants morphed into al-Qaeda and flexed their muscles into the USA with terrorist attacks. They had to be degraded and this public enemy number was ultimately destroyed.

Since 2011, the US-Saudi-Qatar donors have aided and abetted the anti-Assad mercenaries. In 2014, the ISIS monster flaunts US equipment that it has seized "in our pockets" and now needs to be degraded.

Unless we stop history from repeating itself, we are doomed to witness yet another Arab leader crowned, then crushed in 10 years time.

This familiar narrative evokes Mary Shelley's haunting tragedy about Dr Frankenstein who creates the monster for his own benefit. When the monster turns on him, Frankenstein hunts him down to exact *revenge*.

Although the story is nearly 200 years old, the current war testifies that the *moral* remains unheeded. The modern name for Frankenstein's monster in US foreign policy is *blowback*.

While fictitious Frankenstein made one mistake with a tragic ending, the factual Frankenstein keeps cooking up monsters then counter-monsters, and needs to be told: Khalas (enough).

## FOREIGN POLICY

To uproot the causes of home-grown hatreds we need to redress the injustices that breed this radicalisation.

Injustices such as Australia pounding the UN Security Council table over the tragic loss of life in Eastern Ukraine last year, but not over the tragic loss of life in *Gaza* a few weeks earlier. Injustices such as threatening to *isolate* Russia with sanctions, but not *daring* to apply the *same moral* standards with Israel. Injustices such as treating *Muslim* foreign fighters with scrutiny and non-Muslims with impunity.

If we witnessed a kangaroo cull through *aerial* bombardment, there would have been moral outrage. If we witnessed a whale cull through *ships*, there would have been moral outrage.

But when we witnessed a *Palestinian* cull by air, land and sea, we are told to blame the victims for hiding among terrorists.

The Palestinians all belong somewhere on the terrorism continuum as potential terrorists, breeding terrorists, born terrorists, supporting terrorists, hiding terrorists or armed terrorists. The loaded label is intended to throw a blanket over our eyes to blind us from any questions of legitimacy or humanity.

This is the well-worn, war-time propaganda of dehumanisation, aimed to absolve us from any guilt that the humans are like *us* – with a name, a face, a family, a home, a dream.

The dehumanisation blindfolds us to two facts: all human life is *absolutely* equal, and these two "sides" are *absolutely* unequal.

Propaganda relies on controlling the cameras. But social media has become a powerful weapon. As pilots "send" air missiles *down* to Gaza, Palestinians "send" videos *up* for the world to see – graphic and uncensored. Unlike the pilots who see inhuman dots on a screen, the videos enable us to see terrified humans with nowhere to hide.

And the seductive voice of ISIS beckons: come home, help your brothers right these wrongs.

The bombardment of these words is juxtaposed against the bombardment of these images. Some heed the call.

These foreign policies are helping ISIS and giving credence to their cause. They are upgrading not degrading ISIS.

## **NEED ENEMY**

Did we need the crisis over ISIS, because there are beneficiaries of the bogey man?

The most *obvious* beneficiaries are the weapons manufacturers. Seven of the world's top 10 weapons exporters are based in the USA. The biggest of these is Lockheed Martin, whose stock price reached an all-time high at \$180.74 on 19 September 2014.

Governments may receive *secondary* benefits. A war may be an effective distraction from domestic issues (blocked budget bills) and may provide politicians a bounce in the polls.

A dark profiteer of war is encapsulated by the 2003 slogan “No blood for oil” during the invasion of Iraq.

In 2007, former US Senator Chuck Nagel conceded: “People say we’re not fighting for oil. Of course we are.”

This is akin to *rape* of a nation’s natural resources so that foreigners can *reap* the financial rewards.

The military *industry* needs an enemy to justify further funding.

The intelligence and surveillance industries need to talk up the fear of home grown terrorists to justify new laws so we can supposedly sleep at night while they work around the clock.

The television and media industry need these terrorist stories to boost their ratings and readership.

## ISLAMOPHOBIA

If the hostage-taker carries a gun, it is a *siege*. But if he also carries an Islamic flag, it is *terrorism*.

A black flag was brandished from a passing vehicle in front of my children’s school in Parramatta last September. Verbal threats were made by a 14-year-old about slaughtering Christian children. Again it was the *flag* that catapulted the incident to banner headlines. As the school spokesman, I fielded media interviews from around the world to put this isolated incident into factual perspective.

The black flag has morphed into a weapon that is more explosive than the bomb. Yet the *shahada* on the flag iterates the most basic tenets of Islam: ‘There is no God but God; Mohammed is the messenger of God.’

Imagine waving a crucifix inscribed with a basic Christian creed: ‘Jesus is the son of God who rose from the dead.’

## PROPAGANDA

The re-establishment of the Islamic Caliphate seeks to repudiate the old colonial borders. It is borne out of disillusionment with corruption of Arab governments and apathy of Western governments as large populations of Arabs and Muslims live in misery and poverty. The Caliphate represents a sentimental yearning for the good old days, the golden age of the Islamic motherland. But the disillusionment is replaced with a misguided *illusion* of pleasing God by creating heaven on earth.

If you listen to their travelling circus as it recruits kids to 'roll up' across the Levant, their mission is more *political* than religious. They talk about territory, power and victimhood and use violence to express their politics.

They have more in common with the Ku Klux Klan.

The KKK targeted non-whites as sub-human. ISIS targets infidels who do not pledge loyalty to their caliphate leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. *Both* seek to carve out a *pure* homeland. In both ISIS and KKK, the executioners of the public murders cloak themselves in *hoods*.

While ISIS initially sought to restore their version Sunni supremacy in Iraq, KKK sought to restore white supremacy in America's South.

The KKK may not be able to teach us how to conquer ISIS, but it may teach us that its most powerful enemy may be *within* its own circles, especially former members who have become reformed and speak out. Their repulsion by pure *evil* may trump the attraction to a pure territory.

These movements thrive on staged spectacles and free publicity which feeds into their power. They seek to provoke a war with the west as warriors against the infidels.

We fan their flames if we give them oxygen, and our media *is* their oxygen, inadvertently paying for their global recruitment and fear campaign.

To snuff *out* their flame, we need to stop re-tweeting their propaganda. The power of stopping *supply* costs *nothing*, but saves lives.

The Australian, British and other Western recruits who speak on their slick videos with the black flag as their backdrop tell their Muslim targets that they understand their alienation. "For all my brothers living in the West, I know how you feel ... you feel depressed ... the cure for the depression is jihad."

They appeal to a sense of belonging “[from a Muslim brother’s heart to another brother’s heart](#).” They use expressions such as “finally among your people.”

Some Australian Muslims are seduced by this allure and can relate to the identity crisis of the recruits.

From the wider Australian community, we should stop pushing people over the edge. Stop pushing people to denounce *every* crime committed by Muslims, as if it does not go without saying. Stop pushing people to feel that they are collectively guilty until proven innocent. Stop pushing people towards the margins of society, towards radicalisation, towards the IS recruitment propaganda. If we treat people as outsiders, they become outsiders.

Using a migration paradigm, the Islamophobes are creating the *push* factor which feeds into the ISIS *pull* factor.

Our self-appointed vigilantes who attack Muslims may believe that they are defending Australia from the potential enemy within, to degrade and destroy ISIS.

But are they actually helping the ISIS recruitment campaign?

A look at the language used by the ISIS recruiters and the language used by Islamophobes bear chilling similarities. Both tell their young male Muslim targets: you are unloved and unwelcome in the West.

Some young Muslim males may already feel angry, for various sociological reasons. They may be [ignorant](#) of their own religion and may be susceptible to the beck and call of ISIS who would be rubbing their hands: “See – we told you! The West hates you. You are a victim. You are depressed. Come to your brothers where you belong.”

## CONDEMNING

My colleagues in the Muslim community feel condemned no matter what they do.

If they are silent in the face of atrocities that incriminate their faith, they are seen as complicit.

If they condemn the atrocity, they feed into an unquenchable hunger for submission.

Their condemnation does *not* guarantee that their equal citizenship status is restored. It guarantees that they will be condemning *forever*.

It guarantees that their loyalty remains in question because they continue to *answer* that question.

The cycle runs along these lines. A crime is committed by misguided 'Muslims', in Australia or abroad. Their brethren are asked: are you part of 'them' or part of us – Team Australia? The brethren plead: No! we *hate* them! We love you! Please believe us!

Thus, they perpetuate the perception of the *powerful* bringing the *powerless* to their knees.

When asked about the atrocities, the answer should be, "Please Google all previous condemnations on the public record. Why would our position be any different today? What part of the word *condemn* don't you understand?"

Of course, Muslim leaders have condemned and denounced and issued press releases, in English and in Arabic, in private and in public. Muslim clerics have explained that murderous such perpetrators end up going down as criminals, not rising up as martyrs. The Grand Mufti Dr Ibrahim Aby Mohammed denounced ISIS as committing crimes against humanity and sins against God. He understands that this movement thrives on *fear* and attracts those who *love* to be *feared*.

If we are serious about condemning injustices, where were the Je Suis *Gaza* banners last July when Operation Protective Edge claimed more than 2100 Palestinian lives, mostly civilians and children?

On 30 December, Australia voted with the USA *against* a UNSC motion to recognize a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, to end Israeli occupation within 3 years and for a 'just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful solution.' In effect, Australia voted to perpetuate the misery of the Palestinian people under the ever expanding Israeli State.

Where was the global condemnation of this injustice?

## **AS CHRISTIANS**

Many of my Christian friends have questioned my advocacy: 'You defend Muslims, but you're *Christian*.'

To which I would reply: 'I defend Muslims *because* I am Christian.'

And if they pointed their fist at me, I pointed to the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The Jews saw Samaritans as *inferior* and half castes. But the Good Samaritan was the hero in this parable because he stopped to help a stranger in need, *without* judging his race or religion.

The parable was told to a lawyer who asked Jesus about who enters heaven. The answer was to love your neighbour as yourself, which is *exactly* what the good Samaritan did. But it is exactly what the priest and the Levite *failed* to do, although both were experts in God's law.

For me, the parable highlighted the difference between *preaching* God's law and *practicing* God's law through the concept of Neighbour.

Like the Samaritan, Jesus has compassion for the outcast, because he *too* was an outcast in the eyes of priests, lawyers and leaders.

The Samaritan took care of the man who was beaten up. He risked his life by stepping forward on a dangerous road. He took full responsibility for the man who was beaten up by taking him to an inn where he was safe.

We are all called to do the same, and step out of our comfort zone into our neighbour's zone.

As a Christian, I find it imperative to highlight these *hypocrisies* without fear and *rehumanise* those who have been demonised.

## CONCLUSION

My book shows why the opposite of love is *not* hate. It is fear. The Good Samaritan had no fear as he risked his own life to save the life of his neglected neighbour.

Our *heart* is indeed the *inn* of love. It is as small as a clenched fist but big enough to embrace the whole world. If it can be twisted to say 'sorry we have no space', then it can be untwisted.