

**The Interactive Session Entitled "Driver Of Conflict 1. Political Islam And Its Discontents" At The World Economic Forum**

Davos, Switzerland 24 January 2003

This session is entitled - "Driver of Conflict

Political Islam and its Discontents". Obviously it assumes that Islam, Political Islam is at the bottom of the conflicts that we see today. But is Islam the only religion that has been politicized? What about parties called Christian Democrats or the Hindu parties of India? Are these religions not politicized? In any case is Islam the cause for political discontent or is political discontent, or political ambition in a democratic system a cause for exploiting Islamic teachings?

2. Let us look at the history of the present conflicts involving Islam and the Muslims. Islamic terrorism was not the cause of the Christian Crusade. The cause was territorial. The holy lands of the Christian i.e. Palestine had come under Muslim rule. As far as is known the Christians in Muslim ruled Palestine continued to be Christians. The Muslims did not convert or expel the Christians. Even the Jews, the few that were left after the Romans expelled them, were allowed to remain. That is why Jews persecuted by Christian Europe preferred to migrate to Muslim countries.

3. The reason for the Crusade was therefore territorial and not religious.

4. If we look into the history of any country we will find that it had been populated by different people at different times. Britain was ruled by the Romans, the Vikings and the French. Much of France was ruled by the Germans and the British and Germany by the French. All were ruled by the Romans at one stage. Turkey was ruled by the Greeks and much of Russia was ruled by Tartars and Mongols.

5. If we try to restore all the lands to the people who once ruled or populated them, we will end up with impossible claims and endless wars.

6. But the Europeans decided that their Jewish problem could be solved once and for all if the Jews could have a homeland of their own. It could have been Argentina or Uganda. But unfortunately the decision was to create Israel from Arab Palestine, because 2000 years ago the Jews lived in Palestine.

7. Two thousand years ago the Aborigines lived in Australia, the Red Indians in North America and the Amerindians in South and Central America. Today their claims would not be entertained. And they can do nothing about it.

8. If we care to acknowledge it, the problem in the Middle East, the violence and the fightings began when Jews were given Palestine as their homeland. To do this the Palestinian Arabs had their houses and land seized and they were expelled from Palestine to live in miserable refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. Is it any wonder that they want to regain their land?

9. The majority of them are Muslims but quite a number are Christians. The world in general looked with disinterest at the expulsion of the Palestinians and the seizure of their properties. Only Muslims seem to sympathise with the largely Muslim Palestinians.

10. Conventional wars were tried by Egypt, Syria and Jordan to win back Palestine for the Palestinians. But every time European and American material and moral support for the Israelis defeated the Muslim countries.

11. The Palestinians then launched the Intifada, a kind of civil protest which involved children throwing stones at Israeli forces. The Israeli soldiers shot at them at first with rubber bullets, then with real bullets, wounding and killing many of the children.

12. The world looked on. They passed resolutions condemning Israeli occupation of Arab land. But otherwise the world did nothing. Muslims have to assume that the world sympathise and support the Israelis.

13. Various attempts were made for a negotiated settlement but all failed because the Israelis refused to comply even with the agreed terms. More settlements were built on Muslim land and more Muslim holy places were desecrated. And more Palestinians, including children were wounded and killed.

14. The world just looked on. The Muslim countries could do nothing to help. They have been defeated militarily and they will again be defeated if they try another conventional war.

15. Some people accept defeat and back off to lick their wounds. They may return one day to fight back for what is theirs. The Palestinians, having failed with conventional wars, having failed in negotiations, having failed with their civil action Intifada, resorted to more violent means. The Israelis escalated their attacks and remained in occupation of

captured territories, and applied greater pressures on the Palestinians.

16. Muslim sympathy for their Palestinian brothers mounted with the atrocities and the arrogance of the Israelis. It began to look like a holy war. Some non- Palestinian Muslims, frustrated with their own countries' inability to help the Palestinians, became so incensed and angered that they resorted to terror attacks.

17. I have no sympathy with terrorists, nor do I believe in terror for whatever struggle. In Malaysia we rejected Communist terrorism in the struggle for independence. We chose to negotiate for independence with the British. I don't know what would have happened if the British had rejected our peaceful bid. There are examples in the African continent.

18. But whether we like it or not when people are robbed of their land sooner or later they will fight back. Refusal to entertain their claims would only harden their attitudes and escalate their struggle. Eventually they would resort to whatever means are at their disposal and terror attacks is one of them. Out- terrorising them would only increase their determination. For them life has become meaningless and they would willingly lose it. We may think it is madness but that is not going to help us.

19. Islam was no more political than Christianity. But just as Christians will fight for their land, Muslims and everyone else will do the same. What we are seeing today is the struggle of desperate people for their own land. Let us not kid ourselves into believing that it is religion, or poverty or ancient rivalry. It is territorial.

20. The struggles of the Palestinians must be recognised for what it is, the struggle of a people to regain their property and their land. If we acknowledge this the first steps towards resolving the conflict would have been taken.