

What are the implications of these statements? What are they saying? What do they mean? Do they represent people beyond themselves? How should we respond?

Views on Jews By Malaysian: His Own Words, October 21, 2003

(Source: NYT). Following are excerpts from Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's speech on Thursday at the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Putrajaya, Malaysia: We need guns and rockets, bombs and warplanes, tanks and warships for our defense. But because we are discouraged from learning of science and mathematics as giving us no merit for the afterlife, today we have no capacity to produce our own weapons for our defense. We have to buy our weapons from our detractors and enemies. . . . Today we, the whole Muslim ummah [community], is treated with contempt and dishonor. Our religion is denigrated, our holy places desecrated. Our countries are occupied, our people starved and killed. . . . Our only reaction is to become more and more angry. Angry people cannot think properly. And so we find some of our people acting irrationally. They launch their own attacks, killing just about everybody, including fellow Muslims, to vent their anger and frustration. . . . There is a feeling of hopelessness among the Muslim countries and their people. . . . But is it true that we should do and can do nothing for ourselves? Is it true that 1.3 billion people can exert no power to save themselves from the humiliation and oppression inflicted on them by a much smaller enemy? Is there no other way than to ask our young people to blow themselves up and kill people and invite the massacre of more of our own people? . . . We are actually very strong; 1.3 billion people cannot be simply wiped out. The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million, but today the Jews rule the world by proxy: They get others to fight and die for them. . . . We also know that not all non-Muslims are against us. . . . Even among the Jews, there are many who do not approve of what the Israelis are doing. . . . We are up against a people who think. They survived 2,000 years of pogroms not by hitting back but by thinking. They invented socialism, communism, human rights and democracy so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong, so that they can enjoy equal rights with others. With these they have now gained control of the most powerful countries and they, this tiny community, have become a world power. . . . Of late, because of their power and their apparent success, they have become arrogant. And arrogant people, like angry people, will make mistakes, will forget to think. They are already beginning to make mistakes. There may be windows of opportunities for us now and in the future. We must seize these opportunities.

“General casts military, anti-terror efforts in religious terms” by Lisa Myers and NBC Investigative Unit.

Oct. 15 — A highly decorated general who is one of the leaders of a secretive new Pentagon unit formed to coordinate intelligence on terrorists and help hunt down Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and other high-profile targets has a history of outspoken and divisive views on religion — Islam in particular, NBC News has learned. This summer, Boykin was promoted to deputy undersecretary of defense, with a new mission for which many say he is uniquely qualified: to aggressively combine intelligence with special operations and hunt down so-called high-value terrorist targets including bin Laden and Saddam.

But that new assignment may be complicated by controversial views Boykin — an evangelical Christian — has expressed in dozens of speeches at churches and prayer breakfasts around the country. . . . In June 2003, Boykin spoke to a church group over a slide show: "Well, is he [bin Laden] the enemy? Next slide. Or is this man [Saddam] the enemy? The enemy is none of these people I have showed you here. The enemy is a spiritual enemy. He's called the principality of darkness. The enemy is a guy called Satan." Why are terrorists out to destroy the United States? Boykin said: "They're after us because we're a Christian nation."

NBC News military analyst Bill Arkin, who's been investigating Boykin for the Los Angeles Times, says the general casts the war on terror as a religious war: "I think that it is not only at odds with what the president believes, but it is a dangerous, extreme and pernicious view that really has no place."

During a January church speech in Daytona, Fla., Boykin recalled a Muslim fighter in Somalia who bragged on television the Americans would never get him because his God, Allah, would protect him: "Well, you know what I knew, that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol." The Somali was captured, and Boykin said he told the man: "Mr. Atto, you underestimated our God." Boykin also routinely tells audiences that God, not the voters, chose President Bush: "Why is this man in the White House? The majority of Americans did not vote for him. Why is he there? And I tell you this morning that he's in the White House because God put him there for a time such as this."

Listening to Mahathir October 21, 2003 By PAUL KRUGMAN (NYT)

"The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them." So said Mahathir Mohamad, the prime minister of Malaysia, at an Islamic summit meeting last week. The White House promptly denounced his "hate-filled remarks." Indeed, those remarks were inexcusable. But they were also calculated - for Mr. Mahathir is a cagey politician, who is neither ignorant nor foolish. And to understand why he made those remarks is to realize how badly things are going for U.S. foreign policy.

The fact is that Mr. Mahathir, though guilty of serious abuses of power, is in many ways about as forward-looking a Muslim leader as we're likely to find. And Malaysia is the kind of success story we wish we saw more of: an impressive record of economic growth, rising education levels and general modernization in a nation with a Muslim majority.

It's worth reading the rest of last week's speech, beyond the offensive 28 words. Most of it is criticism directed at other Muslims, clerics in particular. Mr. Mahathir castigates "interpreters of Islam who taught that acquisition of knowledge by Muslims meant only the study of Islamic theology." Thanks to these interpreters, "the study of science, medicine, etc. was discouraged. Intellectually the Muslims began to regress." A lot of the speech sounds as if it had been written by Bernard Lewis, author of "What Went Wrong," the best-selling book about the Islamic decline.

So what's with the anti-Semitism? Almost surely it's part of Mr. Mahathir's domestic balancing act, something I learned about the last time he talked like this, during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98. At that time, rather than accept the austerity programs recommended by the U.S. government and the I.M.F., he loudly blamed machinations by Western speculators, and imposed temporary controls on the outflow of capital - a step denounced by all but a handful of Western economists. As it turned out, his economic strategy was right: Malaysia suffered a shallower slump and achieved a quicker recovery than its neighbors.

What became clear watching Mr. Mahathir back then was that his strident rhetoric was actually part of a delicate balancing act aimed at domestic politics. Malaysia has a Muslim, ethnically Malay, majority, but its business drive comes mainly from an ethnic Chinese minority. To keep the economy growing, Mr. Mahathir must allow the Chinese minority to prosper, but to ward off ethnic tensions he must throw favors, real and rhetorical, to the Malays.

Part of that balancing act involves reserving good jobs for Malay workers and giving special business opportunities to Malay entrepreneurs. One reason Mr. Mahathir was so adamantly against I.M.F. austerity plans was that he feared that they would disrupt the carefully managed cronyism that holds his system together. When times are tough, Mr. Mahathir also throws the Muslim majority rhetorical red meat.

And that's what he was doing last week. Not long ago Washington was talking about Malaysia as an important partner in the war on terror. Now Mr. Mahathir thinks that to cover his domestic flank, he must insert hateful words into a speech mainly about Muslim reform. That tells you, more accurately than any poll, just how strong the rising tide of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism among Muslims in Southeast Asia has become. Thanks to its war in Iraq and its unconditional support for Ariel Sharon, Washington has squandered post-9/11 sympathy and brought relations with the Muslim world to a new low.

And bear in mind that Mr. Mahathir's remarks were written before the world learned about the views of Lt. Gen. William "My God Is Bigger Than Yours" Boykin. By making it clear that he sees nothing wrong with giving an important post in the war on terror to someone who believes, and says openly, that Allah is a false idol - General Boykin denies that's what he meant, but his denial was implausible even by current standards - Donald Rumsfeld has gone a long way toward confirming the Muslim world's worst fears.

Somewhere in Pakistan Osama bin Laden must be enjoying this. The war on terror didn't have to be perceived as a war on Islam, but we seem to be doing our best to make it look that way.