
INTERVIEW

Mr. Crawford on the Muslim Brotherhood

The following is an interview with William Crawford, former U.S. Ambassador to North Yemen and Cyprus, and executive director of the Islam Centennial Fourteen, by Robert Dreyfuss, EIR's Middle East editor.

Dreyfuss: What are the objectives of the Islam Centennial Fourteen and what do you hope to achieve in the next year or so?

Crawford: There is a real curiosity [about Islam] that has come into being in the American public because, I think, of recent events and all the headlines. So we're finding a great and mounting receptivity to objective, nonpolitical information [on Islam]. We're not coming from any particular political point of view. We're not lobbyists or pushing the interests of any particular country or any bloc of countries. We're simply in the business of providing basic, objective information. We're finding a very warm reception, indicative, I think, of the kind of interest which is welling up in this country, a lot of it starting from a hostile point of view, understandably enough, given the hostage situation and so on.

Dreyfuss: There's obviously been sort of a well-poisoning going on since the Khomeini revolution, in the sense that a lot of Americans view Islam as a threat rather than simply a religion. What is your organization doing specifically to counter that? You say you provide "simple, nonpolitical, objective information," but I doubt such information exists.

Crawford: I think our "Introduction to Islam" kit pretty well describes the kind of information we put out.

Dreyfuss: What I mean is, if someone in the Muslim world called up some Christian mission and asked, "Is Adolf Hitler an expression of Christianity?" there would be many ways of explaining why that wasn't true. If some American organization asked you, "Does the Khomeini regime represent Islam?" what would you say?

Crawford: They do ask that question frequently, and I say first of all that you must realize that Iranians are Shia Muslims representing only 10 percent of the Muslim world; that they are Persians, not Arabs; that what is going on is a political revolution given a religious label [which] is regarded as absolutely false and an aberration, and a very dangerous one, by most sensible Muslims around the world. . . .

How do we counter all these stereotypes that do

appear in the aggregate threatening to Americans? Yes, in the aggregate it looks threatening, but becomes less so through better information, if you portray the Muslim world for what it is: highly diverse nations, in cultural and ethnic and linguistic terms, going through a process of reaffirmation of pride and independence from the major power blocs, having been inundated by everything Western for over the last many decades and then in frantic pursuit of catching up, beginning to question the appropriateness of everything that's being imported or pushed on them by their own national leadership. This is not a rejection of things Western. It's a more selective approach—"what is appropriate to our own societies." And at the same time I think you find people drawing a balance sheet—what has been achieved after the headlong pursuit of "modernization" and imports of technology and all the rest. And they find that something important is missing in their lives, and that is their own indigenous value system, variously interpreted, and that is Islam. And this is what I think is the implication of what we are seeing when we talk about Islamic resurgence and fundamentalism.

Dreyfuss: What I'm really asking you is to make a value judgment. If some group in the United States—for example, supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini—came to you and asked you to include in an art exhibit some calligraphy done by Khomeini's mullahs in some Qom theological seminary, I presume you would turn them down.

Crawford: Yes, I would.

Dreyfuss: But what about the Ikhwan Muslimun [Muslim Brotherhood]? Would you consider them to represent Islam as they claim to, or would you agree with Sadat's characterization of them as lunatics and dwarfs?

Crawford: I think that they run the gamut from genuinely religious people who are very seriously concerned about the headlong pursuit of Westernization, to those who essentially see their involvement in the Muslim Brotherhood as an expression of political opposition.

Dreyfuss: How do you view someone like Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Brotherhood?

Crawford: I wouldn't really pretend to be an expert on the Ikhwan. Where I would put him personally, I don't know.

Dreyfuss: But that brings us to the central question. He's revered, but he's a madman. He was an assassin. He had an extremist organization that was allied to the pro-Nazis in the Middle East. He was responsible for killing several Egyptian prime ministers.

Crawford: Well, that I obviously find reprehensible.

Dreyfuss: But you can't separate his religious activities

from the fact that his organization as a whole was extremist. What I'm asking is whether your organization would agree unequivocally that these people are evil?

Crawford: The whole Ikhwan? Or the Khomeini group?

Dreyfuss: The Khomeini group, the Ikhwan, Hassan al-Banna's organization—the whole thing. You say you find his actions reprehensible, but you don't say you find *him* reprehensible. Or do you?

Crawford: Khomeini? Or Hassan al-Banna?

Dreyfuss: Both.

Crawford: Khomeini I do find reprehensible.

Dreyfuss: And the latter? Hassan al-Banna?

Crawford: I don't know. My personal estimate is that there are some seriously religious people, reformists in it. There are others who are in it as an expression of political opposition.

Dreyfuss: I understand that you recently addressed an Islam and the West conference in Paris. I've read their literature, and I've noticed that they're very critical of what they call the "Western development model." . . . Your organization is obviously trying to contact a lot of Americans and explain Islam to them, but I wonder if

you can do that if you associate yourselves with a group like Islam and the West.

Crawford: We are not members of Islam and the West.

Dreyfuss: In October, you attended a conference on Islam at the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas, under the sponsorship of Mrs. de Menil. There were a number of radicals at that conference, like Hamid Algar of the University of California at Berkeley, who led a group of chanting pro-Khomeini ruffians into the room. Could you explain your presence at the conference?

Crawford: Unfortunately, I was only there for a day and a half. I have the highest regard for Mrs. de Menil, who organized the conference in order to give Muslims a chance to talk to each other in a non-Muslim environment where they wouldn't feel there was an audience looking over their shoulders, and the press, and governments, and so on.

Dreyfuss: Are you aware that there were people at this conference from various Muslim Brotherhood organizations from various Arab countries, that there were people praising the Sadat assassination, and people calling for the overthrow of the Saudi government?

Crawford: No, I did not hear any of that. Maybe that came up later, but not during the time I was there.

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