

Documentary Report

JOURNEY INTO EUROPE

December 23, 2015



Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad

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Prepared by

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THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN

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The Institute of Strategic Studies was founded in 1973. It is a non-profit, autonomous research and analysis centre, designed for promoting an informed public understanding of strategic and related issues, affecting international and regional security.

In addition to publishing a quarterly journal and a monograph series, the ISSI organises talks, workshops, seminars and conferences on strategic and allied disciplines and issues.

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Introduction

Under the Distinguished Lecture Series, the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) brings national and international scholars for broad reaching discussion about global issues. On December 23, 2015, at the Institute, Honourable Advisor to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz launched the documentary *Journey into Europe* by renowned anthropologist and Islamic scholar, Dr. Akbar S. Ahmed. The documentary explores the place of Islam in European history and civilization. Based entirely on fieldwork, this comprehensive film explores relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe today, while also teaching the lessons of Andalusia and *La Convivencia* — centuries of peaceful Muslim rule and their promotion of knowledge and coexistence among Muslims, Jews and Christians. The documentary features the views of European leadership including presidents and prime ministers, archbishops, chief rabbis, grand muftis, heads of right-wing parties and common Europeans, while seeking ways to improve relations between Muslims and non-Muslims today.

Journey into Europe

Overview

Akbar S. Ahmad's documentary film, *Journey into Europe* is timely because we are witnessing an increased misunderstanding, intolerance, extremism and hostility between and among different faiths. Dr. Akbar S Ahmad tries to pose a question "are we witnessing a clash of civilization?" It highlights the challenges and complex issues like the dress code of Muslims particularly of women, interpretation of sharia, religious extremism and terrorism, the wrath of which is being faced by Muslims living in Europe and the responses of both Muslims and Europeans to them.

The documentary takes its viewers through the glorifying history of Islam in Europe to the present-day challenges faced by Muslims. The journey in the documentary is in three phases. The first phase pictures the past in Andalusia located in south-western European region — a Spanish autonomous community and Sicily — an Italian island which had been a crossroad of cultures for centuries where different religions co-existed. The second phase is about the Ottoman Empire's expansion into Europe and resistance to it. The third phase explores European colonization and Muslim immigrants' influx in millions into Europe.



Andalusia



Central Mosque of Sicily

Though there were times when relations among different faith followers were not ideal, but they lived and prospered together. It was the period of Renaissance.

The personalities interviewed in the film are from diverse religious and political backgrounds, social activists, some with biases against Islam and others seeking peaceful coexistence and harmony among all faith believers. At present, many say that Islam and European identity are incompatible or Islam has contributed nothing to Western civilization and there are others who are of the opinion that Islam is part of Europe.



Scene from the film depicting past of Muslims in Europe

According to the later group of voices, the Tenth century was a peaceful era during which a lot of progress was made in science, culture and education. Muslims translated Greek and Roman books and through these translations different branches of science are understood today. An example of Islamic contribution to literature is of Rabbi Moses Maimonides from Middle Ages, whose philosophy and every aspect of life was influenced and stimulated by Islam. His creation of the magnificent court was inspired by Shariat Court. Hence, it is acknowledged that Islam led the Europe out of darkness.



Allama Iqbal at the Grand Mosque of Cordoba

The story of Islam in Europe came to an end with the Fall of Grenada — Spain in 1492 AD. Over the next few centuries, Spain tried to erase every sign of Islam but Muslims' influence remained even after the Fall. Centuries later Islam still exists in Europe, but that period left behind the idea of *La Convivencia* — a Spanish term — that means people could live together, they could coexist and this idea is desperately needed in the current times. The documentary also illustrates the role of Christian rulers in Sicily, Roger II and Frederic II, the Holy Roman emperors, who spoke Arabic, had Arabic guards and had Arabic inscription on their royal mantles. So the *Convivencia* in Sicily is in reverse, i.e. the Christian rulers were highly appreciative of the Muslim culture and contributions.



Granada, Spain

In short, the journey is a depiction of concerns and hopes, getting all the facts straight as recognized by many European scholars and religious elites, that Islam brought civilization to Europe. The current xenophobia about Islam is expressed beautifully in the film through the Balkan history, which was a frontline of conflict between Christian Europe and Ottoman Empire.

For centuries though there was a conflict but there were also times of peaceful harmony among Jews, Christians and Muslims. The conflict made the Europeans to realize or believe that Islam was uncivilized and alien to Europe. That idea is the basis for Islamophobia in Europe at present. It could be because of ignorance to the Islamic history, as the documentary reveals that the history is taught only from 1492 AD onwards i.e. after the Fall of Granada.

The third phase of the documentary i.e. **European colonization** led to the era when Africa met Europe and Islam met Christianity.

While highlighting the examples from the past, the documentary also displays the widespread stereotypes in the West about Islam. The Muslims who once ruled the Europe are now migrating to the same area and facing multiple challenges. Many mosques have been attacked and protests are observed against the existing ones. Muslims view themselves as target of the European right wing political parties having racist and stereotype mind-set. For example, in Munich, a Muslim lady complains of racism and discrimination for carrying a Turkish name. In the same city a popular TV anchor lost her job because she was a Muslim. Among European countries, France and Britain are known for having grave biases against Muslims.

The moderate voices showing their concerns say that Muslims react because they are labelled as terrorists and that Islam in Europe has been fossilized. It is also expressed that when one talks about good relations among faiths, people consider that person — an utopian. What brings these aspirations from utopia to reality is the knowledge that researchers' team led by Dr. Akbar S. Ahmad acquires after visiting Andalusia — the single most important feature of the current situation — since it depicts the past and the present that how things used to be and how they are now. Many Muslim, Jew and Christian scholars are filmed who are working for reconciliation, understanding and mutual respect.

To conclude, the documentary, despite the differences and stereotyping presents a ray of hope. The documentary gives an important message of building bridges among believers of different faiths by “being out in the world and, engage

in dialogue with the ‘other.’” A broad audience from different walks of life watched the documentary. Chief Guest, Adviser to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, Honourable Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Director General, ISSI, Ambassador Masood Khan and Executive Director, Markaz-e-Ilm, Center for Dialogue and Action, Amineh Hoti spoke on the occasion.

Remarks

Ambassador Masood Khan

Director General, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI)

Honourable Sartaj Aziz,

I thank you for accepting our invitation to watch with us the film, *Journey into Europe*, produced by a brilliant intellectual and an outstanding thought leader of our times – Dr. Akbar S. Ahmad.

Dr. Ahmed needs no introduction in Pakistan, the Middle East, the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States. Currently, the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University in Washington, D.C., he has contributed to and shaped contemporary thinking on the relations between the Muslim and the Western worlds. In that sense, he is a communicator and conduit between the East and the West.

Today we are going to watch a fascinating documentary covering relations between Muslim world and Europe spanning many centuries, starting with the period of Muslim presence in Andalusia and Sicily, tracing the Ottoman expansion into Europe, and understanding the more recent era of colonization and immigration. This documentary is not about history, but about pressing contemporary issues of multiculturalism in Europe, cross-fertilization of the Islamic and European civilizations, stereotyping, Islamophobia, terrorism and violent extremism.

The message of the documentary is not despondence but hope. It explores how Christians, Muslims and Jews can live together and promote harmony and peace.

After Paris terrorist attacks, some existential questions have emerged. Europe and Islam are not quintessentially different or disparate. We see many parts of Europe steeped in Islamic civilization, whose culture, language, architecture and knowledge has left an indelible mark on modern European thought and renaissance. Similarly, Europe has left a strong imprint on the Middle East, Africa and Asia and shaped Muslim worldview. So an interface of culture already coexists.

Today it is our collective responsibility to stop the hands of the terrorists from hurting Europe, its people and its cities. We have to work together to frustrate the murderous designs of the masterminds of terror, repulse their attacks and destroy the entities that support them. At the same time, Europe has to restore self-confidence to stop incitement to hatred against Muslims living in Europe.

It is clear that as Hitler, Mussolini, Milosevic and Karadzic do not represent Europe similarly Baghdadi and Osama Bin Laden do not epitomize, or speak for, Muslims and Islam. They are not us. Criminals and terrorists are not us either in Europe or the Muslim world.

There is no use pretending that this problem — the strained relations between West and Islamic world — does not exist. It exists. We need a continuing self-healing process in Europe so that situations that led to the atrocities committed during the interwar period of the last century and the Second World War are not

repeated, this time targeting Muslims. And the Muslim world needs its own reformation to turn the tide of violent extremism that threatens the Islamic and Western countries.

This is not just about crafting narratives but changing reality on the ground by embracing tolerance, moderation, co-existence and scientific innovation. On the political side, the international community must find ways to resolve the issues of Jammu and Kashmir and Palestine.

Let's focus on commonalties between Muslim and European worlds and try to build on them to save our world from strife and conflict and steer it towards shared prosperity. Pakistan wants to be a crucible for that transition for integrating humanity.

Dr. Ahmed's *Journey into Europe* is about Europe. It is about how Europe should be more cohesive, more coherent and more integrative. His captivating and gripping odyssey takes us from Andalusia to Sicily to the Balkans to Britain to France to Germany to Denmark — all places jolted periodically by the tremors of simmering religious discord. He gives us hope.

Today, the story of Europe will be told by the superb narrator Dr. Akbar S. Ahmed himself. But we are also fortunate to have in our midst Dr. Amineh Hoti, who is the associate editor, cinematographer and script consultant of the documentary.

Let me conclude with a phrase I have picked up from the documentary: Fear should not mutate into hatred.

Remarks

Dr. Amineh Hoti

Executive Director, Markaz-e-Ilm, Center for Dialogue & Action

It is an honour and pleasure to be amongst you. I see many dear friends and well-wishers here. Thank you all, especially honourable Sartaj Aziz *Sahib*, Ambassador Masood Khan *Sahib*, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood *Sahib* and Tahir *Sahib* and ISSI for giving this event a platform.

With the increase of Islamophobia and violent terrorism in our shared world, these are NOT easy times for those who are perceived as “the Other” or people who are different from us. In the film you will notice the brewing of a major crisis in relations between different communities. You will also see hope for dialogue and examples of co-existence.

This film, *Journey into Europe*, is the fourth in a quartet of projects by Professor Akbar S. Ahmed and his team of researchers — and I tell you that despite being my father it was, for me personally, a rigorous journey. One in which we explored relations between the West and the World of Islam conducted on the basis of fieldwork over a period of two years. In this project, prominent European leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Chief Rabbis, Grand Muftis, and everyday Europeans, such as taxi drivers, have been interviewed by us. We especially brought out the voices of women.

I was privileged to be a part of this unprecedented project. I would like to

emphasise that this project reverses the trend of Western scholars studying Asian and African societies. This project shows that we outside of the West can make important contributions to understanding global societies.

You will notice that this film begins with the history of Andalusia and *La Convivencia*, when Muslims from 711-1492 (about 800 years), lived with fellow Christians and Jews and were able to lead and foster a peaceful pluralist society. That era of history produced great art, architecture, and literature, and contributed immensely to European and Islamic civilizations. Unfortunately, few people in Europe and in the world elsewhere, including Pakistan, know of the details of Andalusia and its rich history. Therefore, it is important to promote better understanding of the time of Andalusia and highlight the great contributions of Andalusians to European society and the world at large.

Preliminary findings of the study show the desperate need for all people to work towards a better understanding of each other. In Europe, the Muslim community is greatly misunderstood. They have many questions about Muslims, especially concerning women and terrorism. It is crucial that Muslims should be able to explain themselves to others. We also need to better understand young Muslims, who are alienated because of generational gap, lack of leadership, and unrelenting pressure to explain their faith and heritage.

Having travelled across Europe for this project, interviewing hundreds of European Muslims and hearing their challenges, I realized how valuable and precious our home country — Pakistan — is to myself and to Pakistanis. Look at the example of the Quaid-e-Azam, who exemplifies pluralism and the need to respect minority rights, women's rights, and the rule of law. It is important for all of us, especially our next generations of young Pakistanis, to claim back the soul

of our nation and fight for the Quaid's values of a progressive and successful Pakistan. We can only do this if we cultivate positive, hard-working and good global citizens through peace education. If there is a sudden raging fire in this room —the question is will u do nothing, will you sit and watch prayerfully, or challenge yourself to action and put it out.

As there are conflicts at a global level, they also exist within Pakistani society. In Pakistan we have many different religions and ethnicities. We should respect and celebrate this diversity as Quaid-e-Azam wanted. To attempt to bring different communities together, the Centre for Dialogue & Action started an innovative Peace Education course called *Ilm, Adab aur Insaaniyat* to cultivate Pakistani students to become more tolerant and inclusive of others. These courses focus on lessons from Andalusia, Pakistan's own founding father's and their emphasis on respect for the other. Textbooks for students and teacher training on acceptance will be published in English, Urdu and Pashto. Material from the film became part of our teaching material.

As you will see in the film, Europe has its own challenges with its minority communities — there are lessons in this for us, too, in Pakistan that how to be inclusive of people who are different from us.

Remarks

H.E. Sartaj Aziz

Advisor to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs

There is a great urgency after the attacks in Paris to mend relations between Muslims and non-Muslims globally, especially in Europe. This was the second major terrorist attack in Paris, and now the whole Europe has started debate on Islam, refugees, and terrorism. And the debate is being shaped by a great deal of misunderstanding, prejudice, and ignorance toward the European Muslim community.

Unfortunately, most of the commentaries on Muslims are being written by non-Muslims, continuing a trend over the last two centuries of European scholars being the primary commentators on the Muslim World. But in this case, we have Dr. Akbar S Ahmed, with his team of Muslims and non-Muslims, reversing the trend and studying European societies on the basis of fieldwork. In the light of this fieldwork, Dr. Ahmed has produced this film and is currently writing a book of the same title.

This comprehensive documentary explores contemporary relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe, while also teaching the lessons of Andalusia and *La Convivencia* — centuries of peaceful Muslim rule and their promotion of knowledge and coexistence among Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The film features top European leadership including presidents and prime ministers, archbishops, chief rabbis, grand muftis, heads of right-wing parties, and

common Europeans, in its quest to improve relations between Muslims and non-Muslims today.

In order to build understanding among societies today, it is vital that we promote scholarship and mutual respect among people of differing backgrounds. Only by building knowledge and truly learning about one another we can foster peace among the world's faiths and cultures. This film teaches us how peace has been fostered in Europe, while also showing what can happen when groups do not respect one another and fail to seek knowledge.

Interview of Dr. Akbar S Ahmad

Dawn Newspaper

How Perilous is the Threat to Muslims in the US?

Raza Rumi — *Published Dec 26, 2015, 11:35am*

Since the deadly Paris attacks and San Bernadino shootings, a widespread backlash against Muslims in the US has been reported. This has happened despite the condemnations of every major Islamic group in the country.

CAIR, a Muslim civil rights group, has issued several alerts. An independent news outlet, Think Progress, states that 41 incidents of “violent attacks, threats, assaults, protests, and instances of vandalism” have occurred in the past few weeks.

Take a look: Muslim group CAIR evacuates US HQ after getting white powder in mail

This backlash also comes in the wake of controversial positions taken by Republican Party’s Presidential candidates such as Donald Trump, and aided by dozens of governors who announced that they would not accept Syrian refugees as they could be potential sympathisers of the Islamic State of Iraq and Shaam (ISIS).

Read: Donald Trump calls for keeping Muslims out of US

This media frenzy and political posturing has whipped up passions against an imagined enemy. For instance, 30 per cent of Republicans in a December survey held by Public Policy Polling said that they would support an attack on Agrabah — a fictional place in the Aladdin cartoon.

It was a relief that nearly 60pc admitted that they were not sure. The desire to ban all Muslims entering the US — over 50pc show support for the idea — needs to be understood within this background. There is a blurring of reality and fantasy in which the fear of Muslims becomes merely a minor detail.

What is alarming is that disinformation and politicking is stirring unprecedented levels of hatred. Many observers say that this is worse than the post 9/11 climate in the United States. The Democrats, liberal sections of US media and civil society, are confronting this toxic mixture of ignorance and xenophobia.

While the threat of Islamic extremism cannot be dismissed, the 24/7 coverage of “terrorism” and “security analysis”, and its constant purveying of fear creates an unreal situation. Americans have been warned to be fearful of neighbours, of fellow passengers at the airport, train stations, and bus terminals. Once the threat has been established and assumed to be universal, it could come from any direction.

To understand the narratives around Islam and Muslims in the US, I spoke to Dr. Akbar S. Ahmed, who is the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at American University and author of “Journey into America” based on extensive field research on Islam in America.

1. What was your reaction to Donald Trump’s idea that Muslims should be banned from entering the US?

Like all Muslims, I was shocked but not surprised at Donald Trump’s statement that all Muslims should be banned from entering the US because he has been making increasingly outrageous statements about America’s Muslim community for the last few months. Trump’s positions on banning Muslims from entering America and increased surveillance and profiling shocked many non-Muslim Americans as well as people across the world.

2. Does Islamophobia exist in America?

Islamophobia in the United States has increased and is turning into a dangerous, growing reality. Recent rhetoric and attacks have resulted in widespread fear and uncertainty in the Muslim community. These attacks have included outrageous incidents where a taxi passenger in Pittsburgh shot the Moroccan driver after checking if he was a “Pakistani guy”. Some extremists have opened fire on mosques and Muslim homes. This kind of hatred against Muslims needs to be challenged and checked but unfortunately the statements of people like Trump are making the environment worse.

3. Your work on Muslims in America highlighted some of the dangers after 9/11? What were the key concerns and have they become irreversible?

In my book, *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam*, I explored the place of Islam in American society and history. I discovered that there is not a single

American identity but three broad identities that can be located in American history.

The first is primordial identity, which is rooted in the English settlers. For these settlers and their descendants America was a white, Protestant nation.

The second identity is American pluralist identity promoted by the Founding Fathers who established the US as a nation of religious freedom, civil liberties, and democracy. The Founding Fathers welcomed Muslims and people of all religions from around the world to America. Franklin even expressed his desire that the Mufti of Istanbul come to Philadelphia and preach Islam to Americans because he believed so much in religious freedom and pluralism.

The third identity is a ‘predator’ identity, which entails the compulsion to reinforce primordial identity using force against any perceived threat to America. So while people like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy represent pluralist America, the policies of enslavement of African Americans, an inferior status for them after slavery was abolished, the oppression of Native Americans, and the mass internment of Japanese Americans during World War II are examples of predator identity. After 9/11, the danger was that predator identity may asserting itself once again, with Muslims as the target.

Examine: In solidarity with Muslims: US ambassador visits Faisal Mosque

4. Is the US going backward since 9/11, when President Bush went to mosques and said that Islam was not the enemy.

People don't give President Bush credit but he did visit the main mosque in Washington DC after 9/11 and declared that America was at war against terrorists, not Islam.

The question now is whether America will go forward with predator identity. While Trump and advocates of predator identity are prominent in American society, at the moment we must not forget about the efforts of pluralist Americans to support and defend the idea of an inclusive America. As history shows, fear when combined with the economic insecurity so many Americans are feeling right now, can lead to hatred of the "other."

5. What's driving this recent shift in public sentiment?

The questions Americans asked about Muslims after 9/11 have unfortunately not been answered a decade and a half later. Lately, the rise of ISIS, terror attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, videos of beheadings, and the chaos in the Muslim world have led many Americans to argue that Islam is a violent religion that must be challenged.

Influential media television channels like Fox News feature nonstop coverage of Islam in which the religion is associated with terrorism. This is a real problem for the American media in general. Invariably on these shows, you will have three or four people discussing and defining Islam or Muslim societies and not one will be a Muslim.

6. The anti-Islam debates by some groups are contributing to the political narrative?

In 2011, the Center for American Progress, a Washington, DC think tank, published an extensive report called Fear, Inc. on what it called the “Islamophobia network,” which was updated in 2015. The report describes how a \$57 million network of wealthy donors, politicians, think tanks, media outlets, bloggers, and terrorism “experts” promote hatred of Muslims and the idea that Islam itself is a direct threat to the United States. This indicates that Islamophobia is more than a simple American ignorance and fear of Islam and terrorism.

Independent scholarship based on extensive fieldwork and research can help challenge the kind of misinformation about Islam and Muslim societies and help improve relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

7. What are the long-term consequences of anti-Muslim rhetoric, beyond the presidential campaigns?

It will take a long time for Muslims to recover from their current situation. Muslims in America are in a double bind. While they are constantly being questioned and told they are un-American and a threat to the nation, they are at the same time non-existent in mainstream media. The community is also divided ethnically and in terms of sectarian loyalties. They will end up becoming a minority community that lacks access to power, wealth, and privilege that other religious minorities like Catholics and Jews have been able to achieve.

8. What needs to be done to reverse this tide, if at all? What should the American Muslims be doing other than the usual media rhetoric on condemning violent extremism?

First, there should be a much closer relationship between the government and the Muslim community. There is too much mistrust on both sides right now at a time when they need to be working together. Muslims must contribute to public opinion debates and participate in civil society movements. They must counsel (and penalize if needed) the young against violence and radical ideologies.

A great deal of work has been done to build bridges between religious communities in America, but in this toxic environment, we need to be doing much more. I have participated in major interfaith initiatives in Washington DC and I have had the privilege to partner with great religious leaders with the common goal of promoting interreligious communication and compassion towards one another. Such interfaith cooperation and dialogue, where people of different faiths can collaborate and coexist, goes back to the start of American history. It is my belief and hope that this pluralist America, the America that has inspired so many across the world, will be able to withstand the current challenges of hatred and bigotry to move into the future without compromising itself.

Brief Bio

Professor Dr. Akbar S Ahmed

*Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies School of International Service
American University in Washington, D.C.*

Ambassador Akbar Ahmed is the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies in the School of International Service at American University in Washington, D.C. He has served as a Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and was the First Distinguished Chair of Middle East and Islamic Studies at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD. Ahmed belonged to the senior Civil Service of Pakistan and was the Pakistan High Commissioner to the U.K. and Ireland. Previously, Ahmed was the Iqbal Fellow (Chair of Pakistan Studies) and Fellow of Selwyn College at the University of Cambridge. Ahmed was the Diane Middlebrook and Carl Djerassi Visiting Professor and Visiting Fellow of Jesus College for the Fall term of 2012 at Cambridge University. He has also taught at Harvard and Princeton Universities. He holds a PhD in Anthropology from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (where he is placed in the “notable alumnus” category) and a Diploma in Education (“double distinctions”) and M.A. from the University of Cambridge. In addition, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Law from the University of Liverpool (2007) and an Honorary Doctorate from Forman Christian College University in Lahore, Pakistan (2013), where he has a gold medal for standing first in English and History. Ahmed was declared ‘The Professor of the Year’ for the DC area in 2004 by the Carnegie Foundation. He has also been involved with interfaith efforts in Washington, DC. The Bishop of Washington hosted an unprecedented Evensong

dedicated to Ahmed at the National Cathedral and he gave a sermon as part of the memorial service commemorating the decade since 9/11 at St. Alban's Church at the National Cathedral. With Professor Judea Pearl, the father of Danny Pearl, Ahmed conducted a series of high-profile dialogues to promote better Jewish-Muslim understanding. The two received the first ever prestigious Purpose Prize. The Gandhi Centre in Washington, D.C., gave him the inaugural Peace Award. He was given the Medal of Excellence and the Star of Excellence in Pakistan and was invited to address the Senate of Pakistan on relations between the West and the Muslim world in a special session in 2014.

Ahmed is consistently featured in *The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims* edited by Professor John Esposito et al. The Huffington Post's World Post and the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute named Ahmed a 2015 Global Thought Leader. His latest film, *Journey into Europe*, was launched in Islamabad by Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Foreign Affairs, at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.

Event Pictures





Press Coverage

‘Journey into Europe’: Aziz calls for promoting tolerance, harmony

By Our Correspondent

Published: December 24, 2015

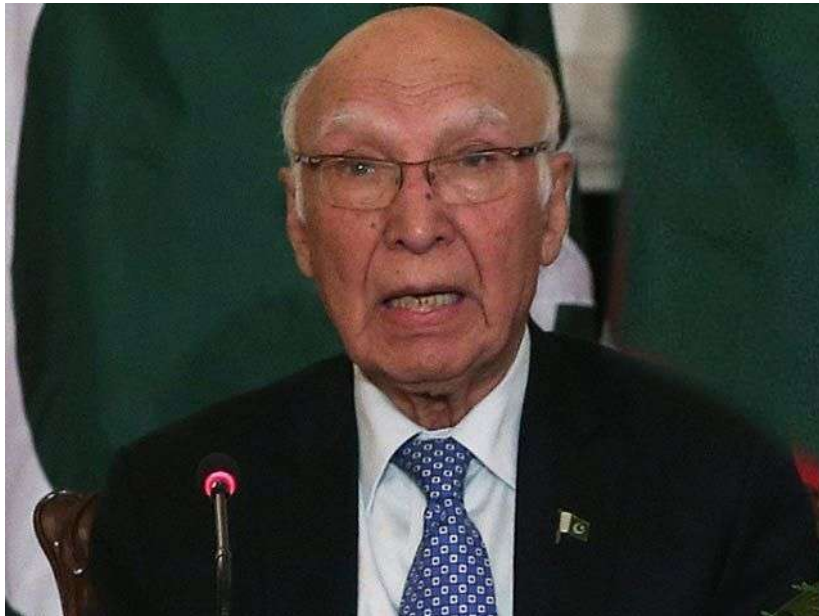


Photo: AFP

ISLAMABAD:

Prime Minister’s adviser on foreign affairs Sartaj Aziz has underlined the need for promoting tolerance and harmony in society through educating people about different religions and cultures.

“It is vital that we promote mutual respect and tolerance between people of different backgrounds so that they can accept each other and live together peacefully,” Aziz said while addressing at a documentary screening session at the Institute of Strategic Studies here on Wednesday.



” It is vital that we promote mutual respect and tolerance between people of different backgrounds

PM's Adviser on Foreign Affairs
Sartaj Aziz

“This is only possible by truly gaining knowledge,” he added.

The documentary ‘Journey into Europe’, produced by Professor Akbar S Ahmed, acclaimed author, historian and maker of ‘Jinnah’, explores the place of Islam in European history and civilisation.

Based on fieldwork, the documentary traces relations between Muslims and the Europeans, citing the examples of Andalusia and La Convivencia — centuries of peaceful Muslim rule and their promotion of knowledge and co-existence among Muslims, Jews and Christians.

The adviser who was the chief guest, said educating each other about different religions and communities is the way to tolerance. He clarified that what has happened in Europe is a prime example of intolerance.

Speaking to *The Express Tribune*, Dr Amineh Hoti, daughter of Professor Ahmed and executive director at the Centre for Dialogue and Action, said the effort aims at building bridges among different communities, ethnicities, countries and religions.



” Europe and Islam are not
quintessentially different;
many parts of Europe are
still inspired by Islam

Institute of Strategic Studies Director-General
Masood Khan

“This project includes a book and a documentary, highlighting examples where Muslims face discrimination and prime examples of tolerance and co-existence.”

The genocide in Bosnia has also been highlighted in the documentary, she said.

Hoti further mentioned that she interviewed a woman called Khadija from Bosnia, for this documentary, who lost 50 members of her family when Serbians came and the neighbours killed each other.

“Men were killed and women were raped.”

At the same time the documentary highlights another example from Andalusia in Spain where Muslims ruled but lived peacefully with people of other faiths.

“This led them to produce some of the best knowledge the world has ever seen,” she added.

The institute’s Director General Masood Khan said the message of the documentary is not despondence but hope.

“It explores how Christians, Muslims and Jews can live together and promote harmony and peace. After the Paris attacks, some existential questions have arisen. Europe and Islam are not quintessentially different, many parts of Europe are still inspired by Islam,” he said.

He further said that it is our collective responsibility to stop terrorists from hurting people in Europe and other parts of the world.

“We have to work together to prostrate murderous designs of masterminds of terror, repulse their attacks and destroy their entity while at the same time Europe must stop hating innocent Muslims,” Khan stressed.

Published in *The Express Tribune*, December 24th, 2015.

Source: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1015367/journey-into-europe-aziz-calls-for-promoting-tolerance-harmony/>

Documentary Traces Islamic Influences on European History

A Reporter — Published Dec 24, 2015 06:14 am

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) screened Dr Akbar Ahmed's documentary 'Journey into Europe' on Wednesday.

The documentary explores the place of Islam in European history and civilisation and looks into the relationships between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Europe

Sartaj Aziz, adviser to the prime minister, lauded the documentary and said the film promotes peaceful co-existence and shows the repercussions of not respecting the rights of others.

He added that the film could help in decreasing the sudden surge of hate and hostility towards Muslims, especially after the Paris attacks. The film promotes good relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, he said.

The Director General ISSI, (retired) Ambassador Masood Khan said Dr Ahmed, a renowned anthropologist and Islamic scholar, was a conduit between the East and West.

He said the message of the documentary was of hope and that it explores how Christians, Muslims and Jews can live together. The documentary promotes harmony and peace, he added, and that it answers some of the questions that have arisen after the Paris attacks.

The film shows that Europe and Islam are not incompatible, he said.

The DG ISSI said that many parts of Europe were still reminiscent of Islamic culture, language and architecture and that the religion has left impression on modern European thought.

It is our collective responsibility to stop terrorists from hurting Europe, its people and its cities, he said.

The Executive Director of the Makaz-e-Ilm Centre for Dialogue and Action Dr Aminah Hoti, who was the key note speaker, said the making of the film had required a lot of fieldwork and that it would not have been possible if people from various streams of life, from the archbishop of Canterbury to local taxi drivers, had not participated in its making.

Dr Hoti, who was part of the team researching for the film, said the documentary shows that non-European scholars can also make important contributions to research.

Published in Dawn, December 24th, 2015

Source: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1228424>

Sartaj for Urgency to Pacify

Surge of Hate Towards Muslims

Mian Arshad

Thursday, December 24, 2015, - Islamabad—Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz has said that in the aftermath of the Paris attacks a debate dominated by prejudice and hate has started. Thus, there is a growing urgency to appease this surge of hate and hostility towards Muslims.

Speaking at a screening of a documentary “Journey into Europe ceremony hosted by Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) here on Wednesday, he said that comprehensiveness and depth of documentary explored and promoted peaceful co-existence and also showed the repercussions of not respecting other people’s rights.

Hence, this film is vital to promoting relations between Muslims and Non-Muslims. He stated that this film’s greater understanding would without doubt be an important contribution in a time when such scholarship is desperately needed.

Renowned anthropologist and Islamic scholar, Dr. Akber Ahmed had prepared the documentary.

The Director General ISSI, Ambassador Masood Khan during his welcome remarks praised Dr Akber Ahmed and stated that Dr. Ahmed was a conduit between the Eastern and the Western worlds.

He stated that the message of the documentary is not despondence but hope. It explores how Christians, Muslims and Jews can live together and promote harmony and peace.

He pointed out that after the Paris terrorist attacks, some existential questions have emerged and highlighted the fact that Europe and Islam are not quintessentially different or disparate.

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JOURNEY INTO EUROPE



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