

Stephen Kinzer: Never Islam, Always

An article of surpassing idiocy, by Stephen Kinzer, [here](#).

No mention of Islam, nor of the violence and aggression that make it difficult, in that un-Islamic construct the nation-state, for national unity to prevail over the many ethnic and sectarian divisions that all the states that were heirs to the formerly Ottoman territories, necessarily reflect. As expected, it's heavy on the anecdotal – a line from Gertrude Bell– and the usual complaint about all that Sykes-Picot supposedly wrought. There is no mention of Islam, no hint that Kinzerr thinks that how Muslims regard the nation-state, how Muslims within Muslim-dominated lands treat non-Muslims or, indeed, Muslims of a different sect, might have something to do with the texts and teachings of Islam, and the atmospherics of societies suffused with Islam, and the attitudes that naturally arise among those who are raised in those states, societies, communities, families suffused with Islam. Islam, Steven Kinzer has decided, indeed long ago made the decision, as can be seen from his book on Iran “All the Shah’s Men,” that Islam has nothing to contribute to the analysis and explanation of Muslim behavior, has no role in explaining the hypertrophied aggression and violence of almost every Muslim society that is fully Muslim, with its Islamic nature not systematically constrained (as was done in Turkey by Kemalism) or diluted by a pre-Islamic still-existing substrate (as with the Hindu and Buddhist customs and culture, by distance, and difference based on still-existing significant non-Muslim elements in the culture (as with the Hindu and Buddhist substrata still evident in much of Indonesia, though not in Aceh).

When next you read or hear about an attack by Muslim terrorists, on non-Muslims or on other Muslims who, in their

view, are insufficiently Muslim – there have been about 25,000 separate attacks by Muslim terrorists all over the world since 2001 – that is, have yet one more to add to the list, that list of which we remember only the most sensational examples, such as the World Trade Center attacks in New York, and on the Pentagon, and on the Madrid subway station, on London busses and the London Underground, and on a London street on Lee Rigby, on Theo van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn in Amsterdam, on the audience in a Moscow theatre, and a school in Beslan, at the Jewish museum in Brussels and a Jewish school in Toulouse and on tourists at Jewish sites on Djerba, in Tunisia, on unarmed soldiers at Fort Hood, on pedestrians in Nantes and at a Christmas market in Strasbourg, in Ottawa, and Sydney, and French people at an editorial meeting of Charlie-Hebdo in Paris, and at the kosher supermarket at the Porte de Vincennes, in the same city – and where tomorrow? or the day after tomorrow? – remember that none of this has to do with Islam. It all has to do, in Stephen Kinzer's view, with the colonial West, and its blunders, and its terrible legacy, with such things as Gertrude Bell, and Sykes-Picot, and the coup against Mossadegh. It would be fascinating to know, given the many different peoples in the former Ottoman vilayets of the Middle East, how Kinzer would have marked the boundaries, set out the states, that he thinks would avoid all the troubles we see today. Why doesn't he set out his alternative map, and explain how that would have worked out, given the way Arabs treat non-Arabs, Muslims treat non-Muslims, and even non-Muslims are affected, when in a sea of threatening Muslims, by the violence and aggression with which the Qur'an and Hadith and Sira are instinct.