

The Flight of the Intellectuals
By Paul Berman

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Paul Berman is a left-liberal American intellectual who has done as much as anybody in the English-speaking world to grapple with the implications and problems of the violent Islamist ideological movement responsible for September 11 and most other subsequent international terrorism. His book *Terror and Liberalism* was one of the most penetrating and original treatises on the real nature of the Islamist ideological movement.

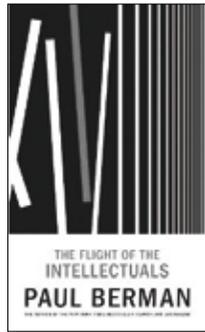
Now, when many Western commentators and writers seem to be losing interest in even talking about terrorism and its ideological inspiration, Berman's back with another bite at the cherry. And this time, it's his fellow intellectuals who are the primary target for his pointed, penetrating prose.

The main subject of the book is the controversial but highly public Swiss Muslim intellectual Tariq Ramadan, with a supporting role for Ramadan's favourite Muslim cleric, Sheikh Youseff al-Qaradawi.

However, the real target of this book is not Ramadan himself—despite Berman's careful, fair-minded yet relentless and ultimately damning look into Ramadan's real agenda, intellectual background, and worldview. It is Berman's fellow intellectuals

of the Left, who, apparently in the name of a distorted and morally simplistic multicultural ethic, feel the need to downplay the utter illiberality of the Islamist movement and its thinkers, including Ramadan.

As Berman recently told an interviewer, this book was the product of his own annoyance at 'the refusal or inability of intellectuals and journalists in the US and the West to come to grips with the kinds of doctrines that are cropping up.' Instead, he said, they prefer to 'project fantasies onto what they're reading.'



Berman begins with a review of Ramadan's Islamist forebears, particularly his famous grandfather Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood—the well spring, either directly or schismatically, of almost all subsequent Islamist terror groups.

Berman provides some useful history of the brotherhood and its role in sprouting terrorist and other anti-liberal intellectual offshoots. In particular, he offers some effective discussion of the Brotherhood's clear affinities and links with European fascism.

Drawing on Jeffrey Herf's recent study of Nazi propaganda in the Middle East, other recent research, and his own careful readings of the seminal works of al-Banna and other Muslim Brotherhood ideologues, his sketch is brief and incomplete, yet convincing. An important player in the story he tells is the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, an active and important collaborator with

both the Nazi war machine and the Nazi's 'final solution' for the Jews, and a close intimate of al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood.

All of this is essential background to looking in detail at Ramadan's published writings and speeches and where he places himself in the Muslim Brotherhood tradition. Over 100 or so pages of often witty, always fair-minded, and carefully researched argument, Berman demonstrates convincingly many devastating points about Ramadan. These include:

- Despite his ability to say what Western liberals want to hear, and the portrayal of Ramadan by himself and others as a free-thinking reformer, he is nothing of the sort. He is an intellectual imprisoned 'in a cage made of his doctrine' by his worshipful attitude toward his grandfather's legacy. As Berman concludes crushingly, 'He does not believe in thinking for himself.'

- Ramadan deals with the pro-fascist statements and actions (including the acceptance of Nazi money) of his famous ancestor, Hassan al-Banna, through a simple expedient. He simply treats it as if it never occurred. He never mentions it in his extensive writings about al-Banna. Even the latter's close relationship with al-Husseini, essentially an unindicted Nazi war criminal, is downplayed and mentioned only in passing, with al-Husseini's Nazi associations simply expunged from the record.

- Ramadan also provides some pretty bizarre and untenable interpretations of his grandfather's thought, such as claiming he favoured a 'British-style parliamentary system,' something

which actually existed in Egypt in his time and which al-Banna demanded be replaced by a single national council which would be a theocratic 'single phalanx.'

- Ramadan makes a distinction between the followers of his grandfather and followers of Sayid Qutb, a later Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood figure who is the direct inspiration for al-Qaeda and other similar groups. However, this distinction is exaggerated and based in part on very incomplete history. For instance, Ramadan makes the point that al-Banna and Qutb 'did not even know each other.' This is strictly true but also deliberately misleading, as Berman shows. Not only did al-Banna, prior to his assassination in 1949, actively work to woo Qutb into the Brotherhood but al-Banna's close collaborator, Said Ramadan, worked closely with Qutb and launched Qutb's career as a Koranic commentator and inspirer of violent jihad. Said Ramadan was Tariq Ramadan's father.

- Tariq Ramadan and Qutb can rightly be seen as 'stars in a single constellation' according to Berman. He demonstrates that what Ramadan calls 'Salafi reformism' to describe his own philosophy, incorporates both. It is, as Berman explains particularly aptly, a form of 'Rousseauism Islamised,' a belief that there is a pure and authentic way of living, yet those who are born free are 'everywhere in chains.' But in their version, the pure and authentic ways of living is found in seventh century Islamic documents, while the 'chains' are supplied by the 'western cultural invasion' which

'colonises minds' in Ramadan's phraseology.

- Both Qutb and Ramadan seek to overcome this by reconstructing the modern age along Salafist lines, and 'grab hold of modern political vocabulary, which they treat as empty glasses, and fill the modern vocabularies with Koranic meaning.' The vocabulary is different—Qutb used revolutionary, apocalyptic vocabulary common in the 1950s and 1960s; Ramadan's Islamic counter-culture uses the language of globalisation, multiculturalism, and third worldism. Nonetheless, there are close parallels in their intellectual projects.

- Ramadan does publicly condemn terrorism, but not against Israel. He approvingly quotes his grandfather as saying 'armed resistance' against Israel was 'incumbent'—meaning obligatory—against 'all Zionist colonisers,' i.e. all Israelis. Moreover, he remains dedicated to and worshipful of Sheikh Qaradawi, who has issued fatwas authorising suicide bombings against Israel and in Iraq and Afghanistan, who publicly backs Hamas and opposes peace with Israel, who indeed calls himself the 'Mufti of martyrdom operations.' While Ramadan himself condemns attacks against civilians in principle, in practice he argues that Israeli policy is the cause of such acts, and the 'only recourse' Palestinians have is to attack civilians.

- On Jews, Ramadan does condemn anti-Semitism as such. However, Berman explores Ramadan's scattershot condemnation of six French intellectuals with Jewish sounding names in 2003 whom he charged,

essentially, with militating for narrow Jewish interest by calling attention to anti-Semitism and backing the Iraq war (which Ramadan argues served Israel's interests). Not only were some of these individuals not Jewish but most of them had not even backed the war, and Berman picks apart the assumption that went into Ramadan's claims—and they are not complimentary to Ramadan's approach to Jews.

On this last point and others, Berman contrasts Ramadan with other leading Muslim intellectuals as diverse as German academic Bassem Tibi, Algerian writer Bousalem Sansal, Tunisian writer Abedewahab Meddeb, Moroccan-born novelist Tehar Ben Jalloun, and others. He shows that more sincere condemnations of anti-Semitism are in fact common among Muslim intellectuals of a more liberal bent than Ramadan.

Moreover, Berman traces the rise of Muslim liberalism in France, especially the rise of the 'March of the Beurs' in the 1980s leading to the multi-ethnic liberal movement 'SOS Racisme.' And he recounts the destruction of European Muslim liberalism as a political force in the 1990s by the rise of Islamism in European communities, something that Ramadan contributed to. And he further explains the bizarre alliance that developed between the global left generally and the Islamist movement, mediated largely by Trotskyite groups.

Most of the book is not at all polemical in tone, but Berman hits some polemical heights in the final two chapters. These contrast how otherwise good writers broadly of

the Left, especially Ian Buruma and Timothy Garton Ash, treat Ramadan highly positively, yet denigrate more liberal Muslim figures—especially the Somali-born Dutch citizen Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Berman's outrage and anger begins to burn through as he demonstrates their subtle condescension, their arguable sexism, their dismissal of her ideas, and their absurd efforts to paint Hirsi Ali as an 'enlightenment fundamentalist.' In the end, this final burst of white heat is illuminating. Berman demonstrates that what Western intellectuals are doing is in fact adopting the categories of the Islamist movement themselves—to whom Qaradawi is an orthodox moderate and Ramadan is half-way lost to Western liberalism while Hirsi Ali is 'an infidel fundamentalist,' as she was labelled by the murderer of her collaborator Theo van Gogh.

Moreover, these intellectuals basically treat Muslims as children with no agency while engaging in an essentialising and condescending quest for a single Muslim intellectual messiah to cure all the ills of the diverse Muslim world—thus their attraction to Ramadan. Overall, this is a book that anyone interested in the most important intellectual debates of our time must read.

Reviewed by Tzvi Fleischer

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Hawke: The Prime Minister By Blanche d'Alpuget

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H*awke: The Prime Minister* has been written to confirm the 'great man' view of history, which is not surprising given Blanche d'Alpuget is Bob Hawke's current wife. The result is that Hawke's judgment is depicted as near peerless and he is seen as having full ownership of the reform legacy of his governments. It would have been a better book if it were less cavalier in its portrayal of Hawke and more willing to credit his team of ministers for successes.

Looking back on the Hawke era, there were at least four or five potential prime ministers. There were obvious candidates in Hawke, Bill Hayden and Paul Keating, and less obvious contenders in Kim Beazley and John Dawkins. The strength of Hawke's government was in the depth of its talent as well as his leadership. This is almost completely lost in the biography.

Hawke's importance to the government peaks in the first 18 months after his election to office. Keating had yet to emerge as the Treasurer who would dominate politics in the latter part of the 1980s. Hawke's involvement is well mapped out as integral to the float of the dollar. The Keating of 1983 may have been guided by Hawke, but the condescending nature of d'Alpuget's depiction is unnecessary. Both men emerge

from the float strengthened, but for d'Alpuget only Hawke can take credit.

d'Alpuget barely covers the deregulation of the banking sector or Keating's role in putting together the detail of the policy together, underplaying his contribution to the government from the start.

Hawke's great contribution as a Labor leader, aside from winning four elections, was the Accord. In

this landmark change for labour relations in Australia, the major unions and the Hawke government agreed to arbitrated wage increases that were lower than rises in inflation in exchange for social benefits such as universal health care, superannuation, and tax reforms benefiting low-

and middle-income Australians most. It was both the framework for negotiating key reforms to the economy and an effective macro-economic tool for creating jobs and limiting inflationary pressure. It had support from key business groups.

Ralph Willis is credited in the book with formulating the vision of the Accord. After visiting Britain in the late 1970s and early '80s, Willis became convinced that the unions there had cost Labour office, resulting in Thatcher recasting the industrial landscape. The Accord was a hope that the political wing of the Labor Party could tame the industrial wing led by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Hayden as leader had been sceptical of this, but Hawke embraced this hope and could use his relationships in the union movement to obtain

