

Nothing to fear – a reflection by an Australian Muslim

The program of the AFP senior executive retreat held in Canberra in December 2003 included a cultural awareness presentation by Ali Roude, Chairman of the Islamic Council of NSW. The Council was established in 1976 and, along with a range of community-oriented objectives, aims to foster and promote cooperation between Muslims and others and promote peace, understanding and good relations among all people. The text of Mr Roude's presentation follows.



Mr Ali Roude and Ms Nada Roude addressing media representatives during a break in the December AFP senior executive retreat.

By Ali Roude OAM, Chairman of the Islamic Council of NSW

Franklin Delano Roosevelt – known to all as FDR – became the 32nd President of the United States of America some 70 years ago. He faced a world in crisis. The global economy had collapsed under the Great Depression. Farmers, labourers and workers scoured America seeking food and jobs. His federal politicians said their borders must be defended against boat people and illegal entrants – by force if needed. They said their nation must look to itself for protection against the ills of the world. They treated global peace-making bodies with contempt.

Across great oceans, unstable and corrupt governments were set up to fail by victorious wartime powers, for their own economic and strategic advantage. The peoples of these client states lived in hunger, disease, poverty and hopelessness. Radical political, ethnic and religious movements emerged, often with the support of the disheartened and dispossessed. Extreme nationalism, xenophobia and racial suspicion were widespread.

Privileged nations turned back ships full of so-called “economic migrants” to face futures of despair, isolation and eventual annihilation. We lied to them – especially the Jews of Middle and Eastern Europe – saying their governments were imperfect yet sufficient for their needs. We said they were better off in their birthplace, despite all links – cultural, ethnic, religious, even industrial and political – being torn away by regimes that despised them. (This was not a new thing. Catholic Spain had expelled its Jews in 1492. Muslim Turkey gave them shelter. Many of their descendents remain today.)

Dangerous countries led by almost crazy men prepared for impossible wars, building massive stockpiles of offensive weapons, often with materials and technology provided by the very Western powers they hoped to destroy.

What could a man say to such a world as this? What could he offer them?

Roosevelt built vast national infrastructure programs; he revolutionised industries and global alliances; he faced and won four elections over 12 years; and he almost brought the world – even momentarily – to total peace, before his generous heart finally failed him.

Where did he start? What was the spark that lit this path? It was these simple yet utterly true words from his First Inaugural Address: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

That was the cornerstone on which a new world, the “New Deal”, was built.

Roosevelt told Congress on 6 January 1941, his goal was the Four Freedoms:

- freedom of speech and of expression;
- freedom of every person to worship God in his own way;
- freedom from want; and
- freedom from fear.

His vision appealed to what an earlier president, Abraham Lincoln, had invoked in his own First Inaugural Address, namely, “The better angels of our nature”.

It worked because it treated people as if they were real. That sounds so obvious. Of course we treat people as if they were real. They are real.

Yet, most of our local, state, national and global structures assume otherwise. None of us are seen as individuals, members of families, neighbourhoods or communities. We are merely serial numbers or statistical anomalies or generalisations, stereotypes or population groups or profiles, caricatures or bogeymen – not as real people. That is much easier, less threatening, less demanding. And, often, it works.

I can lower my eyes this morning and tell you who you are:

You are middle-aged, middle-class, self-educated, aspirational people; heads of households, struggling to raise growing families on single incomes; overworked, underpaid, exhausted; getting fatter, eating too much and drinking far too much, getting not nearly enough exercise since you left the Academy, with a meat pie or a doughnut in one hand and a cold beer in the other.

You are ever so slightly trigger-happy. One in 10 of you is probably crooked – but don’t worry, you’ll be dead by the end of this episode. So will the ones with only a day left to retirement or your first day on the job. Most of you will be of Irish stock, or Scottish, or Italian.

Am I right? How could I possibly be wrong? I’ve watched TV and seen the movies. I know what a policeman is and what he does.

Is there anyone in this room who matched that description perfectly? Of course you didn’t match the profile. You may carry one characteristic, or two or three or even most of them. If so, the AFP’s professional counsellors are just down the hallway!

Were you offended by this caricature? Did you feel reduced, demeaned, ridiculed? Angry, upset,

annoyed? Or, rather, betrayed by an ancient cartoon image you are proud NOT to be?

Be pleased, at least, that your stereotype isn't the global villain of the day. Imagine what it is like to be "a man of Middle Eastern appearance". I have myself, a father, three brothers and five sons aged 16 years to 18 months matching that increasingly unwelcome profile or about to enter it. Imagine what we see and hear and feel when we turn on a television, or a radio, or pick up a paper? No wonder our people are so defensive.

A hostess and pilot on American Airlines Flight 363 from Baltimore to Dallas on Christmas Eve 2001 knew exactly how to profile – or so they thought.

The hostess spotted an athletic young man of Middle Eastern appearance. While he got off the plane for a minute, she rifled through his jacket and found an English language book, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*. He was also carrying a handgun on the plane. Yes, it was registered. Yes, he had handed the necessary E2 form to the Captain – as required – but she just didn't feel right about him.

Checking the paperwork which the pilot had left on the cockpit dashboard, they found he had been bumped flights due to Christmas air traffic. The form he had crossed out and re-lodged twice now had incorrect details. The pilot interrogated him at length on his return. After a while, the polite young man's patience began to break down. He demanded

his employer's local office be phoned to confirm his details. The pilot knew that could be a false telephone number and told him so. The pilot told the man not to look directly at him or speak in a forceful tone. Airline crew later claimed the young man became belligerent and shouted. Fellow passengers with utterly no connection to the man denied these claims.

As a result, the young man was bumped off his flight. His details were checked overnight and he flew the next day. When his boss found out what had happened, that boss said he would "be madder than heck" if profiling had occurred. He called for an immediate investigation and whatever George W. Bush wants, George W. Bush gets.

Some weeks later, American Airlines made a partial and qualified apology for removing United States Secret Service Agent Waleed Shater from their flight, forcing him to miss a connecting flight in Dallas out to the presidential ranch in Crawford, Texas where his roster would have seen him on the Presidential Personal Detail (PPD) for the Christmas holiday weekend.

You and I both know – that's how civilians and amateurs profile.

You have a very difficult job to do. I do not envy it or you. You also face a world in crisis. You must respond to chaos, to crisis.

Four months ago today, a bomb went off in the heart of Jakarta – a near neighbour and ally of Australia. Two days later, someone said: "Terrorism is not a scourge that is easily wiped out. We can make life very difficult for terrorist elements. We can scatter them. We can cut off one head here and one tentacle there, but often the beast survives. It melts into the alleyways, the hills, the forests; it mutates, then it strikes again.

To eliminate the terrorist, a first prerequisite is to know who he is, where he is, and what and when he is going to strike: in other words, we are talking about intelligence."

This wasn't Donald Rumsfeld or George Tenet or even Jacques Chirac. It was Yab Dato' Seri Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister; who has since succeeded his mentor, Dr Mahathir Mohamed.

Members of the AFP Senior Executive Service met in Canberra on 5 December 2003.



War, poverty, disease and malnutrition are rampant in many Muslim nations. The majority of the world's refugees today are Muslims. The majority of the world's refugees today are also women and children.

As your venerable Commissioner knows too well, reasonable and decent Muslims do not oppose intelligence gathering; we do not oppose investigation or arrests; we do not even oppose profiling – a necessary tool of your trade. What does alarm us is the misdirected use of these weapons; the careless turning of them back on innocent people and families; the presumption that “they’re all alike, underneath, those Muslims”; the inability or unwillingness to treat people as if they were real.

It’s still far too easy to tick a box or to confirm a prejudice.

The Navy is at Melville Island, but we know terrorists don’t come by boat. That is a fact but we’re not at Mascot or Tullamarine turning around planes. Particular and targeted passengers might deservedly be another matter and we all remember effective collaboration during the Sydney Olympics.

Remember this year is also an Australian bicentenary. In 1803, a Naval vessel in waters only recently identified as “Australian” by their very own captain came upon six Indonesian fishing boats off western Arnhem Land. Did we turn them back? No, we did not.

Matthew Flinders allowed the Muslims from Macassar to ply their trade and meet up commercially and socially with the local Aborigines – as their forefathers had been doing for centuries before he came upon them. They intermarried with the Aborigines; they are buried on our coastline; their distinctive ships, the prau, appear in our people’s sacred rock art and some of their words remain today in Arnhem Land languages.

They might well be surprised that John Howard sends them back now. Governor Philip Gidley King didn’t. What’s changed? That’s a story for another day... Remember, you are only ever agents of government policy – not its authors.

Remember also that we Muslims have always been great navigators.

Six centuries ago (1405-1433), Chinese Muslim Admiral Zheng He, after exploring the Persian Gulf, the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean, sailed his navy from China to Somalia in Africa, returning via

Indonesia. He made seven journeys over 28 years, covering 50,000km and 30 nations.

His 200m long armour-plated flagship was six times the length of Christopher Columbus’ flagship – the *Santa Maria*, launched 87 years later. It was larger than any ship of the Royal Australian Navy, past or present, including our two aircraft carriers – HMAS *Sydney* and HMAS *Melbourne*. Zheng He’s first fleet contained 62 “ships of the line”, Columbus’ a total of three. The admiral’s largest contingent taken abroad exceeded 27,000 men, more than double the size of our current Navy.

Zheng He’s mission was to display the might of Chinese power and to collect tribute from the “barbarians beyond the seas.” He could easily have sailed down around the Cape of Good Hope, up the western coast of Africa and invaded defenceless little Britain. Back home, an emperor died and political priorities changed. Africa was dull, Europe worthless; the ships were turned around. After Zheng He’s death, the ships were destroyed and China turned inward. Western civilisation was saved from the ‘yellow peril’ by their disdain four-and-a-half centuries before it even thought of fearing them.

Sixty-five years later, the Portuguese reversed the journey. Vasco da Gama made it to Malindi on Kenya’s coast. Then, to form a stronger alliance against neighbouring Mombasa, the ruler “loaned” da Gama a famous Arab Muslim pilot, Ahmad Ibn Majid, who sailed his four small Portuguese boats to India and into the port of Calicut. Four years later, da Gama returned with 20 well-armed naval vessels, demanding the expulsion of his competitors – the Muslim traders of Calicut. He bombarded the city from its coastline and hanged 38 unarmed fishermen, severing their heads, hands and feet before floating their corpses to shore. The Indians quickly signed a peace treaty: the first free trade agreement in Asia.

Thus was born the great tradition of European seafaring and the grand Age of Discovery – setting the scene for imperial colonialism. When I studied history at school, da Gama’s name was in all the text books.

No-one could remember the name of that “bloody Arab”, Ahmad Ibn Majid.

When Europeans worked out that there were other uses for gunpowder besides fireworks and civil excavations, the world turned over.

Pope Alexander VI sat down with a map and divided the whole world between Catholic Spanish and Portugal. Protestant Holland and Britain had other ideas about this carve-up and soon we had competing empires. Even France and Germany had a go. Ancient Muslim lands came under European military and colonial control. Having had them up to the gates of Vienna and ruling Spain for six centuries, the European powers thought it wiser not to educate their Muslim subjects.

Ancient universities were closed, the oldest in the world. Islamic medicine was banned and its traditions relegated to libraries, which meant Europeans had to go back to first principles, only later rediscovering the circulation of the blood and antiseptic hospitals, neurosurgery, psychiatry, dentistry and ophthalmology.

This is why Admiral Nelson bled to death, George III spoke with trees, George Washington had wooden teeth and Benjamin Franklin had to re-invent bifocal spectacles: to satisfy European pride, vanity and fear of conquered nations.

Still, I am grateful for European contributions. If a Franciscan monk had not thought to add milk and even more sugar to bitter Turkish coffee left behind from the siege of Vienna, I would not be able to enjoy a cappuccino in Lakemba today.

Also, if Elizabethan philosopher Sir Francis Bacon had not incorporated the Arabic concept of the number zero into the new Western mathematics, we would never have developed binary notation and the computer science that lets me receive spam e-mails from around the world. For this, I have almost forgiven him telling Britain that Islam was “the present terror of the world”. It was four centuries ago, it was the Ottoman Turks and Europeans claimed they made lousy coffee. Just ask the Capuchins.

How strong was this legacy? What was its impact? Let me say this: Jordan, Oman and Saudi Arabia are the only Muslim majority nations in the world older than AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty!

Every other Muslim majority nation either received its political independence from a colonial power – often Britain or France – during our lifetime or has undergone a radical change of government from monarchy, empire or democratic republic to communist republic or military dictatorship or back (usually with external aid from the CIA or KGB or both). This second list of traumatised states includes Afghanistan, Albania, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Syria and Turkey. How do I know this information is accurate and up-to-date? I received it directly from the CIA – more specifically, from their website.

Democracy has come late to many Islamic nations precisely because it did not suit the West to deliver it any earlier. Arbitrary national borders

drafted by departing powers at independence forced many nations to accept cultural, ethnic and religious configurations utterly foreign to their history, geography and traditions. “Conquer, divide and leave” – the British strategy in Ireland, India, Cyprus was also applied to many Muslim lands across the globe.

War, poverty, disease and malnutrition are rampant in many Muslim nations. The majority of the world’s refugees today are Muslims. The majority of the world’s refugees today are also women and children. These two groups overlap with horrific regularity and consistency. On the other hand, Oman now enjoys a thriving democratic parliament; it collaborates directly with international organs such as the United Nations; it supports many global Islamic charities. There can be success.

Failed US foreign policy is another matter again. In the time available to me, I will not even begin to speak of Palestine and Israel. Perhaps another day...

This is the history, the global socio-political context for the present troubles. It allows us to see why people in stressed situations around the world resort to illegal migration, civil disobedience and, occasionally, civil warfare. It also provides a framework for “Orientalism”, the historical mindset explained by the late Professor Edward Said and other modern intellectuals whereby the notionally Muslim East and the notionally Christian West intentionally misunderstand each other and themselves. It can best be summarised by Rudyard Kipling’s famous yet false 1889 maxim: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”

This common fallacy is insufficient to explain the behaviour or motivation of individual Muslims. Why do I – Ali Roude – think, say and do one thing while Willie Brigitte or Zak Mallah or Osama Bin Laden or Saddam Hussein thinks, says or does the exact opposite? I like the ideas of the Welsh Muslim, Merril Wyn Davies, who says:

“The most subtle and, for Muslims, perilous consequence of Orientalism...is the silencing of self-criticism and (a) slide into defending the indefensible...but Islam is supremely a critical, reasoning and ethical framework, a system of values applicable first and foremost to Muslims. Islam or rather ought not to be manipulated into ‘my fellow Muslim right or wrong’ ...

On both sides, wilful, determined, distorted, imaginings...propels, fuels and...justifies aggression, oppression, dispossession and dehumanisation of anyone who is not ‘us’... The consequences are real, appalling human suffering whether in Palestine or Israel, Baghdad or New York ...

We have to go back to history and see how much Europe gained from the knowledge and ideas...of Muslim civilisation... Indeed, Europe acquired its

crowning glory, liberal humanism, from Islam. Islam taught Europe the very idea of reason as well as how to reason.

The West has the task of learning to think differently about where it came from. The Muslim world must rethink where it is...In short, we have to admit to errors and remedy what we have got wrong. To do that we have to be able to explain ourselves, make our debates not predictable but comprehensible to each other.”

That concludes Merrill Wyn Davies’ thoughts. To them, Ali Roude wishes to add his own.

We live in a world full of people and their stories, their journeys, their hopes and aspirations, their traumas and fears. That is the world in which you must live and work. It is not a case of East or West, it is Australia. We are both together.

Remember, you are here today because our Australian Government once feared ethnic and religious separatism was tearing our nation apart. In 1917, it was the ‘awful’ Irish Fenians and Catholics who could not be trusted. We were at war – World War I – and they refused to support conscription. They were seen as disloyal to the nation. The Prime Minister quit the Labor Party, forming a nationalist government.

On Thursday 29 November at Warwick Railway Station in Queensland, an egg was thrown at Prime Minister Billy Hughes, “The Little Digger”. His hat was knocked off. He demanded the offender be arrested on the spot. The furious Prime Minister alleged Senior Sergeant Kenny replied “he recognized the laws of Queensland only and would act under no other”. However, the Queensland Police Commissioner told another story, with his report a week later confirming that Kenny had arrested the man.

A single-minded Prime Minister claimed treachery by both the sergeant and the Irish Catholic Queensland Premier, T. J. Ryan. Hughes wrote the crowd consisted of communist trade unionists, Sinn Feiners and pro-German radicals. He claimed Sinn Feiners had infiltrated the police.

Eight days later, on Saturday 8 December 1917, the Prime Minister appointed the first Commissioner for a Commonwealth Police Force. Their major achievements were raiding the Queensland Government Printer to confiscate allegedly seditious state-sponsored, anti-conscription pamphlets. Queensland’s Premier declared referendum day – Thursday 20 December – (exactly four weeks after the egg incident) a state-wide public holiday.

The Australian people voted no for the second time in as many years.

This inaugural Commonwealth Police Force was disbanded within two years, being the first of a string of federal law enforcement agencies. Its successors finally merged with the ACT Police in 1979, forming the Australian Federal Police we know and respect today.

Therefore, you are here today because 86 years ago a conservative prime minister during wartime believed Australians of a distinctive minority religion and ethnicity were undermining the stability and coherence of the nation, as well as his own political ambitions and objectives. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Wherever you go as Australian Federal Police officers, whatever you do there, be it family law order enforcements, drug raids, SIEV boat impounding, anti-terrorist or intelligence operations, I ask this of you to remember your training, keep yourself and others safe at all times, follow your instincts and carry out your duties – whatever they might be.

After this and at all times, add these three things to your dealings with all people:

- Whoever this is, wherever they are from, whatever they have done – remember this is a real person before me. May I treat them as real.
- Whatever I must do and whatever consequences the law shall bring – this person is a child of God and shall stand before God in judgment – it is neither necessary nor fitting for me to take up that role myself.
- Finally, as Franklin Roosevelt said, “I have nothing to fear but fear itself”. Let me recognise my fear, control it and conquer it. I am greater than my fear. As are we all.

We Muslims know this final truth best of all. The Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) spoke of this internal struggle, the battle against our fears and weaknesses, our prejudices and hatreds. The Hadith, the recognized sayings, have him saying to his followers: “I have returned from the Smaller Jihad (Jihad Asghar) to the Greater Jihad (Jihad Akbar). The Sahaba enquired of him, “O Prophet of God, what is the Greater Jihad?” He replied to them: “The Jihad against inner disorder (Jihad ul-Nafs).”

This is a Jihad we all can enter. Let us succeed in it – Insh’allah (God willing).

Strides to cultural awareness

When Ali Roude, Chairman of the Islamic Council of New South Wales, came to Canberra in early December to address the AFP's senior executive he was accompanied by his sister Nada.

As a volunteer education officer with the Islamic Council of New South Wales, Ms Roude provides information to those wanting to understand more about the Muslim community.

This was the case with the AFP Sydney office when in April 2003 Ms Roude presented a cultural awareness workshop to 40 federal agents. She said that the aim of the presentation was to educate people about the diversity and history of the world's 1.7 billion Muslims.

"We provide people with facts," she said. "We engage with people and that helps to destroy the myths."

In her seminars Ms Roude said she concentrates on the common ground of the different religions and the common ethics and goals.

"When you look at the commonality its makes the differences smaller," she said.

In May 2003 the Brisbane office hosted the Imam of the Holland Park Mosque, Uzair Akbar, who presented four information sessions to AFP members on various aspects of the Islamic faith, customs and cultures. Over two days, 73 people attended the sessions to listen and ask questions on operational issues. The Imam reciprocated by hosting a morning tea at the mosque to which around 30 members attended to get a glimpse of the cultural diversity encompassed by the faith.

Regular interviews of AFP members on 4EB, Brisbane's ethnic radio station, also reach the Muslim community.

Northern Operations personnel in Darwin have increasing contact with the local Islamic community through the Indonesian Embassy, with efforts underway to form a similar relationship with the Islamic population in Alice Springs.

Members in Townsville have ongoing contact with the Migrant Resource Centre and facilitate visits to the local mosque. In the Robina Office, members have attended the local mosque and were well received by the local community.

In Perth last October, as part of an ongoing program of contact community General Manager Western Operations Nick Anticich took the initiative to introduce himself to the Muslim community by visiting Al-Hidayah, a Muslim school in suburban Perth.

A report in the *West Australian* stated Federal Agent Anticich wanted to "make a clear statement that he and federal police colleagues want to better understand and support WA's Islamic community."

"I think the AFP nationally has made a conscious effort to engage the Islamic community in a positive sense," he was quoted as saying.

"We've been very quick to distinguish what we see as acts of terrorism as crimes in their own right and

to distinguish quite properly between those specific crimes and any ethnic or religious group."

Canberra-based representatives of the Islamic community have made several presentations at the AFP College since being invited to do so by Commissioner Keelty in 2002. These presentations are in conjunction with the regular cultural awareness training connected with recruit and other courses.

According to Federal Agent Steve Samuels, Learning and Development members also supply broad cultural diversity sessions through the Cultural Resource Centre, a Melbourne based cultural training organisation with world-wide credentials in cultural diversity training.

When combat started in Iraq, the ACT Chief Police Officer and other senior officers met with local Islamic leaders to provide assurances of support, service and accountability. Following these meetings they participated in a community information evening at the Canberra Islamic Centre.

Consequently the Crime Prevention team funded 12 positions for police officers to undertake a basic course on Islam. Together, this series of initiatives strengthened the relationship and accountability links between police and the Canberra Islamic community.

The Crime Prevention Superintendent has a radio spot once a month on CMS Radio (Canberra's local ethnic radio station) specifically about multicultural issues and crime prevention for the multicultural community.

The Crime Prevention team has also given personal safety presentations to various multicultural groups, including the Muslim community. Members have conducted security assessments using Crime Prevention through Environmental Design principles on the Islamic Community centre in Tuggeranong and other multicultural groups.

The Crime Prevention Superintendent is also on the board of the ACT Police Multicultural Board and the Australasian Multicultural Board, and maintains regular contact with multicultural groups throughout the ACT.

As part of the English as a second language school in Reid TAFE, Crime Prevention team members lecture on Policing in the ACT to all students, covering topics such as rights, contacting police and laws in the ACT.

ACT Policing has also been involved in the Multicultural Festival and plans to sponsor a stage at the Multicultural Fringe Festival at the Street Theatre, along with its usual presence at the Food and Wine Frolic.

Like other major AFP locations, the Melbourne office has had Islamic community representatives visit and present talks to members. These visits have been supported with the distribution of cultural awareness documentation.