

Headlines:

- **Former Anti-Muslim Dutch Politician Converts to Islam**
- **Many People in Mostly Christian Countries Believe Values Clash with Islam**
- **Trump Wants Out of America's Longest War, but Afghans Can't Just Walk Away**

Details:

Former Anti-Muslim Dutch Politician Converts to Islam

Former anti-Muslim Dutch MP Joram van Klaveren announced he had converted to Islam, becoming the second former member of the Netherlands' far-right Party for Freedom (PVV) to embrace the religion the party railed against. Van Klaveren said he converted to Islam last October while researching an anti-Islam book. "I thought, 'If everything I have written so far is correct -- if I believe all that -- then I am de facto a Muslim'," he told Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad. "In previous years I developed a great aversion to Islam. If you then conclude that you are not right, that is not fun but, as a God-seeker, I always felt a certain unrest and that gradually disappeared," he said. "It [converting to Islam] felt a bit like coming home, in a religious sense." Van Klaveren told of his conversion ahead of releasing a book titled "Apostate: From Christianity to Islam in the Time of Secular Terror." As an MP for Geert Wilders' far-right PVV, van Klaveren was an outspoken critic of Islam. He said he felt bad for promoting divisive discourse about Islam during his time with the party, which he left in 2014 to form his own political group. He quit politics in 2017 after his group, which was also on the far right, failed to win a seat in the country's parliamentary elections. "I have contributed to creating and maintaining that bad image of Islam but you cannot imagine how preconceptions work until you have to deal with them yourself," he said. In comments to Algemeen Dagblad, van Klaveren said: "I only looked politically at faith, not religious and, yes, that was polarising, that is regrettable afterward." Van Klaveren is the second high-profile former PVV member to convert to Islam. The Hague City Councillor Arnoud van Doorn announced his conversion in 2013. Van Doorn welcomed van Klaveren's conversion, posting on Twitter: "I never thought that the PVV would be a breeding pond for [Muslim] converts." Anti-Muslim sentiment is entrenched in many European countries, including the Netherlands. Wilders' populist anti-Muslim PVV was second in the 2017 elections, winning 13% of the vote. The Dutch Central Statistics Bureau said approximately 5% of the country's population of 17 million say they Muslim. Van Klaveren denied that his conversion was PR stunt for his new book. "You do not set aside your faith to sell a book," he said. [Source: Arab Weekly]

Allah (swt) says: ﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ﴾ **"They desire to extinguish the light of Allah with the breath of their mouths, but Allah will perfect His light, even if the disbelievers hate it."** [TMQ: 61:9]

Many People in Mostly Christian Countries Believe Values Clash with Islam

Large numbers of people in Christian-majority countries in the west see a fundamental clash between Islam and the values of their nation, according to a survey. However, significantly fewer people in the Middle East and North Africa view Christianity in the same way. Nearly half the people taking part in the poll in France and Germany, and nearly one-third in the US and the UK, thought there was a clash between Islam and the values of society in their country. When asked the same question about Christianity, 25% of people in Saudi Arabia and 22% of Algerians said there was a clash with the values of their country, but the proportions fell to 13% in the United Arab Emirates and 7% in Egypt. The poll on attitudes towards religion, carried out by YouGov, was commissioned by the Muslim Council of Elders to mark the first papal visit to the Arabian peninsula. Pope Francis is attending an interfaith conference in Abu Dhabi and will hold an open-air mass on Tuesday expected to be attended by 120,000 people. The YouGov poll on religious attitudes found in four western countries, respondents had less favourable views of Islam than other religions. In France, 49% said they felt fairly, or very, unfavourable towards Islam, compared with 19% who were unfavourable towards Judaism, 15% to Christianity, 13% towards Hinduism, 14% to Sikhism and 9% to Buddhism.

In Germany, 53% of respondents were unfavourable towards Islam, compared with 10% to 22% who were unfavourable to other religions. In the US and Britain, smaller proportions (37% and 32%) were unfavourable towards Islam, with a similar range viewing other religions negatively. In north African countries and the Middle East, unfavourable views of Christianity ranged from 43% of respondents in Algeria and 42% in Saudi Arabia to 28% in Egypt and 13% in the UAE. In Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Egypt, large majorities viewed Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism unfavourably. More than half of respondents in Saudi Arabia and Algeria, and 40% in Egypt, had negative views about Judaism. [Source: The Guardian]

The clash between civilizations is inevitable and Islam and Christianity are no different. Allah (swt) says, ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ تِجَارَةٍ تُجِيبُكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِ أَلِيمٍ﴾ “He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the Religion of truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religions, even if those who associate partners with God hate it.” [TMQ: 61:10]

Trump Wants Out of America's Longest War, but Afghans Can't Just Walk Away

The start of 2019 has brought for Afghanistan a tantalising hope of peace, fragile but very real, as the Taliban sat down for talks first with Americans in Qatar and this week with senior members of the Afghan elite in Moscow. These discussions come fraught with fears, that the progress for women and civil rights will be traded away too easily, and that the Taliban may renege on any deal once US troops and their coercive power are gone. Perhaps the only thing more disturbing is the possibility that talks will fail, US forces will leave anyway and Afghanistan will slide even further into conflict. Although their country is the site of America's longest war, Afghans have been on the battlefield for more than twice as long as their US allies. Donald Trump has made clear that he wants to end America's war in Afghanistan as soon as possible, but Afghans do not have the option to walk away. That has proved a powerful driver for a broad array of Afghans to back some form of engagement. The Taliban, foreign forces and the Afghan government have all intermittently tried to reach out for talks over the last 17 years. But this is the first time that all parties have shown real interest in coming to the negotiating table at the same time. Last month, Taliban negotiators met for six days with US envoys in Qatar and hammered out the basic framework of a possible peace deal. It was met with cautious optimism, but there was a glaring absence at the table. With just Americans and Taliban planning the country's future, no one spoke for the millions of Afghans who reject the insurgents, and fear a return to the austere and brutal regime they presided over in the 1990s. The Afghan government was not invited, because the insurgents denounce it as a puppet regime. But neither was anyone else asked to represent anti-Taliban Afghans. This week in Moscow, however, the insurgents met with a wide cross-section of the Afghan elite. They included warlords the Taliban once fought on the battlefield, others who as ministers and governors strategised about how to defeat the insurgents, a man running for president and another who had been vice-president. The group reflected to some degree the ethnic and political diversity of Afghanistan. There were even two women: scant representation for half the country's population, but better than the entirely male delegations that have headed to other attempts at preliminary talks. In joining this meeting, which included several men who had only recently left office, the Taliban acknowledged the existence of a large and legitimate Afghan opposition to their rule. In speaking to media, including the BBC, they alluded to concerns at how they are viewed beyond Afghanistan's borders. There was criticism of the meeting on social media, with some young Afghans pointing out the age and civil war backgrounds of most of the delegates. “The post-Taliban generation was mostly missing in Moscow,” said Waheed Omar, Afghanistan's ambassador to Italy and one-time spokesman for former president Hamid Karzai. [Source: The Guardian]

America is using all of its influence to persuade the Taliban to agree to the permanent occupation of Afghanistan in exchange for some US troop withdrawals. This a betrayal of the Afghan jihad and the countless lives lost in liberating Afghanistan. Taliban should understand that it is America that is hurting and they hold the upperhand. Allah (swt) says: ﴿فَلَا تَهِنُوا وَتَدْعُوا﴾ “So do not weaken and call for peace while you are superior; and Allah is with you and will never deprive you of [the reward of] your deeds.” [TMQ: 47:35].