

## **“GASPING FOR MORALITY AND SAFETY”**

**El Hassan bin Talal**

Is there no shame? Has honour been made redundant?

For years I have warned of the impending end of the dream of the emergence of an Arab nation “based on morality, commonality of purpose and human dignity”. My great grandfather, Al Hussein bin Ali spoke of *tark al masalih li ahliha* – what we now call self-determination of the Arab genus. He was exiled to Cyprus for that boldness, and today lies in the walls of the Aqsa Mosque compound in his beloved Jerusalem. The murder of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri, is the latest – not the first and most probably not the last – of the litany of a culture of futility and hatred engendered by political selfishness and craving after power and control. In Lebanon, we hear calls for a public, even an international, investigation of the late Prime Minister’s tragic death. Yet, one can ask: who investigated the assassinations, over the last decades, of the leaders of the Arab independence movement? The slaying of my late grandfather, King Abdullah bin Hussein, and King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia, to mention two examples. But leaders, Prime Ministers, Ministers and diplomats are only part of the story. What about worshippers killed in prayer in mosques and churches? Let alone civilians destroyed by suicide bombing and other acts of terror. These acts have become synonymous with collective Arab and Muslim compulsion for extinguishing the flame of their national and pan-Arab identity based on popular legitimacy.

We do not need to be stereotyped by our enemies and detractors as terrorists and murderers. We are our own worst enemies. I once heard a critical voice asserting that ‘Arabs kill like wolves’, and was forced to comment that ‘even wolves hunt in packs and only to eat’. Today, four decades after the call for non-alignment at Bandung, Indonesia, man is still “gasping for safety and morality” (Sokarno). Is it too late to keep hope alive that the peoples of the South – including Arabs and non Arabs, Muslims, Christians, Jews and others – can come to their senses before we are all enslaved by our

collective madness and bigotry? When will morality motivate us again in place of the lust of controlling and suppressing others? In the words of Nehru, “We all make mistakes; but when great powers make mistakes, the results are even greater”. Are Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Iran and every other ‘trouble spot’ the legacy of colonialism or a new beginning of pluralism and respect for the other within the region and beyond? 70% of the world’s refugees are Muslims. Is this a symptom or a cause of desperation? Are our humanitarian responses to the tsunami disaster and to Darfur adequate, when the region’s monies – oil rich and non-oil rich – are spent first and foremost on militarization? We still naively pin our hopes on fairness and justice from the international community to improve our lives. It is time that we charted our own future and kept some semblance of a better tomorrow for our children’s children.

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