

# Nefarious Designs

**The Mahdi**, A J Qinnel, Macmillan, London, 1981, 252pp, <6.95

**A Crack in the House of God**, Giora Shamis and Diane Shamis, Widenfield and Nicholson, London, 1983, 324pp, <8.50

It often seems far-fetched when the superpowers are accused of being involved in massacres like the recent one in Makkah. But as **A W Effendi** shows from reviewing two fiction accounts, serious thought is being given to subvert Muslim beliefs and ideals.

A FRIEND was once commenting on a leading pan-Arab publication produced in Europe by relaying to me the widely circulating rumour that it was CIA-financed. I said to him: "I don't know about that, but I am sure that no matter how hard the CIA worked, it would never have been able to come up with a product that will serve its purpose better".

The same thought is appropriate regarding these two somewhat antiquated but highly relevant works of fiction. The elaborate procedures they suggest for foreign intelligence organisation in order to manipulate and control Muslim countries appear wholly unnecessary when most 'Muslim' rulers are already doing the job for free and far more smoothly and efficiently than their foreign masters.

The first novel, by a British author writing under a pseudonym, tells of a retired British 'superspy' (appropriately living in Malaysia) who sells the Americans the idea of creating a self-appointed *Mahdi* to unite the Muslims in the interest of the West. Islam, he told his CIA guest, is the only religion that could be described as 'young, aggressive and expanding'. For such a religion the standard western policy of divide-and-rule is still too dangerous. It leaves this dynamic force a little bit weakened perhaps, but still out of control. A convincing messianic figure discreetly controlled by the West who will be able to unite the Muslims will get full control of Islam: "It is like having the Pope on your payroll". The Americans are finally convinced to back the idea and use the British for a front. But the British MI6 is infiltrated by the Russians who find out about the project and have to be let in on the act in order not to blow the whistle. The new *Mahdi* will thus not only serve American interests, but in

addition help the Russians in Afghanistan and elsewhere. But the British are punished for their sloppiness by being made mere guests at the feast.

The *Mahdi* is duly selected, a lone sufi living in Medina of Hashemite stock who generally fits the prescription. He is convinced through technological 'miracles' simulating angelic apparitions that he is the chosen one. He is also coaxed to choose for his main disciple a seasoned CIA agent posing as a merchant in Jeddah. The 'disciple' will be the main tool of control of the movement. Another high-tech miracle is concocted in the form of some three million pilgrims when a sacrifice offered by the *Mahdi* received 'divine' acceptance by being devoured by a laser beam sent down from an American satellite.

However, the British have the last laugh, because the *Mahdi* now acknowledged by the one billion Muslims turns out to be none other than the (most probably illegitimate) son of the same 'superspy', who hatched the idea in the first place, by an Egyptian spouse. It turns out that the British have been manipulating the two superpowers all along. Even the leak to the Soviets was preplanned, in order to compromise them and forestall any attempt by them to spoil things.

This might be a case of British fantasy disguising the melancholic yearning for a bygone glorious past. But like most fantasies it is significant for real life by what it draws from it. As the hero, the British MI6 operative who masterminded the operation puts it, the result of controlling the world of Islam brought out dramatic changes in sagging British fortunes. "In one step we've put the British back in the superpower league... the Russians and Americans will have to come to us, cap in hand... once again

we shall sit at the head of the table in world councils. Before the Second World War we were the only major power in the Gulf for thirty years and that has been eroded until we became nothing. Now, once again, we pull the strings and they can do nothing about it".

In this simple admission we are given the abiding truth that Britain's past glory has been based mainly, if not solely, on its control of rich Muslim lands, and its corollary, that whoever controls the Muslim lands, will occupy the position of the foremost superpower. But what about the object of this tug-of-war itself? Where are the Muslims who compose this apparently inanimate mass? If this mass unites and controls itself, it will become par excellence this foremost superpower. But in the book we do not catch so much as a glimpse of this existence. For the author, as it is for most policy makers in the West, the vast Islamic lands are no more than an open field for the intrigues, exploits and battles of western and eastern intelligence agencies. These foreign agents appear to get in and out of these countries and set up all kinds of cumbersome projects and fight gun battles without being even noticed let alone stopped. The answer for this apparent lapse is duly supplied by the author: spies pose as foreign advisers indispensable to propping up thrones and dictatorships. And who will stop these? The only one who tries is a contingent of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood who ambush a Soviet diplomat and accidentally stumble on the plot. Again here the western fantasies reveal their nightmares and identify the only likely force that could stop them: the Islamists.

The second novel under review, *A Crack in the House of God*, is an even more sordid fantasy compiled by even more sordid minds. The husband and wife Israeli authors (does this suggest anything about the identity of the 'pseudonymous' author of the previous novel?) purport to 'use the medium of fiction to tell the true story of what happened' in the events that led to the capture of the Grand Mosque in Makkah in November 1979. This makes the whole work a monstrous lie and a gross act of disinformation designed to discredit all genuine Islamic activities and cast them as cheap CIA agents. The attempt to devalue anything Islamic is deliberate and nauseating in its grossness.

Although it casts known western allies among Arab monarchs as cheap foreign agents, which is not far from

the truth, even the antagonists of these rulers will find the portrait painted here insulting to all Muslims. Even our criminals are not that bad. Regarding other aspects of events the book, untrue to its claim, blends much fiction and very little fact in the most misleading way. So we are told that the events leading to the occupation of the Mosque were part of a grand conspiracy masterminded by a joint American-Russian spy team. The conspiracy included transporting members of the Islamic groups from Egypt through North Yemen with the permission of Sadat. (Abboud al-Zumar is shown to meet personally with Sadat to discuss even the minutest details of the operation, and Sadat is shown to approve an imaginary link of the group with Qhadahfi, and even sends messages through Zumar to Mo'amar). The operation has the full approval of the CIA and the Russians even send a thirty-man contingent to join Juhayman al-Uteibi in his desert hideout in Arabia. The arms are said to come from none other than Mani Said al-Uteiba, the UAE Oil Minister. To top it all, the Islamic revolution in Iran is portrayed as a complete creation of the CIA, and in characteristic sloppiness the authors portray King Hussein of Jordan as discussing the implications of an Islamic revolution in Iran months before it materialised. Everyone knows that the King and his mentors never envisaged, let alone masterminded, an Islamist takeover in Iran. What they dreamt of was an Aquino-type change where a corrupt and useless agent is replaced by a more viable alternative. It took months for the true character of the Islamic revolution to be affirmed after a lot of struggle and blood. As if this is not enough, the very selection of Muhammad bin Abdalla al-Qahtani as the self-proclaimed *Mahdi* in the November 1979 uprising in Makkah is shown to be an initiative of the CIA operative directing the activities of Juhayman and his brothers.

The first novel *The Mahdi*, may represent the romantic yearnings of Westerners unable to reconcile themselves to the emergence of Muslims as an independent world power, and expressing the pious wish that this very power may be harnessed and tamed to perpetuate foreign domination. But it remains a pious wish and a dream (admittedly an insulting dream of its nature, since it assumes such a degree of mass imbecility on the part of so many human beings). But the second book is in itself an act of subversion. It projects the wishful thinking char-



acteristic of Israeli chauvinists in a misleading fact-fiction blend deliberately designed to mislead. The very suggestion which permeates the whole novel that Muslims have no soul of their own, no objective existence except as pawns on a chess-board manipulated by others, is symptomatic of a disease that is afflicting the western soul, proving that the Nazi heritage is safe and sound, even thriving, in its Zionist, neo-rightist (Reagan, 'Rambo', and -not least- Ollie North!) and Christian Zionist (Falwell et. al.) forms. We get it also in some self-consoling newspaper reports, like that assertion in Jack Anderson's column (quoting intelligence - presumably Israeli intelligence - reports) that the Lebanon 'suicide bombers' are actually hired agents paid by Iran. (One wonders how much you have to pay a

man in order to kill himself?).

But all this rubbish remains in the end what it is: self-consoling rationalisation aimed at a sick soul. Maybe the American Marines who were blown up and the Israeli soldiers who were driven out will feel better in their graves to know they were blown by hired or doped agents, instead of by God-loving martyrs. It is an even bigger consolation for the terror stricken survivors and their compatriots to realise that their enemies are as mundane (and even as sordid) as themselves: merely paid agents of the CIA or, at best, Iran. This even holds the tantalising prospect of being able to hire your own one day: your own 'martyrs' and even your own custom-made *Mahdi*.

Unfortunately for all these people, this is not true. And it can never be. ■