

## **Anathematizing the assassins**

[DAVID WENDT - Perspective](#) trib.com | Posted: Sunday, January 16, 2011 12:00 am

Where have we seen this before? Somewhere out of the worldwide cauldron of hatred and intolerance, a statesman emerges who can, in Lincoln's words, address "the better angels of our nature." The statesman, after building up hard-won political capital among hard-liners, makes the fateful decision to expend that capital by staking out a position for moderation and peace. He pays for this act of courage with his life, assassinated at the hands not of his former enemies, but of his own hard-line supporters.

We saw it in October 1981, when Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt, was assassinated by members of his own honor guard. After leading Egypt in the 1973 Yom Kippur war against Israel, Sadat, in a dramatic reversal, went to Jerusalem with a message of peace in 1977. A year later he joined with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to sign the groundbreaking Egypt-Israel peace accord at Camp David.

Then, a decade and a half later, we saw it again with the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzakh Rabin. In 1993, drawing on his enormous popularity in Israel as hero of the 1967 Six-day War, Rabin signed the Oslo accords with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafit, formally establishing an independent Palestinian authority. Two years later, Rabin was assassinated by a true believer who was convinced he had betrayed a God-given cause.

And now, after yet another 15 years, we have seen it with the assassination of Salman Taseer, Governor of Punjab province in Pakistan. Governor Taseer had the audacity to speak out publicly against Pakistan's Blasphemy Law, outlawing "insults" against Islam. As Pakistan's leading moderate and advocate of religious tolerance, he had specifically opposed the application of this law to condemn a mother of four to death.

The death of Governor Taseer is a stunning blow to moderates in the region, and specifically to the United States as it seeks to enlist the cooperation of the Pakistani government and military in denying the Taliban sanctuaries within Pakistan's borders. His assassination puts those who side with the U.S. in opposing the forces of intolerance in the region on notice that they are at even greater risk for their lives.

In March 2008, C. Holland Taylor of the "LibForAll" Foundation ([www.libforall.org](http://www.libforall.org)) visited a community in Wyoming to urge a policy of engaging Islamic moderates in Indonesia and of "anathematizing" the Islamic extremists. Sadly, in Pakistan, there has been no "anathematizing" of Malik Mumtaz Hussain Qadri, Taseer's accused assassin. On the contrary, Qadri has been celebrated as a hero in the streets and even among a body of Pakistan's Islamic clerics.

Surely the only ultimate deterrent -- not only against such acts of violence and intolerance, but also against the attitudes that give rise to them -- must be the stigma of the communities from which they emerge. America only increases resentment against itself and recruits more hard-liners to the cause when it takes upon itself the role of fighting others' wars.

Our best contribution to the process of "anathematizing" religious extremism, as Taylor suggests, is the patient engagement of moderates in the region and the cultivation of attitudes of tolerance within communities from which potential terrorists are likely to draw their support. Then, instead of sheltering and nurturing terrorists, these communities can discourage and deter them through the force of community norms.

Education can play a vital role in this process. Other recent visitors to Wyoming have also demonstrated their leadership in promoting moderation in the region. Greg Mortenson, author of "Three Cups of Tea," visited here in April 2008 and described his efforts over the past decade in building schools for girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan. These efforts strike a blow for literacy, equality of opportunity, and freedom of expression.

Douglas M. Johnston, president of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy ([www.icrd.org](http://www.icrd.org)), also visited Wyoming later that year. He talked about the work of his organization in engaging clerical leaders in Pakistan to reform the curriculum at local religious schools, or "madrassas." Currently, as pointed out by former CIA director R. James Woolsey in another visit to one of our communities a year ago, these schools tend to be purveyors of an ideology of bigotry and religious intolerance.

It takes brave people -- people like Taylor, Mortenson, and Johnston -- to support brave leaders like Sadat, Rabin, and Taseer. These people deserve a continued platform within our communities -- speakers' series at the University of Wyoming, service club luncheons, public discussion forums -- so that we can better understand and support their important efforts on behalf of peace. We here in Wyoming have a stake in their success and, through that success, in helping to curb acts of religious violence like that which resulted in the death of Governor Taseer.

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