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Islam and We

Jae-Hyun Yoo

Panel: Islam and We

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Jae-Hyun Yoo (South Korea)

Islam and We

Islam is a very strange word for most Koreans. We, Koreans, have not had a reason to think about it for the last four thousand years. Islam had been so far away from a far-eastern country like Korea. Some historians are saying that groups of Islamic merchants had come to Korea a few hundred years ago. Whatever. I'm not a Muslim. I don't want to be Islamicized. I'm not even interested in Islam as religion. I don't believe in any kind of god. Then, why am I here? It's because Islam is becoming one of our severe realities. Since the US invasion of Iraq, South Korea (SK) has been heavily involved in the Iraq War. SK sent the third largest number of troops to Iraq, following number two Britain. Unfortunately, we have been able to meet Islam in this way.

How did I feel? It was very bad. Like many British people, we felt like we were another one of the USA's poodles. It was worse than humiliating that we had to accept the truth, SK still has not gotten out of the US's dirty hands. We are repeating the same thing that happened in our country during the 1960s. At that time, SK sent troops to Vietnam at the USA's will. They sent the second largest number of troops in the name of the USA's allied forces. What happened? More than 5,000 SK young people were killed in that war. Almost all of them were enlisted men. Is that all? 50,000 US soldiers faced the same fate over this war. More than three million Vietnamese people were murdered. A few hundred thousand people of Cambodia and Laos were murdered by the US air forces' secret bombing. SK at the time had a pro-America military dictatorship, and we are doing the same thing even after finishing with the military dictatorship a decade ago.

In addition to this historical event, the Iraq War reminds me of the painful history of our Korean War. Most of you think that the Korean War was a war between North and South Korea, and the US became involved later. This is not true. After the liberation from Japanese imperialism, Korea was divided into two parts, North and South, by the US and Soviet armies. The Korean peninsula was the first victim of the just-born Cold War after World War II. It was natural that there would be a strong conflict between a few political groups after liberation from Japan in 1945, but these conflicts could never have developed into a horrible war if two imperialist forces didn't divide Korea and didn't compete for their interests. Do you really think that US involvement in the Korean War was in order to save Korea? If so, you must be a child. The US wasn't involved in the Korean War. It was just their war for keeping US interests in the Far East region.

Also it was a horrible war that took more than five million lives. Imagine this great number of lives, and compare this number with the just 36,940 US soldiers killed in the Korean War. Have you ever been to the Korean War Veteran Memorial in Washington, DC? I've been there. I could see more than one hundred innocent Korean names behind one American soldier's name written on the memorial wall. Now, how many innocent Iraqi people have to die for one American soldier's stone?

After the Korean War, the US backed the dictatorship in SK for a long time. In April of 1960, South Koreans were rising up to throw out the Rhee regime for democracy. Our efforts for democracy were destroyed by a pro-America military coup two years later. In 1979, we had another chance to build democracy in my country after Dictator Park was assassinated by one of his men, the director of KCIA. This hope was ruined by another pro-America military coup, and we saw a massacre in Kwangju in May of 1980. One bold-headed military general named Chun became president after the massacre. In 1981, Ronald Regan invited this murderer to hug him warmly. I remember all of these things. I was twenty. I swore to do anything to defeat our people's enemy. Now, the USA is trying to build their puppet government in Iraq. The USA is killing innocent Iraqi people every hour. Can you blame a young Muslim man who attacks the USA with a suicide bomb? You should, but I couldn't.

What is Islam for me and the SK people? It is a symbol of the victim of this cruel world, of the injustice of this world, of US imperialistic greed dragging our young generation around ugly battle fields.

What is Islam for the whole world? It is a martyrdom that will lead to a better world. We know that the US neo-liberalists (you call them neo-conservatives) who are leading their empire are so confused about their war. Chris Harmon of the British Socialist Workers Party said that it will get harder and harder for the USA to keep its hegemony in the world as it gets bogged deeper in the mud named the Iraq War. Now, they can't keep their imperialistic interests in Latin America, which was once the USA's dirty backyard. Hugo Chavez is progressing his socialistic reform of Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. Also what's happening in Bolivia now? If this was the 1970s, Chavez might be murdered like Allende in 1973. A Pro-America coup might be successful in Venezuela and Bolivia, but it hasn't happened yet. It won't happen again. The Iraq war is not another Indochinese War. Each of them seems to be a twin of US imperialism, but they are not the same. The US empire doesn't have enough power to rule this world anymore. We are facing the decline of the US empire just like the Roman empire. The US empire no

longer has the power to conduct the Iraq war while getting involved in Latin America. The US empire does not have supreme power. It is proven all over the world: Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa.

What is Islam for neo-liberalists like Bush, Cheney, Irving Kristol, and David Henderson? It is a really scary nightmare. They should know that they themselves speeded up the empire's collapse. They will feel the very fresh, vivid horror, worse than what Colonel Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* experienced. You remember the movie *Apocalypse Now* based on Conrad's same novel? It must be an impressive scene when Marlon Brando says "Horror, Horror," patting his bald head in the darkness. Still, he did not have to deal with the horror of imperialism coming to his doorstep; for me, the scene only symbolizes self-consciousness of imperialism (European imperialism for Conrad, US imperialism for Francis Ford Coppola). But the experience of the neo-liberalists will be very different from Kurtz's experience.

What is Islam for the American people? Is this a religion that worships evil? Is this a society of crazy terrorists who try to destroy your cities, the White House, and the Pentagon? Whatever you think, they will remind you of your country's defeat sooner or later.

Please remember the 1960s. Who stopped the Indochinese War? South Vietnam's National Liberation Front (NLF) did that? Ho Chi Minh did that? Probably, yes. But if you, young American people, were not against Kennedy's, Johnson's, Nixon's war, war never would have stopped. If people in the world didn't rise up in 1968, war never would have stopped. In my opinion, Young angry Americans in the 1960s saved not only Indochina, but also their own country. So, it's time for you to do something to stop Bush's war. I believe you are doing something. We, South Koreans, are fighting for withdrawal of our troops in Iraq. The Spanish people have already done that. The British people are doing that. Now, you, American people, have to be at the head of this march. This is a war your country started. This is a war which will destroy your country first.