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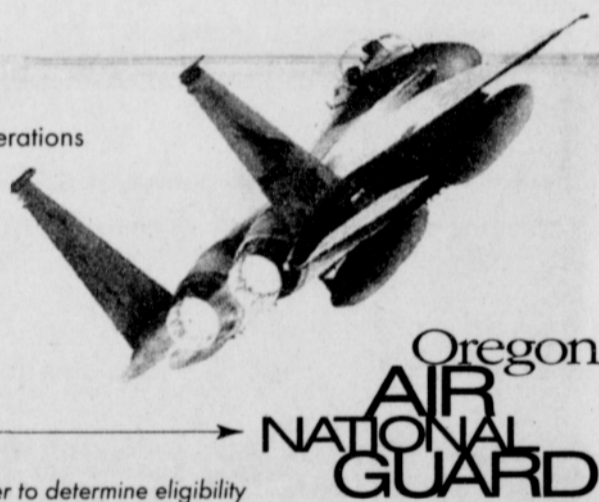
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## Hunting Down Terrorists Doesn't Solve Problem

Former Portland newspaper writer shares Afghan views in new book

BY LEE PERLMAN  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Tamin Ansary, a former Portlander, former Afghan and now a bridge builder between several cultures, was in town recently with a new book and advice on how to deal with Afghanistan and the Muslim world.

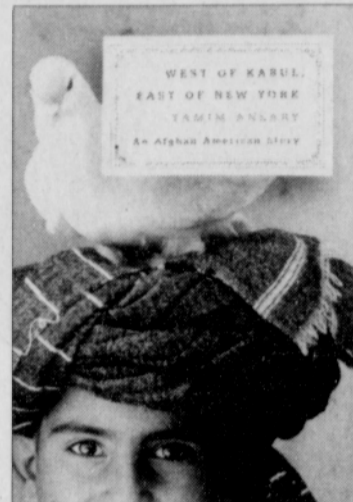
Ansary, the son of an Afghan official and a Finnish-American mother, achieved instant fame with an e-mail message he wrote last Sept. 12, in the aftermath of the day of terror. In it, he warned against too hasty or broad a military response.

The author offered no defense of Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, whom he called "Nazis," and "ignorant psychotics." However, he urged people to separate them from the Afghan people, who he said were fellow victims. Moreover, he said, too broad an attack could escalate into a world war between the west and Islam.

"And guess what?" he wrote. "That's Bin Laden's program."

"West of Kabul, East of New York," is mostly an autobiography, but also offers unique insights into Islam as practiced today, including the customs of Afghanistan and other parts of the Third World. With an easy, engaging style, the book is at times humorous, at times moving and often thought-provoking.

Ansary and his family lived in Afghanistan until he was 16, at which time he emigrated to this country with his mother, brother and sister; his father stayed behind, and only came to visit twice before his death. Ansary spent much of the next 16 years becoming a thoroughly assimilated American, living first in Portland, where he was a "hippie" in his words and wrote for the alternative paper Portland Scribe, and later in San Francisco.



"West of Kabul, East of New York," is mostly an autobiography, but also offers unique insights into Islam as practiced today.

Beginning in 1979, trips back to Afghanistan and the death of his father helped him rediscover his roots. He is now active in Afghan expatriate circles in this country. At a book-signing session at Powell's Books, he said he was pleasantly surprised by the restraint of the U.S. military response

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and the results it produced. In particular, he said, the Taliban had helped to shatter its own mystique by breaking under fire and running.

Ultra-orthodox Islam speaks of an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, and one of the symptoms of such a struggle is the emergence of a cadre of pure holy warriors. Many in the Muslim world saw the Taliban as this strain of pure warrior, he said. Had they fought to the last man and died as martyrs, the myth would have persisted, he said.

However, Ansary warned against hunting down all terrorists as a long-term solution to the problem. "Suppose you could find

the most fanatical, most hating, most bloodthirsty, most intolerant, most ruthless terrorist alive and you kill him," he said. "There's the next most fanatical, most...one less adjective, out there to take his place. And if you kill him, there's...two less adjectives out there to take his place."

He added, "CNN is broadcast all over the world. People in Islamic countries watch Al Jeerza, but they watch CNN too. Remember those broadcasts with a map of Afghanistan, and little arrows raining down on Kandahar and the commentators saying we were bombing only military targets? Well, people in the Muslim world saw the same pictures, but they didn't hear the commentary."

Ansary said Afghans by and large are pleased with the U.S. for chasing out the hated Taliban.

"Left to itself, Afghanistan would become an Islamic state, and a conservative Islamic state at that," he said. "If this country can stomach that, there's a chance for a friendly relationship."

He suggested aid for small-scale projects, including one that gives local people training and equipment to remove and de-activate land mines.

Asked about American bombing of civilians in the war he said, "Afghanistan has been bombed so many times in the last 27 years, it's impossible to say whose bomb did what. It's like examining Rodney King's head after the beating and trying to figure out exactly which club produced which bump. You have to say, 'Okay, it happened, now what do we do about it?'"

Ansary had a similar response to the conflict in Israel, where he says he is philosophically somewhere in the middle. Asked a pointed question by an apparently pro-Palestinian questioner he said, "That sounds like a legal brief. Suppose you could write a document that proves, beyond any doubt, who is right and who is wrong? The next day people would still be out there throwing rocks and shooting guns."

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