



How Europe Escaped Speaking Arabic

By [Michael Novak](#)

Posted: Thursday, December 11, 2008

SPEECHES

[AEI Online](#)

Publication Date: December 8, 2008

Revisiting a topic from the first Bradley Lecture Series in 1988-1989, Michael Novak delivered the fourth installment of AEI's twentieth-anniversary Bradley Lecture Series on December 8, 2008. Video, audio, and more information are available at www.aei.org/event1775/.



Jewett Scholar
Michael Novak

The Western world has never taken Islam with the full seriousness it has earned. Down through history, once Islamic armies have conquered a land, with very few exceptions, that land has remained Muslim. A Christian will wish in vain that the great circle of Christian lands around the Mediterranean (and on up into Syria, Iraq, Iran, and northwards into Georgia) had not fallen irretrievably into Muslim hands, most of them before 732 A.D. For Christians who think that the future of the world favors movement in their direction, a study of the latent dynamism of Islam is not a little unsettling.

Edward Gibbon, finishing up his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-78), was able to imagine how easily serene little Oxford could have been dominated by tall Islamic minarets before his birth, and the accents in its markets would have been Arabic: ". . . the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet" (469).

Gibbon was writing about the decisive battle of Poitiers in 732 A.D., when at last a Christian leader, Charles Martel ("Charles the Hammer"), drove back the Muslims from their highwater mark in Western Europe with such force that they went reeling backwards into Spain. From there, it took Spain another 750 years--until 1492--to drive Islamic armies back into North Africa, whence they had invaded. Even so, the Islamic terror bombers who just a few years ago killed more than a hundred commuters in Madrid did so (they announced) to avenge the Spanish "Reconquista" of 1492. For Islam, to lose a territory once Muslim is to incur a religious obligation to wrest it back.

It had been a marvel in 732 that a mere one hundred years earlier, Mohammed had launched his army from Medina, to conquer in rapid fire so many of the most glorious capital cities of Christianity--Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Hippo, Tunis, Carthage, and then all of Spain. More amazingly still, Muslims went very quickly further into the Far East than Alexander the Great ever had.

Even today, in the eyes of influential Muslims, the expansion of Islam (although it covers a huge swathe of geography) is far from finished. The religious obligation at the heart of Islam is to conquer the world for Allah, and to incorporate it all into the great Islamic Umma. Only then will the world be at peace. Submission to Allah is the reason why the world was created.

In any case, Islam began making war on the Christian world from the very first moments of its birth. For a thousand years afterward, it fell to southern Europe, and in particular the Pope, to give active military resistance to the "Saracens" (as the Islamists came to be known in the West). From 632 A.D. until about 1292, Arab nations led the Muslim onslaught on the West. After that, the Turks established their dominion (the caliphate) over most of the Arab world. For hundreds of years a huge sea war ensued for control of the Mediterranean. But war by land was not called off. The Turks expanded their empire in all four directions on the map. For more than a century they made attempt after attempt to take down the largest and richest of the Christian capitals, Constantinople, whose walls they finally breached in 1453. There followed great plunder, huge fires of destruction, the desecration of Christian basilicas and churches, murder, torture and thousands of Christian men, women, and children marched off in long lines toward slavery in the East.

A long line of great warrior-sultans sponsored Turkish advances in shipbuilding, gunnery, military organization, and training. By the mid 1550s, they had slowly conceived of a long-term offensive, a pincers movement first by sea and then by land, to conquer the whole northern shore of the Mediterranean. They first launched a massive sea attack in 1665 on the crossroads of the Mediterranean, the strategically placed island of Malta, and were repelled after an epic siege (which in itself is one of history's great stories). Their penultimate aim was to take all Italy; then all Europe.

The northern pincers movement by land was aimed at an attack up through the Balkans for the conquest of Budapest and then, in a northeast arc into Slovakia and Poland. In this way, the Muslim forces would essentially encircle Italy from the North.

Because by 1540 the Reformation was separating the Christian nations of the north from Rome, the Sultans soon recognized that the Christian world would no longer fight as one. The next hundred years or so would be the most fruitful time since Mohammed to fulfill the destiny of Islam in Europe.

The Preliminary Battles on Malta (1565) and at Famagusta (1571)

Each new caliph of the Islamic empire was expected to expand the existing Muslim territories, in order to fulfill the mission given Islam, and to gain for the leader the necessary popularity and legitimacy. So it was that in the pleasant springtime of 1571, an entire Muslim fleet under Ali Pasha was ordered by the Sultan to seek out and destroy Christian dominance of the Mediterranean Sea, all the way up to Venice. During the summer, Ali Pasha raided fort after fort along the Adriatic Shore, picked up thousands of hostages as slaves, and sent at least a small squadron to blockade for two or three days the approaches to St. Mark's Square in Venice, not least to plant a seed of terror about worse things to come.

Meanwhile, another large Muslim force soon conquered Cyprus, most practicing ritual cruelties on the defeated population of Nicosia, setting fire to churches, beheading the older women, and marching all younger Christians of both sexes into slavery. The Muslim armies then headed north for the fortress of Famagusta, the last Venetian stronghold on the island, the "extended arm" of the trading posts and protective forts of the Venetian navy in the entire eastern Mediterranean. An army of 100,000 opened the siege, against a force of 15,000 behind the walls.

Under the energetic generalship of the elderly General Marcantonio Bragadino, the small band of defenders held out for week after week, despite receiving more than 180,000 incoming cannonballs. The defenders ran so short of food that in the end they were eating cats, until they consumed their last one. The Muslim general was outraged by the length of the siege, which had already cost him 80,000 of his best men, despite the fact that Famagusta's fate was sealed from the first days. Yet there were still long days and sometimes nights of hard hand-to-hand fighting just outside the walls. Muslim losses kept getting fully replenished by sea, and the Muslim forces grew stronger even as the Christians got down to their last six barrels of gunpowder, and had only four hundred men still able to fight.

On August 1, General Bragadino finally accepted surrender terms, which guaranteed safe passage of all his men to sail home to Venice, and safety to all citizens of the walled city. He walked with the full scarlet regalia of his office out from the walls and down to the tent of the Alfa Mustafa, the victorious commander. There the two leaders conversed. Then something went wrong, and Mustafa grew visibly angry and called for his men to behead the full complement of 350 survivors who had laid down their arms to march out with Bragadino. All 350 bleeding heads were piled up just outside Mustafa's tent.

Mustafa then ordered Bragadino's ears and nose chopped off, and forced the man to go down on all fours wearing a dog's collar around his neck, to the jibes, mockery, and horror of the onlookers. Bags of earth were strapped over Bragadino's back and he was made to carry them to the walls of the fortification, and to kiss the earth each time he passed Mustafa. As the old man grew fainter from the loss of blood from his head, he was tied to a chair, put in a rope harness and hoisted up to the highest mast in the fleet, so that all survivors of the city might see his humiliation. Then Bragadino's chair was dropped in free-fall into the water and brought out again. The tortured Venetian was led in ropes to the town square and stripped. At a stone column (which still stands today), Bragadino's hands were tied outstretched over his head, and an executioner stepped forward with sharp knives to carefully remove his skin, keeping it whole. Before the carver had reached Bragadino's waist, the man was dead. His full skin was then stuffed with straw, once again raised up to the highest mast, and sailed around to various ports as a trophy of victory, and finally taken back to Istanbul for permanent exhibition.

Meanwhile, Don Juan had put the Christian fleet of some 200 vessels on course toward Lepanto, where Ali Pasha was refitting his vessels in the safe protection of an impregnable harbor. On board the Christian ships, the Spaniards were under secret orders to avoid fighting, only to keep their honor by going along, while urging reasons to turn back. By contrast, when a fast corsair dispatched from Famagusta arrived to deliver the tale of the last dishonors visited on General Bragadino and his 350 surviving soldiers, the blood of the Venetians boiled. They now allowed no question of turning back. They were determined to avenge the horrors suffered by their comrades in arms.

The young Don Juan was buoyed by this new resolve. Now he would be able to keep the vow he had made to Pope Pius V, to seek out and destroy the threatening enemy. The young admiral--he was twenty-two when he became commander of this fleet--felt confident in his battle plan. He had taken care to have his whole fleet rehearse their roles in the quiet seas of the Adriatic, just before turning toward Lepanto.

Don Juan and many of his men spent much of the night before battle in prayer. The fate of their civilization, they knew, depended on their good fortune on the morrow. The uncertainties of the changing winds and choppy seas, and the speed of the two onrushing lines of ships rapidly closing on each other, would erupt in unpredictable havoc. The odds against the

Christians in ships were something like 350 ships to 250. But the Christians had a secret weapon.

The Greatest Sea Battle in History: Lepanto, October 1571

For more than three years Pope Pius V had labored mightily to sound alarms about the deadly Muslim buildup in the shipyards of Istanbul. The sultan had been stung by the surprising defeat of his overwhelming invasion force in Malta in 1565. The savagery of Muslim attacks on the coastline villages of Italy, Sicily, Dalmatia, and Greece was ratcheted upwards. Three or four Muslim galleys would offload hundreds of marines, sweep through a village, tie all its healthy men together for shipment out to become galley slaves, march away many of its women and young boys and girls for shipment to Eastern harems, and then gather all the elderly into the village church, where the helpless victims would be beheaded, and sometimes cut up into little pieces, to strike terror into other villages. The Muslims believed that future victims would lose heart and swiftly surrender when Muslim raiders arrived. Over three centuries, the number of European captives kidnapped from villages and beaches by these sea pirates climbed into the hundreds of thousands.

The reason for this kidnapping was that the naval appetite for fresh backs and muscles was insatiable. Most galley slaves lived little more than five years. They were chained to hard benches in the burning Mediterranean sun, slippery in their own excrement, urination, and intermittent vomiting, often never lying down to sleep. The dark vision that troubled the pope during the late 1560s was of even more horrible calamities to befall the whole Christian world, bit by bit. But unity in Europe was hard to find, and even more scarce was the will to fight for survival.

Finally, Don Juan of Austria, the younger brother of the King of Spain, an illegitimate son, stood erect and summoned allies to repel the much-anticipated Muslim advance. He aimed at leading a large fleet to go after the new Muslim fleet preemptively, before they could depart from their home seas. Having seen Muslim ferocity first hand, the Venetian public was eager to contribute a fleet to the task. Their support was crucial, for Venice was in those days the shipbuilding and gunnery capital of the world, producers (for a profit) of the most innovative, most versatile, stoutest, and most seaworthy armed vessels in the world. The best sea captains of Venice were the most eager to avenge their friends and fellow citizens.

For years, Venice had preferred peace with the Muslim East, in order to carry on their lucrative international trade. Now there was a cause that took precedence over the traditions of commerce. Genoa, too, contributed a fleet under their famous but now elderly Admiral Andrea Doria, these days a less bold warrior despite the glory of his earlier exploits.

The Knights of Malta, the premier sea warriors of the time, offered their small but highly skilled fleet in support of the Pope's appeal, and agreed to work cooperatively with Don Juan.

The latter, whom his contemporaries described as a modest and humble man, characteristically set aside his own ego for the sake of the cause that engaged him. He pledged to the armada a large contingent supplied by Spain and Portugal. By the end of September 1571, eager to get their job done before winter turned the seas choppy and unfit for battle, the four distinct parts of the Christian fleet sailed past Italy, hugging the coasts, sending teams of observers to land to pick up the latest intelligence on the Muslim force. Finally, they learned that an enormous Muslim fleet, nearly 100 ships larger than their own, was sailing near to land toward the Gulf of Lepanto. No more talking, Don Juan told his leading admirals; now, battle.

Keeping the Knights of Malta in reserve just a short distance behind the main battle line, Don Juan assigned the impassioned Venetians the important left flank, with its leftmost ships close to the shore line. He himself commanded a hundred vessels at the center. In plain sight was his capitol ship, the *Real*, its banners of leadership visible to all. To the right flank he assigned the venerable Andrea Doria and the Genoese fleet. The plan was to hold his ships in as long and straight a line as seamanship in a besetting wind would allow, while heading directly for the Muslim line.

At his front, however, Don Juan placed a nasty surprise for Ali Pasha. Six new, taller, sturdier ships packed with cannons (especially in the bow) and heavily laden with lead and shot placed themselves a mile forward of the Christian line. They looked flat on top, like merchant ships. No one had ever seen such ships before. They lacked a bow rising up skywards, the one necessary weapon for vicious ramming. For the purpose of these new galleasses, as they were called, was not to ram oncoming ships but to blast them with an array of cannons. Their shot could carry a mile with great accuracy. When the galleasses turned sideways, they could blast with even more cannons, designed for shorter ranges, often aiming their cannon just at the waterline of their foes. They had the power to sink a smaller, lighter, faster Muslim galley with a single burst.

At first, the two fleets spotted each other on the horizon as single masts, then small numbers, and only as the two fleets closed to about two miles of each other could any one of the two hundred thousand sailors, marines, and janissaries on board catch a glimpse of the lines and dispositions of the fleets. The Muslims preferred to attack in a crescent rather than a straight line, but the winds at their back and tricky tides from the shoreline to their north forced them to straighten up their lines. Those who gazed on the massive array of ships and sails were filled with awe. On deck, one of those to be wounded in this battle, the great author Miguel de Cervantes wrote of "the most noble and memorable event that past centuries have seen." Just over six hundred ships in two amazingly orderly lines, each stretching three miles from end to end, silently bore down on one

another as the distance between them closed. The Muslim fleet outnumbered the Christian fleet by nearly a hundred ships. A sense of destiny weighed upon all who watched and waited.

The huge green battle flag of Allah--his name embroidered on it in Arabic some 29,800 times--marked out the tall capital ship *Sultana*, on which the fearsome young admiral Ali Pasha held command. Pasha was puzzled by the six more or less flat barges out in front of the Christian lines. His own armed soldiers were reliant mostly on clouds of arrows. His sailors had mastered the arts of ramming, and disgorging massive boarding parties onto the enemy's slippery decks, then beating down their defenders by a sort of fierce land warfare out on the open seas. In those days, sea warfare was like land warfare, only carried out on open decks side-by-side instead of in open fields. Ship was lashed to ship, sometimes a dozen together. Hand-to-hand combat was the key.

There is no point here in giving the whole narrative of the battle. Suffice it to say that in the center the volleys from the galleasses out in front destroyed one Muslim vessel after another. Masts snapped, the oars of the galleys were shattered, and huge holes opened up the thin wooden sides of the galleys to the boiling sea. The Muslim ships that were not sunk were easily boarded by the Christian ships coming alongside, built a little higher, and amply supplied not only with boarding nets but, even more important, with ranks of the old-style predecessors to rifles--the arquebuses--directing point-blank rifle balls into the unarmored flesh of Muslim archers. It is true that in a few cases whole clouds of Muslim arrows felled many in the Christian ships, including the great Venetian admiral Marcantonio Bragadino shot in the eye. Mostly, the Christian warriors wore the latest in body armor, which often repelled wooden arrows harmlessly. Nonetheless, at least one Christian ship was later found aimlessly afloat, with every single man dead or wounded.

At the last, the two capital ships *Real* and *Sultana* clashed head-on, and Don Juan led the final boarding party which in its ferocity drove Ali Pasha to the aft poop, where he soon fell with a bullet in his eye. The Muslim admiral's head was cut off and borne aloft on a pike to be mounted on the bow of the *Real*. The seas around were filled with cloaks, caps, struggling bodies, the vast wooden wreckage of battle, and large splotches of red blood.

On the Christian left, the Venetians attacked with almost blind rage and broke the line of the Muslim right with relative ease. They were aided by a revolt of the galley slaves on board a number of Muslim vessels, who in the explosions on board had their chains broken, and poured up on deck swinging their chains to left and right. So great was the Venetian fury that even after the battle, many of its sailors spent hours using their pikes to kill Muslim sailors and soldiers struggling in the sea. They tried to excuse their bloodlust by saying that they never wished to see those individuals sailing against the West again.

In four hours the battle was over. More than forty thousand men had died, and thousands more were wounded, more than in any other battle in history, more even than at Salamis or, in years to come, at the Somme. Never again did the Muslim fleets pose a grave danger to Europe from the South, although of course Muslim fleets kept busy expanding their bases on the African coast, harassing Western ships and territories across the Mediterranean. Technology, especially that pioneered by Venice and by ocean-going Portugal and Spain, had made the decisive difference. As Victor Davis Hanson writes, it was to capitalism that the victory was owed, for it was open markets that spurred competition to keep improving gunnery and ships, and it was the great merchant and commercial cities that built these new technologies. After Lepanto, the arts of gunnery replaced the arts of the bow and arrow, however deadly for many centuries those weapons had proved to be. Ships were made stouter, taller, more able to carry heavy armaments--and new methods had to be sought to replace locomotion by galley slaves.

As news of the great victory of October 7 reached shore, church bells rang all over the cities and countryside of Europe. For months, Pius V had urged Catholics to say the daily rosary on behalf of the morale and good fortune of the Christian forces, and above all, a successful outcome to the highly risky preemptive strike against the Turkish fleets. Thereafter, he declared that October 7 would be celebrated as the feast of "Mary, Queen of Victory." A later pope added the title "Queen of the Holy Rosary" in honor of the laity's favorite form of prayer. All over the Italian peninsula, great paintings were commissioned--whole galleries were dedicated--to honoring the classic scenes of that epic battle. The air of Europe that October tasted of liberties preserved. The record of the celebrations lives on in glorious paintings by Titian, Tintoretto, and many others.

The Northern Pincers and the Siege of Vienna, September 1683

Of necessity, our consideration of the Battle of Vienna must be briefer than our attention to Lepanto. But many of the same forces were at play as before, only this time by land, not by sea. The Protestant nations regarded the expanding Ottoman Empire as a Catholic problem. Few Catholic nations took the Muslim threat as seriously as it deserved. The French, in particular, had become used to buying off the Turks with trade and commerce, rather than resisting them in war. The French even preferred the defeat of their most dreaded rivals, the German-speaking Austrians. The nation Germany did not yet exist, only a number of smaller political units--Brandenburg, Saxony, Bavaria, and others, some Protestant and some Catholic. And so the Muslim overland advance through the underbelly of Europe seemed not only relentless but mostly unopposed.

The sultan of all Islam, Mehmet IV, spent his days in his unrivalled harems and on his huge hunting territories, some of them as

large as nation-states. Thousands of mostly Slavic serfs were required to service his hunting party, in part by driving deer and other game animals his way. To uphold his obligations to Islamic expansion, however, Mehmet stirred himself to choose Kara Mustafa to be general of all his forces in the final conquest of Hungary, Slovakia, and the south of Poland -- the greatest of all ventures on which the sultan's historical reputation would rest. The sultan directly warned Mustafa not to try to take Vienna, for doing so would arouse the West to retribution. He gave Mustafa the long green cord of the Prophet to wear around his neck, both to signal the importance of his commission, and to warn him that failure meant that he must be hanged--must even hang himself.

For the drive northward, Kara Mustafa sent messengers throughout Anatolia, through Greater Syria, and out to the scores of Muslim nations from Morocco to India. He marched northwards with an ever-increasing army of more than three hundred thousand, many on horseback as cavalry to spread terror in advance of his main forces, other scores of thousands in his supply trains. This huge army took some five months to occupy Budapest, rest, and then push on northwards. They swatted resistance away like flies, and sometimes bypassed walled cities that refused instant surrender, to deal with them later with special severity.

By July 7, they were in sight of Vienna, which in those days was a walled and heavily fortified city, well designed by its military engineers to lay down fields of fire by which each strong point could assist its neighbors. Compared to today, Vienna within its walls was a small city, and yet large enough in those terrorized days to admit refugees from nearby villages who hurriedly sought safety. For the next weeks the sultan's armies kept tightening the ring they had established on all sides of Vienna. Both Mustafa with his green cord around his neck and the leader of the Viennese defense, General Lubomirski, now knew that they were fighting to the death.

Meanwhile, the Turks launched massive engineering works, including many honeycombed tunnels beginning from long distances away, out of sight, and burrowing underneath strong points and vulnerable walls that ground troops might breach. These veteran and highly skilled sappers--the best in the world--dug all the way underground both to the wide moats at the base of the walls and still further underground to the very center of Vienna. Beginning in mid-August, without any warning, huge explosions tore gaping holes in one strongpoint after another, and sometimes beneath homes in the very center of the city. The twenty thousand or so warriors within the city fought with great determination and intelligence to drive back the screaming, bloodthirsty men who were storming through the breaches, while all around them Viennese civilians rushed to make repairs to the breaches in the walls. The Christians also sallied forth themselves, often at night, to drive far into the Turkish lines to blow up engineering devices and stockpiles of gunpowder.

Relentlessly, the Turks kept heaving up huge mounds--small mountains--of earth and sand just outside the walls, from which fire might constantly be poured down into the doomed city, from above its walls. With every Muslim attack, fewer and fewer Christian soldiers were left to repel them. In late August, supplies of meat ran out, and the population was reduced to eating horses and stray dogs. A very strict rationing of water became necessary. The elderly began to die off from starvation.

Meanwhile, the Christian relief forces were belatedly and all too slowly advancing from the north in four separate columns, from Catholic Germany and from Poland, to lift the siege. For nearly forty miles around the beleaguered city, Muslims had ravaged the land, and sent refugees fleeing by foot in all directions. Thus, making use of captured Muslim cavalrymen and foot soldiers, as well as the fleeing Christians, the Germans and the Poles picked up enough intelligence to learn that their best chances lay to the southwest, through the Vienna Wood. It would be hugely difficult terrain for cavalry, and also for quick forced marches by the infantry. But one other factor spoke for that line of attack: the supply trains and Mustafa's luxurious tents, with their splendid harems and rich treasury, were also located on that side of Vienna. The approaching Christian generals met together to go over the plan of attack, and then rapidly set off to their southwest, far enough from the city to advance mostly undetected.

At intervals, back in Vienna, Mustafa had messages in German tied to dozens of rocks, which he had his catapults shoot over the city walls. One such message read:

Surrender now and you will be saved. Open your gates, turn your churches over to us and lay down your arms, and no one will be killed. If you resist the will of Allah, your leaders, and all of them, will be slain. Able men and women will be sold into slavery. You will be allowed no rights of worship, and your mighty walls will be thrown down. Fight and you die! Surrender and you live!

For more than four hundred years, hundreds of Christian villages and cities had received such messages. The duplicity and primitive brutality of Muslim conquerors were well known to hundreds of thousands of Christian families, through the fate of relatives in other overrun communities. Nevertheless, sometimes terror overwhelmed them and they surrendered. At Vienna, behind fearless and determined leaders, they chose to die fighting rather than to surrender. So the issue inside Vienna became whether food and gunpowder would give out before the long-promised army of relief would arrive. Dauntless messengers slipping in and out of Vienna kept hope at least flickering. The commander in Vienna promised he could hold out until September 1. The advancing army of relief replied that they would need almost two weeks more than that. Only gritted-teeth determination could bridge that gap in time.

One thing the Muslim armies were not trained to do, as were the Christian armies of that time, was to fight on two fronts--against the city ahead and against any oncoming forces that might arrive to break the siege. For this, Kara Mustafa relied on his mobile cavalry, some twenty thousand Tatars from the Asian steppes in camp about twenty miles south of Vienna. Because of the density of the Vienna Wood to the southwest of the city, this was the one region which the cavalry could cover only lightly. Still, if even small bands of mounted Tatars had infiltrated the hills and valleys of the Wood, no Christian soldiers could have made it through the narrow passes. Unaccountably, Mustafa forbade the Tatar leader to launch an attack on the Wood.

King Sobieski of Poland had drawn the privilege of advancing on the right flank, right through the heart of the Vienna Wood. His army's double-time march through the Wood was arduous, by narrow valleys and slow but deep summer streams. Late on September 11, just as his men were making their initial contact with the Turkish outposts, and the final battle began to be joined, the King formed a resolution to attack on the morrow as swiftly and with as much surprise as possible, to overwhelm Mustafa's bodyguard of cavalry and rush on with force as close to the supply trains as he could, and to conclude the matter on the next day. In the rough terrain where his troops broke out from the Wood on September 12, Sobieski held his famed hussars back. They were his best, his ultimate, weapon.

For hours all day long, left, center, and right flanks of the Christian army advanced far more steadily than expected, although the hand-to-hand fighting was furious, and the Turkish lines were yielding only a yard at a time. The last four hundred yards took an immense effort, but the Christian forces reached open ground with less than an hour of daylight left. This is when Sobieski made a huge gamble and boldly released his much-feared hussars. These famous horsemen wore special caps with strips of leather flying behind them in the wind, lined with feathers like the headdresses of American Indians, and the wind whistled through the leather with an eerie tone. As they charged across the open land the low, melancholy wail of the wind through their feathers frightened the Arabian horses--and their Turkish riders, too.

The sheer speed and force of the Polish hussars was too great and too surprising to be resisted. Mustafa escaped, but his tents and treasury were captured (one of his green velvet tents sits now in the Czartoryskis Museum in Krakow). The Muslim lines nearby broke, and their men began looting Mustafa's rich supply wagons and pleasure tents on their panicky flight southward. The entire Muslim ring surrounding the city melted away, back whence it had come. Mustafa, slowed by a bad wound to his eye, was rushed southward by his remaining bodyguards. From the first moments of crushing defeat he began plotting his reports to the sultan, shifting the blame onto one of his subordinates. Yet as the Christians pursued the once-great Muslim army down through Hungary, retaking one city after another from Muslim control, and in effect laying the groundwork for the future Austro-Hungarian Empire, the sultan's anger against Mustafa finally exploded. Mustafa recognized what must happen. He was hanged on December 25, 1683, by the green cord that he had worn round his neck, a little more than three months after he had imagined he had Vienna in his grasp.

Thus, once again, this time by land, the Muslims had attempted to fulfill the Prophet's command to spread Islam to all corners of the world decisively, with force. The sultans had long had the advantage of an enormous standing army ready for all seasons, and swiftly added to when larger ambitions demanded. This time, however, the siege-lifting battle outside the walls of Vienna marked the high-water mark of Muslim power. After September 11-12, 1683, that power kept receding, on into modern times.

Still, it should surprise no one that the date chosen to bring the new resurgence of modern Muslim ambition to the whole world's attention was also September 11, 318 years after 1683. The announcement came in the vivid orange bursts of blossoming flame and dark black smoke from two of the tallest towers of the West's financial capital. Muslim memory runs very deep, and so does the Muslim imperative to conquer the world for Allah, not just by force of arms but by conversion to Islam. The West has always refused to give this long and deeply rooted Muslim threat against the West's own soul the sustained attention it requires.

Nonetheless, four centuries after Lepanto, three centuries after Vienna, today in most of the capitals of once-Christian Europe, there are more Muslims attending services in mosques on Fridays, than Christians at worship on Sundays. In some ways, the pluralism of the West is a blessing, even an advantage to the West--and yet its profoundest historical weakness lies in its own divided spirit. The ultimate issue between Islam and the West is not military force. It is the depth of intellect and engagement. In matters of the spirit, we seem always to become tongue-tied, as if lacking in spirited confidence. We do not insist on presenting better arguments in recognition of the inalienable rights to human liberty that our totalitarian opponents deny. Mere secular force will not do, when the fundamental battle is spiritual. Thus, the same movie seems to be played over and over.

That is the historical record, it seems, at least in regard to October 7, 1571, and September 11-12, 1683, after Lepanto, and after Vienna.

Michael Novak is the George Frederick Jewett Scholar in Religion, Philosophy, and Public Policy at AEI.