



## Middle Eastern Scholar Bernard Lewis dies at 101



On Saturday, 19 May, the renowned British-American Middle Eastern scholar, Bernard Lewis, died (aged 101) in New Jersey.

Born in London -- in 1916 -- Lewis served as a soldier in the British Army in the Royal Armoured Corps and Intelligence Corps during World War II before being shifted to the Foreign Office only to return to academia specialising in the history of Islam and the interaction between Islam and the West.

Lewis was among the leading proponents of the idea of an alleged ‘clash of civilisations’ between Christianity and Islam as a major source of post-Cold War conflict. Lewis argued the roots of the battle lay in the similarities at the core of the two faiths, and argued that their being two religions with shared ideology living side by side made conflict inevitable.

Lewis authored hundreds of articles and more than 30 books, establishing himself as one of the world’s foremost experts on Islam and deepening analysis of current events in the history of the region. Among his best-sellers is a volume completed just before the 9/11 attacks, titled “What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam

and Modernity in the Middle East.” With mainstream fame, he also started to appear more often in the media to comment on current affairs.

In addition to his scholarship, Lewis acted -- from time to time -- as an advisor to prominent policy makers in both the US and the Middle East. His association with the US neocon movement, and his writings in the early 2000s, drew the accusation of him supporting the 2003 invasion of Iraq--an accusation which he rejected. In a 2006 Wall Street Journal article, with regards to the nuclear threat from Iran, Lewis wrote that mutual assured destruction is not an effective deterrent in the case of Iran, because of what he describes as the Iranian leadership’s ‘apocalyptic worldview’ and the ‘suicide or martyrdom complex that plagues parts of the Islamic world today.’

Lewis’ positions often sparked controversy, including a long-running feud with the latePalestinian-American scholar, Edward Said, from Columbia University, who called Lewis emblematic of a patronising Western perspective of superiority over the Middle East. Lewis responded with a rejection of the view that Western scholarship was biased against the Middle East, and that Orientalism developed as a facet of European humanism since the 16th and 17th centuries, long before European powers aimed to gain control of the Middle East.

Amid all the controversies and the praises it is undeniable that the world lost, with the passing of Bernard Lewis, a foremost voice on Middle Eastern affairs.

We at the Euro-Gulf Information Centre extend our condolences.