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6. **The International Trade in Arms: Problems and Prospects**, 21-22 October 1987, by Keith Krause, March 1988, 47 pages.

**NOTE FROM THE EDITOR**

■ As *Peace&Security* goes to press this fourth week in February, international news is dominated by the escalating diplomatic struggle over Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*. And the affair is getting ever more bizarre: many Western countries, including Canada, are recalling their senior diplomats (to whom the the government of Iran has essentially said "good riddance"); the press is asking anyone with the remotest connection to Islam for their opinion - the answers to Western ears seem to range from non-committal (King Hussein of Jordan) to hostile (70s soft-rock crooner and Moslem convert Cat Stevens says Rushdie should die for his writing); and bookstore chains are pulling the books from their shelves then selling copies out of the back room.

For the record, this editor expresses solidarity with Mr. Rushdie and the international writers organization, PEN, in condemning the actions of the government of Iran and denouncing the book burning and threats to life and property that have accompanied the publication of his book. But these words come very easily

to someone rooted in Western liberal, secular traditions. The drama we are watching unfold arises because such sentiments do not come easily, or do not come at all, to many whose roots lie elsewhere. Khomeini's assassination squads aside, many Moslems just don't buy the "free expression" argument when it comes to Salman Rushdie.

The controversy over *The Satanic Verses* is one of those little decisive moments in history that ripples down through months and years, altering perceptions, creating new opportunities, and changing the future. It forcefully demonstrates, in case we needed reminding, that the system of relations among different states and peoples is fragile and pitifully inadequate. Most of the countries of the West have frozen diplomatic contacts with a powerful and dynamic regional superpower over the reaction of that power's religious leaders to the contents of a novel. How can we expect to carry on civilized discourse among diverse cultures, with the goal of finding solutions to the problems that beset us all, when what minimal consensus there is about how to conduct the discourse is so easily undermined?

The most disquieting part of this affair is that it could make the finding of answers to this question much more difficult. The action of Iran against Rushdie is alarming not only because it menaces the life of an individual outside Iran, nor even because it sets a terrible new precedent for modern interstate behaviour, but also because it creates a chilling effect among the very people we need most. Whatever else happens to Rushdie, his creative life is permanently altered for the worse. He is now a symbol - a hero to some, a villain and defiler to others. He can never again be just an excellent writer. The best and the brightest thinkers in the world are on notice that their work could cost them their lives if it happens to cause "offense" to some group or other.

The world frequently seems to be heading straight to hell in a hand basket. This is hardly the time in human history for a new dark age; we need all the ideas we can get.

- Michael Bryans

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