Blaming Islam:

Examining the Religion Building Enterprise

Louay Safi
institute for social policy and understanding fellow

About the Author

Louay Safi is a Fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding and a recognized authority on Islam and the Middle East. He has published extensively on such issues as socio-political development, modernization, democracy, human rights, and Islamic resurgence, including eight books and numerous academic papers. He is the author of eight books and numerous papers, including Tensions and Transitions in the Muslim word, published by University Press of America, 2003.

The report was supported by a generous contribution from Mohamed Elnabtity of Lansing, Michigan.

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Institute for Social Policy and Understanding
43151 Dalcoma, Suite 6
Clinton Township, Michigan 48038
Tel. 586.416.1150
Fax. 586.416.2028
Email. info@ispu.us
www.ispu.us

Preface

Blaming Islam for the lack of democratic and scientific developments is not a new idea but an old enterprise, rooted in the nineteenth and twentieth century European Orientalism. The late Edward Said succeeded, in the 1980s, in unmasking Orientalist notions within Western academia and exposing its false pretense. In his seminal work, *Orientalism*, Said demonstrated that Orientalist views of Islam were used to justify the European colonial ambitions in the Muslim world. Said's monumental work was pivotal for the eventual transformation of Middle Eastern studies in Europe and the United States, as it forced the academia to embrace more scholarly and objective methods when studying the Muslim world.

Specialists who were intent on presenting Islam and Muslims in a negative light were unhappy with the positive portrayal, as were those who previously considered their work to be objective. Many were particularly disturbed by the rise of authentic voices that presented Islam as a vibrant religion, whose followers share many of the values and concerns of the West. Led by Princeton University historian, Bernard Lewis, they attempted to refute Said's work and defend Orientalism. But Said's thesis was profound, and Orientalists never fully recovered.

The September 11th terrorist attacks on mainland United States gave a new momentum to the Orientalist spirit. Bernard Lewis once again led the effort to revive Orientalist notions with the publishing of his 2002 book, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*. Using subtle arguments, he indeed placed the blame on Islam and Islamic traditions for the failure of Middle Eastern societies to develop and modernize like the West. Lewis' book has since been followed by an avalanche of similar articles and publications, mostly by neoconservative journalists and pundits, who reinforce Lewis' thesis and even blaming Islam for the rise of terrorism as well as the rising tension between the West and the Muslim world.

The blame game is led today by neoconservative pundits who often present Islam as the new villain to be confronted by American military power. They have consistently presented Muslims as incapable of democratic rule, and who espouse values that are antithetical to world peace and religious tolerance.

To ensure that their views are not challenged by the academic community, neoconservatives are working hard to undermine academic freedom by intimidating scholars that present a balanced view of the Middle East. Martin Kramer's *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America*, a diatribe against Middle East Studies in U.S. universities, and Daniel Pipes' Campus Watch, an organization devoted to smearing professors critical of U.S. foreign policy and Israeli's treatment of Palestinians, are two such examples. This campaign is one that aims to intimidate free thinking on Middle East politics and silence voices that challenge their perspective.

Although many of the anti-Islam writers and neoconservative pundits play on the fear of the general public by publishing books for a general audience, others have been done for policymakers under the cover of respected institutions and think tanks, such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the RAND Corporation. Readers should note that this activity began in 1992 when Defense Department staffers [1]. Lewis Libby and Paul Wolfowitz drafted the "Defense Policy Guidance." and was followed more discretely and in more depth in a report, "Rebuilding America's Defenses," published in 2000 by the Project for the New American Century.

Because neoconservatives share similar attitudes and conceptions of Islam and the Middle East, often influenced by the work of Bernard Lewis, we will focus specifically on one of the most recent and frequently cited studies. *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners Resources and Strategies*, written by sociologist Cheryl Benard and published by the RAND Corporation in late 2003, blames the rise of intolerance, anti-democratic tendencies, and terrorism on all Muslim groups that closely adhere to Islamic values and practices. It concludes that the only way to counter terrorism and anti-Americanism is by engaging in "religion building" and thus transforming the religion of Islam.

Summary

Islam is in need of a new interpretation and Muslim societies are in need of serious reform. Such reform is already underway, and, for more than a century, Muslims have been engaged in an internal struggle to redefine modern Islamic societies in ways that aim at empowering civil society and ensuring democratic control. A call for external intervention to restructure religion and society is faulty, and is guilty of misreading Islam and ignoring the sociopolitical reality that gives rise to global terrorism.

Religion building is perilous, complex, ill-conceived, and practically untenable. It is a distraction and a blatant attempt to avoid any serious evaluation of the responsibility of world powers for the radicalization of Muslim politics. The rise of radical Islam cannot be explained purely on the level of religious doctrine. Radicalization of Muslim politics is directly connected to the rise of authoritarian regimes in Muslim societies. Authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes that suppress open debate and silence opposition have long enjoyed the support of successive U.S. administrations.

On balance, Islam has been a positive force, rather than a villain to be arrested and chastised, in the development of the modern Middle East. The focus on radical groups perpetrating violence in the name of Islam prevents some analysts from appreciating the centrality of Islamic notions and values in the progress toward a more open society and vibrant culture. A full assessment that takes into account the impact of Islamic reform on Muslim society would illustrate that pessimism toward Islam, reflected in *Civil Democratic Islam* and similar documents, is unwarranted.

While urging support to one group and opposition to another, the report remains oblivious to the connection of the various ideological groups to the larger population in Muslim societies and to one another. The United States, as an external political actor that is increasingly perceived by Muslims as biased and uneven-handed, cannot positively affect political development by rendering support on the basis of artificial religious preferences. Rather, it must base its positions on intrinsic values and political principles. In actuality, Benard's recommendations are nothing but a recycling of the very old foreign policies that got us where we are today and that have led to the radicalization of the Middle East.

The United States has tried in the past to put its weight behind Muslim secularists. The result has been the aggravation of the internal political balance and the radicalization of the societies where the U.S. took sides on the basis of superficial criteria and short-term interests. It was the very approach of siding with modernists against socialists and traditionalists that got us into trouble with the Iranians, the Lebanese, and, most recently, the Palestinians.

The report is conspicuously silent on the effects of U.S. foreign policy, which has been frequently characterized by Muslims as one of inconsistency and double standards — one that supports friendly dictators and corrupt, but useful, regimes in the Muslim world, while pushing for democratization in Eastern Europe; one that defends human rights in China, but ignores them in the Middle East; and one that protests Palestinian violence against Israel, but remains silent in the face of Israeli violence in Palestine. Indeed, the politicization of Islam and the rise of anti-Americanism are directly linked to the very efforts that aim at marginalizing Islam and forcing Western secularism on Muslim society.

The author of *Civil Democratic Islam* has surprisingly chosen religious identity rather than political values to distinguish foes from friends. While *Civil Democratic Islam* declares democracy and civil rights to be its ostensible goals, it surprisingly stresses religious doctrine and lifestyle to distinguish democratically oriented Muslims. Benard can hardly say the same thing about similar practices among Christians and Jews. The author would not use the same terms to describe Joe Lieberman, the U.S. senator from Connecticut, who is also a practicing orthodox Jew.

Containing radical groups and ensuring more friendly and cooperative relations with the Muslim world requires a drastic shift in policy and attitude. Rather than searching for "lifestyle" criteria to separate friends from foes, the United States' position should be based on principles and values. The United States should support and cooperate with political forces in the Middle East that uphold the values of freedom, equality, and tolerance of ethnic and religious diversity, and should embrace those who display commitment to democracy and the rule of the law, regardless of their religion, religious doctrines, and their "lifestyle."

Rather than using lifestyle and religious criteria to assign guilt, the U.S. government needs to extend its founding principles to followers of all religions, and ensure that it does not use different standards for dealing with different religions. The United States must be consistent in pursuing its support for democracy and human rights, and must ensure that the principles of right and justice that guide its relations with Europe also apply to its relations with Muslim societies.

American Muslims can be of great help in fighting terrorism and extremism, and in bridging the deepening divide between the United States and the Muslim world. American Muslims have deep understanding of both Muslim and American cultures, and are well-positioned to help reconcile Islam and the West. American Muslims have already made remarkable achievements at reconciling Islamic values with the founding principles of the United States, and have managed to develop good and important experiences as to how Islamic values can bear on modern living. They can be instrumental in sharing their experiences of aligning Islamic values and education with democratic institutions and practices with coreligionists in Muslim countries. But for that to happen in more effective ways, American Muslims need to be involved in policy making and implementation, rather than allowing themselves to be marginalized and chastised.

In addition to involving American Muslim leaders in consultation on policies relating to Islam, the Muslim world, and the war on terror, civil society and government organizations should:

- Engage Muslim leaders who represent social and political groups that are committed to democracy, instead of relying completely or exclusively on the views of experts who do not have firsthand contact or experience with Muslim groups.
- Ensure that U.S. foreign policy is always respectful of democratic principles and values, the rule of law, and protection of human rights.
- Apply the same set of principles and values to all people, regardless of their religious and ethnic affiliation.
- Withdraw support from authoritarian regimes, and send a clear message by requiring an open political system and free and fair elections as a precondition for economic cooperation.
- Have a clear position regarding Islam, and avoid sending mixed messages to Muslim communities and societies.

Response: Issues of Expertise and Prejudice

How should the United States deal with Islam? How should it reconstruct Islam to make it more compatible with dominant social preferences and tastes? Which Muslim groups should be supported and which should be marginalized and suppressed? These are some of the questions raised by a 2003 report commissioned by the RAND Corporation under the title *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*.

The above questions and *Civil Democratic Islam's* responses to them reflect an attitude and a posture normally associated with the Far Right and totalitarian states, but that has been creeping slowly to the center of political debate. Islam and Muslims are separated out from the citizenry and increasingly presented as a problem to be addressed and a question to be tackled. The last time a world religion was considered a problem and a question was in late-nineteenth-century Europe. Then, the "Jewish Question" was widely debated by both the enlightened and bigots among European thinkers.

The twentieth century witnessed great struggles all over the world to overcome bigotry and racism, and to create more open and inclusive societies in which different races, ethnicities, and religions live side-by-side and cooperate for the betterment of society. After many devastating tragedies and wars, including two world wars that wiped out more than 80 million people, a holocaust, and a long civil rights struggle, chauvinism, racism, and bigotry were finally condemned, though not totally rejected. By the mid-twentieth century, the concept that individuals must be treated on the basis of their individual characters and actions, and that no individual or group should be targeted on the basis of religious, ethnic, racial, or national affiliations became widely accepted.

Therefore, the recent efforts that aim at presenting Islam as a challenge and Muslims who practice their faith as a problem are both disheartening and disquieting. They represent a dangerous move to reverse human progress and return to the age of outright racism and intolerance. This renewed focus on Islam as a problem has been justified by invoking security concerns. Many voices, particularly within the policy community decided, either out of ignorance or prejudice, to place the blame for terrorism squarely at the door of Islam.

The decision to ignore complex and painful realities that give rise to discord and tension between Western and Muslim countries, and to blame it all on a major world religion and its practitioners, will only exacerbate an already dire situation. This exercise in self-delusion can only distract us from confronting the real sources of the concerns on both sides and delay the efforts to bring forth a permanent and lasting solution. Meanwhile, tremendous resources are wasted, and the credibility and prestige of the United States are being undermined.

The failure to understand the profound changes taking place in the Muslim world is not simply a matter of ignorance and lack of insight into Muslim cultures, but a reflection of the bewildering stubbornness of neoconservative analysts in the United States and Europe, and their comfort in employing the archaic Orientalist attitudes and tools to analyze relationships between the West and the Muslim world. Muslims are not awarded the dignity of equal human beings with intrinsic values and legitimate concerns, but are often presented as thoughtless and violent masses incapable of articulating their conditions and solving their problems. Consequently, no effort is made to initiate dialogue and exchange, and all energy is focused on devising strategies for the manipulation and control of the Muslim world.

Many self-proclaimed experts on Islam continue to behave as if Islam and Muslims are a distant part of reality and an external problem to address, rather than partners for dealing with common problems and challenges. An increasing number of Muslims are proud Americans, serving American society as professors, businessmen, medical doctors, engineers, lawyers, sports stars, firefighters, police officers, and teachers. Many experts in Middle East and Islamic Studies departments have their ancestral roots in Middle Eastern and Muslim cultures. Many American Muslims are active in the debate on how best to bridge the divide, or at least change the perceptions of a divide, between the Muslim world and the West.1 Yet *Civil Democratic Islam* makes no efforts to seriously engage authentic Arab and Muslim voices for more accurate information on Islam and American Muslims.

Civil Democratic Islam is no exception; the same attitude permeates other think tanks and policy formation groups. In a recent study, the Freedom House made sweeping and largely inaccurate generalizations about American Muslims. After collecting copies of Saudi publications their researchers alleged were found on the library shelves of fifteen mosques,

they accused mosques across the nation of promoting hate. The Freedom House found it quite permissible to smear every mosque in the United States without conducting a single interview, or inquiring about the reasons and circumstances of carrying questionable Saudi publications.[2]

This report is critical of *Civil Democratic Islam* findings not necessarily because it faults the theoretical scheme, but mostly because it rejects the inconsistencies in demands and expectations. As will be argued later in more detail, *Civil Democratic Islam* interprets all criticism by Muslims of modern secularist culture as anti-Western and anti-democratic, dismisses Muslim women's choice of dress as a political provocation, and views Muslim religious practices as signs of extremism and radicalism. Benard can hardly say the same thing about similar practices among Christians and Jews. *Civil Democratic Islam* would neither use the same terms to describe Joe Lieberman, the U.S. senator from Connecticut, who is also a practicing orthodox Jew, nor demand to reshape Christianity.

This attitude toward Islam and Muslims, and the policy recommendations that stem from it, have so far led to continuous radicalization of Muslim societies and have strengthened the very divisive forces that desire to marginalize and eliminate Islam and Muslims in the West. As will be shown later, many of the complex challenges the United States faces are the outcome of a faulty or unbalanced foreign policy, formulated from information supplied by ill-informed, Islamophobic experts. These policies are the result of defining adversaries on the ground of ethnic and religious identities, rather than universal ethical principles and actions, which include respect for the religious sensibilities of others. Sadly, the *Civil Democratic Islam* continues a very divisive tradition, and ultimately adversaries are defined by lifestyle and religious criteria.

In the following pages some of the questions raised in *Civil Democratic Islam* will be examined, and concerns in the presentation of Islam will be underscored. In addition, recommendations for engaging Muslims at home and abroad will be made.

The Labeling Game: Marker Issues and Identity Tests

The first step in understanding the politics of a particular society or region is to identify the political forces operating there. Grouping peoples into social and political categories is, however, only the first step in a more elaborate effort that includes looking at the interaction and the dynamics of change that bring a particular society into a given political formation. *Civil Democratic Islam*, sadly, starts and ends its examination of Muslim politics and society at this elementary level.

Benard groups the various political actors in Islamic societies into four categories: fundamentalists, traditionalists, modernists, and secularists. The four groups are then subdivided into three overarching groups: fundamentalists, traditionalists, and secularists. The fundamentalists and traditionalists are further divided into "scriptural fundamentalists," "radical fundamentalists," "conservative traditionalists," and "reformist traditionalists," while the secularists are divided into "mainstream secularists" and "radical secularists."

The identity of each of these groups is constructed in relation to a set of issues that the report's author calls "marker issues," which actually serve as "identity tests" to figure out where the various individuals in Muslim societies stand on particular issues. The report uses the following eight "marker issues": democracy, human rights, polygamy, Islamic criminal penalties, hijab, beating of wives, status of minorities, and the Islamic state.

Civil Democratic Islam attempts to grapple with the complexity of Muslim societies, and the diversity of political and social positions taken by various social groups. It does actually help readers capture the complexities of the modern experience of Islam and avoid the simplistic tendencies to divide Muslims into "Islamists" and "modernists," or "radical Muslims" and "moderate Muslims," and to declare any assertion of Islamic values as a threat to modern society.

While doing a fairly good job in capturing the diversity of social and political positions, the report's selection of the "key issues" and its understanding of the dynamics of relationships among various groups leaves a great deal to be desired. The report makes no effort to assess the impact of the competing ideological groups on the larger society as well as the direction

of social and political change, and it fails to locate the various groups within the process of democratization and in relation to human rights promotion and protection. The report also does not examine the dynamic relationship between the ideological groups it assembles. It is not clear, for instance, whether the four main groups or the seven subgroups, are equal in number or influence across Muslim societies or the various ethnic communities in the United States. The result is a set of questionable and counterproductive recommendations for dealing with Muslim societies.

The report identifies polygamy, Islamic criminal penalties, hijab, and beating of wives as key issues in identifying social and political grouping in Muslims societies, and considers these issues focused on by Orientalists as independent of the category of human rights, while continuing to ignore more central issues to the ongoing political debates in Muslims societies. The questions of privacy, freedom of press, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly, which are central to the political debate and struggle in many Muslim countries, and more relevant to the rise of radicalism and extremism in Muslim societies, are simply ignored.

In addition, many of the concepts employed are used loosely and lack clear definition. "Islamic state" is not defined and is assumed to have the same meaning among the various ideological groups. The term "hijab" is assumed to have negative connotation and an anti-democratic meaning. Hijab, as used in the report, is not considered as an individual choice and an expression of modesty, but is assumed to be oppressive to women and antithetical to modernity. Further, the author of the report makes no efforts to investigate how certain terms acquire different meanings and connotations as they move across cultural and religious divides. The word "secularist" is assumed to have the same meaning and manifestation among Muslims, a shaky assumption that would hardly stand any rigorous examination.

Secularization for most people in the West refers to the liberation of scientific research from the shackles of religious imposition, and the rationalization of public debate. Similarly, the secular state is seen in the West as providing an essential space for religious freedom and a vital structure for preventing the imposition of one religious tradition on a multi-religious society. In the Muslim world, however, secularization has been associated with the decline of

individual autonomy and the disappearance of civil society, while the secular state is often associated with the control of public institutions and debates by dogmatic political elites, bent on imposing "modern" ideas and institutions on the larger society. In many ways, the term "secularism" for Muslims evokes the same images that the term "fundamentalism" evokes for Westerners: imposition and intolerance of diversity.[3]

The lack of appreciation of cultural subtleties, even with an attention to cultural complexities, and the lack of awareness of the marked differences in the historical experiences of Muslim and Western societies, renders many of the report's conclusions erroneous at best and sinister at least. The assumption, for instance, that Islamic religious reassertions are signs of anti-democratic sentiments is naïve, and fails to recognize the centrality of religious reformation for any important cultural change. It even omits a discussion of indigenous Muslims and their interactions with immigrant Muslim communities. The modern drive toward democracy and empire is rooted in the Religious Reformation of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe. Similarly, the American democratic tradition is rooted in the religious beliefs and practices of the pilgrims.[4]

The underlying socio-political morality advocated by the pioneers of the secular state in Europe was derived from the religious tradition delineated by the religious reformists of fifteenth-century Europe, but argued in rational terms and common-good logic. Early advocates of the separation of state and church, such as Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, had no intention of undermining religion, or faith in the divine; rather, they predicated their reformist ideas on the notions of God and civil religion. Descartes, for instance, argued "that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him."[5] Similarly, Rousseau, while critical of the way religion was traditionally taught and practiced, recognized the need, even the necessity, of religious commitment and faith for the modern state to function properly. He, therefore, identified a number of "dogmas," and argued for their inclusion in the "civil religion" he advocated: "The existence of an omnipotent, intelligent, benevolent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of sinners; the sanctity of the social contract and the law – these are the positive dogmas. As for the negative dogmas I would limit them to a single one: no intolerance."[6]

It is, therefore, unreasonable to expect any profound cultural change that transforms the authoritarian culture in some Muslim societies or in American Muslim communities to a democratic one unless cultural change is rooted in Islamic values. The early attempts to transplant modern education and modern institutions into Muslim societies have only produced corrupt elites, uprooted from their cultures and communities. Therefore, the question we need to confront is not whether reformists in Muslim societies appeal to Islamic values and symbols, but rather how Islam is being interpreted by various groups, and which interpretations are conducive to establishing a free, open, democratic, and tolerant society.

As recent developments in Iraq and Egypt have shown, Islamically inspired religious leaders and groups play an important role in the struggle to reform politics and cultures in Muslim societies. Islam and Islamic values are at the heart of the reform movements in Muslim societies. From Turkey to Indonesia and from Morocco to Iraq, Islamic values have provided the foundation for reform impetus and aspiration.

The Islamic Drive Toward Open and Democratic Society

The focus on radical groups perpetrating violence in the name of Islam prevents some analysts from appreciating the centrality of Islamic notions and values in the progress toward more open society and vibrant culture. A full assessment that takes into account the impact of Islamic reform on Muslim society would illustrate that the pessimism toward Islam, reflected in *Civil Democratic Islam* and similar reports, is unwarranted.

In the past two centuries, Muslim cultures have lost a great deal of their vitality and experienced a series of crises that virtually affected every sphere of life, including the social, the economic, and the political. These crises have shaken Muslim societies to their foundation, and prompted many intellectuals and leaders to search for a way out from the state of decline and backwardness. The search for reform has been slow and tenuous and the responses to the development challenge are numerous. The responses ranged from the most rigid and imposing, emphasizing blind imitations of established traditions or unfamiliar cultures, to the most engaging and imaginative. One of the most influential reform movements that has made a profound impact on contemporary Muslim cultures is the Reform Movement (al Harakah al Islahiyah).

The Reform Movement can be traced back to the work of Islamically inspired reformers, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (Iran), Muhammad Abduh (Egypt), Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (India), and Abdul Rahman Al-Kawakibi (Syria). The Islamic Reform Movement has rejected the literalist interpretations of Islam and has embarked on an ambitious reform project, aiming at relating Islamic beliefs and values to modern life.[7] The works of Afghani, Abduh, and Muhammad Rashid Rida? the founders of what has been termed the reform school — present us with an unmistakably egalitarian and forward-looking discourse, emphasizing openness and tolerance. Early reformers rejected the anti-intellectual approach of literalist jurists, and advocated a rational and critical reading of classical Muslim works. They rejected, for instance, the restrictive role assigned by traditionalist jurists to women, emphasizing the importance of women's education and social participation. Indeed, as early as the 1930s, not only did Rida advocate the right of women to education and social participation, but also to political participation.[8] Similarly, al-Kawakibi attributed the cultural decline of Muslim society to the denial of the right to education for women, and stressed the importance of women's public involvement for their ability to provide proper guidance and sound upbringing for children.[9]

Reformist scholars have exerted a profound and far-reaching influence on contemporary Muslim society. Their impact can be seen in the increasingly more open views adopted by leading figures within the traditionalist schools. Several influential and widely respected jurists within traditionalist circles are on record in supporting democracy and human rights, including the right of women to compete equally with men for public office.[10] The views they express today and teach in public, as well as in shari'ah departments of traditional Islamic colleges, would have been sufficient for them to be branded as heretics just a century ago. Leading scholars of Al-Azhar University, such as Muhammad Abu Zahra, Mahmoud Shaltoot, Muhammad al-Ghazali, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, have emphasized equality between men and women, as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims.

More recently, enlightened Muslim scholars and political leaders have advanced more open and tolerant visions of modern Islam. Scholars such as Salem Awa, Tariq Bishri, Fahmi Huwaydi, Rashid al-Ghanoushi, and Ali Juma have emphasized the values of democracy, freedom, and equal protection of the law. Similarly, American and European Muslims are undergoing a process of profound intellectual and community reform, as they are engaged

in a fresh reading of Islamic texts and heritage. The works of Ismail al-Faruqi, Tariq Ramadan, Jamal Badawi, Muzammil Siddiqi, Maher Hathout, Ingrid Mattson, Khalid Blankenship, Hamza Yusuf, Zaid Shakir, Zaki Badawi, and Mustafa Ceric place Islam and Islamic values firmly within the best traditions of advancing an open, tolerant, inclusive, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society.

The views of reformers continue to mature in the direction of recognizing human dignity and reciprocity in society. Most recently, Huwaydi, a leading intellectual and writer in the Arab world and respected Muslim reformer, addressed the question of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims in a book entitled Muwatinun La Dhimiyun (Citizens, Not Dhimmis). Huwaydi rejected the dhimmi classification of non-Muslims as a historically bound concept, and demonstrated, by referring to Islamic sources, that non-Muslims in a Muslim political order enjoy full citizenship rights on par with Muslims.[11] The views advanced by Huwaydi are supported by the views of the leader of the main Islamic opposition in Tunisia, who stresses that non-Muslims enjoy equal citizenship with the Muslim majority.[12]

Therefore, the failure to recognize the compatibility of the Islamic faith with democracy is not only a failure to read the dynamics of change in Muslim societies, but to understand Islam's respect for religious freedom and individual autonomy. Modern Islamic reformers appeal to the prophetic traditions to establish a modern democratic tradition.

Scholars who studied the history of Islam and the attitude of Muslims toward the followers of other religious communities have concluded that Islam teaches tolerance and respects religious freedom. While this description is true, it only partially describes the prevailing attitude in historical Muslim society, as it fails to capture the essence of Islam's remarkable contribution to social and political liberation. On the sociopolitical level, Islam's embrace of cultural and religious pluralism is manifested in the founding document of the first Muslim polity in Medina, the Compact of Medina (Sahifatul Medina), under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad.[13] The various principles enunciated in the Compact were aimed at maintaining peace and cooperation, protecting the life and property of the inhabitants of Medina, fighting aggression and injustice regardless of tribal or religious affiliations, and ensuring freedom of religion and movement. It is remarkable that the Medina Compact placed

the rules of justice over and above religious solidarity, and affirmed the right of the victims of aggression and injustice to rectitude, regardless of their tribal or religious affiliations.

The Compact of Medina formed the constitutional foundation of the political community established by the Prophet.[14] It established a number of important political principles that, when put together, formed the political constitution of the first Islamic state. This constitution defined the political rights and duties of the members, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, of the newly established political community, and drew up the political structure of the nascent society.

The Islamic political system adopted the principle of religious tolerance based on freedom of belief for all the members of the society. It conceded to the Jews the right to act according to the principles and rulings in which they believed: "The Jews of Banu Auf are one community with the believers. The Jews have their religion and the Muslims theirs." The Compact emphasized the fundamental need for cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims in establishing justice and defending Medina against foreign aggression. "The Jews must bear their expenses and the Muslims theirs. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this Compact. They must seek mutual advice and consultation." It prohibited the Muslims from doing injustice to the Jews, or retaliating for their Muslim brothers against the followers of the Jewish religion without adhering to the principles of truth and goodness. "To the Jew who follows us belongs help and equality. He shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided."[15]

The Compact stipulated that the social and political activities in the new system must be subject to a set of universal values and standards that treat all people equally. Sovereignty in the society would not rest with the rulers or any particular group, but with the law founded on the basis of justice and goodness, maintaining the dignity of all. The Compact emphasized repeatedly and frequently the fundamental nature of justice, goodness, and righteousness, and condemned, in different expressions, injustice and tyranny. "They would redeem their prisoners with kindness and justice common among the believers," the Compact stated. "The God-conscious believers shall be against the rebellious; and, against those who seek to spread injustice, sin, enmity, or corruption among the believers, the hand of every person shall be against him even if he be a son of one of them, it proclaimed.[16]

The Compact introduced a number of political rights to be enjoyed by the individuals of the Medinan State, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, including (1) the obligation to help the oppressed, (2) the outlawing of guilt by association, which was commonly practiced by pre-Islamic Arab tribes: "A person is not liable for his ally's misdeeds;" (3) freedom of belief: "The Jews have their religion and the Muslims theirs;" and (4) freedom of movement from and to Medina: "Whoever will go out is safe, and whoever will stay in Medina is safe except those who wronged (others), or committed offense."[17]

Inspired by the openness of the political practices during the formative years of Islam, modern Muslim reformers continue to build on this rich tradition to push for the democratization of the post-colonial Muslim societies.

External Manipulation and the Radicalization of Islam

Civil Democratic Islam is faulty on both diagnosis and prognosis: on identifying the key issues that give rise to radicalism, terrorism, and anti-Americanism, and on prescribing remedies to dealing with the problems at hand. To begin with, the report falsely assumes that Islam is the key to understanding both the radicalization of Muslim politics and the deepening mistrust and confrontation between the Muslim world and the West. That is, the author of the report takes it for granted that political ideologies rooted in Islam, rather than the internal politics of Muslim societies and U.S. foreign policy toward Muslim countries, is at the root of the terrorist threat confronting the United States and its allies.

The politicization of Islam and the radicalization of politics in the Muslim world are not rooted in ideology but in reality. Not too long ago, Islam was seen as irrelevant to public discourse in the Muslim world, and religious groups were hardly involved in national politics. The withdrawal of Islam from the public sphere was so complete that some scholars of the Middle East argued that Islam was part of the past and was no longer relevant to modern experience. Daniel Lerner, for instance, made the following assessment of the place of Islam in Middle Eastern society in his highly acclaimed work, The Passing of Traditional Society:

Whether from East or West, modernization poses the same basic challenge — the infusion of "a rationalist and positivist spirit" against which scholars seem agreed, "Islam is absolutely

defenseless." The phasing and modality of the process have changed, however, in the past decade. Where Europeanization once penetrated only the upper level of Middle East society, affecting mainly leisure-class fashions, modernization today diffuses among a wider population and touches public institutions as well as private aspirations with its disquieting "positivist spirit."[18]

Lerner's assessment of modern Muslim society in relation to Islam was widely embraced by Middle East specialists, so much so that his work was considered classical for the students of the Middle East. It is not my intention here to examine why Lerner badly misjudged the place of Islam in modern Muslim societies, but I refer to his statement to illustrate the extent to which religious slogans and sentiments were far removed from public discourse and debate in the Middle Eastern society around the 1950s.

The radicalization of Muslim societies and the emergence of extreme interpretations of Islam should not be sought on the realm of ideas alone, but the social and political spheres, and the experiences of Middle Eastern societies in the past four decades. The radicalization of politics in Middle Eastern countries like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq was the result of deliberate efforts by Muslim secularists to impose modern practices, developed in the West, on Muslim societies. The reliance on force and iron fist policies to impose "modern" institutions and practices by "radical" and "mainstream" secularists, who held and continue to hold power in many Muslim countries, has led to the destruction of public debate and the radicalization of politics. For instance, the use of violence by state security agencies to silence opposition during Gamal Abdel Nasser's years in Egypt has paved the way to the rise of terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s.

Modernization was carried out vigorously by almost all Muslim secular regimes that dominated Muslim societies since the middle of the twentieth century. The result has been a very slow pace of material growth without development. Surely, for all appearances, life in most Muslim capitals seems to be as modern as it is in Western capitals. But beneath the façade of modernity lies an eerie emptiness. For as soon as one delves deep to examine modern practices, one finds that Muslim elites have acquired only modern taste, but not modern industriousness and creativity. That is to say, ruling elites in Muslim societies are more inter-

ested in consuming modern goods and imitating Western lifestyles, and less in advancing democracy and the rule of law, protecting human rights, promoting technology, or building modern institutions. Even when one encounters modern institutions and technologies in Muslim societies, one finds them lifeless and dysfunctional. Hence, parliamentary systems in most Muslim countries share only the procedural element of vote-casting, and not the spirit of popular political participation, with their Western counterparts.

The failure of the secularist project of modernization lies primarily in the fact that secular elites thought they could impose modern practices through an act of sheer force. They failed to understand that the mode of change lies ultimately in the psychological and cultural aspects of society, which can only be influenced through an open debate aimed at persuasion, and not through compulsion and harassment. By employing a one-party system, controlling civil society and its institutions, and silencing opposition through iron-fist policies, modern secularist regimes in the Muslim world did not leave room for political solutions and the peaceful exchange of public offices among contending political groups.

Ultimately, the only opposition to government policies came from Islamically inspired individuals and groups who were willing to take risks in confronting established power. Islamic groups were very often provoked by the ruling elites, particularly in countries that adopted a Marxist-socialist approach to politics, such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and who considered religion a subversive force in society that had to be suppressed and marginalized.

Political Cynicism and the Recycling of failed Policies

"Support the modernists first… Support the traditionalists against the fundamentalists… Confront and oppose the fundamentalists… Selectively support secularists." This formula proposed by *Civil Democratic Islam* is at the heart of the recommendations offered for dealing with Muslim countries, even with American Muslims. Apart from the cynical nature of the proposal, and the lack of clarity in separating one group from the other, it is worthwhile to examine the practicality and usefulness of such an approach.

The author of the report is completely oblivious to the connection of the various ideological groups to the larger population in Muslim societies and to one another. The United States

as an external political actor, which is increasingly perceived as biased and uneven-handed, cannot positively affect political development by rendering support on the basis of artificial religious preferences, but on the basis of intrinsic values and political positions. *Civil Democratic Islam*'s recommendations are, in actuality, nothing but a recycling of the very old foreign policies that got us where we are today and that have led to the radicalization of the Middle East.

The United States has tried to put its weight with Muslim secularists in the past, and the result has been the aggravation of the internal political balance and the radicalization of the societies that the U.S. sided with on the basis of superficial criteria and short-term interests. It was the very approach of siding with modernists against socialists and traditionalists that got us into trouble with the Iranians. The United States Central Intelligence Agency was directly involved in engineering the coup d'état that removed the democratically elected government of Mohammed Mossadegh, and installed the Shah regime in Iran in 1954. Despite his abuse of his people's civil liberties and his extensive use of state security forces to suppress critics and opposition forces, the Shah continued to receive American support. President Jimmy Carter, who insisted that the United States foreign policy must be based on the United States' commitment to human rights, praised the Shah during a visit shortly before the latter was ousted by the Islamic Revolution.[19]

The United States later took an active part in arming Saddam Hussein in a bid to topple the revolutionary government in Tehran. To ensure the cooperation of the Iraqi government, the Reagan Administration kept silent when Saddam used chemical weapons against Iranians as well as against the Kurdish opposition in Northern Iraq. It was only when the belligerent Saddam turned his newly acquired military strength against the oil-rich Gulf countries that he was declared a renegade. It took two costly wars to unseat Saddam, and the ramifications of the most recent intervention are still unclear and the likely future fallout is still unknown. The emerging government in Iraq is, evidently, more in sync with Iran than the United States.

The Shah received American support not because he embraced American political values of freedom, equality, democracy, and the rule of law, but because he cooperated with and

supported U.S. policies in the region, while he alienated a large number of Iranians with his reckless spending and repressive policies. And, of course, his lifestyle was more in line with that of European royalties than traditional Iranian society. The short-term gains from the cooperative Shah regime are far out-weighed by the messy and explosive situation the United States confronts today. Choosing sides based on Benard's criteria did not strengthen the modernists and secularists, but empowered the fundamentalists and traditionalists, and further made them more hostile to, and less cooperative with, the United States.

Civil Democratic Islam's recommendations also fail to apprehend the dynamic relations between the various groups and the negative consequences that follow from supporting one group on the arbitrary and superficial criteria of lifestyle. The same spectrum of ideological variation is natural to all free political societies, and, in most cases, serves important social functions: it ensures competition among political groups in the service of the larger society, provides different perspectives on social and political issues, and guarantees that no single ideological point of view dominates the entire society and suppresses dissent.

The external support received by certain groups because they are considered useful to advancing the economic and strategic interests of the United States has historically upset the internal political balance and dynamics, and has contributed to the radicalization of internal politics and the rise of global terrorism. The support the Egyptian secularists currently receive from the United States in the form of $2 billion has allowed them to marginalize both the modernists and reformist traditionalists by relying on the repressive power of the state. To ensure minimal public support, secularists in Egypt allied themselves with conservative traditionalists who have gained more influence in shaping public opinion and perception. The views advanced by the conservative traditionalists are neither controlled by the secularist elites, nor are they challenged by reformist traditionalists or other social groups. Consequently, the conservative traditionalist point of view dominates public discourse on social and religious issues.

The policy of supporting the groups that seem willing to advance the immediate interests of the United States and comply with its instant demands has created political imbalances in several Gulf countries. U.S. support of the conservative traditionalists in Saudi Arabia has

led to the marginalization of modernists and reformist traditionalists, while strengthening the hand of scriptural radical fundamentalists. Today, the latter are the avowed enemies of the United States.

The Secularist-Islamist Interplay and the Dynamics of Sociopolitical Change

Two important questions the *Civil Democratic Islam* fails to raise are: Are the ideological groups equally popular among the larger Muslim population? And, how does the behavior of an external power like the United States affect the internal political dynamics?

The report's author is keenly aware of the impact of international politics on the perceptions and positions of Muslim populations. The ideological differences among the groups do not translate into clear delineation of positions toward international political actors. Reformist traditionalists and fundamentalists are quite similar in their views, the report tells us, when it comes to international politics. "Even the reformist traditionalists, whose views on social and lifestyle issues are more compatible with international modernity," the report contends, "are often much closer to the fundamentalists than to the West on issues of international politics."[20]

Indeed, even the secularists, the report admits, seem to share an antagonist stance toward the United States. "The problem has been, and continues to be," the report states, "that many important secularists in the Islamic world are unfriendly or even extremely hostile to us on other grounds."[21] The report blames the hostility of Muslim secularists on "leftist ideologies, anti-Americanism, aggressive nationalism, and authoritarian structures with only quasi-democratic trappings."[22] Aggressive nationalism and leftist ideologies have lost ground in most Muslim countries, and most of the regimes that maintained and continue to maintain good relations with the Untied States are authoritarian, while anti-Americanism is not an explanatory factor, but a posture in need of explanation.

The report is conspicuously silent on the effects of U.S. foreign policy, which has been frequently characterized by Muslims as one of inconsistency and double standards – one that supports friendly dictators and corrupt, but useful, regimes in the Muslim world, while pushing for democratization in Eastern Europe; one that defends human rights in China, but ignores them in the Middle East; and one that protests Palestinian violence against Is-

rael, but remains silent in the face of Israeli violence in Palestine. Indeed, the politicization of Islam and the rise of anti-Americanism are directly linked to the very efforts that aim at marginalizing Islam and forcing Western secularism on Muslim society.

Likewise, the report fails to appreciate the importance of the dialectical relationship between different political components for political maturation of the democratic forces in society, as it fails to understand that Islamically inspired political forces can be, when given the chance, the best guarantee for smooth and forward-looking reforms. The democratization process in Turkey illustrates this point.

Bemard identifies Turkey as "one of the Islamic world's most successful states," but erroneously credits that success to "a policy of aggressive secularism." According to the report, Turkey "provides a dramatic instance of an Islamic polity transforming itself, in a very short time, from being a deeply Muslim Ottoman state to a laicism system."[23] The report completely ignores the fact that Turkey's "Islamists" were at the center of the transformation from a quasi-democracy, ruled by a militarized ruling class, to an open and vibrant democracy.

The struggle between the Islamic parties and the Junta-controlled government of Turkey is a case in point. The U.S. continues to align itself with and overlooks the excesses of the Turkish military. The Turkish generals have interfered in the political process, forcing the democratically elected Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan from office in 1998 because of his Islamic leanings; persecuting Turkish citizens because of their religious beliefs and preferences, firing many of them out of the army and bureaucracy; banning Turkish women who chose to wear headscarf from government offices, universities, and schools; and outlawing the teaching of the Qur'an to children below 12 years of age. Despite these blatant human rights violations and continuous provocations, Islamically inspired reformers continue to work positively toward building a democratic state, displaying unwavering commitment to peaceful political development.

The Prosperity Party, which the Turkish Junta accused of threatening the secularist foundation of the Turkish republic, hardly fits even the broadest definition of radical Islam. The party showed an extraordinary commitment to democracy and exhibited a remarkable

self-restraint in the face of provocation, intimidation, and outright repressive tactics by the presumably secular and democratic elites. The party was dissolved five times over the past thirty years, only to emerge every time stronger and with broader popular support. The Prosperity Party was banned in early 1998, its property was confiscated, and its top leadership banned from practicing politics for five years.

Commanding the largest number of seats in the parliament, the Prosperity Party was dissolved under the pretext that it threatens the secular character of the Turkish Republic. The Turkish courts were unable to implicate the party in any violation of the law, and the party was faulted for not persecuting Turkish women who chose to wear a headscarf to school and work. The party emerged a few months later under the name of Virtue. The Virtue Party was once again outlawed in June 2001, and was charged "with inciting protests against a headscarf ban in universities and orchestrating a failed bid by one of its legislators in 1999 to take oath in parliament wearing a headscarf."[24]

Commenting on the Junta's efforts to save the Turkish republic from Islamists, Nilufer Gole, a respected Turkish sociologist, underscored the paradox of Turkish secularism. "What I find a pity is," she explained, "that in the name of secularism, we go back to authoritarianism. This is a very vicious circle in Turkish politics which is very similar to other Muslim contexts which experienced modernity and secularism."[25]

Turkey is governed today by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which drew its leadership from the Virtue Party, and which is led by Tayyip Erdogan, a charismatic leader who was imprisoned in 1998 for reading a religious poem. The AKP has been credited with advancing democratic practices in Turkey in order to meet the conditions of membership in the European Union.

Lifestyle as a Litmus Test and the Imposition of Dogmatic Secularism

The author of the *Civil Democratic Islam* has surprisingly chosen religious identity rather than political values to distinguish foes from friends. While the report declares the promotion of democracy and civil rights to be its ostensible goals, it surprisingly stresses religious doctrine and lifestyle to distinguish democratically oriented Muslims. As the report's author

puts it: "The utility of 'mapping' the views of the various Islamic positions is that, on issues of doctrine and lifestyle, they adhere to fairly distinct and reliable platforms, which define their identity and serve as identifiers toward like-minded others—a kind of 'passport.'"[26]

It is a "passport," an identity card, that Benard offers for facilitating the exclusion and marginalization of people. And because many people would be offended if the report's author were to suggest that religious criteria should be added to national passports and identity cards to differentiate between the 'good guys' and the 'bad guys,' the next best alternative is to look at religious doctrines and lifestyles.

Of all the aspects of religious lifestyle, the report identifies hijab, or the "headscarf" that many Muslim women choose to wear in keeping with the Islamic requirements for female modesty. In defiance of a widely accepted position within the Muslim community, the report castigates the Muslim headscarf as a provocative political statement rather than a religious practice, as well as a challenge to Western democracy, and rebukes Americans for tolerating it.[27] "One can cast 'hijab' as an issue of freedom of expression and of pluralism," the report proclaims, "but that ignores the larger context. And the larger context is that 'hijab' is neither a neutral lifestyle issue nor a religious requirement. It has become a political statement."[28]

While it is true that not all Muslim women choose to wear a headscarf and that some Muslim women do not consider wearing it as a religious requirement, the facts of the matter are that a large number of Muslim women choose to do so and a majority consider wearing hijab a religious mandate. In many Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, women are free to either wear the headscarf or elect not to wear it, and the female population is divided almost in the middle around the choice. The hijab has not been politicized in these countries, and the state neither enforces nor prohibits the wearing of it. The hijab is worn not only by rural women, but also by professional women, judges, and members of parliament. The hijab is enforced in Iran, and prohibited by law for state employees in Turkey and Tunisia.[29]

The report seems intent on considering the wearing of the hijab as a political statement rather than a religious practice, suggesting that it is worn by women preserving old habits. "In the United States," the report claims, "hijab is typically worn by the following groups: recent immigrants from rural, traditional parts of the Muslim world; fundamentalists; unassimilated traditionalists belonging to the strongly observant minority; the elderly;" and, the author states that when it is worn by "young women," these women "want to get attention and make a provocative statement in their schools, colleges, or workplaces."[30]

Civil Democratic Islam's stance with regard to Muslim religious practices is both contradictory and troubling, as it purports to promote a "civic and democratic" Islam, while calling for the suppression of those who voluntarily assert their moral autonomy. One is left to wonder what conception of democracy and human rights drives someone to boldly deny Muslims the capacity of experiencing religious authenticity, and to appeal to state power to prevent Muslim peoples from enjoying their moral autonomy.

Benard's recommendations on hijab, the wearing of which is a personal choice of a Muslim woman to affirm her religious faith, places it at odds with the notion of democracy and human rights, and strikes us as being disingenuous. The recommendations potentially defy constitutional protections of religious freedom. The practice of wearing hijab is protected by the First Amendment, which prohibits the government from "establishing religion, or preventing the free exercise thereof." They further reveal utter contempt to the Islamic faith and those who choose to follow its precepts, and ignore an important requirement for any fair treatment: reciprocity.

Civil Democratic Islam does not ask whether a community can castigate a religious practice because a majority of people deem it "provocative." Reciprocity requires that each moral or religious group recognizes that other groups are entitled to the same moral autonomy they wish to enjoy. They should not insist on imposing their own moral preferences, even when they truly believe that these preferences are universally valid, as they would naturally dread that such an imposition be directed against them. The danger of Benard's argument is that it can be easily turned against the self-expression of women of any culture, including Western culture.

It should not be difficult, then, to see why the arguments of those who fail to recognize the autonomy of non-Western moral communities and insist on using their position of power to impose their moral vision on others run contrary to the requirement of a democratic society. If democracy is meant to protect the human dignity and moral autonomy of individuals, one cannot appeal to it to force Muslim women to abandon their voluntarily adopted hijab under the pretext of it being intended or understood as a political statement and provocation. I am sure that the Turkish generals and dogmatic secularists would be glad to adopt the argument of political provocation to justify their authoritarian and anti-democratic decree, tantamount to religious persecution, in order to prevent Muslim women from adopting their dress style in accordance with their religious conviction.

From Religion Building to International Consistency

"It is no easy matter to transform a major world religion. If 'nation-building' is a daunting task, 'religion-building' is immeasurably more perilous and complex."[31] Despite this remarkable statement, Cheryl Benard proceeds to do the most foolish thing: she advocates "religion building", while the author remains oblivious to the political reality in Muslim societies and the impact of the foreign policy of the U.S. and European countries on shaping the Middle Eastern reality.

The Bush administration has discovered, perhaps too late, that "nation building" in the twenty-first century is literally impossible. Even if the current political arrangements hold and the Iraqi insurgency subsides, the outcome is far removed from the one envisaged prior to the invasion of Iraq. The Bush administration's most favored political forces are marginalized, while those who are favored by the Iranian government are at the helm of power.32

Aside of the fact that 'religion building' is perilous, complex, and practically untenable, it is in the first place a distraction, a blatant attempt to avoid any serious evaluation of the responsibility of world powers for the radicalization of Muslim politics. The rise of radical groups is a recent experience in Muslim society, and it cannot be explained purely on the level of religious doctrine. Radicalization of Muslim politics is directly connected with the rise of authoritarian regimes in Muslim societies. Authoritarian regimes that suppressed open debate and silenced opposition have long enjoyed the support of successive U.S. administrations.

Further, the idea of religion building is counterproductive, and is bound to strengthen the very forces the 'religion building' advocates want to defeat. Any direct support given by a foreign power to one group of the competing political forces against its competitors is bound to weaken it, particularly when such support requires it to reciprocate by favoring foreign interest over the legitimate interests of the population to which it belongs. This has been the bitter experience of the United States in Iran. Given the extent of the damage to the United States' long-term interest in Iran, it is certainly foolish for political leaders and policy advisors to stick to the same failed policy.

Containing radical groups and ensuring more friendly and cooperative relations with the Muslim world requires a drastic shift in policy and attitude. Rather than searching for "life-style" criteria to separate friends from foes, the United States' position should be based on principles and values. The United States should support and cooperate with Middle Eastern political forces that uphold the values of freedom, equality, and tolerance of ethnic and religious diversity, and should embrace those who display commitment to democracy and the rule of the law, regardless of their religion, religious doctrines, and their "lifestyle."

By the same token, the United States should distance itself from those who disparage the principles of freedom, equality, and religious tolerance, and those who show contempt to democracy and the rule of law, even when they choose more familiar lifestyles. There are ample examples that democracy was advanced in various parts of the world by individuals who were proud of their local customs and traditions and did not share western lifestyle or tastes. The most recent example is that of South Africa, where those who shared with Americans their values and political commitments have more affinity to African traditions and lifestyles, while those who shared American lifestyles and tastes have long embraced the apartheid regime of South Africa.

Rather than using lifestyle and religious criteria to assign guilt, the U.S. government needs to extend its founding principles to followers of all religions, and ensure that it does not use different standards for dealing with different religions. The United States must be consistent in pursuing its support for democracy and human rights, and must ensure that the principles of right and justice that guide the internal politics of the United States are brought to bear on relations with Muslim societies.

The United States played a crucial role in supporting democracy in Europe, and made sure that it was consistent in dealing with Europe on the basis of clear democratic principles, and not on the basis of religious affiliations. It showed respect to the national traditions and debates, and did not resort to subversive politics to advance its interests. It is about time that this attitude and treatment is extended to the Muslim world. The American people are uniquely situated to expand the values of freedom, equality, and rule of law from the national to the international domain. Not only is the United States an unrivaled superpower, but Americans constitute a microcosm of the world population. The United States is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society consisting of groups that represent the major ethnic and religious communities that form the modern world. Africans, Arabs, Chinese, Europeans, Indians, Japanese, Irish, Koreans, Latinos, and Slavs live peacefully in the United States; work together in pursuit of their individual and collective dreams; and confess and practice freely different religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, along with a host of other religions.

American Muslims have deep understanding of both Muslim and American cultures, and are well-positioned to help reconcile Islam and the West. American Muslims have already made remarkable achievements in reconciling Islamic values with the founding principles of the United States, and have managed to develop good and important experiences as to how Islamic values can impact modern living. They can be instrumental in sharing their experiences of aligning Islamic values and education with democratic institutions and practices with their counterparts Muslim countries. But, for that to happen in more effective ways, American Muslims need to be involved in policy making and implementation, rather than being marginalized and chastised.

Recommendations

The last thing the United States wants to do is to turn its efforts in dealing with terrorism and extremism into an open war with the Muslim world. The issues that most Muslims have with the United States evolve around U.S. foreign policy and the inconsistent application of American political values in Muslim regions. Many Muslims, including secularists, have come to see the United States as biased in their treatment of them and their concerns. Following *Civil Democratic Islam*'s recommendations can only exacerbate an already bad situation.

The United States would be better served if it can demonstrate that its concerns about human rights and democracy are genuine, and are not a tool to set up regimes that would serve its foreign interests at the expense of the wellbeing of local populations. This may not seem as the most "useful" thing to do in the long run, but surely it will be of great benefit for world peace.

The U.S. government should:

- Engage intellectuals and leaders who represent social and political groups that are committed to democracy, and do not rely completely or exclusively on the description of experts. In ascertaining the positions of and understanding the grievances and misgivings of Muslim groups, it is vital that the United States should avoid relying on expertise of a single ideological group. The blunders and setbacks suffered in confronting global terrorism are due to the reliance on the neoconservative perspective. In conducting the war on terrorism, the government would do much better by utilizing the reservoir of expertise and knowledge available in both the academia and the American Muslim community.

- Ensure that U.S. foreign policy is based on democratic principles and values, the rule of law, protection of human rights, and mutual respect. This does not mean that the United States must abandon its pursuit of economic and geopolitical interests, but rather should align them with the economic and geopolitical interests of the Muslim countries with which it interacts. At no point should the United States make the pursuit of its economic interests more important than respecting the human rights and dignity of other nations. Placing economic interests over the dignity of other nations may provide short-term interests, but will create mistrust, ill will, and animosity in the long run.

- Apply the same set of principles and values to all people, regardless of their religious and ethnic affiliation. The U.S. government should treat people on the basis of their moral and political commitments to universally sanctioned principles, and never on the basis of religious affiliation or membership in a specific racial and ethnic community. Setting foreign policy and relations on the basis of ethnic and religious affinity would give ammunition to extremist voices to undermine trust in the capacity of the lone superpower to act judiciously, and could ultimately undercut the ability of the United States to influence development in the Muslim world.

- Withdraw support from authoritarian regimes, and send a clear message by requiring an open political system and free and fair elections as precondition for economic cooperation. Dictators who are willing to please the U.S. government to gain external support have little incentive to please local populations. They often use brutal force to keep the population they control in check. The dictators have been breeding radical and extremists groups who assign blame to the United States for their miseries.

- Have a clear position regarding Islam, and avoid sending mixed messages. The Bush administration, while officially rejecting any linkage of Islam to terrorism, has failed on a number of occasions to take to task public officials who equated the two, and who made derogatory statements or took offensive actions against Islam. The administration missed several opportunities to demonstrate its commitment to stem out anti-Islam bigotry. John Ashcroft, former U.S. attorney general, got away with similar bigoted remarks when he asserted that "Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for him," while "Christianity is a faith in which God sends his son to die for you." Lt. Gen. William G. Boykin, the deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, was allowed to keep his job after telling church gatherings that the Christian God is "real" and the Muslim deity is an "idol." Similarly, the administration denied visas to highly respected Muslims or turned them back at the airports, despite the fact that they are known for their moderation, and are actively involved in bridging the deepening divide between the West the Muslim world. Such individuals included Tariq Ramadan, Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens), and Zaki Badawi. These and other missteps create the impression that the U.S. government applies a different set of standards when dealing with Islam and Muslims.

- Involve American Muslim leaders in consultation on issues of foreign policy toward the Muslim world and the war on terror. Muslim communities and leaders are the greatest, but least utilized, assets the United States has for fighting terrorism and extremism, as well as bridging the deepening divide with the Muslim World.

NOTES

1 "Bridging the Divide" is the title of an annual conference sponsored by the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C., in which Muslims engage policymakers and leaders of public opinion in discussing how to overcome the rising tensions between the United States and the Muslim world, and what role American Muslims can play in this regard.

2 "Saudi publications on hate ideology fill American mosques." published by Freedom House, 2005. After discovering a few copies of Saudi publications in fifteen mosques throughout the nation, the Freedom House authored this report. There are more than two thousand mosques in the United States, and fifteen out of two thousand mosques constitute less than 1 percent of all mosques in the country. Evidently, the authors of the Freedom House Report never stopped for a second to ask: How has the presence of the Saudi literature impacted the attitudes of the mosque-goers? They have also failed to consider asking the leaders of the Islamic centers about their views and activities, or how the Saudi material was used. One would think that this is the most reasonable and sensible thing to do in a study that aims at ascertaining the truth and enhancing understanding.

3 John Esposito and John Voll, Makers of Contemporary Islam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also Raymond William Baker, Islam without Fear (Harvard University Press, 2003)

4 Keiko Oberman, The Dawn of Reformation (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992)

5 Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 49.

6 Jean-Jacque Rousseau, The Social Contract, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Boo0ks, 1968), p. 186.

7 See, for instance, Muhammad Abduh, "Islam, Reason, and Civilization", in John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, Islam in Transition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 24-8.

8 Muhammad Rashid Rida, Huquq al-Nisa' fi al-Islam [Women's Rights in Islam] (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Hijra, 1987), pp. 12-4.

9 Abdul-Rahman al-Kawakibi, Um al-Qura in Al-a'mal al-Kamila, ed. Muhammad 'Imarah (Cairo, Egypt: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyah al-ammah, 1970), p. 261-4.

10 See for example, Muhammad Al-Ghazali, Huquq al-Insan fi al-Islam.

11 Fahmi Huwaydi, Muwatunum La dhimiyun (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1985).

12 Rashid al-Ghanoushi, Al-Huriyyat al-Ammah fi al-Dawah al-Islamiyyah [Public Rights in the Islamic State (Beirut, Lebanon: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihdah al-Arabiyyah, 1993), p. 135

13 See Ibn Hisham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah, vol. 1, p 502

14 To review the full text of the Compact of Medina, please refer to Ibn Hisham, Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah [The Biography of the Prophet], (Damascus, Syria: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyah, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 501-2.

15 Ibn Hisham, Al- Syrah, p. 501.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Daniel Lemer, The Passing of Traditional Society (Glencoe, ILL, The Free Press, 1958), p. 45.

19 Stephen Kinzer, All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror (John Wiley & Sons, 2004).

20 *Civil Democratic Islam*, p. 30

21 Ibid., p. 25

22 Ibid.

23 *Civil Democratic Islam*, p. 26.

24 See Turkey's Pro-Islamic Party Banned, Middle East Times, June 22, 2001.

25 Jolyan Naegele, "Turkey: Military Upholds Secularist Tradition," Radio Free Europe Website, url: http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1998/08/F.RU.980804131658.html.

26 *Civil Democratic Islam*, p. 22

27 Ibid, p. 30.

28 Ibid, p. 57

29 See John O. Voll, Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World, 2nd ed. (Syracuse University Press, 1994), p. 339.

30 *Civil Democratic Islam*, p. 58. For an detailed discussion of the politicization of hijab by European colonialist, please see Katherin Bullock's Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002).

31 Ibid, p. 3.

32 Iyad Alawi, the Bush administration's favorite, has failed to muster more than fifteen seats for his party, out of 275 members. Ahmed Chalabi did even worse, failing to procure even one seat for his party.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Farid Senzai
Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

Aminah Beverly McCloud
DePaul University

Saeed Khan
Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

Hatem Bazian
University of California, Berkeley

Rafeek Beekun
University of Nevada Los Vegas

Zakiyyah Muhammad

Yvonne Haddad
Georgetown University

Louise Cainkar
University of Illinois Chicago

John Voll
Georgetown University

Ahmed Dalal
Georgetown University

Genevive Abdo
Chicago Tribune

CONTRIBUTORS (CONTINUED):

Kamran Bukhari
Stratfor Consulting

Sulayman S. Nyang
Howard University

Zahid Bukhari
Georgetown University

Frederick Thaufeer al-Deen,
Oak Park Mosque

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The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) is an independent and nonprofit organization committed to solving critical social problems in the United States through education, research, training, and policy analysis. ISPU provides cutting-edge analysis and policy solutions through publications, public events, media commentary, and community outreach. Major areas of focus include domestic politics, social policy, the economy, health, education, the environment, and foreign policy. Since our inception in 2002, ISPU's research has worked to increase understanding of key public policy issues and how they impact various communities in the United States.

US society is far from being monolithic, whether culturally, socially or politically. It is therefore imperative that the thoughts and insights of each aspect of this heterogeneity play a contributory role in the discourse and debate of issues that affect all Americans. ISPU was established and premised on this idea – that each community must address, debate, and contribute to the pressing issues facing our nation. It is our hope that this effort will give voice to creative new ideas and provide an alternative perspective to the current policy-making echelons of the political, academic and public-relations arenas of the United States.

ISPU firmly believes that optimal analysis and treatment of social issues mandates a comprehensive study from several different and diverse backgrounds. As social challenges become more complex and interwoven, ISPU is unique in its ability to bring this new approach to the human and social problems facing our country. Through this unique approach, ISPU will produce scholarly publications, incorporating new voices and adding diversity to the realm of ideas. Our multidisciplinary work in partnership with universities and other research institutes serves to build understanding and create programs that effect lasting social change.

Further information about ISPU can be obtained from our website at www.ispu.us