



## Comment by Daniel Pipes

Habib Malik's paper is quite an extraordinary polemic written by a free Christian. In my thirty years of studying the Middle East I have never heard anything quite like it, and I applaud its excellence and its bravery. My remarks will touch lightly on a few of his points, highlighting differences, of course, for who needs to hear me repeat what he said?

First I want to comment on Samuel Huntington's suggestion that Islamists in Algeria and Turkey are like Christians in China. I would revise this formulation and compare Islamists in those two countries to Communists in China. They are, in other words, the persecutors, not the persecuted. Islamists are the third and most recent harbingers of the century's utopian radicalism, following on the heels of the fascists and Marxist-Leninists. All three of them have a clarion vision of how to structure society and are ruthless in attaining it. They all happily break eggs to make their particular flavor of omelet. That said, some radical utopians break more eggs than do others. Not every Communist is a Stalin, not every Islamist is like the Taliban in Afghanistan.

On the question of moderate Islam: from 1880 to 1940, Islam became more modern. Muslims in those years were influenced by Western liberal thought. The subsequent sixty years have seen regression. It has reached the point that Muslims find it hard to be at all critical of Islam in public—I'm not talking about blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad but, for example,

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opposing the application of Islamic law. Liberal voices find it difficult to speak out.

I disagree with the notion that liberal Islam must be based on the Koran, that one has to find the right verses and then have a tolerant spirit grow out of the verses. Rather, it's possible for a liberal spirit to grow out of the right circumstances, out of trends that are taking place in the world. However tenuously based in Islam, the last two centuries have shown that Islamic liberals are people influenced by the West. Should favorable conditions prevail, moderate Islam can once more find strength, and I predict this will happen, though I have no idea when. Sixty years in our direction, sixty away; things will again turn around some day.

What can Americans do to encourage moderate Muslims? The global influence of the U.S. government specifically, and of Americans more generally—of churches, businesses, nonprofit organizations, filmmakers, you name it—is extraordinary. Washington and Hollywood have an outsized presence around the world, to the point that things that are quite minor here—some prize given, some grant bestowed, some resolution passed—can have considerable importance in the outside world. Recognition by Americans of beleaguered moderates can help them feel that they belong to something larger, that they're not quite so isolated as it may seem, and that powerful forces support them.

I differ slightly with Habib Malik on the question of the *dhimmi* status. Yes, by today's reckoning it is uncontestedly an inferior position, even a form of religious persecution. I certainly would hate to live as a *dhimmi*. But in historical terms, the *dhimmi* status was not that bad. Compare the position of Jews in the Christian world with those in the Muslim world through the long middle era, from, say, A.D. 700 to 1700. In both civilizations Jews were a small, somewhat despised minority, but the Jews in Muslim countries were unquestionably better off, in good part because they had a legal status. Inferior though it was, this offered them a security that was far more assured than anything in Christendom. It also bears note that when the European colonial powers conquered Muslim lands and eliminated the *dhimmi* status, finding it anathema, the Jews and Christians in Muslim lands suddenly lost their legal standing. The persecution of Jews and Christians notably increased after the *dhimmi* status disappeared. Do not misunderstand, however: I abominate its continuance today and especially oppose efforts to impose it in the West.

Finally, I'd like to note how the Middle East stands out as a place where religion has central importance for politics. From an American point of view, our interests in the area basically boil down to two: those connected to reli-

gion and those connected to petroleum. As an example of the former, note Jerusalem, which is lacking in either strategic or economic importance. It is the purest of religious issues in U.S. foreign policy. Note too how American policy there is determined by a religious ambition: for fifty years, the U.S. government has supported a plan to internationalize Jerusalem, which effectively means withholding it from either an Israeli or a Palestinian state and placing it under Christian control. That remains on the books as the official U.S. goal, but in practical terms it is defunct. At this point and forward, Jerusalem will be under some combination of Jewish and Muslim control, not Christian.

Still, this is perhaps a unique issue where Christendom still exists politically and has much to say about the disposition of Jerusalem. The issue today is: Will Jerusalem be wholly under Israeli control or will it be divided between the Israelis and the Palestinians? Jewish Israelis and Muslim Palestinians realize that which side the Christians come down on will be critical—I sometimes draw the analogy of two siblings fighting for the favor of the third. This explains why both Jews and Muslims are actively making their case to Christians, for example in recent dueling full-page advertisements in the *New York Times*. Some Christians—generally those on the left—favor the Palestinian viewpoint, while others—generally on the right—adopt the Israeli viewpoint. The side that prevails in this contest to win Christendom's favor will probably prevail in Jerusalem.