

Letters

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term. Already a wide range of international bodies—most recently the International Bar Association—have denounced Mugabe’s abandonment of the rule of law, his use of torture, mass beatings and murder against political opponents and his attacks on the press and judiciary. The idea that the 2002 election can be free or fair is, under such circumstances, already preposterous. Indeed, President Mugabe routinely declares that the Movement for Democratic Change opposition “will never, ever be allowed to rule Zimbabwe”—apparently regardless of any election result.

President Mbeki’s abandonment of President Mandela’s human rights commitment is simply a sad fact which no amount of flannel and PR can disguise. Apart from keeping Mugabe in power, the sole result of Mbeki’s policy is to ensure that other international actors—the United States, the EU and the Commonwealth—will have to bypass Mbeki if they are to fashion a policy to save democracy in Zimbabwe. He is now simply part of the problem, not part of the solution.

### **Sovereignty:**

In Senator Helms’ imperious article, “American Sovereignty and the UN” (Winter 2000/01), “the American people” are implicitly referred to as a collective body of homogenous thinkers.

Would any, never mind all, Americans agree that our leaders have the self-ascribed right to disregard other nations’ sovereignty, simply based upon those leaders’ judgments of other countries’ actions? If so, it is no surprise that we are referred to as a “hyperpower” by some nations. Senator Helms convincingly says that leaders such as Saddam Hussein, Fidel Castro and Slobodan Milosevic derive their sovereignty from the consent of their people, and if they are oppressing, or killing their citizens, they do not have the right to have their sovereignty respected. With that, not many would argue. However, was it the public in the former Yugoslavia that invited NATO to wage a bombing campaign? While Senator Helms speaks of leaders who oppress their people, let us remember the Iraqis (the children, in particular), who continue to pointlessly suffer under the sanctions that have lasted almost ten years. Let us also remember the people of Baghdad who have been repeatedly bombed because of their leader’s stubborn refusal to allow weapons inspections.

Senator Helms says that the UN does not have the right to impose its utopian vision of international law on Americans. He says that America’s actions are inherently legitimate and do not require the consent of the UN or any other country. These vainglorious proclamations that assert America’s role in

the world as a hegemon could come back to haunt the United States. It is true, the United States emerged victorious from the Cold War. However, does that mean we have the right to assert our interests over the rest of the world? How long will other countries sit idly by as the United States undermines the very international law which seeks to protect them? The arrogant actions of the United States ultimately may lead to terrorism, the loss of allies, or worse. As the omnipotent Senator Helms speaks on behalf of Americans, defining what we want, it is difficult not to notice that his speaking on our behalf represents a microcosm of America imposing its values on the rest of the world.

KELLY TOBIN

Graduate student,  
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### **Islamism:**

Ray Takeyh’s “Islamism: R.I.P.” (Spring 2001) argues, rightly, that Islamism (or fundamentalist Islam) must fail because of its inherent weaknesses. But he errs in thinking that moment is upon us.

Takeyh skews his analysis by choosing three countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iran) and almost randomly declaring them the “bookends” of the Muslim world, then showing how Islamism is in retreat in all three. Had he chosen three other, no less important countries—say, Morocco,

Pakistan and Indonesia—and called them “bookends”, he could have made a convincing case for the continued rise of Islamism.

More broadly, the author (in the footsteps of Olivier Roy’s 1992 study, *L’Echec de l’Islam politique*, which he surprisingly does not mention as his intellectual precursor) ignores the fact that Islamism remains on the ascendant from Afghanistan to Atlanta. Whether one’s measure be lives lost or political assertiveness, far from having failed, the Islamist movement is more vibrant and bellicose than ever before.

Do I need to remind Takeyh how the Morocco Islamist movement has challenged the government’s legitimacy? That Nigeria is going through an acute national crisis because of the sudden decision of some states to apply Shari’a law? That Islamists have prosecuted a religious war in Sudan that has caused the most horrific humanitarian crisis in the world today? That a Muslim vigilante group in Cape Town, South Africa, has set off about one bomb per month over the past three years? That the explosion of the U.S.S. *Cole* in Aden reflects the surge of Islamism in Yemen? That Hamas is steadily gaining strength *vis-à-vis* the Palestine Liberation Organization? That the main opposition to the already fervently Islamic Saudi regime is a Taliban-like movement? That the growth of *jihad* movements in Pakistan has led

to a wave of terrorism around the world? That Islamists in the Philippines are engaged in an active attempt to break up the country? That their counterparts in Indonesia have created violent crises in such regions as Timor, Aceh and the Moluccas? That France in late 2000 witnessed the largest wave of anti-Semitic violence since World War II, all carried out by Islamists? That virtually every American Muslim organization invited to the White House to celebrate the Islamic holidays is Islamist?

The list goes on and on. Only a selective vision and willful disregard of the facts can lead an analyst to look around today and declare that “the failure of political Islam” is upon us. This failure will come in good time, as Takeyh suggests, but it has not yet happened.

DANIEL PIPES  
*Middle East Quarterly*



Writing on Islamism in Algeria, Egypt and Iran, Ray Takeyh claims that, with the defeat of Islamic fundamentalists, the onward march of political Islam has reached a cul-de-sac. And the Islamists, instead of flogging the ideological dead horse, should concentrate on political liberalization and economic modernization.

While Takeyh’s conclusion may be valid in regions where Islam holds sway, in the non-Muslim world the Islamists’ struggle for supremacy continues unabated,

and is still far from over. Islamic movements in these regions (India and Russia), although not dissimilar to those in the Middle East, have two distinct features. First, they are directed not against fellow Muslims but against non-Muslims. Second, they are driven not just by the call to return to pristine Islam, but also by the engine of Islamic triumphalism. In fact, they are in many respects akin to religious wars, supported not just by many local Muslims, but also by Muslim *umma* (universal community of believers) throughout the world.

Armed insurgencies in India (Kashmir) and Russia (Chechnya) started in the early nineties, but today Islamists control both of these. Their declared aim, especially in Kashmir, is to create a Caliphate state that would stretch from Kashmir through Pakistan to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The defeat of Islamists in Algeria, Egypt and Iran is undoubtedly a serious setback to political Islam, but it is not a fatal blow. Political Islam is an ideology, and Islamists are engaged in violent campaigns to impose that ideology. A single defeat or victory, as the Cold War repeatedly demonstrated, seldom decides the final outcome of ideological conflicts. Only economic collapse, like the one brewing in Islamic Afghanistan, would put an end to the growth of political Islam.

RANDHIR SINGH BAINS  
Essex, UK

Recent events show that Ray Takeyh's eulogy of fundamentalist Islam could not have been more off base. This is especially true in the three countries he cites: Egypt, Algeria and Iran.

Takeyh is correct in that Egypt's Islamist population has "sensibly rejected the notion that the violent overthrow of the state would magically solve all its problems." But that does not mean the movement has lost popularity, or that it would not support militancy again. A closer look shows that the Islamist movement in Egypt is as strong as ever. Even the government-censored media freely admits that repeated clampdowns on the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) have not undermined the outlawed organization's popularity.

In February, despite repeated efforts by the Egyptian military to turn away voters in heavy Islamist districts, MB candidates running for seats in the People's Assembly succeeded in taking seventeen, more than any other opposition party. Further, in the recent Egyptian Bar Association elections, MB-supported candidates won twenty seats—a clear majority. Takeyh must surely be aware of the fact that professional associations in Egypt are the true gauges of the popularity of Islamism. Egypt is far from finished with its ongoing fight against fundamentalist Islam.

Takeyh's assessment that "after nearly a decade of civil war, the Algerian military has

effectively defeated the Islamist insurgency" could not be further from the truth. Recent reports show that Algeria's battle with Islamism has intensified, not waned. About 450 people have been killed so far this year in attacks carried out by the extremist Armed Islamic Group (GIA). These attacks have been reported across the country; targets have included both civilians and military personnel alike. Clearly, the amnesty deal offered to Islamist militants in early 2000 has fallen short of its goals. The Islamist movement continues to wreak havoc in Algeria.

Finally, Takeyh erroneously asserts that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's radical Islamic Republic "died with him" in 1989. Since President Muhammad Khatemi's 1997 landslide election, it appeared that Iran's reform movement was gaining ground, using the constitution, legislature and democratic building blocks already in place. In recent months, however, Iran's mullahs have regained strength while weakening Khatemi's power base as the re-election registration deadline rapidly approaches. Khomeini's protégé, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who served as president from 1989 to 1997, is also rumored to be making a political comeback. This is an ominous sign for Iranian liberalization. Rafsanjani is thought to be behind state-sponsored killings of dissidents, and is a long time supporter of the Hizballah terrorist organization in Lebanon.

Pace Takeyh's assessment, a simple survey of the media clearly shows that fundamentalist Islam, particularly in Egypt, Algeria and Iran, is alive and well.

JONATHAN J. SCHANZER  
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### *Takeyh replies:*

All the three respondents have one thing in common, namely, they have failed to account for the fact that after decades of activism, with the exception of Iran, militant Islamists have failed to assume control of regional governments. Even in Iran, the Islamists are struggling to redefine their failed revolutionary dogma in order to appeal to a relentless and disillusioned constituency. Obviously in a region where religion permeates the political culture, Islam will influence the parameters of public discourse. However, such influence does not suggest that radical Islamists are on the threshold of appropriating state power. Although they will always tempt those befuddled by the relentless march of modernity, Islamists have thoroughly failed to provide a viable alternative to the normative order—however defective that order may be.

In a curious manner, all three respondents concur with my assessment of Islamism's ideological shortcomings, but then defend its alleged resilience. Pipes begins by noting that Islamism "must fail because of its inherent weaknesses," and then proceeds to

note its ascendance “from Afghanistan to Atlanta.” Does Pipes really believe that there are forces and movements seeking to emulate the Taliban, or that the Islamists are poised to assume control of the Atlanta city council and use its august powers to subvert Christendom? Pipes enumerates an impressive list of Islamists attacks, failing to appreciate the difference between random and desperate acts of terror with mass movements capable of overthrowing secular states. For his part, Schanzer defies both popular literature and scholarly treatises by continuing to note that “Algeria’s battle with Islamism has intensified, not waned.” Schanzer would be well advised to note that the debate on Algeria has shifted since 1993 and the current quandary is how to compel the military oligarchs to fully rehabilitate the political institutions.

After reading the critical responses, I am even more assured in my judgment that the moment of militant Islam has now passed.

### China:

I like to think that I am still too young to be, as Charles Horner implies (“China and the Historians”, Spring 2001), a non-Chinese China specialist relic about to be pushed over the evolutionary precipice by a new generation of Chinese China

specialists, but I am otherwise gratified to learn that minds like his are observing what is happening in China history writing.

Too often, commentators use China’s imperial history as a rhinestone crutch for the conceit of modern Chinese leaders as “emperors” and China’s political culture as “traditionally” authoritarian, paranoid or inhumane. In fact, as Horner suggests, and as I would argue openly, the important thing about modern Chinese history is that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is *not* an empire—but tries with monotonous failure to reconcile the geographical, economic and cultural disparities of the Qing empire with the political culture of a republic. It is, in fact, the only successor state of an early modern empire to attempt such a thing. And so, put in the framework of the past two or three hundred years and the histories of the other great land empires of early modern Eurasia, the Qing-to-PRC narrative appears very immediate, without the bright threshold between traditional and modern that we are often conditioned to see.

And was the Qing imperial ideology “really” like I say it was? It was really written like I say it was written by the empire itself. No historian can prove that the way things were written was the way they were. We can only say how it was written, and

guess why it was written that way.

Many thanks for a terrifically insightful essay.

PAMELA KYLE CROSSLEY  
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### Southeast Asia:

Peter Hartcher’s article, “From Miracle to Malaise: Southeast Asia Goes South” (Spring 2001) errs on one datum: there were not 36 but 48 parties in the free Indonesian elections of 1999. On everything else, Hartcher’s proportions are splendidly judged: economic catastrophe, democratic fission, and fragmentation of ASEAN as a regional entity.

To amplify his already broad historical perspective: The NATO powers and the Washington sisters, IMF and World Bank, took the region for granted when it opposed the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and while it built up economic momentum. Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines stood for suffocation of communism and unregulated free enterprise. Now we are a dozen years beyond the first achievement, and into re-analysis of the second.

Dinner recently with a director of a mutual fund specializing in Asia reminded me of decades long preoccupation by such vehicles with cheap resources, cheap labor, authoritarian governments and their armies. Recent