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Islam: Appeasement or Discrimination?

AS ONE OF THE first Western journalists to report the “first” Algerian war from the Muslim side, I spent two winters with the FLN and the ALN in the field. . . . While living among the Algerians I had direct experience of the profound anti-Western hatred of fundamentalist Muslims. Thus it came as something of a surprise to see—in *The National Interest* of all places—the long-discredited argument for a complaisant view of Islamic fundamentalism (“Déjà Vu All Over Again—Algeria, France, and Us”, Winter 1995/6). The logic of it dates back well into the last century: an implicit assumption that with dialogue there is bound to be some sort of rapprochement between hidebound Islam and the more or less Christian West. This will be brought about by a necessary resort to Western technology and/or institutions such as “democracy” (i.e. elections), both of which must lead to a gradual “maturing” of the Islamic world into Western ways and standards or something enough like them to be tolerable.

Those who make that argument disregard the structures and nature of Islamic politics, and deliberately overlook basic tenets of Islam. For these people there is the *Dar-al-Islam* inhabited by the faithful and their subjects, and the *Dar-al-harb*, or house of war inhabited by the rest of us, who must be annexed into the *Dar-al-Islam* either by force or persuasion. Liberals like Matthew Connelly say essentially that we and our governments should pretend that this doctrine is not taken seriously by Muslims.

The impact of Western civilization on

Islamic rulers and their people has taken two primary forms. One, technological, has been for the last century and more to increase the efficiency and brutality of the repressive politics in the Islamic world. This has tended to envenom the second effect: a rabid resentment and envy—especially deep-rooted at popular level—of the West and its institutions and its military and economic successes. Contact and dialogue between the two worlds has if anything *further inflamed* both effects. Internecine conflicts in the Islamic society of the Maghreb and the Middle East have altered none of this.

At very best the Islamic attitude toward the West is a reluctant and rather thin tolerance, with the underlying goals (see above) quite unchanged. Because such an approach to international relations has been discredited in the West by Hitler, Stalin, and others, liberal scholars like Matthew Connelly. . . . indulge themselves in the illusion that a “reasonable” approach to the fundamentalists will bring tactical tolerance, as it were, to a point of no return. This is dangerous, as the efforts of dominant powers in the Islamic world to acquire weapons of mass destruction show only too clearly. . . .

Pardon my candor, but the silliest part of Mr. Connelly’s argument is the suggestion that a hysterical anti-Nazism/communism is merely being retreaded in warnings against fundamentalist Islam. The fact that fundamentalist Islam is not the same thing as Nazism or communism in no way lessens its threat to the West. If the serious menace of Nazism/communism (which was Western and “internal”) belongs to the last generation, that is not so with fundamentalist Islam which lies outside Western civilization and does not

intend to become part of it. On the contrary it wishes to dominate and/or absorb the culture and civilization of the West, employing Western technology to do so. We would be extremely foolish to proceed as though this wish were not to be taken seriously.

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MATTHEW CONNELLY sums up his argument with me over U.S. policy toward Algeria in a single sentence: “Nothing is more likely”, he writes, “to make the Islamic revival a united and genuinely dangerous threat than treating it as such.” In other words, he holds that the ultimate responsibility for fundamentalist Islam lies not with the fundamentalists but with us in the West.

If that sounds familiar, it should, for it’s the old blame-America-for-its-enemies line popularized by the radical left in the 1960s. Just replace “the Islamic revival” with “the Soviet bloc”, and the parallel becomes obvious. We turned Ho Chi Minh, Vietnamese nationalist, into an ally of Moscow. Belligerent American policies undermined the doves in the Kremlin, spurred the “arms race”, and so forth.

These leftist arguments presume two points: that our enemies are at odds with each other until we counterproductively force them to work together; and that, on their own, they are benign, but that Washington’s aggression makes them malign.

The blame-America argument, then and now, fails to understand that extremist ideologues (fascists, communists, fundamentalist Muslims) the world over hate the United States as such, whether Washington’s policies are soft or hard. And those extremists are right to do so, for by its very existence, this country threatens their visions. It’s not just what we do but who we are; not just our objectionable policies but our way of life. As

a dynamic, open, affluent society the United States gets in the way of their plans to create a world of stasis, closure, and poverty.

Mr. Connelly also implies that American toughness prompts our enemies to strike at us—and that’s flat wrong. To cite just one notable counterexample: Khomeini held American hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran for 444 days of Jimmy Carter’s presidency, then let them go at the very hour of Ronald Reagan’s inauguration. A resolute defense of one’s interests, history shows, works much better in the long term than the appeasement Mr. Connelly advocates.

The National Interest never once presented this blame-America argument when it came to the Soviet Union; why do so now in the Algerian case?

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Connelly replies:

Lest anyone else finds all this to be “implicit” in my article I, at least, was not aware that it was written from either a liberal or leftist perspective, however capacious these pigeon-holes have proven to be. To the extent that such terms are still meaningful they apply equally well—or badly—to those who support anti-Islamist dictatorships for the sake of freedom of expression and gender equality. Indeed, Mr. Greer and Dr. Pipes may find that civil libertarians and feminists are their natural allies.

Mr. Greer was perhaps equally unaware that he too was adding to an old tradition. Conservatives, liberals, and leftists alike have long claimed to speak with authority for “these people” after spending some time with some portion of them. Through their eyes Islam appears to rule over a squalid, pitiable place whose benighted inhabitants have nothing better to do than hate and envy us. “Contact and dialogue between the two worlds” is thus made to appear as difficult

and dangerous as any other inter-planetary travel. Where liberals and conservatives differ is in assessing whether Muslims might be made “tolerable” or whether they really are incorrigible.

Surely a third position is possible, one that recognizes that Islamic civilization is not simply a rejection of the West and that it may even have something to offer. As for the tiny minority of Muslims who do indeed wish us harm, what is needed is a nuanced and knowledgeable analysis, one that would distinguish between their intentions and capabilities and prescribe a policy that showed intelligence as well as “toughness.” From Algeria to Afghanistan, Dr. Pipes has failed to meet these minimum requirements, and his continual resort to dubious analogies from another age hardly obscures that fact. We have not yet reached the point where the fanatics on either side have forced us to choose between confrontation or appeasement, between absorbing Islam or being absorbed by it. A more professional approach to U.S. policy can help ensure that we never do.

Terrorism and Bureaucratic Turf:

L AURIE MYLROIE’S reconstruction of the probable provenance of the World Trade Center bombing in your Winter issue is, as CIA’s former chief of counterterrorism attests, a “brilliant” job of research and imaginative scholarship—and it was a brilliant (and gutsy) decision on your part to publish it. Saddam Hussein’s bloody handprints are smeared all over the rubble. What really died there (one hopes) was American complacency that terrorism cannot be brought home to us.

But there are problems of omission. The author’s explanation of why it is that law enforcement—catching, trying, and convicting the perpetrators—is walled off from national security concerns—who really ‘dunit, and how, and why—is wanting. Indeed, the answers she offers for our

inspection are not explanations at all, but, rather, the most obvious of rationalizations; curiously, she stops short of saying so.

“Protecting bureaucratic turf”? Sure—but only if those who own and operate *all* of the turf, the FBI’s *and* the CIA’s, protect the protectors. Ms. Mylroie’s second explanation, offered without editorial comment, is even curiously:

[T]he U.S. government cannot properly address both the national security question of state sponsorship and the criminal question of the guilt or innocence of individual perpetrators at the same time.

It “cannot”? Why? I thought, perhaps naively, that our government had long since mastered the art of chewing gum and simultaneously walking in a straight line.

Saddam Hussein, alas, cannot be brought to American justice along with the hapless bombers themselves. But it must also be noted that the same stringent standards of proof do not apply: the evidence that almost surely would “convict” Saddam of conspiracy to abet terrorism would probably not be produceable in a U.S. court—and, on national security grounds (“protection of sources and methods”), probably ought not to be. But that does not, nor should not, get Saddam off the hook. It simply shifts the judgment of his guilt *and the assessment of his appropriate punishment* to other ground: namely, to the implementation of national security policy at the highest levels of our government.

Therein, in all likelihood, lies the answer to the question “why?”—*why* the indulgence of turf battles, *why* the acquiescence in fake walls of separation between law enforcement and national security, *why* the incessant foot-dragging in identifying the roots of terrorism. To push beyond the conviction of the hands-on perpetrators (when they happen to be available for prosecution) to those fundamentally responsible for terrorism (a.k.a. Saddam Hussein, or Muammar