

Political Islam: U.S. Policy Implications A Conference Report

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Session III: Policy Implications for Dealing with Political Islam

The final session was opened by Tom Moore, Director of Foreign Policy and Defense Studies at the Heritage Foundation. Mr. Moore raised two issues. First, he pointed out that coping with radical Islam must be categorized either as an issue of law enforcement — in which case protections under civil law are pertinent — or as a national security threat, which entails fewer protections for the protagonists.

Second, he asked whether or not revolutionaries can be co-opted. Stating that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States, he questioned the role of people such as Louis Farrakhan and the issue of American sources of funding for Islamic extremism here and abroad. Mr. Moore then introduced the first of two presenters for this session, Dr. Daniel Pipes, Editor of "The Middle East Quarterly."

Liberal vs. Conservative Approaches to Policy Dr. Daniel Pipes

"The policy debate in the U.S. resembles the old American policy debate over Marxism/Leninism. *Islam doesn't resemble Marxism,*" Dr. Pipes stressed. "But the debate does look the same in terms of the division of liberal and conservative opinion." *Liberals* largely believe in co-opting their adversaries; in dialogue with them. *Conservatives* are more interested in confrontation, leading, they believe, to victory."

He made a dichotomy between liberals and conservatives on various issues of foreign policy:

1. *Liberals* believe the source of the problem is material distress.
Conservatives believe the source is radical utopian ideology.
2. *Liberals* believe the answer is economic growth, and so advocate that we help impoverished peoples.
Conservatives want radical utopians to lose.
3. *Liberals* believe it is the fault of the West; we should have been nicer to them.
Conservatives do not accept blame and believe we have to confront them.
4. *Liberals* believe the Islamists are comprised of individual groups.
Conservatives see lines of cooperation, unifying threads among groups.
5. *Liberals* believe moderates exist among communists and/or fundamentalists.
Conservatives do not.

6. *Liberals* believe that if the West leaves Islamists alone, they will not threaten Western interests.
Conservatives believe they are gunning for us.
7. *Liberals* pay no attention to hostile words.
Conservatives believe the text is important.
8. *Liberals* are more sanguine.
Conservatives are alarmed.

Liberals believe human beings are essentially good. *Liberals* predominate in academic circles.

Placing himself on the conservative side of the spectrum, Dr. Pipes said, "The American government is taking advice from academia and largely getting the benign view. Until 1989, the U.S. government view was that fundamentalism was bad. They reassessed after fundamentalists began to win elections and President Clinton took office."

Pipes made four policy recommendations:

- The United States government should continue to repeat the distinction the government is making between religion and politics. "The U.S. government can't have a policy on a religion. It has interests in the public realm."
- The government should "celebrate anti-fundamentalists abroad. We sent the wrong signals in the case of the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) in Algeria, suggesting that the Algerian government negotiate with them. It is not an accident that the French celebrated Castro in Paris shortly thereafter." The same policy is important domestically as well, as a counterweight to Louis Farrakhan. The Nation of Islam is a fringe group and does not represent the majority of Muslims who are patriotic Americans.
- The American government should encourage others to hold the line against encroaching radicalism.
- The U.S. should stand strongly by beleaguered governments — even those that are not ideal by American standards.

Current U.S. Foreign Policy

Gregg Rickman

The second presenter for the final session was Gregg Rickman, Legislative Director for Senator Alphonse D'Amato. He gave an update of current foreign policy and assured the group that this policy is constantly being revised and reappraised. "We, on Capitol Hill, have focused on Iran and its influence on the Islamic movement, and we have had some success.

"In November 1995, Iran had an 'Energy Expo' — a major trade fair — looking for foreigners to invest in Iran. It was a bust because of the U.S. position embargoing companies doing business with Iran. The Europeans have been very slow to pick up the slack."

On the other hand, he added, "Other countries (mainly France and Germany) subsidize Iran's economy and weapons search. The loans they provide and the rescheduling of Iran's old loans (which Iran can't repay), and the provision of credits allow them to divert scarce resources into weapons programs. We think they should stop subsidizing Iran.

"Our allies, of course, believe our approach is wrong. They have a policy called "critical dialogue." There is no sympathy in Congress for critical dialogue.

"Iran supports Hamas. And Hamas provided the bus bomber."

Discussion

Dr. Pipes's presentation prompted the comment that in Algeria, the FIS had tried to use democratic means to come to power, but had been foiled by the government's canceling of the election results. Dr. Pipes replied, "I am convinced that the fundamentalists have no intention of abiding by democratic norms. A democracy has the right to try to defend itself.

"Turkey is a more interesting case. Turkey is a better entrenched democracy, so the rise of Refah is more interesting.

"Democracy is actually the last step. First you need a free civil society, i.e., an independent judiciary, etc. Algeria doesn't have it, Turkey does. Therefore, if Refah comes to power, so be it. FIS is not a legitimate player; the 1995 election was the first multiparty election for president in Algeria."

There was general agreement with Morris Amitay, JINSA Vice Chairman, who said, "One election, one time, is not democracy. There is a need for a real opposition and a free press. Angola is a case in point. Even the U.N. couldn't make one election work."

Asked about congressional interest in Sudan, and Pakistan's role in supporting Islamic radicalism, Mr. Rickman said that Congress, "wanted to look first at the source, which is Iran. There is more coming on Pakistan, but we had to start somewhere and we chose to start at the top. Everything else follows."

The program ended with the observation that the European approach to Islamic radicalism — "critical dialogue" — makes the presumption that Islam can moderate. Dr. Pipes concluded, "Islam as the 'solution' to problems is a 20th century invention. Islam is a totality. It was not designed to respond to specific political questions."

Whether the United States should support the electoral process despite the possibility of its subversion, or should support even unsavory governments that are fighting radical Islamic groups, remained unresolved. Dr. Pipes noted that during the Cold War the United States supported a variety of non-democratic governments because they were anti-Communist. "However, the apartheid of South Africa posed no threat to us. Neither did Marcos in the Philippines or Somoza in Nicaragua. Now, we are seeing the opposite side of that policy."