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There Are No Moderates: Dealing with Fundamentalist Islam

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Source: *The National Interest*, No. 41 (Fall 1995), pp. 48-57

Published by: Center for the National Interest

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42897027>

Accessed: 13-04-2017 13:32 UTC

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# There Are No Moderates

## *Dealing with Fundamentalist Islam*

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Daniel Pipes

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IN EARLY FEBRUARY 1995, newspapers around the world featured a photograph taken in Cairo, which showed, for the first time ever, the prime minister of Israel standing side-by-side with the king of Jordan, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the president of Egypt.

These gentlemen ostensibly met to discuss the faltering peace process between the Arabs and Israel. Yet this unprecedented event of an Israeli leader in conclave with Arab colleagues sent another signal too: four leaders who share a common problem—fundamentalist Islam—are ready to work together. According to the *Jerusalem Post's* account of the meeting, Rabin said that Israelis are the target of the fundamentalist attacks. Arafat jumped in and said, "Me too. They have threatened my life." At that point, Mubarak and Hussein both nodded their heads and said they too had personally been threatened by the radicals.

The photograph neatly symbolizes a great shift now taking place in Middle Eastern politics. Arab-Israeli issues remain formally the main item on the agenda but fundamentalist violence has become the greatest worry of nearly every government in the region. Through six decades, a politician's stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict

defined more than anything else his standing in Middle East politics. No longer. Now, his position on fundamentalism, the single greatest threat to the region, primarily determines his allies and his enemies.

Why do Middle Eastern leaders feel so threatened by fundamentalist movements? Are they perhaps exaggerating the threat? And how is the U.S. government dealing with this novel issue?

### *A Variety of Threats*

THOUGH ANCHORED IN a religious creed, fundamentalist Islam is a radical utopian movement closer in spirit to other such movements (communism, fascism) than to traditional religion. By nature anti-democratic and aggressive, anti-semitic and anti-Western, it has great plans. Indeed, spokesmen for fundamentalist Islam see their movement standing in direct competition to Western civilization and challenging it for global supremacy. Let's look at each of these elements in more detail.

### *Radical utopian schema*

Outside their own movement, fundamentalists see every existing political system in the Muslim world as deeply compromised, corrupt, and mendacious. As one of their spokesmen put it as long ago as 1951, "there is no [sic] one town in the whole world where Islam is observed as enjoined

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by Allah, whether in politics, economics or social matters.”<sup>1</sup> Implied here is that Muslims true to God’s message must reject the status quo and build wholly new institutions.

To build a new Muslim society, fundamentalists proclaim their intent to do whatever they must; they openly flaunt an extremist sensibility. “There are no such terms as compromise and surrender in the Islamic cultural lexicon,” a Hamas spokesman declares.<sup>2</sup> If that means destruction and death for the enemies of true Islam, so be it. Hizbullah’s spiritual leader, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, concurs: “As Islamists we seek to revive the Islamic inclination by all means possible.”<sup>3</sup>

Seeing Islam as the basis of a political system touching every aspect of life, fundamentalists are totalitarian. Whatever the problem, “Islam is the solution.” In their hands, Islam is transformed from a personal faith into a ruling system that knows no constraints. They scrutinize the Koran and other texts for hints about Islamic medicine, Islamic economics, and Islamic statecraft, all with an eye to creating a total system for adherents and corresponding total power for leaders. Fundamentalists are revolutionary in outlook, extremist in behavior, totalitarian in ambition.

Revealingly, they vaunt Islam as the best ideology, not the best religion—thereby exposing their focus on power. Whereas a traditional Muslim would say something like, “We are not Jewish, we are not Christian, we are Muslim,” the Malaysian Islamist leader Anwar Ibrahim made a very different comparison: “We are not socialist, we are not capitalist, we are Islamic.”<sup>4</sup> While fundamentalist Islam differs in its details from other utopian ideologies, it closely resembles them in scope and ambition. Like communism and fascism, it offers a vanguard ideology; a complete program to improve man and create a new society; complete control over that society; and cadres ready, even eager, to spill blood.

### *Anti-democratic*

Like Hitler and Allende, dictators who exploited the democratic process to reach power, the fundamentalists actively take part in elections; like the earlier figures, too, they have done dismayingly well. Fundamentalists swept municipal elections in Algeria in 1990 and won the mayoralties of Istanbul and Ankara in 1994. They have had successes in Lebanese and Jordanian elections and should win a substantial vote in the West Bank and Gaza should Palestinian elections be held.

Once in power, would fundamentalists remain democrats? There is not much hard evidence on this point, Iran being the only case at hand where fundamentalists in power have made promises about democracy. (In all other fundamentalist regimes—Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Sudan—military leaders have dominated.) Ayatollah Khomeini promised real democracy (an assembly “based on the votes of the people”<sup>5</sup>) as he took power. Once in charge, he partially fulfilled this pledge: Iran’s elections are hotly disputed and parliament does have real authority. But there’s an important catch: parliamentarians must subscribe to the principles of the Islamic revolution. Only candidates (including non-Muslims) who subscribe to the official ideology may run for office. The regime in Tehran thus fails the key test of democracy, for it cannot be voted out of power.

<sup>1</sup> Abd al-Qadir `Awda, *Al-Islam wa-Awda'una as-Siyasiya* (Cairo, 1951), quoted in Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Ibrahim Ghawsha, *Keyhan* (Tehran), October 31, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> *Ash-Sha'b* (Cairo), June 3, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, March 28, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Hamid Algar, trans. and ed., Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations* (Berkeley: Mizan, 1981), p. 259.

Judging by their statements, other fundamentalists are likely to offer even less democracy than the Iranians. Indeed, statements by fundamentalist spokesmen from widely dispersed countries suggest an open disdain for popular sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Nawfal, a Muslim Brother from Jordan, says that “[i]f we have a choice between democracy and dictatorship, we choose democracy. But if it’s between Islam and democracy, we choose Islam.”<sup>7</sup> Hadi Hawang of Partai Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) in Malaysia makes the same point more bluntly: “I am not interested in democracy. Islam is not democracy, Islam is Islam.”<sup>8</sup> Or, in the famous (if not completely verified) words of ‘Ali Belhadj, a leader of Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), “When we are in power, there will be no more elections because God will be ruling.”<sup>9</sup>

#### *Anti-moderate*

Fundamentalist Islam is also aggressive. Like other revolutionaries, very soon after taking power fundamentalists try to expand at the expense of their neighbors. The Khomeinists almost immediately sought to overthrow moderate (here meaning non-fundamentalist) Muslim regimes in Bahrain and Egypt. For six years (1982–88) after Saddam Hussein wanted to quit, they kept the war going against Iraq; and they occupied three small but strategic islands in the Persian Gulf near the Straits of Hormuz. The Iranian terrorist campaign is now fifteen years old and reaches from the Philippines to Argentina. The mullahs are building an arsenal that includes missiles, submarines, and the infrastructure for unconventional weaponry. In like spirit, Afghan fundamentalists have invaded Tajikistan. Their Sudanese counterparts reignited the civil war against Christians and animists in the south and, for good measure, stirred up trouble at Halayib, a long disputed territory on Sudan’s border with Egypt.

So aggressive are fundamentalists that

they attack neighbors even before taking power. In early February of this year, as Algeria’s FIS was fighting to survive, some of its members assaulted a police outpost along the Tunisian border, killing six officers and seizing their weapons.

#### *Anti-Semitic*

Consistent with Hannah Arendt’s observation about totalitarian movements necessarily being anti-semitic, fundamentalist Muslims bristle with hostility toward Jews. They accept virtually every Christian myth about Jews seeking control of the world, then add their own twist about Jews destroying Islam. The Hamas charter sees Jews as the ultimate enemy:

[They] have used their wealth to gain control of the world media, news agencies, the press, broadcasting stations, etcetera. . . . They were behind the French revolution and the Communist revolution. . . . They instigated World War I. . . . They caused World War II. . . . It was they who gave the instructions to establish the United Nations and the Security Council to replace the League of Nations, in order to rule over the world through them.<sup>10</sup>

Fundamentalists discuss Jews with the most violent and crude metaphors. Khalil Kuka, a founder of Hamas, says that “God brought the Jews together in Palestine not to benefit from a homeland but to dig their

<sup>6</sup>For documentation, drawing on audio cassettes of some thirty major Muslim preachers, see Emmanuel Sivan, “Eavesdropping on Radical Islam,” *Middle East Quarterly* (March 1995).

<sup>7</sup>*Wall Street Journal*, November 4, 1993.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Abbas and Magnum Photos, *Allah O Akbar: A Journey Through Militant Islam*, (London: Phaidon, 1994), p. 137.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted by Saïd Sadi, *Le Point* (Paris), August 6, 1994.

<sup>10</sup>Article 22, quoted in *Contemporary Mideast Backgrounder* (October 1988), pp. 8–9.

grave there and save the world from their pollution.”<sup>11</sup> Tehran’s ambassador to Turkey says that “the Zionists are like the germs of cholera that will affect every person in contact with them.”<sup>12</sup> Such venom is common coin in fundamentalist discourse.

Nor is violence confined to words. Especially since the September 1993 White House signing of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have repeatedly targeted Israelis and other Jews, killing some hundred and fifty individuals.

### *Anti-Western*

Unnoticed by most Westerners, war has been unilaterally declared on Europe and the United States. Fundamentalists are responding to what they see as a centuries-long conspiracy by the West to destroy Islam. Inspired by a Crusader-style hatred of Islam and an imperialist greed for Muslim resources, the West has for centuries tried to neuter Islam. It has done so by luring Muslims away from Islam through both its vulgar culture (blue jeans, hamburgers, television shows, rock music) and its somewhat higher culture (fashion clothes, French cuisine, universities, classical music). In this spirit, a Pakistani fundamentalist group recently deemed Michael Jackson and Madonna “cultural terrorists” and called for the two Americans to be brought to trial in Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> As Bernard Lewis notes, “It is the Tempter, not the Adversary, that Khomeini feared in America, the seduction and enticement of the American way of life rather than the hostility of American power.”<sup>14</sup> Or, in Khomeini’s own words: “We are not afraid of economic sanctions or military intervention. What we are afraid of is Western universities.”<sup>15</sup>

Fearful of Western culture’s hold over their own people, fundamentalists respond with vitriolic attacks denigrating Western civilization. It is crassly materialist, says ‘Adil Hussein, a leading Egyptian writer, seeing man “as nothing but an animal whose

major concern is to fill his belly.”<sup>16</sup> To dissuade Muslims from Westernizing, they portray our way of life as a form of disease. Kalim Saddiqui, the main Iranian polemicist in the West, deems Western civilization “not a civilization but a sickness.” And not just any sickness but “a plague and a pestilence.”<sup>17</sup> Belhadj of Algeria’s FIS ridicules Western civilization as “syphilization.”<sup>18</sup>

Operationalizing this hatred, fundamentalist groups have since 1983 resorted to anti-Western violence. Americans have been targeted in two bombings of the U.S. embassy in Beirut, the Marines barracks in Beirut, the embassy in Kuwait, and the World Trade Center. Lesser incidents include the killing of American passengers on several airliners, many hostages seized in Lebanon, and several fatal incidents on U.S. territory. We can only guess how many incidents (like the plan to attack the Holland tunnel and other New York landmarks) were foiled; or how many lie yet in store.

While the World Trade Center gang has pretty much held its tongue, a Tunisian named Fouad Salah conveyed the views of this violent element. Convicted in 1992 of setting off bombs that killed thirteen Frenchmen in a terrorist campaign during

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari, *Intifada: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Uprising that Changed the Middle East Equation*, trans. by Ina Friedman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 235.

<sup>12</sup>Islamic Revolution News Agency, August 9, 1993.

<sup>13</sup>*Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 13, 1995.

<sup>14</sup>Bernard Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 145-46.

<sup>15</sup>Quoted in Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 122.

<sup>16</sup>*Ash-Sha’b* (Cairo), July 22, 1994.

<sup>17</sup>*Tawhid*, Shawwal-Dhu’l-Hijjah 1412, pp. 154, 155.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Sivan, “Eavesdropping,” p. 17

1985-86, Salah addressed the judge handling his case: "I do not renounce my fight against the West which assassinated the Prophet Muhammad. . . . We Muslims should kill every last one of you [Westerners]."<sup>19</sup> He is hardly alone in harboring such sentiments.

### *Rejection of Co-Existence*

Hatred against the West inspires a struggle with it for cultural supremacy. Fundamentalists see the rivalry as cultural, not political. "It is a struggle of cultures," a Muslim Brethren leader explains, "not one between strong countries and weak countries. We are sure that the Islamic culture will triumph."<sup>20</sup> But how is this victory to be achieved? By producing better music or coming up with a cure for cancer? Hardly, as Saddiqui, the Iranian spokesman in London, vividly makes clear: "American GIs clutching photos of their girlfriends would be no match for the soldiers of Islam clutching copies of the Koran and seeking *shahadah* [martyrdom]."<sup>21</sup> Islam will triumph, in other words, through will and steel.

Fundamentalists do not restrict their sights to the Muslim quintile of the world's population but aspire to universal dominance. Saddiqui announces this goal somewhat obliquely: "Deep down in its historical consciousness the West also knows that the Islamic civilization will ultimately replace it as the world's dominant civilization."<sup>22</sup> Men of action share the same ambition. The gang that bombed the World Trade Center had great plans. `Umar `Abd ar-Rahman, the Egyptian sheik who guides them, stands accused in a Manhattan court of seditious conspiracy, that is, trying to overthrow the government of the United States. However bizarre this sounds, it makes sense from `Abd ar-Rahman's perspective. As he sees it, the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan brought down the Soviet Union; so, one down and one to go. Not understanding the robustness of a mature democracy, `Abd ar-Rahman apparently thought a campaign of terrorist inci-

dents would so unsettle Americans that he and his group could take over. A Tehran newspaper hinted at how the scenario would unfold when it portrayed the February 1993 explosion at the World Trade Center as proof that the U.S. economy "is exceptionally vulnerable." More than that, the bombing "will have an adverse effect on Clinton's plans to rein in the economy."<sup>23</sup> Some fundamentalists, at least, really do think they can take on the United States.

### *U.S. Policy: The Record*

MISCHIEF BY fundamentalists on U.S. territory pales, however, in comparison to the danger they pose in the Middle East; their seizure of power in just a few countries there would likely create a new political order in the region, with disastrous consequences. Israel would probably face a return to its unhappy condition of days past, beleaguered by terrorism and surrounded by enemy states. Civil unrest in oil-producing regions could lead to a dramatic run-up in the cost of energy. Rogue states—already numerous in the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya)—would multiply, leading to arms races, more international terrorism, and wars, lots of wars. Massive refugee outflows to Europe could well prompt a reactionary political turn that would greatly increase the already worrying appeal of fascists such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, who won 15 percent of the French vote in the recent presidential election.

What steps has the Clinton administration taken to protect Americans from such prospects? On the plus side, it has isolated and made efforts to weaken Iran; unfortunately, no other industrial power has agreed to commit itself in like fashion, virtually

<sup>19</sup>*Le Monde*, April 4, 1992.

<sup>20</sup>*Ash-Sha'b*, September 27, 1994.

<sup>21</sup>*Tawbid*, Shawwal-Dhu'l-Hijjah 1412, p. 152.

<sup>22</sup>*Tawbid*, Shawwal-Dhu'l-Hijjah 1412, p. 153.

<sup>23</sup>*Resalat*, March 3, 1993.

negating the impact of U.S. sanctions. Washington has also focused world attention on atrocities committed by the Sudanese regime.

But if the Clinton administration is sound on fundamentalists already in power, it has terribly misguided ideas about fundamentalists in opposition. Rather than oppose them, it has initiated dialogue with the Palestinian, Egyptian, and Algerian fundamentalist movements, and perhaps others. Why meet with these groups? As President Clinton, James Woolsey, Peter Tarnoff, Martin Indyk, and others have all explained, American policy opposes terrorism, not fundamentalist Islam. Most fundamentalists are decent people, serious individuals espousing (in the words of Robert Pelletreau, assistant secretary of state for the Middle East) "a renewed emphasis on traditional values."<sup>24</sup> So long as a group has no connections to violent activities, both we and its government should encourage it to pursue the political process.

We are in combat only with the violent extremists, they say. Actually, look closely and you'll see that these extremists are not even good Muslims, but criminals exploiting the faith for their own malign purposes. "Islamic extremism uses religion to cover its ambitions," national security advisor Anthony Lake maintains.<sup>25</sup> In other words, those who use violence in the name of Islam are not just marginal to the fundamentalist movement; they are frauds whose activities go against its praiseworthy aims.

This distinction between good and bad fundamentalist Muslims leads to an important policy conclusion: that the U.S. government should work with the former and against the latter. Yes: even as fundamentalists accuse the United States and Israel of the most horrible crimes and announce their hatred of us, the American government decides that these are people with whom we can do business. Hence our political relations with Hamas, Egypt's Muslim Brethren, and the FIS.

This is poor judgment and leads to bad policy. It would almost always be better not to work with such groups, the only exceptions being circumstances of dire necessity.

### *Bad Advice*

IN PART, THE blame for misguided U.S. policies must fall on the shoulders of the usual suspects—academic specialists. While in the usual course of events the executive branch tries not to rely on advice from outsiders, on issues where it lacks expertise it does turn to specialists for help. Islam is one such issue. Since the Iranian revolution of 1978, diplomats have leaned heavily on Iranists and Islamicists to help them develop U.S. policy.

With almost a single voice, these specialists advise the government not to worry. Some say the fundamentalist challenge has faded. The usually sensible Fouad Ajami reports that "the pan-Islamic millennium has run its course; the Islamic decade is over."<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Olivier Roy, the influential French specialist, announced in 1992 that "the Islamic revolution is behind us."<sup>27</sup> Other analysts go further and say it never posed any danger in the first place. John Esposito, probably the most important of the academic advisors, published a book dispelling the notion of an "Islamic threat."<sup>28</sup> Leon Hadar, an Israeli associated

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<sup>24</sup>Robert H. Pelletreau, Jr., "Symposium: Resurgent Islam in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy* (Fall 1994), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>Address by Anthony Lake, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 17, 1994.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Judith Miller, "Faces of Fundamentalism: Hassan al-Turabi and Muhammed Fadlallah," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1994), p. 124.

<sup>27</sup>Olivier Roy, *L'Echec de l'Islam politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>28</sup>John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

with the Cato Institute, dubs the whole topic of fundamentalist Islam a "contrived threat."<sup>29</sup>

Specialists posit at least two benefits to be gained from American dialogue with the fundamentalists. First, they assume fundamentalists are bound to reach power (an assumption no less dubious than like predictions a generation ago about the inevitability of a socialist triumph) and counsel establishing early and friendly relations with them. Second, the specialists present fundamentalist Islam as an essentially democratic force that will help stabilize politics in the region, and so deserve our support. Graham Fuller, formerly of the Central Intelligence Agency and now at RAND, makes the case for fundamentalism as a healthy development: It "is politically tameable . . . [and] represents ultimate political progress toward greater democracy and popular government."<sup>30</sup> The Egyptian scholar Saad Eddin Ibrahim actually goes so far as to suggest that fundamentalists "may evolve into something akin to the Christian Democrats in the West."<sup>31</sup>

The trouble with all this is that the notion of good and bad fundamentalists simply has no basis in fact. Yes, fundamentalist Muslim groups, ideologies, and tactics differ from each other in many ways—Sunni and Shi'ite, working through the system and outside it, using violence and avoiding violence—but every one of them is inherently extremist. Fundamentalist groups have evolved a division of labor, with some seeking power through politics and others through intimidation. In Turkey, for example, the Nurcu and the Necmettin Erbakan's Refah Partisi accept the democratic process, while the Süleymanî and the Milli Görüş do not. In Algeria, much evidence points to FIS coordinating with the murderous Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

Non-fundamentalist Muslims understand that, by aspiring to create a new man and a new society, all fundamentalists in

the end must work to overthrow the existing order. Non-fundamentalists know this because they have seen the gleam in the eyes of fundamentalists, heard their rhetoric, fended off their depredations, endured their murders. Deemed traitors, non-fundamentalists like Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasrin are first in the line of fire, even ahead of Jews or Christians.

They tirelessly try to educate Westerners on the subject of fundamentalist Islam, with dismayingly little response. As the militant Algerian secularist Saïd Sadi explains: "A moderate Islamist is someone who does not have the means of acting ruthlessly to seize power immediately."<sup>32</sup> The pro-Western president of Tunisia points out that the "final aim" of all fundamentalists is the same: "the construction of a totalitarian, theocratic state."<sup>33</sup> The outspoken Algerian ambassador to Washington, Osmane Bencherif, echoes this sentiment: "It is misguided policy to distinguish between moderate and extremist fundamentalists. The goal of all is the same: to construct a pure Islamic state, which is bound to be a theocracy and totalitarian."<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the strongest statement comes from Mohammad Mohaddessin, director of international relations for the People's Mojahedin of Iran, a leading opposition force: "Moderate fundamentalists do not exist. . . . It's like talking about a moderate Nazi."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Leon T. Hadar, "What Green Peril?" *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1993).

<sup>30</sup>*Washington Post*, January 13, 1992.

<sup>31</sup>Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Civil Society and Prospects of Democratization in the Arab World," in Augustus Richard Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 52.

<sup>32</sup>*Le Point* (Paris), August 6, 1994.

<sup>33</sup>*Le Figaro*, August 2, 1994.

<sup>34</sup>*Washington Post*, April 1, 1995.

<sup>35</sup>*Middle East Quarterly* (September 1995), p. 77.



### *Approaches to Fundamentalist Islam*

IF MODERATE fundamentalists do not exist, then the U.S. government needs a new policy toward fundamentalist opposition groups. But before proposing specific steps, three premises must be aired: the need to draw a distinction between Islam and fundamentalist Islam; the burden on Americans to prove themselves; and the reason why we should work with the Left against the Right.

#### *Fundamentalist Islam is not Islam*

Islam is an ancient faith and capacious civilization; fundamentalist Islam is a narrow, aggressive twentieth-century ideological movement. Whatever one chooses to call the phenomenon—extremist Islam, fundamentalist Islam, militant Islam, political Islam, radical Islam, Islamism, Islamic revival—it is the problem, not Islam as such.

Distinguishing between Islam and fundamentalist Islam has two important benefits. First, it permits the U.S. government to adopt a sensible attitude toward both. A secular government cannot have an opinion on a religion, especially when it is practiced by significant numbers of its own citizens. But it most assuredly can have an opinion on an ideological movement that is hostile to its interests and values. Second, this distinction makes it possible to ally with non-fundamentalist Muslims. Many of them, including some quoted here, are fearless speakers of truth. Their insights guide those of us outside the Islamic faith; their courage inspires us; and—when the fundamentalists or their apologists accuse us of being “anti-Islam”—their agreement legitimates us.

#### *Demonstrate will*

Fundamentalists see the West, for all its apparent strength, as weak-willed; it reminds them of the Shah's regime in Iran—rich, vainglorious, corrupt, and decayed. `Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the Iranian hardliner, disdains the United States as “a hollow paper

tiger with no power or strength.”<sup>36</sup> To be sure, it disposes of wealth and missiles, but these cannot stand up to faith and resolve. Fundamentalists don't even bother to hide their contempt for Western countries. Iran's Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, for example, publicly asserts: “The British today are on their death bed. Other Western countries too are in a similar state.”<sup>37</sup>

Such contempt obliges the West to act even more strongly and decisively than otherwise might be the case. Tough positions are needed both as an end in themselves and to show that we are not the flabby degenerates of the fundamentalist imagination. The U.S. government has to prove, however absurd it may sound, that Americans are not weaklings addicted to pornography and drugs, that, quite the contrary, we are a healthy people, resolute and ready to protect ourselves and our ideals. Fundamentalists are so enthralled by their own views of the West that these simple points have to be made over and over again. Soheib Bencheikh, a former fundamentalist himself, explains that the West must give them some of their own medicine: “To fight the fundamentalists one has to have been a bit like them oneself.”<sup>38</sup>

#### *Better the Left than the Right*

Until five years ago, the Left had a global network that threatened American interests, while the Right consisted of isolated and mostly weak regimes. It incontrovertibly made sense to work with the friendly tyrants of the Right against the Marxist-Leninist complex on the Left. Since 1990, these roles have, roughly speaking, been reversed, especially in the Muslim world. Today, the Left consists of the odd shipwreck of a regime: the FLN (National Liberation Front) in

<sup>36</sup>*Salam* (Tehran), July 27, 1994.

<sup>37</sup>Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, March 5, 1993.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Martine Gozlan, *L'Islam et la République: Des musulmans de France contre l'intégrisme* (Paris: Belfond, 1994), pp. 41-42.

Algeria, or a General Dostam in Afghanistan. These governments stand for no ideas or visions; their leaders merely want to stay in power. However corrupt, however nasty, they pose fewer dangers to the Middle East or to the United States than do their fundamentalist counterparts. Further, as mere tyrannies, they have a better chance of evolving in the right direction than do intensely ideological regimes.

Instead, it is the Right, made up mainly of fundamentalist Muslims, who have built what Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel calls "an international infrastructure."<sup>39</sup> The network sends out practical aid; for example, the Iranians are reliably said to provide arms, money, cadres, political counseling, military training, diplomatic support, and intelligence to the Sudan. It also provides important psychological support. Fundamentalists feel much stronger for being part of a surging international alliance, somewhat as Marxist-Leninists did in previous years. This new network, like that old one, has the United States of America in its sights. For these reasons, the U.S. government should now—carefully, intelligently, selectively—join with the Left against the Right whenever circumstances suggest doing so.

### *What We Should Do*

THE OVERRIDING GOAL of U.S. policy must be to keep fundamentalist Muslims from seizing power. Once they take over, as the mullahs in Tehran have so clearly shown, they will hold on tenaciously.<sup>40</sup> How, then, to keep the fundamentalists from taking power?

#### *Do not engage in official or public dialogue*

Dialogue sends signals that undercut existing governments without bringing any gains. President Husni Mubarak of Egypt counsels Washington along these lines. "To engage in dialogue with radical fundamentalists is a waste of time."<sup>41</sup> Actually, it is worse than that because it works both to legitimize

fundamentalism and to confirm its belief in Western weakness. The U.S. government ought not to talk to fundamentalist groups, much less ally with any of them; meetings with Palestinian, Egyptian, and Algerian fundamentalists should stop.

#### *Do not appease*

As a former CIA specialist on Iran notes, "fundamentalism is a war fought primarily in Muslim imaginations. Private and collective dreams are not amenable to negotiations."<sup>42</sup> Like other totalitarians, fundamentalist Muslims respond to appeasement by demanding more concessions. Saïd Sadi, the Algerian secularist, advises his fellow countrymen not to give in to the fundamentalists "because if we made the slightest concession, all our freedoms would be threatened."<sup>43</sup> Again, Mubarak has it right: "I can assure you," he says, fundamentalist groups will "never be on good terms with the United States."<sup>44</sup> A change in foreign policy will not suffice because fundamentalists despise us not for what we do but for who we are. Short of adopting their brand of Islam, there is no hope of satisfying them.

#### *Offer no help*

With the end of the Cold War, this goal should be easier to achieve. To get Pakistani

<sup>39</sup>*The Jerusalem Post*, December 4, 1994.

<sup>40</sup>The only exception is Turkey. Should fundamentalists be voted into office there, we should accept that outcome, and for two reasons: Turkey being a full democracy, the only one in the Muslim world, the fundamentalists will probably leave office if and when they lose an election; and if they do not, the military stands in the wings ready to force them out.

<sup>41</sup>*Corriere della Sera* (Milan), November 20, 1994.

<sup>42</sup>Edward G. Shirley (a pseudonym), "Is Iran's Present Algeria's Future?" *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 1995), p. 44.

<sup>43</sup>France-2 Television, September 20, 1994.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in the *New Yorker*, January 30, 1995.

permission to arm the Afghan *mujahidin* against Soviet forces in the 1980s, the CIA had disproportionately to supply the fundamentalists. Washington did as bidden, and rightly so, for it meant aligning with the lesser evil against the greater one. Now that fundamentalism is the greater evil—or, at least, the more dynamic one—this conundrum is less likely to arise. It is hard to imagine any scenario today in which the U.S. government should help fundamentalists.

*Press fundamentalist states to reduce their aggressiveness*

The West should pressure fundamentalist states—Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan—to reduce their aggressiveness and the aid they supply to ideological brethren in such countries as Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and Algeria, as well as to Palestinians. The U.S. government and its allies have a wide range of commercial and diplomatic tools at their disposal with which to confront fundamentalist aggression, with a military option always reserved in the background if needed.

*Support those confronting fundamentalist Islam*

Governments in combat with the fundamentalists deserve U.S. help. We should stand by the non-fundamentalists, even when that means accepting, within limits, strong-arm tactics (Egypt, the PLO), the aborting of elections (in Algeria), and deportations (Israel). It also means supporting Turkey in its conflict with Iran, and India in its conflict with Pakistan on the Kashmir issue.

The same applies to institutions and individuals. As a curtain of silence and terror comes down around them, non-fundamentalists in the Middle East are losing their voice. To be celebrated by Americans would greatly boost their morale and prestige; and funds from the U.S. Information Agency, the Agency for International Development, and private sources could do much good.

Again, this means working with some less than Jeffersonian organizations, notably the People's Mojahedin of Iran, despite the controversy that would probably arouse.

*Be careful and restrained about democratization*

The U.S. government must be very careful how it presses for democracy. Unfortunately, it has become common to equate democracy with elections, leading to a single-minded emphasis on them as ends in themselves. We should correct this, stressing democracy's connections with liberty and the rule of law.

Quick elections solve little. Often they make matters worse by strengthening fundamentalist elements, these usually being the best organized in societies in which the citizenry is not equipped to make fully informed electoral decisions. Instead, we should press for those prior conditions for successful democracy: political participation, the rule of law (including an independent judiciary), freedom of speech and religion, property rights, minority rights, and the right to form voluntary organizations (especially political parties). In short, we should urge the formation of a civil society. Elections are not the start of the democratic process but its capstone and finale, the signal that a civil society has come into existence. As Judith Miller of the *New York Times* summarizes the point, we should encourage, "Elections tomorrow and civil society today."<sup>45</sup>

In the end, the ideological battle of the post-Cold War era instigated by fundamentalist Islam will be decided by Muslims, not by Americans. The fundamentalist challenge will succeed or fail depending on what they and their non-fundamentalist opponents do. Still, Americans are important bystanders who can take significant steps to help our natural allies against our inevitable adversaries. □

<sup>45</sup>Judith Miller, "The Challenge of Radical Islam," *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1993), p. 53.