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Identifying Friend and Enemy In the Complex Islamic World

Daniel Pipes

Philadelphia

Some experts theorize that ideological divisions of the past are gone and that major future conflicts will be between civilizations, Western, Confucian, Islamic. I disagree: Ideological divisions continue and the key question is not how or to whom one is born, but rather one's beliefs. While many people in China, for example, or in Iran or the United States see the world the same way, there are others in those same countries who fundamentally disagree with liberal views. Particularly in Islam, little division exists between Muslims and us because of how we were born, but rather divisions exist strongly between Muslims and Muslims because of differing world views.

The Muslim world's nearly one billion people are not monolithic in language, Islamic practice or politics and it would be a mistake to see all Muslims as enemies. Many Muslims consider that the World Trade Center bombing in New York was horrific, and we must be careful not to turn these natural allies into

enemies. In the United States, fundamentalists, Sheik Abdel Rahman, or in a very peculiar sense Louis Farrakhan — radicals — get all the attention. Much more

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attention and celebration should be paid to the good Muslim citizens, such as Wallace Muhammad, a good American who heads a far larger group than Louis Farrakhan's, but who gets very little of the attention which he deserves. Farrakhan and Abdel Rahman are not the only Muslim figures in this country.

Fundamentalist "troublemakers" constitute a very small proportion of the general population, small in Algeria, for instance, where they kill their enemies by the thousands. But as did devout Marxist-Leninists (also a small group), their ideo-

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logical formation, organization and activism create a punch much greater than numbers would suggest. Fundamentalists, particularly those who have spent time in Afghanistan (known as Afghans even though they are Arabs), who are dedicated to their cause, militarily competent, and devoutly religious, number only in the thousands in Algeria, Bosnia, Jordan and elsewhere, but have had a tremendous impact. Though important, however, they are not many and we would be greatly mistaken to see them as the whole of the Muslim world.

Friction between Muslims is apparent in the war between North and South Yemen or the civil war in Algeria. Muslims fight with one another because they

see the world differently and want to address global problems in very different ways. Fundamentalists seek to return to what they imagine things were like in the "old days" of unquestioning application of Islamic law and, with momentum behind them, are pressing the issue. Non-fundamentalists who disagree, whatever their internal differences, consider the fundamentalists wrong and to be resisted.

Secularism — anti-fundamentalism — has its strongest presence in Turkey and, therefore, Turkey will ultimately play a critical role in determining whether fundamentalism succeeds or fails. Unfortunately, most Turks themselves don't realize this and are passive in the face of attacks from Iran and elsewhere. They must awaken to see the problem not merely as a matter of borders, money and arms, but as a counter-ideology that

threatens to change Turkey. And a Turkey that is no longer secularist would be a major blow to secularism throughout the Muslim world.

Who is making trouble? Against whom should we respond forcefully? Certainly not Muslims in general. The United States

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must preface all international policy initiatives with respect to these matters by making two points: First, the U.S. must indicate its understanding that the Muslim world is not monolithic and that the U.S. recognizes and respects the many differences. Second, the U.S. should note that the problem is not Islam, but fundamentalist Islam, that radical Utopian ideology

torments Muslims and threatens us, and it is the problem that must be addressed.

We must stand by our friends — and “friends” can be rather liberally interpreted as people who are our allies on this issue, though perhaps not congenial to us personally. We should stick by states and organizations with domestic fundamentalist problems: In Egypt or Algeria, for example, we should say that these governments, institutions, organizations and people are being persecuted and attacked. Rather than appease, we should pressure fundamentalist groups and states by threat or discussion to make clear that we will fight their aggressive activities. United States Information Agency and Agency for International Development funding should support the front lines against fundamentalism. We must be tough and make clear that we will not buckle under pressure and that we know who our enemies are.

Daniel Pipes is director of the Middle East Forum and editor of the Middle East Quarterly. He is author of “Islam’s Intramural Struggle” in the Spring issue of The National Interest and contributed his thoughts in a conversation with the editors of the Northern Centinel.