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## **Islamic Activism and U.S. Foreign Policy**



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# Islamic Activism and U.S. Foreign Policy

*Scott W. Hibbard and David Little*



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Political violence in the Middle East and elsewhere has come to symbolize for many people the threat of "Islamic activism." This perspective frequently assumes that the phenomenon—also referred to as "Islamic fundamentalism" or "political Islam"—represents a common and coordinated threat to the West. For others, however, Islamic activists are seen as neither unified nor necessarily hostile. What, then, is the nature of Islamic activism and what does this mean for U.S. foreign policy?

These issues were the basis for a series of meetings hosted by the United States Institute of Peace between 1994 and 1996. The dominant theme of the Institute series was the dilemma faced by U.S. policymakers who must deal with the political violence of extremists in countries where political, economic, and social reforms are very much needed. Implementing such reforms, however, may inadvertently strengthen groups who have no more commitment to human rights or democratic norms than the regimes they seek to replace.

In the course of the Institute meetings, two different interpretations of Islamic activism emerged, and, with them, two different policy approaches. The first approach distinguished between moderate activists (those who advocate social reform in a manner consistent with democratic values) and extremists (those who condone the use of violence to achieve antidemocratic ends). Since, according to this approach, most Islamic activists are first and foremost social reformers, the best policy is one of inclusion and accommodation. Tolerating, or co-opting, the moderate opposition isolates the extremists and minimizes the threat of violence and radicalism. The second approach, however, rejects the significance of distinguishing between moderates and extremists. Regardless of the methods they may employ, all activists have fundamentally

the same goals: the establishment of an authoritarian theocratic state. Consequently, a policy of exclusion and repression is not only warranted but also essential.<sup>1</sup>

U.S. policy has sought to address the basic concerns of both these viewpoints. The Clinton administration, like its predecessor, has articulated its opposition to political violence and its commitment to addressing the economic and social ills that generate support for extremism. According to administration officials, the problem is extremism, not Islam.

Implementing this approach, however, is not easy. Policymakers must balance the often competing goals of long-term democratic development, on the one hand, and short-term regional interests (such as stability and access to energy resources), on the other. One way of achieving this balance is to promote political and economic policies that gradually cultivate "civil society" in at-risk countries. Accordingly, policymakers would avoid equating democracy with its formal trappings, such as elections, and instead work toward encouraging an independent sector of society devoted to tolerance, voluntary participation, and nonviolent reform. The objective is to create stability and accountable government by developing the conditions that support democracy, rather than trying to impose it abruptly and artificially.

## IRAN

Iran was the first case study examined. Participants generally agreed that the revolution is now dead insofar as public support for the Islamic agenda has waned. The Iranian regime, it was argued, retains only a narrow base of domestic support, and many observers feel it will ultimately collapse of its own weight. For the foreseeable future, however, oil revenues and lenient European trade policies seem to ensure the regime's survival and continued ability to fund militant groups around the world. Several participants noted, also, that the policy of containment and isolation pursued by the United States may have shored up the regime's legitimacy by casting it as an abused victim.<sup>2</sup> Since neither indulgence nor isolation alone is likely to change the regime's behavior, it was argued that an alternative approach might be effective—one that opens Iran to outside influences and more directly links financial support and trade to Iran's international actions.

## ALGERIA

The situation in Algeria epitomizes the dilemmas facing U.S. policymakers. In that country, competing and frequently violent militant Islamic groups seek to reshape Algerian society. Although such groups justify their actions as a fight against the forces of corruption and sacrilege, they have demonstrated little commitment to democratic values and the tolerance of dissenting views. However, the ruling regime has been demonstrably undemocratic and has for several years pursued a policy of "eradication" in dealing with its Islamic opposition. As one participant noted, "In Algeria, there are no good guys."<sup>3</sup>

The future of Algeria remains uncertain. One policy alternative offered in the Institute roundtable was to support a serious dialogue among all political parties in Algeria, similar to the one initiated by the Italian lay Catholic group Sant'Egidio in pursuit of national reconciliation. Unfortunately, subsequent events, including the November 1995 presidential elections, marginalized the Sant'Egidio process, and national reconciliation, as well as economic and political reform, is still needed. To this end, a more proactive U.S. policy could help. It is argued that the United States should be "more engaged with the [Algerian] regime and encourage it down a road it says it wants to pursue. . . . namely, a return to normal life, reform [of] the economy, a rebuilding [of] political institutions, parliamentary elections, and so forth."<sup>4</sup> Whether the current government of President Liamine Zeroual can achieve such goals will determine whether its approach to the challenge of Islamic activism is successful in the long run.

## JORDAN AND THE PALESTINIANS

In the third meeting in the series, the Institute working group examined the Islamic movements in Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza. Islamic activism in this area illustrates both the diversity of Islamic organizations and the competing tendencies within specific groups over both means and ends. In the West Bank and Gaza, the political exclusion of the Palestinians appears to have contributed to the militancy of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, while in Jordan a policy of political inclusiveness has produced a degree of accommodation between Islamic activists (particularly the Muslim Brotherhood) and the government. These organizations, however, are not uniform. Although Islamic activists generally

agree, theoretically, on ultimate ends, factions within organizations have struggled over how best to achieve their goals.

The implications for policy remain mixed. Despite repressive measures, violence carried out by members of Hamas has hindered the Middle East peace process and increased pressure on both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to respond with greater force. In Jordan, the effort to co-opt Islamic activists has also not been entirely successful. Despite a policy of limited inclusion, activists retain an assertive mood based on their opposition to the peace process with Israel. There is also concern that continuing confrontation by Islamic activists may lead Jordan—like Israel and the Palestinian Authority—to respond more forcefully to the challenge of Islamic activism. As a result, the tension between political liberalization and opposition to a negotiated settlement with Israel may restrict movement toward democracy and peace within the region. “[Consequently], contrary to many optimistic forecasts, . . . the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict will likely usher in a new era of authoritarianism.”<sup>5</sup>

## PAKISTAN AND SOUTH ASIA

The Pakistan case also illustrates the diversity of Islamic activism. The Jama’at-i-Islami (the Party of Islam), a prominent Islamic organization influential throughout the Islamic world, has historically worked within the political process, rather than standing for violent resistance and revolution. The inclusion of the Jama’at in the political system, it is argued, has mitigated its ideological demands and shaped its largely accommodationist methods. Although never able to secure power in its own right, it has been extremely influential through grassroots activism and its ability to define political debate.

Although the Jama’at has been influential, its predominance in Pakistan is diminishing. Assertive “sectarian” parties have emerged recently that represent a special challenge for U.S. policy. These new groups are less focused on doctrinal purity, and are influenced more by the “Kalashnikov culture” of the region. Their strength derives from access to sophisticated weaponry left over from the Afghan war, funding from abroad, and the absence of government control. These groups are, in part, unintended consequences of the Cold War strategy to arm the *mujahidin* during the 1980s. As former ambassador Robert Oakley commented during the Institute discussion, once the Afghan war was over, the network established to support the *mujahidin* began “looking for a cause, [and] the militants . . . for something to do.”

## TURKEY

Turkey demonstrates yet another variation of how government policy and Islamic activism interact. In Turkey, Islamic activism has not been a significant force politically, though it has long been represented in the electoral system, most recently by the Islamic party Refah (Welfare). The relative weakness of the Islamic activists is due in part to Turkey's unique history and to a strong sense of Turkish identity. Of greater significance, however, is the explicitly secular and democratic political system in Turkey. This relatively open political system has mitigated the development of Islamic extremism in Turkey, and the existence of mediating institutions, including a vibrant civil society, keeps a check on extreme swings in Turkish political life.

Despite its historical weakness, the current Islamic party, Refah, won a plurality of votes in the December 1995 parliamentary elections, and subsequently established a coalition government. It is not yet clear what this development will mean for the future. Early indications, however, appear to signal little radical change. Despite opposition among many of Refah's core supporters, the Refah prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, adopted many of the previous government's policies in order to gain the support necessary to form a ruling coalition. Furthermore, it is argued that Refah's electoral success does not represent the ideological challenge many people fear; on the contrary, many of the people who currently support Refah do so for economic rather than ideological reasons. Many observers—and even Refah leaders—acknowledge that Refah benefited significantly from those voting in protest against the two dominant political parties that have alternately ruled Turkey over the past ten years.

## INDONESIA

The last case study examined was Indonesia, the world's largest Islamic country. This country has not been plagued in recent years with the kind of religious extremism, violence, and intolerance that are present in other areas. On the contrary, Indonesia's "New Order" regime, which has ruled Indonesia since the 1960s, has based its tenure on the twin pillars of national unity and religious pluralism, even if it had to rely upon military rule to enforce these policies.

Although there seems to be no significant "threat" of Islamic extremism in the conventional sense, the centrality of Islam in Indonesian politics has increased over the past decade. This is due, first, to a stronger sense of Islamic

identity among Indonesians, and, second, to the ruling regime's use of Islam as a means of supporting its rule. While the overall trend is clear, the implications remain less so. Many people are concerned that this "greening" (or Islamization) of Indonesian politics may fuel intercommunal tensions and threaten the country's tradition of religious tolerance.

However, this environment, coupled with Indonesia's phenomenal economic development, has also produced a flowering of Islamic modernist thought. "Concurrent with the growth of the Islamic middle class has been a self-conscious attempt on the part of a small group of Islamic intellectuals [the so-called neomodernists] to develop a more open, tolerant and pluralistic approach to the relationship between state and Islamic society."<sup>6</sup> The resonance of this interpretation of Islam gives some analysts reason to believe that Indonesia may be the "cradle for [the] growth of tolerant Islam."<sup>7</sup>

# FOREWORD

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## How Should Policymakers Respond to the Challenge of Islamic Activism?

*William B. Quandt*

**E**ver since the Cold War came to a sudden end at the beginning of this decade, Americans have been debating foreign policy priorities. One of the frequent candidates for a new “-ism” to rally against is “Islamism.” The publication of this volume, *Islamic Activism and U.S. Foreign Policy*, is an occasion to ask whether Islam, in any of its variants, is really a threat to American interests in a way that might be seen as analogous to communism in the 1950s and 1960s, and if so what can the United States do to deal with such a challenge. If not, we still need to ask how we should conduct our relations with Muslim states and political movements.

The debate over political Islam spans a spectrum from fairly sophisticated arguments about the increasing role of values and culture as dividing lines in international affairs—the “Clash of Civilizations” thesis—to simple journalistic visions of a “green peril.” For most Americans, it seems, Islam is a poorly understood religion, associated with disparate menacing images such as those of Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi, and even Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. The memory of Americans held hostage in Iran and Lebanon reinforces the popular belief that there are deep incompatibilities between Muslims and the United States.

Despite these indications that Islam is somehow seen as a threat by many Americans, it is striking to note that the United States has quite good relations with most Muslim countries—Egypt, Indonesia, Morocco, to mention just a few—and American officials go to considerable lengths to stress that Islam is a religion deserving of respect, not a source of problems for American foreign policy. Presidents Bush and Clinton have both publicly stated that they see no

basis for hostility between the United States and Islamic countries. On the domestic front, millions of American Muslims go about their daily lives quite normally. If Islam is not the problem, then what, if anything, is?

The debate surrounding Islamic activism and American foreign policy has a certain similarity to the debate over communism in the middle third of this century. In the 1930s, many saw communism as an understandable response to the economic crisis of the depression and to the rise of fascism in Europe. Then, as now with Islamic militancy, it was easy for intellectuals to become apologists for an ideological system that seemed idealistic, egalitarian, and anchored in a strong sense of community in contrast to the rampant individualism of capitalism. The horrors of the Stalin era were still not widely known, or were treated as aberrations.

In the 1940s, many Americans swallowed whatever distaste they felt for communism and treated Stalin as a worthy ally in the fight against fascism. Something similar happened in the 1980s when Americans cheered on the Islamic warriors in Afghanistan who were battling the occupying Soviet army. But once the common cause was ended, in both cases perceptions quickly changed. Stalin became a bloody dictator in popular American perceptions—no more “Uncle Joe”—and the noble *mujahidin* warriors were seen as misogynist fanatics reveling in a “Kalashnikov culture.”

Perhaps the most revealing comparison of American attitudes toward communism and Islamic militancy can be found in the period of the 1950s and today. During the 1950s, a real debate took place over the nature of the communist threat. Was it primarily ideological, or was the danger fundamentally related to Soviet power? Could the threat be dealt with by deterrence and containment, or did it require more active measures of opposition? Were the main communist powers working together in the international arena, or could one drive wedges between them? Were socialists and radical nationalists little more than fronts for communists, or were they potentially valuable allies in the struggle against communism? Could one weaken the appeal of communism, especially in Third World settings, by addressing underlying social and economic issues? Would time and circumstance work to moderate communism and turn it into a harmless political movement akin to social democracy?

At various times, different sides of these debates had strong followings, but by the end of the 1950s there seemed to be something of a consensus. Not all communist regimes were the same. The United States could have good relations with Yugoslavia's Tito, “peaceful coexistence” with Russia, and no relations at

all with China, while actively trying to undermine communist regimes on the periphery of the big power blocs. Nationalism in the Third World was not automatically seen as equivalent to communism, and European Social Democrats were recognized as allies in the competition with the Soviet bloc. Soviet power, more than the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao, was seen as the major threat, and containment, based on the assumption that in due course communism would change from within, provided a bipartisan foundation for American foreign policy for much of the remainder of the Cold War. The great exception to this consensus in the 1960s, of course, was Vietnam, where the debate was resolved only after the death of fifty thousand American soldiers and a rethinking of the place of China in the global scheme of things.

As the current volume demonstrates, many of the arguments concerning political Islam have a familiar ring to them. There is still no consensus on key issues. Is there an Islamic "essence" that is fundamentally hostile to Western values and to ideas of democracy and pluralism? Or is Islam, like other great religions, subject to a variety of interpretations at different times and places? Are moderates and extremists among Islamic activists simply two wings of the same movement, both of which seek to impose Islamic law and pursue a militant struggle with all non-Muslims? Or are moderates and extremists deeply different in their goals and tactics, and if so, can those difference be exploited by those who fear Islamic radicalism? Can Islamic political parties function in democratic settings, or will they use any opening to seize power, then suspend democratic procedures, as Hitler did in the 1930s—the "one person, one vote, one time" phenomenon?

Needless to say, these issues are debated in a highly politicized context. It would be a mistake to believe that so-called experts or informed sources are free of political agendas of their own. For example, many of the regimes in power in the Middle East are intent upon promoting a view of Islamic radicals as beyond the pale, sponsored by Iran or Sudan, and irrevocably committed to violence. Much of the information available to policymakers comes from such sources. Many Israelis, apprehensive about the views of Islamists toward Zionism and the peace process, support this interpretation and find themselves championing Arab leaders and regimes whom they used to abhor. These voices are also listened to in Washington. From time to time one even gets a hint that Saddam Hussein will try to work his way back to respectability in the West by presenting himself as an anti-Islamist who supports the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Just as critics of Islamist activists have their own political agendas, so often do their supporters. Many in the academic community are offended by simplistic caricatures of Muslims, and tend to bend over backward to make distinctions between legitimate grievances of Islamic movements and the violent extremists who also claim to speak for Islam. And they see a double standard when human rights violations by incumbent regimes are tolerated, while the excesses of Islamist movements are pointed to as evidence that they are little more than terrorists.

To say the least, there is little meeting of minds among observers and analysts about the nature of Islamic activism. And yet policymakers cannot wait until a consensus emerges. They need sensible guidelines and some notion of the range of reasonable interpretation, and they cannot be expected to become experts on Islam and its political manifestations overnight. Most frequently, they will take their cues from highly self-interested and biased sources. But if dealing with Islam and its political offspring is really likely to be a major issue in the years ahead, we must try to understand the nature of the diverse challenges to American interests that are mounted in the name of Islam, and we must have some reasoned discussion about policy responses.

A careful reader of this volume will come across a number of themes that deserve serious attention. Each can help policymakers form judgments about concrete issues.

- ▶ The cases reviewed here, which include Iran, Algeria, Jordan and the Palestinians, South Asia, Turkey, and Indonesia, reveal a remarkable diversity of Islamic movements. There is no equivalent of the Comintern—a central clearinghouse for Muslim activists. Each country seems to have Islamic movements that reflect distinctive political experiences of that country. Some regimes that consider themselves Islamic are quite open to close relations with the West—Saudi Arabia is a case in point—and others show a measure of support for democracy and pluralism, such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Malaysia.
- ▶ Despite the diversity that one finds among Islamist movements, there are also common themes and cross-border relations that cannot be ignored. For example, Islamic movements are almost all hostile to Israel and critical of some aspects of Western power and values. In opposition, Islamic movements tend to appeal to the disenfranchised, the “oppressed,” the marginal, promising greater social justice, an end to corruption, and that “Islam is the solution.” They tend to be short on programs and specifics, and long on

idealism and rhetoric. In power, Islamist parties often find it difficult to retain popular support. They have no magic solutions to the problems of society; they have no unique Islamic economic model; they end up relying on force and abusing human rights; and the claim of ruling in the name of Islam is not enough to maintain legitimacy indefinitely.

- ▶ Where Islamist movements have long traditions and have been tolerated by regimes—Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, Indonesia—they have generally refrained from violence and from total challenges to the political system. This suggests that it may be possible, in some circumstances, to domesticate and moderate Islamic political movements by giving them voice. But where Islamic movements have emerged more recently in sharp reaction to the perceived failures of the nationalist model, as in Algeria and Gaza and the West Bank, it may be more difficult for regimes to co-opt or domesticate Islamic militants. Their initial goal is to take over the system entirely, not to reform it. Their moderate wings can easily be outflanked by militants willing to use violence. In other words, the likely success of a policy of co-optation depends very much on the nature of the regime itself—whether or not it has reservoirs of legitimacy to draw on—and the nature of the opposition. The analogy with communist parties may again be instructive. French and Italian communists participated in elections after World War II and eventually moderated their programs and recast themselves as social democrats; in many Third World countries, communist parties remained illegal and militant, beyond co-optation and unreformable. Regimes there were too weak to risk allowing communists to participate in political life, and the parties themselves were too narrowly based to compete for power through legal means.
- ▶ In a number of countries, very violent groups have emerged that claim to be Islamic. In some cases, there is a direct link to the Afghan war, which produced a hardened, disciplined cadre of fighters from a variety of countries. Today in Algeria, Pakistan, and Egypt, these veterans of the Afghan war are among the most radical and intolerant of all Islamic activists. Incumbent regimes often argue that there is a seamless web linking these radicals and more “moderate” Islamists. This is probably not usually the case, but it is often true that the militants can outbid the moderates, driving them to silence or making them appear to be in complicity with unpopular regimes. For example, in Algeria the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), while small in numbers, has contributed to undermining the more popular Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). It is no exaggeration to say that some of these extremist groups are

little more than armed gangs, often with strongly fascist overtones. The head of the Algerian GIA (a veteran of the Afghan war) was quoted in January 1997 as saying, "Except for those who are with me, all the others are apostates and merit death." It is hard to imagine what basis there might be for accommodation with such a movement. Attempts by Western powers to engage with such movements in the hope of moderating them will be futile and will further serve to undermine the credibility of other political movements, including Islamists, that are willing to eschew violence and play by democratic rules.

- ▶ As a political phenomenon, Islamic activism must be seen in context. It is a movement that grew out of the failure of the nationalist project in many parts of the Muslim world; it often identified itself with popular and populist causes; it received a boost from the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; and it has probably begun to lose its broad appeal as the record of Islamic regimes in power is seen as wanting. This does not mean that Islamic movements pose no challenge to the existing political order, but predictions that Egypt, Algeria, or Saudi Arabia are about to fall to radical Islamist challenges seem far from the mark. At least one serious scholar has already written of the "failure of political Islam." In Iran, some who initially supported the role of the clergy in politics are now calling for more distance between the state and religion, a development that could be important for Iran's eventual return to less militant politics. Outside of Iran, the revolutionary Iranian model is rarely mentioned as one to be emulated. The other Islamic republic, Sudan, is something of a pariah in both the Middle East and Africa and continues to struggle with a long-running civil war.
- ▶ As powerful as political Islam may seem as an opposition movement, it has never managed to win a majority in a free election. Even in Algeria in 1990–91, most Algerians either abstained or voted for non-Islamist parties. Of the total Algerian electorate, only one-third voted for Islamist parties in 1990 in local elections, and only one-quarter the following year in parliamentary elections. In Turkey, which had an Islamist prime minister between 1996 and 1997, the Refah party came in first in the 1996 elections, but with about 20 percent of the vote. In the Palestinian elections in January 1996, Islamists generally did not run, but public opinion polls indicated that their support was considerably less than 20 percent. In Jordan and Kuwait, Islamist candidates have recently lost to conservative candidates with strong

tribal support. In short, democracy does not always work to the advantage of Islamists. Much depends on the other parties and how they manage to form coalitions.

- ▶ Much time and energy has been spent on the theoretical debate over the compatibility of Islam and democracy. This study suggests that, in certain circumstances, the two can be compatible, but it is still difficult to find many convincing examples. Turkey, Pakistan, and Malaysia, along with Jordan and Yemen, are cases that suggest that Islamic political movements can engage in competitive politics along with other political parties. But in each case there are other powerful actors to check the ambitions of the Islamists. The Iranian case suggests that when an Islamist movement seizes power and eliminates its major competitors through force, it will not be willing to risk its newfound power through genuinely free elections.
- ▶ Since experience to date does not provide a conclusive answer about Islam and democracy, we are tempted to look at Islamic political theory for answers. As with any religiously based political movement, there is bound to be a question about the ultimate source of authority. Does legitimate authority flow from God (as interpreted by someone claiming to know His will) or is sovereignty rooted in the people? In theory, Islam leaves no room for doubt. God is sovereign. But in practice, Muslims have experimented with a wide array of political institutions and have not recognized that rulers are above the law. If there is something distinctive about Islam and its political theory, it is that institutions have been devalued in favor of the "just leader" who can interpret God's law for the community of believers (as Muhammad did for his followers), and today's Islamic regimes are measured against an ideal set by the first Islamic state—that of Muhammad in the seventh century. Thus, there is a tendency toward idealism and the search for the just leader on the part of Islamic activists that does not always fit easily with the give and take of democratic politics. This is not to say that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Most religions do not fit easily with practical politics. But it does suggest that there is little in Islamic political theory that is a natural ally of democracy, other than, perhaps, the emphasis on the rule of law.
- ▶ No Muslim country, and no Islamic movement, poses a threat to the United States in any way comparable to that posed by the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s. Most are economically weak, militarily underdeveloped, and quite vulnerable to American and Western counterpressures. This does not

mean that acts of terror cannot be mounted by radical Islamists, but such threats are quite different from the type of challenge that the Soviets presented to Western Europe, or Saddam Hussein posed to the smaller Gulf states.

- Muslim states have not been noteworthy for their levels of cooperation. In fact, there are more fault lines among Muslim states than between them and any other political grouping. Algerians are suspicious of Moroccans; Syrians and Iraqis are at loggerheads; Egypt and Sudan are often quarreling; Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are all at odds. There is little reason to believe that Muslim unity will soon arrive. Thus, whatever the nature of the challenge from specific Islamist movements or regimes, the United States is unlikely ever to face a unified Islamic threat. When the United States has found itself at odds with Islamic regimes, as with Iran, it has found many allies such as Saudi Arabia on its side. *Raison d'état* still trumps ideology in most of the Islamic world.

American policymakers will be well advised to reflect on some of the themes of this study. The world of Islam is not unified or monochrome. Islam as a faith is not the same as the political activism that seeks to legitimize itself by invoking the symbols of Islam. Most Muslims, and most regimes in Muslim countries, pose no particular problems for American interests. We are still very far from the much-hyped "Clash of Civilizations." There is nothing inevitable about such a clash, as numerous American political leaders have already made clear in their public comments.

A realistic appreciation of the nature of the Islamist challenge, however, does not necessarily lead to a posture of passivity. There are, after all, steps that can be taken by the United States that might reduce the likelihood of serious disputes between Americans and Islamists. Policies generally need to be tailored very much to the specifics of individual countries—such as American policy toward Turkey's relations with Europe—but there are also some broad themes that need attention.

For better or worse, the United States is now deeply involved in the negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. If these stalemate or fail, many Islamists will blame the United States, and many ordinary Muslims will agree with that judgment. Regimes that have cooperated with the United States in the peace process (the Jordanian, Egyptian, and Palestinian regimes, for instance) will come under pressure from more radical voices, some speaking with an

Islamist accent. As the negotiations approach the final-status issues in coming years, it will be increasingly difficult for the United States to avoid taking positions on substantive issues. For example, will the United States recognize the Israeli claim to all of Jerusalem and move the U.S. embassy there? Will it continue to oppose the creation of a Palestinian state? Will it support the idea that Israeli settlements can remain in the midst of the West Bank? If so, one should expect a backlash of some magnitude on the part of many Muslims. By contrast, an American position on these issues that is judged to be fair by moderate Muslims will help to strengthen those in the Islamic world who argue for cooperation with the West.

In addition to promoting a just and secure peace between Israel and its neighbors, the United States should try to ensure that at least one of the Muslim countries with which it has close ties will emerge as something of a model of economic and political development. So far, no country in the Islamic world stands out as a model of economic and political reform in the way that South Korea, Taiwan, or any number of Latin American countries do. That is to say, we cannot point to a case of successful American-supported economic and political development that has resulted in sustained economic growth, social progress, and democracy. The big recipients of American aid in the Muslim world, such as Turkey and Egypt, could play important roles in their regions if they were to be seen as successful in their development. While the United States cannot make development happen, it can continue to encourage those policies that seem to have the best chance of bringing about economic progress and political liberalization. Of all the Muslim countries, Egypt and Turkey are probably the two where success would redound most to America's advantage, while also protecting tangible geostrategic interests in the region. Smaller, but also important cases might be Jordan and the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority. Aid, trade, and investment need to be used intelligently to promote development, and high-level political contacts will be required to try to develop a shared sense of purpose between the United States and existing regimes.

How should the United States deal with comparatively friendly authoritarian regimes that confront Islamist challenges, such as Algeria or Tunisia? Some would argue that a policy of strong support is the only viable option. Others make just the opposite case, citing Iran as an example of the need to open contacts with those who oppose unpopular regimes before they come to power. There is something unsatisfactory in both of these positions.

Those who urge full backing for incumbent anti-Islamist regimes seem to believe that the Iranian revolution could have been avoided if only Jimmy Carter had not criticized the Shah for his human rights record. There is scant evidence for this conclusion. No regime has fallen to Islamist opposition because it has been too mindful of human rights. On the contrary, the regimes that are the most flagrant abusers of human rights seem most vulnerable to Islamist challenges.

Those on the other end of the policy spectrum seem to believe that U.S. relations with postrevolutionary Tehran could have been fine if only we had cut our ties to the Shah at an earlier date. This view ignores the usual dynamics of revolution and the near inevitability that a new Islamic regime would have found itself at loggerheads with the United States even if we had maintained a dialogue with Khomeini before the revolution.

Where, then, should policymakers come down on this issue of dealing with unpopular incumbent regimes facing Islamist challenges? First, the United States should recognize that it usually has only marginal influence at best. Second, a status quo power such as the United States cannot be expected to try to unseat existing regimes, even if they are unpopular. Third, even friendly regimes should not be exempt from criticism on matters ranging from economic policy to human rights. But the most effective means of raising such issues is likely to be in private. This requires an ongoing dialogue even with regimes that we may not much care for. Fourth, some contacts with Islamist opposition groups are probably useful, but should be handled carefully and with an awareness of the political signals being sent. Fifth, if and when Islamists come to power, the United States will generally want to try to develop normal working relations with them, counting on mutual interests to overcome ideological antagonisms. Sixth, Europeans often have similar views on these matters and we should try, where possible, to coordinate policies to maximize the chance of having some impact.

Although most acts of international terrorism regularly occur in non-Islamic settings, there is still a popular perception, and some reality, that links terror attacks to some Islamist movements. What can the United States do about this type of threat? The answer has nothing specifically to do with policy toward Islam, but rather is part of the more general problem of fighting militant armed groups that are intent on using terror to advance their causes. The only sensible course seems to be a combination of heightened intelligence work; cooperation with other countries in tracking and neutralizing the activities of these groups; and prudent steps to make it difficult for terrorists to attack sensitive

targets. But this issue belongs in a discussion of terrorism more generally, since there is nothing particular that sets Islamist terrorists apart from others. If the issue, however, is state sponsorship of terror, then we should focus on how to deal with the offending state.

Finally, there is the question of Iran and how the United States should manage its relationship with this self-styled beacon of Islamic radicalism. It is tempting to think that Iran today is a bit like China in the 1950s in terms of American foreign policy. The idea of an American opening to Iran, just as the idea of recognizing "Red China" then, is practically taboo in political circles. And yet the regime in Tehran seems to be entrenched, it is dealing quite normally with most of our allies, and sanctions have done little to curb its revolutionary ardor. At some point, almost inevitably, the United States and Iran will need to deal with one another. The question is on what level and on what terms. There is no easy answer, but we might begin by recognizing the failure of the containment policy to date; and we might open the public discussion on alternatives, rather than simply referring to Iran as a "rogue," or "gangster," or "backlash" state. If at some point the United States and Iran come to be on speaking terms, this will send a signal to Islamist movements elsewhere that the United States is not uniformly hostile to Muslim interests. This is not so much a matter of searching for elusive Iranian moderates, but of dealing with Iran on matters where our interests are engaged, much as we do with other difficult regimes. In time, there no doubt will be moderates in power in Iran, but more because of Iranian political dynamics than anything the United States can do. Still, it does little good to try to keep Iran isolated, and the legislation that seeks to punish firms investing in Iran's oil industry is likely to be counterproductive.

In addition to some of the steps mentioned above, there are also a number of small steps that can help to build a foundation for better relations between the United States and Muslim countries in the future. First, there is still a great deal of interest among Muslims in studying in the United States and in learning English. While cultural and educational exchanges do not always work miracles, they can present a strong and attractive feature of our society and can help to create points of contact that may be useful in the future. The cost of these programs is minor compared to the benefits, but Congress needs to hear the case over and over again for why they serve American interests.

Second, the United States cannot expect to have a sophisticated policy toward Muslim countries without the intellectual resources to know what is actually happening in those countries. This means that scholars who study the

history, politics, and languages of these regions need support, without political strings attached. Funding through the Pentagon and CIA is still too compromising for most academics to tolerate. Other sources need to be provided to ensure that American students are able to study the world of Islam, learn its languages, travel among its people, and eventually improve their understanding of the Islamic world. Certainly, the United States benefited during the Cold War from having a group of scholars and students who were knowledgeable about Russian and Chinese societies and spoke their languages. Such programs are not a panacea, but they are a lot better than the ignorance that will otherwise be the basis for policy.

Note what is missing in this discussion of policy options. Nowhere does it seem as if the United States will be called upon to undertake a massive military buildup to meet the Islamic threat. Nowhere do we hear calls for big increases in economic aid. Mostly what is called for is sensible diplomacy and an investment in understanding a region of the world that still seems mysterious, and perhaps ominous, to many Americans. This should not be too big a challenge to meet, even in the post—Cold War era.

In 1994, the United States Institute of Peace initiated a series of roundtable discussions to examine the phenomenon of Islamic activism and its implications for U.S. foreign policy. The goal of the project was to better understand not only a variety of manifestations of Islamic activism but also how different government policies—ranging from repression to inclusion—influence the development of activist organizations. By approaching these issues in a comparative manner, the project sought to identify patterns among regions and countries and the effectiveness of different policy responses, both by governments within Islamic countries and by the United States.

The end result of this project is the following report. The report summarizes the proceedings of the various meetings hosted by the Institute between June 1994 and February 1996. Although the report is by no means exhaustive, it has sought to portray these discussions accurately and to identify the themes of greatest import for policymakers and students of U.S. policy. The report presents a survey of diverse cases that can provide a useful overview to a very complex issue. The cases were chosen because they exemplify the diversity of the Islamic world, and not just of the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of these discussions, a working group was assembled to examine the cases of Iran; Algeria; Jordan and the Palestinians; Pakistan and South Asia; Turkey; and Indonesia. The participants included government officials, academics, journalists, and foreign policy specialists. There was little consensus in the discussions, reflecting the wide divergence of opinion among both the participants and the Washington policy community regarding both the nature of Islamic activism and how policymakers should respond to it. There were, however, several recurring themes and topics that dominated the discussions.

Two key issues identified in the seminars are (1) why certain activists advocate and use violence to achieve their goals while others do not, and (2) whether efforts by some governments to "co-opt" such movements do, in fact, work. Although the answers to these questions are complex, the case studies provided valuable insights.

Concerning the first issue, the resort to violence appears to be rooted in both the marginalization (and radicalization) of certain populations and the tactical effectiveness of using violence to achieve political ends. Quite simply, persons with little stake in a given political system are more prone to militancy. Efforts to isolate and eradicate militants, though somewhat successful in quelling violence, do not address the long-term, social, economic, and political problems that generate support for such extreme tactics. Also of concern are the long-term ramifications of repressive policies. Both of these issues are discussed in this report.

Regarding the second issue, the case studies illustrate that efforts to co-opt Islamic activist movements have met with mixed results. Although in countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, and Indonesia, the participation of certain groups in the political process has had a moderating effect on their behavior, such efforts have also had the side effect of "Islamizing" the political debate, often with deleterious consequences for minority groups. The case studies thus highlight the complexity of Islamic activism and provide insight into the role of religion in the political life of a number of different Islamic countries.

A report such as this is, of course, time-sensitive. Even so, efforts have been made to update the text to reflect key developments through 1996 and early 1997. Furthermore, the depiction in this volume of the basic issues and perspectives of the debate over Islamic activism will not soon be outdated. Care has been taken to accurately portray not only the differences of opinion and outlook among the participants in the Institute discussions but also the views of other experts whose opinions were solicited or whose writings were consulted. Having laid out the competing interpretations and proposals, the report leaves the task of evaluating the different approaches to the reader.

This report builds on earlier work of the United States Institute of Peace concerning both Islamic activism and the role of religion in politics. An early effort by the Institute in this area included a conference held in May 1992 that culminated in the publication of *Islam and Democracy: Religion, Politics, and Power in the Middle East* by Timothy Sisk. The Institute also hosted a symposium in March 1994, in conjunction with Georgetown University's Center for

Muslim-Christian Understanding, entitled "Political Islam in the Middle East: Its Regional and International Implications." Some of the papers and discussion from that conference are referenced in this report. Finally, the Institute's special initiative on Religion, Ethics, and Human Rights has been involved in a multiyear study of religion and ideology, with a particular focus on intolerance and discrimination as sources of international conflict, and, conversely, on the role of religious tolerance as a necessary condition for peace.

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