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Islam and the West : confrontation or cooperation

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ISLAM AND THE WEST:
CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Political Science

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Abdul-Rahman Barakji

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ABSTRACT

ISLAM AND THE WEST: CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION

by Abdul-Rahman Barakji

This thesis discusses relations between Islam and the West. Their relationship can be that of cooperation or of confrontation depending on the many complicated factors that produce initial or long-term attitudes.

The Islamic political system is discussed and compared to democracy. Common areas between the two systems are emphasized in order to establish areas of possible cooperation. However, there are factors that can cause confrontation. Among the factors this thesis addresses are Western foreign policy towards the Muslim world in general and the Middle East in particular, the difficult transformation to democratic rule in the Muslim world and the role of Islamic movements in this transformation, and the distorted images that Muslims and Westerners have about each other. The thesis ends by discussing different approaches which could lead towards understanding and cooperation between the two civilizations.

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Chapter One

Islam and the West: Confrontation or Cooperation

Introduction

The fall of the Soviet Union and the demise of Communism as an attractive ideology at the same time that Islamic political movements were substantially increasing in strength throughout the Muslim World has advanced the question of relations between Islam and the West to the forefront of international politics. In academic circles, Islam's compatibility or incompatibility with democracy and how that relationship would affect Islamic-Western relations has become a leading intellectual question. However, it has been in media and political circles, where American policy toward the Islamic World is largely formed, where attacks on "Islamic fundamentalism" and "Islamic extremism" have largely drowned out any intellectual debate, a fact which has placed the Islamic and Western Worlds in a confrontational posture.

Rapid political transitions toward democracy, in what Samuel Huntington has called the "third wave"¹ of democratization, began in the late 1970s in Latin America and then spread to a number of Asian countries and crested in the late 1980s with the collapse of the Communist governments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. A number of authoritarian African countries have also felt the pressures of the wave and regime transitions have taken place throughout the continent. No real democratic

transitions have, however, taken place in the Arab World and the few attempts toward democratization were thwarted.

In Algeria, the country's first multiparty parliamentary elections were overturned by a military coup in early 1992. The coup led to a civil war between Islamic groups, who had won the elections, and the military government that undertook the coup to prevent the Islamic political parties from taking power. In Tunisia, a 1987 coup removed an authoritarian leader who had ruled the country for thirty years. An Islamic party made an impressive showing, winning one-third of the vote in subsequent parliamentary elections. However, rather than consolidating the democratization process, the Tunisian regime which had undertaken the 1987 coup imprisoned thousands of Islamic activists and outlawed the country's major Islamic movement.

Algeria and Tunisia underscore a phenomenon that is repeated in other parts of the Arab and Muslim Worlds. An attempt to repress all opposition, including Islamic political groups, is used by a number of authoritarian states to derail the process toward democratization. Regimes use the threat of political Islam to maintain their rule and to gain international legitimacy for the lack of any movement toward democracy. This is important in light of the fact that international pressure played a significant role in the democratization of Latin America and Eastern Europe. The case

with the Islamic World is that international pressure is working in the opposite direction--certainly an important point for the future relationship between Islam and the West. Haggard and Kaufman note that a major reason which has allowed for the survival of authoritarian states in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Muslim World is the "continued backing of external patrons." The authors note that authoritarian regimes are kept alive in the midst of a massive move toward democratization in other parts of the world because of the "unwillingness of external donors to sever the aid tie, usually for strategic as well as humanitarian reasons."²

The attempt by a number of Western countries to support authoritarian regimes in the hope that such regimes would forestall the coming to power of Islamic groups has received justification by Huntington who notes that the economic and social conditions in the Arab World are ripe for an opening toward democracy, but then goes on to warn that such openings will principally benefit Islamist movements, which, according to Huntington are intrinsically anti-Western. Huntington concludes that the democratization of the Arab World will ultimately lead to a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West.³ There is substantial data to support Huntington's thesis that the democratization of the Arab World, and other parts of the Islamic World, will principally benefit political Islamic groups, who have been able to secure more political legitimacy in much of the Islamic World than any other political party or ideological movement.

Political Islamic organizations play an important role in various parts of the Muslim World including the Israeli occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, Afghanistan, Egypt, Central Asia, Bosnia, Jordan and Morocco. In 1979, political Islam fueled a popular revolution in Iran that removed the Shah and installed an Islamic government. Political Islamic forces also seized power in Sudan and set the country on a course of Islamization. A similar Islamization campaign is taking place in Pakistan. As Mir Zohair Husain has pointed out:

The size and potential power of the Muslim world, although currently 'a house divided,' makes the subject important for any student of international relations. Muslims number one billion people, one-fifth of humanity. They constitute a majority in nearly fifty countries, a substantial minority in another seven countries, and a sizable minority in at least nine others.⁴

The legitimacy enjoyed by the Islamic groups comes from a number of sources. After the Lebanese Army failed to dislodge Israeli forces, who in the early 1980s were in occupation of nearly half of Lebanon, it was Islamic political forces who organized a military response and were able to deal Israel a substantial blow. After driving the Israeli Army from substantial parts of the country in 1985, the Lebanese Islamic groups continued to engage the occupying Israelis in the south of the country. The performance of these Islamic groups gained substantial legitimacy for the movement not only in Lebanon but throughout the Arab World. Similar successes in Afghanistan also increased the attractiveness of Islam as an ideology which could liberate Muslim

countries from perceived political, economic, military, and even cultural dependencies on external powers.

While such successes certainly boosted the morale and strength of Islamic political forces throughout the Muslim World, the root causes of the increasing popularity of Islamic political ideologies are deeper. An important cause of Islamic revivalism in the past three decades has been the growing belief that secular nationalism has totally failed to solve the main problems being faced by Muslim countries. Whereas secularism in the West led to the spread of democratic values and the recognition of human rights and civil liberties, secularism in the Muslim World has been associated with authoritarianism and dictatorship, the violation of basic human rights and the confiscation of civil liberties. While secularism in the West reinforced the components of civil society, secular governments in the Muslim world weakened and almost obliterated such components.

Esposito points out that secularization in fact never spread beyond a small minority ruling elite in most Muslim countries whereas the majority of the Muslim populations never internalized a secular outlook and values.⁵ Esposito explains that the Muslim governments espousing modern secular nationalism “seemed less interested and successful in establishing their political legitimacy and creating an ideology for national unity than in preserving autocratic rule.”⁶ He further explains that the

economic programs of such governments “failed to redress widespread poverty and maldistribution of wealth,” and that socioculturally and psychologically, attempts to force Westernization and secularization on societies which had a different historical and cultural legacy than that of the West only resulted in alienation, feelings of cultural dependency, and a loss of identity.⁷ Esposito noted the ultimate incompatibility of Islam with the Western concept of secularism and criticized the proponents of the modernization theory in their belief that development must necessarily involve the secularization of society in the same manner that it occurred in the West.

The secular nationalists who have ruled most of the Muslim World from the time of independence from European occupation to the present are facing increasing pressures from those segments of the population which never internalized the secular outlook and are now forming the backbone of the contemporary Islamic revival. The failure of secular governments to produce economic prosperity, provide civil liberties and protect Muslim lands from occupation has led the peoples of the Muslim World to seek alternative sources of power. As Esposito showed, Islam could present such an alternative.

For the adherents of the Islamic political movements which have become increasingly powerful in the last three decades, Islam was not only a religion, but an ideology, a way of life, and a means to achieve political, economic, social, and moral

success. Whereas the disunity of the Muslim World was seen as a primary cause of the weakness of each individual Muslim state, Islam was seen as the only means to unite a region which for centuries had been united into one political entity and was only divided with the 19th and 20th Century European colonial incursions. Whereas the movements based on imported nationalist and leftist ideologies could never mobilize mass bases of support in most Muslim countries, Islam could not only mobilize Muslims but also motivate them and prepare them to make sacrifices to achieve the goal of an Islamic utopian society. Hasan Albanna, who was the principal ideologue of the current Islamic revival, and the majority of Islamic revivalists believe that Islam is able to provide Muslims with a means of changing a repressive and stagnant status quo while at the same time enabling them to preserve their religious and cultural traditions.⁸

The ideological attractions of Islam and the failure of authoritarian regimes to deliver economic prosperity and political freedom, which contributed to the rise of Islamic movements calling for democracy and freedom, provide strong arguments in support of Huntington's thesis that democratization in the Muslim World will primarily benefit the Islamic groups. However, the second part of Huntington's thesis, namely that increased power for the Islamists will inevitably lead to a clash of civilizations, remains untested and requires more research.

While Islamic revivalists are opposed to the secularization of their societies and the adoption of individualistic Western value systems, they are not necessarily opposed to the West per se. Islamic revivalist leaders have applauded many aspects of Western society, especially its political system which many leading Islamists assert contains many similarities to the ideal Islamic political system. Islamic revivalists have acclaimed the Western democratic process for its ability to administer modern societies and have accepted it as a method of establishing *Sharia* law (law derived from Islamic sources), the ultimate goal of the modern Islamic movements.⁹

In much of the Muslim World it is the Islamic movements which are in fact the greatest proponents of the further democratization of society. However the exploitation of democratization as a potential point of shared affinity and cooperation between the West and the Islamists has not been attempted, largely because of those, like Huntington, who believe that the Islamist phenomenon is a zero-sum-game in which any increase in influence for the Islamists will necessarily lead to a decline in Western influence. Even more than Huntington and other political scientists, this belief has been spread by the mass media. The Western mass media has contributed to the distortion of the Islamic image by focusing on the most sensational aspects of political Islam while ignoring its basic characteristics. This is especially important because the media has been extremely influential in the making of Western, and especially American, policy toward the Muslim World.

The rise of political Islam is certainly creating a change in the status quo in several areas vital to Western interests, especially the control of oil and the south Mediterranean regions. The possible threats that such changes pose to the status quo has led many in the West to characterize the Islamic revival as a menace that should be reviled as much as Soviet Communism had been during the Cold War. NATO secretary-general Willy Claes told a security conference in Germany in February, 1995 that "Islamic fundamentalism is at least as dangerous as Communism was" and said that NATO's biggest problem now was working on a strategy to counter the growing Islamic "threat."¹⁰ Similar "declarations of war" against Islamic fundamentalism are heard in most Western capitals and in the capitals of many pro-Western countries around the world. However, research into the many facets of the Islamic movement underscores that the Western fear of Islamic revivalism is rooted more in misunderstandings than it is in reality.

One factor which intensifies the conflict is the failure of Western European and American public decision makers to understand the great diversity within Islam. Just as there are many Islamists who hold the West responsible for almost all the troubles of the Muslim world, there are many others who are on good terms with the West. James P. Piscatori states that " 'Islamic politics' generally . . . cannot be said to be

revolutionary or anti-Western, although there may be specific instances when these descriptions apply."¹¹

To help clarify the nature of the relationship between Islam and the West, this paper will discuss some factors that contribute to cooperation and others that contribute to confrontation between the two cultures. The paper will compare the Islamic political system to Western democracy. It will then discuss the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the role of the mass media on American-Islamic relations. It will end by discussing factors that may contribute to increased cooperation between Islam and the West.

Chapter Two

Islam and Democracy

One of the main challenges to the relationship between Islam and the West is how each views government. In the West, religious and political domains are separate, and coexist with their distinct sets of laws. This separation of state and church follows the Christian principle, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."¹² In Islamic teachings and historical practice, however, the religious and political domains have always been inseparable. Both church and state come under the domain of God. Also, while in the West the state and church have separate chains of authority, in the Islamic system both share the same chain. A superficial comparison of both systems might show incompatibility between the two, and probably even the impossibility of coexistence. But a deeper study of both political systems reveals large areas of agreement. Islamic political principles concerning the details of how Muslims can rule themselves are flexible as long as certain fundamentals remain fixed. Democracy also allows for a wide spectrum of possible political arrangements, some of which come very close to the Islamic political system. This chapter will discuss the Islamic political system and then identify areas of agreement and conflict with democracy.

Socioeconomic Justice in Islam

In Islam the borders between society and religion are obscured. The role of political institutions is to defend and promote Islam, not the state. Loyalty is to the *Umma* (Muslim nation), not the state, and to *Sharia*, not the ruler. Henry Seigman writes: "... at the heart of Islamic political doctrine lies neither the state, nor the individual, nor yet a social class, but the *Umma*, the Islamic community tied by bonds of faith alone."¹³ Thus, political and social laws do not exist separately from the prescriptions of *Sharia*.

In managing the affairs of the people, *Sharia* concentrates on socioeconomic equity and justice. Modern Islamic revivalist movements are in fact motivated to a large extent by the socioeconomic inequities which currently exist in many Muslim countries. The secular regimes that have ruled the Muslim world for most of this century have been blamed for policies which have resulted in the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small percentage of the population. The result has been social and political injustices throughout the Muslim World.

Sharia establishes concepts and rules that ideally would lead to socioeconomic justice. This is illustrated in the Quran and the traditions of Prophet Mohammad. The Quran states:

Summon them, O Mohammad. And act with justice, as you have been commanded; do not imitate their lusts, but rather say: I believe in whatever

was set down in the Scriptures, and I am commanded to be just among you..."(42:15)

Prophet Mohammad emphasized the importance of justice in Islam. He said: "The anger of God against the unjust man is all the greater when the victim of injustice has no defense save God."¹⁴ Mohammad also orders Muslims to take action against injustice: "If you see evil being done, change it with your hand. If you can't then with your tongue. If you can't then correct it in your heart, and that is the weakest of faith."¹⁵ The Quran specifies the punishment for injustice: "A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and wounds equal for an equal."(5:45)

Sharia laws demand that women be treated fairly and equally. Misconceptions about injustices against women in Islam are due more to the improper practices of some cultural traditions which are in fact opposed by the majority of the Islamic activists. The Quran states:

O you believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the dowry you have given them, except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; On the contrary, live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. (4:19)

Sharia ordained specific measures to promote economic equality and justice. Among these measures are (1) *Zakat*, by which Muslims pay 2.5 percent of their

savings to the poor, (2) *Ushr*, by which farmers are required to pay a tenth of the benefits acquired from their agriculture to the poor and (3) *Sadaqah* by which Muslims are encouraged to donate from their wealth to the poor in return for rewards in the afterlife. Islamic revivalist movements proclaim Socioeconomic equity and justice as a major goal in their struggle to apply *Sharia*.

Sharia

Sharia is the detailed code of conduct or the canons comprising the ways and modes of worship, the standards of morality and the laws that allow and proscribe certain actions, as well as the means for judging between right and wrong. Huntington and other critical Western social scientists rarely object to the ritual parts of Islam, but rather consider the Islamic *Sharia* to be incompatible with Western secular philosophy. *Sharia* has not been fully practiced on a state level for over three hundred years. The Ottoman Empire, which was destroyed in 1918, was the last Islamic state that partially applied *Sharia* in government.

The process of extracting detailed laws from the fundamental laws of *Sharia* is called *Ijtihad*. Underscoring the flexibility that *Sharia* allows for the establishment of an Islamic political system, El-Awa has pointed out that: "Exercising political *Ijtihad* for the purpose of organizing and administering the state has never stopped throughout the history of Islam."¹⁶ Modern Islamic movements have been critical of

Islamic jurists for not making more use of *Ijtihad* to address the concerns of modern society in the Muslim World. Rachid Ghanooshi, the exiled leader of the Tunisian Islamic movement, *Annahda*, states that "the fact is that whenever Islamic *Sharia* was excluded from the government, creative efforts to develop Islamic jurisprudence were frozen and jurists ceased to practice their juristical explanations."¹⁷ The absence of *Sharia* from government for the past three centuries has led to the de facto halt in the practice of *Ijtihad*. Consequently, the detailed laws derived from *Sharia*, known in Islamic jurisprudence as *Furu*, that were continuously developed in past centuries to meet the needs of a changing society, do not address the needs of modern society.

During Islam's fourteen-hundred-years history, there has been a consensus among Muslim scholars that Islam is a total way of life. The existence of a political system that emanates from the teachings of Islam is a part of that consensus.¹⁸ Historically, Muslims established the first Islamic state in *Madinah*, a city now in Saudi Arabia, immediately after the migration of Prophet Muhammad to that city in 625 AD.

That early Islamic state formed a community whose members shared common values, social obligations and duties. That community performed the basic functions of a state, such as the formation of a judicial system, social security, an educational system, as well as defense and foreign relations.¹⁹

Islamic revivalists consider establishing an Islamic state a religious duty since only a state can undertake the Quranic command to "judge between them by what God has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the truth that has come to you." (5:48). The first incident in Muslim history that illustrated that Muslims would continue to view politics as a part of their faith after the death of the Prophet happened during the rule of *Abu Bakr*, the first Caliph (leader of the Muslim community) after Prophet Muhammad. Less than one year after the Prophet's death, a large number of Muslims refused to pay *Zakat*, poor alms, to the new ruler *Abu Bakr*. Since, according to *Sharia*, the collection of *Zakat* is a function of the government, *Abu Bakr* declared war on those who refused to pay it. He declared: "I will fight those who differentiate between prayers and *Zakat*." Thus, he equated prayers, which is a worship ritual, with the collection of *Zakat*, which is a political function.

General Properties of Sharia

Sharia does not outline a specific method which people should follow in order to achieve the political objectives stated in the Quran and *Sunnah* (or traditions of the Prophet, which, along with the Quran, forms the basic texts used to derive Islamic laws and beliefs). However, the general principles and guidelines of governance were specified, and could be compared with the principles and guidelines of other forms of government.

In neither the Quran nor the *Sunnah* does Islam prescribe a specific system of government. Nevertheless, it clearly defines the values and guidelines the community should adhere to and rulers should abide by. In addition to other nomenclature, these values may be referred to as "general rules" or "comprehensive issues." In the political field this is compatible with the nature of Islamic legislation which are characterized by complete flexibility. This in itself is an important prerequisite of applicability through extrapolation and deduction.²⁰

The Islamic political system is similar to other political systems in the sense that it is based on an ideology or a belief system. The difference is that most other systems are based on secular beliefs while the Islamic system is based on religious beliefs. The Islamic system originates with the belief that God has complete authority to make law. All individual parts of that system are intended to complement each other in order to create a just and free society.

There are three properties which Islamic revivalists assert helped in maintaining *Sharia* as a viable political system throughout history up to the present time. First, comprehensiveness; *Sharia* addresses all individual and community matters: religious, legal, political and social. Second, loftiness; *Sharia* established laws that challenge the individual and the community to rise to higher moral values while at the same time taking into account the human tendency to make mistakes. Thus, while *Sharia* seeks a utopian society, it establishes the fact that utopia can never be achieved and its laws are made to address real human problems. This is illustrated by the many statements in the Quran and the *Sunnah* telling people that they cannot avoid committing mistakes,

but that the best among them are those who correct their mistakes: "God does not forgive that others be associated with Him (in worship) but He forgives all other sins." (4:48). Third, perpetuity; *Sharia* is consistent and stable in its general principles and guidelines which are independent of time and place, yet, at the same time, adaptive to new situations through its flexibility at the level of detail.²¹

Sharia stresses that people should not fear anything but God. This basic principle has a strong political component because of the critical role it plays in enabling people to criticize their political leaders and practice their rights without fearing retaliation from the state. El-Awa pointed out that voicing one's opinion is not just permissible in Islam, but it is a duty.²²

Freedom is an indispensable Islamic value, guaranteed and considered to be instinctive. Political freedom, in Islam, is a branch of a general fundamental right: the freedom to choose. The Prophet said: "let not any one of you be a characterless person, saying: I do what the people do - if they do good I do good, and if they do bad I do bad."²³

Legislation in Sharia

There are two main sources of *Sharia*, the Quran and the *Hadith* (also known as *Sunnah*). The Quran is the book that was revealed from God to Prophet Muhammad. *Hadith* is a collection of the instructions issued by the Prophet or the memoirs of his conduct and behavior, as preserved by the Prophet's disciples. Muslim scholars of jurisprudence draw on these two sources for making laws. If a direct ruling cannot be found in the text of the Quran or *Hadith*, then deductive methods are used to extract that ruling. These methods include the instruments of *Qiyas*, deduction

by analogy and *Istihsan*, selecting the more appropriate rule among several given rulings. *Sharia* schools teach a discipline called *Usul Al-Fiqh*, by which students learn the methodologies of extracting laws from the Quran and *Hadith*.

Legislation in *Sharia* differs from legislation in a secular democracy in major ways. One of the main differences is that the scope of the extracted detailed laws, *Furu*, cannot exceed the fundamentals of *Sharia*, *Usul*, regardless of public desire. For example, Islamic *Usul* prohibits the consumption of alcohol, so Islamic jurists would have to abide by that general law even if the majority voted for legalizing alcohol.

Legislation in an Islamic system is the preserve of a legislation council. Abdul-Wahab Khallaf, a modern Islamic political scientist, states: "In constitutional governments, the legislative authority is delegated to members of parliaments who make rules . . . while in an Islamic state the legislative authority is delegated to scholars who interpret the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet and extract rules from them."²⁴ In cases in which scholars differ on a matter of legislation, the Caliph has the right to select which rule to apply. Hassan Albanna stated: "In matters where the text, of Quran and *Hadith*, is not explicit, and in matters where opinions of scholars differ, the opinion of the Imam, ruler, or his deputy then becomes the rule."²⁵

Judicial System in Sharia

Islam establishes a legal system that regulates the relationship among people in their daily affairs. The judicial branch, in an Islamic state, is constitutionally independent of the executive branch and thus allows judges to carry out their tasks without government intervention.

According to *Sharia*, non-Muslims in the Islamic state should preside as judges in their own communities. Female judges are also allowed and were common during the height of Islamic civilization. *Sharia* calls for Members of the executive branch, including the ruler, to be subject to the same laws and legal procedures in front of the court as any other citizen. The executive has the authority of monitoring the rulings of the judges to ensure that they remain within the scope of *Sharia*. Rulings are supposed to be carried out by independent judges who are scholars appointed by the executive.²⁶

Islamic laws are usually presented in the West as brutal and uncivilized, mainly due to misconceptions about *Sharia*. For example, in the case of penalty for adultery, it is true that *Sharia* requires the stoning to death of both the man and woman convicted of adultery. However, such a sentence cannot be carried out unless four adult and sane witnesses testify that they all without a doubt witnessed the explicit act of the man entering the woman. The difficulty of finding four such witnesses is clear.

Similar strict conditions are placed on other matters requiring punishments, like murder and theft.

Political Leadership according to Sharia

The Islamic political system is not a theocracy. It is based on the popular election of representatives to *Majlis Ashura*, or consultative council, a forum that is equivalent in form to today's parliaments. There are different methods by which local community leaders are elected to public office. The head of government represents the people who elected him and does not represent God on Earth. The people always maintain their right to remove the ruler if he becomes unfit to continue in his position or if he defaults on any of the conditions agreed upon by the people. Removing the ruler should ideally be achieved through peaceful means; however, if the ruler refuses to step down, force and revolution is justified and, in fact, it occurred several times throughout Islamic history.²⁷ In 1979, the Iranian revolution removed the Shah. In Syria, a popular revolution in 1982 was launched to remove Hafez Al-Asad. The attempt however failed and ended in a civil war in which more than twenty thousand people were killed.

Similarities between the Islamic Political System and Democracy

There are several areas of compatibility between the Islamic political system and democracy. First, Islam shares with democracy the principle of electing political

leaders. The Islamic *Umma* is invested with the right to select the Imam (ruler or president). The Islamic political system does not allow leaders to have a monopoly on power. Contemporary Muslim scholars and leaders of Islamic movements have called for the dismantling of one man rule regimes and for free elections of political leaders. *Sharia* did not specify how leaders be elected, but it maintained that rulers must receive the support of the people and must be accountable to the people.

Choosing the ruler was the cornerstone in the organization of the Islamic state when it was first established. Nevertheless, Islam at that time had only prescribed *Shura* (consultation) as a method for making the choice. What matters is that the people should be able to exercise their free will in appointing the ruler. This is exactly how the first four Caliphs were chosen. The actual procedure is left for the community to determine, and may therefore differ from time to time and from one place to another.²⁸

The method by which early Muslims chose their leaders led to the division of the community into two major sects that continue to exist until today. The two main groups are the *Sunnis*, those who believed that any Muslim could be eligible for the leadership of the community, and the *Shi'ah*, who believe that the leadership position should remain within the immediate family of the Prophet and their descendants. The *Sunni* group now comprises 85 percent of the world's Muslims while *Shi'ahs* comprise the remaining 15 percent. The two sects initially differed on who should be the Caliph after the death of Prophet Mohammed. Although *Ali*, the nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet, did become the fourth Caliph, he was preceded by *Abu Bakr*, *Omar* and *Othman*. While *Sunnis* revere the first four Caliphs, *Shi'ah* reject Ali's predecessors as

well as his successors as illegitimate leaders. This difference has been a major obstacle to reconciliation between the two sects.

People have the right and the duty to depose a Caliph if he ceased to rule by *Sharia*, or if he becomes incapable of carrying out his functions. According to *Sharia*, the ruler's functions include: protecting the Islamic faith and way of life, ensuring the security of the state, ruling according to the *Sharia*, ensuring the smooth running of daily affairs of the people, protecting citizen's individual rights, providing systems for agriculture, industry, scientific research and the proper management of natural resources.²⁹

Islam shares with democracy the principle of granting citizens certain freedoms. *Sharia* grants individuals "freedom of speech, freedom of protest, freedom of practice and economic freedom."³⁰ In *Sharia*, people's participation in the decision-making process is essential. *Shura*, or consultation of people, is binding upon the ruler who has to follow the will of the majority. There is a fundamental difference, however, between Islamic *Shura* and legislation in a secular Democracy. *Shura* is a political form of expression, by which people voice their opinions on public matters, and their opinions are considered as long as they remain within the legal boundaries of the *Sharia*. On the other hand, secular democratic systems allow people to change laws and constitutions by popular vote through certain procedures.

A basic difference between Islam and secularism is how each views man's relationship to God. While secularism considers man to be independent from God in managing his political life, it is a central tenet of the Islamic ideology that man is to be considered a deputy of God on earth. Western democracy has an outer form and an inner content. The form is characterized by the ultimate authority of the people over their own affairs. People practice that authority through constitutional institutions which may differ from one democratic system to another. All democratic systems, regardless of how their institutions are constructed, provide for equality, elections in a multiparty context, separation of the different branches of power, freedoms of expression and assembly, majority rule and the right of minorities to form an opposition to the majority. Democracies also provide different forms of social security and welfare to their citizens.

Islam agrees with most of the mechanics of the democratic political process while not fully agreeing with its philosophical aspects. Islam does not agree with the democratic principle that people are the ultimate legislators. That right is reserved only to God. People are, however, allowed to democratically arrive at the proper interpretation and implementation of God's law in their life. Legislators usually have diverse interpretations of God's law. Such diversity has in fact been instrumental in making *Sharia* adaptive to people's circumstances.

Islam shares with democracy the principle of checks and balances. The ideal Islamic government consists of a mixed presidential and parliamentary system. It has four organs: the presidency, the council of *ahl al hal wal aqd* (literally the council of tying and untying, i.e., a council consisting of people with the authority to oversee the running of the daily affairs of the state, or a parliament), the *Shura* council, and the judiciary. The first three institutions are elected bodies and hence are directly responsible to the people. Members of the judicial authority are appointed by the ruler but they maintain the power to call upon the ruler to face charges.³¹

“The president's powers are restricted by the fact that he is obliged to consult with the council of *Shura* and abide by its decisions.”³² A bill introduced by the ruler must be ratified by the council of *Shura* and endorsed by the council of *ahl al hal wal aqd*. Thus both houses of the legislative power act as checks and balances to the executive authority. The *president* is also accountable to the people in general through the election and deposition process.

Islam shares with democracy to some extent the principle of multi-party system. The multi-party system is a new political practice which did not exist at the time of the early Muslim scholars. There is thus no discussion of it in early Muslim history. Contemporary Muslim scholars and political thinkers have four different opinions

on the multi-party system. First, there are those who believe that there should not be any political party in an Islamic state. This opinion is based on the belief that Islam is a comprehensive ideology which includes all Muslims and that there is no need for Islamic parties which would divide the society between party members, and non-party members while non-Islamic parties could not be tolerated because of their worldly ideologies. Second, there are those who believe that there should only be one ruling Islamic party. Their argument is that there should not be any parties based on non-Islamic ways of thinking. Third, there are those who believe that there could be many parties under the condition that all of them work according to *Sharia*. Fourth, there are those who believe that there could be many diverse parties. The fourth point of view is gaining more popularity among contemporary Islamic scholars and leaders of Islamic movements.³³ This is attributed to the fact that Islamic leaders cannot ignore the presence of several political parties within each Muslim country that hold views that are inconsistent with *Sharia*, but who are willing to participate with the Islamic groups in a democratic system.

Islam shares with democracy the principle of having interest groups or pressure groups. The role of such groups was not discussed in early Muslim thought, but contemporary Islamist political thinkers note that there were examples of such practices at the time of the Prophet. For example, a woman once came to the Prophet and asked him to allocate a certain time for teaching the women. In another incident,

the second Caliph, *Omar Bin Alkhatab*, once tried to place limits on the dowry in marriage, but a woman protested. The Caliph acknowledged the woman's point of view and retracted his decision. These two examples show that certain segments of society, in these cases women, can advocate certain rights within the system. Al-Akim uses such examples to argue that in a modern Islamic state, contemporary groups, like trade unions, laborers, teachers and others can organize their own interest groups.³⁴

Islam shares with democracy the principle of guaranteeing minority rights. Muslim scholars see Muslims and non-Muslims as equal citizens in the society. Islam considers all humans to be equal because of their common origin which is traced to Adam. Under Islamic law, non-Muslims enjoy civil and religious rights.³⁵ *Omar Bin Alkhatab*, the second Caliph, was the first to incorporate non-Muslims in the Islamic welfare system. Before he died, he said: "I trust whoever follows me with the good care of the non-Muslims, he must fulfill their commitments, defend them and not overburden them." *Ali Bin Abi Taleb*, the fourth Caliph, enacted a law granting equal rights to Muslims and non-Muslims in blood and money.

Modern Islamic Movements and Democracy

Esposito has shown that the evidence suggests that most modern Islamic movements are trying to reconcile Islamic law with common law institutions of government inherited from the colonial period.³⁶ A prime example of respect for the democratic process is presented by the Islamic Movement in Jordan. Since 1989, the Muslim Brotherhood organization in Jordan has participated in the parliamentary elections. Today, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), a political party representing the interests of the Muslim Brotherhood, represents the largest single political party in the 80-member Jordanian parliament with 21 members. Dr. Ishak Al-Farhan, chairman of

the IAF, stated that the goal of their party is "to strengthen national unity, *Shura* and democracy, and to defend freedom and the respect of law."³⁷ In Yemen, the Islamic movement has participated in the political process for the past ten years. It formed a party called the Yemeni Coalition for Reform which is currently the second largest party in the parliament. In Kuwait, the Islamic movement began participating in the *Majlis Al-Umma*, Kuwait's parliament, before the Gulf war. After the war, three separate Islamic parties all participated in the parliamentary elections winning a substantial percentage of the seats. Similarly, the *Sunni* and *Shi'ah* Islamic movements in Lebanon participated in the parliamentary elections after the end of the Lebanese civil war, and won 25 out of a possible 100 seats.

Other attempts by Islamic movements to participate in the political process failed, usually due to uncompromising forms of authoritarian rule. In Syria, the Islamic movement had participated in the parliamentary elections before the military coup of 1963 that brought Hafez Al-Asad to power. Since then, all political freedoms have been canceled and an absolute dictatorship has been established.

In Algeria the Islamic political movement participated and won the municipal elections in June, 1990, and the parliamentary elections in December, 1991. The military however staged a coup a month after the parliamentary elections and declared their results void. All democratic practices were subsequently suspended and

emergency law was enforced. The French government openly supported the military regime while the rest of the Western democratic countries kept silent about the undermining of democracy in Algeria. The result was the radicalization of members of the Islamic movement who began a military struggle to regain their political rights. After three and a half years of fighting, the Algerian civil war has already claimed over 40,000 lives. Perceived Western support for the termination of democracy in Algeria as well as elsewhere in the Muslim World has become one of the most contentious issues in the relations between the West and Islam. An older, and even deeper, source of tension is the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Chapter Three

Influence of the Arab-Israeli Conflict on American-Islamic Relations

Despite the many factors impacting American-Islamic relations, no other factor had as much impact on those relations as the Arab-Israeli conflict. The occupation of Palestine in 1948, and the inability of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) along with the other Arab governments to take it back has alienated most Arab populations from the secular regimes and caused them to turn to Islam as an alternative. Esposito notes that the rapid growth of the current Islamic movement can find its origins in the 1967 war.³⁸ Because of its significance in the Islamic faith and Islamic history, Palestine constitutes one of the central issues for the majority of Islamic movements throughout the world today. The strong support Islamic movements maintain for the fight to take back all of Palestine has put them in direct confrontation with governments that are seeking a diplomatic compromise to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict. These governments, which included the United States, European countries, Israel and most Arab governments, escalated the political, security and media campaigns against what they called “Islamic fundamentalist” groups that are standing in the way of the diplomatic solution. Since the beginning of the peace process in September 1990, daily pronouncements by politicians, journalists and academicians against Islamic groups opposed to that process played a significant role in tarnishing the image of the Islamists in the US and throughout the world. The Arab-

Israeli conflict was not the only cause of negative publicity against Islamic revivalists, centuries of wars between Muslims and the Crusaders, the general lack of knowledge about Islam, and conflict over US foreign policy in other parts of the Muslim World, such as Kashmir, Bosnia and Iraq, were also factors that created an atmosphere of antagonism between most Muslim populations and the West. However the issue of Palestine is certainly the most significant issue dividing the Islamists and the West.

The issue of Palestine and its relations to Western-Islamic relations has become pertinent in the 1990s when a number of Arab governments became increasingly amenable to negotiating and signing peace treaties with Israel while the Islamists continued to reject Israel's very existence. The Islamists have become the major challenge to both Israel and the moderate Arab states which are willing to make peace. Islamic revivalists in Palestine, led by the Islamic Resistance Movement (known by its Arabic acronym HAMAS), have become increasingly popular as they maintain their calls for "ethnic identity, attachment to the land, and cultural purity as Palestinians."³⁹ In its Communiqué Number 30, HAMAS declared Palestine an Islamic "trust" that should be governed by Muslims until the Day of Judgment.⁴⁰ Islamic revivalists throughout the Muslim world saw the "peace process" as an unfair solution to the issue of Palestine, and supported HAMAS in its fight against that process. Over 600 Muslim scholars, leaders and Islamic organizations from various different countries published a statement supporting HAMAS and denouncing the "peace process."⁴¹

In face of this emerging threat to the Middle Eastern peace process, the media increasingly portrayed Islamic revivalism in negative terms. Islamic movements were often portrayed as a threat not only to Israel's security but to Western security in general. Such portrayals were actively encouraged and promoted by Israel.

Influence of the Arab-Israeli Conflict on the Image of Islam in America

Statements by Israeli officials alleging terrorist activities by Muslim groups in the US became very frequent and received extensive coverage in major media outlets. The Los Angeles Times published an article in which Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin was quoted warning of a Muslim militant threat to Jews and the West: "our struggle against murderous Islamic terror is also meant to awaken the world, which is lying in slumber. . . . This is a real and serious danger that threatens world peace in future years and . . . today we stand on the line of fire against the danger of fundamentalist Islam."⁴² In an address to the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, one of the strongest political lobbying groups in the US, Rabin stated:

Thank you very much for your decision to go [to Capitol Hill] and to try to convince the senators and congressmen of the need of Israel in this period . . . to ensure that the United States will support these efforts by Israel, as the president said, by minimizing our risks, by military aid, economic aid, understanding of the threat of the Islamic extremist terror groups not only to Israel . . . it's a threat to all moderate regimes. . . . The United States has to continue its support and to prove to the region, to the peoples, to the countries, that it is ready to assist those who seek peace and ready to bring economic and social reform and to try to contain . . . the dangerous trend of the Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organizations and the country that backs them.⁴³

Rabin's strategy has not been lost on observers of the region. Editors at the Middle East Report noted: "For Rabin and his cohorts, HAMAS' armed militancy has great utility. It keeps the PLO off balance, and all the 'terrorist' horrors and atrocities which used to be attributed to the PLO or 'the Palestinians' can now be attached with impunity to HAMAS and 'Islamic fundamentalists'." ⁴⁴ Chaim Hertzog, Israel's former president, described "Islamism" as a "disease [that] is spreading rapidly and constitutes a danger not only to the Jewish people, but to humanity in general." ⁴⁵ These remarks by Rabin and Hertzog are consistent with an Israeli policy of presenting itself as a leader in the fight against the Islamic monolith that threatens global security.

In the growing atmosphere of fear from an Islamic threat to American interests, some American Congressmen moved to take legislative action against Islamic groups and their supporters in the US. Representatives Peter Deutch and James Saxton spearheaded a proposal that would have incriminated anyone raising funds for Islamic causes in the occupied territories (West Bank and Gaza). The bill sought a ban on alleged HAMAS members, barring them from entering the United States. In a letter seeking support, the Congressmen wrote: "The suspects apprehended in the World Trade Center bombing have close ties to militant, radical Islamic fundamentalist groups. One of these violent groups, the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) actually operates here in the US." ⁴⁶ The only official allegation

that HAMAS was linked to the WTC bombing came from Israeli intelligence officials who told the London Evening Standard that: "The plans for the bombing were set at a secret four-day 'terror summit' in Iran in February, where supporters of . . . HAMAS approved a strategy of bombing large buildings."⁴⁷ Considering that the United States' own Federal Bureau of Investigation never charged or accused HAMAS of any involvement in the WTC bombing, the alacrity displayed by the Congressmen in trying to discredit and outlaw HAMAS indicates the level of influence which the Israeli claims had on their thinking and policy-making.

The willingness of some US officials to accept unverified assertions stemmed from the fact that US policy toward the Middle East is largely the product of a one-sided debate. The strength of the pro-Israel interest groups in influencing US policy toward the Middle East is well documented. Richard Curtiss, who worked in the US foreign service for 30 years, has found that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) manages over 120 pro-Israel Political Action Committees (PACs). By creating numerous like-minded PACs the pro-Israel lobbyists have been able to skirt laws limiting PAC contributions to individual candidates and have thus been able to spend three to four times more in campaign contributions than any other American interest group.⁴⁸ Former Congressman Paul Findley has explained how the large amounts of money pro-Israel groups spend on campaigns has led many Congressmen to fear the ability of the pro-Israel lobby to have them defeated in

elections. Findley argues that the pro-Israel groups are thus able to suppress free debate on the Middle East and therefore shape American foreign policy toward the Middle East.⁴⁹ An example of how the Israel lobby has been able to affect US policy is the decision by the State Department to sever all US ties to HAMAS and list the movement in the State Department's annual report on terrorism.⁵⁰ Members of the Islamic group were dismayed by the decision.

The Jerusalem Institute for Western Defense, an Israeli organization, published an article written by Sir Alfred Sherman with the threatening title "Islam's drive into Europe." Sherman's article, which was widely disseminated in the US and Western Europe, starts with an ominous warning that "there is a Moslem threat to Christian Europe. It is developing slowly and could be checked, but the policies of the Western powers have done almost everything possible to help it grow."⁵¹ Sherman painted Muslims living in the West as militants and blamed "the totally irresponsible immigration policies in Western and Central Europe, which have rapidly created an increasingly militant minority of 15 million Muslims there."⁵²

Even more than Sherman's article itself, Muslims living in the West are hurt that such racist articles can be spread against their community without any considerations from political and media circles. The fact that Muslims living in the West can serve as a potential bridge of understanding between the West and Islam is

thus lost as media attacks alienate the Muslim populations in the West. As long as the anti-Islamic propaganda continues, the future of American-Islamic relations will remain tenuous.

Chapter Four

Covering Islam in America

The future of American-Islamic relations is greatly influenced by how each of them views the other. The media has played and continue to play a critical role in shaping the image of Islamic revivalists for the American public. The images portrayed are however usually superficial, stereotypical and hostile. Islamic "revivalism" has become synonymous with "fundamentalism," "fanaticism," "extremism" and "terrorism." The American media is participating in this campaign for a number of reasons. Besides the Israeli connection, some of the other important factors that have led to a hostile American attitude toward Islam include the post cold-war geostrategic map, the historic antagonism between Islam and the West, ignorance about other cultures, American fears that oil might become a hostage and the misrepresentation of Islam by orientalists. This chapter provides examples of how Muslims are being portrayed in American media and academic circles as foreign and hostile to American and Western societies.

The Spring, 1993 issue of the quarterly magazine Foreign Affairs contained an article by Judith Miller entitled "The Challenge of Radical Islam."⁵³ Miller wrote that:

Radical political Islam placed atop the societies of the Middle East created a combustible mixture. And those who believe in universal human rights (and women's rights in particular), democratic government, political tolerance and pluralism and in peace between the Arabs and Israelis cannot be complacent

about the growing strength of militant Islamic movements in most Middle Eastern countries, or about the numerous and increasing ties among such movements and between Iran and Sudan.⁵⁴

In advocating a policy approach toward the Islamists, Miller wrote that Western governments “should be concerned about these movements and, more important, should oppose them.”⁵⁵

In the succeeding edition of the same Foreign Affairs, which is considered by many scholars to be the most influential journal on the making of American foreign policy, Huntington states that the opening up of democratic institutions in the Islamic world is strengthening Islamic movements, which he states are inherently “anti-Western.”⁵⁶ Like Miller, Huntington calls upon policy-makers to oppose the Islamists and goes further to advocate strengthening Western military superiority in the Muslim world and exploiting differences and conflicts among Muslim countries and other states which may support them, especially China.⁵⁷

Miller uses the examples of Algeria and Sudan to support her arguments that Islamists will not be sincere in fulfilling the promises they make concerning democracy and justice. Both of these experiences are quite new to Muslims, and in both cases Islamic leaders were not given the chance to act upon their promises. The Algerian example is not relevant because it was the military regime that undermined the democratic experiment. The leaders and sympathizers of the Islamic parties who had

won the elections were then arrested before they had even taken up their positions in the new parliament. Instead of demanding that the results of the democratic elections in Algeria be respected, Western governments ignored the refusal of the military regime to accept the elections. In line with Miller's argument, they accused the Islamist groups of exploiting democracy to seize power and then destroy the democratic process. The allegation was frequently repeated that the Islamists are only interested in "one man, one vote, one time." Yet this allegation was apparently leveled against the Algerian Islamists for the sole reason that they had participated in the elections and won an astounding victory, not because of anything they did to prove they were not interested in ruling within a democratic framework.

Miller carried her attack further against "tame" Islamic movements. She accused the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt of being silent partners in the "Islamic threat" by stating that "even the leaders of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which is non-violent and law-abiding compared to its Islamic counterparts (whose attacks on tourists have crippled Egypt's single largest source of foreign currency), is unwilling to criticize many Islamic excesses or challenge fundamentalist orthodoxy. In an interview last year, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood spokesman said that if Egypt were to become an Islamic state, alcohol would have to be banned and perhaps the Camp David peace accords with Israel reconsidered."⁵⁸

While making her arguments, Miller frequently quotes Martin Kramer, Associate Director of the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, and Bernard Lewis, a Professor at Princeton University. Both have played a significant role in overstating the hostility and incompatibility of Islam to Western values.

Miller concludes that there could never be a "moderate" Islamic political system. She quotes Martin Kramer "who argues that militant Islamic groups, by nature, cannot be democratic, pluralistic, egalitarian or pro-Western. . . . Kramer notes that Islamic law is not legislated but divinely revealed. It is, therefore, perfect law, which as such is beyond reform, abrogation or alteration."⁵⁹ In other words, according to Kramer and Miller, it is within the nature of Islam to be anti-Western and anti-democratic. While this view is prominent in popular media portrayals of Islam and has in large part been adopted by policy-makers, it is not the prominent view among scholars, except those using the political culture approach, or in the scholarly literature, with the notable exception of Foreign Affairs.

Many scholars believe that this approach to Islam is unfair because it creates a bias against objective evaluation of Islamic views. Similar debates against the compatibility of Judaism or Christianity to democracy are now being avoided even though they were common in past centuries as outlined by Fuller.⁶⁰ Many scholars contend that even if Islam appears to be anti-democratic as Huntington, Miller,

Kramer and Lewis assert, many other cultures that were similarly regarded have since undergone successful transformations to democracy. "Democracy has been spreading and still is in the Confucian world. One need think of Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, which is one of the bulwark countries of the democratic world. And yet the skepticism akin to that heard today about the prospects for democracy in the Islamic world was expressed in very similar terms about the prospects for democracy in Japan before it became democratic."⁶¹ Many scholars have further affirmed that in fact the strength of the Islamic Movements are due to the opposition of the people in many Muslim countries to the political and economic status quo, and the attendant desire for better and more accountable government.⁶² If that is the case then it is unlikely the Islamists would oppose the very system they are agitating for.

The second source from which Miller draws her information is Bernard Lewis, a professor at Princeton University who has written extensively on Middle Eastern history. Miller writes that in an article in the Atlantic Monthly, Lewis "argues that the nature and history of Islam and the relationship between Islam and temporal power do not make liberal democracy and Islam natural bedfellows." Miller writes that "Islam has been characterized throughout history by the absence of any legal recognition of corporate persons or the legal person, which is at the heart of the representative institutions embodied in Roman law. The Islamic state was in principle a theocracy, Lewis argues, not in the Western sense of a state ruled by the church and the clergy,

since neither existed in the Islamic world, but in the more literal sense of a polity ruled by God."⁶³

Lewis goes on to accuse Islam of being inherently autocratic. According to Miller, "Lewis concludes that against such a backdrop, autocracy has been the norm, and the notions of plurality, self-criticism and disagreement--all essential features of liberal democracy--face an uphill, though not impossible, battle in winning widespread cultural acceptance."⁶⁴

Lewis ignored the important fact that Islam only established general rules for how Muslims should govern themselves while leaving the details of the political system to the Muslims of every age. The two most important general rules which are required of any Islamic polity are the right of the people to elect their leader, and the duty of the ruler to consult his people in making decisions. It is ironic that the Islamic political system, which is currently non-existent in the Muslim World, is accused by Western scholars of being autocratic at a time when the current secular autocratic regimes ruling the various states of the Muslim world are supported and protected by Western governments. It is the existing secular governments of the Muslim world which abolished individual rights and freedoms and prevented self-criticism and disagreement, characteristics which were widespread in the region when true Islamic

states ruling by *Sharia* were present and characteristics which the contemporary Islamist movements are striving to bring back to their countries.

It is clear that both Miller and Lewis are more interested in keeping authoritarian pre-Western governments in power than allowing for the introduction of democracy in the Muslim world. Their predictions that Islamic movements will establish new dictatorships cannot be supported by historical analysis nor by recent examples. It is important to note that for all of Iran's shortcomings, close observers of the country credit it as being one of the few pseudo-democratic countries of the Muslim world.⁶⁵

While certain academicians and researchers attack Islam as being anti-democratic, Muslims suffer even more from religious stereotyping in the media. Terminology such as "Muslim terrorists" and "Muslim threats" to Western society are widely repeated in the media whereas, for example anti-abortion activists who kill physicians are rarely portrayed as "Christian terrorists" and the threat of "radical Christian fundamentalism" threatening the society is rarely invoked.

John Zogby, president of John Zogby International, Inc., says: "there are overt pieces designed to stir hatred. Several themes emerge from the various articles and commentaries."⁶⁶ Zogby pointed out that first of all, there is "a rush to judgment:

those who (were) accused of the World Trade Center bombing were convicted in the press even before their trial (had begun).⁶⁷ A second point he brought up was the existence of "a dangerous and dehumanizing tendency to exaggerate when describing (Islamic fundamentalism)." William F. Buckley verified this point when he suggested in a July 8, 1993 column that there was an "incompatibility of our own culture and that of the fundamentalist Mohamedden."⁶⁸ In another example, Steve Emerson, writing in the New York Post about the alleged plot to blow up two tunnels in New York City, suggests that the Arab Muslims who were arrested betray a "ruthless fanaticism, the likes of which the West has never seen."⁶⁹ Zogby remarked that Emerson's suggestion that a few Muslims suspected of planning terrorist acts represented "the apex of fanaticism in history" was a significant slight to Hitler and Stalin, who are both much more deserving of the title.⁷⁰

The third observed theme brought up by Zogby is what he termed the "call for a Western 'jihad' against Islamic fundamentalism." Zogby writes that "according to Eric Breindel, writing in the New York Post, 'All Islamic fundamentalists are potential terrorists.'"⁷¹

In a fourth point, Zogby writes that there is "a crusade that feeds an anti-immigrant hysteria."⁷² He argues that "what makes this anti-immigration crusade especially dangerous is that it appears to be scoring points with large segments of the

American public. A CNN/ USA TODAY/ GALLUP POLL conducted July 9-11 of this year (1993) underscores this point. While 52% feel that the number of immigrants entering the US from European countries is 'about right' and 33% feel there are 'too many,' only 24% say that immigration from Arab countries is 'about right,' while 64% say there are 'too many'--the lowest of any group." Zogby's own poll showed that 42% of Americans call for restrictions on Muslim immigration.⁷³

The most offensive image of Islam in the media, according to Zogby, was by "The New Yorker Magazine when its July 26(1993) cover showed a boy dressed as an Arab threatening a sandcastle city on the beach--an obvious reference to Islamic violence and terrorism."⁷⁴

A poll conducted by Zogby showed Islam scoring several negatives with Americans. Only 23% of Americans had a favorable opinion of Islam contrasted to 67% favorable rating for Roman Catholicism, 65% for Presbyterianism, 52% for Judaism, 39% for "Christian Fundamentalism," and 35% for Mormonism. His poll also showed that 43% of Americans agreed with the statement that "Muslims tend to be religious fanatics," while only 24% disagreed, and 33% were not sure. Zogby also pointed out that "according to a poll by the Los Angeles Times, 41% felt that Islam is not compatible with Western style democracy, while only 10% felt that it was."⁷⁵

Ahmad AbulJobain, a researcher with the United Association for Studies and Research (UASR), an institution which has done extensive work on the relations between Islam and the West, writes about the sheer magnitude of anti-Islamic material in the press and the effect that material has had on relations between Islam and the West: "realistically, I believe that the quest for a fundamentalist chimera is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Over the past couple of years, the drive to paint a demonic portrait of Islam has become more intense by the day. The volume of material that has been said against Islam--politically and otherwise--has become so frequent that we (at UASR) are no longer able to keep track of it. Even partisan politics, sometimes in the guise of scholarly work, plays a prominent role."¹⁷⁶

According to AbulJobain, there are some general trends among journalists and scholars whenever they write or report about Islam. "First, the general news story: this sometimes seemingly straightforward type of journalism is often manipulated when it comes to Islam. An example is the headline that appeared in the Washington Times that blared out: 'Muslim arrested in World Trade Center bombing.'¹⁷⁷

AbulJobain continues, "second, the news analysis: Journalists often combine analytic observation with their reporting. This method provides an easy way to shroud sarcasm or prejudice with news. For example, Nora Boustani wrote for the Washington Post on Jordan's (Muslim) Brotherhood. She used pejorative and

patronizing language: 'As Islamic fundamentalism becomes a synonym for bloodshed and terror elsewhere in the world, Jordan finds itself generally avoiding the pitfalls of confrontation with religious activists. . . . In Jordan . . . the decision to bring the fundamentalists into the political system . . . has bred a new generation of tamer, urbane Islamists.' Here, you see how Boustani juxtaposes an image of rampant death-mongering by Islamists in general, against that of a broken breed of Islamists who were successfully 'tamed' by the system."⁷⁸

AbulJobain noted that the "commentary" sections in newspapers offer a welcome mat to those who describe Islam negatively. AbulJobain says: "the list of syndicated columnists, politicians, and so called experts is endless in this category."⁷⁹ He gives as examples, A.M. Rosenthal of the New York Times and Steve Emerson of the Wall Street Journal.

The media often paints Muslims as intolerant radicals who are waging a war on so-called moderate Arab regimes. The Times magazine published an article entitled "The Dark Side of Islam: With Terror, Muslim Radicals Declare War on Arab States That Stray From the Religious Path."⁸⁰ The article describes Islamic groups as "the dark side of Islam, which shows its face in violence and terrorism intended to overthrow modernizing, more secular regimes and harm the Western nations that support

them."⁸¹ Such misinformation creates in the minds of its readers an image of darkness and evil about Islam and Muslims.

It is clear that the media's portrayal of Islam, and especially the Islamist movements, is far from accurate. Considering the great influence the media is able to wield in the US and other Western societies, the implications of such negative reporting are tremendous. The creation of antagonism and conflict between Islam and the West is the most prominent outcome. While there are many honest and objective journalists, others, who are bent on distorting the image of Islam, have been able to formulate the general manner in which Islam is presented in the West. The main reasons that such journalists have negatively portrayed Islam are, first, the journalists' own ignorance about the Islamic ideology and culture, and second, in a number of the most prominent cases, a clear loyalty to Israel by the journalists and a belief that making Islam the enemy of America will serve Israel's interests.

Chapter Five

Islam and the West, Towards Understanding

If there is to be an understanding between Islam and the West it is necessary that rational and neutral people in both the Western and Muslim worlds work to defuse the artificial tension that has been created between the two after the cold war. There is a need on the part of Western political thinkers to study Islam objectively. More research needs to be done on the points of convergence with the West rather than the points of divergence. Some Western observers are pessimistic about Islamic-Western rapprochement in the near future. While the points of tension and misunderstanding which have arisen to negatively affect the relationship between Islam and the West are strong, it is not yet impossible to discuss the potential for a rapprochement.

In recent centuries, the Islamic world has been relatively stagnant and uncreative intellectually, as well as corrupt and degenerate in the sociopolitical sphere.⁸² The Muslim world is currently witnessing a new reformist movement that has accepted the values of modernity but within an Islamic framework. The Western characterization of this movement as "monolithic" and "fundamentalist" is not correct. "Fundamentalism" assumes the nonexistence of *Ijtihad* (the ability to change religiously-sanctioned institutions to fit in with changing circumstances), discounts

pluralism and restricts the freedom of thought in dealing with religious texts. It is important to note, as Albert Hourani states, that "what is usually called 'the resurgence of Islam' is a phenomenon which varies greatly within the context of individual political societies."⁸³

The relationship between Islam and the West can either take a destructive confrontational course or a constructive cooperational one. Recently, and due in large measure to the intentionally destructive work of a number of actors, the relationship between Islam and the West has deteriorated. Grave misrepresentations of Islam are tarnishing its image in the West. Islam is being associated with whatever offends the values of civilization and the noble achievements of humanity such as democracy, freedom, women's rights, the arts, moderation, tolerance, progress and peace. Islam is being represented as a threat and an increasing number of people in the West are beginning to see it as such.

There has certainly been a radicalization of some elements in the Muslim World which has taken on an anti-Western tone. Numerous Western policies however are to blame for the radicalization of these elements. The militaristic heavy handed approach to dealing with Muslims has escalated hostility towards the West. The Gulf War and the continuing embargo on Iraq which is leading to the starvation of large segments of the population, the war in the former Yugoslavia in which the West is perceived to

have sided with the Serbs by denying the Muslims the means of acquiring weapons to defend themselves while allowing the Serbs to commit acts of genocide and the intense pressure on Pakistan to end its nuclear program while providing large aid to nuclear-armed Israel are some of the most prominent examples of Western policies which have contributed to the radicalization of the Muslim World. Certainly, the perception that the West provides support for authoritarian regimes in the region while helping to forestall democratic change is also a source for deep animosity. Frustration has led some Muslims to perpetrate acts of violence that in turn led to more distortions about and hostility towards Islam from the West. It is important to note that the hijacking of aircraft, kidnappings and killings of foreigners are all opposed to Islamic tenets and have been condemned by the majority of Islamic movements.

Despite the hurdles which must be overcome before a rapprochement can take place between Islam and the West, a number of constructive steps have been taken in recent years. Edward Djerejian, the former US Assistant Secretary of State, said in Washington DC on September 11, 1992: "We do not view Islam as the next 'ism' confronting the West or threatening world peace. That is an overly simplistic reaction to a complex reality. It is evident the crusades have been over for a long time."⁸⁴ Similar positive statements were made by Prince Charles of England, Professor John Esposito of Georgetown University and several other Western scholars and politicians.

For a rapprochement to take place, Muslims have to avoid treating the West as a monolith. United States policy towards events in Bosnia and Algeria are much different than the policies adopted by European states. While France is adamant on encouraging Europe and the US to reject FIS (the Islamic movement in Algeria that swept the 1991 free elections), the United States continues to consider FIS a legitimate political movement that has a legitimate political agenda. There is no evidence that the United States opposed the attempt by FIS to come to power by democratic means. In Bosnia, United States policy has been much more sympathetic to the concerns of the Muslims than has European policy.

The growth of Islam in the West is also a factor that has great potential for promoting an understanding between Islam and the West. John Zogby concluded his poll about the attitude of Americans towards Islam and Muslims by saying: "All in all, responses could have been worse -- a lot worse. I believe the key finding in both my poll and that of the Los Angeles Times is the number of people who are not sure or have no opinion about Muslims -- after all the bombardment." He further says: "It also suggests that there is a window of opportunity for both Islamic nations and American Muslims to soften the image of Islam."⁸⁵

The Independent published an article by Martin Palmer, Director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture that presents a good

example of how cooperation between Islam and the West can be established. Palmer argued that "there is no need for an Enemy; Islam has much to teach the West about how to escape the constraints of the consumerist culture, if only Christians would take the time to find out."⁸⁶ Palmer makes the important point that "Muslims need to stop decrying and distorting Christianity and its role. Yes, much of Western society comes from Christian roots. And yes, some aspects of this are profoundly destructive to Islam. But Christianity is not Western culture, so don't throw the faith-brother baby out with the secular bath water. Christians need to learn not to fear Islam. If we tackle the poison of dualism and remove the need for an Enemy, Islam will be seen in a very different light."⁸⁷ Palmer continues:

Finally, Christians must come to accept that in a world largely promoting one dominant Western model of society, driven by economics, secularism and consumerism, which devours not only the poor but nature itself, we urgently need new models. Christians, over one and a half times as populous as Muslims, are now found mostly in the Third World, many of them living below the poverty level. Many Christians are engaged in seeking new economic, social and environmental models. Islam offers some radical alternatives in these areas, and perhaps we should try to understand them better.⁸⁸

There are many positive indications, especially in the aftermath of the Cold War, that the world is moving towards a pluralistic system in which tolerance and cooperation will take precedence over hostility and hatred. The majority of Muslims welcome such a world. Theoretically and ideologically, Islam has always promoted such concepts and has recognized the legitimacy of other religions and their followers. There is a clear call in Islam that "there is no compulsion in religion."⁸⁹ For this

reason, Christian and Jewish minorities have always felt safe in Muslim countries. It is true that there exists opposition to such concepts by a very small periphery of the majority Muslim core. Such Islamic extremists have however been radicalized by frustration over their inability to defend themselves and their properties against external hegemony and are largely reacting to oppression and injustice.

Islam and the West, the two largest civilizations in the world today, are destined to coexist and can come to an understanding and peace through the recognition and respect of each other. The Quran sums up the pleas for coexistence and peace that are made by numerous philosophers, thinkers, human rights activists and peace lovers, when it states: "O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is the one who is most righteous among you."⁹⁰

Violence in several Muslim countries is a direct result of the repressive practices of their authoritarian regimes. Dialogue, the respect of human rights and the promotion and consolidation of democratic practices will certainly end the politically motivated violence. Several Islamic movements, such as those in Kuwait, Pakistan, Jordan, Malaysia and Turkey, have proven that when given the chance, the majority of Islamists would rather choose to participate in the democratic process than engage in

violence. Western governments, if they desire a positive relationship with Islam, should not follow the calls of their own extremists who are promoting making Islam into the new enemy of the West. They should rather open a dialogue with Muslims and Islamic movements and work genuinely toward the promotion of democratic values and respect for human rights in the Muslim World with the same intensity that they formerly promoted such values in Eastern Europe.

Notes

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