The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (Nov. 2002).

Islam and the West After Sept. 11: Civilizational Dialogue or Conflict?

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The Sept. 11, 2001 attacks against New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington reinforced the voices of those in the West who had spoken of a "fundamentalist" holy war exported to America. Fears of radical Islam and the continued threat of global terrorism have led many to warn even more confidently of a clash of civilizations. In some ways, the Cold War attitudes of the West towards communism have been replicated in the projection of a new global threat. The tendency of many governments, the media and political analysts was to conclude the existence of an inherently anti-Western global Islamic threat. Muslim rulers in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia, and the Central Asian Republics as well as Israel, India, the Philippines have used the danger of Islamic radicalism to attract American and European foreign aid and to deflect from the failures of their governments or the indiscriminate suppression of opposition movements, mainstream as well as extremists.

In America and Europe, those who believe a clash is inevitable have maintained that today we see but the latest iteration of a centuries old confrontation and conflict between Islam and Christianity, the Muslim world and the West.

The History of Muslim-Christian Relations

Despite many common theological roots and beliefs, throughout history, Muslim-Christian relations have often been overshadowed by conflict as the armies and missionaries of Islam and Christendom have been locked in a struggle for power and for souls. This confrontation has ranged from the fall of the early Byzantine (eastern Roman) empire before the armies of Islam in the seventh century to the fierce battles and polemics of the Crusades during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the expulsion of the "Moors" from Spain, the Inquisition, the Ottoman threat to overrun Europe, European (Christian) colonialism and imperialism from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, the political and cultural challenge of the superpowers (America and the Soviet Union) to the Muslim world in the latter half of the twentieth century, the creation of the state of Israel, and the competition of Christian and Muslim missionaries for converts in Africa today and the contemporary reassertion of Islam in politics.

Islam's relationship to Christianity and the West has often been marked less by understanding than by mutual ignorance and conflict. Ancient rivalries and modern day conflicts such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have so accentuated differences as to completely obscure the shared theological roots and religious vision of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. Many have focused solely on and reinforced differences and polarized, rather than united, these three great interrelated monotheistic traditions.

Islam's early expansion and success constituted a challenge, theologically, politically and civilizationally, which proved a stumbling block to understanding and a threat to the Christian West. Both Islam and Christianity possessed a sense of universal message and mission that, in retrospect, were destined to lead to a history in which confrontation would prevail over mutual cooperation. Both have a dual history of religious propagation and conversions. In early Christianity, the apostle Paul spread the Gospel through his preaching and teaching, a peaceful example followed in later years by the Eastern Church. However, Western European Christianity was spread both by force, as evidenced by Charlemagne in Europe and the conquistadors in Latin America, as well as through peaceful means prior to the 19th century. The missionary connection to European colonialism and imperialism has been especially problematic for the Muslim world in the 19th and 20th centuries. More recently, as Christianity and Islam have continued to spread through Asia and Africa, tensions and conflicts have occurred between Muslims and Christian communities from the Sudan and Nigeria to Pakistan and Indonesia.

The history of the conquests and expansion of the Arab/Islamic Empire through military force in the early years has been emphasized in Western approaches to understanding Islam. However, many fail to distinguish between the use of the sword to expand empires and of religion by rulers to legitimate conquest versus the more complex manner in which Islam as a religion was spread by soldiers, merchants and Sufi (mystic) brotherhoods. Few who talk of the early spread of Islam by the sword are cognizant of the fact that since Muslim rulers profited from special taxes paid by non-Muslims, there was often little desire or need to convert people to Islam. Moreover, Sufi networks and traders and merchants from Africa to Southeast Asia spread Islam peacefully.

In addition, for some Oriental Christians living under Byzantine rule, the arrival of Islam freed them from more onerous taxes and gave them a religious freedom that permitted them to remain as independent communities and practice their faith. In these cases, Islam was seen as a liberating political force, rather than as a menace or challenge to the Christian faith. The Muslim conquest of Europe was also more complex than often recognized, witnessing co-existence as well as conflict. Muslims and Christians sometimes joined in political alliances with each other against common enemies or where there were common interests.

Points of Coexistence, Cooperation and Tolerance

Throughout much of Islamic history, Jews and Christians, "People of the Book (ahl al-kitab)," were regarded as "protected" people (dhimmi) who enjoyed far more tolerance under Muslim governments than did Judaism, Islam and forms of Christianity not recognized by Byzantium or the papacy. However, dhimmi were not equal subjects with Muslims. They paid higher taxes than Muslims for the freedom to privately practice their own religion. Historically, they were generally granted the right to govern their own communities and practice their religion. Over time and space, however, practice of religion in private meant that dhimmi could not build or repair churches or buildings for worship without permission, issue public calls to prayer, publicly display religious symbols, give testimony against a Muslim in court, or marry a Muslim woman. In some places, dhimmi were required to wear specific dress identifying them as non-Muslims.

As Islam spread as an empire and civilization, it proved open to the many religions and cultures it encountered. Classical Islamic culture incorporated elements of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian law, Byzantine and Sassanid (Persian) imperial and administrative practices, Greek science, philosophy, architecture and art in addition to its Arab and Muslim influences. Greek classics of philosophy, science and medicine were translated into Arabic under the Abbasids. These translations formed the body of materials later translated from Arabic into Latin by Roger II of Sicily. This period, reminiscent of when Muslim rulers incorporated Christians within court life, provides a positive example of mutual exchange and tolerance as Muslims were incorporated into political and intellectual positions as engineers, architects, court poets, and scholars in a Christian kingdom and vice versa. Twelfth century Toledo was also a major center of study for scholars from all over Europe who came to work with native speakers of Arabic. This incorporation of the most advanced elements from surrounding civilizations and the past demonstrates an openness to the benefits to be obtained through a limited form of pluralism - cultural, civilizational, scholastic, and religious. Accompanying this recognition was comparative tolerance.[1]

Positive examples of Muslim-Christian relations can also be found. In 1076, Sultan al-Nasir of Bejaya made a request to Pope Gregory VII for the ordination of a local priest to care for the Christian population. Christian Emperor Charlemagne and the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid made arrangements for Christians to travel to the Holy Land, establishing a hostel in Jerusalem for Christian pilgrims as well as hostels run by the Christian Cluniac order along the way.

Al-Andalus: Convivencia (Living Together) of Civilizations

The most famous example of inter-religious and inter-civilizational tolerance is that of Muslim rule in Spain (al-Andalus) from 756 CE to about 1000 CE, often idealized as a period of interfaith harmony. Part of the attraction for Christians and Jews was the opportunity Muslim rule offered to those seeking refuge from the old ruling class system of Europe. Muslim rule brought with it the elimination of the nobility and clergy and the redistribution of their lands, creating

a new class of small landholders who were largely responsible for the agricultural prosperity of Muslim Spain.

Although tensions did arise between the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities, Christians and Jews occupied prominent positions in the court of the Caliph in the 10th century, serving as translators, engineers, physicians, and architects. Bishops were even sent by the Umayyads on important diplomatic missions. The Archbishop of Seville had the Bible translated and annotated into Arabic for the Arabic-speaking Christian community. Tolerance and social intercourse between religious groups at the upper levels was the highlight of the period: upper class Christians adopted Arab names and aspects of Arab culture, including veiling of women to reflect and enhance their status, not eating pork, and incorporating Arabic music and poetry into their own culture. Interfaith marriages also occurred at the upper class level. This example is important, but it needs to be balanced with the knowledge that the records indicate that, overall, actual contacts between Christians and Muslims were relatively limited. However, Muslims showed less tolerance towards Christians in their territories after the 10th century during the rule of the caliph al-Mansur.

Religious/Political Conflict and Confrontation

Historically both Christians and Muslims have their bitter memories of conquest and intolerance. Christians experienced losses during the expansion of the Islamic and Ottoman Empires; Muslims experienced the traumatic loss of Andalusia and independence during European colonial dominance of much of the Muslim world. Today, memories of the past, continued experience of conflicts globally in Palestine/Israel, Nigeria, Sudan, Chechnya and the emergence of Islam as the second or third largest religion in Europe and America reinforce an even stronger sense of the need for greater pluralism and tolerance to avoid the intolerance and retaliation of the past. Today Muslims and Christians share common challenges and concerns: rampant secularism and materialism, the moral breakdown of society - the collapse of the institution of marriage and the family; problems with drugs, alcohol, and promiscuous sex; these moral and social challenges affect Christians and Muslims alike. In the twenty-first century, all are challenged to remember and build on the positive legacy of convivencia, living together, as well as to reinterpret and broaden their theological worldviews.

Historically, there are many examples of Muslim sponsorship of interfaith discussion and debate. The Prophet's dialogue with the Christians of Najran resulted in a mutually agreeable relationship where the Najranis were permitted to pray in the Prophet's mosque. The fifth caliph, Muawiyah's (661-769 AD), initiated regular invitations to the contending Jacobite and Maronite Christians to the royal court to work out their debates with each other. The Syrian Christian John of Damascus was invited to appear in the court of the caliph to debate the divinity of Jesus and the concept of free will. Debates between both Muslims and Jews occurred in Spanish Muslim courts. In the 16th century, the Emperor Akbar presided over inter-religious theological discussion between Catholic priests and

Muslim religious scholars (ulama) in Fatehpur Sikri. Like the debates sponsored by Christians, these debates were not always conducted between "equals" (indeed, many were held in order to "prove" that the other religion was "wrong"). However, the fact that the debate was permitted and encouraged indicates some degree of open exchange between faiths, during one of the highest stages of educational and cultural achievement in the Muslim world.

The Crusades are well known and remembered as a war between Christianity and Islam for political kingdoms. Traditional studies of this history focus on the differences between the two sides, yet there were also similarities and positive moments of coexistence and cooperation. Both Christians and Muslims shared cultural ideals of chivalry, loyalty, bravery, and honor. In fact, the Muslim leader Salah al-Din (Saladin) was highly respected and admired by the Christians, especially Richard the Lionhearted, for his mercy, honor, and bravery. Likewise, Saint Francis of Assisi won the respect of the Muslims he came to convert for his examples of piety and reverence. Some treaties were also concluded in the 13th century between Christians and Muslims who granted Christians free access to sacred places then reoccupied by Islam. Francis met Salah al-Din's nephew Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in 1219, leading the Sultan to grant freedom of worship to his more than 30,000 Christian prisoners when hostilities were suspended, as well as the choice of returning to their own countries or fighting in his armies.

The Modern Debate

In recent years, many Muslims attributing the failures of their societies to an excessive dependence on and dominance by Western governments, values and culture reject secular governments and conservative religious establishments holding them responsible for the long period of decline and demoralization. Thus, the resurgence of Islam and of Muslim identity has swept across much of the Muslim world.[2] A somewhat similar process occurred in Christianity during the Christian Reformation of 15th and 16th centuries. Many in Europe, shocked by the failure of their rulers to resolve the economic and social ills of the time and the decline and corruption of the orthodox Church, pushed for a return to the foundations of the faith. They emphasized a relearning and reappropriation of God's intentions for human civilizations and an insistence that God's order for society be followed as a means of reviving Christian civilization. Similarly, at the turn of the century, Pope Leo XIII condemned American-style pluralism and voluntarism as patterns for adoption by the church (*Longinqua Oceani*, 1895). He critiqued both American society and its economic doctrines (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891) because of unrestricted economic competition and the excesses of capitalism that grew out of it. It was not until the 1960s and the Second Vatican Council that Catholicism officially accepted religious pluralism.

Islam and the West: A Clash of Civilizations?

In a controversial 1993 article, “The Clash of Civilizations?” Samuel Huntington warned that a "clash of civilizations will dominate global politics."[3] Many in the Muslim world saw this important American academic and opinion-maker, who had also held a prominent position in government, as articulating what they always thought was the West’s attitude towards Islam. If some academics and government officials were quick to distance themselves from Huntington’s position, the sales of his subsequent book, its translation into many languages, and the sheer number of international conferences and publications that addressed the question demonstrated that there was “a market” for “clash.” The attacks of September 11 and the global threat of Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda have resurrected a knee-jerk resort to “the clash of civilizations” for an easy answer to the question “Why do they hate us?”

Huntington, like many others today, characterized Islam and the West as age-old enemies: "Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1300 years."[4] He interpreted resistance to secular Western models of development as necessarily hostile to human rights and progress: "Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic [and other] . . . cultures." [5]

In his 1997 follow-up book, Huntington concluded that “Islam’s borders are bloody and so are its innards.”[6] His blanket condemnation went beyond Islamic fundamentalism to Islam itself: "The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture, and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. "[7] Though Huntington has now significantly refined his position, September 11 unleashed new “updated” versions of an “Islamic threat” as many found it more expedient to fall back on convenient stereotypes of a monolithic Islam, an historic clash of civilizations, and a conflict between Islam and modernity rather than examine the complex political, military, economic and social causes of terrorism.

Proponents of a clash cite Bin Laden and al-Qaeda as clear indicators of an unbridgeable gulf between two very different worlds. Similarly, the declared war of religious extremists and terrorists against entrenched Muslim governments and the West – all in the name of Islam – are also cited as proof that Islam is incompatible with democracy. However, while the actions of extremist groups and of authoritarian governments, religious and non-religious, reinforce this perception of a clash of civilizations, the facts on the ground present a more complex picture.

Neither the Muslim world nor the West is monolithic. Common sources of identity (language, faith, history, culture) yield when national or regional interests

are at stake. While some Muslims, as in the Iranian Revolution, have achieved a transient unity in the face of a common enemy, their solidarity quickly dissipates once danger subsides and competing interests again prevail. The evidence that there is no monolithic Islam is abundant. The inability of Arab nationalism/socialism, Saudi Arabia's pan-Islam, or Iran's Islamic Republic revolution to unite and mobilize the Arab and Muslim worlds, the competition and conflict between countries like Egypt, Libya, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia, the disintegration of the Arab (Iraq and the Gulf states) coalition against Iran after the Iran-Iraq war, and the subsequent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and divisions in the Muslim world evident in the Gulf War of 1991 are but a few examples. Bin Laden's failure to effectively mobilize the vast majority of the 1.2 billion Muslims in the Islamic world or the majority of religious leaders in his unholy war despite his global terrorist network is a reminder that Muslims, like every global religious community, are indeed diverse. As Islamic history makes abundantly clear, mainstream Islam, in law and theology as well as in practice, in the end has always rejected or marginalized extremists and terrorists from the radical groups of the past like Kharijites and Assassins to contemporary radical movements like al-Qaeda.

A War against global terrorism or against Islam?

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, President George Walker Bush and many policymakers were careful to emphasize that the America was waging a war against global terrorism not against Islam. Bush visited a major mosque in Washington and held meetings with Muslim leaders reinforcing his respect for Islam and the need to distinguish between the religion of Islam and the actions of terrorists. However, America's pursuit and prosecution internationally and domestically of its broad-based war against terrorism, the rhetoric and policies of the administration that have accompanied it, have convinced many Muslims that the war is indeed a war against Islam and Muslims.

Despite the fact that Bush and the Pentagon apologized for the early use of the terms Crusade and "infinite justice," months later, the code name "the green front" was employed for raids against Muslim organizations and homes in Northern Virginia and Georgia that were suspected of laundering funds that went to "terrorist" groups, reopening questions about the real attitude and motives of the administration. The propensity of President Bush and his administration to condemn Palestinian terrorism but not equally decry Israel's brutality, violence and terror enraged many who daily watch the Israeli armies "cleansing" of cities and towns in the West Bank and Gaza.

The unfolding and trajectory of the war against terrorism has convinced many in the Muslim world that this is a war against Islam and

Muslims. Several factors have reinforced this perception and belief, contributing significantly to a widespread anger and anti-Americanism that cuts across Muslim societies: the broadening of the American-led military campaign's scope beyond Afghanistan, the use of the term "axis of evil," and the continued "pro-Israel" policy during the current crisis and carnage on the part of the Bush administration and Congress.

Initially the Bush administration declared that the purpose of the military campaign was to bring Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda to justice. When the Taliban refused to surrender Bin Laden and warned that they would militarily resist American forces, the war was widened to include the overthrow of the Taliban. The widespread and extensive bombing of Afghanistan with its civilian casualties followed by the pursuit of second fronts in the Philippines, Yemen, and Pakistan and the designation of Iraq, Iran and Syria as an axis of evil have been capstoned by the Bush administration's policy in Palestine/Israel. The failure to acknowledge and condemn Ariel Sharon's provocation of the second intifada through his visit to the Temple Mount and the Israeli sustained invasion and devastation of Palestinian cities and villages in its war against "Palestinian terrorism" has fed a rage that has been witnessed across the Muslim world. The lack of parity in rhetoric and policy as the Bush administration criticized and held Arafat fully accountable for suicide bombings but praised Sharon as a man of peace reinforced the popular perception of a Bush-Sharon, American-Israeli alliance.

At the same time, the American media's coverage and editorials often reveal glaring contrasts with those of Europe and the Arab and Muslim world. The differences between programming on the BBC or al-Jazeera versus CNN and Fox News, the sharp contrast between headlines and coverage of Jenin, Nablus, and Bethlehem as well as assessments of the Bush administration in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and their counterparts in Europe is glaring. Moreover, the depth and breadth of media bias is reflected in editorials, op-eds and articles of commentators such as Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Charles Krauthammer, William Safire, Steven Emerson, Judith Miller, Martin Kramer, AM Rosenethal, William Kristol, George Will, Martin Peretz, Morton Zuckerman, Norman Podhoretz and others in publications like the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The New York Post, The New Republic, The Weekly Standard, and National Review.[8] However different, they all tie the war on terrorism and an anti-Islam rhetoric to an uncritical, pro-Israel position.[9] As a result, the Palestinians are painted consistently as the brutal aggressors and the Israelis as innocent victims despite Israel's disproportionate firepower and the far greater Palestinian deaths and injuries.

The American media quite rightly has highlighted the horrific impact of suicide bombings on innocent Israeli civilians and children, but fails to provide equal coverage and images of the brutality and terror, deaths and casualties experienced by Palestinian civilians. Articles underscore the growth of anti-Semitism but are silent about a comparable growth of anti-Arabism and anti-Islamic sentiment. Arafat is portrayed as responsible for acts of terrorism but Sharon's current and past (Shatila and Sabra) record is ignored. There is no balance in underscoring the failures of both Arafat and Sharon; no balance in depicting both Palestinians and Israelis as warriors as well as victims. At the same time, the alliance between the Christian Right and Republican neo-conservatives who espouse a theological/ideological pro-Israel, Zionist agenda exacerbates the situation. Their calls for the targeting of "terrorist" states from Libya and Sudan to Iran, Iraq and Syria seemingly confirms advocates of a widespread "conspiracy" against Islam.

The resultant image of America and American foreign policy is increasingly that of an "imperial" America whose overwhelming military and political power is used unilaterally, disproportionately and indiscriminately in a war not just against global terrorism and religious extremists but also against Islam and the Muslim world. The failure of the American administration to practice a parity of rhetoric and politics in Palestine-Israel, India-Pakistan, Russia-Chechnya feeds anti-American sentiment among the mainstream as well as the hatred of America among militant extremists. Across the political spectrum there is a growing tendency to believe that a clash of civilizations is on the horizon, provoked by America as well as al-Qaeda and other extremists.

American Foreign Policy in the Muslim World

After September 11, slogans like a clash of civilizations, a war between the civilized world and terrorists or against fundamentalists who hate Western democracy, capitalism, and freedom; or a war against "evil" and "merchants of death" were common, emphasizing a white and black world that obscures the deeper realities and long-term issues that exist.[10] Similarly, belief that overwhelming force brought a quick victory in Afghanistan and is an effective answer has distracted from the need to address the nature and causes of real and future threats. Other Bin Ladens exist as do the political and economic conditions that they can exploit to recruit new soldiers for their unholy wars.[11]

Osama Bin Laden, like the secular Saddam Hussein and the Ayatollah Khomeini before him, cleverly identified specific grievances against Muslim regimes and America that are shared across a broad spectrum of Muslims, most of whom are not extremists. He then used religious texts and doctrines to justify his jihad of violence and terrorism. Anti-Americanism is driven not only by the blind hatred of terrorists but also by a broader-based anger and frustration with

American foreign policy among many in Arab and Muslim societies: government officials, diplomats, the military, businessmen, professionals, intellectuals, and journalists. Many admire the fundamental principles and values (political participation, human rights, accountability, basic freedoms of speech, thought, the press) of the West. But they also believe that a double standard exists; these American principles and values are applied selectively or not at all when it comes to the Muslim world.

Part of the problem Americans have had in understanding anti-Americanism is the failure to recognize that Arabs and broader Muslim world sees more than Americans see. In recent years, America had become less international-minded and more preoccupied with domestic issues. Many members of Congress saw no reason to travel abroad; a prominent congressional leader freely quipped that he had been to Europe once and saw no reason to return. Major American networks and newspapers have cut back on the number of foreign bureaus and correspondents. Domestic news coverage expanded at the expense of American public awareness of international affairs. In contrast with the past, today many in the Muslim world are no longer dependent on CNN and the BBC for news of the world. International Arab and Muslim publications and media provide daily coverage of foreign affairs. Families in the Muslim world sit glued to their television sets, watching daily coverage on Al-Jazeera which gives them live news in vivid color from Palestine/Israel, Iraq, Chechnya, and Kashmir. Many see America's espousal of self-determination, democratization, and human rights as disingenuous in light of its foreign policies. With the exception perhaps of Kosovo, America's interventions in Kuwait and Iraq in the Gulf war and in Somalia are seen as driven solely by national interest rather than American principles.

While the average American sees one side of the latest explosive headline event such as suicide bombings in Israel, they are not bombarded daily with the sight of Israeli violence and terror in the West Bank and Gaza, the disproportionate firepower, the number of Palestinian deaths and casualties, the use of American weapons including F16s and Apache helicopters provided to Israel and used against Palestinians, including civilians, in the occupied territories. America's relationship with Israel has proved to be a lightning rod. While some in the West downplay or deny the significance of the Palestinian issue, surveys continue to verify its importance to Muslims globally. A survey in Spring 2001 of five Arab states (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Lebanon), demonstrated that the "majority in all five countries said that the Palestinian issue was "the single most important issue to them personally." [12] In a Zogby International poll of American Muslims in Nov/Dec 2001, 84% believed that the U.S. should support a Palestinian state, 70% believed that it should reduce financial support to Israel. [13]

America's long record of relatively uncritical support of Israel--expressed in its levels of military and economic aid to Israel, its voting record in the United

Nations, official statements by American administrations and government officials, and votes by Congress (often opposed by administrations in the past) to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in direct contravention of long-standing UN resolutions--are seen by many in the Muslim world as proof of American hypocrisy.

Other critical foreign policy issues include the impact of sanctions on more than a half million innocent Iraqi children (with little direct effect on Saddam Hussein) and sanctions against Pakistan but failure to hold India and Israel to similar standards for their nuclear programs. The moral will so evident in Kosovo is seen as totally absent in US policy in the Chechnya and Kashmiri conflicts. A native-born American convert to Islam, Ivy League educated and a former government consultant spoke with a frustration shared by many Muslims: “Every informed Muslim would point to America’s bizarre complicity in the genocidal destruction of Chechnya, its tacit support of India’s incredibly brutal occupation of Kashmir, its passivity in the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia, and even America’s insistence on zero casualties in stopping the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. These are hot spots in the so-called “ring of fire” around the edge of the Muslim world, where Muslims are throwing off the shackles of old empires.” [14]

The war against global terrorism has been taken as a green light for some authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world, particularly in Central Asia, to further limit the rule of law and civil society or repress non-violent opposition. Many governments use the danger of “Islamic fundamentalism” as an excuse for authoritarian responses and policies, labeling all Islamic movements, extremist as well as moderate (whom they characterize as wolves in sheep’s clothing), as a threat. Many Muslim and Western governments oppose any Islamic candidates’ participation in elections, fearing that they will hijack elections. These fears often obscure the fact that many governments themselves have proven non-democratic or authoritarian track records.

American, as well as European, responses must remain proportionate, from military strikes and foreign policy to domestic security measures and anti-terrorism legislation. A reexamination and, where necessary, reformulation of U.S. foreign policy will be necessary to effectively limit and contain global terrorism. Short-term policies that are necessitated by national interest and security must be balanced by long term policies and incentives that pressure our allies in the Muslim world to promote a gradual and progressive process of broader political participation, power sharing, and human rights. Failure to do so will simply perpetuate the culture and values of authoritarianism, secular as well as religious, and feed anti-Americanism. If foreign policy issues are not addressed effectively, they will continue to provide a breeding ground for hatred and radicalism, the rise of extremist movements, and recruits for the Bin Ladens of the world.

Conclusion: Coexistence or Conflict?

The political as well as religious challenge in today's increasingly global, interdependent world is to recognize not only our competing interests but also our common interests. America's policy toward Japan or Saudi Arabia is not based primarily upon a sense of shared culture, religion, or civilization but upon common political and economic interests. Cooperation can result from common religious and ethnic backgrounds; however, more often it comes from the recognition of similar or shared interests.

A clash of civilizations can become the clarion call that justifies aggression and warfare. However, future global threats will be due less to a clash of "civilizations" than a clash of interests, political, economic and military. For indeed, the followers of the three great monotheistic faiths share much in common. While there are distinctive differences of doctrine, law, institutions, and values between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, there are also a host of similarities. They all see themselves as Children of Abraham, are monotheists, believe in prophethood and divine revelation, have a concept of moral responsibility and accountability. This shared perspective has been recognized in recent years by the notion of a Judeo/Christian tradition, a concept that is slowly being extended by some who speak of a Judeo/Christian/Islamic tradition.

Historic clashes and violent confrontations have occurred, but they do not represent the total picture. Positive interaction and influence have also taken place. Islamic civilization was indebted to the West for many of the sources that enabled it to borrow, translate and then to develop its own high civilization that made remarkable contributions in philosophy, the sciences and technology while the West went into eclipse in the Dark Ages. The West in turn reclaimed a renovated philosophical and scientific heritage from Islamic civilization, retranslating and re-appropriating that knowledge, which then became the foundation for its Renaissance.

In the modern period, Muslims have freely appropriated the accomplishments of science and technology. In many ways, they face a period of reexamination, reformation, and revitalization. Like the Reformation in the West, it is a process not only of intellectual ferment and religious debate but also of religious and political unrest and violence.

Today it is critical to distinguish between the “hijacking” of Islam by extremists and mainstream Islam in order to appreciate that all members of the international community--- Muslims and non-Muslims alike --- are in one way or another caught in the current confrontation between the civilized world and global terrorism.

The continued tendency of many to see Islam and events in the Muslim world through explosive headline events hinders the ability to distinguish

between the religion of Islam and the actions of extremists who hijack Islamic discourse and belief to justify their acts of terrorism. It reinforces the tendency to equate Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism with all Islamic movements, political and social, non-violent and violent. The Taliban's narrow, tribal, militant interpretations of Islam - from their restrictions on women to the destruction of ancient Buddhist monuments - have little to do with Islamic doctrine and law. Muslim governments and religious leaders have criticized them across the Muslim world. Similarly, Osama Bin Laden and al--Qaeda are no more representative of Islam than Christians who blow up abortion clinics or the Jewish fundamentalists who assassinated Yitzak Rabin, or, like Dr. Baruch Goldstein, slaughtered Muslims at Friday prayer in the Hebron mosque.

Yet, a deadly radical minority does exist; they have wrought havoc primarily on their own societies from Egypt to the southern Philippines. Osama Bin Laden and others appeal to these through real as well as imagined injustices and prey on the oppressed, alienated, and marginalized sectors of society. The short-term military response to bring the terrorists to justice must also be balanced by long-term policy that focuses on the core issues that breed radicalism and extremism.

Muslims today face critical choices. If Western powers need to rethink, reassess their policies, mainstream Muslims worldwide will need to more aggressively address the threat to Islam from religious extremists. Governments that rely upon authoritarian rule, security forces and repression will have to open up their political systems, build and strengthen civil society, discriminate between free speech and mainstream opposition and a violent extremism that must b crushed and contained. Societies that limit freedom of thought and expression produce a sense of alienation and powerlessness that often results in radicalization and extremism. Formidable religious obstacles must be overcome: the ultra conservatism of many (though not all) ulama; the more puritanical militant exclusivist brands of Islam; the curriculum and training in those madrasas and universities that perpetuate a “theology of hate,” the beliefs of militants who reject not only non-Muslims but also other Muslims who do not believe as they do. The jihad (struggle) will be religious, intellectual, spiritual, and moral. But it must be a more rapid and widespread program of Islamic renewal that not only builds on past reformers but also follows the lead of enlightened religious leaders and intellectuals today who more forcefully and more effectively engage in a wide ranging process of reinterpretation (ijtihad) and reform (islah).

Relations between the Muslim world and the West will require a joint effort, a process of constructive engagement, dialogue, self-criticism and change. The extremists aside, the bulk of criticism of Western, and particularly American policy, comes from those who judge the West by its failure to live up to its principles and values. Regardless of cultural differences, Muslims and Christians share common religious/civilizational principles, values and aspirations: belief in God and His prophets, revelation, moral responsibility and accountability, the

sanctity of life, the value of the family, a desire for economic prosperity, access to education, technology, peace and security, social justice, political participation, freedom and human rights. An increasing number of Muslims, like non-Muslims, are concerned about the excesses of modernity and globalization: a secularism that instead of denying privilege to any one faith in order to protect the rights of all its citizens, is anti-religious in its identity and values; an emphasis on individual rights and freedoms that is not balanced by an equal concern for the public good; a free market capitalism that is not balanced by the common good; a process of globalization that threatens a new form of western, especially American, economic and cultural hegemony.

Post September 11 challenges governments, policymakers, religious leaders, the media and the general public to all play both critical and constructive roles in the war against global terrorism. The process will have to be a joint partnership which emphasizes the beliefs, values and interests that we share in common; addresses more constructively our differences and grievances; and builds a future based upon the recognition that all face a common enemy, the threat of global terrorism, which can only be effectively contained and eliminated through a recognition of mutual interest and the use of multilateral alliances, strategies and action.

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[7] . Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order , , p. 217.

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