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RADICAL ISLAM AND ITS EFFECT ON POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Chapter One

Radical Islam

Islam plays a significant role in the political machinations in the Middle East. This paper seeks to explore the militant end of the political spectrum and its effect on politics in the Middle East and the concomitant effect on American foreign policy. The militant end of the political spectrum carries many appellations; however, this paper will use the term Radical Islam suggested by Emmanuel Sivan. The term is appropriate because the Islam that seeks to impact on the governmental structures in the region by replacing them with ones more in line with its understanding of Islamic principles and ideals is indeed radical in its thinking and actions. The dynamic nature of Islam and the political situation in the Middle East lends credence to the necessity for a better understanding of the precepts and goals of Radical Islam and its effect on the foreign policy decisions of the United States in the region.

This paper will analyze Radical Islam by outlining its pre-modern underpinnings, primarily represented by the influence of the fourteenth century theoretician, Ibn Taymiyyah, as well as the modern influences of Sayyid Abul

ala Maulani Maududi of Pakistan and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt. The notion of Radical Islam will be defined and the precepts and goals of the movement will be elucidated. In addition, the paper will examine the present crisis environment concerning Islam in the Middle East and present some basic characteristics common to individuals most likely to participate in activities that could be considered under the appellation Radical Islam. Finally, the relationship of Radical Islam and the foreign policy of the United States will be discussed.

The future of the Western world, and more specifically, the United States is inextricably linked to the Islamic world. Recent world events, most notably the 1991 Gulf War, have made it clear that it is imperative that the foreign policy of the United States, in regards to the countries in the Islamic world, be predicated on a better understanding of Islam. The focus of this increased cognizance should be the knowledge that Islam is a community and Radical Islam will be the movement that redefines and restructures the Islamic world. Emmanuel Sivan, in his book Radical Islam, identifies the radical end of the contemporary Muslim political spectrum as

Radical Islam.¹ The objective of this radical element is to replace existing regimes with governmental organizations and leaders that are more attuned to Islamic principles and ideals as defined by Radical Islam.

The challenge for the foreign policy pundits of the United States is to acquire the requisite information on Radical Islam pertinent to their mission and avoid the pitfalls of misperception and myopia that have characterized Western attitudes toward the Islamic world in the past. The American failure to understand the Arab/Islamic world is best exemplified by a statement made by Patrick Lang of the Defense Intelligence Agency during a strategy session in the Oval Office prior to the Gulf War. Lang remarked to those assembled, including President Bush, that, "We have a perennial inability to comprehend alien cultures, even marginally alien cultures."² Such a comment, by a senior official in an American administration, is indeed a sad commentary on the state of understanding of the policy makers of the United States government vis-a-vis other cultures.

A particularly perceptive treatment of Western

¹ Emmanuel Sivan. Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics. (London, 1985), 9.

² Bob Woodward. The Commanders. (New York, 1991), 359.

attitudes towards the Muslim world is found in Fred R. Von Der Mehden's selection "American Perceptions of Islam" that is included in the fine work edited by John L. Esposito, Voices of Resurgent Islam. Von Der Mehden presents valuable information concerning the fundamental ignorance of Americans concerning the Islamic world. Von Der Mehden contends that past cultural and racial biases against Third World societies in general has obscured the American view of Islam as well as "other" belief systems. He also charges that the current American perception of Islam results from a combination of ignorance of the religion and negative reactions against the rhetoric and activities of a minority of its adherents.³ Von Der Mehden's treatment of the historical environment and education patterns is especially instructive. He points out that public education in the United States normally devotes a relatively small part of World Civilization courses to the non-Christian world. He provides one example of a 878-page text in which less than 700 words are given to an explanation of Islam as a religion, and fewer than five pages are devoted to the religion, its spread, culture, and

³ Fred Von Der Mehden. "American Perceptions of Islam." Voices of Resurgent Islam. (New York, 1983), 19.

law.⁴

It appears that the fundamental ignorance of the West extends into the realm of alleged scholarly work. A rather startling and distressing review, written by John C. Campbell, of Daniel Pipes' book, In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power adds to the fundamental ignorance. Campbell pointed out that Pipes set out to explain the complex interaction among Islam's ideals, Muslim historical experience, Western civilization, and current events. The fundamental ignorance of the Western perception of the Islamic world was compounded by Mr. Campbell's statement that, "in general, he (Pipes) succeeds, although the Western mind's difficulty in grasping Islam occasionally defeats a reader in the face of the author's best effort."⁵ The only Western mind that should have difficulty grasping Islam, or any "other" culture is a closed one.

Habib Boulares, a former Tunisian Minister of Culture and now a university lecturer and journalist in Paris, in his finely-crafted book, Islam: Fear and Hope, wonders if it is necessary in the world of today for Islam to be

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John C. Campbell review of In the Path of Good: Islam and Political Power by Daniel Pipes, in International Journal of Middle East Studies (November 1984), 543.

viewed as a frightening threat to non-Muslims. Boulares alters Sivan's definition of radical Islam slightly. Boulares considers Islamism as the precise sense of an action carried out by militant Muslims so that their concept of religion penetrates the state and society.⁶ Boulares maintains that Islamism (Radical Islam) is the compelling force behind an ongoing process of a search for answers in Muslim societies. For Muslims, it is a question now of the fate of their religion. The destiny of close to one billion believers hangs in the balance.

Boulares recounts some of the explosive events in the Muslim world since 1979 which have caused different negative perceptions of Islam. He questions the Islam of the Ayatollah Khomeini following the fall of the Shah of Iran. The "Islamic" justice meted out by Khomeini presented to the world a decidedly negative spectacle of unrestrained barbarism. The summary executions and repressive measures in the name of Islam engendered doubt in the Muslim world. The violent reaction of the government of Saudi Arabia against those who occupied the Haram al-Sharif of the Kaaba in Mecca in late 1979 revealed to the world that even a country based on strict Wahhabism

⁶ Habib Boulares. Islam: Fear and Hope. (New York, 1989), x.

could be a target for Islamic militants.

Boulares succinctly points out that the Islamists who call for an awakening of Islam must understand that there is more than one Islam. In 1979 statistics revealed almost one billion adherents to Islam and forty-two countries that referred to themselves as Muslim.⁷ He contends that the unique situation in each country makes Islam and any revivalist movement in that country adapt to the special circumstances of the country. It should be apparent that the Islam of Burkina Faso is not the Islam of Saudi Arabia.

Boulares is confused as to why the West fears Islam. He provides examples of other religion-based situations and problems in the world that do not evoke fear in the West. It was the West, for instance, that helped in the creation of the state of Israel. Boulares questions how a nation which mushroomed in size from tens of thousands at the beginning of the century to several million by following a policy of immigration and the expulsion of Palestinians is deemed acceptable and Islam is feared. The whole world applauded enthusiastically the support given by the Catholic Church to the struggle of Polish trade unionists to gain political autonomy and to change the structures of

⁷ Ibid., 8.

power in their country but when Islam makes an appearance in the political arena it is met with open disapproval. The explanation offered by Boulares is the idea that those opposed to Islamist activism are not repulsed by the exercise of power in the name of Islam but rather that these regimes may collapse.⁸ In addition, he points out that Islamist militancy provokes rejection since it appears (to the West) to attack a system of values already in place and internationally accepted.

The most incisive and cogent handling of the turbulence and dynamism in political Islam is found in R. Hrair Dekmejian's Islam In Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World. Dekmejian's definitive work is replete in its exposition of the catalysts, consequences, and prospects of the Islamic reawakening. The primary emphasis of Islam In Revolution is the examination of the historical underpinnings and patterns of the Islamic reawakening and the forms of its manifestation in the crisis milieu of contemporary Muslim society. Concomitantly, the book focuses on what Dekmejian refers to as political Islam and its revolutionary implications in the Arab world. Dekmejian's effort presents empirical evidence on the

⁸ Ibid., 31.

reawakening movement through the analysis of ninety-one Islamic societies and groups. He delves into the history of Islamist movements and their cyclical patterns as well as the social-psychological bases of Islamic revivalism.

A particularly prominent element of Islamic history is that it offers many examples of revivalist movements. The cyclical dynamic of crisis and resurgence in Islamic history is discernible in various historical periods ranging from the Umayyad decline and Abbasid degeneration through the Fatimid and Ottoman decline extending into the contemporary Islamic crisis milieu of the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Revolution in Iran to the Sunni resurgence of the 1970s.⁹ Every major religion is characterized by a tendency and need to restore vitality to its dogma. Islam, however; is unique in that it is more than a religion. It is an all-encompassing culture that is not restricted temporally; it is applicable to all ages. Islam constitutes a complete social system that embraces all Muslims.¹⁰

The previously restrictive term fundamentalism has

⁹ R. Hrair Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World. (Syracuse, N.Y., 1985), 11.

¹⁰ Dilip Hiro. Holy Wars: The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism. (New York, 1989), 1.

been expanded in use to include the effort to define the fundamentals of a religious system and the adherence to those basic tenets. One of the cornerstones of the Islamic version of the Western-applied term fundamentalism is to protect the integrity of Islamic precepts from corruption imposed by sources outside the Islamic community. Related to fundamentalism, and central to this discussion, is Islamic radicalism which seeks to initiate a renewed reawakening in Islam in a struggle to purify Islam in order to unleash all its vital force.

In any religious context, fundamentalist phenomena involve a return to the basics, to the extreme foundations of the faith. The radical Islamists subscribe to the general characteristics of fundamentalist thought and ideology which most of the Sunni Islamist movements of the Islamic world have come to share. Islam is considered a complete system of existence, universally applicable to all times and places, including the hereafter. Dissimilar to Christianity, the separation of the faith and the state is inconceivable. Rule is inherent in Islam; the Qur'an gives the law, and the state enforces the law.¹¹

The foundations of Islam are the Qur'an and the

¹¹ Leonard Binder. The Ideological Revolution in the Middle East. (New York, 1964), 41.

traditions (sunna) of Muhammed, God's Messenger, as well as the practices of the Prophet, his companions, and the first four caliphs. Islam is the final truth and final revelation. Muhammed was the last prophet; the Seal of the Prophets. As stewards of the ultimate truth, primary missions in life for Muslims are submission or slave status to God (ibadah), and the propagation of Islam. The call to the spiritual reawakening should be based on a return to the straight path which motivated the first Muslims. Salvation is possible if Muslims turn away from the ways of the modern corrupted society and revert to the purity of belief and actions of their ancestors. The first community established by Muhammed and his companions is the only model for imitation.

"Lo! this Qur'an guideth unto that which is straightest, and giveth tidings unto the believers who do good works that theirs will be a great reward."¹² All adherents of Islam are called to the straight path to God, however; those Muslims who desire to be in the forefront of the reawakening of Islam take a more critical look at what constitutes the straight path. The significant linchpin to this more critical look is the governmental leaders in the

¹² Marmaduke Pickthall. The Meaning of the glorious Koran. (New York, n.d.), 205.

Arab/Muslim world. Fundamental to this focal concept is the replacement of those in power with leaders more attuned to Islamic principles. It is the movement and the groups associated with this militant idea that is called Radical Islam.

It is impossible to undertake a discussion of Radical Islam without including the contributions of the ideological theoreticians of the movement: Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1326), Sayyid Abul ala Maulani Maududi (1903-1979), and Sayyid Qutb (1903-1966). Ibn Taymiyyah is generally considered, after Ibn Hanbal, to be the most prominent harbinger of present-day Radical Islam. This medieval theoretician was the archetype of the militant and activist defender of the faith. He refused to accept any authority except the Qur'an, the sunna and the practices of the early Islamic community. Ibn Taymiyyah vehemently advocated Jihad (holy war) against the Mongols, the Ismailis, Alawis, and the Druze.¹³ An adherent of anthropomorphism, he attributed human characteristics to God and believed in the literal interpretation of Qur'anic references to the Deity.

As an activist renewer of the faith (mujaddid), Ibn Taymiyyah's central goal was the manifestation of moral

¹³ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 40.

solidarity centered on the reawakening of Islamic ideology and its strict implementation in society. For Ibn Taymiyyah, this solidarity translated to the spirit of brotherhood binding together all the Muslim faithful from the time of Muhammed to the time of the Final Judgement.¹⁴

Moral solidarity was imperative if Muslims were to become the witnesses of God on earth. Ibn Taymiyyah considered fighting in Jihad a higher obligation than pilgrimage, prayer, or fasting.¹⁵

The most significant impact of Ibn Taymiyyah on contemporary Islamist theory and practice results from his commitment to translate his words into deeds. He actively participated in the military operations against the Tartars and was incessantly a victim of inquisition and imprisonment by local authorities for the unwavering defense of his beliefs.

The Egyptian ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, was instrumental in the transition of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from its stagnated fundamentalism to the youthful radicalism of the 1970s. In his book, Milestones, the Egyptian theoretician of the resurgence movement issued a call to

¹⁴ Victor E. Makari. Ibn Taymiyyah's Ethics. (Chico, C.A., 1983), 113.

¹⁵ Ibid., 121.

action to Muslims. Qutb called for what he termed a vanguard of believers which would undertake the formidable task of reviving Islam.¹⁶ He further charged that Islamic belief should materialize into a practical movement, and once that occurred, the movement should become a valid representation and an accurate mirror of its belief. This vanguard proposed by Qutb must separate itself from the existing society whose aim it is to inhibit Islam. Qutb formulated that the dominant sociopolitical system of the world in which he lived (Islamic and non-Islamic) was that of jahillyyah. The usual definition of the term jahillyyah is a state or condition of sinfulness, injustice, suffering, and most of all, ignorance of Islam's divine guidance. Sayyid Qutb altered his definition of jahili society as one man's lordship over another in a society which has its own traditions, habits, and feelings -- all of which are contrary to an Islamic way of life.¹⁷ Qutb's defiance of the perceived "jahili" government and his subsequent death at the hands of the government provided the younger militants with a paradigm of martyrdom to follow. Qutb perceived social reality as a perpetual

¹⁶ Sayyid Qutb. Milestones. (Cedar Rapids, I.A., 1966), 82.

¹⁷ Ibid., 84.

dialectic between the Islamic path and jahillyyah. The ideological formulations of Sayyid Qutb continue to have a guiding effect on reawakening movements in the Islamic world. Qutb followed the precedents established by Ibn Taymiyyah and his disciples.

Qutb challenged that the duty of the faithful Muslim is to transform the jahili society through proselytization and militant jihad. The transformation of jahili society into a genuinely Islamic polity is the task of a dedicated vanguard of Muslims. According to Qutb, the ultimate aim of committed Muslims should be the establishment of al-Hakimiyyah -- the reign of Allah's sovereignty on earth to end all sin, suffering, and repression.¹⁸ Qutb considered it imperative that the Muslims emulate the Prophet's move of his fledgling community of believers from jahili Mecca to Medina by separating themselves from the existing corrupt society to constitute a strong vanguard as a prelude to the final victory of the establishment of God's authority on earth.

Sayyid Qutb's influential work, In the Shade of the Qur'an is an attempt to reach those Muslims whose lives he considered to have been poisoned by modern (jahili)

¹⁸ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 91.

civilization. The exegesis of the Qur'an submitted by Qutb is not temporal; rather, it is meant to be applicable to all ages and to all Muslims. A common thread that runs through Qutb's interpretation and explanation of the Qur'an is that the straight path to Allah is well-marked and the rewards for following the path are manifest and the consequences for straying from the path are as equally obvious. Qutb understood that the straight path to Allah is a central belief of all Muslims. One of his aims was to warn Muslims that the enticements of the modern corrupt society is not central to Islam. In the Shade of the Qur'an is written with such eloquence that it is easy to understand how a disaffected young Muslim might be attracted to the vanguard proffered by Sayyid Qutb and indeed wish to emulate Qutb who was hanged for his beliefs.

The Pakistani, Abu ala Maududi, is revered in the Islamic world as one of the foremost modern exponents and interpreters of Islam.¹⁹ The writings of Maududi provided powerful expression to the themes basic to the present-day reawakening of Islam. A critical turning point in Maududi's career and the evolution of Islamic resurgence occurred in 1933 when Maududi assumed responsibility of the

¹⁹ Charles Adams. "Mawdudi and the Islamic State." Voices of Resurgent Islam. (New York, 1983), 99.

journal Tarjuman al-Qur'an in Hyderabad. Maududi believed that an obligation had been thrust upon him. His mission, as he perceived it, was to invite Indian Muslims to a reawakened and purified commitment to Islam and thereby to save them from destruction by the malevolent forces sweeping over their society.²⁰ Utilizing the journal as his tool, Maududi undertook a campaign of criticism, analysis, and exposition of Islam designed to induce the allegiance of the Indian Muslim leadership and to redirect it to the straight path.

Maududi developed the modern jayllyyah theory in 1939 as a sweeping condemnation of modernity and its incompatibility with Islam, and to formulate a definition of the danger it constituted.²¹ Maududi claimed he saw a great wave, stimulated by modernity, about to destroy the Muslims. Maududi, who was a Sunni, developed Islam, through ijtihad (independent and authoritative interpretation in Islamic law) and literal exposition, into a modern ideology with answers for all individual and social problems.²² His advocacy of ijtihad was based on

²⁰ Ibid., 101.

²¹ Sivan. Radical Islam. 22.

²² Hiro. Holy Wars. 247.

the interpretation being in strict adherence to the spirit of the Sharia commandments.

Differing from the traditional ulama of the time whom Maududi perceived as expending their energies in dealing with relatively arcane and irrelevant matters, he confronted the modern world equipped with the Sharia. Maududi chastised orthodox ulama for confusing the fundamentals of Islam with the details of its application, and weakening Islam by adding their rules to the precepts of the Sharia.

The argument offered by Maududi that Islam was self-sufficient and quite separate from, and indeed opposed to, both western and socialist ways of life made his teachings particularly attractive to young Muslims then and young disaffected Muslims everywhere in today's Muslim world.²³ Maududi considered the West to be morally bankrupt and corrupt which logically led to his assertion that Islam and Western civilization are poles apart in their objectives and in their principles of social organization and there was no likelihood that the twain would ever meet. In his writings, Maududi used the term [la dini] to translate secular. His term [la dini] literally means religionless

²³ Sivan. Radical Islam. 76.

which makes it consistent with his belief that a religionless society is obviously anathema to everything for which Islam stands.

Emmanuel Sivan provides in Radical Islam a treatment of radical Islam that is essential to the understanding of events that might take place in the future in the Islamic world. Sivan's essay traces the transformation of medieval theology into contemporary Muslim politics. This spectrum includes the conservative fundamentalist movement and extends to extreme radicalism. As the title of his book indicates, the author's subject is the radical end of the spectrum. Sivan distinguishes the ends of the spectrum based on their means to achieve their objectives. Those Muslims involved in Islamist groups that are considered relatively conservative are content to depend on religious education programs to convince the powers that be that a change to a system more aware of Islamic ideals is needed. Conversely, those more militantly-oriented Muslims belonging to the more radical Islamist groups have tired of waiting for the elite to be re-educated. They are calling for immediate action.

Sivan identifies a subdued mood among hardcore fundamentalists during the last few years of the fourteenth century of the Islamic Era (ended 19 November 1979). As

Muslim thinkers evaluated the vanishing century, which of course included the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the general feeling was that Islam faced tremendous challenges. The 1967 and 1973 wars contributed significantly to the realization of the abysmal state of Islam. Sivan points out that the shared experience of being in prison under one regime or the other crystallized the unity of thought and action of the radicals.

The perception of the radicals provides many pieces of evidence that they believe have caused the relegation of Islam to marginality and necessitates the need for an Islamic reawakening. Sivan cites the Egyptian theologian, Dr. Muhammad al-Bahi, who accused the secularizing elites of being the problem from within that is destroying Islam. Dr. al-Bahi also maintains that nationalism (Arab or Persian) loosens religious solidarity and essentially replaces it.²⁴ One of the basic tenets of Sivan's discussion is that the Islamic reawakening is a defensive holding operation against the encroachment of modernity.

Habib Boulares parallels the assessment of Emmanuel Sivan concerning the current state of Islam. In the opinion of Boulares, the religion is wracked by the disease

²⁴ Ibid., 78.

of corruption, westernization, and ostentatious materialism. As a result of this crisis milieu, the Islamic religious freedom fighter recognizes the disease and understands the cure that must be applied to save the society. For Boulares, Islam is a faith, an ethos, a cosmogony, a cult, and most importantly, a way of life.²⁵ He defends Islam as an all-encompassing religion with simple creeds that will lead all who believe in them to the straight path to Allah. Edward Mortimer, in Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam, recounts how he naively thought of Islam as a subject that could be fairly easily identified, defined, described and analysed: an institution, a set of ideas - something more or less comparable to the Roman Catholic Church. Mortimer discovered that Islam is much more protean than that. In his opinion, it is everywhere and nowhere. Islam is advertised as more than a mere religion; it is a way of life, a model of society, a culture, a civilization. Any thinking that reduces Islam to an institution belittles the religion and condemns the one reducing it to such a state to be in perpetual misunderstanding about Islam.²⁶

²⁵ Boulares. Islam. 44.

²⁶ Edward Mortimer. Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam. (New York, 1982), 16.

Islamic revivalists blame mass media for polluting the sanctity of Islam. Pop music, video games, cassette recorders and other purveyors of Western influence are assaulting Islam. Foremost among these forms of Western decadence, according to the radical Islamists, is the nightclub industry. The radicals point to problems in education such as the teaching of science which also subverts Islam. The embarrassing state of the Arabic language, the sacred language of Islam, puts another chink in the armor of Islam. The most destructive critique of the education field is reserved for the teaching of history. The radicals allege that the current trend in the teaching of history distorts the significance of Islam. In the teaching of history, Muslim motivation in the seventh-century conquests is linked to the population and resource imbalance in Arabia and the desire to acquire rich lands to the north. The present methods attribute Muslim victories to military skill rather than religious spirit.

The economic aspect of modernity also causes problems for the radical defenders of Islam. Increased Western investment in the Middle East and the failure of oil-rich Arab states to share the wealth contribute to the decline of Islam. Foreign investment brings with it foreign corruption of Islamic society. A type of cultural

imperialism occurs. The most vehement condemnation of this cultural imperialism by the radicals is directed at consumerism. The Western advertising and media onslaught has created new needs and heightened expectations for the Islamic world which the economy and the politicians cannot deliver. The radical assessment of the challenges facing Islam is that the challenges cannot be coped with considering the present state of the Islamic establishment.

Sivan succinctly uses memoirs from radicals recounting their prison experiences and reform movement activities to demonstrate how the radicals equate barbarity and nationalism. One such prison account explained how Israel and Nasser were simply two variations of tyranny which were hostile to Islam.²⁷ Sivan presents evidence showing how the ideology of the radicals, especially in Egypt, was altered due to their shared prison experiences. For instance, the repression of the Muslim Brethren by Nasser so alienated its members that by 1967 the group proclaimed that the Arab-Jewish conflict was not an Islamic war.²⁸

Sivan maintains that the events at the Abu Za'bal prison camp in Egypt prior to the 1967 war transformed

²⁷ Sivan. Radical Islam. 105.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

Muslim Brethren radical thought. He points particularly to the branding of Nasser's regime (and really any authoritarian regime) as being anathema to Islam as the critical element. The 1967 disaster (the Six Day War) contributed to the spread of this radical thought from Egypt to Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Sivan credits Sayyid Qutb with having crystallized the ideology of radical Islam. Qutb was modern-educated and had reached a level of distinction as a literary critic in the 1930s and 1940s. It is critical to understand that Qutb's antimodernism was based on the premise that he came to know modernity, did not like it, and turned away from it. As was mentioned previously, Qutb owed allegiance to the theory of "Modern Jahillyya" developed in India in 1939 by Abu ala Maududi. Maududi stated emphatically that a compromise between modernity and Islam was impossible.

The idea that autocratic regimes are infidel emanated from Qutb's writing. In his book, In the Shade of the Qur'an, Qutb wrote: "Jahillyya signifies the domination of man over man or rather the subservience to man rather than to Allah".²⁹ Qutb warned that as the world grows smaller the danger of culturally poisoning the Islamic world

²⁹ Sayyid Qutb. In the Shade of the Qur'an. (Cedar Rapids, I.A., 1963), 94.

becomes more inevitable. Qutb maintained that a view toward Western societies is a view to a future that will not work. That future includes unfettered individualism, dissolution, and decadence which will lead to a moral and social decline.

In an effort to escape the state of barbarity, society must experience a radical change. Domination should be returned to Allah by way of Islam. An all-encompassing jihad should be declared and waged against modernity. Qutb does not call for a rejection of technology and science. Meaningful uses can be found for the results of technology and science but Qutb cautioned against blurring the borders between the two and basic religious tenets. It is essential to mention the radicals' viewpoint on Pan-Arabism. Pan-Arabism is totally rejected as being incompatible with Islam. In their opinion, the only identity worthy of mankind is Islam.

Rule in the Muslim world is predicated on Islamic legitimacy and authenticity. The radicals consider such trends and events as the Westernization of schools and laws, male teachers in girls' schools, the semi-secularization of Al-Azhar and the incorporation of Egyptian Sharia courts into the civil system as affronts to legitimacy and authenticity. The religious establishment

(the ulama) are considered ineffectual government lackeys. Sivan correctly concludes that the inefficacy of the ulama, combined with the ignorance of the masses in religious matters, accounts for the ease with which the autocratic regimes in the region manipulate Islam for their benefit.

A more contemporary account that supports this view is found in the article "The Political Leverage of Islam" by John Esposito. In this article, Esposito explains how Saddam Hussein played his "Islamic card" during the recent Gulf War. Esposito elucidates how Hussein appealed to many of the conditions and issues that are the hallmarks of Radical Islam: the poverty, corruption, and maldistribution of wealth presided over by Arab governments, the plight of the Palestinians, and foreign intervention leading to Arab dependence. Esposito predicts that the reality of Muslim societies today contributes to a climate in which the influence of Islam and radical Islamist organizations will increase rather than diminish.³⁰

One clever strategy used by the radicals which also is credited to Sayyid Qutb is the Nasser = Ataturk formula to condemn secularization. Ataturk's devastation of Islam in Turkey through the abolition of the caliphate, the

³⁰ John Esposito. "The Political Leverage of Islam." The Christian Century. (April 10, 1991), 45.

subversion of Islam as a religion, the destruction of the Arabic language and the rejuvenation of Pan-Turanian nationalism was provided as evidence of the evil of the secular world. The equation has outlived Nasser and has been applied to other Muslim rulers in the 70s and 80s, most notably Hafez Assad of Syria.

Sivan provides an interesting treatment of a phenomenon he refers to as cultural pessimism. He maintains that the Islamic civilization that has always considered itself as destined for leadership in the world has suffered one setback after another at the hands of infidels. The spectrum of disaster runs the gamut from the Umayyads to the Israelis. It is these disasters, combined with the decadence of the encroaching foreign powers, which have returned Islam to the state of jahillyya. An accusation first made by Maududi, and further developed by Qutb, alleges that those in power (especially in military regimes) have caused this state of affairs and are guilty of apostasy.

Chapter Two

The Crisis Environment

The first step in the radicals' program of emergence from the present state of barbarity is the return of the reawakened Islam to politics. The new Radicals hope for greater unity among the various groups but resign themselves to the political situation in their countries. Sivan contends that there is intense exchange of ideas and cross-fertilization between the groups and it is this transfer of ideas that makes the new Radicals a movement. However; there is no overall, pan-Islamic, radical leadership. The writings of the fourteenth-century theologian, Ibn Taymiyyah, provided the ideological justification for this element of the radical ideology. Ibn Taymiyyah maintained that the community (umma) did not necessarily need one leader. In his opinion, when the historical conditions necessitate it, as when there are many Muslim states, there could certainly be several leaders, if worthy individuals could be found. Despite the decentralization and the factionalism of the different radical movements, there are certain broad common currents. The radicals presuppose a pathetic state of Islam. This presupposition necessitates urgency and leads to some type

of a revolt against present Muslim society. According to the Maududi theory, the true Muslims should be involved in a state of war against those Muslims who have caused the state of jahillyya or those who are condoning it. Qutb referred to these true Muslims as the vanguard (a term he freely admitted that he borrowed from Marxism) and believed that they should be set apart in a counter-society. Muhammed's group of followers in pre-622 Mecca is considered by the radicals to be the exemplary counter-society.

The right to revolt is not inherent in traditional Sunni political theory. The trauma of the mid-seventh century civil wars continues to haunt Sunni thinking. The process of removing legitimacy and the right to revolt are virtually alien to Sunnism. Sayyid Qutb attempted to legitimize revolt in Sunni political thought by transferring the blame to those who force Muslims to work in a counter-society to restore Islam. The radicals' position on violence is clear. They discount the conservative call for an on-going educational program to cure the state of decay. In the view of the radicals, the distinction between educational effort and violence is immaterial. Individuals as well as the state should be fought if it is a deviant Islamic state in which the ruler

is unjust, morally depraved, employs non-Muslims, or incompetent Muslims in the administration, or finally, when the Sharia is not applied. The reasons that propel urban youth to the radical movement could be considered an omen for the future. The movement of the urban youth is caused not only by the idealism and activism of people (in the Muslim world) aged fifteen to thirty, but mainly by the fact that these youths are the ultimate victims of the region's socioeconomic ills. Once the young people were tempted by rising expectations prompted by the October war and economic Open Door Policy, the state was set for disruption. Radical Islam provided these urban youth with a focus for their dashed hopes. The movement is viewed as a return to a more puritanical and egalitarian way of life.

In the final chapter of his book Sivan leaves his central idea of Sunni radicalism and analyzes the impact of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Sivan maintains that Sunni radicalism evolved in an autonomous manner. In his opinion, there is no evidence of Shi'ite influence on Sunni radicalism in the twenty-five year period between the enunciation of Sayyid Qutb's ideas in the 1950s and the Iranian Revolution. The author points out that some of the apathy and ignorance was partially linguistic. The crux of Sivan's treatment of Shi'ite radicalism is reduced to three

major areas: the diagnosis of the threat to Islam, how to cure it, and how to apply the cure. In these three respects, the philosophies of Radical Sunnism and Revolutionary Shi'ism are amazingly similar.

The diagnosis is that Islam is in a state of jahillyya once again. The state causes a danger to the existence of the religion far greater than any it has ever faced. This time the danger is not from some encroaching foreign power but from within Dar al-Islam. The present leaders in the Muslim world are under the spell of the West and use the most modern electronic devices to stimulate the desire for the good life as seen through Western-influenced eyes. The cure is simple to the radicals. It necessitates the return of those faithful to Islam to the political arena. Once returned to the political sphere, they must attack modernity in its Muslim version. In addition, the awareness of the masses and, above all, the youth, must be increased. There is an unavoidable consequence for the radicals; the existing regimes must be delegitimized and overthrown. The final blow, the application of the cure, will mean an armed uprising and the taking over of governments by the vanguard of political Islam. This application of the cure will enable the establishment of a state in which the Sharia is applied.

These assertions and claims portend an ominous future for the Muslim world. As the chasm between the haves and the have-nots widens, more of the disaffected youth will turn to the radical movement. As this vanguard increases in numbers the attempt to apply the cure becomes more likely.

Radical Islam has exploded onto the international scene by its actions in myriad national settings since 1979 such as:

- The Islamic Revolution in Iran
- The takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca
- Resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan
- Armed opposition to Iraq's Baath regime
- The assassination of President Sadat
- Suicide attacks and armed struggle against Israeli, American, and French forces in Lebanon
- Disturbances in Bahrain and bombings in Kuwait
- Rioting and demonstrations in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco³¹

It is clear that the decade since the Iranian Revolution has witnessed a heightening and deepening of Islamic consciousness in Muslim communities throughout the

³¹ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 3.

world. This reawakening of the Islamic spirit has been spiritual, social, economic, and political in its manifestations. Radical Islam, in its attempt to renew the principles and fundamentals of Islam, is pervasive, polycentric, and persistent.³² The pervasiveness of Radical Islam is evidenced by the existence of groups and movements in just about every Muslim community regardless of size, or political, economic, or cultural setting. The reawakening of Islam and the concept of its application as envisioned by the radical Islamists is polycentric because it does not have a single revolutionary leadership or organized epicenter. To a significant degree, Radical Islam has manifested a local character based on responses to particular crisis situations existing in different national environments. Radical Islam, along with the more passive reawakening of Islam, has shown its persistence by attempting to intrude upon the sociopolitical process to impact on its evolution.

Any balanced and dispassionate analysis of Radical Islam is singularly dysfunctional if the Western practice of placing Radical Islam (or any form of Islamic

³² Hiro. Holy Wars. 13.

reawakening) under the rubric of fanaticism is applied.³³ The current reawakening of Islam fits into the historical pattern whereby manifestations of religious resurgence correlate to periods of intense spiritual, social, and political crisis.³⁴ Contemporary Islamists regard themselves as the direct successors and emulators of past leaders and movements of resurgence and renewal.

Present-day Islamists harken back to the first Islamic community founded by Muhammed as the perfect expression of social existence. Muhammed was both prophet and leader. This dual role translated divine revelation into political community. The Prophet's ability to combine theory and practice has exercised a profound influence on Muslim communities throughout the ages. There are two primary sources of imitation for later generations of Muslims. The foremost is the Qur'an -- God's word through his Messenger, the Prophet Muhammed. The second source is the sunna which is the exemplary behavior of the Prophet consisting of his statements, deeds, and judgements, as embodied in narrative traditions or hadith.

The contemporary Islamists response to the jahili

³³ Boulares, Islam. 176.

³⁴ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 9.

situation in the Arab world has its most vocal expression in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliate organizations in Syria and Jordan. After its brutal repression by Gamel Abdel Nasser, the Brotherhood resurfaced during the period of Anwar Sadat as part of a new reawakening. The new resurgence went beyond the Brotherhood to include several of its belligerent branches, along with a profusion of other Islamic societies.³⁵ The establishment of the Islamic regime in Iran caused a surge of Shiite militancy in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Gulf states. The Iranian Revolution also provided the impetus for revolutionary action by Sunni Islamist groups in the Arab world.

R. Hrair Dekmejian, in Islam in Revolution, provides a cogent chapter on the social-psychological bases of Islamic reawakening. It is especially instructive to consider these factors in the context of the presently perceived crisis environment in the Arab/Islamic world. The contemporary Arab/Islamic social setting is characterized by certain special attributes of protracted and intense crisis, which establishes the catalysts that have triggered Islamist responses. One characteristic

³⁵ Richard Mitchell. The Society of Muslim Brothers. (London, 1969), 201.

inherent in the Islamic crisis milieu is the upheaval of individual and collective identity among the Muslims. Since the Islamist view of Islam constitutes an all-encompassing life system that includes religion, state and law, the challenge of finding a substitute framework of identity is difficult, if not impossible.

The progressive demise of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires provided the impetus for the rise of competing ethno-linguistic identities.³⁶ In the Arab/Islamic world, the indigenous Turkish, Iranian, and Arab/Egyptian nationalisms emerged as alternatives for the Islamic umma or community. Religious legitimacy has always been a staple of the Islamic world. The most immediate consequence of identity crisis and alienation or disaffection is the abrupt decline in the religious legitimacy of ruling elites and institutions. The legitimacy crisis has been reinforced by the failure of the leaders in the political, economic, and social realms.

The legitimacy of political systems and elites is immutably reinforced or weakened depending on the performance of the leaders. Arab leaders have often been devoid of the necessary initial political acumen to

³⁶ Hiro. Holy Wars. 224.

generate effective policies that establish the foundation of stable public order. The frequent failure of those in power to develop and implement socially beneficial policies has led to the disintegration of their tenuous legitimacy and to a consequent increase in the use of force to maintain control. In recent decades, Arab ruling elites have often solidified themselves in power through increasing levels of coercion against opponents, who are summarily denied institutionalized channels of free expression. The acquisition of administrative expertise and technological sophistication has significantly increased the coercive capabilities of these elites. These quantum increases of coercive and control capabilities have further contributed to the present crisis environment in the Islamic world.

A critical result of leader incompetence and misrule in the Arab/Islamic world has been the increasing maldistribution of wealth in just about every Arab country. The availability of oil money and the impact of global market forces have greatly expanded the economic chasm between the social classes. This phenomenon has occurred in the midst of corruption and conspicuous consumption among rulers and their clients. These factors have generated sharp divisions in the social classes and

contention in populations experiencing accelerated rates of growth.

Another contributing factor to the crisis situation is the persistence of military defeats. Implicit in the Arab quest for independence was the yearning to acquire sufficient military potential to safeguard vital interests. It is obvious that this aspiration has not been realized, despite significant sacrifices of economic and human resources by military and monarchical oligarchies. With the lone exception of Algeria, no Arab state has realized independence primarily through military means. The successive defeats by Israel culminating in the June 1967 disaster produced traumatic waves among Arabs and Muslims, engendering deep feelings of fear, insecurity, and anger. The June 1967 defeat spurred a period of intense introspection in the Arab/Islamic world. The inability of Arab leaders to nullify Israeli occupation of Arab territory has sapped their political legitimacy and generated widespread disillusionment, anguish, and despair. The rather swift and complete annihilation of the Iraqi army in the most recent Gulf war adds further insult to the already injured perception of continued Arab military impotence.

Fouad Ajami, in his controversial work, The Arab

Predicament, uses an excerpt from Najib Mahfuz's book, Al-Karnak, to exemplify the apparent predicament of the Arabs. During the interminable discussion of war and how and why it should be waged against Israel, one of the characters laments, "The real enemy of the Arabs are the Arabs themselves."³⁷ The Arab Predicament paints a picture of a divided and fractured world which does not have the capacity to solve the Arab predicament in the modern world. Ajami lays bare the root of the problem. The history of the Arab world since the beginning of the Arab renaissance in 1850 until 1980 has been fraught with promises of grandeur from political leaders which have ended in despair and politics so unbalanced that even religion had been made a part of the grubby process.

Ajami contends that the ills of Arab society come from within the system. Even though the outside world breached its borders from time to time, the real damage was inflicted by those in positions of power. Ajami questions their authenticity as well as the quality of their leadership. His diatribe directed at the internecine activities of those in power leads one to the conclusion that the Arabs (more aptly, those in power at any given

³⁷ Fouad Ajami, The Arab Predicament. (New York, 1981), 77.

time) do not possess the abilities to allow the Arab countries to enter the modern world. According to Ajami, Arab society is not accustomed to taking responsibility for its deeds.³⁸

Ajami points to two landmark events that dominated the post-World War II era in the Arab world: the Six Day War of 1967 and the October War of 1973. The October war was in essence an answer to the defeat in the 1967 war. The defeat in 1967 was a devastating blow that was culturally, psychologically, and politically unacceptable, especially to a group which commonly eschews responsibility for bad results. The Pyrrhic victory by the Arab world in the 1973 war catapulted the Arabs onto the world stage. Those in power, according to Ajami, were ill-prepared to function in the world arena at the time.

The years following the 1967 disaster are arbitrarily divided into four phases by Ajami and provide evidence for his accusations of ineptitude in the Arab system. The first Ajami phase lasted from 1967 to 1970. In an attempt to overcome the defeat of 1967, the Arab state system had to first mend some internal fences. A reconciliation was worked out between the radical states and the conservative

³⁸ Ibid., 29.

ones. This is indicative of the dominant predicament of the Arabs. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a country or region to stake a claim to legitimacy in the world if it must first win battles at home. The second phase (1970-1973) experienced a resurgence of the dominant political order. Following a deradicalization of states, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia forged the trilateral alliance that waged the October war.

The third cycle (1973-1975) witnessed the ascendancy of the dominant political order. Promises and illusions abounded. Even Palestinian self-determination seemed possible. The manifestation of sudden oil wealth caused more dreams about development and military power. Some predicted the resurgence of the Arab world and a solution to its predicament. In what Ajami charges is a common result in the Arab world, the euphoria turned into despair. The Sinai accord in September, 1975, which solidified Egypt's determinations to distance itself at that time from the Arab world and the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war signalled an uncertain future of interstate problems and domestic chaos. The last cycle (1975-1980) involved a continuance of the trends of the third one. Sadat led Egypt down a separate path (by way of Jerusalem), and the carnage of Lebanon raged as there appeared a de facto

separation between a Christian Lebanon and a Muslim one. Syria became trapped in the quicksand of Lebanon as Islamic resurgence stood ready to flourish.

It was inevitable that even a society as closed to self-criticism as the Arab world would be forced to answer some difficult questions following the defeat in the Six Day War. Ajami avers that in such introspection the tendency to charge unabated into an unknown area is overcome by the temptation to retreat into one's own tradition in a period of historical pressure.³⁹ The post-1967 era in Arab politics was a new time. The people endured the inevitable apologies and explanations for the defeat offered by the leaders. Transcending the customary ideological aftermath of such a defeat was a more profound and meaningful set of developments. There was a sincere attempt by intellectuals to discover the bases of the Arab ailment. The younger generation fostered a search for a new political truth and for concrete solutions to harsh realities. This coherent way of thinking was contrary to the normal conduct of politics and postmortems of mistakes and defeats.

Ajami alleges that the defeat was viewed as an

³⁹ Ibid., 24.

indictment of an entire way of life. All facets of Arab life were subjected to ruthless assault: Islam, the Arabic language, the capacity of the Arab as an individual, the record of the radical Arab states. According to Ajami, the principal victims of the defeat - the Baath Party and President Nasser - had just not gone far enough. The criticism of the radical left centered on the Arab heritage. It was suggested that the religion of the Arabs and its ability to provide some meaning in the present and modern world be scrutinized and, if found lacking, discarded. One prominent critic, Ali Ahmad Said (Adonis), charged that the Arab leaders had failed to imbue the masses with new beliefs and ideas that they could understand.

The concerns of the new radicals following the 1967 disaster were best expressed in a book by Sadeq al-Azm entitled Self-Criticism After the Defeat. Azm condemned the practice of not taking responsibility for the defeat by Arab leaders. He further contends that the Arabs did not know how to wage modern war. Saddled with ancient traditions of chivalry based on tribal warfare, the Arabs, to include urban dwellers and land owners, were ill-prepared for the devastation and lethality of the modern battlefield. (Azm's contention could well be applied to

the Iraqi army in light of its ineffectual performance in the recent Gulf War.) The 1967 defeat also revealed the failure of the Arab states to train and create modern citizens, to inculcate men with the will to fight and die for the state. This was and is a difficult and sensitive undertaking for it is not to the state that Arabs owe their loyalty but to their families and clans. Azm points out that this is not an individual problem but an Arab state system problem.

Many elements of Arab/Islamic society made contributions to the autopsy that followed the 1967 defeat. Those espousing a reawakened Islam attributed the defeat to the deviation from religion: the Arabs had turned away from religion and God had turned away from them. The harshest criticism was reserved for the revolutionary socialists who were active in pre-1967 Arab leadership positions. These leaders were held responsible for the Arab reversion to the state of jahillyya.

In The Arab Predicament, Fouad Ajami's final accusation against the Arabs is a pointed one. He maintains that the Arab/Islamic world is incapable of revolting against the rest of the world to become a part of it and is likewise incapable of rebelling against the past to keep the past revered but in the past. Ajami contends

that in this internal confrontation heritage wins by default in accounting for the reawakening of Islam. He extends his argument by asserting that the Islamic reawakening, which professes to be the authentic claim to power, and the integration of the Arab world into the world economy are not in contradiction at all. Ajami does warn that often authenticity becomes a refuge when practical politics fails to deliver concrete solutions for foreign weakness, domestic breakdown, and cultural seduction.⁴⁰

In the battle for authenticity which followed the disaster of 1967, the old order in the Arab world triumphed. The people of the desert and heritage had won over the worldly capitals that had strayed from the straight path (Beirut) and those that had sold out to foreign doctrines (Cairo, Damascus). In a new modification of the theory espoused by the North African historian, Ibn Khaldun, which depicted the struggle between the Bedouins and the city dwellers as the key to the rise and fall of dynasties and empires, the Arab cities were in decline while the Bedouins (Qaddafi and the conservatives in the peninsula) were on the ascendancy.

By far the most puissant catalyst of the Arab cultural

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

crisis is the disruptive impact of modernization. The incentive to modernize was originally instigated by the desire to emulate the West in acquiring military strength and economic development. This largely unsuccessful and destabilizing enterprise for military and economic modernization has produced abrupt cleavages between traditionalists and modernists. These chasms of opinion are exacerbated by the fact that modernization involves the introduction of non-autochthonous behavioral norms and values which might impinge negatively on Islamic principles.

The crisis environment in the Arab/Islamic world impacts significantly on the personality of an individual who can be categorized as an adherent to Radical Islam. The vanguard member is an acutely alienated and disaffected individual. His alienation, the direct consequence of the Arab/Islamic crisis milieu, involves rejection of alternative identity designations such as Nasserism and Baathism, liberal capitalism, socialism, and the legitimacy of Arab ruling elites.⁴¹ The radical Islamist clearly recognizes that in the spectrum of wealth maldistribution he/she is at the lower end of the scale. As is usually

⁴¹ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 33.

typical of a convert, the Islamist's discovery of the reawakened faith is followed by complete submersion into the faith as a true believer.

There are often feelings of inferiority among the radical Islamists. These feelings are precipitated by their disaffection and inability to find a comfortable place in society. Islamists have a propensity to be aggressive in their associations with unbelievers and often with mainstream Muslims in compensation for their deprivations in society and in their conviction that those who do not follow the Islamist way of thinking are not following the straight path to God. The intolerance of Islamic radicals stems from the dogmatic content of their creed and their total identification with its strict precepts.

These radical believers exhibit the highest sense of idealism and devotion to their cause. Based on the belief that their interpretation of the message and mission of Islam is the unequivocal truth, the replacement of existing jahili governments becomes the driving impetus for their actions. This radical idealism is intensified by the pledge of absolute obedience to Allah and the sunna of the Prophet.

The factors that cause a crisis environment

necessarily create the opposition to state authority. This opposition is a result of widespread popular dissatisfaction with existing society and state. Habib Boulares points out in Islam: Fear and Hope that the most aggressive Islamist movements come from traditional sources at times when societies are undergoing profound changes. He explains that it is during such times that people seek new meaning in their lives. People desire a balance between what is and what should be and between the present and the future. Boulares considers a general condition for radical Islamist action to be a situation in which a society in full transformation discovers the break between the economic and social order.⁴² Boulares, as do many others, presents the Muslim Brethren as the archetypal Islamist organization. The Brethren has survived phases of understanding with state power.

It is possible to ascertain from manifestos and statements issued by Islamists groups some commonly perceived conditions that might spur Islamist movements to undertake violent actions. In Syria in 1982, a manifesto issued under the aegis of the Syrian Islamic Front contained words such as repression, oppression, tyranny,

⁴² Boulares. Islam. 88.

despotism and terrorist state. In Egypt, one manifesto read corruption, misery, alliance with Israel (after Sadat's peace activities) and despotism.⁴³ Boulares explains that an attempt to determine if these Islamist movements are primarily religious or political is secondary. According to him, it is a fact that these movements proliferate in societies that are in periods of evolution displaying disarray and imbalance. Just as Islam and its application differs from country to country so does the impact on individuals. However, there are clearly common characteristics of those groups more susceptible to the call to Radical Islam.

The youth of the Arab countries tends to be the most impressionable in relation to the call to the reawakening of Islam. This category includes high school, college and university students and graduates who are likely to become the most zealous participants in Islamist societies advocating violence.⁴⁴ The fact that the membership of radical Islamist societies includes a high percentage of young people is no coincidence. Significantly, university students and graduates with specializations in science and

⁴³ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁴ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 49.

technical fields are more prone to be attracted to Radical Islam. These people are highly motivated, idealistic, and upwardly mobile.⁴⁵

The continuous wave of migration from the countryside to the cities has been a significant destabilizing factor in the Middle East. The consequence has been the explosion of massive urban aggregations, characterized by lack of housing, unemployment, and virtual non-existence of social services. A more damaging element that fuels the feelings of disaffection is the trauma of culture shock that is experienced by the new urban dwellers. This trauma results from being separated from the solidity of their traditional middle-and lower-middle class families in the small towns and villages.⁴⁶ Thus, in an urban conglomerate society, these individuals have the proclivity to lose their psychological and social bearings as they are confronted and challenged with the values of an alien environment. In the traumatic and perplexing loneliness of the city, the migrants seek to find a niche that can provide social and spiritual comfort. The allure of the Islamist societies is

⁴⁵ Saad Eddin Ibrahim. "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups." International Journal of Middle East Studies. (December, 1980), 437.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 439.

perceived as filling that void.

The Islamist societies also tend to attract a large number of political malcontents. Their opposition to state authority is usually precipitated by the social, economic, and foreign policies of Arab/Islamic governments. These dissidents include a plethora of Nasserist and nationalist idealists, dispossessed and disaffected political, religious, and economic groups, middle - and lower - rank military officers, and the victims of state repression. Among these, the military constitutes the most potent source of Islamist insurrection.⁴⁷ The traditionalist sectors of Arab society include several mid-level occupational clusters consisting of bureaucrats, shopkeepers, professionals, teachers, clerks, artisans, and small landowners. This target audience for Radical Islam is opposed to the weakening of the Islamic ethos under the impact of foreign political, economic, and social penetration. These people perceive a threat from the state and the outside world that causes a shift from passive religious existence of radical activism. The perceived threat is viewed as being dangerous to their traditional religious identity as well as to their economic interests.

⁴⁷ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 50.

The socioeconomic position of the Arab middle classes has been destabilized in the last decade or so due to the manifestation of government policies operating in the arena of a global economy.

Not only have opportunities for middle-class individuals to acquire upward mobility been significantly reduced, it has become increasingly difficult for this stratum to retain its existing socioeconomic status. This situation leads to a milieu of relative deprivation. The economic frustrations of the middle-class elements have been compounded by their cultural alienation from the Westernized political and social elites. The great amount of conspicuous consumption by the rich, including alcohol and the mixing of the sexes has caused a collective wrath to be generated by devout Muslims against the ostentatious and corrupt rich.⁴⁸ This gap is reinforced by a widening economic chasm which the middle classes are unable to bridge despite their relatively high educational level. The high level of education in the middle classes has contributed to an increase in social consciousness among large segments of the middle class. This acute awareness to socioeconomic injustice and the cultural corruption by

⁴⁸ Yvonne Haddad, Byron Haines, and Ellison Findly (eds). The Islamic Impact. (Syracuse, N.Y., 1984), 38.

the West on their Islamic identity has made the middle class a fertile field for recruitment by Islamist organizations.

The shapeless mass of the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum consists of poor peasants, tribesmen, and the urban poor. These oppressed and disinherited lower classes are proliferous sources of new members for the radical cause. As the most traditional sectors of society, these Muslims possess a deep and abiding commitment to Islam. This element, combined with their inferior socioeconomic position, makes them willingly receptive to the Islamist message of reawakening. In a crisis environment of revolutionary fervor, this segment of society along with the youth and lower-middle class elements, are likely to be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice by providing cannon fodder in possible seizure of power by the military and its civilian allies.

Even though the reawakening movement in the Islamic world has no identifiable center of control, it is possible to distinguish some basic characteristics of the radical Islamist ideology which contribute to its ability to induce converts to its cause at the mass level. The movement provides a new identity for a multitude of individuals who have lost their social and spiritual way. The doctrine

clearly defines the world view of its adherents in unambiguous terms by identifying the sources of "right" and "wrong". The movement offers alternative modalities to cope with the crisis milieu of the contemporary jahili society. A protest ideology is provided against the entrenched system. Radical Islam provides a safe haven from uncertainty for its followers by granting a sense of dignity and belonging. Probably the most attractive element in the ideology of Radical Islam is that it promises a better life in a future Islamist utopia, possibly on earth and definitely in heaven. With that thought, it is instructive to quote the credo of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt:

God is our goal, the Prophet is our leader,
The Qur'an is our constitution, struggle is
our way.

Death in the Service of God is the loftiest
of our wishes.

God is Great, God is Great.⁴⁹

The revolutionary ideology of Radical Islam transcends the usual precepts of the Western-named Islamic fundamentalism movement. The adherents of Radical Islam

⁴⁹ Mitchell. Muslim Brothers. 193.

believe that theological doctrine and political realism necessitate violent revolution. Inherent in this militant doctrine is the assumption that a Crusader mentality, Western (in particular, the United States) and Eastern (the Soviet Union, even after the crumbling of the communist monolith) neocolonialism, and the power of Zionism pit the West against the Islamic world. A key hypothesis of the precepts of Radical Islam is that the establishment of an Islamic system of government is not simply an alternative but an Islamic imperative, based on God's command or will. From this hypothesis, it follows that all Muslims must obey and follow this divine mandate by struggling to implement and follow God's law.⁵⁰

The radical Islamists presuppose that since the legitimacy of Muslim governments is based on the Sharia, those governments that do now follow it are illegitimate. Those governments and individuals who fail to follow Islamic law are guilty of unbelief. They are no longer Muslim, but are atheists whose unbelief demands holy war. Opposition to illegitimate governments extends to the official ulama, the religious establishment, and state-supported mosques and preachers who are considered to have

⁵⁰ John Esposito. The Straight Path. (New York, 1988), 171.

been co-opted by the government. For the radicals, jihad against unbelief and unbelievers is a religious duty. Therefore, all true believers, according to the radicals, are obliged to combat such governments and their supporters, whether individuals or foreign governments. Christians and Jews are generally regarded by the militant Islamists as unbelievers rather than "People of the Book" because of their connections with Western (Christian) colonialism and Zionism. They are seen as partners in a Judeo-Christian conspiracy against Islam and the Muslim world.⁵¹ In contrast to the so-called fundamentalists who have tended to concentrate on nonviolent interpretations of jihad, the radicals believe that Islam is indeed in danger, locked in a defensive war against repressive anti-Islamic or un-Islamic rulers and states. The radicals regard themselves as the true defenders of Islam.

⁵¹ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 161.

Chapter Three

Implications for United States Foreign Policy

Any effort to predict the future of Radical Islam must take into account the myriad variables and the high probability of accidents and unforeseen events. Who, for instance, would have prognosticated the 1991 Gulf War. It is clear that the foreign policy makers and intelligence agencies of the United States were taken by surprise by the actions of Saddam Hussein and his attempt to play his Islamic card in the aftermath of his invasion of Kuwait. The most significant factor to be taken under consideration in a prognosis of the future of Radical Islam is that of profound and pervasive social crisis. The crisis environment in the Islamic world is characterized by a crisis of identity, legitimacy, rulership, culture, economic development, and military credibility.⁵²

The emergency milieu for Islam is precipitated and sustained by external challenges from the West and Israel, as well as by internal fomentation caused by maldistribution of wealth, social injustice, and misrule and corruption. This situation sets the stage for an era

⁵² Ibid., 162.

of intense political instability. It is within this environment of upheaval that any potential role for Radical Islam must be scrutinized. The crisis milieu extant in the Islamic world will directly affect the actions of the existing governmental entities. The situation will be complicated by the types of external stimuli and internal opposition the leaders are likely to confront. The Arab-Israeli peace negotiations in the fall of 1991 is but one example of the external stimuli mentioned. While the current leaders of the Islamic world are likely to view the peace convocations as an attempt to ease some of the external stimuli, the vanguard of Radical Islam will probably perceive the conferences as another failure of the ruling elites.

To abate the radical Islamist movement and lessen the level of social agitation, Islamic leaders must pursue interrelated policies of comprehensive reform, systematic socialization, and moderation in the use of state power against opponents. The track record of the region in the arena of major reform in these types of policies does not provoke encouragement. Major reform of the requisite magnitude requires self-discipline and dedication by the ruling elites as well as energy and vision. The refusal of the Al-Sabah regime in Kuwait to implement any meaningful

reforms after its liberation in the Gulf War is but one example of this elite recalcitrance.

To a significant degree, the evolution of Radical Islam is molded by external factors. Despite the fact that the Islamist movement has no focal ideological center, an increase of significant degree in Islamic militancy in Egypt will reverberate throughout the Muslim world. Moreover, an Islamist takeover in one of the countries in the Muslim world would be even more serious. Should the recent Islamic agitation in Algeria result in the replacement of the existing government with one more attuned to Islamic principles, a concomitant rise in radical Islamic activity in other countries in the Muslim world can be expected.

The previously mentioned Arab-Israeli conflict is another powerful external stimulus. Radical Islam has for a long time used the military impotence of the Islamic world vis-a-vis Israel as an effective propaganda weapon in its attack on virtually all the ruling elite in the region. The American complicity in its relations with Israel and key states in the Muslim world has had a continuing debilitating impact on the eroding legitimacy and credibility of ruling elites. The progressive deterioration of the Arab position with respect to Israel,

combined with the American failure to achieve a mutually acceptable Arab-Israeli settlement with an accompanying solution to the Palestinian debacle, are apt to provoke movements of Islamist and national rebellion against pro-American elites in the Muslim world.⁵³

The evolution of Radical Islam will also depend on the quality of its political and intellectual leadership. The movement is presently devoid of ideological, political, and tactical guidance. The leading activists of the various militant groups have been killed.⁵⁴ It may be an extended period of time before new leaders emerge. The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and other Arab states is old and weary after years of imprisonment and persecution.

The ultimate challenges facing Radical Islam are clear. The movement has to develop a broad and flexible Islamic ideological program that generates and maintains the widest possible appeal to major segments of the population. An effort of this sort would be a prelude to organizing something approximating a "national front" with other militant organizations and "non-fundamentalist" groups which oppose the existing regimes. There has been

⁵³ R. Hrair Dekmejian. "Islamic Revival and the Arab-Israeli Conflict." New Outlook. (November-December, 1980), 66.

⁵⁴ Mitchell. Muslim Brothers. 223.

some movement in this direction in Syria and Iraq and to a lesser degree in Egypt. It is doubtful whether the Radical Islamic movements themselves can agree on a single profession of purpose and risk compromising their ideological purity. It is imperative that Radical Islam develops strong transnational links between Islamist groups, both within and outside the Arab world. There is evidence that the level of transnational cooperation among Islamist organizations has greatly increased in recent years. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is once again the catalyst for this phenomenon. The Brethren have had over a half-century to propagate their ideology in every Arab country and beyond. Exiled Brethren living in various countries have become missionaries around whom natives and exiles gather to pursue Islamist objectives which eventually fuel the radical Islamic movement. Finally, the grand scheme of the movement of Radical Islam will not be complete without the development of capable leadership cadres. The vanguard of Sayyid Qutb is without effective leadership. From within the ranks of the Islamist movements there must emerge charismatic leaders who can guide the vanguard in the pursuit of its Islamic ideals.

Any future manifestation of radical Islamic militancy is dependent on a myriad of developments both internal and

external to the Islamic world. Despite the ill-conceived feelings of optimism brought about by the Arab-Israeli peace talks in late 1991, a period of sustained Arab-Israeli warfare is likely to shift the target of Islamic militancy from the governments in the Arab world to Israel. The continued oppression of Palestinians in the occupied territories by Israel is another potential flash point. Individuals and movements under the aegis of Radical Islam are irrevocably opposed to Israel and the ideology of Zionism that fuels its existence. Considering this vehement opposition to Israel, the Islamist groups would take any opportunity to engage Israel in combat. The most militant of the Islamists in Radical Islam are convinced that the regimes in the Arab/Islamic world are unwilling to challenge Israel and, consequently, Radical Islam considers most Arab elites as foreign pawns who have imposed upon their people a sense of permanent military inferiority with respect to Israel. Taking this perception into account, any defeat of one or more of the Arab regimes is bound to trigger widespread opposition to the United States and pro-American governments in the region.

Arab feelings of anti-Americanism have increased significantly in recent years. During the last decade, the Muslim world has associated every evil that has befallen

the region, from military defeats to economic misfortune, to the United States. The United States military intervention during the liberation of Kuwait and the defense of Saudi Arabia was camouflaged by the multinational coalition propaganda. The presence of large numbers of American military personnel on the sacred soil of Saudi Arabia did evoke some incidents of militancy in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. Even if the massive Desert Shield/Desert Storm operation is considered to have been successful, the tenuous bases of religious and political legitimacy of the ruling elites in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was damaged.

The key country in the inextricable relationship of the United States and the Muslim world is Egypt. Based on Egypt's geopolitical location, homogeneous popular base, cultural centrality, and military potential, there is no substitute for its strategic importance.⁵⁵ In addition, Egypt is home to the largest Islamist movement in the world -- the Muslim Brotherhood and its militant offshoots. A significant element in the crisis milieu of Egypt that has the potential for providing the impetus to radical Islamic militancy is the enormity of Egypt's socioeconomic burdens.

⁵⁵ Dekmejian. Islam in Revolution. 169.

The spiraling growth of its population within a precisely restricted area of habitation with scarce resources makes it difficult for any leader, capable or not, to effectively address the socioeconomic problems.

The explosion of Radical Islam onto the international scene as a pervasive transnational phenomenon has confronted the United States with serious challenges. American responses to the awakening of Islam in a militant context have not been based on a clear understanding of Islam or the phenomenon that Westerners have dubbed "fundamentalism". This ignorance of the Islamic ethos by policymakers has resulted in a less than judicious formulation and application of American foreign policy vis-a-vis the Arab/Islamic world. The price of this ignorance has been manifested by the disastrous effects on American strategic and economic interests, evidenced by the situations in Iran and Lebanon.

According to Radical Islam, American foreign policy has been characterized by certain constants that are anathema to the ideological policies of Radical Islam and will eventually lead to a confrontation. These policy constants include American support for secularly oriented Arab regimes because of their pro-American orientation. One of the glaring constants, as perceived by the radical

Islamists, has been America's virtual unconditional support for Israel. This support perpetuates the feeling of Arab military inferiority which is reinforced by the American military presence in several Arab countries. The lingering deployment of American forces to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Turkey as a result of Desert Storm exacerbates the feeling of inferiority. Radical Islam accuses the United States of economic imperialism due to its pursuance of economic policies which promote increased maldistribution of income in Arab countries. In the view of Radical Islam, America also inflicts cultural imperialism on Islam because of the spread of American-Western values and cultural practices which are considered alien to Islam.

The chance that these convictions held by adherents of Radical Islam will be altered significantly in the near future is slight. The continuance of protracted conflict between the interests of the United States and the objectives of Radical Islam is logical. Theoretically, there can be no basis for compromise. The United States continues to be considered the major source of external and internal stimuli which have evoked militant responses by radical Islamic movements.

R. Hrair Dekmejian, in his book Islam in Revolution, suggests that in the realm of practical politics, there is

a possibility that there are specific areas of coexistence and even limited cooperation, depending on regional developments and modifications in the policy of the United States. In Dekmejian's opinion, the United States must pursue two lines of policy as responses to the reawakening of Islam if the vital interests of America in the Arab/Islamic orbit are to be safeguarded. He maintains that a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israel conflict, which would provide for a Palestinian entity along with an unambiguous Islamic presence at the holy sanctuaries in Jerusalem might ameliorate the ideological/religious rift between the United States and the Islamic revivalist movements. In addition, the United States must provide explicit encouragement and support of socioeconomic justice, particularly in pro-American Arab states, to promote greater socioeconomic justice and to safeguard basic human rights.⁵⁶ Significant progress in these two policy areas would increase the legitimacy of pro-American elites by removing or reducing two major provocations that have piqued responses from radical Islamists.

Despite the guarded optimism resulting from the Middle East peace talks held in Madrid in October, 1991 and in

⁵⁶ Ibid., 174.

Washington, D.C. in December 1991, great care should be exercised in formulating American policy in the region. Any peace process that does not result in the establishment of a Palestinian entity and an Islamic presence in Jerusalem is destined to prove politically dangerous to all Arab ruling elites, particularly those friendly to the United States. Given the Islamist reality, and the perception of Radical Islam concerning American involvement in the region, the United States should tread softly and consider all facets of Arab/Islamic culture. On the basis of American historical experience in the area, excessive economic, cultural, and military penetration is interpreted by militant Islamic organizations as thinly disguised imperialism and has proven detrimental to long-range interests of the United States. Given the acute sensitivity in Islamic societies to foreign influences, such policies are abruptly dysfunctional. Highly visible and large diplomatic, technical, and military contingents usually become the targets of popular resentment such as that which occurred in the eastern regions of Saudi Arabia during the most recent Gulf War.

The foreign policy implications of the ignorance of the militant Islamist movements combined with repeated American incursion into the Middle East are clear. In the

last decade of the twentieth century, the United States has emerged as the only remaining superpower in the world. The American government has begun scaling down the size of the American military machine in accordance with a change in philosophy. The policy makers in the American government no longer envision a global confrontation precipitated by a threat from a truly challenging adversary. Instead, the American military is being redesigned to respond to regional confrontations around the world. The lifeblood of the United States is directly linked to the stability of the region Westerners have dubbed the Middle East. Future United States foreign policy must be formulated with a clear understanding of the tenets and goals of Radical Islam in order to ensure that the lifeblood of the United States remains strong.

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