



National Committee on American Foreign Policy

Where Leaders Meet

The Middle East: Islamic Law and Peace

Summary of the Roundtable on Militant Islamic Fundamentalism in the 21st Century

January 10, 2002

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Dear Reader:

The January 2002 "Roundtable on Militant Islamic Fundamentalism in the 21st Century" was the second in the National Committee on American Foreign Policy's series on Islamic Law and Peace in the Middle East. As in the instance of the first roundtable in this series, which was convened in May 2001, the closed-door and off-the-record discussions by Muslim scholars teaching at U.S. universities and former Muslim diplomats now residing in the West addressed core problems facing Islam that not only affect the beliefs and the life-styles of Muslims in the Middle East but also have far-reaching implications for the world beyond Islam.

The frank discussions that ensued and the conclusions that were reached by the discussants at the second roundtable are summarized in this (not-for-attribution) report.

On behalf of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, I thank Mutual of America for its generous support of the Committee's activities and acknowledge, with gratitude, the support provided to the roundtable by the Edith C. Blum Foundation and individuals such as Sandy Frank, Thomas J. Moran, Sheila Robbins, and Clarence Schwab.

Sincerely,

George D. Schwab
President



Contents

- [Introduction](#)
 - [Definition of MIF](#)
 - [Bin Laden and "Salafism"](#)
 - [Other causes of MIF](#)
 - [Conspiracy Theories](#)
 - [Agendas](#)
 - [Why Hatred of the West?](#)
 - [How to Deal with MIF](#)
 - [Discussion and Conclusions](#)
 - [What Should Be Done?](#)
 - [Participants](#)
 - [Notes](#)
-

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the NCAFP has called attention to the expanding danger of international terrorism whose nature changed after Ayatollah Khomeini's seizure of power in Iran. A few years after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the NCAFP realized that a new kind of activist had appeared--a "believer" ready to sacrifice his or her life to destroy what the terrorist organizations' leaders dubbed as enemies of Allah; these diehards knew that if they were killed, hundreds would obey the summons to take their place. The spread of suicide bombings and other kamikazelike operations extended the "martyr culture" of Shiite extremists to the Sunnite radicals. The religious leaders of these terrorist organizations promise their followers immediate access to Paradise and special recognition by Allah. In the meantime they provide financial compensation for the families and organize networks of social services to gain recognition and recruit willing operatives.

The NCAFP has frequently noted a common thread that runs through these militant groups: Wherever they strike, they pursue three goals. First, they aim at overthrowing the governments of Muslim countries because, in their view, the leaders have strayed from the "right path." Consequently, they want to replace them by theocracies. Second, they seek to destroy Israel, which they consider an extension of the hated West implanted in the "House of Islam." Third, they aspire to renew jihad (holy war) in order to bring Europe and the United States as well as the rest of the planet under the flag of Islam. To them Western culture (including Christianity and Judaism) represents the greatest danger to Islam, which is the "last and final" message of God and therefore should be obeyed and respected by all humans.

Although they share some interpretations of the Koran with the majority of Muslims, who do not approve of their terrorism and extremism, the militants constitute only a tiny minority among Muslims. In order to draw a distinction between them and mainstream Islam, the NCAFP, in the 1980s, coined the phrase "militant Islamic fundamentalists" (MIF).

The barbaric attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, confirmed the danger that these fanatic extremist groups--funded or protected by particular states, institutions, and rich individuals--pose to the civilized world. After that tragedy, the NCAFP thought it useful to consider diverse



aspects of MIF and the means to counter its development. That is why it convened on January 10, 2002, a roundtable consisting of a number of distinguished intellectuals who are recognized experts in several fields pertaining to the Muslim world. The subject proposed to the participants was "Militant Islamic Fundamentalism in the 21st Century."

The purpose of this report is to make available to the foreign policy community the views and suggestions that were voiced at the roundtable.

Definition of MIF

One panelist remarked that in academic circles and in the European media the term "Islamism" is generally used to designate the phenomenon of "militant Islamic fundamentalism." Actually Muslims reject altogether the "fundamentalist" appellation on the grounds that it comes from American "Protestantism" and therefore cannot apply to Islam. Nevertheless, there is a strong element of "fundamentalism" in the phenomenon. That panelist added that "militant Islamic fundamentalism," or "Islamism," is far from being new. For instance, although a number of Muslim historians affirm that Cordoba was destroyed by Christians from northern Spain in 1236, in fact, the event took place much earlier at the hands of North African Talibanlike people who conquered that capital city of Western Islam in the 12th century.¹ They destroyed every trace of "civilization," using arguments similar to those made by the Taliban in Afghanistan. For instance, they forbade music, dance, poetry, the arts, and female education. They imprisoned thinkers, burned books, and demolished monuments. Such "antijoy" movements, which concentrate solely on the worship of God and exclude other activities, exist in the history of other religions, but in the Muslim world they became chiefly a political phenomenon.

It was also observed that sometimes militant Islamic fundamentalists call themselves mujahed (performer of jihad). According to a panelist, after the start of the resistance to the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan, the term "jihadi" gradually replaced "mujahid" because the first opponents of the Communists were not Islamic militants but nationalists. Later "indoctrinated militants" from among Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan were sent into Afghanistan. Before turning against the Soviets, those militants eliminated the nationalists. When volunteers from Arab countries arrived in Afghanistan, they were referred to as Arab Afghans. Now everybody speaks about Al Qaeda fighters.

In mainstream Islam people recall a saying of prophet Muhammad distinguishing between "lesser" jihad (holy war) and "greater" jihad (the fight against the evil in oneself). Jihad literally means striving, and in the Koran it means striving in the path of God. Some theologians and jurists express the opinion that there is no concept in Islam of jihad as aggressive combat. In any case, when bin Laden joined the Arab Afghans, the term "jihadi" gained currency. Actually, before him, Sheikh Omar Abdur Rahman (who was indicted in the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993) rejected the saying attributed to the prophet as sheer fabrication. He said that there is only one jihad, the holy war against "infidels." Mainstream Muslims called the followers of bin Laden "jihadis" in order to distinguish them from the "mujahiddin" who fought against the Soviets.

Several panelists observed that the phrase "militant Islamic fundamentalist" or the term "Islamist" covers a variety of militants. There are such "radicals" among Sunnis (a majority of Muslims) as well as Shiis (a sect representing about 10 percent of all Muslims). In each of these groups, the extremists subscribe to slightly different interpretations of the Koran.

One panelist distinguished three kinds of fundamentalism: theological fundamentalism, which can be considered very narrow-minded in terms of issues of salvation; populist social fundamentalism (as,



for instance, populist religious movements in the United States) that is a "normal aspect" of pluralistic civil societies; and religiously inspired political movements that use violence. It is the latter that specifically concerned this roundtable.

Speaking of bin Laden's Al Qaeda, one participant connected it with the ideology of a group of scholars called Salafis who lived in the 18th and 19th centuries in Yemen. Another panelist recalled that diverse fundamentalist interpretations of the Koran superseded less orthodox readings of the scriptures in the 12th and 13th centuries throughout the Muslim world. From time to time extremist and violent movements emerged. They appear in the present against the backdrop of "basic" fundamentalism. As previously indicated, the NCAFP coined the phrase "militant Islamic fundamentalism" in order to draw a line between terrorist activities and mainstream Islam. As several speakers remarked, a vast majority of Muslims do not share the radical ideologies of the militant fundamentalists and, more often than not, reject and condemn acts of violence such as hostage taking and the September 11 attacks.

One panelist stated that one can find in the Koran and in Islamic theology whatever one likes. MIF is a political problem. In his view, the world is, to put it simply, divided into two "camps": on the one hand, countries struggling to develop on the basis of democracy, free markets, and human rights; on the other hand, regardless of apparent differences in their political systems, states that lack civil society and have created despotic if not totalitarian regimes. According to him, most Muslim countries are in the latter camp. Many events similar to the September 11 attacks have already taken place inside those countries: the massacre of the population of Hama, Syria, by the army; the truck bombing of a U.S. marine barrack in Beirut, Lebanon, by Hezbollah; the use of chemical weapons against the inhabitants of Halabj a, Iraq; the massacre of Kurds in Iran; and so on. The militant Islamic fundamentalists say that Muslim nations are in a sorry situation because the people are not "good Muslims" and the leaders have strayed from "true" Islam; therefore they should become more Islamic and better Muslims.

Bin Laden and "Salafism"

Although militant Islamic fundamentalist groups present a number of common characteristics, diverse causes and theological interpretations explain their emergence in different parts of the Muslim world. Speaking of bin Laden and Al Qaeda, one panelist singled out the "Salafi" movement and the ideology that developed around scholars who lived in Yemen in the 18th and 19th centuries. Within that movement bin Laden represents a fringe that can be called radical Salafism. His particular world view can be understood by looking at the roots of this ideology in Islamic intellectual history. Its teachings were marginal and opposed by mainstream Islamic thought. The majority of Muslims in the modern period are either Sunnis (about 90 percent) or Shiis (10 percent). Bin Laden and his followers are Sunnis. The distinction between the two groups pertains chiefly to a dispute over the spiritual and political leadership of the Muslim community (Umma) after the death of prophet Muhammad. In political matters two principles are strongly identified with the Sunnis: first, not "pointing fingers" at the other group and not declaring fellow Muslims "infidels"; second, prohibiting rebellion against Muslim rulers as long as Islam remains the religion of the state and Islamic law (Sharia) is enforced. Sunnis argue that adherence to these two principles is crucial in order to maintain social order and to avoid warfare among Muslims that might lead to the demise of Islam itself.

The "Salafi" branch of Sunnism dates to a small group called Ahl al-Hadith whose central ideas were crystalized in the teachings of ibnTaymiyya, a 14th-century scholar who was willing to brand fellow Muslims heretics and to declare that rebellion against Muslim rulers who did not apply the Sharia



was permissible.² Salafism's hallmark is a call to modern Muslims to revert to the "pure" Islam of the prophet's generation and the two generations that followed?³

The message of Salafism is utopian. Its adherents seek to transform the Muslim community and to ensure that Islam as a system of belief and governance will eventually dominate the globe. In his October 7 statement referring to the September 11 attacks, bin Laden said: "These events have divided the world into two camps: the camp of belief, in which there is no hypocrisy, and the camp of unbelief. May God protect us and you from the latter. It is therefore necessary for every Muslim to rise up in defense of Islam."

In an interview with al-Jazeera (TV) in 1998, bin Laden affirmed: "Our goal is to liberate the lands of Islam from unbelief and to apply God's law so that when we meet Him in the hereafter, He will be pleased with us." Even to Muslims opposed to his actions, bin Laden appears to be a man sincere in his beliefs who rejected life as a rich Saudi to live according to his principles. He is a kind of "Islamized" Robin Hood--a refreshing notion to the masses who are used to their own leaders being corrupt, murderous, venal, and hypocritical.

Salafis are not against technological progress but abhor innovations (in belief as well as in the practice of religion) that are not anchored in their conception of the pristine Islamic age. Muslims should adhere to a strictly literal interpretation of the Koran and to the sayings of the prophet Muhammad. Salafis consider themselves the sole correct interpreters of the Koran. To a lesser or greater extent, therefore, other Muslims are "deviant" innovators. Obsessed with God's "oneness," they condemn all forms of polytheism and unbelief, even among fellow Muslims. They abhor the Sufis, especially those who visit the graves of the "holy masters." They hate Shiis as well as the followers of the traditional schools of law. Eternal salvation is at stake, they believe, and they take very seriously the concepts of heaven and hell. They are true and sincere believers who want to grab power in order to ensure "salvation" for all Muslims and the whole world. Their appeal lies to some extent in the "simplicity" of the answers they provide to the problems of the world.

In its radical form, Salafism leads to the practice of finger pointing (takfir: calling fellow Muslims infidels). This is exactly the meaning of bin Laden's November 4 statement to the effect that Muslims who were not with him were by definition infidels. In order to cross the gates of paradise, Muslims should carry out bin Laden's religious edict (*fatwa*) calling on believers to kill Americans and destroy American assets.

Ibn Taymiyya's teachings were picked up by Abdal Wahab who allied himself with the Saud tribe toward the end of the 18th century. His "reformist" message galvanized the tribes of central Arabia. In 1805 the Wahabis destroyed the tombs of the companions of prophet Muhammad. Their excesses horrified the majority of Muslims, leading the Ottoman sultan (who was also the caliph of all Muslims) to send an Egyptian military force that destroyed the fledgling Saudi state. Immediately after World War I and the collapse of the Ottomans, King Abdel Aziz Ibn Saud reestablished the Saudi kingdom based on the Salafi doctrine, which still is its official ideology.

Aware of its potential for radical extremism, Ibn Saud fought and vanquished his own radicals in the early 1930s. The radical Salafis raised their heads again in November 1979 when they seized Mecca's Great Mosque. The Saudis today adhere to the two principles of Sunnism that forbid finger pointing and rebellion against Muslim rulers. As a consequence, the Saudi minister of Islamic affairs declared in the aftermath of September 11 that obedience to Islamic rulers is obligatory, meaning that bin Laden is a deviant. Actually the rupture between radical Salafis and the Saudi regime goes back to the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War. By allowing American troops on Saudi soil, the Saudi leaders became deviants in the eyes of radical Salafis, and therefore their overthrow became licit.



This, rather than the sanctions against Iraq or the Palestinian-Israeli situation, is the main issue for bin Laden and his followers, although both problems are important to them. Most Muslims do not appreciate or understand such legal arguments as the one about the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia. But they react enthusiastically to bin Laden's role as a leader and symbol of Muslim resistance to both domestic and Western oppression. This reaction is supplemented by a century of argument voiced by Arab rulers who contend that all the problems of the Muslim world stem from foreign intrigue (conspiratorial theories) and not from Arab policies.

There are several reasons why Arab regimes have not clearly condemned bin Laden; first, reluctance to finger-point at fellow Muslims; second, the United States has not provided evidence incriminating bin Laden; third, the fear of violent retaliation by radical Salafis has convinced those leaders to remain silent.

Other Causes of MIF

One panelist observed that the political leadership of the Muslim world has failed to prevent theological fundamentalism and populist religious movements from becoming violent political movements. Those leaders have sought to control and dominate the religious expression of their citizenry. The panelist cited Turkey as a case in point: The government attempts to impose its own version of religious orthodoxy by "bureaucratizing" Muslim clerics. The United States, on the other hand, is the example Muslims should follow: It ensures the right of all religious believers to exercise their faith in a political system that does not sanction any state religion. Such a balance between civil society and political power is essential. The same panelist said that in order to develop Egypt economically and socially, the government not only identified domestic groups that it considered "reactionary" but also decided to teach people how to think in order to build a modern society. The government wanted Egyptians to understand that the state was the source for solving all their problems.

In Islam "communal solidarity" is an important part of religious expression. Thus in the Islamic Middle Ages, private endowments financed all sorts of welfare activities. Actually the most successful populist violent movements are those that deliver this type of aid to people. If there is not enough of a legitimate outlet in civil society for religious movements to act as if they have a stake in the society, they will eventually turn violent. In the past the endowments provided material resources for religious scholars independent of the state. When theologians are supported by the state and become "bureaucrats," they lose their credibility. That participant cited the case of some Egyptian clerics who complained to journalists interviewing them after September 11 that nobody took them seriously because of their association with the government.

Another panelist linked the surge in MIF to the corruption of the ruling regimes in Muslim countries. To him such regimes are not substantially different. All have destroyed civil society and created despotic, even totalitarian, governments. Their extraordinary control of the economy, of financial resources--of the whole society--is compounded by their absolute control of the means of coercion centered in the military, the police, the special guards, and the various secret security services that ensure that corrupt, unelected regimes are accountable to nobody, not even to Allah. The monstrous, powerful state apparatus suffocates energy emanating from society.

There is also an "incestuous" relationship between the ruling classes and business. In Iran, for instance, the supreme guide, who claims to represent God on earth, is also on the board of directors of the company that has a monopoly on importing office furniture and is a major shareholder in Iran's main automobile factory. In Indonesia in the last days of the Suharto regime, one couldn't move from anywhere that didn't belong to the dictator and his family. In Bahrain one big palace



belongs to the emir and another to the prime minister and so on. The Muslim world as a whole doesn't produce any of the world's leading products. It lacks great intellectuals, artists, and scientists. To justify this situation some members of the ruling "elite" claim it is attributable to the fact that people stray from Islamic law. Consequently, the solution is for society to become more Islamic and for people to become better Muslims. In the past 20 years or so, the Muslim world has become very Islamic, but it is worse off than it was in the 1980s. Most of the MIF in the world today was created by the Muslim states themselves. The participant cited the example of Kuwait, where more than 70 Islamic "charities" directly or indirectly finance terrorist groups. People opposed to such regimes also advocate more Islamization of the societies.

In fact, the core of the problem is not religious. It is social, political, and economic. All debates tend to become theological: Muhammad said this. He didn't say that. Is this in the Koran? Unfortunately, international debate has fallen into this trap. Experts and politicians spend a lot of time wondering whether bin Laden is theologically correct or not, when it should be obvious that he is a politician fighting for power in the name of religion. He may exert appeal through his religiosity and his Spartan way of life, but his objective is strictly political. Recently he shrewdly added to his long-standing diatribes against the United States and the Saudi royal family arguments drawn from Muslims' deep sense of frustration over the condition of the Palestinians, the continuous occupation of Arab lands by Israel, and the sanctions against Iraq.

Another panelist insisted that these issues are some of the main sources of the expansion in MIF. He too cited the difficult economic and social conditions of the majority of the Arab people. He drew attention to the demographics: Seventy percent of all Arabs are under the age of 25; there are no civic institutions or enterprises to absorb young energies; all this presages an explosion and explains the appeal of Islamic radicalism to many Muslims, especially to the younger generation.

One participant expressed the opinion that poverty and economic difficulties have no bearing on the behavior and actions of militant Islamic fundamentalists. Bin Laden and the suicide hijackers of September 11 did not come from the slums of the Muslim world. Moreover, the Koran forbids Muslims to question social differences, which are the will of Allah to which Muslims should submit. Insofar as attributing MIF to the "nature" of Islam, the panelist remarked that Islam, like other faiths, is neither violent nor nonviolent. A religion is what its believers and leaders make of it.

The same panelist referred to remarks by others that almost all Muslim countries, even those that are basking in petro-dollars, are steeped in underdevelopment. Yet in the year 1002, the Muslim world was the most advanced and prosperous part of the globe. This complete reversal of fortune was due to the triumph of the most orthodox interpretations of the Koran around and after the 12th century. In its first four centuries, the Muslim world was relatively open and tolerant. But Islam turned fundamentalist in the Middle Ages and remained so thereafter. It rejected its scientists and thinkers and stood still while the West advanced and accomplished scientific and technological revolutions. After the Middle Ages most religions accomplished their *aggiornamento* and aligned themselves with a changing world. Oddly enough, Islamic clerics followed the reverse path. As a result, a "time gap" developed between the Muslim world and the West. One can say that Muslims remained more or less in the 12th century while Western countries moved on. In other words, the Muslim and the Western worlds are far from contemporaries.

In the second half of the 19th century, the encounter with an aggressive and technologically superior Europe triggered many modernizing movements in Muslim countries. But most of the modernizers failed, and the ultraorthodox activists reemerged in the final years of the 20th century and eventually succeeded, as Khomeini did in Iran. The toppling of the shah by the ayatollah encouraged other



radicals among Shiis and Sunnis to resort to violence for political gains. Therefore, one can say that the "time gap" between the Muslim world and the West is one of the essential causes of MIF.

But if Khomeini's success in seizing power in Iran and in establishing a Muslim theocracy that became a model for activists in many countries explains to some extent the recent surge in violent groups, other causes, other panelists maintained, should also be mentioned. First, it should be noted that the concepts of martyrdom and suicide operations were introduced by the Iranian Shiite government and used in Lebanon against Israeli, American, and French troops and during the war against Iraq. Second, as several participants remarked, the defeat of Arab armies by Israel in 1967 sounded the knell of Arab nationalism and restored the prestige of religious activists. As early as 1970, old religious militant groups reappeared, and new ones such as Jihad in Egypt and Hezbollah in Lebanon came into existence. Third, the rise in the price of oil in the 1970s allowed the Saudis, Kuwaitis, and others to fund many clerics and Islamic schools and mosques around the world, including those in Western countries. Those mosques and schools became nests of terrorists. Fourth, the cold war and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan prompted the United States to train and help the worst militant fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan and other Muslim countries. As usual, American (and other Western) policymakers concentrated on immediate problems without bothering about the consequences of using religious fanatics. As one participant put it, this was a kind of Frankenstein policymaking: creating a monster that in the end turned against its creator.

Conspiracy Theories

Many panelists reiterated that militant Islamic fundamentalists, like a majority of Muslims, blame the West in general and the United States in particular for the sorry state of their countries. Citing the Crusades in the 11th and 12th centuries, colonial rule in the late 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, and economic and political imperialism in the second half of the twentieth century, radical Muslims accuse the West of waging continuous war against Islam. As an Iranian cleric once put it, the Crusades never stopped.

One panelist observed that the denunciation of the West and the United States by militant Islamic fundamentalists has been curiously compounded by an expanding group of Western intellectuals and academics called postmodernists who criticize Western rationalism and propound what they call relativism. In the views of those academics, all the ills of the third world (including the Muslim world) stem from Western policies of economic and political exploitation. As a result, Muslim students in American and European universities return home with anti-Western sentiments that facilitate their recruitment by radical religious groups. Indeed one should not forget the number of highly educated people around MIF leaders. In Iran many such "intellectuals" joined Khomeini in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Egyptian and Pakistani doctors, engineers, and even atomic scientists have contacted bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Palestinian doctors and intellectuals help the militant group Hamas. In Lebanon many highly educated Shii are members of Hezbollah.

It was observed that militant Islamic fundamentalists, even those who have been educated in Western institutions of higher learning, cling to more or less absurd conspiracy theories instead of considering the mistakes made by their own religious and secular authorities in the past and in the present. Many believe that the United States and Israel are conspiring to erase Islam from the planet. Right after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, rumors spread throughout the Islamic world that Israel was the perpetrator and had warned Jews not to go to work in Manhattan on September 11. Such fantasies still distort Muslim public opinion.



Agendas

Most MIFs believe that the West, inspired by Satan, is conducting a vast conspiracy against the Muslim world, which started with the Crusades and has continued under many guises, including colonialism and imperialism. After World War II the "infidels" implanted Israel in the "House of Islam" as a first step in the realization of their plans. They also corrupted most Muslim leaders and plundered the natural resources of Muslim countries. Moreover, the steady decline of the Muslim world is a "sign" of God's wrath, signaling that the time has come to resume the jihad against "traitorous" leaders as well as the infidels. One participant cited several high Islamic authorities. In one quote, Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, affirmed the following belief: "We are at war with America as our Prophet was at war against the corrupting empires of his time. Because we believe that Islam is the One and Only true faith, it is incumbent on us to fight until the entire humanity either converts or submits to Islamic authority. This natural march of human history is resisted by America, which is offering a life of corruption and debauchery and waging a war against Islamic values all over the world."

That participant quoted Dr. Zaki Badawi, a "very moderate" British Muslim leader: "Islam is a proselytizing faith. As such it has either to win new territory all the time or to retreat and decline." Khamenei hopes to achieve proclaimed Islamic goals through seizing American hostages, organizing demonstrations at which American flags are burned, and financing militant anti-Western groups. Badawi pursues his targets through "peaceful" propaganda. Bin Laden and his Al Qaeda sought to achieve the same objectives by organizing the September 11 attacks and other terrorist operations. The same panelist recounted the harangue that Sheikh Saleh Ben Humaid, the imam of Mecca, Islam's holiest place, delivered to an audience on January 5, 2002: "The World Order imposed by America is a dark one characterized by arrogance, haughtiness, humiliation, and disdain. It is characterized by tyranny, the annihilation of nations, domination, and monopolization. These are attitudes that provoke legitimate hatred. What kind of a system is this monstrous manifestation of conceit and arrogance? It becomes even worse when domination and arrogance exercised through violence [are said to be carried out] in the name of legality, thus assuming a programmed systematic course." The sheikh went on to ask: "Can Islam turn its face away from the crimes committed against its children everywhere? Can Muslims allow their most sacred values to be trampled underfoot by a power that recognizes no god but money and guns?" That participant added that textbooks in countless schools from Malaysia to Nigeria tell Muslim children that the world is divided into two antagonistic camps: The "House of Islam" and the "House of War" (countries not ruled by Muslims). Children are taught that there can be no peace between the two until Islam triumphs. The most that can be allowed in that ongoing war is a truce that would have to be renewed every 10 years.

In the view of another participant, such statements help in defining the agendas of the various militant Islamic groups, which can be summed up as follows: expelling the infidels from the House of Islam (for instance, removing American servicemen and servicewomen from the "sacred" soil of Saudi Arabia, as demanded by bin Laden); overthrowing the secular Muslim leaders who cooperate with the West; establishing Islamic republics, as in Iran and Sudan; removing Israel from the Islamic soil of Palestine; multiplying attacks in the "House of War"; and, finally, resuming the "great" jihad against the West in order to bring the planet under the banner of Islam. In the resumption of the holy war, all means of combat are licit: assassinations, terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and regular warfare.

One panelist said that both mainstream and militant Muslim clerics beckon Europe and America to the "right path." They want to convert all and make no secret of their goal. In their view, the new century will be a century of spirituality in which the "oriental man" (meaning Middle Eastern) will deploy his "thousand years" of spiritual experience in order to bring the West out of "darkness."



Why Hatred of the West?

Recriminations against the West in general and the United States in particular are multiple: colonialism, imperialism, plundering Muslim countries' natural resources, backing Israel, and so on. All the participants alluded to them in different contexts, and some of them have been cited in the preceding sections of this summary. But several panelists observed that they are marginal compared to the essential accusation.

A panelist quoted from Mawdudi, a long-standing Pakistani militant fundamentalist theologian of the 1930s and 1940s who propounded a theory of God's exclusive possession of sovereignty: "Any institution or individual attempting to assume political and legal sovereignty and seeking thereby to restrict the jurisdiction of God to spheres of personal law or religious duties is a usurper and a rebel. The truth is that no one can claim to be a lawgiver save under the dispensation of God; no one can challenge the supreme authority of God almighty in any sphere." To Mawdudi and all militant fundamentalists, democracy is therefore a manifestation of Satan who told the first man that he could disobey the law of God and pursue his own schemes. This is precisely what the West is doing in the name of democracy. It tells mankind that it doesn't need to obey the divine law, that it can make its own human law by voting and so on. That panelist quoted from a March 1999 speech given at the University of Florence by the so-called Iranian moderate President Khatami, who said that mankind is divided into East and West. The East is the domain of the soul and the West of reason. Reason led to the Renaissance, which led to modernity, which in turn led to oppression, domination, and subjugation of the world by colonialism and imperialism. The West, Khatami continued, is the prime exponent of rationality, whereas the East is the giver of spiritual guidance.

To militant fundamentalists the "Judeo-Christian" West is the enemy. Its values (democracy, secularism, human rights, individual freedom, equality of women, and so on) contradict Muslim values and mores (total submission to the will of God, theocracy, inferiority of women, and so on). To them the existence of Western alien values constitutes a permanent threat to the survival of Islam. They refer in particular to the United States because it is the only remaining superpower and the leader of the so-called free world.

Another panelist stated that militant fundamentalists as well as many mainstream clerics despise democracy as a system of government. Ayatollah Khomeini rejected it on the grounds that God alone is the legislator. Ali ben Haj, ideologue of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (influenced by Ibn Taymyyia) once declared in an interview: "My father and his brothers-in-religion expelled France physically from Algeria. My aim is to banish it intellectually and ideologically and get rid once and for all of all those who still harbor the venom of democracy in their minds."

As a panelist put it, militant Islamic fundamentalists are determined to set up a historical duel between the forces of democratic regimes (the West in general and the United States in particular) and the forces of despotic regimes (most Muslim countries).

How to Deal with MIF

Most of the participants concurred that the war against terrorism, even if successful, would not by itself suppress the likes of bin Laden and all terrorist networks. In order to cut off MIF, the war should be accompanied by other measures, both inside and outside the Muslim world.

One panelist observed that "moderate" Muslims, many of whom have been and continue to be oppressed by Arab and other Muslim governments, do exist and must be encouraged to take center



stage. Indeed most Muslims have not heeded bin Laden's call to kill innocent Americans wherever and whenever they find them. And this in itself constitutes a hopeful sign for the future.

Another participant cited the existence of "liberal" elements in the Arab world who have been intimidated by militant Islamic activists over the last few years. A third panelist said that more important for the future are the enlightened members of Muslim communities in Europe as well as American Muslims who should be encouraged to express their rejection of fundamentalist interpretations of the religion. This panelist said that victory over the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan was made possible by the cooperation of the Northern Alliance. He added that ideologically and intellectually there are "Northern Alliance" liberals and democrats in many parts of the Muslim world. They can help defeat other militant Islamic fundamentalist groups and should therefore be encouraged and helped to do so.

It was observed that the problem of militant or radical Islam is at the core of a larger and many-sided question concerning the nature of Islamic politics and societies. Muslims make up a diverse group in the world. There are moderate Muslims, state-sponsored Muslim clerics, radical and moderate Salafis, secular nationalists, Sunnis and Shiis, Sufis, American (and other Western) Muslims of many different kinds, and so on. Each confronts a lot of problems that no one group can easily solve by itself. On the other hand, the United States cannot play the primary role in solving their difficulties. Total victory in Afghanistan will not end the problem of radical Salafism. Many bin Ladens are positioned offstage in the Islamic world, waiting to continue the struggle begun by Osama. The United States can serve as a catalyst for moderate Muslims who are the only forces that can ultimately defeat the militant radicals and promote a version of Islam that is neither extremist nor antagonistic to the West. Such an objective should be pursued by undertaking to convince the Saudis to stop funding institutions and individuals that propagate Salafism. Very often the key to most of the issues related to MIF is in the hands of regimes in Muslim countries. There are other dimensions that must be considered, including demographic and economic questions.

One panelist remarked that just as Muslim governments should not engage in the business of theology, the United States should refrain from telling Muslim populations what they should believe or do. For instance, pushing for the introduction of democratic practices without heeding well-established fundamental Muslim principles can only help people like bin Laden to tell the masses that "This is a war against Islam; even if you don't engage in terrorist activities and only observe daily prayers and fast and don't drink liquor, they're going to suspect you of being some sort of radical." That panelist deplored the unavailability in local languages of classical texts concerning American democracy. In his opinion, a historic tragedy occurred in the 19th century when Muslim rulers turned to France and other European countries as they introduced political reforms. European democratic political systems reflected the model of very centralized states, whereas American democracy, based on federalism, would have been much more appropriate. Structurally the Anglo-American system of jurisprudence is more akin to the traditional system of government in the Muslim world. Similarly, the West should have at its disposal accurate translations of texts pertaining to Islamic law and jurisprudence. Westerners would then understand that Islam is compatible with modern civilization. One does not have to accept the theological precepts of Islamic law to understand its legal doctrine. After all, Islam does not exempt Muslims from the laws of gravity or of economic development.

Another participant, although agreeing with the idea of translating important American texts on democracy, considered the initiation of a genuine local democratic discourse in Muslim countries to be of more importance. This endeavor could be helped by the translation of extant texts by Muslim modernizers of the 19th and 20th centuries. One can find a democratic tradition in many Muslim



thinkers of the past such as the Iranian Saadi and Nasser Khosrow, not to mention recent authors both in Iran and in Arab countries.

A panelist observed that a change in the interpretation of the religion can originate within Muslim communities in Europe and North America more easily than in the Muslim world itself. According to him, the number of "Western" Muslims is estimated at between 20 and 22 million. Those Muslims pose both an opportunity and a threat. At the moment they might be a threat because many of their organizations and mosques are financed and controlled by the reactionary regimes in power in the Muslim world. First, those Western Muslims should refute lies spread in the Western media. For instance, far from being a symbol of Islam, the "hejab" (the headwear worn by some Muslim women in some Muslim countries and in the West) originated in 1975 in Beirut (Lebanon); it has nothing to do with Islam. It is a political element or statement, like the Mao uniform in China. It differs from what conservative Muslim women wore before 1975. The same goes for beards. "Western" Muslims should seize the opportunity provided by the freer space in Europe and America to create universities that will train Muslim theologians and mosque imams because, in fact, "Islamic theology" is dead.

In the same vein, another panelist said that American Muslims, as law-abiding citizens, live according to the Constitution and the laws of the United States that contradict some precepts of Islamic law (for instance, those relating to inheritance, women, divorce, and so on). Yet they consider themselves good Muslims and practice their faith freely. They constitute living proof that Islam and modernity are not at odds with each other. Their presence in the United States bears witness to the fact that it is possible to perform the leap from the 12th to the 21st century in a reasonably short time and without any harm. Some critics say that changing a mind-set would take a very long time. The communication revolution of the last few decades belies this pessimistic opinion. Today information and education circulate and influence people fairly rapidly. Such means should be used intensively. The panelist added that American Muslim intellectuals should be encouraged to help their coreligionists in the Muslim world understand the necessity of emerging from eight centuries of stultification. With their colleagues in Muslim countries American Muslim intellectuals could organize seminars in which ways of joining the international community of the 21st century would be discussed. The panelist quoted an American Muslim businessman: "Today the Muslim world awaits a move in a modern direction.... Perhaps Muslim immigrants in the West will ultimately become the catalysts for a major ideological transition [that will occur] in the global Muslim community. Nostalgia for Islam's glorious past may provide comfort for some, but the future demands a mind-set open to change."⁴

Discussion and Conclusions

The following remarks were made during the discussions that followed the participants' presentations.

Several participants, referring to the battle of "isms" that characterized the 20th century, said that Muslims, in trying to define their identity in relation to the globalized conflicts of the time, developed "Islamism" as part of the answer.⁵

One panelist observed that in the 1930s and 1940s, fascism played a more or less important role in the Muslim world, especially among popular movements. The mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Hussein, traveled to Germany and met Hitler whom he praised. That panelist cited a jurisprudent who wrote that jihad means only that "Our Faith is to rule the world." In a long footnote the jurisprudent tried to answer the question: "How to live in an ideological age in which the world is divided into two camps--the capitalist and the communist--that are trying to obliterate [each] other."



Although he disagreed with the jurisprudent, the panelist cited him because he showed that the way in which Muslims understand their own tradition and their relations with others is profoundly influenced by the context of global politics. A vibrant liberal tradition existed in the Arab world among both secularized and religious intellectuals. It collapsed after World War II. It is important to explore and explain the causes of that collapse.

Another panelist said that fascism in the prewar days appealed to the clergy both in the Arab world and in Iran where Ayatollah Kashani said that Hitler was the mahdi who was going to help liberate the Europeans from the Jews and the Muslims from the European colonial powers (England and France). Beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the 1960s, some sections of the Muslim clergy looked to another kind of totalitarian ally and found it in communists and various other brands of Marxists because fascism had been defeated. At no point did they try to find allies among democratic forces. They always looked for a totalitarian force outside the Muslim world with which to ally against trends toward democratization in their own countries. A majority of the Muslim clergy generally sided with the secret police against Muslim intellectuals who favored democratic change.

One participant observed that "reversionary" or regressive trends constitute a feature that one finds in the history of Islam since its inception. They became much more active after the 12th century because of the triumph of various fundamentalist interpretations of the religion that are still in force. Fundamentalism naturally begets totalitarianism. Another panelist objected that MIF is basically a political movement that should not be attributed to ancient theological debates. Yet another one said that if Islamic fundamentalism, like Islam in general, is not monolithic, all fundamentalist brands, even when they reject the theological bases of other brands, in the final analysis, say the same thing: They proclaim jihad and promote violence against the infidels. In practice, whether Shii or Sunni, such radical groups cooperate against the "common" enemy, the infidel, meaning the West. If one separates these movements from their religious "coloration," it would become impossible to reform Islam and eradicate the danger involved in the return of people such as bin Laden.

One panelist looked at how MIF started. In the 1950s Arab nationalism reached its zenith with Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt. Expanding Arab nationalism was anticolonial, anti-Israeli, and anti-American. It allied itself with the Soviet Union. Its secularism frightened countries like Saudi Arabia, which leaned toward Islamic nationalism. In those days a strong secular atmosphere existed in most of the Middle East. On the streets one hardly saw women wearing veils. There was a lot of openness; traditions were breaking down. Suddenly the attempt to counter Arab nationalism with Islamic nationalism changed the picture. Preoccupied by the cold war and secular nationalism's leaning toward the Soviet Union, the United States found the Islamic reaction very convenient. Outside funding of Islamic movements began. When they were released from jail, those who had been persecuted by Nasser and imprisoned in the 1950s and the 1960s headed toward the countries of the Persian Gulf and found employment mainly as school teachers. While in detention they had developed political casts of mind. Their new sensibilities were different from those that characterized the people of such countries as Kuwait, Qatar, the Emirates, and others, which were rather apolitical. The immigrants politicized the whole region. They even politicized the Saudi Wahhabi doctrine that had been stripped of its political veneer by King Ibn Saud.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Islamic groups received increased financial support and armaments. Eventually the "Islamists" propagated "simple truths": "Everything is in the Koran"; "Islam is the solution"; and so on. Until September 11, the development of the "Islamic" reaction against Arab nationalism and secularism seemed tolerable to the United States because it served its goals in the region. After the end of the cold war, the Americans considered it in the context of the survival of "friendly" (or what they dubbed "moderate") regimes.



Indeed liberals espousing democratic and secular ideas created only headaches for local rulers who found a welcome relief in turning militant Islamic fundamentalists against them. Liberals are highly educated city dwellers, whereas conservatives--mainly Bedouins--are from the countryside. The coming of Bedouins to the cities created the "desertization" phenomenon--the "desert" invading the city--which has had a bearing on everything, including business. The level of thinking is diminished. Everything has been turned upside down, and "civilization" is suffering.

One participant said that one of the reasons for the emergence of radical and violent movements is the rupture with the past that occurred in the intellectual tradition of the Muslim world. It started with colonialism and was intensified by the regimes that took over after its demise. The few small pockets that did not experience such a rupture are completely marginalized. When people like bin Laden claim that they are expressing "true" Islam, they are in fact propounding a completely invented religion. There are different, competing, "invented Islams" in the marketplace of radicalism, but very little space is left for real scholars to think freely and speak credibly.⁶ Clerics have lost credibility because the state has coopted them and controls what they say. As a result, an intellectual crisis has stricken the Muslim clergy. One way to reestablish a "coherent" version of Islam would be to fund the "marginalized" scholars. Citing the cases of an American Egyptian professor of sociology in Cairo and an Egyptian independent scholar, this participant described what he called government policies of striking deals with radical groups while pretending to be at the forefront of the fight against terrorism; thus, for instance, the authorities tell a radical group that they want them to forgo violent demonstrations against American bombing in Afghanistan; in exchange, the group asks for the arrest of a scholar or another intellectual who is opposed to militant Islam. That is not the way to deal with terrorists, for it will make things worse in the long run. Instead, pressure should be exerted on Muslim governments to abandon such practices and take real and positive measures against terrorist groups.

The same panelist pointed out another practice of Muslim rulers that creates favorable grounds for the spread of militant Islamic fundamentalism. It has to do with the question of succession. Not only do rulers stay in place as presidents for life, but they have begun to pave the way for the transformation of their sons into "crown princes" who will replace them after their deaths. The panelist cited Syria, Egypt, and Lybia. Thousands of young people in Arab countries study hard in the best universities of the world and become top experts in many fields, only to be denied high positions that have been reserved for the unskilled siblings of high-ranking officials. The American Egyptian professor mentioned by the participant was imprisoned in Egypt for criticizing this practice.⁷ It is understandable, he maintained, that young, educated people turn toward militants who want to overthrow such rulers.

That participant brought up the question of Muslim communities in Europe and the United State. He estimated the number of Muslims living in the United States at about four million. Many of them are very wealthy, but only a few contribute generously to the campaigns of the political parties as well as to local Muslim organizations that maintain direct or indirect ties to militant fundamentalist groups. That is why so many extremist "Islamists" from the Muslim world, including one of bin Laden's top lieutenants, used to travel to the United States, where they could raise more funds for their organizations than could be raised in Muslim countries.

In Pakistan during and after Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, universities distributed degrees to members of Islamist groups who easily obtained visas to Canada and the United States. That and the help of an existing network, which provided them with American wives and helped them obtain green cards and citizenship, is how they created a power base in the United States. The network is now very rich and powerful, and it intimidates and even threatens the rest of the Muslim community.



That participant underlined many contradictions in U.S. policies. Even after September 11, President Bush met several times with so-called representatives of the Muslim community who in fact do not represent a majority of American Muslims and are mentally or ideologically on the same wavelength as Al Qaeda.

According to that panelist, there is a split in militant Islamic fundamentalist groups. In one camp are those operating from caves and camps in mountains and deserts to achieve their ultimate objective of killing Americans and Europeans and destroying the assets of the United States and other Western countries. In the other camp are those who are American citizens and think that they can overtake the United States without destroying physical assets and killing innocent people. Indeed they think they can influence the two political parties and, through them, governmental decisions with their campaign and other donations. They have set up approximately two dozens charities and other organizations that help militant fundamentalist organizations in the Middle East and indoctrinate American Muslims through a network of schools and mosques. Rich American Muslims as well as oil-rich Muslim countries fund such organizations, schools, and mosques. The U.S. government has shut only a few since September 11.

The leaders of those organizations and mosques are continually being invited to the White House and the State Department. Eighty per cent of American Muslims voted for Bush, whereas American Jews voted en masse for Gore. The leaders of rich American Muslim organizations boasted that they had brought Bush to the presidency. They sent him a letter asking for evenhandedness concerning the Palestinian and Kashmiri questions. Moreover, for years they have been lobbying in favor of the Sudanese theocracy. Their network in the United States is focused on foreign policy. Muslim army chaplains come from institutions established by American Muslims. There they were trained to adopt a mentality very close to that of bin Laden's followers.

That panelist added that the contradictions in American policies that have already been cited in this summary bewilder a majority of American Muslims who are law-abiding citizens. They suspect that something is wrong with American politics. It seems to them that what the United States suffered on September 11 stems from something American politicians have encouraged, if not created. For them it is still risky to take a clear stand in the midst of so many Islamists in the United States. (One should remember that a large number of American Muslims are political refugees who fled the radicals in their countries of origin.) The United States is a country that harbors masses of qualified anti-Islamist Muslims and the largest number of rich and educated Islamists. The United States is also supporting and helping a new Afghan government that includes several radical Islamists as important ministers.

What Should Be Done?

One panelist suggested that an examination of Muslim associations and institutions in the United States be conducted case by case because there are some positive elements among them. He added that September 11 brought a lot of changes and splits inside radical Islamic movements and suggested the establishment of a dialogue with "Islamists" who abide by laws and refrain from aggressive actions. In his opinion, what happened to Arab nationalism following the 1967 defeat can well happen to militant Islamic fundamentalism after the defeat of the Taliban and bin Laden in Afghanistan. At any rate, if the environment that produced bin Laden is left unchanged, then the same destructive network will reappear under new and different names. In Western schools, information about Muslim thinkers and their achievements should be taught, and in Muslim schools a similar curriculum pertaining to Western philosophers and scientists should be devised and implemented. Referring to the gradual opening in Kuwait's society, the panelist expressed the opinion that things will change for the better in the Muslim world.



Another panelist deplored the fact that the history of Western civilization in colleges is taught separately from other cultures, particularly the Muslim one. He expressed the hope that some reform would take place in order to present all civilizations in one course attended by all students. He added that novels and intellectual works by Arab writers should be translated into English so that American students as well as the general public can become familiar with the problems of the Muslim world. In his opinion, all such initiatives would promote a better understanding between the West and the Muslim world.

Other participants were less optimistic about the possibility of rapid change in relations between the two worlds. One panelist observed that a great part of the difficulties relating to the diversity of interpretations of the Koran stems from the absence of a formal church. Most of the Islamic associations are linked with governments. He emphasized the need for the creation of a genuine "American Islam" that expresses its own identity, without being beholden to anybody financially and politically, and propagates its understanding of the religion in its own way. Another panelist expressed doubts about the role that American Muslims can play in forming cultural trends in the Muslim world at large.

It was observed that the radicals use the United States as a base from which they inflict suffering on people in Muslim countries and elsewhere. One of their "weapons" comes from creating "phony" academic traditions. For instance, the University of California at Berkeley is teaching the thought of Khomeini as if he had been a great philosopher. In Iran they use this as proof that Khomeini was a great philosopher and thinker. Actually "Islamists" seem to suffer from a kind of inferiority complex when they compare themselves to Westerners whose endorsement they often seek. American Islamists do more harm to Muslims in the Middle East than to local militant groups. In the United States these people terrorize members of Muslim communities. The United States should remain true to its values and defend them without compromise. At many international conferences there is an allowance for Islamic exception. The other conferees think that they should treat Muslims differently simply because Muslims say that they are different. He stated that they should be treated like everybody else. The panelist remarked that American leaders and officials do a great disservice to the image of the United States by accepting the pay of various Muslim regimes for acting as consultants or business partners. In doing so they reinforce the notions of people at the local level that Americans can be "bought." And that supposition creates ground for anti-American feelings.

In the opinion of one panelist, the problem with radical populist movements is that they have conferred on their own cultural traditions some sort of eternal meaning, which means that if they gave up any one of them, they would seem to be committing an unacceptable act of ontological compromise. Such a philosophical error is the kind of thing that is usually corrected through typical democratic processes. Denying to Arab Muslims the right to work these things out and excluding from the political process the people who hold to their traditions because, it is feared, they might take over government will only retard political development. In this respect Algeria is the quintessential example: It got a brutal military regime and an unending civil war. The suspension of the democratic process is utterly wrong. The United States must remain true to itself in order not to be accused of adhering to double standards and not to lose credibility and legitimacy. The tensions that Muslims face as a result of modernity are not different from those that Koreans or Chinese people experience. In fact, the United States has its own traditionalists who dislike a lot of things that go on in the country.

Another participant said that "Islamists" should be countered in the political arena and not be allowed to claim a kind of "sanctity." Muslim societies cannot work out their problems because they have regimes that do not allow them to develop in a normal way. What is happening now is a kind of reaction: a "going backward," in comparison to what existed even 30 or 40 years ago. This reaction,



presented as "true" Islam, should be opposed. The same panelist added that if we protect the rights and freedoms of the "Islamist" lobbyists, we should also protect the rights of the Muslim majority who are subjected to intimidation by them. He said that wherever Muslims were offered a chance to adopt democracy, especially to participate in elections, they seized it. We must not assume as true whatever the most reactionary and retrograde elements of the Muslim community say just because they are organized and have powerful governments behind them. In this respect, a panelist recalled that when the radical Islamists sought to fill the vacuum left by the exponents of a waning Arab nationalism, they promised solutions for problems besetting their societies. Now it has become obvious that they have no solutions, and so there is an opening for something different and effective.

One participant criticized the "exceptionalism" that characterizes American foreign policy toward the Muslim world. He gave the recent example of Pakistan's president who launched a coup against an elected leader and is hated by his own people yet is treated as a "good guy" by the United States. He admitted that the circumstances of the war against terrorism make that position understandable but expressed the hope that after the war is over, the United States will reconsider its attitude. Another panelist remarked that the predecessor of the present Pakistani president had forced out the legal government, removed the leader of the Supreme Court, and banned the main opposition party. He was about to arrest the present president, who outmaneuvered him by acting first.

It was observed that the so-called Koranic schools in Pakistan prepared recruits for bin Laden's Al Qaeda. The authorities have closed many of them since September 11. One panelist expressed the opinion that a reform of education is overdue in many Muslim countries and cited the successful experience of Tunisia in this respect. He added that a revision of textbooks is also necessary. Another participant, although approving the creation of modern elementary and secondary schools in Muslim countries, said that special schools to train Muslim theologians and mosque imams should be set up in Europe and the United States where theologians trained in the West are familiar with scientific matters. He even suggested the creation of a modern "Islamic Theological Society" that would take advantage of science and other kinds of knowledge. He indicated that theological centers in Egypt and Saudi Arabia had come up with decisions about "cloning" without knowing the scientific background of the question. He also cited the nonsensical theory, aired by some theologians as justification for the hijab, about the property of women's hair, which is said to emit a kind of ray that drives men crazy. Theologians trained in the West would be able to refute such notions.

One panelist, referring critically to Muslim private schools in the United States, observed that their improvement is hampered by sinister accusations continuously made against Muslim institutions: It is hard to improve the schools when the institutions have to spend a lot of resources in an effort to refute charges of conspiring to destroy the United States.

Concerning recent developments in Iran, one panelist said that the country was in a kind of preinsurrectionary phase. Tehran is the only Muslim capital where young people demonstrated in support of the United States after September 11. Several participants concurred that any change in Iran's policies or its government as a whole would have a beneficial impact on the whole region. At the 11th hour the United States should not begin to support a bankrupt regime that is in the throes of death. It should make it clear to the present rulers that there can be no dialogue that excludes the Iranian people. The Iranian authorities should not limit their concessions to foreign policy matters; they should also offer concessions in domestic politics. It is in the interests of the United States to befriend a successor regime rather than the present one.



One panelist said that Iraq is an important key state in the region. A change in Iraq would have a deep impact on Iran and on a great number of other countries in the Middle East as well as on the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis.

Concerning the latter conflict and its impact on anti-American reactions on the "street" in Arab lands, a panelist stated that the issue of Palestine affects all Arabs. There is a strong sense of personal identification with the Palestinians, and what happens to them is genuinely felt by all Arabs. Moreover, people feel that if the same treatment were meted out to Americans or British citizens, the United States or the United Kingdom would never tolerate it.

Another panelist added that U.S. foreign policy is perceived by ordinary Arabs as driven only by its interests in the security of Israel and in the free flow of oil, not by trying to find a just solution to the conflict and other problems. At any rate the people of the Middle East have the impression that the United States does not engage itself in their region as it does in other regions such as Asia and Latin America. In the view of that panelist, the reluctance of the United States to engage in Middle Eastern affairs has created a vacuum that has been filled by radical Islamists. He urged the United States to draw up policies for its long-term engagement in the region.

Another participant expressed the hope that the United States would also address the economic problems of the Middle East. He suggested a kind of "Marshall Plan." Another panelist was of the opinion that notwithstanding existing obstacles and difficulties, the United States can and should improve its image in the region as well as its relationship with the Arabs. He deplored the fact that American diplomats in Arab countries often do not engage with the population even when the opportunity is given to them. In his opinion, based on personal experience in Yemen, there is no hatred of the United States except on the part of a very small minority; if people resent some actions, they nevertheless genuinely admire America.

Several panelists reiterated that the United States had to persevere in fulfilling the commitments it has made. One panelist reminded the roundtable and the audience that the rout of the Taliban and the disbandment of Al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan have had a tremendous effect. Indeed bin Laden did not get support from any Muslim country. If the United States were to end its actions without achieving its goals in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the war against terrorism, many would conclude that its policy was neither genuine nor farsighted. The same participant added that whatever the method envisioned (change of regime, dialogue, and so on), there has to be a way to end the present negative situation that involves the Iraqi people. A change in Iraq should be one of the priorities of U.S. policy in the region. In Iran, the United States should support the electorate, not the repressive government.

It was also observed that the funding of militant fundamentalist organizations comes from some oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf: for instance, Saudi Arabia in the case of Sunni groups and Iran for Shii groups. This funding should be stopped immediately.

Several participants asserted that a military victory over terrorism is not enough. The United States and its democratic allies should also wage a "political" battle in favor of democracy and human rights in the Muslim world. Indeed they are not at war against Islam but against tyranny and repression. Their real friends in Muslim countries are not the authoritarian rulers but the democrats and modernizers. As one panelist put it, there are many people ready to fight the political battle in all Muslim countries from Indonesia to Morocco.

A panelist said that one of the problems is that everybody wants to determine U.S. foreign policy. For instance, the Arabs want to suggest to Washington what should be done about the Palestinians



and Chairman Arafat. The Israelis, for their part, push their own agenda. The Pakistanis and the Indians press the United States to accept their versions of their dispute over Kashmir. Some states advise against taking action against states that give haven to terrorists. And on it goes. The United States should base its foreign policy on its own interests in each case. It should also remain true to its values and principles.

Concerning U.S. engagement in the region, several participants underlined the fact that there is no real effort to explain American positions to the public in Muslim countries. It was suggested that the Voice of America and other channels like those broadcasting to Iran and Afghanistan be used for this purpose. One panelist observed that we are living in a "people-to-people" era and that the United States should spare no effort in creating "people-to-people" relations. In effect, it should enlarge to a considerable extent the only contacts the United States has with people in the Middle East, which are generally confined to businessmen and military leaders. The people of the region hate the United States vicariously because they hate their own governments. Where Muslim governments are friendly with the United States, people hate Americans. The visits of several U.S. presidents to Syria's dictator, Hafiz Assad, tarnished the image held of the United States by the people of many Arab countries.

It was observed that in other regions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have greatly helped the processes involved in developing civil society. According to one panelist, there is an explosion of NGOs in the Middle East. For instance, every year the World Bank holds a Middle East Development Forum in one Arab capital. NGOs participate in the forums. The Europeans send senior ministers to those gatherings; in contrast, the U.S. government is absent. Even the officials of American embassies do not bother to respond to criticisms aired during the forums. It was suggested that the United States send highranking representatives to such conferences.

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Notes

1. This is a reference to the al-Muwahhidin dynasty (the Unitarians--corrupted into Spanish: *Almohades*) founded by Ibn Tumart, a member of a Moroccan Berber tribe, who assumed the title of mahdi. (See note 6.) His general, Abdal Mumin, succeeded him in 1130 and propagated his fundamentalist doctrine in an empire that included North Africa and Andalusia.
2. This participant recounted that during the time of ibn Taymiyya, the Mongols invaded the eastern part of the Muslim world and converted to Islam. But they did not apply the Sharia. Ibn Taymiyya declared them heretics and argued that rebellion be launched against them.
3. Muslims of the early period are called the pious forefathers; hence Salifi's reference to those early pious forefathers.
4. Munawar Anees in "Civilization," February 2000.
5. See the text under the heading "Definition of MIF."
6. In Shiism, the mahdi is the awaited twelfth imam who disappeared in his childhood. The imam-mahdi dogma is an essential part of the twelvers Shiite creed. In Sunnism, the mahdi restorer of the faith does not occupy such a central place. At any rate, the belief in the coming of the mahdi lent itself in the Arab world to the appearance of many pretenders in all periods of Muslim history.
7. Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim.

