

Political Islam and International System: Impacts and Implications*

Reza Simbar

To ensure world peace and security in twenty-first century, hostile relationship between the two major civilizations in the world today should be managed. Considering the geographical distribution of Muslims in the world today, we can see on the top of the world's known fuel deposits, most important trade routes – the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Bosphorus, the Black Sea, and the Straits of Malacca – are all heavily populated by Muslims. Over the past half-century, many events have highlighted the role of Islam as a cultural and political force in international affairs. They have generated debates and discourses, many of which fall under polemics and apologetics. To understand how and why certain anti-rational tendencies have gained ground in the Islamic world, we need to consider their historical and socio-political context, including the official state policies, notably the attempts to crush major mainstream Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the cancellation of Algeria's elections. This paper aims to present a critical reading of some of the problems faced by the Muslim world and their impacts on international system. The method of approach in this paper is descriptive with explaining the relationship among International relations, Islam, peace and security.

Keywords: *Islam, Political Islam, Muslims, the West, Democracy, International System, Peace, Security*

1. THE POLITICAL RETURN OF RELIGION IN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

There is a complex relationship between religion and international politics. The implication of the first side of the debate is that religion, Islam in this case, has to be studied as an independent and vital force in international relations. If Islam is the driving force behind political phenomenon, it must also have a role in international political process. The counter argument would go like this: Islam is important for the analysis of international relations only if we recognize that its role is shaped by economic, political and social developments which are unrelated to the precepts of the religion. Therefore, religion should not be privileged as an independent field of study in the context of international politics. However, a close study demonstrates how there is an Islamic impact on the study of international politics including peace and conflict, nationalism, nation-states and human rights.

Islam has emerged, therefore, with a 'political profile' to the international scene. This heightened profile is due to various factors (Beeley 1992: 11-29). Among them is the post 1973 realization of the importance of the oil resources of the Muslim world, first and foremost, in the Middle East, and more recently in the republics of Central Asia. This wealth has contributed to the establishment of Muslim commercial as well as financial, economic and civic organization in Europe and North America. For instance, the OPEC has played a significant role in the world politics and finance. This economic power has been

* This paper was edited by Dr. Masoud Khalili, PhD in TEFL in the Department of English Language, University of Guilan.

accompanied by a desire among some Muslims for Islamic revivalism, a greater genuineness in the understanding and implementation of the social, moral, political, and economic imperatives to discover in the Qur'an.

On the other hand, the Muslim world is spread across the three continents of Europe, Africa and Asia, with sizeable Muslim communities in the Americas, India and China. The Middle East region and Southeast Asia form the heartlands of this faith; Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam, and Indonesia the populous Muslim country with 90 percent of its 188 million people being Muslim. The geography of the faith, however, has been experiencing some changes in recent years. The emergence of a Muslim-dominated Bosnian entity in former Yugoslavia and the regeneration of Muslim Albania in southern part of Europe are recent additions to what has been Turkey's lonely spot in Europe as the continent's only Muslim state (Fuller and Lesser 1995: 16-17).

The emergence of Muslim republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia has practically transformed the map of west Asia. Five new Central Asian republics have been joined by Azerbaijan in the Caucasus. These states are not Muslim in the classic sense of the word, where Islam would be the dominant cultural influence. But they are in any case much more in tune with secularist Turkey and still far removed from the traditionalist Islamic forces in the Arab World. But their emergence does represent an expansion of the Muslim world in geographical terms, and terms of a quantitative growth in the number of independent Muslim states operating in the international system.¹ This fact can be ascertained by the growing number of member-states participating at the organization of Islamic countries' meetings. The birth of these six Islamic states and the addition of their 70 million people to the Muslim world will, in the fullness of time, begin to have an impact on the direction and policies pursued by the established Muslim states. Their presence will also influence the orientation and ethos of such hitherto Arab-dominated international Muslim organizations as the 54-member Islamic Conference Organization (Eickelman and Piscatori 1997: 44-45).

It should be mentioned that economically, too, the differences between Muslim states are quite marked. The newly industrializing Muslim countries, for instance, are spearheading part of the Third World challenge to Western domination of the capitalist world economy. Muslim states in this category include Tunisia, Morocco and Turkey in the Middle East and North Africa, and Malaysia, Indonesia and possibly Pakistan in Asia.

Then there are two other types of economic states in the Muslim world: the survivor economy which is the prevalent form in much of Muslim Africa and the stagnant or under-performing Muslim economies, the latter being characteristic of some of the Arab World's economies. Accounting to more than a dozen Muslim states and many millions of Muslims in Asia and Africa, these groups of countries either suffer from a natural resource deficiency, or else find that their economies are unable to respond to the multitude of pressures which are increasingly generated at the global level. They simply do not have the means to assess, let alone respond to, the challenges that a globalized international system poses. Tragically, in most of these cases, poverty continues to prevail, despite a liberalization and opening up of their economies.

¹ In the Twenty-first century, almost one out of every five human being is a Muslim, and a quarter of the human race will probably become Muslim. The new demographic presence of Islam within the Western World is indicative that the Islamization is now a major globalizing force. In the second half of the twentieth century both Muslim migration to the West and conversions to Islam within the West consolidated a new Islamic presence.

A number of other Muslim economies, on the other hand, have been doing quite well, because of oil deposits.² By and large, these economies have prospered because they have been blessed with huge hydrocarbon deposits, which were the main source of their wealth and income in the twentieth century, and will likely be in the next century as well (George 1996: 79). Moreover, the ranks of the Middle Eastern oil states have been expanded in the 1990s by the gradual arrival on the international hydrocarbons scene of potentially serious players such as Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, for example, are said to exceed 50 billion barrels of oil, or could even be as treat as 200 billion barrels. The economic ambitions of these newly independent states are likely to project them to prominence as some of the next century's main hydrocarbons providers. But their arrival as large hydrocarbon exporters may bring them into a devastating competition with the established Middle Eastern hydrocarbons exporters, all of whom are, of course, Muslim states (Esposito and Voll 2002: 33-39). This situation may lead to development of economic capabilities of the Islamic world.³

2. ISLAMISM IN HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The great zones of Muslim culture with which European powers had been engaged were the Ottomans (1281-1923), the Safavids (1501-1722) in Iran, the Mughals (1526-1857) in Indian sub-continent, and Southeast Asia. Of these, the most powerful in relation to Europe was the Ottoman, which for centuries ruled major areas of southern Europe, Greece and the Balkans, together with the Fertile Crescent, the Hejaz and with it the Holy places of Mecca and Medina, Egypt and North Africa.

The severity of British reprisals against the mutineers resulted in many Muslim leaders leaving the sub-continent for the Holy Land and other regions of the Middle-East. It set divisive forces at work among the Muslim and Hindu communities of the region, and marked the beginning of a long history of religious and political movements in the struggle against British rule. Ultimately, in 1947, it was to lead to partition, the creation of the nation states of India and Pakistan, and eruption of the festering sore of Kashmir as a focus for Islamic-Hindu hostility.

The turn down of the Ottoman Empire was sluggish. It was in part due to domestic weakness, rise of nationalism in its European provinces such as Greece and the Balkans, and the rapid expansion of the European powers. An internal assault came from the radical puritanical movement set in train by Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1787) which became a religious ideology of tribal unification in north central Arabia, and in 1773 captured Riyadh, making it its capital. An external challenge to Ottoman authority was Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, which led to the installation of Muhammad Ali, and Albanian, as governor of Egypt (1805-1848). During the course of the nineteenth century areas of Eastern Europe under Ottoman rule, such as Greece and the Balkans, revolted and gained their independence and asserted their cultural identity. Ottoman decline was hastened

² The oil boom in the Middle East during the 1970s which sparked renewed interest in Islam(?) encouraged the development of a loosely knit interconnected network of Muslim international businessmen who working for oil and chemical companies as well as financial firms, gained experience in Western regulatory and business environments.

³ Therefore, several of these new Central Asian countries see themselves as leading regional economies of the twenty-first century, with potential to emerge as new economic powers of Asia.

by the British foment of the revolt of the Arabs during the First World War. The Allied victory led to divisions of the Fertile Crescent in their interests of the metropolitan powers, Britain and France, thus setting the scene for a number of the geo-political problems of the contemporary Muslim world. In the wake of the First World War, Mustafa Kemal, later known as Atatürk formally abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1923, and the position of Caliph, held by the Sultan has gone in 1924.

The British mandate in Palestine opened the door to the implementation of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 that envisage a national home for the Jews in Palestine. This, in 1948, in the wake of the Holocaust, was to lead to the establishment of the state of Israel as a home for the Jewish survivors from Europe, generating an exodus of Palestinians from their homeland, many of whom continue to be refugees. Another consequence was the opportunity given to Ibn Sa'ud, with his support of the Wahhabi current, to create the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has gained a prestige in the Islamic world totally disproportionate to its population and cultural status by its custodianship of the holy places and especially after 1973, its oil wealth.

The religious consciousness and self-perception of Muslims have been transformed from the 1960s. To be a Muslim at that time was largely an observance of the ritual law, which to the outside observer often did not go beyond observance of the daily prayer and the Fast of Ramadan. It seems that Islam has returned to different debates in international relations. In fact, we can trace Islam's international political influence over the last 70 decades. World War II was a watershed, and in this regard and we can note that the two decades after the end of the war, with the power of the European colonial powers visibly on the wane, Islam was used in the pursuit of numerous anti-colonial struggles, typically in the service of indigenous nationalism. There were prominent examples of Islam's involvement in political conflicts from the 1960s and 1970. Two issues in particular highlighted the vibrancy, in particular, of various manifestation of political Islam: the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and the domestic and international ramification of the Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979.⁴ It also became apparent from this time more generally that attempts by Middle Eastern states to 'secularize their politics' sometimes led to a 'political backlash form Islamists' (Featherstone 1990: 22-23).

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the seizure of the US embassy, Iran's relations with the West have been badly strained and often inconsistent. Islamic Revolution in Iran was a turning point in the Islamic World, as the new government declared that Iran would be managed based on the Islamic principles and Iran would pursue a policy based on the principle of non-alignment.

After September 11 some had gone even further, pointing to the resurgence of religion as a direct threat to international stability. They suggest that after the Cold War and the rapid demise of an 'evil empire' had soon given way to a much more complex and anarchic international order beset by and array of new security challenges and conflict situation which proved to be largely fluid in content and irregular in nature. They point to the rise of 'Islam militancy' as evidence for their case (Esposito 1997: 9-10). Their subjects of study, namely

⁴ After the Islamic Revolution, the new government declared that Iran would pursue a policy based on the principle of non-alignment. This was a strategy initiated by prominent leaders of the developing world in order to pursue a foreign policy independent of the great powers at the start of the Cold War. In the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini captured in his best know motto the principles of independence and freedom along side Islam.

the Islamic activists on the other hand, are constantly trying to seize the moment and capitalize on the opportunities created by the new disorder to redraw the existing international system in term that they perceive to be to the Muslim's advantage. Islamist engagement with the international system can easily be misconstrued, however, if not viewed within its proper context.

In the following section, I study Islamism as a political phenomenon. I argue that Islamism in its radical form inspires only a minority. But because many of those who embrace it are highly motivated and idealistic, it exerts a wide influence in many Muslim countries and across the globe, even among those who do not realize its implications or understand its principles.

3. ISLAMISM AS A POLITICAL PHENOMENON

It is important to stress that though 'Islamism' and 'political Islam' broadly refers to those who are committed to applying an ideological vision of Islam in the socio-political sphere. They do not recommend violence, and they want to use political means to reach their objectives. Indeed, committed 'radical Islamists' are fringe groups in the world of Islam who use violence to get their objectives; so they can be called as terrorist groups in the Islamic world. Moreover, it cannot be overemphasized that far from being a movement that concerns only the West, 'radical Islamism', as a political current and in all its forms, is also recognized as problematic by Muslims in general.

There are several distinct ways in which one can study political Islam as a radical force in the modern world. The first approach sees it as a response to the monumental crisis of the nation-state in the Muslim Middle East, which has been caused by a combination of factors in the economic, political and social realms. The Crisis of Middle East and North Africa state is often expressed in terms of social deprivation, lingering poverty, corruption, nepotism, reliance on the West for security and defense, dependence on the West for economic assistance, diminishing degree of political legitimacy, absence of the rule of law, problems of stability associated with unclear political succession procedure, and unaccountable and unresponsive political systems. These problems have been compounded in recent years by rapid population growth, haphazard urbanization, and environmental degradation. Therefore, radical Islam could be said to be an extremist response to a general crisis. It seems the Islamic reconstruction response to the sociopolitical crisis in the Middle East represents the attempts of Muslims to retrieve their own religious heritage and make it the foundation of a new public order.

In the second approach Islamic radicalism is viewed as a form of cultural nationalism, a native response to the weakening of traditional structures. It can be said, in this view, that political Islam was a reaction to Muslim cultural erosion. Islamism is a passing, and badly misperceived, revivalist movement which poses little danger to the West, and is in actual fact a vital part of the cultural renewal of the Third World people. Moreover, fundamentalist movements are seen as no more than a response to the process of globalization, which in all of its aspects challenges standards and ways of life of non-Western world.

It is important to emphasize that though Islamism generally refers to those who are dedicated to applying an ideological vision of Islam in the socio-political sphere, its expression differ and not all Islamists connect to violence. Indeed, dedicated radical Islamists are fringe groups in the world of Islam. Moreover, it cannot be overemphasized that far from

being a movement that concerns only the West, Islamism as political current and in all its forms, is also recognized as challenging by Muslims in general. It is addressed by a number of Muslim thinkers concerned with Islam as their religion, its role in the world and the common good of their society. It cannot swank an acceptance by the mainstream Muslim community. And although some may tacitly ignore their activities, other Muslims are driven to question the competence of their leaders, and even the very basis of their faith at the sight of what other Muslims (i.e. Islamists) are doing in the name of Islam.

Islamism itself is a term difficult to define without falling into misleading generalizations. It is commonly used in European academic and media vernacular to refer to politically active groups that call upon Islam in their political rhetoric and activism as Islamists, not simply as Muslims. The term is intended to emphasize the fact that this religiously based political rhetoric and activism goes beyond and is qualitatively different to works of devotions, social welfare and acts of faithfulness that constitute the norms of Islamic praxis. Islamism, then, is a term engaging a range of significance. It is different in character to what is referred to by the equally ambiguous word, fundamentalism. Though the term fundamentalism is at times used interchangeably with Islamists, there are Muslims who disapprove of the use of this word, noting that all observing Muslims are necessarily fundamentalists by virtue of accepting the Qur'an as the revealed word of Allah. Islamism represents the height of a commitment to Islam to the level of an ideology, and refers to groups who use Islam as a reference to define their political identities. Such groups include political parties that profess to be Islamic parties in their political activities. The extreme manifestation of radical Islamism is seen in the activities of those who see Islam as a universalistic ideology on the world stage, as a system to put to rights what they deem as the imbalance and injustice in the world. Stimulated by this confidence, they approach Islam with a view to molding it according to their aspirations and political agendas, and use it as a justification for the use of terror as a political weapon.

Meanwhile, in this new international environment, especially after the Cold War and hastening in the process of globalization, more developments are shaping without the direct involvement of nations or states. The new antagonisms which are said to driving international relations are increasingly based on such variables as culture, group identity and religion. With the state still acting as the dominant partner in the international politics, confrontations based on these factors have increased in our planet and have added to the existing forms of inter-state tensions. Furthermore, the situation is exacerbated by globalization, which has not only increased interdependencies of countries and regions, but has also reduced the distinction between the 'national' and the 'international' (Piscatori 1986: 21-23).

A cluster of extreme groups, broadly referred to as radical Islamists, have appropriated the rhetoric of Islam, applying it to a promised 'Islamic' reality to be realized once 'Islam is fully applied'. They have put Islam's spiritual course at the service of an ideology that promotes their own program, for use as an instrument to right the wrongs they see everywhere in the world. Of these radical Islamist groups, a few have used their ideology to make of the Qur'an a heavenly command to use terror as a means of achieving political goals, in a way that perverts much of the moral, spiritual and cultural achievements of Islam in history (Huband 1998: 19-22). These few have, unfortunately, dominated public perceptions of Islam in the West, largely because of the amazing incidents they have masterminded, of

which September 11 is an example.⁵ Such groups have abridged Islam to an ideology with specific formula, one that draws on some elements of a quantity of goals and values, and eschews others. This ideology is given an 'Islamic' character by combination of the rhetoric of its political goals with verses from the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet. The resulting ideology is, then, said to be genuinely Islamic and as such is eagerly available for all to whom it makes an application. Its authority is enhanced because it enlists God in its cause, and rhetoric in which it is packaged and appeared to give to its appeal the blessing of religion (Esposito 1992: 33-34)

Islamism in its radical form inspires only a minority. But because many of those who embrace it are highly motivated and idealistic, it exerts a wide influence in many Muslim countries and across the globe, even among those who do not realize its implications or understand its principles. It colors, skews even, many outsiders' perceptions of what is happening in the Muslim world and of what Muslims are, and has generated a new order on the international scene (Dekmejian 1995: 13-23). It is by drawing on the resources of international communication, e.g. media, satellite television and the internet, that Islamism has managed to create an identifiable international presence with the capacity to create and activate groups dedicated to it across the globe. In other words, globalization has allowed greater flows of information and people between the region and other parts of the Muslim world.

Somehow, pattern of clash between civilizations, Islam and the West, has created the chimera conflict and hate. But the clash is more complex, and the prime victims are mainly Muslim living in Muslim countries. As a result, there is now in both the Islamic world and the West a web of confused and confrontational identities: Muslims fearing other Muslims, non-Muslims fearing or suspicious of Muslims, Muslims suspicious and angry on non-Muslims for suspecting that they are feared by them because they are Muslims, and even non-Muslims angry of other non-Muslims for not being anti-Muslim enough, and so putting the non-Muslim world at jeopardy.

While it may be said that presence of political Islam in the Western-dominated international system is a destabilizing factor, the same could be said about the impact of Western policies on the Islamic world. The 'US led anti-Soviet campaign in the 1980s was conducted through the use of Islamist organizations that used the conflict to further their own agenda' (Jurgensmeyer 1993: 27-32). More recently, other instruments were employed, including the rather unusual one of an ostensible concern for women's welfare as a reason to defend the international order. This gender reasoning has allowed the US to claim the right to intervene in the case of Afghanistan. But although abuse of and discrimination against women there still continues, now that the Western military mission of defeating the Taliban regime is finished, gender issues have once again returned to a mere domestic concern.⁶

Islamism is a product of clashes of interests, of colonialism, Islamic and Western, process

⁵ It should be said that the idea of perpetual armed jihad is just a theological construct offered by the scholars in that specific period, not a divine injunction, in response to the prevailing reality of an international system this anarchic and during which war as an important instrument of power and security oriented.

⁶ The anger in the Islamic world created by its foreign policies is mainly based on America's one-sided support of Israel at the expense of Palestinians, its hegemonic role in military invasion in Iraq and its support for creation social reforms relating to liberty and governance in Muslim states because of its great concern with strategic and economic interests.

of de-colonization, and the materialization of modern dictatorial Muslim states supported by Western neo-colonial powers. The end of European colonialism has up to the present left the world with ongoing problems of re-adjustment, due to the arbitrary borders, economic, ethnic and religious aberrations left by and imposed on the territories fixed out by the former metropolitan powers. These were exacerbated in the course of the Cold War as Soviet Russia competed with their former colonial masters to maintain a privileged status and exercise economic and ideological control over their former possessions. The result has been a sometimes bumpy and erratic development in their political structures, the consequence of revolutions, coups and attempts at the re-drawing of borders.

In the following section, I argue the interrelationships among Islam, Muslim polities and the West. I discuss that steps should be taken to promote a new Western message of cultural coexistence internally as well as abroad. A change in popular Western perceptions would be immediately perceived by Arabs and Muslim overseas who follow Western culture and media far more closely than is generally recognized. By acknowledging Islamic contributions to a common global civilization, and by including "Islamic perspective" in interfaith discussions and programs, the West could facilitate a process of intercultural peacemaking.

4. ISLAM, MUSLIM POLITIES AND THE WEST

Since the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center the Western powerful states have been more firmly than ever on the Muslim world. All aspects of life and society in Muslim World have been pored over by policy makers and analysts in attempts to understand the real causes of Islamic radicalism. The operating assumption of most western policy makers and analysts has been that instability in the Islamic world, especially in the Middle-East region including North Africa, poses a direct security challenge to international security. Meanwhile, the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States have led to a kind of 'Western Radicalism' (Adib-Moghaddam 2002: 207-208). While in the past policy makers might have content to advocate a strategy of containing the threat, now they have to seek active intervention in the Muslim World to effect real and qualitative change in these societies through substantive political and economic reforms.

Despite the differences in nature between the conventional Muslim's and the Islamists' commitment to Islam, for many non-Muslims, the distinction between them is indistinct. There are a number of reasons for this. One of them is that the epistemology of Islam is skewed by vagueness of the terms used to assign its trends and tendencies. Because of Islamism's constantly reiterated claim to authenticity, a superior commitment to the Islamic revelation, for many non-Muslim across the globe, Islam itself has come to be seen as synonymous with Islamism in its radical symptom and so with terrorism. Further, the political pattern of the world, and the reputation of expressions such as 'Islam and the West' has resulted in the general use of the word 'Islam' as a conceptual noun which phonetically is suggestive Islamism. Another reason is that Islamism in the general and legal sense of the word is nevertheless Muslims. They are so even if they deliberately hijack elements from the Islamic tradition and 'fashion them into the rhetoric they use to present their own agenda is a way that goes well beyond the parameters of generally accepted Islamic belief, norms and values'⁷ (Guazzone 1995: 14-15).

⁷ It would be too simplistic to see the multitude of international tensions arising from the politicization

To explain the behavior in the Islamic World, some Western analysts are claiming that the problem has always lain within the Muslim world itself and Islam's inability to adapt to the modern age (Lewis 2002: 22-27). This explanation has been setting the theme of much of the policy debate in the West about the complexities of Muslim societies, shackled by the teaching and practices of Islam are said to be as apprehensive and unbalanced as to create a 'direct threat to international security'; while their shortcomings mean that they are 'ill prepared' to manage the challenges of globalization on their own (Huntington 2001: 88).

The allegation, that Islam, as theological doctrine, is responsible for the conduct of a group of Muslims, such as al-Qa'ida, is responsible for the actions of a faction of Muslims who say they act in their religion's name is every bit as unsubstantiated as the claim that Christianity is responsible for the extremes of medieval Crusaders, or the implication that Judaism is to blame for the Israeli government's failure to fully apply the fourth Geneva Convention (Hefner 2001: 493-495).

Meanwhile, the American strategy for counteracting terrorism and building international security lacks both consistency and a reliable strategy for implementing America's best values. As America's leaders inelegantly fight fire with both fire and water, they rely far more on provocative foreign policy than on a real understanding of the flashpoints and firebreaks in American-Islamic relations (Lynch 2003: 91).

During Bush administration, while one strand of US policy projects official messages of good will toward Muslims and seeks to advertise American values through public diplomacy, it has mostly redressed problems of international terrorism and weapons proliferation unilaterally, through intimidation and projection of military power. Instead of proactive agenda to strengthen global governance and deal with root causes, Bush administration produced a hasty foreign policy whose bellicosity threatens to do what al-Qa'ida could not convince the world's Muslim that US policy really does oppose their interests and values. Where many American see policies animated by ideological consistency and even moral precision, Muslim see double standards and moral insolvency. The resulting perceptual gap, and the demonstrable hardship experiences, such as by Palestinians and occupied Iraqis, have fed a deep pessimism about American politics. American strong support of continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is another example. Nor are American concerns about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction regarded as believable given past US indifference to the use of these weapons against Iranians and Kurds during Iraq's invasion of Iran, not to mention the way the American non-proliferation agenda seems driven more by power politics, and an attendant policy of "selective proliferation," than by any consistent set of principles. After all, allies and terrifying adversaries are permitted to maintain stockpiles of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, whereas challenges to the status quo are not. The American desire to spread democracy is viewed with similar irony, given historical US pattern of support for Middle Eastern monarchs, and for "99% majority" presidents whose failure to provide dynamic, progressive, and accountable leadership has greatly enhanced the

of Islam merely in Islamic-Western terms. That this should not be so is evident from two sets of considerations. First, much of venom of radical Islam is still injected into the Muslim world itself, where considerable violence is traded amongst Muslims themselves, as it were. Second, Militant Islam takes as much pleasure in confronting such non-Western powers as Russia, China, India, Burma and Philippines as it does their Western counterparts. Broadly speaking, in the worldview of militant Islamists, Muslim are victims of aggression from a multitude of sources, which includes the Eastern Churches, Hindu and Buddhist movements as well as all secular forces around the world.

appeal of radical Islamic outlook. When speculating about America's intentions, Muslims consider not 'only contradictions' of word and deed but also the resumes and public statements of those who formulate American foreign policy (Ramadan 2004: 274-275).

With Muslims' historical experiences, American should not be surprised that most Middle Easterners view military invasion of Iraq and its occupation as actually a campaign to subjugate Arabs and Muslims, within the well-established traditions of Western imperialism. From a Muslim standpoint, official American pronouncements of respect for Islam are much easier to explain than policies that instead manifest either a deliberate bias or an inability to comprehend the needs, aspirations, and fears of others. After all, it is politically expedient for American leaders to 'profess respect for Islam and for Muslim values' (Salvatore and Eickelman 2004: 16-21).

To counteract terrorism and achieve genuine security, Americans need a policy that inspires active cooperation for mutual gains rather than a program of fear and compulsion. International terrorism has complex causes, and is fed by a growing alienation, between societies and the failure of existing local and global governance to meet minimal expectations of opportunity, efficiency and justice. Such problems cannot be resolved exclusively- or even largely- through intimidation. A policy that combines a clear and impartial message about terrorism with respect for the existential realities, interests, and future hopes of Muslims might open a new chapter of cooperative relations. But a policy that focuses on symptoms and ignores underlying factors could easily reinforce the widespread despair, resentment, and powerlessness that have enabled Bin Laden to attract a following.

Developing an effective policy reaction to terrorism will occur only if we re-examine fundamental suppositions about Islam and its relationship to the West.⁸ To date Western approach to relations with the Muslim world has suffered from deep contradictions and inconsistencies. Former US administration's policies since the tragic events of September 11 divided natural allies and done much to persuade average, apolitical Muslims. Still, there is no reason for fatalism about a clash of civilizations, since a vast majority of Muslims would prefer having America as an ally rather than an enemy. By stressing both the cultural and political roots of the present stalemate, advocates for a new foreign policy vision, predicated upon coexistence and peaceful change, can have an important impact on public discourse. They can serve as intellectual bridge builders, formulating a message and agenda to which both Americans and Muslim might wish to subscribe. The West needs a policy framework with a different tone and intention. This means defining the nature and objectives of the struggle against terrorism more specifically, establishing non-military criteria for success, and framing direct as well as 'structural and cultural violence' in American-Islamic relation as shared problems (Kepel 2002: 16-18).

Another crucial step would be a transformed US commitment to a negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in agreement with international standards of legitimacy as well as with the shared needs of Israeli and Palestinians for human security. United States leaders should actively cooperate with its partners, the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia in the mediation process. The US should efforts(?) in conflicts between Arabs

⁸ The roots of this confrontation have been discussed by many academics and analysts before, but many of them have neglected the important connections between today's affairs with past events. Many of these studies have ignored the background of different perspective towards the US. In simple-minded and mechanistic analyses, they perceive a "good boy," "bad boy" dichotomy in this regard. This normative interpretation has been misleading as they mainly neglect many other variables in the study.

and Israelis as well as Westerners and Muslims. Such efforts would actively join civil society leaders to balance official diplomacy, and seek the counsel of Muslims, Christians and Jews in formulating policies that respond to those aspects of contemporary conflicts that 'fall outside the purview of traditional statecraft' (Midlarsky 1998: 486-487).

Meanwhile, steps should be taken to promote a new Western message of cultural coexistence internally as well as abroad. A change in popular Western perceptions would be immediately perceived by Arabs and Muslim overseas who follow Western culture and media far more closely than is generally recognized. By acknowledging Islamic contributions to a common global civilization, and by including "Islamic perspective" in interfaith discussions and programs, the West could facilitate a process of intercultural peacemaking. To achieve human security in the global system, the West needs a policy stranded in cultural understanding, multilateralism, and expansive consensus about interests, values, and hopes that are widely shared in the international community. By calling for reverential dialogue and mutual commitment, we can help to transform a legacy of pain, producing a deeper knowledge of what the other has to say, a more realistic understanding of present opportunities and dangers, and a stable basis for cultural peace.

Many Islamic figures took up the call for dialogue, urgently calling for moderation and cooperation to avoid an escalation into a clash of civilizations. The invasion of Iraq without the approval of the Security Council, and in the face of unparalleled global public opposition, left the US deeply isolated and resented. Beyond this situation, dialogues between the West and Islam was challenged by the existence of important societal actors in the Islamic world and in the US alike, who believe that a conflict is desirable or necessary, and have access to strong arguments to make it happen. It is not only the hardliners and extremists who reject dialogue. Many Western liberals withdraw from the religious and socially conservative views of the Islamic moderates with whom they might engage in such dialogue, while many moderate Islamists fiercely oppose US foreign policy in the Middle East affair suggests, many on both sides despair of the existence or the desirability of interlocutors on the other side with whom to talk.

In contemporary international situation, we can find several new conditions that suggest a real possibility for a politically momentous global dialogue about Islam and the West.⁹ First, many cases of international terrorism and their consequences generated a corresponding sense of insecurity and fear which create a demand for such a dialogue on the part of the powerful. Communicative dialogue requires a willingness to set aside considerations of power and self-interest which seemed quite implausible prior to 11 September. The second new condition lay in the emergence of a virtually unprecedented issue-specific global public sphere focused on the question of the relations between Islam and the West. Whereas in the past the dialogue of civilizations had been the domain of experts, mainly manifested in conferences bringing together cosmopolitan elites, after September 11 their subjects became the dominant topic of political debates involving political leaders and cultural figures, mass publics and elites, intellectuals and religious leaders, private conferences and mass media.

It should be emphasized that the resources, the potential and the will to engage in such a dialogue do exist within the Islamic world. Against those who see Islam as uniformly radical

⁹ The Islamic image of the West is inseparable from Western policies, especially the US's policy towards the Islamic World and its global politics. The West needs a better understanding of Islamic societies and it should distinguish Islam from terrorism and abandon double- standard policies regarding issues such as human rights.

and deeply hostile, and against similar views in the Arab-Islamic world which see the US as an implacable enemy, a meaningful dialogue can be established. Such a dialogue could change the terms of the interaction between Islam and the West, in part by breaking the monopoly over representation claimed by radicals on either side. Therefore, a number of forces work in favor of global dialogue about Islam and the West: the existence of an emerging global public sphere strongly focused on the issue; the emergence of a new Muslim public sphere committed to open and critical public debate; the existence of important and influential public figures willing to participate; and a growing recognition of the urgent political need for such a dialogue. But it should be mentioned that a demand for dialogue does not necessarily make it possible. The insecurity, fear and anger generated by terrorism and war might paradoxically help 'to reduce the effects of imbalances of power and a meaningful dialogue' (Risse 2000: 37-39).

The existences of conditions conducive to dialogue are necessary such as a shared life-world, some level of trust, a willingness to set aside identities and power. International politics in general and relations between the West and the Islamic world in particular, rarely approximate such conditions. The extremism of Osama bin Laden and the shocking atrocities of al-Qaida's terrorism clearly succeeded in convincing many Westerners of the impossibility of dialogue with Islam. (Elshtain, 2003: 46-48) Meanwhile, The US war on terror convinced many Muslims of the same thing. Such refusal of dialogue in a real sense grants victory to terrorists, whose violence pointedly aims 'to destroy trust and spread fear of the other, and to establish that extremists really do speak for their community' (Zaharna 2003: 33-35).

In the following section, I discuss the necessity of mutual understanding of political Islam and the West. I argue that this conflict must not be allowed to become a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, extremists must not be allowed to hijack and dominate the discourses in the West and the Islamic world, the search for security and revenge should not be allowed to undermine the moral fabric of our societies.

5. POLITICAL ISLAM AND THE WEST: FROM DISCORD TO UNDERSTANDING

There is a deep spirit between Islam and the Western civilization. Like Christians and Jews, Muslims share a common calling to work for peace, and enjoined by the Quran. The shared cultural roots jointing Islam and the West are too often forgotten. Classical Islamic Civilization was constructed out of Arab, Biblicist, and Hellenic cultures, but cast a wider net by integrating Persian, Central Asian, and Indian mechanism within its cultural synthesis. Historically, Islam is the true bridge between West and East. It can be noted that, Islam's Hellenism was mediated primarily through Eastern Christian intellectual circles, and important streams of Muslim Philosophical and scientific thought still remain and understudies field linking Late Antiquity with the Renaissance.

It can be said, what is often viewed as a clash of civilizations is really a clash of symbols. The symbols on the one side are headscarves, turbans, and other symbols of Islamic religious expression that Westerners often find repellant, just a fundamentalist Muslims view much of Western culture as anti-Islamic. Moreover, cultural contact between Islam and the West has been spoiled by historically unequal power relations, leaving the West arrogant and inspective and the Muslim world defensive and insecure. (Buck-Morss 2003: 17-19) Western arrogance breeds contempt and fanaticism on the Islamic side, and there is evidence of

paranoia on both sides. (Brown 2000: 207) The Islamic world is offended by the West's cultural and triumphalism, backed up by overwhelming military force. This is interpreted by some Muslims as a new Crusade. The West and the Islamic world are out of touch with each other. Before the West can effectively express its intentions, it has to understand what is going on in the Arab and Muslim world today. This involved active listening to the voices from the region and engaging with them in sustained dialogue.

Islam and the West have the ability to develop a new mutually rewarding relationship. Such a relationship would be premised not on ideas of cultural superiority, but on mutual respect and openness to cultural eclecticism. Muslims and Westerners can learn from each other and cooperate in pursuit of humane values. The West and Islam are not destined to meet as rivals. 'The West can give Islam the best that it has in exchange for the best of Islam' (Said 2003: 341-344).

It seems that the idea of perpetual armed jihad is just a theological construct offered by the scholars in that period, not a divine injunction, in response to the prevailing reality of an international system that is anarchic and during which war as an important instrument of power and security predominated. In this respect, one can find supporting arguments from conventional international relations tradition such as offensive realism, which holds that the anarchic international system provides strong incentives for states to continuously strive for maximum accumulation of power in relation to other states because security is best guaranteed by achieving a hegemonic power. In doing so, states pursue expansionist policies when and where the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. 'A non-hegemonic power in an anarchic international system is in constant worry that other states will use force to harm or conquer' (Halliday 1995: 33-4).

Islam does play a role in international relations. We cannot understand the politics of the Middle-East, for example, without some references to it. But the contribution of Islam to politics is not 'independent'. The fault-lines of conflict are not drawn between Islamic and non-Islamic governments or movements, let alone between the Islamic world and the rest. A helpful understanding of the role of religion is one that takes into account the social, economic, and political concerns that lie behind the religious terminology or imagery. Mundane and universal issues such as social justice, political legitimating, and the defence of the homeland reveal themselves behind the surface of Islamic politics. This is not to claim that religious discourse is reducible to material concerns or simply a facade. Spiritual and moral issues are often really at stake in religious politics. But the interpretation of religion as such is a fluid one. It evolves in constant interaction with specific historical conditions. This approach to Islam developed above can be applied to the study of international relations and religion generally. 'The recent interest in religion and culture as important factors in international relations is commendable and only redress a curious and unhelpful neglect' (Simbar 2008: 65-66).

This conflict must not be allowed to become a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, extremists must not be allowed to hijack and dominate the discourses in the West and the Islamic world, and the search for security and revenge should not be allowed to undermine the moral fabric of our societies. When the US responds to the murder of innocent people with massive attacks that kill more innocent people, then it is merely responding to terror with terror. The best way to ensure that this war on terror does not escalate is by advancing a new discourse. Unlike the present discourse whose central themes are Islamic terrorism and Western colonialism, we need to explore themes that talk about bridging the gap between democratic values and American foreign policy. The new discourse will emerge

if the moderates within the Muslim world and in the West seriously begin collective exercises in self-reflection and self-criticism 'to bridge the chasm between values and practices, deed and words, ideas and realities' (Hunter 1998: 11-17).

The Islamic community today finds itself engaged in a profound struggle in this crucial moment of its history, effectively cut off from the past, faced with a present that is characterized by tyranny, poverty, and humiliation, with no viable or desirable prospects for creating its own future. Muslims have much to gain from understanding the West and its hard-won achievements in the realm of political coexistence. Democracy is scarce in the Islamic world today, but this is more the result of a lack of Islamic social institution for it and not because of an absence of religious and cultural foundation. Islamic social institutions are more dynamic and variegated than is generally recognized; they provide the basis for genuine participation. Today's challenge for Muslims lies in the expansion of the original ideas of Islam, and a willingness to demonstrate curiosity about historical experiences and achievements of the West. Muslim moderates must become aggressive in their dealings with extremists in their midst. The first step is to recognize that when moderates remain silent extremists speak for all. Those Muslims who do not wish to be represented by the likes of Osama bin Laden must speak out loud and clear.

Most important for both communities is active engagement with one another, through sustained dialogue, permitting each to understand the deep meaning, associations, and implications of the prevailing clash of symbols referred to above. The West needs to recoil from Islamic symbols, as they do not represent anti-Western, anti-secular, irrational extremism. The West remains secure enough to uncover the extent to which a deeper pathology has been clothed in religious rhetoric. Active engagement permits us to understand and recognize the true expression of human religiosity and protects us from the politics of manipulated symbolism.

6. CONCLUSIONS

One of the main elements of the post-Cold War conflict lies in the struggle between political Islam originating in the Middle East region and the Western dominated international system led by the US and subscribed to by the West's allies in the Middle East. Although most of the world's 1.1 billion Muslims live outside of the this region, and not every person living in the Muslim Middle East is in fact a Muslim, the politicization of Islam is perhaps most evident in this region. Not exclusively, however, recent examples from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria and Kenya demonstrate a widening pattern. Therefore, Islam does not have just one voice in today's complex world, nor is political Islam a huge force. Actually, the very term political Islam is itself undermanned for a diverse set of opinions, where the Islamic groups themselves have many fundamental differences with each other. These movements do not represent a single political force, neither at home or internationally. Furthermore, we can discern that Islamists are still split doctrinally between those adhering to the majority sect of Islam (Sunnis) and the minority 16 percent of Shi'is.

There are several distinct ways in which one can study political Islam as a radical force in the modern world. The first approach sees it as a response to the monumental crisis of the nation-state in the Muslim Middle East, which has been caused by a combination of factors in the economic, political and social realms. The Crisis of Middle East and North Africa state

is often expressed in terms of social deprivation, lingering poverty, corruption, nepotism, reliance on the West for security and defense, dependence on the West for economic assistance, diminishing degree of political legitimacy, absence of the rule of law, problems of stability associated with unclear political succession procedure, and unaccountable and unresponsive political systems. These problems have been compounded in recent years by rapid population growth, haphazard urbanization, and environmental degradation. Therefore, radical Islam could be said to be an extremist response to a general crisis. It seems the Islamic reconstruction response to the sociopolitical crisis in the Middle East represents the attempts of Muslims to retrieve their own religious heritage and make it the foundation of a new public order.

To understand how and why certain anti-rational tendencies have gained ground in the Islamic world, we need to consider their historical and socio-political context, including the official state policies, notably the attempt to crush major mainstream Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the cancellation of Algeria's elections. To this, the manipulation of religion by ruling elites and opposition movements alike should be added. In the cultural sphere, the narrow educational curricula of certain Islamic schools, including the traditional religious faculty of al-Azhar in Cairo, and the tendency to impose narrow oral censorship in the name of Islam have seriously stifled intellectual and cultural life.

Although Islamists lay claim to power in the political as well as religious spheres, and much of their activity is heading for against the West, Islam itself is not necessarily the prime reason or even the channel for this occurrence. Rather, it can be argued that it is the political background in which their views have taken shape, rather than their religious ideals, that is catalyst for the expansion of the movement. The political realities influencing this context can be seen as internal and external to their societies. As for those that are internal, in many Muslim countries, there is little room for the politics of opposition. Political opposition is likely to result in consequences ranging from imprisonment, self-exile or even extra-judicial assassination. In some countries, opposition political parties do exist, but for little more than superficial purposes. They have negligible influence on policy. While it would be an overstatement to say that all the Muslim world is run by dictators, authoritarian tendencies are all too often evident in the government of many of its states. As for the external factors, they are equally pernicious. It seems US policies have contributed to the radicalization of Islamist movements. Despite its metaphorical posture in favor of democracy worldwide, Washington possesses a tacit sense that representative government in most Muslim states will be less submissive to American interests than the current generation of dictatorial leaders. Indeed, Western nations were not only 'excusing', but also contribution to this lack of freedom in the Middle East. In the oppressive political climate of many Muslim countries, a current such as Islamism has at its disposal a transcendental claim to authority deriving from its appeal to religion, and is able to use it effectively as a vehicle for the expression of dissent.

It is not difficult to see reasons for and animus against the West as a further constituent of the inspiration driving Islamism. We have already referred to the role of the West among the external influence maintaining authoritarian regimes in power. There are others. It seems that Islamists are convinced that the only way to triumph over the power of the West, and the unfaithfulness of its scheming against Islam and the Muslim world, is to unite Muslims through the realization of the inner resources of a strong political and spiritual identity, i.e. Islam itself, which they all share. From this, one may argue that the Islamists response to such perceived threats, though on the surface religious, is primarily a reaction to internal

factors in many Muslim countries. The West is perceived as complicit in the authority that their governments enjoy.

Political Islam takes as much pleasure in confronting such non-Western powers as Russia, China, India, Burma and the Philippines as it does their Western counterparts. Broadly speaking, in the worldview of militant Islamists, Muslims are victims of aggression from multitude of sources, which includes the Eastern churches, Hindu and Buddhist movements as well as secular forces around the world. Militant Islam thus operates in a world of intra-civilization one. It engages in battles with Muslims within the Muslim world itself, with outsiders at the nodes of contact with the Muslim world, as well as increasingly with non-Muslim on their home territory.

As it evident from its rise, political Islam has found it particularly hard to compromise the Muslim world, what it regards to be the Muslim region in political economy terms, to global pressure befalling all other actors in the international system. It has resisted outside pressures and has opposed what it sees as the exploitation, fragmentation and domination of the region of Islam or Muslim region by the West. The concern about the integrity of the Muslim region has provided the most vital stimulant for trans-boundary international action.

It is reasonable to suggest that radical Islam has failed to gain state power and has failed in its main mission of liberating Muslim lands form Western influence and convincing the Muslim masses of the virtues of its brand of Jihad. But this is remain militant, to undertake sophisticated military-style operation, or to generally pose a serous security challenge to Western interests worldwide. Finally, the tensions between radical Islam and the West, which have become a major concern of contemporary world politics, stem from the fact that the former, arguably representing a form of cultural nationalism, has to respond to the process of global Westernization and the means used to pull up the world.

Article Received: 23-Apr-2009 Revised: 02-Jul-2009 Accepted: 14-Jul-2009

REFERENCES

- Adib-Moghaddam, A. 2002, "Global Intifadah? September 11th and the Struggle Within Islam," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 15(2): 203-216.
- Beeley, B. 1992, "Islam as a Global Political Force", In A. McGrew and P. Lewis, eds., *Global Politics: Globalization and the Nation-State*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bernard Lewis, 2002, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Responses*, London: Phoenix.
- Buck-Morss, Susan, 2003, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*, New York: Verso.
- Brown, Chris, 2000, "Cultural diversity and International Political Theory", *Review of International Studies*, 26: 206-209.
- Dekmejian, R. 1995, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Eickelman, D. and Piscatori, J. 1997, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Elshtain, Jean, 2003, *Just War against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World*, New York: Basic Books, 46-48.
- Esposito, J., 1992, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Esposito, J., 1997, *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* Boulder: Lynne

- Rienner.
- Esposito, J., and Voll, J. 2002, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Featherstone, M., 1990, *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, London, Sage.
- Fuller, G., and Lesser, I. 1995, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West*, Boulder: Westview Press.
- George, D. 1996, *Pax Islamica: an Alternative New World Order?* In Sidahmed and Ehteshami, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, Boulder, Westview Press.
- Guazzone, L. ed., 1995, *The Islamist Dilemma: The Political Role of Islamist Movement in the Contemporary Arab World*, Reading: Itcha Press.
- Halliday, F., 1995, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris.
- Hefner, Robert, 2001, "Public Islam and the Problem of Democratization," *Sociology of Religion*, 6: 491-514.
- Huband, M. 1998, *Warriors of the Prophet: The Struggle for Islam*, Boulder: Westview Press.
- Hunter, Shirin, 1998, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilization or Peaceful Coexistence?* Westport: Paeger.
- Huntington, Samuel P., 2001, "The Age of Muslim War," *Newsweek*, 17 December 88.
- Jurgensmeyer, M., 1993, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kepel, G., 2002, *Jihad: The Trial of Political Islam*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latouche, S., 1996, *The Westernization of the World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lynch, Marc, 2003, "Taking Arab Society," *Foreign Affairs*, 82(5): 81-94.
- Lynch, Marc 2005, "Transnational Dialogue in an Age of Terror," *Global Society*, 19(1).
- Midlarsky, M., 1998, "Democracy, and Islam: Implications for Civilizational Conflict and the Democratic Peace," *International Studies Quarterly*, 42(4): 485-511.
- Piscatori, J.P., 1986, *Islam in a World of Nation-State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ramadan, Tariq, 2004, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 271-274.
- Risse, Thomas, 2000 "Let's Argue! Communicative Action in World Politics," *International Organization*, 54: 1-40.
- Said, Abdul Aziz, and Nathan C. Funk, 2003, "Making Peace with the Islamic World", *Peace Review* 15(3): 339-347.
- Salvatore, Armando and Eickelman, Dale (eds.), 2004, *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Boston: Brill.
- Simbar, Reza, "The Changing Role of Islam in International Relations," *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 15(2), 55-68.
- Tibi, B., 2002, *the Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zaharna, R., 2003 "Winning the Second Round: American Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim World," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, June: 33-38.

Rasht-Iran, P.O. Box41635-3988, Rasht, Iran. Tel: (0098) 131 6690385, Fax: (0098) 131 6690280, Email: Simbar@Guilan.ac.ir