

POLITICAL ISLAM AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

JOHN L. ESPOSITO

I'm going to discuss the role of political Islam today and the foreign policy questions surrounding it. You will find a variety of positions out there—positions represented by people like Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Judith Miller, Martin Kramer, Yvonne Haddad, James Piscatore, and John Voll. But it all boils down, ultimately, to a question of: "Are there any Islamic moderates?" What does that mean in terms of U.S. policy? This is also a question in Europe—particularly in France and Britain. Some of you will recall that the former head of NATO, Willy Claes, about a year ago, likened a global Islamic threat to that of the former threat of communism. At the same time, the American Jewish Congress has replaced its "Boycott Report" with the newsletter "Radical Islamic Fundamentalism." The basic issue is the nature of political Islam. Related to that is the question of democratization and democracy. And, finally, what should be the policy, if any, of the United States and other Western powers toward this reality?

When I talk about political Islam, I am talking about the reassertion of Islam in contemporary Muslim politics—a phenomenon that has taken place over the last 20 to 25 years, a phenomenon that often simply gets handled as if it were some kind of monolithic reality. This manifestation of Islam in politics comes from a broader phenomenon: in many parts of the Muslim world, there has been a religious resurgence, both in private and in public life. People are more concerned about Islamic dress, values, and fasting during Ramadan. But what has caught our attention is the extent to which Islam has exploded, as it were, in terms of political and social activism. Media headlines about the Iranian Revolution and hijackings, and people such as Khomeini, Qaddafi, and Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, have brought us to a

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point where we view political Islam in a certain kind of way. I want to tell you how I view it, how I think some other people view it, and what the policy implications are.

For many Americans, for many Westerners, and for many policymakers, the experience of political Islam caught them completely off guard. Most development theories never foresaw anything like it: not only Islamic resurgence, but also what is taking place globally today—a religious resurgence manifesting itself fairly consistently across the world in terms of religion and nationalism, religion and ethnicity. That was not part of the paradigm of development theory, which saw the world—and particularly the perceived “backwater” of the Muslim world—as following Western models and therefore becoming more secular. Even for many Middle East experts, the study of Islam was not seen as anything you had to do very seriously. I have a colleague who did his Ph.D. at a top university, is very well-known, and is a specialist on Iran; I remember being stunned to find out he had done next to no work on Islam during the course of his doctoral studies.

Caught off guard by the Iranian Revolution, having underestimated the role of religion in politics, this reality exploded in our face. In a context in which there is relative ignorance, we got a number of headline events. The danger is in exaggerating, in generalizing from those headline events about an entire people or entire region. If you are an American policymaker and your experience with political Islam is Americans held hostage during the Iranian Revolution, the slaying of Anwar Sadat, and hijackings, if you are living behind barbed wire in embassies, how are you going to feel about this thing called Islam? What if you were there when the World Trade Center blew up? The understanding of “Islamic fundamentalism” or political Islam was mediated through headline events.

In the 1980s, what was our perception of political Islam? Alongside the Evil Empire, Ronald Reagan put Khomeini, radical Islam, and fundamentalism. The night that America bombed Libya, Reagan said the reasons for this are: Qaddafi, terrorism, and the worldwide Islamic fundamentalist movement. A number of years later, Vice President Quayle, in a speech at the Naval Academy, said that the midshipmen’s job was to protect America against those forces that can catch us off guard: so that we would not be caught off guard the way we have been in the past by Nazism, communism, and Islamic fundamentalism.

There is always a basis for a stereotype. If there were no basis, then you would not have a stereotype—there has to be a little something there. There were events from which one could draw some of these conclusions. In the 1980s, it was the slaying of Anwar Sadat and the Iranian Revolution. The decade was particularly dominated by fear of the export of the Iranian Revolution. There were explosions in Saudi Arabia, in Bahrain, and in Kuwait, and many thought that somehow Muslims would rise up because Khomeini was calling for the overthrow of governments. And, indeed, Iran did have a significant impact in Lebanon. The impact of Iran, though, has been greatly ex-

aggerated and that has continued through today. The demonization of Iran in America is second only to the demonization of America in Iran.

The 1980s were dominated by fear of Khomeini's Iran exporting revolution and underground *jihad* groups performing assassinations and hijackings. The received wisdom, therefore, was that political Islam was radicalism and was an enemy that needed to be contained, in a kind of monolithic sense. Islam came to be equated with fundamentalism, fundamentalism with extremism. Look at the media, at political analyses, at many government statements. Also at the popular level—if you talk to many Muslims, they can tell you how they were treated then. Most people would simply equate being a Muslim with being a radical or a fundamentalist. And you would hear many in the region say, if there were elections, people would simply reject Islamists, but of course nobody wanted to try that.

Everything changes in the 1990s in some ways. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, two big events occurred—the breakup of the Soviet Union and the liberation of Eastern Europe—that resulted in a kind of democracy euphoria, but you also had, throughout many parts of the Muslim world, failed economies, food riots, and demonstrations. So a number of governments in the region called for elections. And you got elections in Jordan, elections in Tunisia, elections in Egypt. What happened in the 1990s? Alongside this “radical” Islam, which is seen as revolutionary—violent revolutionary—we suddenly became aware of the fact that Islamic activism has become part of mainstream society and has become institutionalized, socially and politically. We suddenly began to see what was there all along—that Islamic activism was functioning above ground in societies. It ran schools, clinics, hospitals, daycare centers, and tutoring programs. But we also see the political dimension. When elections are allowed, we suddenly see Islamists running as individual candidates or, in some cases where they are able to, as a political party, and they emerge as the leading opposition in all the elections.

Note what is happening here. In many ways, you could argue that this is good from the point of view of Western foreign policy. Because we no longer have this monolithic enemy, we see we can break out the radicals but still have other people who participate in the system. But their very participation in the system—their very success in participating in the system—wound up making them a double threat. First, they were a threat to regimes because, for many regimes, if the Islamists provide an alternative system of social services, there is an implicit critique of the regime, in terms of its inability to satisfy the needs of its people. And we know stories from Egypt and Algeria—the first people to respond to the earthquakes were the Islamists. It got so bad

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that when something would go wrong the governments would immediately keep the Islamists out. The governments could not get there fast enough to relieve the situation themselves, but they could at least get their military and security people there to keep anybody out that they did not want to go in. Secondly, there seemed to be a threat to Western interests because here was this unknown factor that looked like it could be an alternative to established alliances that we already had in the region. We tended to define stability—short-term rather than long-term—in terms of the relationships we already had. However authoritarian the regime, if we had a good working relationship, then that relationship was what was of primary importance.

In the 1990s, rather than people saying maybe we ought to deal with this moderate Islam, we find a number of sectors that are threatened by it. Governments in the region, many elites in the region—because the Islamists represent alternative elites—and many Western governments are not sure what is going to happen. What they see of political Islam is the radicalism. They think that the mixing of religion and politics is necessarily a problem. They are guilty of what I call “secular fundamentalism.” And so, in many ways in the 1990s, you begin to see Islam talked about as a political, cultural, and demographic threat. It is reflected somewhat in Samuel Huntington’s essay, “The Clash of Civilizations,” as well as in the writings of Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes.

Let me summarize this view in order to show you the high points. As for political threat, some people say, just take a look at Iran and Lebanon—look at what happened to us. And look at history: 14 centuries of *jihad*. Of course, they never talk about who waged *jihad* against whom. As soon as you say 14 centuries of *jihad*, as soon as you use that word, it conveys the idea that it was always Muslims who were the aggressors for 14 centuries and others were always defending. The same thing is said regarding a cultural threat. The argument runs, just as our cultures clashed in the past, so today our modern, democratic, secular culture clashes with Islam. And, of course, the Rushdie affair is raised as a concrete example.

Demographic threat is laid out by a number of people, but perhaps best by Pat Buchanan, who wrote that rising Islam may overwhelm the West. It was a wonderful piece because it had memorable lines like, “While their cohorts are humiliating us in Lebanon and Iran, Muslims in Europe are proliferating.” He tied this to his own position on birth control and abortion and said Turkish doctors in Germany work late into the night performing abortions in order to support their burgeoning families of seven and eight. We reportedly have German, Christian secular types limiting their families, while paying all this money to Turkish doctors who are having their own kids, resulting in a demographic threat. The argument is played out more seriously in France and in the United States today. Very serious people, in very responsible positions, in the government and in the media, sometimes publicly, often privately, talk about whether “they” can assimilate to “us.” When they say “they,” they mean all Muslims. They distinguish the West as Western secular or Judeo-Christian and see Islam as antithetical to it.

Where are we in terms of the 1990s? The issue is crystallized with Algeria. Just before the FIS—the Islamic Salvation Front—won its first municipal elections in Algeria, Edward Djerejian, the then-assistant secretary of state for the Near East, issued a statement on Islam. It is called his Meridian House statement. He said, America has no problem with Islam. America has no problem with Islamic populist movements. Islamic populist movements, like any populist movement, should be able to participate within the system. But what we would have problems with, he said, is an Islamic movement, or any movement, that would use the democratic process to seize power permanently. In other words, as he says, “one man, one vote, one time.”

Djerejian’s Meridian House statement was on the mark. But how did that translate into actual policy? Along came Algeria. What did most people do? They froze. The United States froze, and fell all over itself the first couple of days. At the same time that it was upset that the ruler of Peru declared martial law—this was just unacceptable—it watched Algerian municipal elections canceled and did not respond. As Dick Murphy wrote in the *Congressional Quarterly*, we did not know how to respond; we did not know how to react. Having spent many years going to conferences and briefing people at the State Department, one thing I can say we never discussed was, “How would we deal with an Islamic government?” Nobody ever suggested that as a possibility. The only time I ever heard that raised was at a session at the Pentagon during the Gulf crisis when someone in the military asked if we should not be discussing the possibility of future Islamic governments emerging and how we would deal with them.

So we were completely blindsided with Algeria. When the Algerian elections were approaching, all of the major newspapers, such as the *Christian Science Monitor* and *The New York Times*, said that the Islamists will not do well—they will get votes, but they will not do well. The wisdom was always: never in North Africa. That was the attitude toward Tunisia and Algeria. They were too Francophile, they had one-party systems and a secular elite, and, in Algeria, there was a strong women’s movement. Part of the problem was, if you go back and look at these newspapers, usually they would interview only one side. The same people in North Africa would be asked to tell not only what their position was, but what the other [Islamist] position was, too. Journalists would often talk to established secular elites who would give the analysis from their perspective, but then would also be asked to give their analysis on what the Islamists were like.

The FIS not only did well, it swept the municipal elections. The Algerian government responded in that “open” way: it arrested the leadership, canceled elections, redrew the voting districts, and cut off funding from the center to the municipalities so that it could say, “See, the Islamists run the municipalities but they can’t deliver the goods.” And then it decided to hold national parliamentary elections. Everyone said, in the lead up to the national elections, “Now, definitely, the Islamists will not do well. People have learned from the municipal elections. The people who did not show up last time are going to show up to vote. The women have learned, the secular-oriented have

learned. The Islamists have been weakened; their leadership is in prison." But then the Islamists swept the parliamentary elections.

The threat here was not that the Islamists were going to come out in opposition. People have been stunned when they have emerged as an opposition—as in Jordan and Egypt. But the idea that they might actually come to power through the electoral process was the real issue. Are they out to hijack democracy? Are they using the ballot box to come to power and, having come to power, will they then deny it to others? This is a very legitimate question, and you cannot answer it unless you do so on a country-by-country, movement-by-movement basis. You cannot simply say, look at Iran, look here, look there, and see what all Islamic movements will be like, just as you cannot say that about all governments in the region. You cannot look at one government and draw the conclusion that they are all going to be exactly the same.

The issue of hijacked democracy is a real issue. But alongside it is the issue of those governments that believe in risk-free democracy. Most governments in the region only believe in risk-free democracy or democracy without dissent. Both those phrases, "risk-free democracy" and "democracy without dissent," come from senior American diplomats still prominent today. In other words, most of the governments in the region do not believe in having elections if they are going to lose. As a top government official in a North African country said to a human rights person in the middle of some show trials when asked, "Does your president believe in elections?"

"My president has pledged himself to elections."

So the human rights representative said, "Then you will have elections?"

The government official said, "We have announced them, they will take place."

"And they will be multiparty?"

"Again, my president has agreed to that."

"So you could see the Islamists gaining votes and doing well?"

"Again, no problem."

"And you could foresee a day when an Islamist group would come to power and replace your government?"

The government official looked incredulous and said, "Why would we ever allow that?"

I think he was being perfectly honest; such an outcome was inconceivable to him. That was not the way the game ultimately gets played. Risk-free democracy. . . . Democracy without dissent. . . .

On a related note, even for well-intentioned governments in the region, there is a danger in the natural inclinations of one elevated to a position of power. Suppose you came to power in one of these countries tomorrow. Whether you were a leftist, a democrat, or any other affiliation, what is the first thing you would do? You would arrest your opposition—even if you were going to call for elections in a couple of months. Because, given the nature of your society, you need to disarm the opposition so that you are not assassinated before you can have the elections. There is an entrenched political culture that operates in a certain way. How do we break out of this mold? Can

we end up with government leaders who are able to allow for a transition to civil society, who are able to think in the long term and not just the short term?

Another critical danger is that of creating self-fulfilling prophecies. Unless we distinguish among movements, unless we resist the temptation to lump all movements together, unless we resist the temptation to say, as one of my colleagues did, "There are no Islamic moderates; we should crush them all," the risk is that not only will we have to deal with radical terrorists, but we will radicalize those who participate in the system, have participated in the system, or would participate in the system. Algeria is a good example, and Egypt, if we are not careful, may well become an example. In other words, you overreact and do not distinguish the radicals from the moderates; you do not allow those who participate in the system to do just that, and instead use your security forces against them. Violence and repression breed violence and repression. You set in motion a spiral in which after a while it becomes difficult to decide who the extremists are—the fundamentalists or the security forces. In Algeria, they are called the "eradicators." So you have the government eradicators, and you have the radical Islamists running around, and they are both slitting throats. This is one of the risks.

What does all this mean in terms of the response on the part of American—and Western—foreign policy? This is a big issue being debated at present, and the tricky thing is that the response must be both political and demographic. Normally, when you talk about U.S. foreign

policy, you think it would be just political, but it also has to be demographic. Let me take the latter item. It is a real issue in the United States, in France, and in many parts of Europe whether or not Muslims can assimilate, how they are going to be treated, whether they are going to be monitored, whether you are going to limit the number that can come into the country, and if you are going to "go after them." Many Muslim groups in the United States today are simply identified *a priori* as Hamas. Some of them are. But many are simply *seen* as Hamas. The demographic issue is real. In the United States, the World Trade Center bombing is not something to laugh at. Many French experienced explosions in Paris and began to worry about who is doing it and why. The danger is that we will take headline events and generalize about a people—that we will generalize about most Muslims in our society.

We have to realize, not only demographically but globally, that "Muslims are us." What I mean is that there is a Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. We have never approached the world that way. We have always approached the world by talking about the Judeo-Christian tradition—the West—and then,

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separately, the Islamic world. When we look at religion, it is Judaism, and it is Christianity; Islam gets put with Hinduism and Buddhism, which means you make it an "other." When you make something an "other," it is easier to demonize. In our own country, the reason we need to learn to say "Muslims are us"—pardon the poor syntax—is that, in most people's eyes, even third- and fourth-generation Muslims are seen as following a foreign religion and prophet, Mohammed. It's as if Jesus wasn't born in the Middle East.

In terms of U.S. policy, there are a number of positions that I would recommend. First, we need to recognize that there is no monolithic Islamic threat. Second, we must distinguish between radicals and moderates, in terms of Islamic movements. By moderates, I mean those who do and will participate in the system. One of my colleagues, when pressed to identify who he felt the moderates were, said Ben Ali of Tunisia and Salman Rushdie. If that is what you mean by a Muslim moderate, we have a problem. Look at statements by government officials like Martin Indyk and Anthony Lake. They denounce Islamic extremists and say that we can deal with moderates, but they never name the moderates. The only way you are going to convince anyone is if you say, "terrorists like . . ." and name some, and "those who look like moderates or pragmatists, like so-and-so." The fact that there has never been one such public statement means that there is still a gut feeling that all Islamic movements are ultimately the same.

Third, U.S. foreign policy must become more consistent regarding political participation and democratization. We cannot take a position that says we believe in self-determination and political participation for some people but not for others (unless, of course, we say that up front, which is almost less troubling). When we do that, we are accused of having a double standard. In other words, democracy for some areas but not for the Middle East and the Muslim world. James Baker, in his late days as secretary of state, was heading out to the Middle East and had five speaking points, dubbed the five "pillars" of his speech in reference to the five pillars of Islam. But, before he landed, he dropped the fifth pillar—which was democracy. The logic would be that many of our allies in the region are not democrats, but they have oil that is strategically vital to us, so we should stay away from this issue. But if we are going to go around promoting self-determination in the former Soviet Union, we have to think about a consistent, strategic policy. We have to move toward strengthening civil society and the institutions of civil society, and figuring out ways in which we can encourage governments in the region to move in that direction. Unless that happens, we will continue the mistakes of today.

People say, what is it about the Arabs, about the Muslims? There must be something about them that is by nature authoritarian. They have authoritarian governments, therefore it must be something about Islam. Modern democracy has nothing to do with premodern Judaism and Christianity. In light of modern democracy, most Jews and Christians reinterpreted their tradition to see democracy as compatible or at least not incompatible with their traditions. We rule that out with regard to Islam. Why? Why are they automatical-

ly authoritarian regimes? In the Arab and Muslim world, the transition was to European colonialism, which hardly promoted strong civil societies. What did the emergence of modern nation-states mean in this context? It meant the rise of kings, military and ex-military men leading governments who thought it not in their interests to promote strong civil society.

What if there are elections? What if, in the worst case scenario, they [Islamists] are elected, whoever “they” are? One possibility is that they fail; they get elected, do poorly, and are then rejected. They may seize power and then you might not be able to get them out. You have to play out such a scenario in each country. For example, I do not believe this could have ever happened in Algeria. But the other possibility is that you have elections and allow, as you open up the political process and foster a stronger civil society, other options. One of the reasons Islamists do so well is that they are the only game in town. They are the best organized, they are the least corrupt, and they have a sense of vision—even if it is not always detailed. But, most importantly, they are the only game in town. They attract the vote not only of the true believers but also of those who wish to vote against the government. That is what happened in Algeria, and it is what would happen in Egypt if there were open elections. If we—not only Western governments, but governments in the region—continue to put off the development of strong civil societies, we merely perpetuate the conditions for instability. If leaders in both parts of the world continue to take this short-term approach, we have a real problem. We create the conditions that will make Huntington’s thesis correct. We feed the possibility of a clash of civilizations.

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Q: What do you think of the argument some have made concerning the democratization process in the Arab world—that Algeria went too fast, Egypt is going too slow, and Jordan is proceeding just right?

A: I don’t know that Algeria did it too fast—I think it did it too sloppily. The question also then becomes, who in Algeria would have had the will to do it any slower? We can take these countries analytically and say one is too fast, one is too slow. Stepping back from the action, these descriptions look pretty good. But when you actually get on the ground, given the leadership you are dealing with, is there ever really a model that can be imposed on the situation? The Jordanian situation is far more complex than it was two or three years ago. Thus far, the Jordanian government has managed things quite well. But this management of the situation has been just that—*management*. Through legislation, through security forces, through a variety of means. Nonetheless, compared to the Egyptian and Algerian situations, no doubt it is doing much better.

My concern is that what I see happening in many Muslim societies is a polarization within society itself. If there was a war of independence, now it is a war of identity, a war of culture. What you wind up with is a polarization between the more secular-oriented, many of whom line up with the govern-

ment and see themselves as against the Islamists, and the Islamists who see themselves as against the secularists. People lose a middle ground. People who would normally be in the middle feel as if they have to choose sides. At that point, we really have problems. And this is what is happening in Egypt and Algeria.

Q: Why are Islamist politicians often viewed as being far less flexible in their actions than their Western counterparts?

A: The danger of "secular fundamentalism" is that secular fundamentalists believe that their world view is the only world view—not just the best for them, but the best for other people. And if my secular world view is the right

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way, then your way is wrong. My way is the norm; your way is abnormal. People who have that orientation believe that the mixing of religion and politics is *necessarily* combustible, *necessarily* problematic. Applied to practical policy, people have this sense that Islamists are such purists that they would deliberately follow a suicidal policy—because they see suicide bombers and think that everybody is suicidal. Even when General Zia was president of Pakistan, people would say they knew how he was going to respond because he was Islamically oriented; as a good Muslim, he would have to undertake "x" action. But, of course, he often pursued what was the best pragmatic policy, giving it an Islamic facade.

When we look at Islamist movements, we tend to think they are all the same. If they change their positions, we think that they necessarily are deviants. But if you look at American politicians, they change their positions on abortion, health care, and other issues all the time. We judge their changed position on the basis of why they did it. If I were planning to vote for someone today and you tell me that eight years ago he changed his position, that does not mean I am not going to vote for him. *Why* he made such a switch will determine whether or not he gets my vote. Often you find that many who analyze Islamist movements say they are all radicals. But when you point out an exception and say here is one that is not, they then respond either, "that doesn't make any sense," or they respond that "five years ago he was saying such-and-such and now he's accepting political participation; it must be that he is just *saying* that to go along with people." That is one possible conclusion. The person [Islamist] might be deliberately deceptive; he could be acting like a politician who just wants to get elected and will say nearly anything. On the other hand, it could be that people actu-

ally grow and change their mind and opinion. What is important to remember in terms of policy is that while, yes, there is a religious dimension, you have to deal with Islamists the way you would deal with any other human beings. You have to deal with Islamist movements the way you would any populist political movement.

Given the right conditions, groups will split. Even those that have a very strong militant wing—such as Hamas—will split at a certain point and some members will opt to move into the system. Many Palestinians—secularists and Islamists—who were against the peace accords and did not really feel it was going to go anywhere voted in the elections and are now beginning to support the peace accords because they were given the opportunity to vote. Having this chance to vote was important to them. Even if, normally, Yassir Arafat would not have been their number one choice. We sometimes forget that there is a pragmatism there.

Q: How would you characterize the media's contribution to our perception of Islamic fundamentalism?

A: When 29 people were killed in the Hebron mosque, did anyone jump on television and say, "There go those Jews again"? When we have a David Koresh, nobody says, "There go those Christians." Immediately such acts are seen as aberrant behavior. In other words, we all know this is not what mainstream Judaism or Christianity is about. We tend not to do that when it comes to Islam and Muslims. Two incidents with the media last year were very revealing. First, recall how a group of Jewish students, Hasidic Jews, was shot by a Lebanese in New York. I got a call from the MacNeil/Lehrer show asking if I would come on. I said, "To do what?" They said, "Well, the Hasidic Jews were killed and we want to do something on Islamic fundamentalism." I said, "Excuse me, I've been busy all day. Has something emerged about it being fundamentalist? The last thing I heard, it was someone who they thought was Lebanese and they did not even know his background." As it turned out, it was someone who was a Druze and the event had nothing to do with religion. They said, "We still want to do the show on fundamentalism; there could still be a connection." I said, "Did you know that last week there was this killing of 29 people in the Hebron mosque? Are you going to do a show on Jewish fundamentalism and talk about the connection to New York City, to the Jewish Defense League?" There was a dead silence, and the young woman said, "That's a good point—we didn't think of it. We'll call you back." She never did.

The second media incident happened when I came into my office one day and got phone calls from three TV networks. I had no idea what they were curious about. They said, "What do you think about the latest bombing?" The first thing I thought about was overseas. They said, "It's in Oklahoma." I said, "Oklahoma?" Their very next question was, "What do you know about Oklahoma as a training ground for Islamic terrorists—as one of the leading training grounds?" CBS asked me to go on the next morning, and here you

get into the problem of creating a reality. I said, "We have the president of the United States saying don't jump the gun; the FBI is saying don't jump the gun; people locally are saying don't jump the gun. You want to go on TV tomorrow and talk about this as potentially Arab and Islamic terrorism. Isn't that contributing to the creation of a reality?" They called me back and said, "We're going to do the show." So I was torn: should I or shouldn't I go on? I went on. And I was glad I did, because it turned out they also had another person on who began by saying this has all the markings of Arab/Middle East action. How did he know? Because Arabs love to do things big—they love *big* bombings. The other thing he said was, "Everyone, including people in government, *knows* that Oklahoma is the second-largest training ground for radical Islamic extremists." When they discovered it wasn't that at all, I saw a well-known reporter on television say, "There was nothing wrong with that. We could have well been right, and, in fact, they may still be behind McVeigh."

Q: What about connections between various fundamentalist movements—for example, people in Saudi Arabia funding movements in Pakistan and in Turkey?

A: When you have the level of problems that some countries have experienced, the primary causes are domestic. But they can then be exacerbated from the outside. When you have serious, sustained problems, the problems usually have to do with economics, corruption, political participation, maldistribution of wealth, and unemployment. These can then be encouraged from outside. The risk is that people like to turn it around and simply say the problems always come from the outside. Most people never fully appreciated what the Rifaa party in Turkey could do because they were too busy ignoring the party and the conditions that could enable it to do as well as it did; they were too busy looking at external factors. Years ago, if you went to Egypt—before Islamism was a problem—they would always say that if there was a problem, it was the fault of an outside power. You knew that meant Libya or Saudi Arabia. But this is not to say that there is not some outside influence. There are connections, but one should not exaggerate. Most movements ultimately are primarily concerned with their own area and their own country. They are not controlled by outside powers. That does not mean that outsiders cannot influence them, but one needs to be very realistic about that. Otherwise it is a convenient way of explaining away your problems. Governments do it all the time: "We're not failing." They have unemployment, insufficient housing, and people screaming for bread in the streets, but they claim the real problem is coming from someplace else.

Q: Could you provide a critique of U.S. foreign policy in this arena?

A: Ambassador Robert Pelletreau, the current assistant secretary of state for the Near East, and a former ambassador to Egypt, Bahrain, and Tunisia, issued a statement on Islam very much like Djerejian's and laid it out very well. However, one thing he missed was that he ruled out as legitimate any

movement that would use violence; this naturally begs the question about the use of violence in self-defense or by resistance or liberation movements. Would there have been an American Revolution if no movement that uses violence can ever be legitimate? But Pelletreau put out a very good statement. About a year later, he was presenting the situation in Algeria and Tunisia to a congressional committee on North Africa. He said, "We have a very nuanced policy." And we had a very nuanced policy. We were ahead of France; we were making distinctions between Islamists. We were also quietly—not out front—pressuring the Algerian government to be inclusive rather than exclusive, saying you have to bring together all the parties, you have to allow opposition to build, you have to involve the FIS in conversations. But U.S. policy got through because it was pure pragmatism. Not because it really followed from Djerejian's or Pelletreau's statements. How do I know that? When Pelletreau turned to Tunisia in front of the committee, he began by praising Ben Ali for his support of the peace accords, which is that man's trump card. And he went on in a very positive light about the Tunisian experience. At least he was honest enough that when he addressed the question of democracy, he noted that in recent elections Ben Ali won with 99.91 percent of the vote—99.91 percent! And he related that credible sources had talked about pressure at the polls and rigging.

When the State Department actually looked at the Tunisian experience, it fell absolutely silent. It fell silent even when its own human rights bureau—let alone other human rights groups—talked about massive problems regarding elections and human rights. The same thing is true regarding Egypt. In Egypt you have an election that comes across—at least for some people—as some sort of democratic process. The problem is not only with the muted State Department response but with the American media. How many stories did you read about the elections in Egypt? There were a couple of very good stories *before* the elections. But after the elections took place, I kept scurrying around for information, calling friends up and asking, "Am I missing something?" Most people are not even aware of the way the elections played out, who was elected by whom, and by how much. There have been human rights reports for Egypt with titles like "Ten Years of Torture," but you never see stories about that. I think we are still struggling with the problem of what we can accept and really be comfortable with.

In the post-Cold War period, we have a threat vacuum and the danger is that Islam will be seen as the next global threat—ideologically and politically. In terms of American foreign policy, suppose you are President Clinton, who has had come to him Peres, Rabin, Mubarak, Tunisians, Algerians, and others. What they have all said to him, publicly as well, is that we have a threat. Fundamentalism, they say, is a threat—not only to their country, but to the region and to U.S. interests—in terms of oil and domestic concerns. What is Clinton to think? This is the mentality that clearly was operating in Turkey after the elections. Anybody but the Islamists could form a coalition. I may be wrong, but if the Riffa party is really smart, it may in fact be strengthened by being in opposition. Some Jordanian Muslim Brothers said to me a number of

years ago, "We don't want to come to power now; we'll be stronger in opposition." Given the economic conditions and their weak structural organization, they may be strengthened by being in opposition. If the conditions continue to get worse rather than improve, I think they will reap those benefits. And we have seen that in a number of contexts. I remember an Islamist leader who said to me, "If they opened up the system tomorrow, I would have to compete for people. While I would hold on to many, I would lose a good deal of others who are voting for us in order to vote against the government. I'm realistic about that." The challenge today is to get things moving in the right direction and to avoid easy stereotypes based upon the creation of a monolithic threat and the indiscriminate demonization of Muslims and Islamic movements.

