

THE 9-11 WAR PLUS 5: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD AT U.S.-MUSLIM WORLD RELATIONS

Analyzing the current crisis between the U.S. and the Islamic World, the author observes that the U.S. has become isolated by its policies to the detriment of both sides of a building chasm. To win the war of ideas, the author presents an American strategy that recognizes the long-term, generational challenges that must be faced, with concrete suggestions shaped according to the nuances of the Muslim world.

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It is hard to imagine that it has been five years since the 11 September 2001 attacks. “9-11,” as it will always be known, was one of those momentous days like the Pearl Harbor attacks or the Kennedy assassination that will define a generation, even beyond the borders of the United States. But 9-11 was more than a moment. Five years later, we can now see that it was a force that reshaped global politics. It gave nearly every single global actor, whether states, international organizations or NGOs, a new set of priorities and new pitfalls to navigate. For American foreign policy, it was a historic wakeup call, shocking it out of the seeming hangover that had defined the “post-Cold War” decade. As a result, security concerns replaced trade as the coin of the realm, penny-pinching for the “peace dividend” transformed into a trillion dollars “war” on a phenomenon rather than a country, a doctrine of “casualty aversion” was shattered by two major ground conflicts and over twenty thousand American casualties, and a political climate that was veering towards mild isolationism in 2001 transformed into a bi-partisan strategy of global forward engagement that could be described as near imperial.

Perhaps the most challenging development in the five years after 9-11, is that it is clear the attacks and the responses to them have created a new prism of global affairs, with the tensions between a state and a religion playing out on an international level as never before. Relations between the world’s undisputed superpower and community of 1.4 billion Muslim believers can only be viewed as inexorably changed.

While the U.S. standing in Muslim states and communities had been on decline for a while, driven mainly by the prevailing view in the region that the U.S. has failed to be evenhanded in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the difference now is palpable. The U.S. is not simply seen as being unfair, but now nearly 90 percent of publics in Muslim states view the U.S. as the primary security threat to their country. Around 60 percent said weakening the Muslim world was a primary objective of the U.S. In Turkey, public polls show that only 12 percent have a favorable opinion of America, down from 52 percent in 2000. According to the Pew Research Center, 60 percent of Turks believe that the U.S. presence in Iraq is a danger to world peace. At the same time, sympathies in Turkey toward Iran that now has a far more firebrand leader have grown from 34 percent to 43 percent. Even more worrisome is the opening splits in historic understanding. Despite bin Laden’s own claims, 59 percent of Turks don’t believe that Muslims actually carried out the 9-11 attacks, up from 43 percent in 2002.¹ In turn, the trend is being mirrored in the U.S., though to a lesser extent. The number of Americans, who have a negative view of the entire religion of Islam itself has grown each year since the 9-11 attacks, making up almost half the body politic. 22 percent of Americans now say they would not like to have a Muslim as a neighbor.²

¹ The numbers are from: “America’s Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concerns Over Iran, Hamas,” *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*, 13 June 2006. Available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252> and *The German Marshall Fund, Transatlantic Trends 2006*, available at <http://www.transatlantictrends.org/>

² Claudia Deane and Darryl Fears, “Negative Perception Of Islam Increasing: Poll Numbers in U.S. Higher Than in 2001,” *Washington Post*, March 9, 2006. Other reports going into depth on the problem include These include the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, *Building America’s Public Diplomacy*

Perhaps more illustrative is the cultural vibe that permeates relations and sets it for the long term. For example, the most popular movie in Egypt is "The Night Baghdad Fell," which describes an American invasion of Egypt, the destruction of Cairo, and a faux Condoleezza Rice in a sex scene, while in Turkey one of the most popular action films was "Valley of the Wolves," which fanaticizes about Turkish troops wreaking revenge on Americans troops, who have just shot up a wedding and bombed a mosque. Tellingly, the wife of the Prime Minister attended its premiere. But if, as a Washington Post article described, Americans are the "bullies, rapists and mindless killers" of pop culture in the Muslim world, Muslims fair no better in the airwaves of America.³ The villains of almost every new action film or TV show often have a terrorism link back to the region and right-leaning radio and TV are rife with prejudice.

These trends set the tone for a new course post-9-11. Global politics and U.S. foreign policy are increasingly shaped by a new dynamic between a state and a religion. It will extend for a generation or more. History will call this the 9-11 War. It is a contestation in the realm of ideas, shaped by a decidedly tangible security aspect and driven by themes of hurt, fear, and suspicion.

At the start of the Cold War, the last "Long War" the U.S. was in, an anonymous American diplomat Mr. X., later revealed to be George Kenan, wrote an article that crafted U.S. grand strategy for the next 40 years. He laid out a vision of a world divided by real security fears. The 9-11 War will be as if Mr. X merged with Professor Samuel Huntington and his vision of culture's impact on politics.⁴

Us or Them? The Primary Debates after 9-11 and the Growing Consensus

The 9-11 attacks left the U.S. foreign policy establishment scrambling for answers. The primary thinkers and organizations that had shaped conventional wisdom had spent much of the decade before 9-11 trying to figure out their relevance in a globalizing, increasingly trade-centric political environment.

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of 9-11, there was an immense amount of debate on how to answer the basic questions. Who exactly was the "they" that had attacked us? What was the nature of the threat: a man (Bin Laden), an organization (al Qaeda), a movement (al Qaedaism/jihadism), a group of states ("the Axis of Evil"), an ideology (Islamism), a region (the Islamic World), or an entire religion (Islam)? If it was viewed as

through a Reformed Structure and Additional Resources (Washington: September 2002); Council on Foreign Relations, *Finding America's Voice: A Strategy for Reinvigorating U.S. Public Diplomacy* (New York: June 2003); Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, *Changing Minds, Winning Peace* (Washington: October 2003); and Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication* (Washington: September 2004); as well as at least three GAO reports in 2003, 2005, and 2006.

³ Daniel Williamson, "In Egyptian Movies, Curses! We're the Heavies," *Washington Post*, 20 March 2006.

⁴ X, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947, available at www.foreignaffairs.org; Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.

the man and his cohorts, the traditions of criminal law offered a program of investigation and prosecution offered the answers. If it was a group of states, a focus on traditional tools of statecraft all the way up to invasion. For a religion, the threat would become even more existential.

These threads of debate continue hotly today in both academia and government. What matters most, however, is that as the shock from 9-11 wore off, the theories began to solidify. Ideas began to translate into policy, though with varying levels of seriousness of effort. They ranged from a meek effort at a “Road Map” for Middle East peace that quickly led to nowhere, to the pullout of American military bases from Saudi Arabia. Iraq became the ultimate testing ground for many of these theories. Obviously, none met with full success there, and partisan rancor made its way back into American foreign policy.

Yet beneath the rancor, a striking amount of consensus has emerged among the mainstream of both the right and left of the American foreign policy establishment, extending from broad strategic priorities to the recognition of key problems areas.

First, there is a fairly general agreement that we are facing a different type of problem than in the past and thus must be guided by a new strategic paradigm. A 60 year belief in the value of stability in the region is now seen to have yielded a stasis of authoritarianism and recurrent crises, with radicalism as the release valve. The underlying debates are not about whether change is needed, but how best the U.S. can be an agent of change. Constructive destabilization lies at the heart of the new American strategic consensus.

The second area of consensus is the shared recognition that such a long-term problem necessitates a multi-faceted approach. Yes, the issue is framed in terms of a “war,” and the major actions so far have been military in nature. But neither the 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy nor the writings of various liberal American thinkers and columnists push for the idea that this affair will be solved on the military front alone.⁵ Indeed, with the Iraq experience having stung so hard, even the most bellicose members of the Bush Administration are quick to correct that any intentions of “regime-change” in places like Iran and Syria are not to be through military means. Linked with this consensus is the recognition that while we are dominant in the military plane, the U.S. has an incredible problem in its diplomacy, which has become a strategic liability.

The 9-11 attacks were a self-evident violation of all moral and religious codes of conduct. In their wake the United States should have been able to isolate Al Qaeda from the broader public in the Islamic world, and thus cut it off from the support and recruiting structures that would allow it to thrive. But five years later we find ourselves the ones isolated, and the stature of bin Laden and Al Qaeda has increased. As the attacks from Bali to London reveal, their capabilities may even be growing through metastasis.⁶ The primary threat has evolved from a specific organization that was fairly centralized to self-

⁵ See for example, The White House, The National Security Strategy, March 2006, available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>; Peter Beinert, “The Good Fight: Why Liberals-and Only Liberals-Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again,” New York: Harper Collins, 2006.

⁶ Shawn Brimley, “Tentacles of Jihad,” *Parameters*, Summer 2006, p. 35.

organized, self-inspired, cells. We are witnessing the transformation of the threat of Al Qaeda to the threat of Al Qaeda-ism.

This evolution makes the deep and rapid deterioration of America's standing in the Islamic world one of the greatest challenges the United States faces. The erosion of American credibility in the region reinforces the recruiting efforts of our foes, and effectively denies American ideas and policies a fair hearing to the wider populace - the "sea" in which any of our foes must "swim." Winning the war on terrorism depends substantially on winning the war of ideas; unfortunately, by most available metrics, we are not winning that war.

In 2005, President Bush acknowledged that declining U.S. popularity in the Islamic world would be one of his greatest challenges in the subsequent four years.⁷ After leaving the office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy vacant for much of his first term, President Bush called on one of his closest confidants, Karen Hughes, to take over this effort. Hughes was an expert in neither the issues nor in public diplomacy, and indeed had no experience in international affairs at all; but the nomination by Bush of such a close friend was meant as a demonstrable signal that the problem had finally been recognized.

A third consensus, largely influenced by experts from the region, soon built around the importance of human development to both the problem and any solution. The key catalyst was the yearly publication since 2002 of the Arab Human Development Report by the UNDP. The reports were the products of regional scholars and, as such, have achieved an unprecedented level of legitimacy and recognition.

The reports delved into just how far the region had fallen behind in development, not just behind the West, but indeed behind most of the world: the 22 Arab countries, including the oil-exporting Gulf states, account for a combined GDP less than that of Spain alone; all 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) account for one-fifth of the world's population but their combined GDP is less than that of France; little less than half of the world's Muslim population is illiterate, and so on. In the words of the report, the region is "richer than it is developed."⁸

In addition to the development deficits, authoritarian governments predominate in the Muslim world and the exceptions to the rule lie outside the Middle Eastern core. The accountability of public authorities is further hampered by the fact that most media relies on state support and, at best, can be described only as partly free. In the absence of public accountability and deeply rooted bureaucratic traditions of self-governance, most regimes are prone to corruption, at best unresponsive, and at worst incompetent when it comes to meeting public needs.⁹

⁷ "Bush: Better Human Intelligence Needed" *www.cnn.com*, 18 January 2005.

⁸ United Nations Development Program, *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, New York, UNDP, 2002.

⁹ The 2005 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, available at <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0781359.html>

Human development gaps and broken regimes go a long way in explaining the success of radicals and the pool of simmering anger that opposition groups tap into. With authoritarians quite effective at clamping down on secular and liberal opposition, Islamist groups in particular have the advantage of having both the safe ground of the mosque to organize from, and strong credibility on the anti-corruption front. From Pakistan to Palestine, failing public services have created a vacuum filled by Islamists who provide food, shelter, healthcare, and education. This, combined with their opposition to the U.S., has gained them what the regimes lack, political legitimacy in the eyes of deprived urban and rural masses.

Thus, the final consensus on American policy needs towards the Islamic world has built around the need to solve socioeconomic deprivation as much as political repression. Such a strategy primarily calls for human development, with a strong emphasis on political and economic freedoms. “Reform” is such a buzzword in American policy discussions towards the region that Condoleezza Rice has not given a single speech about the region that did not include the word.

What Comes Next: The Twin Problems of Strategy

Consensus on priorities, though, does not yield effectiveness. Two core problems bedevil any strategy that focuses on change. The first is how to match words to deeds. For example, a change in Palestine was viewed as a necessary good, until it brought in Hamas. Moreover, other than the limited set of “rogue states,” the vast majority of stagnant and failing regimes we hope to change are putative U.S. allies, like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Pakistan. The United States suffers from a real credibility gap in convincing regional states and audiences that it is truly serious about change in such areas as reform and democratization.

The second is how to match intentions to capabilities. The U.S. may be able to put change on the agenda, but it has not proven it can control the process of change. The 2003 Iraq invasion may provide the ultimate demonstration. Three years, 250 billion dollars, and over 3000 lost American lives later, its most apt parallel is the 1798 French invasion of Egypt. It bodes a shake-up for the region, but a disaster so far for the invader.

It is widely recognized that the solution to these twin problems must be a long-term, multifaceted strategy, something pushed for in policy documents ranging from Kerry campaign documents to the Bush administration’s National Security Strategy. This is not the crucial question, however. Rather, we must ask how we can enact such a strategy, with the necessary programming in all the various civilian agencies, in a conflict that remains described in military terms. In other words, the strategy has to be executed within a “wartime” political environment that yields a relative free hand for the Defense Department, but belt-tightening for all other agencies. For example, even the Pentagon’s own “National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism” describes the equal importance of three pillars to any modicum of victory: 1) offensive operations to dismantle and destroy terrorist networks and leaders; 2) defending the homeland against

attack; and 3) “countering ideological support for terrorism.”¹⁰ While the three are visualized as equally important, only the first is traditionally military in nature. As a result, the U.S. budget is not reflective of the strategy our own military calls for. Approximately 540 billion dollars of the U.S. budget goes to military operations, 40 billion dollars to homeland security, and at best 540 million dollars goes towards public diplomacy and outreach programs to win hearts and minds. Of this, only about 27 percent is directed towards the Muslim world.¹¹

Within this issue of strategic balance, we must address the question of how we leverage U.S. strengths in areas where we are admired rather than hated. Critical areas remain to be fully tapped. Missing so far is the mobilization of the business community, which was a massive participant in all aspects of American foreign policy during the Cold War.¹² Indeed, when it comes to actual influence, history judges Coke and McDonalds to have been far more useful weapons in the American arsenal than any MX missile. By comparison, current strategies make no attempt at leveraging America’s most powerful vehicle for creating opportunity.

American technical achievements are renown and American arts and culture are consistently popular across the diverse Muslim world, with Hollywood or music stars for example sometimes even more influential than their local counterparts. Polling in Muslim majority states has found high levels of esteem for the U.S. in science, education, and the arts, despite the overall downward trend. At the same time, these areas are subversive to the agendas of radicals by their very nature, because they push openness of thinking and respect for freedoms of choice and opportunity. Yet, their potentials remain grossly untapped.¹³ The Louis Armstrong jazz tours of the 1950s and the mass graduate student fellowships of the 1960s that pushed such ideals during the Cold War have been replaced by closed borders and a vacuum of cultural diplomacy during the 9-11 war.¹⁴

Finally, the United States must figure out a way to utilize its diversity as a strength, rather than viewing it as a weakness. The very success of the Muslim American community, who has a higher income and education level than the national average, is a remarkable

¹⁰ National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism (Washington: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006).

¹¹ Cindy Williams, “Budgets to make America Safer,” *MIT Center for International Affairs Report*, June 2006, “The President’s FY 2006 International Affairs Budget,” Testimony by Secretary of State Condeleeza Rice to Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs, May 12, 2005.

¹² See for example, The Education for Employment Foundation, <http://www.efefoundation.org/> and Cisco Networking Academies, http://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac227/about_cisco_corp_citi_net_academies.html

¹³ Michael D’Arcy and Michael Levi, “Untapped Potential: U.S. Science and Technology Cooperation with the Islamic World,” *Brookings Analysis Paper #8*, April 2005.

¹⁴ Indeed, while the U.S. regularly sends entertainers ranging from music stars to self-proclaimed “D-list” comedians like Kathy Griffin to meet with our troops deployed in the Muslim world, we have done nothing on the cultural outreach front; indeed, USG was not able to cite one American cultural figure it had sought to enlist in outreach. In the words of one senior public diplomacy official, “It is pathetic.” Interview with senior U.S. government official, 12 July 2006. See also “Arts and the Public Sphere: Arts and Culture Leaders Seminar,” Transcript, 2006 US-Islamic World Forum, Doha, Qatar. D’Arcy and Levi, 2005.

demonstration of the opportunities afforded by the U.S. system and proof that the U.S. is not anti-Islam. America also provides a model of citizenship and integration that compares quite well, not only to the regimes in the region, but also to Europe. Yet, overt government surveillance and anti-Muslim slurs made by several U.S. prominent political figures undermine what should be a strategic asset and feed the propaganda of our foes.¹⁵ Moreover, at a time when the U.S. government lacks both credibility abroad and ability to represent its views, the distance between our government and the Arab and Muslim American community is unfortunate. For example, it wasn't until 2006 that the State Department's office for public diplomacy included a single American Muslim on its senior staff. The same diversity problem is repeated across agencies and must be solved, not for political correctness, but for strategic reasons.

Stop Feeding the Beast

Louis Armstrong sang on his tours to win hearts and minds in the Cold War that we have to “accentuate the positive,” but he also noted that we have to “eliminate the negative.”¹⁶ While we know we have a problem, it is too often depicted as simply poor public relations exemplified by President Bush's statements that the U.S. is “behind when it comes to selling our own story.”¹⁷ No amount of “selling” can move a bad product. Policies matter, whether it be demonstrating greater empathy for both sides in the Arab-Israeli conflict or at least a modicum of activity in the peace process to finally get ourselves out of the corner created by Guantanamo and the attached detainee policy. We must also be willing to face the realities of an Iraq that is spinning out of control.¹⁸

At the same time, how we engage and communicate with the world does matter. Two-thirds of the Turkish population perceives Westerners, including the U.S., as arrogant, selfish and greedy, a picture that is shared widely in the Muslim community. Public diplomacy has remained in spin mode despite Karen Hughes appointment. Too often the endeavor is treated like an extension of an election campaign. For example, when asked for a public diplomacy “success story,” senior staffers at the State Department cited Hughes going to a cooking class with students in Germany.¹⁹ Hughes's speeches in the region too often stand as a guide on how not to communicate with the Muslim world, veering from pandering references that lack local cultural awareness to finger-wagging lectures. As one prominent American Muslim imam describes, “She seems to have taken on a very narrow mission - of trying to convince people over there of how correct the administration is, no matter what people might think.”²⁰

¹⁵ Examples of policymakers and private organization leaders associated with the administration who have made slurs that were later repeated in the regional press include General William Boykin, Jerome Corsi, Franklin Graham, and Daniel Pipes.

¹⁶ The song was originally written by Johnny Mercer.

¹⁷ “Bush: Better Human Intelligence Needed” *www.cnn.com*, 12 January 2005.

¹⁸ Kenneth Pollack, “A Switch in Time: A New Strategy for America in Iraq,” *Saban Center Analysis*, Number 7, February 15, 2006.

¹⁹ Interview with Senior State Department official, 12 April 2006.

²⁰ Shaker El Sayed, as quoted in “Entrenched Distrust Undermines White House Effort to Reach Out,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 10 Dec. 2005.

In order to win the 9-11 War the U.S. must reverse its present image and its policies, and public diplomacy must be redefined at all levels of government. For example, the impact on the hearts and minds campaign should be a regular part of any international programming evaluation, as well as written into the annual review of all governmental personnel involved in foreign affairs. Likewise, it should become a regular component of any programmatic budget. Innovative ideas will also have to be supported and tested for viability, such as supplementing the present clustering of all U.S. government personnel in massive barb-wired embassy compounds in capital cities, with a network of small posts, dedicated towards aid and outreach in the Muslim world.²¹ Their enhanced engagement would deepen local area knowledge, as well as the extent and quality of outreach.

A successful strategy must also be far more nimble in seizing any and all opportunities to demonstrate American good intent and seriousness of engagement. For example, the U.S. was quite generous towards the 2004 Asian tsunami-stricken regions and saw an uptick in its standing in Muslim Indonesia as a result. In contrast, when an earthquake slammed Pakistan in 2005, the response from the U.S. government was comparatively meek. Overall, the U.S. committed just 26.4 million dollars in aid, 3 percent of the amount that the government gave towards the tsunami regions. By contrast, radical groups which support terrorism, including Lashkar-e Taiba, Jammah-e-Islami, and the Al Rasheed Trust, quickly started a wide range of aid efforts, seeking to fill the absence of the international community.

Finally, we must figure out how to integrate our own approaches with those of other nations. For all the centrality of the U.S. to this conflict, there is a larger historic context of Western relations with Islam, and, in a post-cartoon environment, great willingness on the parts of the Europeans to get involved.²² From their experiences with the integration of Eastern European states, the EU has far more expertise when it comes to the details of political reform, economic advancement, and rule of law issues. However, the Europeans lack the convening power of the United States. The EU, for example, was unable to get a single Arab leader to attend the last meeting of its Barcelona Process, a respected program that started more than 10 years ago. In turn, the U.S. has programs like MEPI and Forum for the Future that get good participation, but when it comes to actual programming and funding, are widely perceived as all sizzle, no stamina. Yet, U.S. and EU are delinked and suffer as a result.

Strategic Dilemmas

Addressing implementation though is not enough. Three major dilemmas await decision. Until the U.S. develops a strategy on how to solve them, no amount of achievement in the areas of consensus will matter for much.

²¹ Keith Mines, "The Micro-Post: A Silver BB In the War on Terror," in Council for Emerging National Security Affairs, *The Faces of Intelligence Reform*, Washington DC, CENSA, 2006.

²² Shibley Telhami, "In the Mideast, the Third Way Is a Myth, *Washington Post*, 17 February 2006, Page A19.

The first dilemma concerns a real issue that shadows democratic reform, namely Islamist groups and how to deal with their rise. The political spectrum across the Muslim world is quite diverse and reflects the various local social, political and economic contexts from Morocco to Indonesia. Political groups include regime retainers (mostly members of the state bureaucracy and military); secular reformers (the liberal and leftist groups most orientated to the modes of the West, but typically lacking local power and credibility); gradualist main-streamers (the largest set of the professional and business class who are generally disposed to change, but in a measured approach at amending the status quo); Islamist social conservatives (who seek a far greater role for Islam in society and are thus disposed towards democratic reform, but also can tend to be quite anti-American); radical Islamists (who advocate a regime overturn and the implementation of full Sharia); and, at the far end of the spectrum, militant activists and terrorists.

Unfortunately, U.S. policy has often failed to appreciate the diversity of opinion, and worse so, has held the rising power and popularity of Islamist groups, who are gradually winning over the “swing vote” of the business class and mainstreamers, at arm’s length. As Middle East expert Professor Shibley Telhami writes, “The reality shown by Hamas’s victory in the Palestinian elections is this: If fully free elections were held today in the rest of the Arab world, Islamist parties would win in most states. Even with intensive international efforts to support civil society and nongovernmental organizations, elections in five years would probably yield the same results.”²³ The United States has so far steered clear of the tough challenges involved in engaging such groups and prevent their cooption by militant forces.

The United States will ultimately have to accept that Islamist political groups are among the most powerful and credible groups in the Muslim world. While we may not see eye to eye with them on many issues, it is time to open dialogues and work on a shared understanding of how we can cooperate to improve the lives of the citizens of their countries. The fact is that the die is already cast where it matters most. The United States has already accepted the role of Islamist groups in Iraq and engages with old guard Islamist leaders like Ayatollah Sistani as well as emerging firebrands like Moqtada al-Sadr to help steer them and their supporters away from violence.

Thus, the United States must be willing to set aside its qualms about their ideology and instead focus on the principles of the changes it seeks. Any group that accepts the system and the processes of democratic elections and good governance must be engaged, regardless of ideology or past opposition to U.S. policy. The red line, though, is violent action. Only those groups that continue to maintain and support armed wings engaged in violence are the true threats that must be isolated.

Some worry that this will mean the creation of a permanent and backward-looking, bin Laden-led Caliphate across the region. These fears are over-blown. Indeed, akin to the Communists that Mr. X described at the onset of the last long war, Islamism is “capable of exporting its enthusiasm and of radiating the strange charm of its primitive political

²³ Ibid.

vitality but unable to back up those articles of export by the real evidences of material power and prosperity.”²⁴ While the famous fear of ‘one man, one vote, one time’ holds some sway, we must remember that it never even happened in the often cited case for it: Algeria in the 1990s, where it was a military coup not the Islamists that made such a scenario come true. Instead, from Jordan to Turkey to Morocco to Indonesia, such groups have seen that they would not be able to maintain popular support unless they moderated and professionalized. Thus, we must have the same confidence that Mr. X advised for the USSR. The popularity of radical Islamist rule is greatest where not yet reached; wherever it might take power, it “bears within it the seeds of its own decay.”²⁵

In order to ensure that Mr. X’s analysis proves correct the United States must become serious in the implementation of a long-term strategy for development and democracy promotion. Enhanced coordination with the European Union and Japan is necessary to assure additional funds. A multilateral approach that brings in allies such as Turkey will also improve the legitimacy of the whole enterprise. The policy must address and link to the core problems identified in both the political and socio-economic realms. Economic reform must seek to enable and empower the private sector, while building state capacities in such areas as social services and financial transparency. Social development projects should seek to raise the capabilities of local NGOs and civil society, with a focus on skills to organize and act effectively.

Finally, a premium should be placed on the principle of justice in the political sphere, which resonates quite strong with both secular and Islamist social conservative constituencies, as opposed to a pure focus on democratization only in the form of early elections.²⁶ Most importantly, this program must go beyond elections as a sign of democratization and push for genuine constitutional change. At the heart of the agenda for constitutional reform should be the guarantee of freedom of association, speech, the press, as well as the formation of political parties and the repealing of emergency laws. Actual timelines for reform steps should measure the rate of success. Currently all political actors on the spectrum support such a reform agenda, except regime retainers and the terrorists.

The second dilemma concerns the underlying meaning of “reform.” The deep debates that are taking place within Muslim states and communities regarding the shape and teachings of Islam in the 21st century are part and parcel of the 9-11 War. The issues range from the role of women in Islam, to wrestling with globalization and technology, to perhaps the most critical, *ijtihad*, the question of how and who can interpret Islamic law on matters not yet clarified in the Koran or other texts. Discussions about *ijtihad* encourage debates on freedom of thought, rational thinking and the quest for truth²⁷, which many liken to be the contemporary Muslim equivalent to the Reformation period

²⁴ X, 1947.

²⁵ X, 1947.

²⁶ George Perkovich, “Giving Justice Its Due,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005.

²⁷ See for example, Muqtedar Khan, “Two Theories of Ijtihad,” *Common Ground News Service*, March 21, 2006.

within Europe in the 1500-1600s. If this is so, then one must also expect the same violent aspects, when existential and political matters collide.

The tension between historic core and periphery of the Islamic world is one of the most important aspects of this debate, and the U.S. has not yet figured out how to weigh in. Many of the most vibrant discussions about the role of Islam in the 21st century are taking place in locales like Indonesia, Malaysia, and among Muslim minority communities in the U.S. and Europe. Islam not only has different historic roots in these areas, coming through trade and immigration rather than through conquest, but also typically operates in a context of greater freedom of expression. The power of persuasion is more important than the power of any secret police, which means arguments over such matters as how to be both a good Muslim and a good citizen are far richer here than in the historic core. There, the debates have either ossified or veer towards stultifying polemics. To paraphrase Samuel Huntington, Islam may have “bloody borders,” but if reform is to win out, it will likely come from the outside in.²⁸

Reform from without faces a twofold challenge. The first is the convening influence and traditional power of the Arab world. The location of the Holy Sites in the Middle East, the dominance of a few historic centers of learning, such as al Azhar in Egypt, and the monopolization of Arabic over Islamic jurisprudence give the historic core an influence that reaches far beyond the region. The second is the viral effect that money coming from the oil-rich Gulf states has in funding conservative movements and schools that seek a sort of counter-reformation.

Yet, there is the beginning of a strong backlash or, at the very least, the formation of strong sub-regional cleavages. In Southeast Asia, for example, growing anti-Arabism accompanies anti-Americanism. Southeast Asia is comparatively prosperous, stable, and democratic, certainly compared to the Middle Eastern core, and is growing tired of being treated as ‘periphery’. Indeed, the Indonesian government minister for religious affairs recently commented at a conference on Islam in the Age of Globalization that he was “fed up with these Arabs.”²⁹ Likewise, even inside the various Islamist groups, there is regional discord. For example, there are fierce feuds between the Arab Muslim Brotherhood and a group of fairly radical Islamists coming from the Deoband school in South Asia. Tensions also exist between second and third generation European Muslim leaders and those that come straight from the Middle East. It remains to be seen what role Turkey will play in this debate; it can sit on the sidelines or play a positive one if activated.

The U.S. can certainly not drive such cleavages, recognizing the Medusa-like effect its positive gaze will have on the credibility of any local movement. But it should be attentive and ready to engage positively with efforts aimed at moving the reform debate within Islam forward from the periphery to the core. The ground work for this trend was laid in 2005 at two international conferences in Mecca and Amman that brought together reformers. Prominent Indian Muslim journalist M.J. Akbar summarized them: “The key

²⁸ Huntington, 1993.

²⁹ Islam in the Age of Globalization, *American-Pew-Brookings Research Team Trip Report*, June 2006.

word of the new vision was clearly defined: reform.”³⁰ There is a striking symmetry back to the keyword for U.S. policymakers.

The important point here is that, in an idealized approach, U.S. policy towards the region would be recognized not only for its consistency and credibility, but also for its depth of understanding and nuanced approach to engaging a diverse world. As an illustration, much has been made of the Muslim religious educational institutions known as madrassas. Many U.S. officials and commentators describe them as “schools of hate” that must be shut down.³¹ This misses the fact that only a small percentage of madrassas in places like Pakistan are affiliated with radical groups. In other states, such as Indonesia, they are mostly government-linked and many are local sources of moderation that seek to counter the growing outreach of pesantren, which are boarding schools more likely to be funded by radical outsiders. In Arabic-speaking countries, “madrassa” is the ordinary word for a school. As a result, when the U.S. discusses shutting down “madrassas,” it is viewed as striking against moderates in some countries, education in general in others, and rarely as focusing on the radicals. Understanding the region will lead to better policy and engagement.

The third and final challenge is the demographic bow wave occurring within the Islamic world. Between 2000 and 2050, the population within this region is projected to roughly double, representing a growth rate of roughly 130 percent. Within the same 50 year time frame, developing countries as a whole are projected to grow by a total of 67 percent, while the global population growth will be by 54 percent.³² This growth will certainly change the region in a variety of ways. For example, by 2035, little Yemen will be a population powerhouse, becoming the second largest Arab country with 85 million behind Egypt’s 92 million.

The impact of this demographic change would be huge, regardless of the context. But with stagnant political systems, and a weak infrastructure, the rising pool of youth will lack the opportunities needed to fulfill their aspirations. Just to maintain the current level of stagnancy, Kemal Derviş notes that the region will have to create 100 million new jobs over the next 15-20 years.³³ The youth of the coming generation represent what the World Economic Forum called a “ticking time-bomb.”³⁴

Unless the international community is able to help launch an ambitious program of capacity building and quality improvement in education systems, a significant proportion of the next generation in the Muslim world will face conditions that will be much worse

³⁰ M.J. Akbar, “The Alternative Voice is Not a Hostile Voice,” *Asian Age*, 20 Feb.2006.

³¹ Hussein Haqqani, “Islam’s Medieval Outposts,” *Foreign Policy*, Nov-Dec 2002, pp. 58-64. See also, Donald Rumsfeld memo, “Global War on Terror,” 16 Oct. 2003. available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/rumsfeld-d20031016sdmemo.htm>

³² Figures cited in Ömer Taşpınar, “Fighting Radicalism Through Development,” Washington DC: Brookings Press, forthcoming. See also Alan Richards, *Socio-Economic Roots of Radicalism: Explaining the Appeal of Islamic Radicals*, *US. Naval War College Report*, 2003.

³³ Figures cited by Kemal Derviş, Director UNDP, presentation at The Brookings Institution, April 19, 2006.

³⁴ World Economic Forum, Roundtable on Arab Competitiveness, Doha, Qatar April 2005.

than today. Political economist Omer Taşpınar writes of a future in the region that looks like an al Qaeda recruiter's dream. "Hundreds of millions will be poorly educated and lack the necessary skills for employment. They will be living in crowded mega cities and will become attractive recruits for radical groups and organizations that are alienated from the global economic, social and political system."³⁵ The next generation will grow up angry and seek someone to blame, in a political atmosphere in which America is enemy number one. We are seeing the rise of the "hateration" within the Islamic world.³⁶

At the core of al Qaeda-ism's support and popularity has been its ability to draw from and manipulate the deep sense of frustration that is felt among the youth. Accordingly, the U.S. strategic agenda must deal with the underlying anger and frustration that result from a comparative lack of political, economic, and social opportunity. The only environment in which terrorist groups are undermined and the U.S. is seen as credible would be one in which our policies are clearly understood as located on the side of positive change in the region, not on the side of a failing status quo, and as a generator of opportunity. Standard aid and development programming must be accompanied by an array of innovative, youth-centered outreach activities that create layers of networks of local partners and affiliates in the public and private sectors.

The unfortunate truth, though, is that there is no ready and easy silver bullet policy to the dark combination of demographics and hate. The storm will simply have to be weathered, moderated and modulated wherever possible.

Conclusions

Our challenge five years into the 9-11 War remains the same as on that clear morning in September. An ideology of hate has targeted global security and seeks to consume relations between a state and an entire region and religion. Unfortunately, it has met with a fair amount of success so far, to the detriment of the vast mainstream on both sides of an ever deepening divide. But such ideologies have a critical weakness. As long as we do not feed them, they ultimately burn themselves out.

There is no quick-fix path to this end, but the current crisis in U.S.-Islamic world relations need not be permanent. For the U.S., we must have a strategy that echoes the advice that Mr. X provided at the start of the last "long war." He called for American foreign policy to be "long-term, patient" as well as "cool and collected." As he wrote, "*The United States need only measure up to its own best traditions...*"³⁷

³⁵ Taşpınar, forthcoming.

³⁶ Maty J. Blige, "Family Affair," from the *No More Drama* album, 2005.

³⁷ X, 1947.