

Islamic Fundamentalism and Terrorism

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The term Islamic fundamentalism, as it is known today, refers to a religious movement that is loosely structured, but whose intention is to induce Muslims to return to the traditional teachings of Islam to reform their societies, establish an Islamic state, and deal with the many internal and external challenges they face. The appeal of this message was vastly enhanced by articulating the slogan, "Islam is the Solution." The impoverished and illiterate Muslims and others in search of an identity were led to believe that fundamentalism is the right alternative to the systems under which they live, and in which they have little or no stake at all. Nevertheless, Islamic fundamentalism is as old as Islam itself. Throughout the history of Islam, fundamentalism has acted against what its leaders had perceived as the loosening of ethical values and deviation from the true spirit of Islam. But in so doing, fundamentalism found itself resisting social change and cultural transformation.

Islamic fundamentalism has moved from being a mere sociocultural movement seeking to reform Islamic society, to being a sociopolitical movement with an expanded agenda to replace the existing state system with an Islamic one, and to being a radical movement using violence to achieve its objectives. Through these three distinct phases that lasted some 60 years, the fundamentalist movement was able to transform itself to become a dominant force in many Muslim societies, challenging the state and its foreign backers. In each phase, the movement added new objectives to its agenda and gained more self-confidence, using peaceful means to recruit followers, and resorting to scare tactics to silence critics and force intellectuals to stay out of its way. And as it passed from one phase to another, its cultural and political message got stronger and penetrated deeper, motivating the believers to accept its tactics, and, at times, condone its acts of violence.

Unlike the first two phases, the last phase came in response to the failure of the ideas and ideals of the nationalist movement and its nation-state system, and as a reaction to the military

defeat of Arab states at the hands of the Israelis in 1967. Other factors that contributed to the transformation of Islamic fundamentalism include continued Arab military, political, and economic dependence on the West, the corrupting impact of oil wealth on Islamic societies, Israeli occupation of the holy city of Jerusalem, and American invasion and occupation of both Afghanistan and Iraq. As a consequence, Islamic forces armed with old convictions and polished ideas moved to change the existing situation, a change they could not hope to accomplish without challenging the state and its main institutions. The state, however, instead of accepting the challenge and reforming itself, moved to delegitimize Islamic political movements and employ the much hated secret service to suppress all dissent, thereby causing a militant backlash. Thus, the activation of Islam came essentially as an anti-establishment, anti-modernization movement, not an anti-West movement.

Nevertheless, the West's largely unjustified fear of Islamic fundamentalism seems to have convinced the leading Western states to back most Arab and Muslim regimes despite their utter failure, unacceptable human rights records, and wide political and economic corruption. Consequently, the radical Islamic elements concluded that their enemy was not only the dictatorial and corrupt regimes that oppressed them but also Western states that back the regimes they hate and want to replace. Nonetheless, these forces continued to focus on their own governments and attack foreign targets only when those targets stood in their way or appeared vulnerable. Acts of violence committed by radical Islamic forces in Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Syria were aimed at the state, not the West.

To understand the dynamics of this movement and evaluate its potential threat, one must familiarize himself with the European history during the Renaissance and the religious wars of the 17th century. Today, Islamic and Arab societies in general are passing through the same transitional period from the age of agriculture to the age of industry, from pure faith and fate to reason, and from myth and magic to science. As explained throughout this book, societies living in an earlier civilizational stage can neither challenge a society living in a more advanced stage, nor can they free themselves from dependence on it. Therefore, Islamic fundamentalism does not pose an existential threat to the West as some Western writers and politicians and

religious leaders claim. Nevertheless, Islamic fundamentalism poses a short-term problem to Western, Arab and Islamic societies that pursue a secular path. To reduce the potential threat of radical Islam, the West must pressure Arab rulers to free their peoples from oppression and poverty, provide the needed support to quicken the pace of sociocultural and socioeconomic transformation in the Arab world, and find a humane solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab Spring of 2011 provides the West with the opportunity to move on all fronts and do what it should have done decades ago.

Since religious leaders lack the experience to deal with most issues of our times, such as political plurality and democracy, economic development, freedom of speech, the ethics of modern science and technology and women rights, Islamic fundamentalism as a sociopolitical movement is doomed to fail in the long run. In reality, attempts to rejuvenate Islam have boiled down to a cloudy program to remold the present and shape the future in the image of a glorious but fading past. However, as a faith-based movement, fundamentalism cannot fail; it promises its followers no material or even political gains on earth, and therefore, it cannot be held accountable for the consequences of its actions; the only thing it promises its diehard believers is a place in Heaven. A believer therefore has to wait for the afterlife to find out if his or her religion is able to deliver.

Islamic Radicals and the West

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington were not only attacks on the United States; they were also attacks on the freedom and well being of all decent human beings; every one has lost something. Some of us have lost much more than others; they lost their lives. As a consequence of the attacks, our freedom to fly without fear has been substantially curtailed, and our ability to enjoy travel, even to live a normal life without worries, has been undermined. The tragedy of September 11 raises several important questions, noted among them are:

1. Is there a justification for the attacks on the United States?
2. Is there an explanation for what had happened? And

3. How do we prevent this tragedy from being repeated?

In response to the first question, there is no justification for the attacks, regardless of the anger, the injustice, and the grievances claimed by the perpetrators. But while there is no justification for the crimes, there ought to be an explanation for why they were committed. In fact, we owe it to ourselves and our children to find a rational and convincing explanation for what happened on September 11 and why it happened. Otherwise, we will not be able to know the motives of the perpetrators, and may therefore fail to prevent such attacks from being repeated. But despite the importance of the question regarding the motives of the terrorists, it has largely been ignored, particularly by those whose opinions and actions matter most.

In the wake of the attacks, most politicians and journalists in the United States rushed to raise the question of how to retaliate and punish the perpetrators, even before the identities of the suspected terrorists had been determined. As a consequence, the question of why the crimes were committed, and what motivated seemingly normal young people to commit such vicious crimes, was not seriously raised, let alone answered. Even after the war in Afghanistan had destroyed the Taliban's political base, and the war on Iraq had destroyed the Saddam Hussein's regime, only few voices dared to raise the issue regarding the causes of international terrorism. By not debating this very fundamental issue honestly and publicly, we have failed to place the tragedy in its proper political and socioeconomic contexts and, accordingly, find a convincing explanation for why it happened. In addition, we have failed to articulate new policies to contain the spread of radicalism and prevent heinous acts of terrorism. Although we should not accept terrorists' justifications, we must uncover their motives and recognize their grievances in order to deal with the root causes of terrorism.

As the "war on terror" was being waged, President Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the American media in general raised a never-asked-before question: "Why Do They Hate Us?" This question implies that Muslims and Arabs tend to hate the West and that Arabs and Muslims must therefore be an enemy of the West. And while President Bush tried at the time to distinguish between Islam and terrorism, many American politicians, Christian Evangelicals, militarized intellectuals and media personalities continued to talk about a clash of civilizations

and to express hate towards Muslims. Some of them have in fact asserted that Islam is a wicked religion and a source of terrorism.

But do Muslims and Arabs hate the West? The simple answer is no; there is much anger in the Arab world but there is no hate. In fact, most Arabs admire the West and wish to imitate its lifestyles and attain the same levels of economic progress and political freedom its peoples enjoy. E. J. Dionne Jr. wrote in the *Washington Post* on November 23, 2001, commenting on 'why do they hate us', "After the popular response in Afghanistan to the defeat suffered by Taliban, perhaps we can conclude that it was the wrong question. It seems there are many people in the Muslim world, and in the Third World generally, who do not hate us at all."

While Arabs in general do not hate the West, most Arabs and Muslims do hate American Middle East policy. Therefore, the right question that should have been raised in the West is what is wrong with our policies? Among those who have asked the right question, Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin seem to think that American foreign policy has failed to deal fairly with the Third World in general, and that its failure may have been responsible for the September 11 tragedy. They wrote on December 12, 2001 in the *Washington Post*, "For half a century our foreign policy establishment complacently assumed that America could act with impunity in the Third World. We fought the Cold War on Third World battlefields; the list of our interventions is staggering: Iran, Korea, Guatemala, Congo, Cuba, Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua, and, of course, the entire Middle East. Millions died. To our peril in this interdependent world, we are foolishly squandering our first and strongest line of defense: our reputation for fair play. In this sense, September 11 was the ultimate of a foreign policy that has systematically sullied our reputation."

Nine years later, Ted Koppel reaffirmed this assessment. He wrote on September 12, 2010 in the *Washington Post* referring to bin Laden and the war in Pakistan, "Much of what he [bin Laden] has achieved we have done, and continue to do, to ourselves... Again, this dilemma is partly of our own making. America's war on terrorism is widely perceived throughout Pakistan as a war on Islam. Fundamentalism is gaining ground there and threatening the stability of the government, upon which we depend to guarantee the security of those nuclear weapons. Since

a robust US military presence in Pakistan is untenable for the government in Islamabad, however, tens of thousands of US troops are likely to remain parked next door in Afghanistan for some time.” Koppel argues further that US troops should have left Afghanistan immediately after destroying the Taliban regime in 2001, and pursued the al-Qaeda leader instead.

John Duke Anthony, president and CEO of the National Council on US-Arab Relations, said on November 2, 2001 at the National Press Club in Washington, “Prior to 1947, America had no enemies in the Middle East. Neither did it have any adversaries or critics. In the entire region from Morocco to Muscat, its image was the land of the free and the home of the brave. Sadly, much of the goodwill has been drained. There are several reasons. The oldest and main reason by far is related to Palestine.” Indeed, America’s foreign policy failures in the Middle East and the resentment it continues to provoke in Arab and Muslim states are related to the Palestine problem and the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. Lack of political freedom, corruption, and the spread of poverty in most Arab and Muslim states are other contributing factors. But before these issues are reviewed, the relationship between Islam and terrorism need to be analyzed.

Islam and Terrorism

For a very long time, Islam was considered a passive religion, interested in neither politics nor political violence. Like Catholicism during the European Middle Ages, Islam and Islamic teachings were largely directed toward convincing the masses to accept their lot in life and be content despite poverty and injustice, knowing that their true rewards were awaiting them in the eternal life in heaven. Throughout most of the twentieth century, and despite the many Arab liberation movements and wars of independence, Islam had largely remained on the sidelines; it did not even get involved in the popular struggle for freedom and equality. In fact, not a single Arab or Muslim nationalist leader of the twentieth century was a Muslim fundamentalist. However, political Islam emerged slowly in the 1970 and spread in the 1980s in reaction to several developments. Noted among them are:

1. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the US reaction to it;

2. The triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the same year;
3. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982;
4. The outbreak of the first Palestinian uprising or *Intifada* in 1987;
5. The 1991 Gulf War to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation; and
6. The Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.

US-Soviet conflict in Afghanistan: The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 on the one hand, and the US reaction to it on the other, led to the formation of the Mujahidin as an Islamic military force to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. Muslim men from around the world were recruited, trained and equipped by agents of the US government to wage a 'holy war' against the Soviet 'infidels'. The Saudi and Pakistani governments and rich Muslim individuals were instrumental in providing critical financial and logistical support for the Mujahidin. Meanwhile, religious men, particularly Saudi, Pakistani and some Egyptians provided the needed religious justification for fighting the Soviets. So, after several centuries of being a passive religion, Islam was politicized and radicalized to fight a major Cold War battle on behalf of the United States and in defense of Western values and interests, for which hundreds of thousands of Muslims died, and millions of Afghanis became homeless refugees.

When the war against the Soviets ended in 1989, the United States abandoned Afghanistan forcing most of the non-Afghani Mujahidin to return to their countries of origin. Many of them, however, were unemployed and unemployable; they knew only one thing: how to fight a guerrilla war. Inspired by their success in Afghanistan and the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Mujahidin began to carry their message to other Muslim societies and offer their services to groups with similar aims and causes, which took them to former Yugoslavia, Russia and other places. As a consequence, the ex-Afghani Mujahidin were transformed into an international movement; and al-Qaeda emerged in 1988 as an umbrella organization to train and finance members of the new movement, coordinate their activities and help them expand the scope of their operations. Arab states perceived as religiously immoral and politically corrupt were among the first states to be targeted, and because of continued US backing of

many of those states, the Afghani-Arabs felt that they had to expand their operations to include the United States, which by then had been labeled by the Iranian clergy, the “Great Satan.”

Several Arab and non-Arab intellectuals warned years ago of the impending danger of Islamic fundamentalism. In 1984, for example, I wrote an article in a Jordanian newspaper in which I argued that Arab rulers appeasing radical Islamic forces were playing with fire; ideologues, I explained, tend to see things in black and white only, and when they feel strong enough to press their demands, they go for the extremes they believe in. And in 1991, during the “European Conversations” conference in Sweden, Amartya Sen, who later won the Noble Prize in Economics, warned of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, calling it a threat to Europe. And while agreeing with his general assessment, I explained that radical forces were more of a threat to the Arab people than they were to the Europeans. While terrorist attacks believed to have been carried out by al-Qaeda and its affiliates against US and other Western targets have claimed the lives of some 5000 people, attacks carried out by the same forces against Arab targets have claimed the lives of an estimated 300,000 Arabs, most of them were Algerians and Iraqis.

The Iranian Islamic Revolution: In 1979, an Islamic revolutionary movement was able to drive the Iranian king out of power and out of the country and replace his secular regime with a religious one. Although the movement had credible revolutionary credentials, it was largely peaceful and compassionate; it killed neither the Shah nor his family, nor the corrupt politicians of the old regime. But being deeply religious, fiercely anti-American, and strongly opposed to modernization, the new regime could tolerate neither political dissent nor social or religious freedom. As a result, the Revolution failed to develop the Iranian economy, adopt democracy, liberate the Iranian people or respect their human rights. However, the mere victory of the Revolution inspired millions of Muslims around the world, many of whom saw the Iranian triumph as evidence that Islam can win, liberate Muslims from foreign hegemony and provide a solution to the problems facing them in their respective countries.

Israeli invasion of Lebanon: In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, killed thousands of people, occupied Beirut and forced the evacuation of the political and military forces of the Palestine

Liberation Organization. With the invasion coming at a time when the Lebanese were engaged in a sectarian civil war, the departure of the PLO weakened the non-Christian forces in Lebanon, particularly the Shiites, and created a political and military vacuum. To fill that vacuum, the more active Shiite elements in Lebanon formed Hezbollah, or the party of God. Hezbollah was meant to be a social organization to care for the needy, as well as a military force to protect the Shiites and fight Israeli occupation forces. Most of the Hezbollah fighters at the time were trained and closely associated with the PLO before its forced departure from Lebanon. And while Hezbollah provided the fighting force to liberate Lebanon, the Iranian regime provided the financial and military assistance needed to make the Hezbollah experiment a successful one; both as a social service organization and a liberation army.

In the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and subsequent withdrawal from Beirut, the United States dispatched some of its troops to Lebanon to clean the mess created by the Israelis and to pressure the rulers of Lebanon to sign a peace treaty with Israel. As a result, the US mission was perceived by many Lebanese, including Hezbollah as an American attempt to protect Israeli occupation and help Israel attain its strategic goals in Lebanon. Consequently, Hezbollah carried out its first suicide attack ever in 1983 against the American forces, forcing the Reagan administration to evacuate American soldiers and leave Beirut in a hurry. Several such attacks were subsequently carried out in the 1980s and early 1990s against Israeli targets in Southern Lebanon. In 2000, Israel acknowledged defeat implicitly and withdrew its forces from most of the Lebanese territories it had occupied for almost two decades.

The apparent success that Hezbollah suicide attacks were accomplishing on the ground, and the ability of such attacks to weaken American and Israeli resolve were instrumental in radicalizing Islamic movements in Palestine and encouraging them to emulate Hezbollah tactics. Both, the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad movement began in the 1990s to carry out suicide attacks against Israeli targets inside Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories of the West Bank. Such attacks, however, receded substantially in the mid-1990s as the promise of peace increased with the signing of the Oslo Accords, but were renewed with intensity when the hope of peace vanished few years later.

Daniel Williams of the *Washington Post* wrote on December 7, 2001, “In the mid-1990s when Israel withdrew troops from major Palestinian cities, Hamas’s followers shrunk to the point of insignificance. Many Palestinians were outraged in 1996 and 1997 when Hamas militants killed scores of civilians in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Hamas officials could not appear on the streets of the West Bank and Gaza without fear of verbal, if not physical assault. Then Israeli withdrawal ended under Prime ministers Binyamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak. Construction of Jewish settlements soared. Support for Hamas grew.” Subsequently, Hamas resumed its suicide attacks; and in 2006, it was able to win majority seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council and form the next Palestinian government. In 2007, in reaction to plans to liquidate it, Hamas took over Gaza, and formed an Islamic mini-state there.

It must be noted that Hamas was founded in the late 1980s as a social organization with Israeli encouragement to challenge the PLO and counter its political influence in the Palestinian occupied territories. Israel, like most Western states at the time, still believed that Islam was a largely passive religion and that encouraging its followers to organize into social organizations would help undermine the influence of the nationalist forces. Arab nationalists were generally seen by the West as more opposed to its influence in the region than the Islamic ones. But religious fundamentalists, whether they are Jews, Christians, Hindus or Muslims, tend to see things in black and white only. Once they gain confidence, they go for the maximum they believe they can get without regard to the consequences of their actions.

The first Palestinian Intifada: In December 1987 the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza began a peaceful uprising against Israeli occupation, hoping to free themselves and gain independence. However, the Israeli response to the Palestinian *Intifada* was harsh; the Rabin government adopted a policy of “beating and breaking the bones of stone-throwing” children. By the time the Israelis and Palestinians signed the Oslo Accords in 1993, hundreds of Palestinian children had been killed and thousands more were either maimed or severely injured. Tens of thousands more lost years of schooling due to Israeli policies of collective punishment and curfews, which resulted in closing most Palestinian schools and universities for months and sometimes years. The brutality of Israeli actions against Palestinian children on the

one hand, and Arab states impotence on the other angered most Muslims and convinced many that Islamic radicalism was the only way to liberate Palestine.

Iraqi occupation of Kuwait: On the 2nd of August 1990, Iraqi forces invaded and occupied Kuwait. And despite intense international pressure, the Iraqi regime refused to withdraw its forces and abandon its expansionist policy. Consequently, an international coalition, with substantial Arab participation was formed under the leadership of the United States to liberate Kuwait. Within months, the military campaign against Iraq ended and Kuwait was liberated. It was, however, a bloody campaign, during which an estimated 250,000 Iraqi soldiers lost their lives. And to prevent the Iraqi regime from developing weapons of mass destruction, the UN imposed on Iraq a strict and comprehensive regime of economic sanctions that claimed the lives of millions of Iraqis over the next decade, most of them were children. And because the US government did not withdraw its forces from the Gulf region after the 1991 war had ended, the anti-American forces in the Arab world, particularly the Islamic ones led by al-Qaeda saw the American military presence as foreign occupation. The goal of such presence, they concluded, was to control the Arab oil resources, protect US corrupt allies in the region from their peoples, and help Israel achieve its objectives. In 2003, this perception gained credibility when American forces invaded and occupied Iraq and changed its regime.

Despite Arab tendency to support Islamic causes in general, neither the Afghani-Arabs nor al-Qaeda had received tangible support or even much sympathy in most Arab countries until 1991. But as a consequence of the Gulf War against Iraq, continued Israeli occupation of Arab land, Israeli policy of humiliating the Palestinian people, and American unconditional support of Israeli, the Arab masses began to show sympathy for bin Laden and support for his message. The pictures of Iraqi children dying every day of malnutrition, lack of medicine and disease, and Palestinian children being beaten, maimed and killed by Israeli soldiers, caused anti-American sentiment in every Arab and Muslim country to deepen.

Thus, the monster of terrorism associated with Islam was essentially created by the United States to fight the Soviets on behalf of the West and in defense of the American way of life; and grew progressively in response to American policies in Palestine and Iraq. Meanwhile, Israeli

invasion of Lebanon and its colonialist policies in the West Bank and Gaza enabled this monster to consolidate its forces and expand its territory and targets. Today, radicalism is nurtured by American forces waging war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and by an American policy to back Israel no matter what it does or does not do. Meanwhile, the spread of poverty, political and economic corruption, human rights abuses, and hopelessness in most Arab and Muslim countries are helping sustain radicalism. Terrorism associated with Islam, therefore, was the result of both American and Israeli actions, and was justified in the eyes of its supporters as a reaction to American and Israeli policies toward Arabs and Muslims in general, as well as due to the indifference of most Arab and Muslim rulers to the deteriorating living condition in their countries. In addition, globalization that tends to exacerbate poverty, deepen socioeconomic and sociocultural divides within and between nations and foster alienation has kept terrorism an option for radicalized groups. These are some of the hard facts that must be acknowledged and seriously considered if the war on terrorism is to succeed.

In order to defeat terrorism associated with Islamic radicalism, the new generations to be born in the Middle East must find themselves in a completely different environment – one that provides hope and optimism, economic and educational opportunity, freedom and justice, and nurtures cultural diversity and political plurality and tolerance. For such an environment to become a reality, the roots of the current political and socioeconomic and sociocultural crisis in the Arab world must be addressed with honesty. The most important of such roots are the continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the deteriorating life conditions in the Arab world, and the spread of poverty due to corruption and globalization.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

This conflict started years before the creation of Israel in 1948; and since then it has caused several wars and led to the death of tens of thousands of Arabs and Jews alike. The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon alone resulted in the death of approximately 17,500 Palestinians and Lebanese. But despite this heavy toll, the United States has done little to resolve this conflict; it has also refused to let the UN deal with it. The United States, however, has done a lot to

manage the conflict, causing it to fester and deepen Arab resentment of America. All US administrations have used the American veto power at the UN to shield Israel from international condemnation and prevent the UN Security Council from sending an international force to protect the Palestinian People and stop Israeli confiscation of Palestinian land. In fact, the US government has used its veto power at the UN Security Council six of every seven times to protect Israel from criticism. Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is now more than 44 years old, which makes it the longest foreign occupation in the twentieth century. British Rabbi David Goldberg, recognizing the nature of Israeli colonial policy, said that Israel is the “last colonial power in the world.”

While Israel’s conflicts with both Egypt and Jordan were resolved in 1979 and 1994, respectively, the conflicts with the Palestinians and Syrians and Lebanese remain unresolved. A political solution to these conflicts needs to be found, and it can be easily found if UN resolutions 242 and 338 and the US-coined “land for peace” formula were to be implemented, and the principles that governed the Egyptian-Israeli and Israeli-Jordanian treaties were to be applied. The United States and Israel are the only states in the world that, despite recognizing the validity of UN resolutions regarding the Palestinian question have continued to oppose their implementation. John Duke Anthony said in his speech at the National Press Club, “Much of the regional anger against America remains deeply rooted in Washington’s role in shielding Israel from international censure, responsibility, and accountability for its failure to end the occupation.” As long as Israeli occupation of Arab lands continues, there will be no peace in the Middle East, and consequently neither the United States nor Israel will enjoy peace. The American people will continue to spend hundreds of billions of dollars annually fighting wars to advance the interests of a foreign state that is bankrupting their economy and corrupting their political system.

Poverty and Globalization

Arab states, without exceptions, have the most glaring symptoms of underdevelopment: volatile and low economic growth rates, low labor productivity, high unemployment rates,

week social safety nets, relatively high illiteracy rates, deep pockets of poverty, total absence of transparency and accountability, lack of freedom, widespread corruption, and a very bad income distribution. The richer the state is, the more volatile its growth rates are; and the more densely populated the state is, the more poverty and income disparity it suffers from.

The Arab population was estimated at the end of 2010 at about 350 million, or about 4.5% of the world's populations, living on 14.2 million square kilometers of land. The aggregate GDP of all states is estimated at about \$1.7 trillion; however the number changes from day to day depending on the price of oil. Based on this estimate, the annual per capita income in the Arab world is about \$4800. Nevertheless, some Arab states are extremely rich; while others are desperately poor. For example, the rich oil-exporting states, with some 10% of the population, generate almost 60% of the aggregate GDP; as a consequence, the average per capita income in these states is about \$22,500 compared to less than \$2,400 for the other states. Even among the rich and poor states, per capita incomes, levels of economic and social development, education, access to knowledge and life expectancy vary widely from one state to another. For example, the annual per capita income in Qatar is estimated at \$55,000, compared to \$12,400 in Libya. As for the poor states, the per capita income in Lebanon is about \$6,700, compared to \$840 in Mauritania, making the ratio between the richest and poorest state 60 to 1.

Moreover, privatization and widespread corruption have caused poverty to deepen in each state, particularly in the poor states that represent about 90% of the Arab population. While political and economic corruption have enabled the rich and powerful few to own most of the wealth and control all major sources of income in society, they reduced the living standards of the poor to near subsistence. In fact, developments associated with globalization and privatization have caused wealth and income to be transferred from the poor to the rich via state policies, monopoly practices, sale of public assets and, in some cases, through higher fees imposed on all types of public services. Thus, while the few rich Arabs are financially secure, the majority poor Arabs continue to suffer economic and social insecurity and degradation.

On the other hand, the concentration of public services and industries in urban areas, and state policies that neglected the rural ones have caused tens of millions of people to move from

rural and tribal areas to the cities, causing the rates of poverty in urban centers to increase. Due to these facts and trends, slums overwhelm the old cities, causing the Arab city character to be changed; they made city people look and behave less urban and more rural and tribal. In some states like Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco, the transformation of the city has been influenced more by village life than by tribal life, leading to the "ruralization" of the city. In other states like Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the transformation has been influenced more by tribal than village life, leading to the "tribalization" of the city. Still in other states such as Algeria, Iraq, and Syria the city is being ruralized and tribalized at the same time. Baghdad exhibits village and tribal traditions and values living side by side. As a consequence, the Arab city in general has lost the traditional attributes that characterize industrial and cultural cities, causing its ability to become a center for culture, industry, education and creativity to be vastly weakened.

The Arab world as a region is distinguished today by having the highest unemployment rate in the world, conservatively estimated at 16% of the labor force. The other distinction that Arabs enjoy is that unemployment rates among college graduates are higher than among the uneducated and the illiterate Arabs. One might assume that education is the right medicine to cure unemployment and promote development and change, but in most Arab societies, education has been a contributor to unemployment and even to lower labor productivity; education that lacks the right attitudes and work ethics is a liability, not an asset.

Unemployment among the youth who are between 15 and 24 years of age is about twice the average rate for adult males, and more so for females. In 2005, the ALO estimated unemployment among Arab youth at 30% compared to 14.4% for the world at large, worse than Sub-Saharan Africa. Arab unemployment reflects structural economic weaknesses and deep sociocultural and political problems that continue to cripple Arab societies and limit their abilities to grow and diversify economically. Jordan, for example has the second highest rate of literacy among Arab states (90%). Because of this fact, one might think that Jordan should have one of the lowest rates of unemployment and one of the highest rates of female employment. But contrary to expectations and logic, Jordan has the second highest rate of youth unemployment (30%), and one of the lowest rates of female employment (43%).

Can the Arabs solve their economic problems using the tools prescribed by the World Bank and other international agencies? The simple answer is No. One can easily argue that Arab states as a region has had surplus capital since the mid-1970s; yet they have failed to develop and industrialize. Economic development in Arab countries cannot succeed if not preceded by or accompanied with deep sociocultural transformations that include credible political and legal and educational reforms. Prince Hassan of Jordan said in 2010 that “The absence of a modern industrial base diminishes the absorptive capacity of regional economies for the surplus generated by oil revenues.” Such a base needs economic integration, financial coordination, free movement of labor and capital, and above all, political will to make the necessary policy changes.

Globalization is causing this situation to worsen by widening the gap between the rich and poor, and by weakening all national governments to the point of crippling their abilities to keep their economic and social promises. In such an environment of hopelessness, helplessness, suppression and despair, one must not be surprised to see more people resorting to radicalism and violence. For the overwhelming majority of the Arabs, there is no light at the end of the tunnel; life has been a never-ending dark tunnel from start to finish. Many seem to believe, as some of their religious leaders are telling them, that their only hope is awaiting them in heaven, and that the quickest way to reach heaven is through struggle against their oppressors and the perceived enemies of Islam. Luckily, an Arab spring started in early 2011 liberating Tunisia and Egypt and Yemen and Libya from dictatorships, replacing them by Islamists forces, which does not promise change that recognizes the need for genuine sociocultural, socioeconomic and sociopolitical transformations.

The first Arab Human Development Report, issued in 2002, warned that Arab societies are being crippled by lack of political freedom, the repression of women, and isolation from the world of ideas. It said further that creativity is being stifled and intellectuals are forced to flee a repressive political and sociocultural environment. Meanwhile, “Per capita income growth has shrunk in the last 20 years to a level just above that of sub-Saharan Africa. Productivity is declining, research and development is weak or nonexistent. Science and technology are

dormant.” In fact, the Arab political elites are morally corrupt and economically and intellectually bankrupt; they have no vision or a plan for change. While most Arabs see the miserable conditions under which they live connected to and partially caused by US Middle East policy, the fundamentalist and nationalist forces blame globalization as well.

Nevertheless, Arab liberals and Western educated intellectuals are convinced that only the United States can help change this situation by pressuring Israel to end its occupation of Arab lands, and pressing Arab regimes to initiate genuine processes of socioeconomic and sociopolitical change. Lack of US action along these lines makes Arab intellectuals in general feel frustrated and bewildered; it forces them to criticize US policy and often turn a blind eye when radicals commit acts they do not usually condone. While Arab intellectuals are unable to either defend American actions in the world or convince the US government to change course, the America is unable to have a sound and moral policy because foreign policy has long become an extension of a domestic policy influenced by money and controlled by lobbies.

War on Terrorism

Terrorism has been with us since the dawn of history. People who are desperate and have nothing to lose will never stop fighting to regain what they think is theirs. People who believe that their lives can and should be sacrificed for a worthy cause have no problem seeing the lives of others being sacrificed for the same cause. And people who believe that dying while fighting an enemy guarantees them an eternal life in heaven cannot be defeated. Only when the logic of the ideology that underpins radicalism and fanaticism is defeated, and the grievances that feed anger and hate are eliminated that the persuasive power of extremists begins to wane.

In the 1960s, the United States declared war on poverty. But due to the elusive nature of poverty and the government’s failure to address the root causes of poverty the war was lost and subsequently abandoned, causing poverty to persist and increase. A decade or so later the United States declared war on drugs. Yet after more than three decades of fighting drug lords, the war on drugs is still being waged with no end in sight. Meanwhile drugs have become cheaper and more readily available; only the human cost of fighting drug lords has increased

substantially. The war on terrorism is destined to face the same fate unless the root causes of radicalism are vastly undermined.

Since the primary causes of terrorism are national, most acts of terrorism come in response to the failure of national governments to address domestic problems. Foreign powers perceived as wholly or partially responsible for national crises are often blamed and sometimes targeted. David Ignatius, criticizing US policy in the Middle East, wrote in the *Washington Post* on September 30, 2001, "Too often, America has allied with corrupt and authoritarian regimes in what many Muslims see as a cynical attempt to protect the West's oil supplies. It has often seemed oblivious to the lives of ordinary people in that part of the world. America even seems afraid to utter its basic creed of democracy and human rights in the Arab world."

A successful campaign against terrorism has to start with a campaign to undermine religious extremism, and political authoritarianism and corruption. A campaign to capture and kill terrorists will not succeed because whoever gets killed can be easily replaced. Such a campaign has to come in the context of a new American policy that addresses the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, ends US military presence in the Arabian Gulf region, and shows respect for Arab dignity and Islamic culture. In an editorial published on December 2, 2001, the *Washington Post* noted, "The greater danger in the debate over the war's larger agenda is that the energy and ambition needed to change the politico-economic conditions, ideologies and regimes that underlie terrorism will dissipate. Something like that happened following the Persian Gulf War, when schemes for transforming the politics of the Middle East devolved into a narrow Arab-Israeli peace process. A decade later, the failure to bring about deeper change has multiplied the threat posed by Osama bin Laden." Such an outcome has caused the old grievances to deepen, while causing human rights to suffer a set back, not only in states experiencing increasing terrorism but in the United States as well.

Furthermore, the expansion of the 'war on terror' to include Pakistan seems to have convinced some radical Pakistani forces that they have no choice but to fight the Americans and their allies, causing Pakistan to become a war zone. Using unmanned planes to target suspects and kill them, which the Obama administration has expanded, has resulted in the killing of

hundreds of innocent people in Pakistan and Afghanistan, causing the Pakistani and Afghani peoples to hate America more and turn against it. So, instead of winning the hearts and minds of the Afghani and Pakistani people, America is losing whatever goodwill it may have had in that part of the world. This has made the probability of an already nuclear Islamic state (Pakistan) becoming fundamentalist in the next 10 years as great or greater than the probability of a fundamentalist Islamic state (Iran) becoming nuclear.

Can the West win by itself the fight against ideological radicalism, religious fanaticism and terrorism? The simple answer is No. Only the secular and politically moderate forces in the Arab world can lead the fight against political corruption and ideological extremism and social injustice and help defeat radicalism in the long run. But since the 1950s Arab secular and nationalist forces have been subjected to intimidation, suppression and even persecution in their home countries, while the West in general and the traditional colonialist powers in particular did nothing. In fact, Western powers have often acted on the assumption that the nationalist forces were more of a threat to the West's interests than the religious forces. Consequently, while providing refuge to many Muslim fundamentalists, the West aided most authoritarian Arab regimes to suppress and oppress the secularist forces. Even attempts by some Arab regimes to introduce change in response to the Arab revolts of 2011 seem more inclined to appease the religiously conservative forces than to empower the secular ones. Enlightened Arab intellectuals are still being denied the opportunity to reach the masses through the mass media, which remains wholly or partially owned and controlled by the state and the corrupt and corrupting Arab capital.

To have a fighting chance of winning the war against extremism and injustice, the moderate and secular forces in the Arab world must have the freedom to participate in the political process and the sociocultural life of society. They must have the freedom to write and publish, to organize and be recognized, to debate and challenge the radical and conservative forces, to criticize governments' performance and hold officials accountable, and to propose and lead change. And their freedom to do so has to be guaranteed by the law and protected by the government. The United States, meanwhile, has to develop a new Middle East policy based

on moral principles and respect for international law. Such a policy is required if the United States were to deal fairly and comprehensively with the Arab-Israel conflict and address other regional political and economic problems. Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin wrote in the *Washington Post* on December 12, 2001, "America needs a radically new foreign policy. No foreign policy devoid of sound moral principles is realistic today. Even a 'victory' in Afghanistan will do little to protect us from terrorism if we once again become complicit with authoritarian regimes that abuse their own people." Ten years later, these words seem to have been a prophecy.

Where to go from here

The United States seems determined to defeat terrorism; and most people in the world stand in solidarity with it. But for the United States to win the support of the desperate and poverty-stricken masses, and to gain the respect of the politically suppressed and frustrated Arab and Muslim intellectuals, it must commit itself to genuine change in the Middle East. The desired change needs to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in its entirety; initiate a genuine process of sociocultural and socioeconomic transformation that takes into consideration the need to promote freedom, democracy, justice and respect for human rights.

Liberals and conservatives in the Arab world have been fighting a war of ideas since the mid-1960s, with the conservatives winning most of the battles, particularly among the religiously minded and the hopelessly poor, and the largely ignorant and oppressed masses. The nature of the message of the religiously conservative forces has also contributed to their ability to win the battle of ideas. While secular governments and national forces can and do often fail when they disappoint their constituents and appear unable to live up to popular expectations, religious forces do not usually fail; they seldom promise people much in life.

The living conditions prevailing in the Arab world at the time of writing this article in March 2012 and the US Middle East policy are causing the Arab mind to gradually close. The Arab mind is being closed as a result of five major factors:

1. A traditional educational system that lacks dynamism and creativity and labors hard

- to reinforce outdated ways of thinking and rigid convictions and values;
2. A political system that opposes democracy and freedom of speech, and refuses to tolerate criticism and dissent;
 3. A voluntary movement toward Islamic conservatism that aims to transform Arab society along a fading yet revered image of a past that may have never existed as imagined;
 4. A cultural movement led by the diehard nationalist forces that call for a culture of resistance, practically freezing change and weakening social transformation; and
 5. A misguided American policy that gives more ammunition to all of these forces by backing corrupt regimes and autocrats and protecting Israel. Islamic forces in particular claim that Islamic culture has what it takes to lead the Arab masses toward political unity, economic and scientific progress and military strength.

The following are the major factors that appear to be giving the religiously and culturally conservative forces the upper hand in the fight for sociocultural and political dominance in the Arab world:

- Failure of the moderate and secular Arab state both economically and politically;
- The tendency of Arab states to appease the religiously and culturally conservative forces that call for preserving almost all that is old and rejecting almost all that is new, and at the same time, suppress the national and liberal forces that call for political freedom, democracy, and Arab unity; and
- Failure of the secular nationalist forces in the Arab world to formulate a vision for an Arab future capable of inspiring the young, attracting the uncommitted and giving hope to the hopeless.

What the progressive, enlightened Arab intellectuals are asking Americans to do is very simple: to be true to their own ideas and ideals as enunciated in the US Constitution. They ask the United States to stand for democracy, respect for human rights, fairness, national self-determination, freedom, and economic development. They also ask the United States to abandon its double standard regarding the implementation of UN resolutions and work with

honesty to end the unjust and illegal Israeli occupation and colonization of Arab lands. Robert Wright, writing in *Slate.msn.com* said November 19, 2001, “It is in America’s interest to address grievances before they fester into terrorism.” E. J. Dionne Jr. wrote in the *Washington Post* on November 23, 2001, “America’s mistakes in the world usually grow from a failure to live up to our values, not from an effort to practice them.” David Ignatius added in the same paper on September 30, 2001, “To succeed, the new war against terrorism must be also a war for liberation. America is fighting a war of liberation—not simply from terrorism but from the conditions that breed it.” But is America fighting a war for liberation? Again the Arab spring and the killing of Osama bin Laden on May 1st 2011 provide the West and all concerned parties with an unprecedented opportunity to address the grievances of the Arab masses and defeat the logic of radicalism.

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