

Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 177: The "Green Peril": Creating the Islamic Fundamentalist Threat

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Executive Summary

Now that the Cold War is becoming a memory, America's foreign policy establishment has begun searching for new enemies. Possible new villains include "instability" in Europe--ranging from German resurgence to new Russian imperialism--the "vanishing" ozone layer, nuclear proliferation, and narcoterrorism. Topping the list of potential new global bogeymen, however, are the Yellow Peril, the alleged threat to American economic security emanating from East Asia, and the so-called Green Peril (green is the color of Islam). That peril is symbolized by the Middle Eastern Moslem fundamentalist--the "Fundie," to use a term coined by *The Economist*[1]--a Khomeini-like creature, armed with a radical ideology, equipped with nuclear weapons, and intent on launching a violent jihad against Western civilization.

George Will even suggested that the 1,000-year battle between Christendom and Islam might be breaking out once more when he asked, "Could it be that 20 years from now we will be saying, not that they're at the gates of Vienna again, but that, in fact, the birth of Mohammed is at least as important as the birth of Christ, that Islamic vitality could be one of the big stories of the next generations?"[2]

A New Cold War?

Indeed, "a new specter is haunting America, one that some Americans consider more sinister than Marxism-Leninism," according to Douglas E. Streusand. "That specter is Islam." [3] The rise of political Islam in North Africa, especially the recent electoral strength of anti-liberal Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria; the birth of several independent Moslem republics in Central Asia whose political orientation is unclear; and the regional and international ties fostered by Islamic governments in Iran and Sudan are all producing, as Washington Post columnist Jim Hoagland put it, an "urge to identify Islam as an inherently anti-democratic force that is America's new global enemy now that the Cold War is over." [4]

"Islamic fundamentalism is an aggressive revolutionary movement as militant and violent as the Bolshevik, Fascist, and Nazi movements of the past," according to Amos Perlmutter. It is "authoritarian, anti-democratic, anti-secular," and cannot be reconciled with the "Christian-secular universe" and its goal is the establishment of a "totalitarian Islamic state" in the Middle East, he argued, suggesting that the United States should make sure the movement is "stifled at birth." [5]

The Islam vs. West paradigm, reflected in such observations, is beginning to infect Washington. That development recalls the efforts by some of Washington's iron triangles as well as by foreign players during the months leading up to

the 1990-91 Persian Gulf crisis. Their use of the media succeeded in building up Saddam Hussein as the "most dangerous man in the world"[6] and as one of America's first new post-Cold War bogeymen. Those efforts, including allegations that Iraq had plans to dominate the Middle East, helped to condition the American public and elites for the U.S. intervention in the gulf.[7]

There is a major difference between the Saddam-the-bogeyman caricature and the Green Peril. Notwithstanding the Saddam-is-Hitler rhetoric, the Iraqi leader was perceived as merely a dangerous "thug" who broke the rules of the game and whom Washington could suppress by military force. Saddam's Iraq was a threat to a regional balance of power, not to the American way of life.

The alleged threat from Iran and militant Islam is different. The struggle between that force and the West is portrayed as a zero-sum game that can end only in the defeat of one of the sides. The Iranian ayatollahs and their allies--"revolutionary," "fanatic," and "suicidal" people that they are--cannot be co-opted into balance-of-power arrangements by rewards and are even seen as immune to military and diplomatic threats. One can reach a tactical compromise with them--such as the agreement with Lebanese Shi'ite groups to release the American hostages--but on the strategic level the expectation is for a long, drawn-out battle.

Indeed, like the Red Menace of the Cold War era, the Green Peril is perceived as a cancer spreading around the globe, undermining the legitimacy of Western values and political systems. The cosmic importance of the confrontation would make it necessary for Washington to adopt a longterm diplomatic and military strategy; to forge new and solid alliances; to prepare the American people for a neverending struggle that will test their resolve; and to develop new containment policies, new doctrines, and a new foreign policy elite with its "wise men" and "experts."

There are dangerous signs that the process of creating a monolithic threat out of isolated events and trends in the Moslem world is already beginning. The Green Peril thesis is now being used to explain diverse and unrelated events in that region, with Tehran replacing Moscow as the center of ideological subversion and military expansionism and Islam substituting for the spiritual energy of communism.

Islam does seem to fit the bill as the ideal post-Cold War villain. "It's big; it's scary; it's anti-Western; it feeds on poverty and discontent," wrote David Ignatius, adding that Islam "spreads across vast swaths of the globe that can be colored green on the television maps in the same way that communist countries used to be colored red." [8]

Foreign policy experts are already using the familiar Cold War jargon to describe the coming struggle with Islam. There is talk about the need to "contain" Iranian influence around the globe, especially in Central Asia, which seemed to be the main reason for Secretary of State James A. Baker III's February stop in that region.[9] Strategists are beginning to draw a "red line" for the fundamentalist leaders of Sudan, as evidenced by a U.S. diplomat's statement last November warning Khartoum to refrain from "exporting" revolution and terrorism.[10] Washington's policymakers even applauded the January 1992 Algerian "iron fist" military coup that prevented an Islamic group from winning the elections. The notion that we have to stop the fundamentalists somewhere echoes the Cold War's domino theory.

"Geopolitically, Iran's targets are four--the Central Asian republics, the Maghreb or North Africa, Egypt and other neighboring Arab countries, and the Persian Gulf states," explained Hoover Institution senior fellow Arnold Beichman, who is raising the Moslem alarm. Beichman suggested that "the first major target" for radical Iran and its militant strategy would be "oil-rich, militarily weak Saudi Arabia, keeper of Islam's holy places and OPEC's decisionmaker on world oil prices." [11] If the West does not meet that challenge, a Green Curtain will be drawn across the crescent of instability, and "the Middle East and the once Soviet Central Asian republics could become in a few years the cultural and political dependencies of the most expansionist militarized regime in the world today, a regime for which terrorism is a governing norm," he warned.[12]

The Making of a "Peril"

The Islamic threat argument is becoming increasingly popular with some segments of the American foreign policy establishment. They are encouraged by foreign governments who, for reasons of self-interest, want to see Washington embroiled in the coming West vs. Islam confrontation. The result is the construction of the new peril, a process that does not reflect any grand conspiracy but that nevertheless has its own logic, rules and timetables.

The creation of a peril usually starts with mysterious "sources" and unnamed officials who leak information, float trial balloons, and warn about the coming threat. Those sources reflect debates and discussions taking place within government. Their information is then augmented by colorful intelligence reports that finger exotic and conspiratorial terrorists and military advisers. Journalists then search for the named and other villains. The media end up finding corroboration from foreign sources who form an informal coalition with the sources in the U.S. government and help the press uncover further information substantiating the threat coming from the new bad guys.

In addition, think tanks studies and op-ed pieces add momentum to the official spin. Their publication is followed by congressional hearings, policy conferences, and public press briefings. A governmental policy debate ensues, producing studies, working papers, and eventually doctrines and policies that become part of the media's spin. The new villain is now ready to be integrated into the popular culture to help to mobilize public support for a new crusade. In the case of the Green Peril, that process has been under way for several months.[13]

A series of leaks, signals, and trial balloons is already beginning to shape U.S. agenda and policy. Congress is about to conduct several hearings on the global threat of Islamic fundamentalism.[14] The Bush administration has been trying to devise policies and establish new alliances to counter Iranian influence: building up Islamic but secular and pro-Western Turkey as a countervailing force in Central Asia, expanding U.S. commitments to Saudi Arabia, warning Sudan that it faces grave consequences as a result of its policies, and even shoring up a socialist military dictatorship in Algeria.

Regional Powers Exploit U.S. Fears

Not surprisingly, foreign governments, including those of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, India, and Pakistan, have reacted to the evidence of U.S. fear. With the end of the Cold War they are concerned about a continued U.S. commitment to them and are trying to exploit the menace of Islamic fundamentalism to secure military support, economic aid, and political backing from Washington as well as to advance their own domestic and regional agendas. The Gulf War has already provided the Turks, Saudis, Egyptians, and Israelis with an opportunity to revive the American engagement in the Middle East and their own roles as Washington's regional surrogates. Now that the Iraqi danger has been diminished, the Islamic fundamentalist threat is a new vehicle for achieving those goals.

Pakistan, which lost its strategic value to the United States as a conduit of military aid to the guerrillas in Afghanistan, and India, whose Cold War Soviet ally has disintegrated, are both competing for American favors by using the Islamic card in their struggle for power in Southwest Asia. That struggle involves such issues as the Kashmir problem and an accelerating nuclear arms race.[15]

Even such disparate entities as Australia and the Iranian Mojahedin opposition forces are conducting public relations and lobbying efforts in the United States based on the Islamic fundamentalist threat. Colin Rubenstein recently discussed the need to maintain an American military presence in Asia to contain the power of the Moslem government in Malaysia, which according to him has adopted increasingly repressive measures at home and has been developing military ties with Libya as part of a strategy to spread its radical Islamic message in Asia. If Washington refuses to project its diplomatic and military power to contain the Malaysian-produced Islamic threat in Asia, there is a danger that the United States and Australia will soon face anti-American and anti-Israeli blocs, Rubenstein insisted.[16]

The Iranian opposition group, which in the past has subscribed to socialist and anti-American positions, is now interested in maintaining U.S. pressure on the government of President Hashemi Rafsanjani and in winning Western public support. To achieve those goals it is playing up the possibility of a Tehran-led political terrorist campaign aimed at creating an "Islamic bloc" in Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa and suggesting that to avoid such a campaign Washington should back the Mojahedin in Tehran.[17]

Even Washington's long-time nemesis--the hard-core Marxist and former Soviet ally, former president Mohammad Najibullah of Afghanistan, against whom the United States helped sponsor Pakistani-directed guerrilla warfare--a few days before his ouster from power offered his services in the new struggle against the radical Islamic threat. "We have a common task, Afghanistan, the United States of America, and the civilized world, to launch a joint struggle against fundamentalism," he explained. Najibullah warned Washington that unless he was kept in power, Islamic

fundamentalists would take over Afghanistan and turn it into a "center of world smuggling for narcotic drugs" and a "center for terrorism." [18]

The Beneficiaries and Their Motives

Growing American fears about the Green Peril are playing into the hands of governments and groups who, interestingly enough, tend to regard the Islamic threat as exaggerated. The behavior of those groups and governments recalls the way Third World countries exploited the U.S. obsession with the Red Menace during the Cold War despite their own skepticism about its long-term power.

Pakistani officials, for example, reportedly "regard with some amusement Washington's seeming frenzied concern about the spread of fundamentalism in Central Asia, fears they hope to exploit by presenting themselves as sober pragmatists who happen to be Muslims." Indeed, the Pakistani government, like the Turkish government, has expressed the hope that Washington will adopt it as a new strategic ally and is encouraging Washington "to regard Islamabad as a partner in the Central Asian republics, and in the process [limit] the influence of Iran." [19]

Similarly, India, with its growing Hindu nationalist elements, its continuing conflict with Pakistan, and its foreign policy disorientation at the end of the Cold War, has begun to present itself as the countervailing force to the Islamic menace in Asia and Pakistan. [20]

The Israeli government and its supporters in Washington are also trying to play the Islamic card. The specter of Central Asian republics and Iran equipped with nuclear weapons helps Israel to reduce any potential international pressure on it to place its own nuclear capabilities and strategy on the negotiating table. More important, perhaps, the Green Peril could revive, in the long run, Israel's role as America's strategic asset, which was eroded as a result of the end of the Cold War and was seriously questioned during the Gulf War. [21]

Israel could become the contemporary crusader nation, a bastion of the West in the struggle against the new transnational enemy, Islamic fundamentalism. According to Daniel Doron, "With the momentous upheavals rocking the Muslim World, the Arab-Israeli conflict is a sideshow with little geopolitical significance." It is a derivative conflict in which Israel is "the target of convenience for Islam's great sense of hurt and obsessive hostility towards the West." [22]

The operational message is that the United States "must refocus its policy on the basic problems facing the Islamic world rather than only the Arab-Israeli conflict." [23] Jerusalem's attempts to turn that conflict into a Jewish-Moslem confrontation and to place America on its side to help contain radical Moslem forces in the region may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The result is likely to be strengthened anti-American feelings in the Middle East and anti-American terrorist acts, which, in turn, will invite a new round of American military intervention.

Egypt's role in the Gulf War has produced some economic benefits, including forgiveness of its \$7 billion debt to the United States, and its agreement with Israel has improved Cairo's position as a mediator in the peace process. However, Washington's post-Desert Storm expectation that Cairo would play an active role in the new security arrangement in the gulf has proven unrealistic. Saudi Arabia and other conservative gulf monarchies have been less than enthusiastic about Egypt's playing a military role in the region. Since it cannot become a U.S. surrogate in the gulf, Cairo is focusing on its neighbor, Sudan, as a new bogeyman, or radical threat, in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. Presumably, Cairo hopes thereby to gain new significance in the American global perspective. Exaggerating the threat also gives Cairo an environment conducive to military action against Sudan that could fulfill the historical Egyptian goal of turning that country into a protectorate of Cairo.

Sudan: A New Scapegoat

The danger of Sudan's becoming a center of subversion is greatly exaggerated. It is true that Khartoum is ruled today by a military government controlled by the National Islamic Front whose leader, Hassan el-Turabi, wishes to spread his version of fundamentalist Islam in Africa and the Middle East. [24] It is also possible that some Palestinian and Lebanese terrorists visit or even reside in Sudan. [25] But American and Egyptian denunciation of Sudan's "harboring terrorists" is hypocritical considering Washington's ties with its Gulf War "ally" Syria, home to several terrorist

groups, and Cairo's current diplomatic romance with Libya, another center of international terrorism.

Iranian officials, including President Rafsanjani, did visit Sudan several times as part of Tehran's efforts to break the diplomatic isolation imposed on it by Washington. That is hardly evidence of a Khartoum-Tehran political axis, however. The Sudanese seem interested mainly in Iranian economic aid, including subsidized oil. It is not clear that the two countries have common political objectives or that either regime's goals are consistently hostile to U.S. interests. During the gulf crisis, the Iranians tried to convince the leaders in Khartoum to join them in isolating Saddam--not an "anti-American" move--but the Sudanese declined. In contrast to Tehran, Khartoum supports the Palestine Liberation Organization and the U.S.-brokered Middle East peace process. The Sudanese also supported the Washington-backed rebel groups that came to power in Ethiopia and Eritrea.[26]

Moreover, Sudan is one of the world's most miserable economic basket cases. It has a relatively weak military that is no match for the Egyptian army and is embroiled in suppressing a bloody civil war in the south. The notion that Sudan has the power to destabilize the countries of Africa and the Middle East is far-fetched.

An "Iranian Scenario" in Saudi Arabia?

As has that of Egypt and Israel, Saudi Arabia's use of the Green Peril to mobilize U.S. support has been characterized by confusion, ironies, and paradoxes, the most dramatic of which has been the kingdom's own commitment to Islamic fundamentalism. With the elimination of Iraq as a regional military power, the Saudi royal family, worried about the rise of Tehran as a hegemonic player in the gulf, has been fanning the anti-fundamentalist and anti-Iranian mood in Washington. The Saudis have indicated that they are interested in countering Iranian influence in Central Asia. Ironically, they are doing what they accuse Tehran of-- spending lavishly to establish political and religious influence. Riyadh has spent more than \$1 billion to promote the Saudi brand of Islam.[27] Along with Egypt, Saudi Arabia has also been supporting the Somali president against a faction, supported by Iran, that is trying to overthrow him.[28]

The Saudi Propaganda Campaign

A series of reports about resurgent militant Islamic forces in Saudi Arabia (which also portrayed the royal family as a politically reformist regime and active supporter of the U.S.-led peace process) has been used to try to mobilize American support for the Saudis as a "moderate pillar" and anti-fundamentalist force in the gulf, the Middle East, and Central Asia.[29]

The problem with that campaign is that the legitimacy of the Saudi regime is based on its own Islamic fundamentalist principles. The Saudi government is actually more rigid in its application of Islamic law and more repressive in many respects than the one in Tehran. For example, Saudi Arabia has no form of popular representation, and political rights are totally denied women and non-Moslems. The Saudi regime has been able to stay in power largely because it has had both direct and indirect American military support, most recently during the Gulf War. To paraphrase President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Saudis are Islamic fundamentalists--but they are our Islamic fundamentalists.[30]

The recent celebrated Saudi foreign policy "assertiveness" and domestic "moderation" are little more than public relations gimmicks orchestrated by Riyadh's flamboyant ambassador to Washington and supported by King Fahd. They are intended to win brownie points with the American public. The Saudi interest in signing huge arms deals with U.S. companies, for example, could help to secure the survival of the dwindling American defense industry and provide "jobs, jobs, jobs." The administration has abetted that strategy. In spite of Bush's post-Gulf War rhetoric, the administration has announced that it is providing arms packages to the Middle East totaling \$4 billion, of which close to \$1 billion in aircraft-delivered bombs, cluster bombs, air-to-air missiles, and military vehicles is destined for Saudi Arabia.[31]

The participation of the Saudis in the Madrid peace conference, although it had a very marginal effect on the outcome of the negotiations, helped to strengthen Bush's political popularity at home by suggesting that the Gulf War did achieve "something." The recent meetings between Saudi officials and American Jewish leaders, including the invitation extended to leaders of American Jewish organizations to travel to Saudi Arabia, must be viewed in that context. Such conciliatory gestures can also be seen as part of an effort to neutralize the Israeli lobby's Capitol Hill opposition to arms sales to the kingdom.[32]

Prerevolutionary Conditions in Saudi Arabia

There are clear indications of continuing domestic opposition to the Saudi royal family. The House of Saud has resisted any move toward serious political and economic reforms proposed by Westernized Saudi elites. That intransigence reflects a catch-22 dilemma facing the House of Saud, which was accentuated by the American military intervention in the gulf. On the one hand, the regime's *raison d'être* is its commitment to strict, anti-Western Islamic tenets, including support for Islamic fundamentalist groups in the Third World. On the other hand, to survive, the House of Saud needs the support of the West's prime power, the United States, which invites criticism from the conservative elements in the kingdom.

With Westernized opposition silenced, the only viable opposition to the royal family tends to be found in religious elements who enjoy relative autonomy in the Saudi system and focus on the discrepancy between the Saudi regime's Islamic pretensions and its ties with America. The numbers of fundamentalists in Saudi Arabia have grown considerably since the Persian Gulf crisis and, according to one observer, "are now estimated to include tens of thousands of younger radical religious leaders, Islamic university teachers and students." [33] Those leaders criticized the arrival of the American troops during the Gulf War and have attacked Saudi support for the Arab-Israeli peace process as well as the political and personal conduct of the Saudi leadership.

Washington, through its public rhetoric during the Gulf War, heightened expectations for democratic reforms in the Arab states of the gulf, only to collaborate later with the Saudis in stifling any possible moves in that direction. The Bush administration and the Saudis helped to restore the emir of Kuwait, whose government immediately resumed its harassment of proponents of democracy and launched a campaign of repression against and expulsion of the Palestinians living there. The Saudis were also apparently behind the American effort to prevent the weakening of the central government in Baghdad and the possible emergence of a Kurdish state or Iraqi Shi'ite autonomy. [34]

Washington should, therefore, not be surprised if, as the provider of the main mercenary forces for the Saudi regime and its interests in the region, it ends up being the focus of hostility for the opposition groups in Saudi Arabia and the Arab gulf states.

The cosmetic political reforms announced in early March 1991, including the creation of a Consultive Council (to be chosen by the king himself), were portrayed in the American press as signs of a Saudi version of perestroika. In reality, the new measures do not introduce any elements of Western-style democracy; they are more akin to streamlining voting procedures in the Communist party in the Soviet Union in the 1950s. They are certainly not going to solve the regime's legitimacy problem. [35]

Article 19, a London-based freedom-of-expression watchdog group, reported recently that since the Gulf War there has been no lessening of the Saudi government's control over all aspects of life. What is permissible in Saudi Arabia is synonymous with the wishes of the current ruler, King Fahd, and "anything contradicting the origins or the jurisdiction of Islam, undermining the sanctity of Islam . . . or harming public morality" is subject to censorship. Artistic and academic freedoms, for example, are severely limited or nonexistent, and the media are under total government control. [36]

Dangers to the United States

It is not the Green Peril that the United States is facing in the gulf but the peril embodied in its own policies. The pre-Gulf War Saudi debility stemmed from a willingness to secure the kingdom's interests through the preservation of an inter-Arab diplomatic framework for solving regional problems and the maintenance of a regional military balance of power. The American intervention in the gulf completely destroyed those two mechanisms. It led to the collapse of the Arab diplomatic order as a mechanism for dealing with crises and to the destruction of the balance of power in the gulf. It turned Washington into a local diplomatic hegemonic power and military "balancer." Those developments have made the Saudis not more "assertive" but more dependent for their survival, domestically and regionally, on American power. The fact that Saudi Arabia is for all practical purposes an American dependent today is perhaps one of the most dramatic results of the war. The perceived Saudi willingness to take "risks," such as attending the Madrid peace conference and refusing to subsidize the PLO, is largely based on the expectation that Washington will secure Saudi

interests by, for example, "delivering" Israel to the negotiating table or deterring potential anti-Saudi Palestinian terrorism.

The current American-Saudi relationship resembles the U.S.-Iranian relationship during the shah's rule. In exchange for granting access to oil supplies and military installations and showing a willingness to make the politically correct moves on Israel, the Saudi regime receives security protection masquerading as an "alliance" with Washington. That arrangement, however, lacks the clear definitions of obligations and rules of the game that characterize formal alliances.

Indeed, the "alliance" seems to involve an open-ended commitment on the part of Washington to continue supporting the Saudis, without a clear quid pro quo on their part. As was the case with the shah's Iran (and Israel today), Saudi Arabia's chief perquisite of being America's client state is the "freedom of enjoying a commitment without paying a penalty of being an ally." [37]

The U.S.-Saudi relationship produces destructive domestic political consequences for both countries. Washington is tying its interests to the survival of the repressive Saudi regime, while allowing the latter--through the control of oil prices, the buying of American military equipment, and cooperation in U.S. covert operations--to exert leverage on American policy and politics.

The specter of Iran does hang over Saudi Arabia, but not the way Riyadh is framing it, that is, as a consequence of subversive activity by an external power. The original revolution in Tehran, which was the first mass urban uprising in the Middle East and led to the establishment of Western-derived political institutions, was very much a product of American policies. If a revolutionary regime comes to power in Saudi Arabia and subordinates its institutions and mechanics to an anti-Western theocratic expression of nationalist ideology, U.S. policy, not the "exporting of radical Islam" from Iran, will be the culprit.

Iran

The foreign policy that has been pursued since the end of the Iran-Iraq War by the leadership in Tehran, headed by the reform-minded President Rafsanjani and the so-called "pragmatic group of revolutionary clerics," [38] has reflected an effort to advance Iranian national interest more by regaining that state's traditional role as a gulf power and strengthening its economy than by orchestrating a regional or global messianic crusade. Iranian policies have stressed diplomatic pragmatism and military caution coupled with an effort to liberalize and privatize Iran's centralized economy, expand its trade relationships, alleviate its huge foreign debt problems, and satisfy its need for infrastructure.

Signs of Moderation

While the Saudi regime has pursued very superficial political and economic reforms, the government in Tehran has removed many of the religious restrictions, especially those on women, and helped to reinvigorate a quite lively parliamentary and political debate, which culminated in the critical parliamentary election in April 1992. Iran, according to Eric Hooglund, "compared to its Arab neighbors, does appear to have some political characteristics typical of democratic governments." [39]

Rafsanjani, himself from a wealthy pistachio-growing family, has sided with the wealthy merchants who ran Iran's economy in the years before the revolution brought nationalization and state control. He has welcomed foreign investment and called on Iranian expatriates to return and invest in the country. [40]

Iran's economy after the war with Iraq was depressed and contorted by artificial controls. Since then, the government has launched a major program to demilitarize the economy. "Fortunately, we don't have any serious military threat," explained the governor of Iran's central bank. "The threat we do have is economic," he argued. "If you don't have enough food, even if you have the most sophisticated tank, how are you going to use it?" [41]

A Conventional Foreign Policy

Iran's policies during the gulf crisis and the war that followed were an example of textbook realpolitik diplomacy. The

Iranian leadership was able to separate its ideological and historical baggage, including its resentment of both Washington and Baghdad--after all, Saddam invaded Iran in 1979 with a green light from the United States and the United Nations--from its vital, hard-core national interests.

Criticizing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and rejecting the permanent presence of U.S. military forces in the gulf, Tehran remained neutral during the crisis and the war that ensued. It took advantage of the developments in the gulf to sign a peace agreement with Iraq; to reestablish diplomatic relations with the Arab countries in the allied camp, above all with Saudi Arabia; and to improve its relations with countries that supported Iraq, especially Sudan.[42]

However, during the crisis Iran refrained from exploiting the weakness of the central government in Baghdad, except in the most cautious fashion. Its support for efforts to oust Saddam among Iraq's Shi'ite majority remained surprisingly limited. Similarly, Tehran did not take advantage of the anti-American feeling in the region to incite the Moslem world against the U.S. presence in the gulf. Rafsanjani's government even offered its services as a mediator between the United States and Iraq. Iran supported American, Saudi, and Turkish policies intended to replace Saddam with a more benign Iraqi leader and, like those states, expressed its interest in preventing the disintegration of Iraq after Operation Desert Storm.

Despite its anti-Israeli rhetoric, Iran supported the U.S. position that the Palestinian-Israeli problem and gulf security issues, including the invasion of Kuwait, should not be linked (as Saddam had demanded). In addition, after years of boycotting the UN Security Council, Tehran expressed an interest in becoming a member. It also reestablished diplomatic relations with Great Britain and expanded relations with other Western countries.[43] All of those actions were consistent with a conventional state's advancing its foreign policy interests, not a messianic state's seeking to foment revolution.

Postwar Initiatives

In the aftermath of the war, Iran has played a stabilizing role in the Middle East. Tehran pressured radical Shi'ite groups to release U.S. hostages in Lebanon, dispatched diplomats to mend its relationship with Saudi Arabia, and even sent fire fighters to the oil fields of Kuwait. More significant, perhaps, Iran launched plans for reintegrating itself into the gulf security system, a move intended to strengthen its own interests while providing the Arab gulf states with a countervailing force against a future threat from Iraq. Iranian spokesmen stated the need to replace "ideological radicalism" with "pragmatic politics" and argued that the fragile balance of power in the gulf, which was responsible for the outbreak of both the Iran-Iraq war and the Persian Gulf War, should be replaced with "clear lines and frameworks for a new approach to security issues of the region." [44] The Iranians presented a far-reaching plan for a regional collective security arrangement based on cooperation between the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), noninterference of regional countries in each other's internal affairs, confidence-building measures, arms control structures, and economic reconstruction programs.[45]

Notwithstanding alarming U.S. intelligence reports, Iranian policy toward the Central Asian and Caucasus republics has been confined to efforts to gradually establish diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties with some of the newly independent states, especially with those, such as Azerbaijan, that have large Shi'ite populations. There are no indications that Tehran is engaged in political and religious "subversion" of the region, unless one considers helping set up mosques or religious schools subversive.[46]

While proposing ideas for regional security and trade cooperation, Iran has rejected efforts to exclude it from post-Desert Storm security arrangements through the creation of an exclusive Arab-dominated system there and, on a more general level, has expressed its opposition to a Pax Americana in the region. The latter is seen by Iranians as anachronistic at a time when the Soviet threat has disappeared. They believe that regional threats can be contained by regional powers and that foreign intervention is destabilizing.

Indeed, Iran's message to the Saudis and the six-member GCC has been simple and straightforward. Iran is willing to play a positive role in the security of the gulf but will reject "extraregional arrangements" involving nongulf Arab states, such as Egypt, or the continuing presence of Western, especially American, military forces in the region.[47]

Iran's position was one factor in Saudi Arabia's decision to reject a U.S.-supported proposal embodied in the so-called

Damascus Declaration of early 1991. That declaration proposed that Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states base their security on the continuing presence of an Arab regional defense force led by Egypt and Syria. Tehran made it clear that it regarded such an arrangement as a hostile Pan-Arabist move.[48] The Iranian objective appears to be a Middle Eastern security system that would not be exclusively Arab but would include Pakistan and Turkey.

An Inconsistent U.S. Policy

Although Washington has never made clear its vision of a gulf security arrangement--it has supported such diverse ideas as a "Middle Eastern NATO" as well as the Damascus Declaration--its policy and statements suggest that it sees its interests in the region secured through a "strategic consensus" involving four pillars--Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and Israel. An "occasional United States presence" would supplement their efforts and ensure that the oil resources of the region would "not be controlled by somebody fundamentally hostile to our interests." [49] It is not surprising that, from their vantage point, the Iranian leadership perceives those American plans and the continued U.S. military presence in the region as directed against them.

Washington has responded to the positive signals coming from Iran with mixed messages. On the one hand, the U.S. government is gradually trying to take advantage of Rafsanjani's moves toward a free-market economy and to expand economic relations with Tehran. Initially, the Bush administration had restricted U.S. trade with Iran and had even tried to keep other countries from investing in that country. It was only last year that the administration removed some trade restrictions. The result was that trade between Iran and the United States leaped 300 percent as the United States became the sixth-largest exporter to Iran, with more than \$5 billion in exports. Moreover, the administration recently withdrew its objections to the sale of European-made Airbus passenger jets, which use U.S.-made engines, to Iran.[50]

On the other hand, when it comes to the diplomatic and military arenas, Washington seems to be intent on treating Iran as a pariah state, a "strategic enemy," as Patrick Clawson put it.[51] The Bush administration has rejected Iran's reintegration into the gulf security system and has denounced alleged Iranian pursuit of a nuclear military path.

The Issue of Nuclear Weapons

Washington's reports about Iranian attempts to acquire nuclear capability are denied by Tehran, and the evidence is ambiguous. Even if Iran does have nuclear ambitions, such Iranian moves are not necessarily a reflection of "radical" foreign policy goals. Avner Yaniv, an Israeli military analyst, suggested recently that "as the leaders in Tehran see it, since Pakistan for all practical purposes is a nuclear military power and Iraq, notwithstanding U.S. efforts, is moving in that direction--and the main target of Saddam's nuclear efforts is Tehran--Iran is now surrounded by a circle of nuclear threats." Rafsanjani's attempt to acquire nuclear capability is defensive in nature, and "any other regime in Tehran would have taken similar steps," concluded Yaniv (indeed, it was America's friend the shah who initiated Iran's nuclear arms program).

Yaniv raised another interesting point. Some observers expressed concern that Iran's overtures to Kazakhstan might be part of an effort to try to take advantage of that Moslem state's nuclear military capability. He argued that, if anything, a nuclear Kazakhstan--which with 1,500 nuclear warheads has a larger arsenal than France--is actually perceived by Iran as a major threat to its security, not as a source of support for its own nuclear program.[52]

Certainly, American efforts to isolate Iran only strengthen its sense of insecurity and may accelerate its nuclear drive. At the same time, Iran's ideas for regional security arrangements--rejected by Washington--have at least the potential for creating some mechanism for controlling arms, including nuclear arms.

Moreover, by continuing to try to isolate Iran, Washington is weakening the forces of Rafsanjani and the more pragmatic wing of the current Iranian regime that won a massive victory in the parliamentary elections on April 10, 1992. Without a large flow of foreign investment and in a continuing hostile diplomatic environment, Rafsanjani and his allies in the parliament will find it difficult to continue their efforts to demilitarize and reform the economy and to pursue a moderate diplomatic path.

American hostility toward Iran is understandable given the anti-Western nature of the Iranian revolution, the 1979 seizure of the American embassy in Tehran, the threat to assassinate author Salman Rushdie, and the ties between Iran

and radical Moslem groups.

However, Iranian behavior should be seen in its historical context. The legacy of U.S. intervention in Iran after World War II, especially Washington's support for the repressive regime of the shah, left a residue of hostility toward American policy, not only among Islamic radicals, but also among more secular and Westernized Iranians. That hostility was only strengthened after what was seen in Iran as U.S. support for the Iraqi invasion of Iran and American efforts to prevent an Iranian victory in the war with Baghdad.

Constraints on Iranian Power

The image of Iran as the new regional bogeyman is exaggerated. Iranian foreign policy seems to project a pragmatic understanding of world and regional politics and a careful application of diplomatic and military means. Even if one assumes that Iran is intent in spreading Islamic radicalism and creating a huge monolithic bloc stretching from North Africa to India, it is obvious that Tehran does not have the power to achieve that goal and will be prevented from doing so by such powerful states as Russia, Pakistan, Israel, and Egypt, even without American prodding.

In addition to the constraints placed on potential Iranian expansionism by its powerful neighbors, Iran lacks the capabilities to carry out such ambitious game plans. The condition of Iran today resembles that of the Soviet Union at the beginning of its decline: a bankrupt economy, a dissatisfied population, ethnic rivalries, and an official ideology that does not respond to the needs of the citizens. Iran cannot serve as a "model" for other Moslem societies or as a "magnet" for Shi'ite groups in the region. There are major questions about whether it will even survive in its current condition.

Indeed, Iran, a large country with a population of more than 55 million, is itself a miniempire where a small Persian majority (a little more than 50 percent of the population) controls several ethnic and religious groups, including Arabs and Kurds who have strong ties to other states and groups in the region. Hence, the possibility of the political disintegration of Central Asia and the Caucasus into different states and nationalities may pose a danger to Iran's identity and stability.

For example, 20 million Azeris live in Iran and only 7 million in Azerbaijan itself. One Azeri faction calls for secession from Iran and the establishment of a united republic (a Soviet-sponsored independent republic that existed 45 years ago proclaimed that large areas of northern Iran were part of its homeland). Therefore, it is not surprising that the governments in Tehran and in Baku have a common interest in preserving current borders. That is also a common interest of Turkey and Iran. Both are opposed to the creation of an independent Kurdish state that would serve as a magnet for their own large Kurdish minorities.[53]

Tajikistan, whose language is close to Persian, seems to be the only Central Asian state where some sympathy for Iran's political model exists. There, the Islamic Renaissance party, banned in other republics, operates openly and claims 20,000 members. As were those of the anti-communist struggle of the Catholic church in Poland, Iranian efforts in Tajikistan have been directed mainly at weakening the Tajik Communist party. Last September, for example, Tehran covertly supported a peaceful uprising against a communist power grab in Tajikistan, allegedly paying demonstrators 100 rubles a day to lead Moslem prayers and demand the resignation of the Tajik communist leadership.[54]

In any case, Iran's Shi'ite religion is not shared by the majority of the 60 million Moslems in Central Asia (most of whom are Sunnis--with the notable exception of Shi'ite Azeris) and the Middle East. That presents a major obstacle to Iran's alleged ability to export its religious influence. Notwithstanding expectations after the revolution in Iran that a wave of pro-Iranian Islamic fundamentalism would engulf the Arab world, support for Khomeini and revolution remained limited and confined to Shi'ite communities.

Moreover, even Shi'ite groups in the region have been resistant to Iranian overtures. Shi'ite identity does not guarantee allegiance to Tehran and is in most cases weaker than national or ethnic identity. Indeed, despite the religious affinity between Iranian Shi'ites and the Shi'ite majority in Iraq, the latter fought on the side of other Iraqi Arabs during the war with Iran and rejected Iranian calls to secede from Iraq and join the fight against Saddam.[55]

The Need for a Conciliatory U.S. Approach

Iran's cautious foreign policy reflects a recognition among its leaders of the major weakness and fragility of their political rule, economy, and the state structure itself. Instead of trying to isolate Iran, Washington should take advantage of that country's need for economic investment and diplomatic acceptance and the existence of islands of free enterprise and pro-American sentiment (as opposed to pro-U.S. government policies) among some of the political and intellectual elite.

The United States could encourage Tehran's drive for integration into a gulf security structure. As Shireen Hunter explained, "Any security scheme must recognize the Gulf region's unique ethnic, religious, and cultural characteristics" and "its dual Arab and Iranian character." An attempt to exclude or isolate any country dooms any arrangement there. Hence, "any security framework that portrays Iran as the regional bully and aims to exclude it would be self-defeating" and "would be a sure recipe for pushing Iran toward extremism." [56]

However, American policy in the Middle East in general, and in the gulf in particular, is still motivated by a drive for hegemony in the region and attempts to build new "regional pillars" to support that goal. U.S. leaders seem unwilling to accept Iran's idea of an independent regional security system. Instead, Washington is trying to turn Iran into the new bogeyman whose alleged ideological and military threat necessitates American intervention in the region and the establishment of new "pillars." That policy is detrimental to the interests of the states in the region as well as to the long-term goals of the United States.

Return of the Great Game in Central Asia

One of the pillars Washington hopes to rely on is Turkey. The perceived rising Islamic threat in the Central Asian republics has given rise to suggestions on the part of officials in Ankara that America use Turkey as a new pillar to contain Iranian expansionism. Those proposals, which range from having Turkey serve as a cultural and political-economic "model" for the new Moslem republics to having Turkey play a more active political and military role in the Middle East and Central Asia, have come at a time of growing Turkish apprehension about the future of NATO, the U.S. security role in Europe, and Turkey's value to the Western alliance.

Turkish Losses from the Gulf War

Turkish president Turgut Ozal's strategy of close cooperation with the United States during the Gulf War was intended to reaffirm Ankara's commitment to U.S.-Turkish bilateral relations and to highlight Turkey's importance to U.S. strategic interests and concerns in the Middle East. By promptly terminating the flow of petroleum from the Iraqi pipelines, Turkey made a major contribution to the effective implementation of the UN-authorized sanctions against Iraq. During Operation Desert Storm, Ankara played a key role in the coalition's war effort by permitting U.S. military aircraft access to the Incirlik air base for strikes against Iraq and by deploying near the Iraqi border 100,000 Turkish troops who pinned down an equal number of Iraqi airmen.

Notwithstanding Washington's efforts in the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm to provide Turkey with increased security assistance and new trade benefits, Ankara's involvement in the Gulf War has not produced the "new strategic relationship" that Ozal expected. Nor were Turkey's NATO allies appreciative enough of Turkey's contribution to the war to give Ankara a more favorable hearing on its application for admission to the European Community. (NATO's members, especially Germany, were also opposed to what seemed to be Turkish, and by extension U.S., efforts to extend, through the defense of Turkey, the organization's out-of-area military role.)

Moreover, the Gulf War embroiled Turkey in the regional politics of the Middle East, a dramatic departure from the European orientation of the Turkish republic's founder, Kemal Ataturk. The fact that, contrary to Ozal's expectations, Saddam has remained in power has left Turkey with a major security threat on its southern border.

The war also vastly complicated Turkey's Kurdish problem. A significant percentage of Turkey's population is Kurdish, and many Turks are of Kurdish origin. Turkey shared Saudi Arabia's opposition to the disintegration of Iraq, fearing that it would lead to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. U.S. efforts to aid the Kurds in northern Iraq via Turkey through Operation Provide Comfort allowed Kurdish guerrillas to increase their operations from Iraq against Turkey. [57]

When both violence on the part of separatist Kurdish guerrillas in southeastern Turkey and repressive measures taken against them by Turkish military forces grew, the German government imposed an arms embargo against Ankara in March 1992 and accused it of using German weapons to put down the Kurds.[58]

A U.S. Surrogate

Ozal's efforts, with U.S. support, to establish political ties with the nearly 45 million Turkic people in Azerbaijan and the former Soviet Central Asian republics can be seen as a way of countering the negative repercussions of the Gulf War by trying to find new foreign policy outlets for Turkey and revive its strategic importance to the West, especially the United States.

However, overtures to the new Moslem republics also went against another Kemalist principle: noninterference in the affairs of neighboring states on behalf of Turkic minorities. Ankara's efforts have already kindled fears of a rise of Pan-Turkism and a revival of centuries-old ambitions to establish a Greater Turkistan.

With the decline and eventual collapse of Moscow's central authority, Ankara began to expand its political and economic ties with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. A flurry of diplomatic visits has been accompanied by the signing of an economic and commercial agreement as well as cultural exchanges.[59]

Ozal and his aides did not hide their hope that Turkey would achieve a stronger regional and global status as a result of its new penetration into Central Asia. That new foreign policy orientation, which sparked interest in post-Gulf War Washington and was encouraged by the Bush administration, assumed that Turkey, together with Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, would become the four pillars of American hegemony in the region.

Under that strategy, Turkey and the other American surrogates that help the United States to control the strategic centers and oil resources of the Middle East are viewed as instruments to contain the radical Islamic forces that are supposedly led by Iran.

Islam's Limited Influence in Central Asia

Contrary to the Green Peril paradigm, Central Asia does not seem to be in danger of turning, under Iranian influence, into a monolithic "Islamic crescent." Visitors to the region find instead a complex mixture of national, ethnic, and religious groups and political and economic interests. Ties to outside nations are clearly being sought for economic deliverance rather than as a religious and cultural denominator.

Although it sometimes worked with democratic forces to undermine the old communist regimes, Islam has remained a marginal political force in Central Asia. The popular nationalist movements in those states reflect secular identities with a populist anti-Russian bent, and the more liberal ones attempt to foster coexistence among the different religious and ethnic groups.[60]

Although some of the Moslem republics established diplomatic, cultural, and economic ties with Iran, none of them appear interested in imitating the Iranian political and economic model. Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Turkmenistan, and most other republics favor Western-oriented models of development. "Iran would take us back to the Middle Ages," argued an adviser to the Azerbaijani president. Instead, "the prevailing vision seems to be economic progress in a secular society," with Turkey serving as a secular free-market model for modernization.[61]

Dangers of an Anti-Turkish Backlash

In trying to gain economic influence in the region, however, Turkey faces dilemmas similar to those Germany and Japan face in their trading zones. Any effort on Turkey's part to play a political-military role in the area as a counterweight to Iran--as part of the American strategy to become the hegemonic power in the region--could produce a backlash and reduce Ankara's influence and ability to succeed as a trading state.

Turkey has strong cultural ties to Central Asia whose people, with the exception of the Tajikistanis, speak variants of Turkish. To strengthen those ties, Turkey helped the Central Asian republic of Azerbaijan to change from the Cyrillic

to the Latin alphabet, which has been used in Turkey since the 1920s, and which Azerbaijan formally adopted in January 1992.[62]

Although they welcome Turkey's playing a cultural role, the Central Asians are concerned that a Turkish expansionist policy in the region could easily be converted into Pan-Turkism, which has had a nonsecular Islamic character. That development could frighten non-Turkic peoples, such as the Kurds and the Armenians, and create pro-Iranian movements among the Persian-speaking population in such states as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Pan-Turkism could also produce a backlash from the Arab states, Pakistan, India, and even China. Seventy years of socialist state and nation building have produced separate notions of identity in the various Turkic-speaking republics, and it is unlikely that they will gravitate toward unity or accept Turkey as a dominating and unifying regional power. The player that would be most opposed to Turkey's assuming a leading role in the region would be Iran. An American effort to groom Turkey as the policeman of Central Asia could, therefore, have the same disastrous consequences that U.S. attempts to make Iran the gendarme of the gulf had in the 1970s or its support for Iraq as a countervailing force to Iran had in the 1980s. Turning Ankara into a strategic pillar in Central Asia could also weaken the Turkish economy, increase the political power of the military, and contribute to a growing Turkish-Iranian rift that could escalate into war.

Turkey's Resistance to Washington's Strategy

Indeed, in November 1991 Turkish voters, concerned about the domestic and regional costs involved in being Washington's cop in the Middle East and Central Asia--the economic and military burden, the erosion of Turkey's European orientation, the reentry into the dangerous politics of the Middle East--defeated Ozal's governing Motherland party and brought the Social Democratic party, with Suleyman Demirel as prime minister, to power.[63]

Demirel's policies seem to reflect the current Turkish foreign policy consensus. He is interested in strengthening Ankara's economic ties with the Central Asian republics and seems to envision Turkey as the democratic, secular, free-market-oriented "Shining City on the Hill" of the Moslem world. During his recent visit to Washington, he tried to downplay the notion of a spreading Islamic menace and rejected the idea that Ankara would play a pro-American political-military role in Central Asia. He made it clear that he is determined not to be perceived as "an American poodle." [64]

Despite the setbacks of recent years, Ankara still hopes that Turkey will eventually be invited to join the European Community. Hence, Turkish policymakers are concerned that the limited prestige Turkey gained in Washington and the West as a result of Ankara's involvement in the Gulf War is being outweighed by the possibility of military entanglement with Iraq and Kurdish groups. Along with the unresolved Cyprus problem, those difficulties complicate Ankara's ties with the community.

In addition, Turkey could be drawn into regional conflicts, such as that between Christian Armenia and Azerbaijan. And certainly Turkey would gain no benefit by creating tensions with Iran. "Turkey is determined to keep good relations with Iran and knows its own economic limitations in meeting the expectations of its Central Asian cousins," insisted one Turkish official.[65]

Like those of Iran, Turkey's ties to the ethnic and religious mosaic of Central Asia and the Caucasus could create long-term problems. Indeed, the continued bloodshed in the Caucasus has demonstrated Turkey's limited ability to shape events in the region and highlighted the costs that efforts to do so involve.

The Myth of a Central Asian Islamic Bloc

Developments in Central Asia suggest that the region is not turning into a Tehran-run Islamic monolith against which Ankara should be established as a bastion. Instead, Central Asia is reemerging as the geopolitical and economic chess board it was during the 19th century--a chessboard on which regional and external powers vie for the traditional prizes of access to markets and natural resources as well as political influence.

However, that rivalry has more of the flavor of a balance-of-power game and trade competition than of the kind of

religious military struggle that Washington initially envisioned. The model that Washington should use as it studies the future of the Central Asia region, as well as that of the emerging new Middle East, is not that of a new Moslem empire but that of a multinational and multiethnic mosaic, in which political, military, and economic cooperation will coexist with chaotic ethnic and religious rivalries, not necessarily between Christians and Moslems and certainly not as a result of religious subversion by one player, such as Iran.

Limits to U.S. Influence

With Russia ceasing to regard the region as a center for global political and ideological competition with the West, Washington, while attempting to penetrate the large markets of Central Asia, should remain on the sidelines of the political changes and the regional competition that can be expected to develop, not try to pick the winners or losers. Washington, after opening diplomatic missions and establishing trade ties with the new Central Asian republics, can only hope that Turkey's democratic free-market model will be imitated.

The United States should also encourage a stable balance of power as well as the cooperative economic systems that are already emerging. The administration should understand that any time it attempts to intervene directly or indirectly through surrogates it creates disincentives for the creation of a balance of power.

Any efforts to mediate local conflicts such as the one over Nagorno-Karabakh have little chance of succeeding; any mediation should be left to regional powers, such as Russia, Turkey, or even Iran, all of whom have a major stake in the outcome of that and other potential regional conflicts.

The United States should also reject all proposals for a grand Marshall Plan for Central Asia. Economically backward when they were brought into the Soviet empire, the Central Asian republics enjoyed some limited modernization. However, those republics became a net burden on Moscow's budget. As the Soviet government collapsed, their living standards fell more rapidly than those of the Slavic states. The republics of Central Asia are now dependent on Russia and the other more industrialized regions of the former Soviet Union for manufactured goods.

The idea that Washington could replace Moscow as the region's source of financial aid makes no economic or political sense. Currently, most of the governments of the newly independent states of Central Asia are in the hands of former communist officials who have very little understanding of and experience with free-market economics. Washington should refrain from creating expectations that it will deliver economic prosperity.

Unfortunately, any inclination to adopt a low-key American approach to the region could easily be undermined by an exaggerated fear of Islam that continues to distort Washington's view of the Central Asian republics' ethnic, cultural, and historical realities. Fear of the Islamic bogeyman has already resulted in the destructive idea of turning Turkey into an anti-Iranian pillar and led to an equally dangerous American policy in North Africa.

Algeria: Joining the Jackals

Many analysts used terms like "irony" and "paradox" in referring to the Bush administration's decision to support the military takeover and cancellation of democratic elections in Algeria in January 1992. At a time when Washington was calling for the establishment of a new world order and the spread of democracy and free-market economies, the Bush administration embraced a Marxist military dictatorship.

While the French government, whose stakes in the outcome of the elections were higher, remained initially silent when the Algerian army stepped in to cancel the election that would probably have brought to power the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), Washington was quick to describe the move as in accordance with the Algerian constitution. A day later the State Department backpedaled and said it had "no opinion" on the army's action.[66] That reaction stands in stark contrast to Washington's angry reaction to the recent Haitian military coup that overthrew a populist, socialist-oriented president.

U.S. Support for Democracy: The Middle East Exception

The discrepancy between the Bush administration's global democracy rhetoric and its reaction to the events in Algeria

may have confused some observers, but Washington's response was consistent with long-standing U.S. strategy. The same approach led to the 1953 U.S. intervention in Iran, which led to the ouster of a democratically elected leader and the restoration of the shah; the 1957 American pressure on King Hussein to abolish a popularly elected regime in Jordan; and the current U.S. support for the Arab monarchies of the Gulf.

Indeed, the Bush administration's response to the Algerian coup is only the most recent manifestation of a policy that subordinates the political will of Middle Eastern populations to the preservation of a profoundly undemocratic status quo. In the name of combating the elusive threat of Islamic fundamentalism, which has emerged as one of the most important engines of change in the region, the United States allies itself with some of the most anti-democratic forces there.

The administration finds it convenient to promote elections from Moscow to Nicaragua to Kampuchea to Kenya--even though in many cases the democratic process strengthens or brings to power such unsavory players as the Pol Pot murderers of Kampuchea and pseudodemocratic groups in sub-Saharan Africa.

However, when it comes to free elections in the Moslem Middle East--Algeria being the most dramatic example--officials in Washington suddenly begin to lament the "dilemmas" and "Hobson's choices" they would face if political freedom were to sweep the region. As Gerald F. Seib argues, "Democracy could produce some messy problems for the United States and its friends."^[67] Furthermore, suggests Jim Hoagland, democratic practices there might bring "anti-democratic forces to the threshold of power."^[68]

Though the Bush administration intrudes on every aspect of internal Iraqi affairs, it is reluctant to demand internationally supervised elections in Algeria. Despite the administration's and Congress's vocal denunciations of human rights abuses, including massacres of demonstrators in the streets of Beijing, no displeasure is expressed when the regimes in Algeria and Tunisia take similar, if not harsher, steps against their citizens. Instead, those demonstrators are demonized as "fundamentalists" and "radicals" who supposedly deserve such treatment.

Washington's concern about the rise of democracy in the Middle East stems from the fear that free elections in Iraq, the Arab Gulf states, Jordan, and North Africa will threaten the Arab regimes that help maintain strategic interests of the United States and its access to oil in the region as well as endanger American support for Israel.

The events in Algeria were quite understandable. After close to two decades of bureaucratic mismanagement, political repression, and corruption by the governing National Front (FLN), Algeria was saddled with more than \$25 billion in foreign debt, and nearly 30 percent of its population was unemployed. Meanwhile, members of the elite, who continued to mouth slogans about egalitarianism, socialism, and Arab nationalism, were perpetuating their own privileges, enjoying such benefits as tax-free imports, preferential housing, and special rights to travel.^[69]

The socialist leadership refused to sell its government-controlled industries and continued to impose heavy restrictions on foreign investment. In addition, worldwide recession had been depressing hard-currency earnings of Algerian tourism and petroleum exports, which magnified the economic crisis and increased unemployment.

The economic problems, including a rise in prices, led in 1988 to bloody riots, some led by Islamic fundamentalist leaders, that spread through Algeria. Soldiers gunned down hundreds of unarmed civilians. The crisis resulted in the decision by the FLN government, controlled by elderly socialist military men led by President Chadli Benjedid, to begin ambitious political reforms, including promising to legalize opposition parties and to end the political monopoly of the FLN. That decision was also spurred by the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and subtle pressure from Paris.

However, years of authoritarian rule and the emigration of many Western-educated technocrats and intellectuals to Europe had left Algeria with no alternative political outlets for expression and organization. As was the case in other parts of the Moslem World (and for that matter in Eastern Europe under communist rule), traditional and religious institutions emerged as important centers of political opposition, especially for the majority of poor and uneducated Algerians. By 1991 the FIS controlled 8,000 of Algeria's 10,000 mosques whose five daily prayers provided 40,000 daily relays for its views, which traveled by fax, word of mouth, telephone, and cassette. Moreover, during election campaigns the party was able to present a well-educated field of high-quality candidates.

"Islam has always been a key unifying factor among the Maghreb countries of North Africa," according to analyst Allan Thompson, who added that it "now is a potent political force as well--not because Arabs in those states want to live in Islamic republics like Iran, but because the existing political order has failed them." [70]

Islam in Algeria, as in other parts of the Middle East, has often thrived on the martyrdom of political oppression. One reporter noted, "When populations are fed up with a variety of elitist single-party authoritarian structures over many decades, it's not surprising that Islam should serve as a powerful vehicle of protest." [71] Although the democratic process launched by the government unleashed close to 60 parties and political associations, only the FIS was able to mobilize massive public support and translate it into election victories. It won 55 percent of the posts that were filled by gubernatorial and local elections in May 1990, which gave it control of everything from street sweeping to voter registration. That victory was followed by attempts to gerrymander constituency boundaries to favor the FLN. Those attempts led to new violent confrontations between the government and supporters of the FIS, including the jailing of a prominent FIS leader, Abbasi Madani.

However, attempts to repress the FIS only increased its popularity, and it scored a major victory in the first round of parliamentary elections on December 26, 1991, by winning 3 million votes (5 million other voters split their ballots among 20 parties), which made it almost certain that it would win a majority of the votes in the second round. That would have given the FIS a powerful claim to the right to form a government and also an excellent chance of winning the Algerian presidential election. Concern about that possibility led to the military intervention in January and to the cancellation of the runoff vote. The military also ousted President Benjedid, who apparently was willing to accept an FIS victory; postponed the elections indefinitely; declared a state of emergency; and imposed a military-controlled High Security Council on the country. [72]

Western Democratic Hypocrisy

Those moves were explicitly backed by most of the rulers in the Middle East, including the military rulers of Tunisia and Libya, who face similar opposition from Islamic fundamentalist forces, and at least implicitly by France and the United States. "By neither criticizing nor approving the Algerian army's action, Western countries cloak their real attitude--that democracy is fine, up to a certain point--in necessary ambiguity," noted Jim Hoagland. [73]

American intellectuals--including many who advocate a Wilsonian global democracy crusade--exhibit a peculiar lack of enthusiasm for democratic objectives when it comes to the Middle East. There, to secure American hegemonic power, they typically support a "realist" approach that includes a U.S. military alliance with, and support for, authoritarian Arab regimes. When U.S. policies incite popular demand for change and reform, the neoconservatives solve their cognitive dissonance by proclaiming that the demonstrators in the streets represent the forces of reaction, the Green Peril, and that the spread of democracy would be served by containing that threat. [74]

The events in Algeria highlight the weakness of the global democracy crusade and suggest that it might be nothing more than a way to rationalize, in the eyes of Americans and international opinion makers, policies that are really based on cold, calculated realpolitik considerations. To put it another way, behind the mask of the American global missionary is the American global policeman.

Washington's approach means that the United States ends up backing ruling authoritarian elites and thereby incurring a backlash from popular opposition forces that resent its interventionist policies. Those policies inherently erode America's power as a role model. The search for imaginary Jeffersonian democrats ends up as a search for enemies, and the Islamic fundamentalists are the latest candidates.

Islam and Democracy

The sense of confusion and arrogance that lies at the root of the global democracy paradigm was exposed by the U.S. reaction to the events in Algeria. The United States could have pursued a detached policy toward Algeria, where U.S. interests could have been affected only minimally, and could have encouraged France and the southern European states to take the lead. Washington could have recognized the complexity of the situation, which does not involve just good guys vs. bad guys, and welcomed the gradual moves toward political freedom. Instead, the application of the

Green Peril frame resulted in a destructive knee-jerk reaction.

U.S. policies also reflected the fallacies behind the Islamic fundamentalist scare and America's image of political Islam as a monolithic anti-Western movement that will return the Middle East to the dark ages. Islamic fundamentalism, which serves as an umbrella for many variants of a number of political ideologies, has in recent years eroded the power of centralized and authoritarian political systems in the Middle East. According to Graham E. Fuller, it is a "movement that is both historically inevitable and politically `tamable,'" and "over the long run it even represents ultimate political progress toward greater democracy and popular government." [75]

Some aspects of the FIS understandably concern the United States and other Western countries. Many of the leaders are devout Moslems who seek an Iranian-style Islamic republic, and the party's program calls for the establishment of Shari'a--the rule of Islamic law. Strictly interpreted, that would require the complete segregation of the sexes outside the home; the banning of alcohol and music in public; and the introduction of stoning, flogging, and amputation as legal punishments. The possibility of the FIS's coming to power has therefore raised fears among secular Algerians, especially among educated and professional women. [76]

However, behind the slogans and the rhetoric of the FIS lies a more pragmatic approach. Many of the FIS leaders, who are more Westernized than the Iranian ayatollahs, actually have marketable skills. One of the party's leaders, Abdel Kader Hachani, who is now in jail, was an engineer for the same state oil company that the current prime minister, Sid Ahmed Ghazali, used to manage. Hachani represents a different breed of mullah. He is 35 years old, the son of a middle-class businessman, and fluent in French and English although in public he uses only English. [77]

Hachani and many of the other FIS leaders, unlike the Iranian ayatollahs, do not oppose "Western devils." They advocate deregulation of public corporations, lowering taxes, and freeing independent small businesses from state control.

Even the Wall Street Journal had to acknowledge that "some of the FIS ideas, such as support for a more open economy, could benefit the country if actually implemented by an Islamic government." [78] (Ironically, the most militant and violent of the Islamic groups are the so-called Afghans, Algerians who were trained in Peshawar to fight the Soviet army in Afghanistan through a CIA-funded program.) [79]

Constraints on Fundamentalist Excesses

More important, the FIS leaders who would have come to power through democratic elections could not have overlooked the fact that many of those who voted for Islam did so out of spite--primarily to get rid of the FLN, not to establish a theocracy in Algeria. The majority of the 26 million Algerians, including those who supported the FIS, speak French, watch French television, and read French newspapers. Many Algerians have relatives among the 4 million or so Algerians who live in France, Spain, and Italy and travel back and forth to Algeria. Algeria is also economically dependent on trade with and aid from France and other southern European countries.

Therefore, any attempt by the FIS to impose a xenophobic anti-Western theocracy on Algeria would have produced a major backlash. The prospect of a fundamentalist regime, which appeared imminent after the December vote, had already awakened many of the 5 million Algerians who had not bothered to cast a vote in the first electoral round and brought out hundreds of thousands of modern Algerians for mass rallies. Some even speculated that, as a result of the growing unity of secular Algerians, it was by no means certain the FIS would emerge from the second round as powerful as the military feared.

Hence, the combination of a strong presidency, military support for the Algerian constitution, and resistance by a large proportion of the population, including the large Berber-speaking population, would have acted as a strong check on Islamic radicalism even if the FIS had managed to form a government. Moreover, "the chances are that electoral politics will profoundly moderate those absolutist tendencies latent in almost any kind of religious fundamentalism." [80] For example, in the last Jordanian elections, the fundamentalists had to temper their rhetoric on women's role in society in order to make the gains in the polls that they did. [81]

Those objective constraints would have strengthened the hands of leaders like Hachani who were interested in building

up the FIS as a pragmatic and reformist political movement that could succeed in transforming the economy and creating a popular base of support for the party. Hachani and his colleagues know that by advancing a dogmatic religious agenda they would severely tarnish their future electoral prospects as well as those of other Islamic groups.

Once in power, the FIS, like any other political party, would have been judged by its ability to "deliver the goods," mainly economic opportunities for the growing number of young citizens. Religion, as King Hassan of Morocco put it, is after all not enough to run a country. "Had the Algerian elections been allowed to proceed, we would have seen [the FIS] at work," he said.[82]

Most of the Islamic groups that operate more or less freely, and run candidates in elections, in the relatively open systems of Egypt and Jordan or in the more democratic systems of Turkey and Pakistan have successfully adapted to the rules of the democratic game. Those who have resorted to violence have suffered the consequences. Not only have "Islamic intellectuals and activists tried to come to terms with the democratic ideas and process," but to implement their programs, in recent years Islamic movements in Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Sudan, and Tunisia "have seen the utility of working within the political system. In so doing, they have successfully contested parliamentary seats and held cabinet positions." [83]

Moreover, once they became part of the democratic process, many of those groups moderated their positions in order to expand their electoral base and be able to form coalitions with secular groups. For example, in Egypt during the 1984 election, the Muslim Brotherhood concluded an alliance with the secular and liberal New World party and won 12 seats. In 1987 the brotherhood formed an "Islamic alliance" with the Socialist Labor party and the Liberal party and increased its parliamentary strength to 32 seats.[84]

Without the romantic image of martyrdom, and lacking any serious policy programs, Islamic parties have actually begun to lose public support. For example, the militant Moslem parties are a very marginal force in Turkish politics.

Recognizing the precarious position of the FIS, even before its possible victory in the second round, some politicians proposed a power-sharing arrangement that would have given the FIS control of the parliament and left Benjedid in the presidency. "The idea was to avoid interfering with the country's new democracy and at the same time to give the FIS enough rope to prove itself incapable of coping with the crippled economy." [85] What spoiled that plan and forced the army's hand was a meeting between Benjedid and Hachani at which the president agreed to purge some corrupt officers and officials. That was too much for the old FLN politicians and military people to swallow.

"By canceling the elections, the military has invited Algerians to settle their differences in the streets," suggested the Wall Street Journal.[86] The country is gradually moving toward civil war with potentially tragic consequences in Algeria itself and serious repercussions in Europe, especially in France where 800,000 Algerian immigrants live. It is tragic that Washington has endorsed the strategy of repression.-

Conclusion: Is Political Islam a Threat?

There is no easy answer to the question of whether Islam and democracy are compatible. As John L. Esposito and James P. Piscatori put it, "History has shown that nations and religious traditions are capable of having multiple and major ideological interpretations or reorientations." [87] The transformation of European principalities, whose rule was justified by divine right, into modern Western democratic states was accompanied by religious reform. Christian tradition, which once supported political absolutism, was reinterpreted to accept the democratic ideal.

Islam also lends itself to various interpretations and has been used to support democracy, dictatorship, republicanism, and monarchy. Some leaders of Islamic movements have adopted a negative attitude toward democracy as an expression of their rejection of European colonial influence and, more recently, of U.S. intervention in the Middle East.

Islamic fundamentalism should not be considered "a disease that spreads willy-nilly to infect whole populations." Like Protestant fundamentalism, argues David Ignatius, it is a "religious response to the confusion and contradictions of the modern world." [88] It is not inconceivable that the new Islamic force will play the same constructive political role that the Protestant reformation played in Europe.

In most Middle Eastern countries, including Algeria and Iran, Islamic fundamentalism is already sweeping away the corrupt old political order of the Arab world. Indeed, "support for the fundamentalists in Algeria, as in Iran, has come in part from the bazaar, from the merchants and small businessmen who have been ignited by the statist regime." [89]

One question that troubles many analysts is whether the Islamic movement will tolerate diversity when in power or try to impose an intolerant monolithic order on society. The record of the Islamic experiments in Iran, Pakistan, and Sudan is mixed. Those governments have used power to discriminate against minorities and women and to repress dissidents. But their record has not been worse--and in some cases it has been better--than that of secular regimes or more traditional monarchies.

"Based on the record thus far," wrote Esposito and Piscatori, "one can expect that where Islamic movements come to power in the Middle East, they will have problems similar to those of secular governments in the region." That is especially true where democratic institutions are weak and political pluralism and human rights remain sources of tension and conflict. [90]

The danger for the Western nations, in particular the United States, is that misperceptions will cloud their judgment of and produce counterproductive policies toward Islam and the Middle East. Instead of viewing Islam as a monolithic force, Western analysts and policymakers should recognize that it is a diverse civilization, divided along cultural, ideological, religious, ethnic, and national lines. Even the term "Islamic fundamentalism" should perhaps be modified to reflect the different movements and groups that are lumped into that category.

Moreover, neither Islam nor Islamic fundamentalism is by definition "anti-Western." As noted, the anti-American attitudes of Islamic groups and movements in the Middle East are not directed against Christianity or Western civilization per se. They are instead a reaction to U.S. policies, especially Washington's support for authoritarian regimes and the long history of U.S. military intervention.

American policies that stem from political, economic, and military interests are bound to lead to more incidents that pit the United States against the forces of political and economic change in the Middle East. Political players in both the United States and the Middle East fan the fear of the Green Peril as a way of maintaining public support for policies that serve their self-interest. The interests of the iron triangles are, however, not necessarily synonymous with those of the American nation.

Although it is not in America's interest to launch a crusade for democracy, neither is it in her interest to be perceived as the guarantor of the status quo and the major obstacle to reform. Now that the Cold War is over, Washington should not be searching for a new enemy; instead, it should view regional conflicts with detachment, realizing that they will rarely pose a danger to America's security.

Notes

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[2] "This Week with David Brinkley," ABC News, December 29, 1991, transcript prepared by Graphic Journal, p. 6.

[3] Douglas E. Streusand, "Abraham's Other Children: Is Islam an Enemy of the West?" *Policy Review* 50 (Fall 1989). See also exchange of letters titled "Is Islamic Fundamentalism a New Red Scare?" *New York Times*, January 29, 1992.

[4] Jim Hoagland, "Washington's Algerian Dilemma," *Washington Post*, February 6, 1992.

[5] Amos Perlmutter, "Wishful Thinking about Islamic Fundamentalism," *Washington Post*, January 19, 1992.

[6] Brian Duffy et al., "Saddam: The Most Dangerous Man in the World," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 4, 1990, pp. 38-51.

[7] See "Gulf War Coverage: A One Note Chorus," Extra 4, no. 3 (May 1991).

[8] David Ignatius, "Islam in the West's Sights: The Wrong Crusade?" Outlook Section, Washington Post, March 8, 1992.

[9] Thomas L. Friedman, "U.S. to Counter Iran in Central Asia," New York Times, February 6, 1992; Thomas L. Friedman, "Baker's Trip to Nations Unready for Independence," February 16, 1992; and Robert S. Greenberger, "Baker Is Wooing Central Asian Republics," Wall Street Journal, February 14, 1992.

[10] The diplomat, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Robert Houdek, warned the Sudanese that they would face "grave" consequences if an international terrorist act could be traced to Sudan. See Jane Perlez, "Sudan Is Seen as Safe Base for Mideast Terror Groups," New York Times, January 26, 1992.

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[14] Crossette, "U.S. Aide Calls Muslim Militants Big Concern."

[15] See Edward A. Gargan, "The Chastened Pakistanis: Peace with U.S. Is Aim," New York Times, February 19, 1992; and M. M. Ali, "Soviet Empire's Disintegration Alters the Face of Asia and the Middle East," Washington Report on Middle East Affairs 10, no. 8 (March 1992): 49-50.

[16] Colin Rubenstein, Address before the Asian Studies Center, Heritage Foundation, February 10, 1992. Rubenstein is a lecturer at Monash University, Australia, and the editor of the Australia-Israel Review.

[17] Mohammad Mohaddesin, director of international relations of the People's Mojahedin of Iran in a briefing at the Cato Institute, March 3, 1992.

[18] Edward A. Gargan, "Afghan President Says U.S. Should See Him as Ally against Militant Islam," New York Times, March 10, 1992.

[19] Gargan, "The Chastened Pakistanis." On Pakistani strategy, also see Edward A. Gargan, "Fiscal Political Forces Move Pakistan to Seek Afghan Peace," New York Times, February 16, 1992; Edward A. Gargan, "Islam Challenges Pakistan Economy," New York Times, February 23, 1992; and Steve Coll, "Pakistan Struggles to Incorporate Both Muslim, Western Outlooks," Washington Post, February 18, 1992.

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[21] See Leon T. Hadar, Quagmire: America in the Middle East (Washington: Cato Institute, 1992).

[22] Daniel Doron, "The Mideast's Real Troubles Aren't Arab Israeli," Wall Street Journal, October 3, 1991. Also see

Joel Himmelfarb, "Islamic Republics: Danger for Israel," *Near East Report*, January 27, 1992, for an example of AIPAC's efforts to use the Islamic threat in the Moslem republics to gain sympathy for Israel.

[23] Doron, "The Mideast's Real Troubles Aren't Arab-Israeli."

[24] Jane Perlez, "A Fundamentalist Finds a Fulcrum in Sudan," *New York Times*, January 29, 1992.

[25] Parmelee, "Sudan Denies 'Khartoum-Tehran Axis' to Promote Islamic Regimes in Africa."

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Tom Post and Melinda Liu, "The Great Game, Chapter Two," *Newsweek*, February 3, 1992, p. 29. On Saudi concern about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and Iran, see Youssef M. Ibrahim, "The Saudis Are Fearful, Too, As Islam's Militant Tide Rises," *New York Times*, December 31, 1991.

[28] Parmelee, "Sudan Denies 'Khartoum-Tehran Axis' to Promote Islamic Regimes in Africa."

[29] See, for example, Gerald F. Seib, "Saudis, Shedding Usual Caution, Play Bold Role in Peace Talks, Hope to Win Over U.S. Critics," *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 1991.

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[32] On Saudi overtures to the American Jewish community, see "The Jewish World," in *Long Island Jewish World* 20, no. 43 (November 22, 1991): 2; and "Jews and Saudis Hold First Talks in Saudi Arabia," *New York Times*, January 22, 1992.

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[35] Indeed, in a March interview with a Kuwaiti newspaper, King Fahd made it clear that his reforms are not going to produce a democratic system in the country. "The system of free elections is not part of Islamic ideology," he stated. "Democracies in the West might be good in those countries, but this [does not] suit all the people of the world." Quoted in "No Democracy for Saudis," *Near East Report*, April 20, 1992, p. 1.

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- [45] Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Iran's Leaders Ask Wide Cooperation and Ties to West, Also Call for Gulf Amity," *New York Times*, May 28, 1991.
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- [47] Mahallati, "The New Persian Gulf Security Arrangement and the Relevant Factors," p. 23.
- [48] Peter Ford, "Egyptians Exert Leverage on Gulf Security Issues," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 24, 1991.
- [49] Quoted in *The Soref Symposium: American Strategy after the Gulf War* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991), p. 53.
- [50] Caryle Murphy, "U.S-Iranian Ties Mending," *Washington Post*, April 20, 1992.
- [51] Patrick Clawson, "Iran's Rafsanjani, the New Mideast 'Darling,'" *Wall Street Journal*, April 22, 1992.
- [52] Avner Yaniv, "The End of Moderate Facade," *Ha'aretz*, February 16, 1992.
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[59] Pope, "Wooing the Republics."

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[69] See Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Algerians, Angry with the Past, Divide over Their Future," *Week in Review*, *New York Times*, January 19, 1992.

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[88] Ignatius, "Islam in the West's Sights: The Wrong Crusade."

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] Esposito and Piscatori, "Democratization and Islam," p. 40.