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MODERATE MUSLIMS: MYTH OR REALITY?

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ABSTRACT

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Radical Muslims kill randomly and justify their despicable actions by quoting the Qur'an. Non-radical Muslims, through their silence, seem to condone inflammatory rhetoric and acts of terrorism. Will Muslims seek to re-live the seventh century or embrace the world as it exists, then confront the challenges of modernity by forging a road that does not compromise their religious beliefs, that is non-violent, and that is properly suited for the 21st Century? Western public discourse on Islamic terrorism is rife with appeals to "moderate Muslims" to condemn terrorists and their so-called hijacking of the Islamic religion. But do moderate Muslims truly exist as a viable faction? Can such a group find a successful path for Islam into modernity? How can the United States help such Muslims accommodate modernity and, in the process, sustain the global world order essential to U.S. national interests?

MODERATE MUSLIMS: MYTH OR REALITY?

Globalization has drawn Islamic societies into a world of interdependence they cannot ignore; the sacred “right of each sentient species to live within its normal cultural evolution”¹ is no longer an option. Sadly, many Islamic societies and individual Muslims (people who adhere to Islam) have not accepted this 21st Century multi-cultural globalization. Radical Muslims kill randomly and justify their despicable actions by quoting the Qur’an. Non-radical Muslims, through their silence, seem to condone inflammatory rhetoric and acts of terrorism. Extremist Islamic terrorism has forced religion into the political considerations of an American society that prides itself on the supposed separation of church and state, making religion a centerpiece of U. S. policy. The American public is uncomfortable discussing religion as politics and the conflicting interpretations of Islam.² They simply prefer to accept Islam as one of the world’s great religions and get on with their liberal, capitalist lifestyles. Americans generally believe that Muslims, just as Jews and Christians did before them, should accommodate their religious practices to an ever-changing modern society. This is a fundamental misunderstanding with policy implications. Such a secular perspective is alien to most Muslims because their faith intertwines religious and political order. Muslims see no political order separate from religion.

Muslims are in an internal struggle over how to reconcile Islamic order with a modern and secular society. The Islamic “umma” (community of believers) needs Islam to be successful in the global community and, to retain their faith, must find the source of reconciliation within Islam. Crucial to understanding the current struggle within Islam are the concepts of extremism, fundamentalism, and moderation. Extremists or radicals “advocate or resort to measures beyond the norm, especially in politics.”³ These measures usually include violence. Moderates are “opposed to extreme views and actions, especially in politics and religion,”⁴ and are generally more accepting of change. Islam “has no fundamentalist tradition,”⁵ however, in Western efforts to understand and equate Islamic principles and behavior to traditional Western religions, Western society adopted the term to describe those who adhere strictly to “the basic ideas or principles of their [religion], are intolerant of other views and oppose secularism.”⁶ Unlike extremists, fundamentalists are non-violent. Will Muslims seek to re-live the seventh century or embrace the world as it exists, then confront the challenges of modernity by forging a road that does not compromise their religious beliefs, that is non-violent and that is properly suited for the 21st Century? How can the United States help such Muslims accommodate modernity and, in the process, sustain the global world order essential to U. S. national interests?

The Road to Extremism

Before the Prophet Mohammed, the defining characteristic of the Arabian Peninsula was lawlessness. Through a series of successful battles, Mohammed established himself as a leader and brought the disparate tribes together to form the Islamic umma.⁷ Mohammed's message emphasized confessional pride, communal solidarity, faith and religion over blood, and peaceful relations within the umma. The long decline of the old Roman Empire had left a society of slavery, excessive taxation, and governmental interference in the lives of ordinary people. "Islam [with its focus on the collective good] came as a vast relief and a solution [to] social and economic strain."⁸ Mohammed weaved Islam and government together in a way that vastly improved the everyday lives of the people. "The slave who adopted Islam [became] free....the debtor...was rid of his debts."⁹ The norms established by Mohammed "helped to secure a sense of community among the tribal entities and to protect the umma from outside attack."¹⁰ However, the edict that Muslims not fight within the umma did not prevent them from fighting those not a part of the umma. "Within the span of a hundred years, Islamic warriors [had] conquered Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, the whole of North Africa, and Spain,"¹¹ thereby establishing the caliphate (the Islamic state).

Western and Islamic scholars differ on the impetus for these conquests, but the caliphate, once established, perpetuated Islam. This expansion of Islam is best understood through an analysis of current fundamentalist Islamic thought, which then leads to a better understanding of Islamic extremists. Fundamentalists are not all extremists, but all extremists are fundamentalists. Islamic fundamentalists believe that God is the ultimate authority in everything, including political life. For them, Islam "is [more than] an abstraction...it is, equally...the system that regulates behavior."¹² Islam therefore offers a way of life based on their understanding of God's law (shari'ah) and nature.

The Islamic regulatory system consists of morality, governance, and justice--divine contrivances created by God to serve human beings and assure the well-being of the universe. The divine system also includes "fitra" (intuition), created by God in each human being for revelation.¹³ According to Egyptian author and well-known fundamentalist and extremist, Sayyid Qutb, Islam as a divine creation "conforms to fitra and to the universe.... happiness [in humans] hinges on correspondence among the parts....unhappiness is the consequence of disunity."¹⁴ Revelation cannot occur in a system not derived from divine creation. Establishment of the caliphate is the fulfillment of divine will. Any religion not derived from the divine is human religion, which is incapable of leading individuals to "tawhid" (oneness with God).¹⁵ It follows

then that for the fundamentalist and extremist, shari'ah "becomes the only meaningful law" and a caliphate "the only acceptable system."¹⁶

With the end of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of nationalism in the early 20th century, the caliphate collapsed and the Islamic umma separated into distinct protectorates, nation states, and alliances. The discovery of oil in the Middle East then brought untold wealth to the region, but the monarchal and patriarchal structures that evolved in most Islamic states did not distribute this wealth to the average citizen. Consequently, the new structures retarded the social development and progress of Islamic societies. As a result, Islamic peoples persistently lagged behind Westerners in modern development.¹⁷

Modern Islamic fundamentalism began to surface after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.¹⁸ Many Muslims attributed their defeat and lagging development to their lack of oneness with God, so they sought a return to traditional, fundamental Islamic tenets. Analogous to Christian fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalists believe in the infallibility of the Qur'an and the Hadith (interprets the words and deeds of the Prophet),¹⁹ resulting in the adjudication of all things through the prism of Islam (an Islamic worldview). Unfortunately, their interpretation of traditional Islamic literature gave them little insight into how state and society should cope with the issues of modernity introduced in the 21st century.²⁰ On many aspects of modern society, the Qur'an, like the Bible, is silent or unclear because many of the ideas associated with modernity (free speech, gender equality, popular suffrage) were not issues when the Qur'an was written.²¹ As a result, the extremists selectively dismissed some traditional readings of the Qur'an and developed new interpretations, often more restrictive and radical, like the doctrine of Sayyid Qutb. The alternative readings favored by extremists center on the quest for oneness with God (tawhid) and divine governance (hakimiyya).²² For example, fundamentalists believe that "the basis of moral and ethical systems is divine [and that] humans should not impose their [own] systems....the divine system, as presented by the shari'a is...necessary for human well-being and [to] avoid misery."²³ The quest for tawhid is the "cord that ties together...all... aspects of life;"²⁴ in the mind of the extremists, tawhid justifies the domination of others.²⁵ Such "full-strength religion, with its sublime and dangerous certainty in matters of principle,"²⁶ offers an explanation for the failures of Islamic societies. Reinforced by the radical teachings of Sayyid Qutb, fundamentalist beliefs lead many Muslims to cross the line from fundamentalism to extremism (violence).

For example, fundamentalist political discourse centers on the doctrines of revolution, legislation, and consensus. The quest for tawhid obliterates all institutions that claim secular authority and infringe upon the divinity of God.²⁷ Fundamentalists argue that man should

govern based on God's will and not his own; so they view revolution as their responsibility to reject non-Islamic governance. Extremists believe that revolution requires the eradication of all institutions that claim any authoritative role in God's system.²⁸ Revolution, in the fundamentalist sense, challenges secular society but does not include forced conversion to Islam because the Qur'an states, "There is no compulsion in religion" (Al-Baqarah:256).²⁹ Extremists, however, do permit [and even demand] violence against those whom they perceive as interfering in their quest for tawhid and divine governance (establishment of the caliphate).³⁰ Problematically, extremists see interference as any established authority or government outside the caliphate. For fundamentalists, the only task of humans is to codify from divine principles what is appropriate behavior within society.³¹ God is the source of all legislation, legitimacy comes from God, and everything in society should require human obedience of God. Any deviation from divine guidance (Qur'an) is a "vitiation of true Islam."³² Extremists "[deny even] the...possibility of dialogue and compromise."³³

Traditionally, however, consensus was the source of political transformation used by politically elite Muslims to arrive at a Qur'anic justification and then convince the umma to follow one interpretation over another. But Islamic fundamentalists reject traditional consensus as the dominion of elites and posit that consensus is a communal process for the umma, not for particular individuals or groups. After the umma identifies an issue for consensus, the umma deliberates and revelation occurs to each member through fitra (intuition). When revelation occurs, members of the umma acknowledge divine will and are then able to reach consensus. Fundamentalists use consensus as a political tool to check the power of the state and pass judgment on political behavior.³⁴ Extremists use it to support their political goals: the rejection of Western modernity and the establishment of the caliphate.

Islamic fundamentalists and extremists have experienced success in spreading their message over the past four decades, primarily due to the lack of a cogent and accessible alternative. Literal and restrictive "interpretations of Islamic texts, [in the absence of moderate interpretations], have [dominated] juridical systems of important Islamic states."³⁵ To remain in power, current governments have precluded the traditional and normal evolution of Islam. Consequently, globalization has hit Muslim societies hard: they "are open enough to be disrupted by modernity, but not so open that they can ride the wave."³⁶ The extremist message resonates precisely because it invites "men to participate...[in] contrast to a political culture that reduces citizens to spectators and asks them to leave things to their rulers."³⁷ Just as the timely appearance of Islam in the seventh century served as a catalyst to unite Arab tribes, Islamic extremism gives many Muslims both an excuse for the failure of their societies to reap the

benefits of their wealth and hope for an Islamic utopia. The lack of study and systematic analysis of Islamic interpretations serve only to sustain the current dictatorial and tyrannical governments and fuel extremism. Non-extremist Muslims must find ways to marginalize the extremist message by offering a collaborative and promising alternative message that enables all Islamic societies to enjoy the benefits of modernity and retain their faith.

The reality is Islamic extremists cannot turn back the clock on globalization and modernity, and the Western world will not assimilate into Islam. Unfortunately, extremists will seek to continue their campaign of terrorist violence because they perceive the West as interfering in their efforts to re-establish a legitimate caliphate. Ultimately, they will fail because they lack both legitimacy for their violence³⁸ and an enduring message. A 2006 Pew Global Attitudes Poll found that, with the exception of Nigeria, the majority of Muslims do not believe that violence against civilian targets is justified in “defense” of Islam.³⁹ In addition, the extremist’s message is one of intolerance and violence and promises an unrealistic and unattainable future. As one scholar puts it, the “prospects for [extremist] movements are gloomy unless they can articulate a contemporary Islamic theory on state and society that provides for freedom of thought, political opposition, the transition of power, plebiscites, parliamentarianism, freedom of faith, and individual and collective human rights—especially those of women.”⁴⁰ This can happen only if extremists stop the violence and transform, like the Irish Republican Army, into a legitimate political opposition. Everything about the current extremist movements leads one to conclude they are incapable of transformation and will fail. However, their terror campaign comes at great cost to both the Islamic and Western worlds. Moderate Muslims are key to mitigating these costs and reconciling modernity and Islam.

The Road to Moderation

Westerners expect Muslims to remove the extreme cancer that has invaded their societies just as politically and socially moderate Christians put an end to the cycle of racial superiority and slavery in the Western world. Western public and political discourse on Islamic terrorism is rife with appeals to moderate Muslims to condemn Islamic extremists and their alleged hijacking of the Islamic religion. If the extremists have hijacked Islam, they have done so with ill-conceived assistance from acquiescent Islamic governments and many Muslims who fail to appreciate the urgent need for a reinterpretation of the Qur’an.⁴¹ A Pew Research Center study found that a majority of Muslims do not see a struggle between Islamic modernizers and fundamentalists. However, the study also found that those who do see a struggle tend to identify with the modernizers.⁴² This seems to be a cause for hope, but we must remember that

it is impossible to fix an unseen problem. Do so-called moderate Muslims really exist as a viable faction? Do Muslims hear a call for moderation or capitulation in Western discourse? What constitutes a moderate Muslim? Not surprisingly, Western and Muslim experts differ in their responses to such queries.

Western experts generally characterize moderate Muslims as those opposed to extreme political and social views and actions. Ariel Cohen, senior research fellow of the Heritage Foundation, maintains that “moderate Muslims respect the right of individuals to disagree, to worship Allah the way they [choose], or not to worship - and even not to believe.”⁴³ John Esposito, founding director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, postulates that the human tendency is to define moderate Muslims in terms of what is normal to “us.”⁴⁴ If the behavior is moderate according to American standards, then the Muslim individual who exhibits the same or similar behavior is moderate. He further concludes that the judgment depends largely on the political or religious position of the individual making the judgment. Esposito believes many Americans use a litmus test to identify Islamic moderates and extremists based on their positions with regard to American foreign policy on Iraq or Palestine/Israel.⁴⁵ Graham Fuller, former Vice-Chair of the Central Intelligence Agency’s National Intelligence Council, asserts that moderate Muslims believe “in democracy, tolerance, a non-violent approach to politics, and equitable treatment of women at the legal and social levels.”⁴⁶ Fuller agrees with Esposito that Americans often apply an unfair litmus test for moderate Muslims. He argues that an American litmus test that requires moderate Muslims not to be critical of Israel cannot be met by any serious Muslim thinkers in the Middle East.⁴⁷

Muslim experts vary considerably in their characterization of moderate Muslims. Abid Ullah Jan, a member of the Canadian think tank Independent Center for Strategic Studies and Analyses, insists that the entire debate on moderate Muslims is political, not academic or religious. He views the debate as part of an extremist, albeit non-violent, tendency in the United States.⁴⁸ He believes this U.S. extremism is only concerned with the self-interest and promotion of Israel and is “directed at neutralizing [the] preconceived threat” of Islam. According to Jan, followers of this extremism regard as moderates only those who “publicly reject the Qur’an as the final manifesto of God,” who renounce “key parts of the Qur’an,” and who acquiesce to “unquestioning support for Israel.”⁴⁹ M. A. Muqtedar Khan, Assistant Professor at the University of Delaware, claims that Muslims generally do not like “the terms *moderate*, *progressive*, or *liberal*” because they are associated with individuals who sold out politically to the other side. Others insist that there is no “*moderate* or *radical* Islam; there is *only one Islam*: All other expressions are falsehoods espoused by...hypocrites or...apostates.”⁵⁰ Khan insists the

moderate label should refer to a person's intellectual positions, not politics. He surmises that moderate Muslims are "reflective, self-critical, pro-democracy and pro-human rights, and closet secularists." They differ from radical Muslims in their methods and basic openness to a modern interpretation of Islam.⁵¹

Khan offers a useful definition of moderate Muslims—focusing on their methods to achieve political and social change and their preference for interpreting Islam. Cohen, Esposito, Fuller, and Khan collectively provide a typical modern understanding of a moderate as non-violent, tolerant, pro-democracy, and accepting of a degree of secularism. For Muslim populations long denied a state-centric, secular democracy, these are not easily adapted or acquired behaviors. They are, however, required for Muslims and Westerners to co-exist peacefully in a modern global society.

While both Western and Muslim experts speak of Muslims as either extremist or moderate, most ignore the role of fundamentalists. The fundamentalist can be a devout Muslim who supports the establishment of an Islamic state as divine will, but does not espouse violence as a means to achieve the caliphate. Many such devout Muslims believe it is possible to live and commune with non-Islamic societies without an obligation to convert them to Islam. These Muslims could help to formulate a more favorable interpretation of Islam for the 21st century.

Moderation has both a political and religious aspect. The term moderate is "used in the West to serve different [political] agendas." However, Fuller's pronouncement that "the West cannot be the arbiter of what constitutes Muslim moderation"⁵² ignores the reality that Muslims are part of a larger global community; so their actions, like those of Western entities, are judged in part by the members of that global society. Yet, Muslims who choose to live in liberal, religiously pluralistic societies face difficult challenges. The Pew Research Center found that Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries experience conflict with being a devout Muslim.⁵³ The exact source of this conflict is unclear, but it is probably related to the freedom that makes Western society attractive to Muslims. A key religious attribute of modern Muslims must be their acceptance that "all religions are equal before the state," which is not the same as saying that "all [religions] possess equal intrinsic validity."⁵⁴ Christians, Jews and other religions would each find such a position offensive. Tolerance, as advocated in the Qur'an, is a potential revelation of how Islam can co-exist with other religious beliefs.

Many Muslims construe moderate as a political label applicable to those who acquiesce to U. S. foreign policy. While there is a historical basis for this, today moderates align with U. S. policy because it serves their national interests and political and religious convictions. National interests and, to some degree, American exceptionalism guides U. S. policy. Since its

inception, the United States has believed in its providential destiny. Belief in the rightness of its actions makes it difficult, if not impossible, for Americans to understand how anyone can think differently. This is a basic tendency of American culture. Muslims must understand Western ethno-centrism because while it may be open to negotiation and accommodation, it is unlikely to change. Muslims must also understand that “religious freedom in a pluralistic society...means subordinating the demands of religious conscience to secular laws or values whenever [they] collide in the public square.”⁵⁵ A pluralistic global society, to be successful, cannot permit the beliefs of one particular religion to overshadow the beliefs of other religions or those who choose not to believe.

Yes, moderate Muslims do exist and so do fundamentalist Muslims and extremist Muslims. While some Muslims will disagree, all visible signs point to a struggle between Islamic extremists and moderates. Moderate Muslims are generally tolerant in their political and social agendas; they embrace modernity and interpret Islam in a way to successfully cope with the challenges of modernity. They accept both modernity and Islam, rejecting neither. The defining debate on how to accommodate Islam and modernity must occur between moderates and fundamentalists. Islamic extremists and leaders of Muslim nations and Western countries cannot settle the matter. Muslim rulers have used Islam to control their populations at the expense of modernity. Islamic revelation holds the key to bringing the umma into modernity. The moderates and fundamentalists must find common ground in their commitment to non-violence and tolerance. Together they can sustain Islamic faith while preventing the extremists from turning Islam into a religious pariah.

The Road to Modernity

The religious and political struggle among Islamic extremists and moderate Muslims highlights the need for reform in the Muslim umma (community of believers). Muslims interpret reform in one of two ways--either “reform of society to bring it closer to Islamic norms and values” or “questioning the extant understanding of Islam...to articulate a reformed understanding of it.”⁵⁶ Reform involves the interpretation of Islam's divine texts, usually through the process of “ijtihād” (independent thinking). Ijtihad allows independent thought and reasoning to articulate Islamic law on issues where textual sources are silent. Within Islam, ijtihad provides an opening for the discussion of Islam and modernity.⁵⁷

The Qur'an, considered by Muslims as the true word of God, prescribes the code of life that Muslims must follow. No one suggests interpreting it as anything other than the truth for all Muslims whether extremist, fundamentalist, or moderate. Other texts, however, are open to

interpretation. The Sunna is the oral tradition that recounts the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed; the Hadith is a body of literature that interprets the deeds and words of the Prophet Mohammed.⁵⁸ The Sunna and Hadith are used to address situations on which the Qur'an is silent. The shari'ah (Islamic law) is a set of rules based Qur'anic verses.⁵⁹

Opinions vary on exactly which Islamic texts are open to interpretation and how Muslims should interpret them to accommodate modernity. All recognize, however, that the process of *ijtihad* precedes reform. Syrian engineer Muhammad Shahrur suggests that the shari'ah should be considered a "general guiding umbrella of the rulings, injunctions, and principles mentioned in the Koran and Sunna...[and]...projected forward over time and space." With respect to the Hadith, Shahrur notes that it was "assembled and written by jurists" according to "legal proofs and reasoning." He proposes that today's Muslims do what their predecessors did: They should conduct their "own reading of the Koran and Sunna," and develop the shari'ah based on "supreme ideals (ethics and values)...[and] rites and rituals (centerpiece of belief)." Shahrur does recognize Muslims' difficulty in appreciating "the urgent necessity of a second contemporary reading...guided by the imperatives of the world today."⁶⁰ Yet he believes this is the only way to "posit a shari'ah...not in conflict with civil society and pluralism."⁶¹

Mohammed Khalil, Minister of Justice and Foreign Affairs of the Sudan, proposes an approach similar to Shahrur's. He begins with the declaration that the first compilation of the Hadith appeared 150 years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed and that early Muslim jurists spoke only of the Sunna, not the Hadith, as "reflecting the purpose and spirit of the Prophet." He further reports that studies have found some of the Hadiths are "forgeries dating to Islam's fourth and fifth centuries." He concurs with Shahrur that early jurists derived rules from their overall understanding of the Qur'an. Later, however, the Hadith became the preferred source over the Sunna; then jurists began the practice of deriving new rules only from existing rules (precedence). By Islam's fourth century, the exercise of personal judgment was forbidden and the gates of *ijtihad* (spirit of Islamic thought) closed.⁶² Khalil suggests that Muslims look to the second Caliph, Omar Ibn Al Khattab, for inspiration on how to handle modern situations. "On several occasions, Omar refrained from enforcing Koranic law when its application would have resulted in public hardship."⁶³ For Khalil, Omar's example shows "the potential for the Koran to be interpreted in a manner more compatible with modern democratic norms."⁶⁴

Khan agrees with both Shahrur and Khalil on the use of *ijtihad*, but he goes further by relating *ijtihad* with research in "science, rationalism, human experience, and critical thinking."⁶⁵ He recommends that Muslims look to their ancestors for guidance on bridging science and religion. Khan also suggests that Islam and Muslims have nothing to fear from the "value of

knowledge and the appreciation of science and philosophical inquiry.” However, as long as the majority of Muslims equate Islam with the shari’ah, “closed minds will never open”.⁶⁶

Jan counters that ijihad can occur only within an Islamic state and that Muslims must first agree on the stated problem prior to action. Under these circumstances, ijihad is a formidable goal, since the majority of Muslims living in Muslim countries do not believe a conflict exists between Islam and modernity. Jan also cautions that ijihad--contrary to the presumptions of Shahrur, Khalil, and Khan--may not always lead to a moderate or modern conclusion.⁶⁷ For Muslims, Islam is a system, a “complete code of life...not just a religion or a set of rituals.”⁶⁸ Conventional wisdom holds that most Muslims would not sacrifice their faith for the sake of embracing a modern institution like liberal democracy.⁶⁹ This being the case, Muslims must forge their own way to participate in modern society, a way that allows them to continue their faith and provides the same latitude to the rest of the world.

Can true adherents to any religion stand by the claims of their own faith and at the same time accept the legitimacy of other religions?⁷⁰ The extremist responds with a resounding “no,” but the modernist with an unequivocal “yes.” To the extremist, modernity is nothing more than secularism; to the modernist, extremism is intolerant and counter-productive. Moderate Muslims recognize the value of ijihad for sociopolitical change; military jihad (holy war, struggle) is their last option. For radical Muslims, military jihad is their only option.⁷¹

As moderate Muslims suggest, Islamic re-interpretation through the process of ijihad is necessary if Islam is to progress in the modern world. It leads to reform of Islamic societies, doing away with the injustice of the 20th century and creating a modern and just umma for the 21st century. How and when reform occurs will depend largely on moderate Muslims who truly care about the future of Islam and are the true modernizers. In the hands of moderate Muslims, revolution, legislation, and consensus become not just harsh principles used to dominate societies, but tools for reconciling Islam with modernity. Many believe moderate Muslims are the silent majority. If successful reform is to take place, they must not remain silent-Moderate Muslims must speak out and seek to change the current path of Islam, accepting that the new path may be through collaboration with the non-violent fundamentalist.

What the United States Can Do

The fate of Islamic countries is inextricably linked with the Western world. It is unlikely that they can successfully navigate their path to modernity unassisted. Because of its global leadership, the United States can facilitate the umma's acceptance of the moderate message. The United States can and should use its power and resources to help Muslims marginalize the

extremist voices within their midst and elevate the voices of non-violence and tolerance. Solutions to the problems that plague Islamic countries will not come easily or quickly, but U. S. efforts should focus on areas with the greatest potential for successful change, both in its own behavior and in that of Islamic countries. Recognition and mitigation of U. S. behavior that may impact negatively on its relationship with Muslims is a necessary first step. Further, U.S. aid to education and press reforms in Islamic countries are vital to propel Islamic societies into the 21st century.

Western society, founded on Judeo-Christian principles, must understand that these principles are so enmeshed in secular laws and values that Westerners are unaware of the religious foundations of their secular beliefs. However, non Judeo-Christians can readily see that the Western separation of the state from religion is more a secular myth than a constitutional principle. The United States should in no way yield its principles and values, but it should work with the Muslim peoples to find common understanding to facilitate communication and action. Countries are not all created equal, but the United States should work harder to be more considerate and consistent in its dealings with Islamic countries. Reform efforts must not be limited to those countries not outwardly friendly to the United States. "Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities."⁷² With this in mind, the recommendations that follow apply to all Islamic countries.

After pumping billions of dollars in aid to Islamic countries around the world, the United States has seen little progress toward democracy. The United States must recognize that Western-style democracy is not attainable and in some cases not desired, at least in the near future, in Islamic states. The road to modernity occurs gradually, and Islamic countries must travel through the same societal development process as Western nations. U. S. aid to Islamic countries must be concentrated in areas with the greatest potential for reform and contingent on real political and social change. It should focus on three areas: the economy, education, and the development of democratic values and institutions.

Most of the economic aid sent to Islamic countries props up authoritarian governments and their elitist supporters; very little trickles down to the communities and citizens who actually need help. The current handling of economic aid taunts poor and weak societies who, through the dynamic of globalization, see the rest of the world living quite differently. Muslims find themselves looking for both a savior to propel them from their meager circumstances and a villain to blame for those circumstances, making them extremely vulnerable to the extremist message. Economic aid should not go directly to Muslim governments; but rather, it should

“fund sustainable projects through various international agencies and non-governmental organisations.”⁷³ One example would be micro loans, which are small (averaging \$200), no-collateral loans made to poor people, usually to start businesses.⁷⁴ Micro loans promote initiative, ownership, and entrepreneurship in an environment that has not recently appreciated these traits. Ownership and entrepreneurship give people a sense of pride in and responsibility towards their community, making them less likely to destroy or accept the meaningless destruction of that which they worked hard to create. Such targeted economic aid gives individual Muslims, and in effect the umma, the reasons and will to resist extremism.

Educational reform is vital to the future of Islamic countries. Muslim schools “mainly teach Koranic studies...laced with poisonous teachings against the United States and the Jews.”⁷⁵ These schools are reminiscent of *The King and I*, a movie about a schoolteacher who leaves London to work in the small country of Siam. Upon arrival, she receives a world map to use in her lessons. The map shows the country of Siam covering more than half of the world, with the rest of the countries miniaturized. Much Muslim education paints a similarly distorted view of the world. But unlike Siam, it indoctrinates the next generation of terrorists. The United States should work with other Western nations to provide direct educational assistance to Islamic countries that moderate their course content and revise their textbooks for historical accuracy and objectivity.⁷⁶ Muslims--and anyone else--who are taught daily to blame, hate, and kill will internalize and eventually act on these behaviors. The United States simply cannot stand idly by and watch while the next generation of terrorists trains to destroy it. Properly educated, Muslim students of today can become tomorrow's moderates and advocates for Islamic reform.

Democratic values like a free press, political opposition, impartial judiciary and human rights are vital to 21st century modernity. First, a free and independent press gives people the courage to speak their minds and demand changes in their government and community. Most of the Islamic press are “official or semi-official organs of their governments,”⁷⁷ which often means that opposition voices are harshly or brutally quieted. The United States should pressure Islamic governments to permit the free expression of opinion from all viewpoints and to guarantee no retaliation against those who choose to speak out. Along with a free press, the development of opposition “political parties”⁷⁸ is necessary to counter authoritarianism in Islamic countries. Some countries, like Egypt, actually permit elections but they are of little value when only one name is on the ballot or the opposition cannot publicly challenge the ruler without retribution. The United States and other Western nations should also work with Islamic countries to develop a “fair and impartial judiciary.”⁷⁹ Whatever form governance takes in Islamic countries, an independent judiciary is necessary to ensure the rights of the citizens and

the stability of the government. Finally, individual human rights “should be enshrined constitutionally as a prerequisite for [good governance],”⁸⁰ so the United States and other nations should apply pressure on Islamic governments to prevent abuse.

Globalization makes it impossible for the weaknesses of Islamic societies not to impact the rest of the world. The road to Western-style democracy is long and not currently attainable, but the establishment of basic liberal and democratic values today can lead to greater reforms. Such progress, combined with education and aid reforms, can assist moderate Muslims in their efforts to silence the extremists, take back Islam, and build a modern society that retains its faith and enjoys the benefits of modernity.

Conclusion

Moderate Muslims are clearly not a myth. They do exist, but not in the traditional Western understanding of the term “moderate.” Yes, moderate Muslims are tolerant, non-violent and somewhat liberal. But they are generally less secular than Westerners might prefer. They are also vital, though not the panacea, for resolving the issues confronting Islam and Islamic societies as well as the Global War on Terror. Muslims are confronted with a choice between extremism and modernity. The road to extremism is a dead end. It leads only to conflict and continued dysfunction in Islamic societies. Muslims must ask themselves how they reconcile extremist beliefs and actions with the Qur’anic principle that does not allow compulsion in religion. They must also ask themselves “If people are free to think seriously about religion, is [it] irrational to argue that they must choose Islam[?]”⁸¹ The road to modernity presents a challenge to both fundamentalists and moderates. The goal of the fundamentalists is to respond to the challenges of modernity in ways that do not conflict with traditional Islam. Moderates appreciate and accept modernity and seek to accommodate change through an appropriate interpretation of traditional Qur’anic tenets and principles. Acknowledging that they both desire to serve Islam, moderates and fundamentalists must work together to combat extremism. Extremism threatens both Islam and the West.

The United States can and should work with moderates to achieve success in Islamic societies. The United States should not seek to impose American democracy, but rather to promote basic democratic values as a foundation for modern nation states. The United States should pursue its legitimate interests but show respect for the Islamic perspective. U. S. policy should focus on how to target aid to Islamic countries, and how to attach set conditions for economic, educational and political development aid that can help the umma find success in modernity. However, the United States can only help. Moderates and fundamentalists must

speak out and mobilize themselves to overcome the plague of extremism. Then the umma can forge a new and adaptive road to a promising future for all Muslims.

Endnotes

¹ A key premise for Star Trek, a fictional television series, was the Prime Directive. Under the Prime Directive, Federation personnel could not interfere with the healthy development of alien life and culture. Interference included the introduction of superior knowledge, force or technology. The Prime Directive appeals to the belief that societal cultures are equal and should not be changed by outsiders; available from <http://www.70disco.com/startrek/primedir.htm>; Internet; accessed 3 February 2007.

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³ "Extremist." *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/extremist>; Internet; accessed 13 March 2007.

⁴ "Moderate." *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/moderate>; Internet; accessed 13 March 2007.

⁵ Muhammad Shahrur, "A Call for Reformation," trans. in Bahman Baktiari and Augustus R. Norton "Voices within Islam: Four Perspectives on Tolerance and Diversity," *Current History* 104 (January 2005): 39.

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⁷ Jonathon W. Moses, "The Umma of Democracy," *Security Dialogue* 37 (December 2006): 496 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; Internet; accessed 24 February 2007.

⁸ Jude P. Dougherty, "Indestructible Islam," *Modern Age* 44 (Fall 2002): 326 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; Internet; accessed 11 January 2007.

⁹ Ibid., 326.

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¹¹ Dougherty, 326.

¹² Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy, and the Islamic State* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 25.

¹³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷ Louay Safi, *Tensions and Transitions in the Muslim World* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2003), 62-64.

¹⁸ Shahrur, 40.

¹⁹ Mohammed Ibrahim Khalil, "Islam and the Challenges of Modernity," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 5 (Winter 2004): 99 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; Internet; accessed 11 January 2007.

²⁰ Shahrur, 40.

²¹ Fareed Zakaria, "Islam, Democracy, and Constitutional Liberalism," *Political Science Quarterly* 119 (Spring 2004): 3-4 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; Internet; accessed 11 January 2007.

²² Moussalli, 33.

²³ Ibid., 33-34.

²⁴ Ibid., 31.

²⁵ Ibid., 44.

²⁶ Christopher Clausen, "America's Design for Tolerance," *The Wilson Quarterly* 31 (Winter 2007): 26 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; Internet; accessed 1 February 2007.

²⁷ Moussalli, 35.

²⁸ Ibid., 35-36.

²⁹ Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Mushin Khan, *Interpretation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, trans. Maktaba Dar-us-Salam (Riyadh, 1994), 66.

³⁰ Moussalli, 38.

³¹ Ibid., 34.

³² Ibid., 34.

³³ Ibid., 35.

³⁴ Ibid., 41-42.

³⁵ Khalil, 100.

³⁶ Zakaria, 11.

³⁷ Ibid., 12.

³⁸ Peter Willets, "Transnational Actors and International Organizations in Global Politics," *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 3d ed., eds. John Baylis & Steve Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 434. Willets' article states that "legitimacy in violence increases in four ways: when a group appears to have widespread support within their constituency (*as Islamists appear to have, but is belied by the Pew poll results*); when political channels have been closed to them (*Islamists never sought redress through political channels*); when the target government is exceptionally oppressive (not true of targeted western governments); and when the violence is aimed at military targets without civilian victims."

³⁹ Pew Research Center, "The Pew Global Attitudes Project: Conflicting Views in a Divided World 2006," 4; available from <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/DividedWorld2006.pdf>; Internet; accessed 20 December 2006.

⁴⁰ Shahrur, 41.

⁴¹ Ibid., 43.

⁴² Pew Research Center, 23.

⁴³ Cohen, 2.

⁴⁴ John L. Esposito, "Moderate Muslims: A Mainstream of Modernists, Islamists, Conservatives, and Traditionalists," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22 (Summer 2005): 11; available from <http://iiit.org/AJISSFinal/ALLPDF/V22N3summer2005.pdf>; Internet; accessed 20 December 2006.

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⁴⁶ Graham E. Fuller, "Freedom and Security: Necessary Conditions for Moderation," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22 (Summer 2005): 21; available from <http://iiit.org/AJISSFinal/ALLPDF/V22N3summer2005.pdf>; Internet; accessed 20 December 2006.

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⁴⁸ Abid Ullan Jan, "Moderate Islam: A Product of American Extremism," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22 (Summer 2005): 29; available from <http://iiit.org/AJISSFinal/ALLPDF/V22N3summer2005.pdf>; Internet; accessed 20 December 2006.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁰ Muqtadar Khan, "Islamic Democracy and Moderate Muslims: The Straight Path Runs through the Middle," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22 (Summer 2005): 40; available from <http://iiit.org/AJISSFinal/ALLPDF/V22N3summer2005.pdf>; Internet; accessed 20 December 2006.

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⁵³ Pew Research Center, 3.

⁵⁴ Clausen, 27.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁶ Khan, 45.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁸ Khalil, 99.

⁵⁹ Shahrur, 40.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁶¹ Ibid., 42.

⁶² Khalil, 99.

⁶³ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁵ Khan, 44.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁷ Abid Ullah Jan, "Though Muslims Exist Today, Islam Does Not," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22 (Summer 2005): 70; available from [http://iiit.org/AJISS Final/ALLPDF/V22N3summer2005.pdf](http://iiit.org/AJISS_Final/ALLPDF/V22N3summer2005.pdf); Internet; accessed 20 December 2006.

⁶⁸ Jan, "Moderate Islam: A Product of American Extremism," 35.

⁶⁹ Khalil, 103.

⁷⁰ Clausen, 28.

⁷¹ Khan, 41.

⁷² George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002), 3.

⁷³ Alon Ben-Meir, "Challenges to Democracy in the Arab and Muslim World," *The Political Quarterly* 77 (July-September 2006): 330 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; Internet; accessed 11 February 2007.

⁷⁴ Stefan Lovgren, "Nobel Peace Prize Goes to Micro-Loan Pioneers," 13 October 2006; available from <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/10/061013-nobel-peace.html>; Internet; accessed 13 March 2007.

⁷⁵ Ben-Meir, 332.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 332.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 331.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 331.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 332.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 332.

⁸¹ Mohsen Kadivar, "Freedom of Thought and Religion," trans. in Bahman Baktiari and Augustus R. Norton "Voices within Islam: Four Perspectives on Tolerance and Diversity," *Current History* 104 (January 2005): 44.