

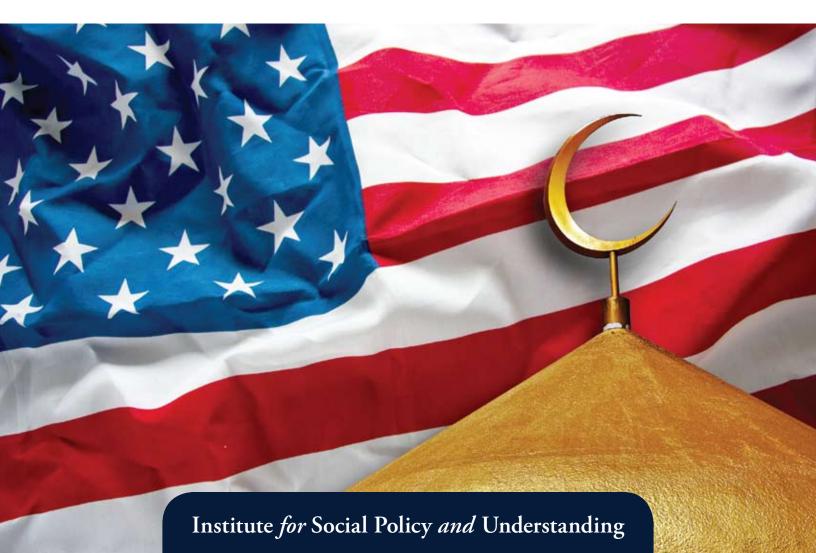


ISPU

The United States & Political Islamism:

From Demobilization to Deradicalization?

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Executive Summary

slamists are too important to be left without a well-crafted American strategy. Some are ready to use violence against American targets and interests; others have renounced violence and are ready to compete for office within the legal boundaries of their polities. "Free" parliamentary elections in most Muslim countries have led to a wave of Islamist victories during the past decade. If truly free and fair elections were to be conducted in most of these countries, Islamists would achieve undeniable gains that might give them a majority of parliamentary seats or at least enable them to be a strong opposition with a real voice in shaping the public agenda.

This study seeks to understand how the Obama administration should formulate a multi-faceted and multi-layered policy toward these different Islamist groups and formations. The most illustrative analogy to describe what al-Qa'eda affiliates accomplished on September 11th is that they penetrated this country's political nervous system. Consequently, the Bush administration behaved like an elephant irritated by ants in its ears and engaged in self-defeating, short-sighted, and ill-defined policies toward friends and enemies alike. The Obama administration's greatest challenge is to remove these ants by reconsidering the previous administration's one-size-fits-all generalizations about the complex and multi-layered phenomenon of political Islam. "Political Islam" denotes a set of political ideologies and movements holding that Islam is not only a religion but also a political system and its teachings should be preeminent in all facets of society including the process of legislation.

Washington developed a strategy to deal with violent Islamists; however, it neglected to develop a cohesive strategy to deal with the nonviolent Islamists who make up the majority of Islamists. The Bush administration's strategy to undermine terrorism and violence relied on military engagement (assuming that it is a war in which the United States sought to undermine violence by engaging in a preemptive violence) and procedural democratization. Such an approach failed to engage Islamists in a constructive dialogue and therefore was – and remains – ineffective as regards combating extremism or mitigating violence in the long run.

The Obama administration needs to devise a corrective strategy to address the unintended high cost of this earlier policy. The challenge now is to move from a strategy of demobilization (i.e., anti-violence) to one of deradicalization (i.e., anti-extremism).

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Are All Islamists Terrorists?

or any meaningful engagement with Islamism as a political movement to occur, violent and nonviolent factions, or local and transnational organizations, must be differentiated. Therefore, American policy should analyze the Islamist organizations' attitude toward violence and the scale of their agendas. This analysis should be done from the perspective of the local debates about violence in Muslim societies since violent Islamists do not have the same definition of "violence" as Washington does. Violent Islamists, and even Muslim secularists, do not appreciate the justifications made by Israel when killing Palestinians in Gaza or Americans killing Iraqis or Afghanis as collateral and unintentional killing. In the minds of so many Arabs and Muslims, there real terrorists are Americans and Israelis. The following table posits a potential operational typology that can serve as a starting point for discussion.¹

Table 1: Typology of Islamic Formations

	VIOLENT	NONVIOLENT
Global (in principles; local in operations)	al-Qa'eda	Al-Tahrir and the Muslim Brotherhood
Regional	Hezbollah (Lebanon, Syria, Iran) Hamas (Gaza, Syria, Iran) Taliban (Afghanistan and Pakistan)	Salafi and Shi'a movements in the Persian Gulf area
Local	The Islamic Salvation Front (Algeria) Jama'a Islamyya (Egypt) Islamist Rebels (Chechnya) The Union of Islamic Courts (Somalia)	Nahdatul Ulama (Indonesia) Parti-Islam se Mayalisa Yemeni Congregation for Reform, AKP (Turkey) The Party of Justice and Development (Morocco)
U.S. Tactics	Identifying, locating, and destroying terrorist organizations and individuals	Selective engagement and deradicalization of Islamist through careful democracy promotion and peace-building

¹ For more details, see Patricia D. Netzley and Moataz Fattah, Encyclopedia of Terrorism (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2007).

The main distinction in this table is that of nonviolent Islamists who advocate incremental evolutionary change and those who believe in a radical, violent reorganization of society.

Clearly, not all Islamists have global agendas. Local Islamists seek to reform their own country, whereas regional groups work within a specific geopolitical sphere (e.g., Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in the case of Hamas; Lebanon and northern Israel for Hezbollah; and Afghanistan and Pakistan for Taliban associates who are not affiliated with al-Qa'eda). Fawaz Gerges calls these groups "religious nationalists" who have local, rather than cosmic, objectives, a factor that differentiates them from transnational jihadist networks like al-Qa'eda.²

Parallel to these violent organizations are the nonviolent Islamist groups illustrated in the second column. "Nonviolent" here means that the organization has refrained from using violence against its own society or government for twenty-five years. None of these groups and formations appear on the U.S. State Department's "Foreign Terrorist Organization" list. In other words, "the organization's terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S, nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States." ³

This table contradicts the naïve, albeit prevalent, assumption that political Islam is inherently violent. Extremist transnational organizations that purport to act politically on behalf of Islam, such as al-Qa'eda, are fringe groups that, while they capture the West's attention with their dramatic acts of terror, are marginal within Islamist movements and irrelevant to the day-to-day political struggles within Muslim countries.⁴

² Fawaz A. Gerges, The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, 8 April 2008, http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/terrorism/state/103392.pdf.

⁴ Mohammed Ayoob, The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

There are violent Islamists whose goals do not extend beyond the borders of their own borders, such as Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, Egypt's Jama'a Islamyya, Chechnya's Islamist rebels, and Somalia's Union of Islamic Courts. Parallel to these violent formations are nonviolent Islamist formations, defined as those meeting the main criterion of not using violence against their own societies or governments for the past twenty-five years. None of them is designated as "Foreign Terrorist Organization" according to American or international organizations.

The nonviolent Islamist groups mentioned in table 1 operate in largely secular and non-democratic political systems. Most of them keep a low profile when facing resistance from the ruling party and then bounce back politically when autocracy liberalizes under domestic or international pressure. They refrain from violence, despite the odds that encourage them to use arms against repressive rulers and their foreign allies. Most have learned that violence is counterproductive to achieving their political objectives, since authoritarian regimes generally have well-equipped and trained armies.⁵

Local, regional, and global Islamist groups hold separate agendas but can unite for a common cause. For example Egypt's Islamic Jihad, frustrated by its inability to overthrow Mubarak's secular autocratic regime, joined with transnational groups to target the "far enemy": the West in general, and the United States in particular. Such groups believe that repressive, anti-Islamic regimes are kept in power by Western states.

When a regional Islamist group joins forces with a global campaign, it is often a tacit admission that it has not achieved the desired results where it matters most—at home. For instance, after two decades of an ineffective violent insurgency, Islamic Jihad first struggled to maintain popular support and then became an al-Qa'eda affiliate.

Assuming that all Islamists are violent and have a global agenda is a strategic mistake that will lead to ineffective policy. The Bush administration understood that Islamism is a multi-layered phenomenon but failed to grasp just how many divisions exist within it. As a result, its counteroffensive was misguided.

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Washington's Strategy of Demobilization

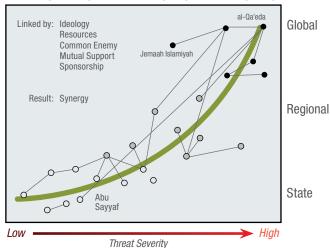
The U.S. National Strategies for Combating Terrorism (February 2003 and September 2006) outline Washington's policy for confronting violent Islamist groups in the "war on terror." The 2003 strategy, which identified three levels of terrorists and terrorist organizations (see figure 1, next page), differs substantially from table 1 in that it fails to consider nonviolent Islamist groups. Table 1's first level consists of the "state" terrorist organizations that operate primarily within a single country. For American policymakers, such local groups do not pose an immediate threat; however, they may become a liability if their ambitions remain unchecked. At the next level are terrorist organizations that operate regionally. Terrorist organizations with a global reach comprise the third, and most dangerous, category. According to the Bush administration's War on Terror, these three types of organizations are linked together in two ways (depicted in Figure 1's connected circles). First, they can cooperate directly by sharing intelligence, personnel, expertise, resources, and safe havens. Second, they can support each other in less direct ways, such as by promoting the same ideological agenda and reinforcing each other's efforts to cultivate a favorable international image for their "cause." By capitalizing on the very technological advances that the United States uses, terrorist organizations learn and share information garnered from our web sites, exploit vulnerabilities within our critical infrastructure, and communicate across the same internet paths we use each day.

According to this strategy, the policy's goal is not to eradicate terrorism, but to return it to the "criminal domain." In order to reduce these groups' level, scope, severity, and capability, the United States adopted a four-part strategy known as "The 4 D's," which comprised of:

- (1) Defeating terrorists and their organizations. The operational goal is to identify, locate, and destroy them.
- (2) Denying sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists; ending state sponsorship of terrorism; establishing and maintaining an international standard of accountability for terrorist actions; strengthening and sustaining international efforts designed to fight terrorism; conducting operations to interdict and disrupt material support for terrorists; and, finally, eliminating sanctuaries and havens for terrorists.
- (3) Diminishing the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit, partnering with the international community to strengthen weak states and prevent the emergence or reemergence of terrorism, and winning the war of ideas.

TRANSNATIONAL TERRORIST NETWORKS

Figure 1. U.S. National Strategies for Combating Terrorism (February 2003).



(4) Defending American citizens and interests at home and abroad; implementing the National Strategy for Homeland Security; enhancing measures formulated to ensure the integrity, reliability, and availability of critical physical and information-based infrastructures at home and abroad; and ensuring an integrated incident management capability.

Another dimension was added in the U.S. National Strategy for Combating Terrorism of 2006, one that was pertinent to the country's commitment to advancing effective democracies as the long-term antidote to the ideology of terrorism. Several criticisms have been made of the overall American strategy, starting with its description as a "war on terror." On August 6, 2004, President George W. Bush himself said: "We actually misnamed the War on Terror. It ought to be called the struggle against ideological extremists who do not believe in free societies, and who happen to use terror as a weapon."

David Miliband, British former foreign minister David Miliband said the correct response to the terrorist threat is to champion law and human rights. The phrase War on Terror, informally dropped from use by the UK government several years ago, "implied a belief that the correct response to the terrorist threat was primarily a military one—to track down and kill a hardcore [group] of extremists." Calling for groups to be treated as separate entities with differing motivations, Miliband argued there is no "simple binary struggle between moderates and extremists, or good and evil," and treating them as such was a mistake.⁷

President Barack Obama ordered that the phrase War on Terror not be used in official discourse in May 2010. In his inaugural address on 20 January 2009 he said: "Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred." In March 2009, the Defense Department officially changed the name of operation from "Global War on Terror" to "Overseas Contingency Operation," and the Obama administration requested that Pentagon staff members avoid using "war on terror."

⁶ George W. Bush Remarks, Washington Post, 1 September, 2004; http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A49035-2004Aug31.html 7 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7829946.stm.

The United States should be particularly careful not to characterize all violent Islamists as inherently anti-American. In 2002 Richard Armitage, then U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, described Hezbollah as the "A-team terrorists," suggesting thereby that al-Qa'eda may be the "B-Team." This misleading portrayal disregards Hezbollah's documented activities over the past two decades, all of which demonstrate that it is not involved in a global fight against Western nations. Equating all violent Islamist groups with Al-Qa'eda reinforces the claim that Americans feel threatened by the Muslim world at large. This viewpoint, lacking in both respect and nuance, will unify potential enemies against the country and harm American security in the long run.

Obama may have phased out the actual term, but it will take more than semantics for Washington to revise its long-term security goals. The approach Obama inherited from Bush is insufficient, perhaps even self-defeating, if it is not coupled with a strategy that focuses on nonviolent Islamists.

Critics like Robert Hutchings have noted that American policy toward Islamists is still "reactive, threat-based and over-militarized." The country cannot fight violence unless it knows how to fight extremism. This deradicalization project requires a twofold strategy: a carefully crafted democracy promotion policy and a comprehensive peace-building policy.

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Is There a Second Life for Democracy Promotion?

Several commentators maintain that the Obama administration should stay clear of any effort to support democratic change in the Middle East. According to this argument, Bush wanted Arab democracy (a world according to John Locke) and what he got was a world according to John Hobbes. Even when Arab states do hold successful elections, the result may empower Islamist groups that are troublesome in Washington's eyes, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Iraqi Islamists, and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. The United States, it follows, would be better off not stirring that pot again anytime soon.

This position, however, is merely a reductionist view of Washington's attempts to promote Arab democratization. The Obama administration needs to promote political participation in the region without advancing unstable, unfriendly, and illiberal democracies. Obama can avoid the traps of the previous administration by pursuing the "principled pragmatism" recently expressed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton: "Sometimes we will have the most impact by publicly denouncing a government action, like the coup in Honduras or the violence in Guinea ... Other times we will be more likely to help the oppressed by engaging in tough negotiations behind closed doors, like pressing China and Russia as part of our broader agenda. In every instance, our aim will be to make a difference, not to prove a point."

To implement real change in Arab countries, Washington should keep in mind the following threats to building democracy.

Democratization and the Trap of Instability

In most Muslim countries, the ruler's authority, the regime's legitimacy, and the state's sovereignty and unity are inextricably linked. In almost every country, an abrupt shift in power would impact negatively on each element. It is relatively easy to remove unpopular autocrats; it is far more difficult to bring to power true democrats who can appease separatist tendencies. The connection between leaders and state cohesion was evident after Somalia's President Siad Barre was overthrown (1991), after the Taliban were removed from power (2001), and after Saddam Hussein was forced out of office (2003). If the United States were to press for regime change in Saudi Arabia, for instance, it would likely affect all three elements. Except

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¹⁰ Thomas Carothers, "Democracy Promotion under Obama: Finding a Way Forward," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief 77 (February 2009): 2.

¹¹ Read more at www.denverpost.com/politics/ci_13997508#ixzz0aRv0rFTj.

Figure 2: Bush Administration
Commitment to Democracy in Arab/
Muslim Countries: Principled or
Opportunistic?

for Egypt and Tunisia, which have very solid social fabrics, this analysis can be applied to most other Muslim countries.

But democracy promotion does not necessarily mean regime change. Domestic and international pressure can push Arab states to enact steady, gradual reform. The Saudi kingdom is known for having one of the Muslim world's most rigid sociopolitical systems, but in post-September 11 Saudi Arabia islah (*reform*) is on everyone's lips. Saudi officials have declared that specific steps will be undertaken to provide more public participation. Deputy Prime Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz promises real political reforms and claims that he has no respect for the notorious 99 percent reelection results of other Arab regimes, since "manipulating elections is the easiest thing the kingdom can do." 12

It is wiser to press current regimes for democratic and liberal reforms rather than force them out of power. Regime change is simply too dangerous in unstable societies. Even incremental reforms need to be conducted with caution and well-crafted institutional design after intensive local debates.

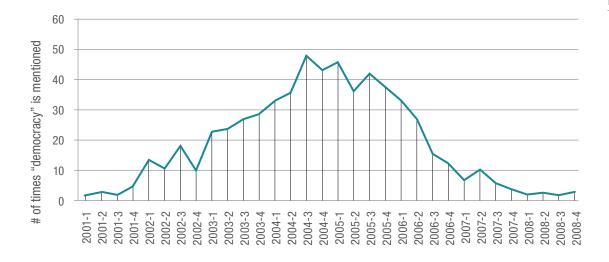
The Decoy of Duplicitous Democracy Agenda

The United States needs to live up to its ethics, for its projection of soft power and credibility depends upon its capacity to behave in accordance with its stated principles. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates argued: "Much of our national security strategy depends upon securing the cooperation of other nations, which will depend heavily on the extent to which our efforts abroad are viewed as legitimate by their publics." The key, he says, is "the steady accumulation of actions and results that build trust and credibility over time." ¹³

The Bush administration's position toward Hamas after the latter won the legislative elections of 2006, which were certified as "free and fair," severely damaged American credibility. Text-mining techniques allowed us to count the number of times top Bush administration figures and their spokespersons mentioned "democracy," "democratization," "freedom," "liberty," and "human rights" with respect to Arab/Muslim countries. The following graph tells an interesting story.

¹² Bahgat Korany and Moataz Fattah, Irreconcilable Role-Partners? Saudi Foreign Policy between the Ulama and the US, in Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (eds.), The Foreign Policies of Arab States, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008, p. 361.

¹³ Robert Gates, "Press Conference," New York Times, 15 June 2009.



As the graph shows, there is a clear fluctuation as regards Washington's verbal commitment to the cause of democracy, especially after the clear gains made by Egyptian and Palestinian Islamists during the elections of late 2005 and early 2006, respectively. This opportunistic approach can been described as a commitment to a "democracy of outcome" as opposed to a "democracy of opportunity," as it is supposed to be. Some Muslims, despite their personal affection for Obama, do not think that he has been much different.

Anecdotally, two secretaries of states adopted categorically different attitudes. Former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice's forceful call for democratic reform in the Arab world in her famous major policy speech in Cairo admitted that Washington's pursuit of stability in the Middle East at the expense of democracy had "achieved neither." That is why, "[n]ow, we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people." But this was not what her successor, Hillary Clinton, asserted during her Senate confirmation hearing on 13 January 2009: the three pillars of American foreign policy should be the "three Ds": defense, diplomacy, and development. There was no mention of democracy. As some observers have noted, during his inaugural address Barack Obama did not use the word "democracy" even once – the first president not to do so since Ronald Reagan in 1981. Similarly, he only mentioned "freedom" three times; Bush used it twenty-four times in his second inaugural address during January 2005. 16

As a result, the Arab and Muslim progressives who aspire for democracy in their countries finally understood that Washington's commitment to democracy in their countries is no more than a sham.

The Threat of Illiberal Democracy

American strategists fear that the transition from autocracy to democracy in the Middle East will bring Islamists to power. In other words, autocracy will give way to theocracy, even though the stated goal is democracy. The foundation of political participation is not deeply rooted in

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¹⁴ Condoleezza Rice, Rice calls for Mid-East democracy: Speech at the American University in Cairo. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4109902.stm, (20 June, 2005).

15 Hillary Rodham Clinton, Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Nomination Hearing to Be Secretary of State. 13 January 2009 (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2009).

¹⁶ Joshua Muravchik, "The Abandonment of Democracy," Commentary (July/August 2009). See also, for example, Glenn Kessler and Michael D. Shear, "Human Rights Activists Troubled by Administration's Approach," Washington Post, 5 May 2009; James Rubin, "The Principle of the Thing," Newsweek, 14 December 2009; and Francis Fukuyama, "What Became of the 'Freedom Agenda'?" Wall Street Journal, 10 February 2010.

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most Arab countries, and often the most organized and mobilized parties are the least liberal groups. Therefore, hasty democratization might result in the elected Islamists replacing the current fairly liberal autocracies with fairly illiberal democracies. Accordingly, promoting American-style democracy should not focus solely on elections, but on establishing the necessary constitutional framework to accommodate only those parties and individuals who are ready to endorse liberal values as stated in well-crafted constitutions.

In this regard, adherents of Washington's "principled pragmatism" should consider moving slowly away from the three dominant autocratic models in most Muslim polities, as listed below.

CONTAINING, but not eliminating, Islamists. Egypt is the best example of this model, as it features both a partial assimilation and a partial elimination without clear red lines. In essence, the Muslim Brotherhood is allowed to participate in national, syndicate, and student elections, provided that it does not win a majority of votes. If (and when) this happens, election results are manipulated or else its candidates are administratively excluded from office and sometimes arrested. This model, in which "democratic" regimes secretly and selectively manipulate election results, leads to a creditability crisis and is not productive for democratic growth.

LEGAL ASSIMILATION and political neutralization. This model is best represented by Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Islamists exist legally, but the monarch or emir has the final say as to how resources will be allocated.

AUTOCRATIC EXCLUSION. The elimination of Islamist influence through coercion is seen in Tunisia, Syria, and Libya. Islamists in these countries are either in exile or in jail, or dead.

These three inherently autocratic models feed into the frustration Islamists hold against their national governments and the United States, which often supports them.

The Bush administration made the strategic mistake of engaging in democracy promotion without focusing on institution design. The Obama administration can press for better-crafted democratization, models such as the German and Turkish political systems. The German formula, as expressed in the 1949 constitution of West Germany, is based on democratic

exclusion so that extreme rightists (i.e., Nazis) and extreme leftists (i.e., communists) cannot hold political office. Elections and other political freedoms are open for powers on the right and the left of the center or powers similar to them.

This model is preferable to the Islamist containment policy, since it excludes extremist parties from the political arena but allows them to enter it if they become reasonably moderate. For instance, it would force all extremists to moderate their views while enabling them to express themselves and participate in the country's political life after they moderate their views. Exclusion is only used to promote healthy democracy, not to benefit the ruling party. All political organizations enjoy the legitimate right to rule, with one caveat: no democracy for the opponents of democracy. The main objection to this model is that it is difficult to establish unless an extremist party commits a crime amounting to a national disaster or if the extremist powers are weak enough to be easily excluded from the political body. Therefore, this model might be well-suited for Syria, Tunisia, and Libya, where political Islam is not a strong force; however, it would be difficult to install in countries where nonviolent Islamist movements (e.g., Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood) are active and enjoy a high degree of popular acceptance.

The Turkish model of democratic assimilation, which Washington holds in high regard despite some resentment due to Turkey's denial of NATO and American forces to use its territory and bases to invade Iraq in 2003 and Turkey's sever criticisms of Israel's blockade of Gaza and attack against Turkish human rights activists who challenged this blockade, differs from the German model in that all parties that agree to abide by the rules of a secular and democratic state are allowed to run for office. Parties have been traditionally monitored by an institution (i.e. the National Security Council in Turkey) dedicated to protecting supra-constitutional rules, which no party can seek to change or amend. The recent constitutional amendments of 2010 would, of course, weaken its ability to perform this monitoring role. The system's strength lies in the fact that these supra-constitutional rules guard against any individual or party that seeks to undermine democracy. The rules are not "anti-Islamist"; rather, they are standards for the whole political spectrum. Given these checks and balances, the Turkish model assumes that any political actor might try to undermine democracy once elected, and therefore ensures that Turkey as a state will continue to be democratic.

The impact of this well-crafted system on Islamist parties can already be seen. Turkey's current ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), is a prime example of an Islamist organization that renounced its radical, exclusivist Islamist agenda.

The Obama administration can (and should) strive to see more liberal democratic systems established in the Middle East. Following either model would allow the formation of balanced institutions and political systems that could be tailored to existing realities and thus help build sustainable Muslim democracies. There is, however, one caveat: Washington should not favor one group over another. It should be pro-rules and world-accepted democratic praxis.

The Peril of Hostility

One of greatest fears for American policymakers is that democratization will empower opponents in Muslim countries. Such logic uses a broad brush to paint all Islamists as anti-democratic and anti-Western:

Democracy, diversity, accommodation – the fundamentalists have repudiated them all. In appealing to the masses who fill their mosques, they promise, instead, to institute a regime of Islamic law, make common cause with like-minded "brethren" everywhere, and struggle against hegemony of the West and the existence of Israel. Fundamentalists have held to these principles through long periods of oppression, and will not abandon them now, at the moment of their greatest popular resonance.¹⁷

Following this logic, Washington has no incentive to facilitate the Islamists' political participation, as this would essentially amount to "helping the enemy." While it is true that most Islamist groups are opposed (at least rhetorically) to key aspects of American foreign policy, not to mention its support for Israel, close relationship with autocratic regimes, and military presence in the Middle East, it is in Washington's best interest to form strategic alliances with them. Washington must learn to differentiate between violent Islamists and pragmatic Islamists who are ready to accept compromises. The positive effects of such collaborations can already be seen in Afghanistan (Burhanuddin Rabbani and Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf), Iraq (the Muslim Brotherhood), and Turkey (AKP).

¹⁷ Martin Kramer, "Islam vs. Democracy," Commentary (January 1993): 35-42.

¹⁸ Daniel Pipes, "Should the United States Support Islamists?" Program Brief, Nixon Center, 24 October 2005.

The United States must keep moderate Islamists in mind when crafting policy measures and should collaborate with them to achieve mutual goals. As Shibley Telhamy wrote: "Skepticism about the real aims of these groups [Islamists] should be balanced by openness to the possibility that their aims once they are in power could differ from their aims as opposition figures. This requires partial engagement, patience and a willingness to allow such movements space and time to put their goals to the test of reality." A good example of innovative diplomacy is the coalition built by President George H. W. Bush in 1990 against Iraq, when Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia participated in a grand coalition of thirty countries to liberate Kuwait. Leaving Iraq and Afghanistan and finding a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are important steps to deradicalizing and engaging pragmatic Islamists through negotiations rather than violence.

To find common ground with Islamists, Washington can use criticisms that have been made against al-Qa'eda by other Islamists. For instance Sayyad Imam, an al-Qa'eda founder and former mentor of Ayman al-Zawahiri, described the group's leaders as ignorant and arrogant, seeking personal gains, and acting against Islamic teachings.²¹

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¹⁹ Cheryl Benard, Democracy and Islam: The Struggle in the Islamic World: A Strategy for the United States (Washington, DC: The RAND Corporation, 2005).

 $^{20\,\,} Shibley\, Telhamy,\, "In\, the\, Middle\, East,\, the\, Third\, Way\, is\, a\, Myth,"\, Washington\, Post,\, 17\,\, February\, 2006.$

²¹ Kamal Habib, "Another Wave of Jihadist Adjustment: Internal Debates of the Movement," Arab Insights 2, no. 6 (winter 2009); Jarret Brachman, "al-Qa'eda's Dissident," Foreign Policy (December 2009).



Obama & Peace-building in the Middle East

Olving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should be a top priority for the Obama administration. General David Petraeus made it clear that this conflict "hurts America's ability to advance its interests in the Middle East, fomenting anti-American sentiment and limiting America's strategic partnerships with Arab governments."²²

In the Muslim perspective, survey data and anecdotal evidence show that no single issue is more damaging to American-Muslim relations than America's continued support for Israel.²³ Solving this conflict would be a major step toward deradicalizing large numbers of Islamists. After all, they cannot be outraged on the Palestinians' behalf if the Palestinians themselves are satisfied. Arab regimes are ready to accept a peace treaty according to the 1967 borders, with territorial exchanges that will give Israel settlement blocs that are too expensive and painful to evacuate, a demilitarized Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the retraction of the demand for resettlement of Palestinian refugees within Israel.²⁴ This compromise deserves the Obama administration's official stamp of approval and should become the roadmap for negotiations. The current negotiations, that need to be revived and internationally supported, are of great relevance, and President Obama's personal engagement is extremely vital as regards suggesting compromises, ensuring international support, and (if necessary) exerting pressure.

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²² Jerusalem Post, 18 March 2010.

²³ Moataz Fattah, Democratic Values in the Muslim World (Colorado: Lynn Rienner, 2006).

²⁴ For a full translation of the Saudi-proposed Arab peace initiative adopted at the annual Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1844214.stm



Conclusion

If the goal of the Obama administration is to achieve long-term security for the United States, it must accord the deradicalization of Islamists, along with its demobilization of violent Islamists, a greater priority. Currently, Washington assesses Islamist movements according to the scale of their operation and the severity of threat they pose to the United States. The great flaw in the system is that it pays too much attention to violent Islamism.

Along with Obama's positions on Afghanistan, his exit strategy in Iraq, and his rhetorical assurances that the United States is not at war with Islam or Muslims, he needs to work harder on removing the actual causes of tension with nonviolent Islamists. Washington must amend its paradigm and view Islamist groups in terms of their scale and use of violence. This will make three facts quite clear: nonviolent Islamists are the majority, their innate understanding of regional disputes and political Islam could make them invaluable allies, and many Islamist groups have strictly national agendas. If the United States were more willing to help these Islamists achieve political relevance in their own countries, they would not be as tempted to join forces with global jihadist networks. In metaphorical terms, demobilizing the "trees" of violence as well as deradicalizing the "seeds" of extremism that eventually lead to terrorism will provide greater security for all parties.

The Bush administration's flawed democratization policy should be replaced by a principled pragmatic strategy that urges Muslim countries to adopt democratic reforms. The containment, neutralization, and exclusion of Islamist parties by Muslim regimes has been largely unsuccessful. Using the Turkish and German political models mentioned above, Washington should press for better-crafted political systems that do not seek to eliminate Islamists, but rather seek to create healthy democratic participation for those who accept democracy as the only game in town.

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