

The Dynamics of Islamic Politics

Friday, February 22, 2002

Jointly Organized by

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland

The Center for International Development and Conflict Management

This conference is part of a larger, joint project undertaken between the National Intelligence Council and the University of Maryland. This project aims to build alliances between scholars and practitioners in the field of national security, broadly defined. The project has helped produce a dialogue between the academic and intelligence communities, and with the policy community more broadly defined, by providing a portal through which members of these different communities can exchange information and discuss pertinent issues.

This conference focused on the role of Islamic politics in the Middle East and in other Muslim countries around the globe. Presenters and participants discussed the development of Islam as a political force in the region, the numerous intersections of Islam with politics, economics and culture in the region, and ultimately the implications of these dynamics for U.S. national interests and national security.

The first panel focused on questions about the relationship between politics and economics in the region. Discussion centered on the economic and demographic drivers of political liberalization and economic growth. The second panel focused on the cultural drivers of political change in the region. Questions centered on the seeming rise in anti-American sentiment and the potential for a future clash of civilizations. Dr. Francis Fukuyama gave the keynote address, which provided insights into the relationship between democratization and modernization, as well as the prospects for the spread of democracy in the Islamic world and the potential obstacles such political liberalization faces in the region. The third panel addressed the role of Islam, more broadly speaking, in the political processes and discussions in the region. The final panel provided some summary remarks and addressed some of the geopolitical strategic implications of Islamic politics and their impact on U.S. national security and foreign policy. This paper

provides a summary of the panel presentations, the issues discussed, the points of contention, and the varying opinions about the role of Islam and the prospects for political change in the Middle East.

Economic and Demographic Drivers

Steve Grummon, from the Department of State, opened the first panel of the conference with a set of questions: what is the relationship between the material world and the world of ideas, in this case Islamic ideas? What drives the behavior of individuals? To what extent do material motivations drive ideational beliefs? And what is the relationship between the economic and demographic situation in the Middle East and the rise of Islamic activism?

Tarik Yousef

Dr. Yousef holds a joint-appointment at Georgetown University in the Department of Economics and the School of Foreign Service Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. Yousef specializes in development economics, economic history, and political economy with a focus on the Middle East. Yousef has also worked for the International Monetary Fund and served as a consultant for many international organizations and government agencies.

Tarik Yousef provided some good news. In the 1990s, the population growth rates in the Middle East declined rapidly. A lower fertility rate has been the trend across Middle East and North Africa, and many countries are now at replacement levels or slightly below this level.

The striking feature of the population is the age structure, and the rapidly rising percentage of young cohorts (ages 15-29). This “youth bulge” is evident in the 1.4% annual rise in youths, resulting in an increase of 30 million persons in this cohort from 1970-1990. Initially, the expansion of this population was seen as a positive indicator for economic growth. However, given the poor economic performance of the 1990s, it became increasingly clear that these countries did not have the institutional or economic capacity to cope with this demographic shift. The largest problem is unemployment among young, educated persons. The economies of these countries cannot absorb this growing population, and migration no longer offers a safety valve.

In order for this demographic “gift” to be realized, and for economic growth to occur, Yousef argued, Middle Eastern countries need well functioning markets and political and economic institutions.

If this situation is not corrected, evidence suggests this young cohort is likely to suffer tremendous economic inequality. The sheer number of job seekers creates too much competition, which will decrease wages. In addition, there is a large policy bias against these young cohorts, who are not being employed in the civil service, traditionally the primary source of employment. Even though the state cannot absorb this new cohort, it has proved reluctant to relinquish its role as the primary provider of jobs in the economy.

Yousef argued that many reforms are essential for providing jobs, but that these reforms are not taking place. The implication is that continuing economic inequality could be converted into political instability. The kind of inequality that is emerging today is something that has not been seen since the oil boom. However, these inequalities will create a different type of competition from the past. This competition will not be urban vs. rural, or Shiite vs. Sunni, but rather will be old vs. young, as the oil boom generation is increasingly unable to find jobs, secure housing, get married, and achieve primary goal for social happiness.

Pedro Alba

Dr. Alba has worked for over fifteen years for the World Bank in the Middle East and North Africa. He specializes on issues of financial liberalization and capital flow in the development process.

Pedro Alba focused his remarks on employment and the pressures of population growth in MENA (Middle East/North Africa) countries. He asserted that the greatest challenge for MENA over the next ten years is the issue of unemployment. MENA countries need to generate 37 million new jobs to keep pace with new entrants, and 19 million additional jobs to eliminate current unemployment. This implies that the currently employed workforce needs to expand by roughly two-thirds over the next decade, and that this expansion is important for both political stability and economic growth.

During the 1990s, across the region, the growth in the labor force has been higher than employment growth, which means unemployment is rising. The growth in the labor force has averaged roughly 3.5 percent per year, while employment growth has been far lower, or negative. Compared with East Asia in the 1970s, both regions experienced similar labor force growth of roughly three percent. However, the growth in gross domestic product in East Asia averaged 7.6%, while that in the Middle East has been only about 3%. Thus, East Asia was able to absorb the growing labor population and use it to produce higher economic growth. The Middle East has been unable to convert the same potential into comparable growth. There are several reasons for this divergence in outcomes. First, the Middle East economic model of state centered growth achieved its limits in the 1970s. In the 1980s, the Middle East experienced severe economic decay as a result of the decline in oil revenues, a decline in the rate of physical capital accumulation, and a collapse in total factor productivity. While the situation improved in the 1990s as a result of reform measures taken to address the decline of the 1980s, the growth in per capita terms and the level of productivity have remained very low. The bottom line, Alba argued, is that not enough has been done to reform the economy, particularly the private investment sector.

Carl Haub

Mr. Haub holds the Conrad Taeuber Chair of Population Information at the Population Reference Bureau. He is a specialist in the compilation and analysis of demographic data.

Carl Haub presented demographic statistics on the region. He argued that one of the most dramatic changes has been the decline in the high fertility rate of MENA countries. In the early 1980s, Middle East countries had some of the greatest potential for population growth in the world, but this has changed due to education and family planning programs. The rate of children per woman has fallen over the past decade from six to about two children per woman. If growth had continued at six children per woman, the population would have at least doubled in the next two decades. Given the high life expectancy rate and the lack of diseases such as AIDS, Middle East countries have not experienced the natural “brakes” on population growth that other regions have.

Haub argued that the most important characteristic of the demographics of the region is the age structure. The Middle East has a very youthful population. While this does offer the opportunity for economic growth, this will only occur if the fertility rate continues to decline. The overall demographic situation in the Middle East is quite complex, and numerous factors affect the situation. For example, in Iran the fertility rate has fallen from seven to roughly two children per woman. This made a huge impact on the population situation in the country and the future economic prospects. However, the population will continue to grow over the next 50-100 years as a result of the age structure of the population, and the fact that the large young cohort will soon approach child bearing age.

Gwenn Okrulik

Dr. Okrulik is an Assistant Professor of political science at the University of Arkansas. She teaches courses on Politics of the Middle East, Political Economy, Islam and Politics, and development.

Gwenn Okrulik focused her remarks on the situation in Saudi Arabia. She argued that the demographic and economic situation in the country provides fertile ground for radicalism, and that these structural problems must be addressed and space must be given to reformist voices in order to reduce the attraction of radical ideas.

Okrulik provided several statistics about the situation in Saudi Arabia. These suggested that while the birth rate is declining, the majority of the population is under the age of fifteen. The infrastructure of the country, long neglected, cannot support this population. There has been a reduction in the availability of schools, hospitals, and municipal services. Unemployment is roughly 10%, but for recent male university graduates it is as high as 30%. The average per capita income has declined from \$18,800 in 1981 to roughly \$6,700 in 1995. The economy remains dependent on an imported labor force, which provides nearly one third of the overall labor force. In addition, problems in education have gone unnoticed. While the raw number of students has increased, the actual percentage of school age children enrolled in school has

declined. While attendance is free, it is not mandatory, and many children are not attending school. The attendance rate is roughly 49% for high schools and 14% for universities.

Since the Gulf War, social problems (e.g., guns, drugs, petty crime), which have always existed in the foreign born population, have become prominent in the local population. The increasing level of socio-economic distress and alienation has generated fertile ground for radicalism, and radical movements have capitalized on this situation. However, Okrulik argued that the debate in Saudi Arabia is not about a pro-U.S. monarchy or a radical anti-West Islamic movement, but rather about how to cultivate a broad middle ground. Ultimately, the rising debate is about participation and about viable alternatives. The lack of representation and the lack of available options provide more support for those figures such as bin Laden, who offer the only viable alternative.

Discussion

Discussion focused on the notion of a social contract between the governments and the populations of these countries. Some argued that this contract is hard to define in general terms. Rather, one should consider differences across countries, as some countries will be easier to reform than others. Points were made regarding the nature of the social contract and who would be involved in such a contract. Some suggested a more global community approach, while others favored a more localized approach. Participants agreed on the need to redefine the rules of the game, but there was less consensus on how to achieve this goal.

Political and economic reforms were seen as the keys to stability in the region. However, there was little agreement on how best to achieve these reforms, and much discussion of the potential destabilizing nature of political reforms. One participant suggested that reform could be initiated by creating a challenge to the status quo, which has traditionally pushed incumbents to make the necessary reforms in the past. The problem, however, is that many governments retrench in the face of these challenges and demands for political liberalization. Some suggested that foreign aid poses a large obstacle to reform. When governments have access to this money they have no incentive to reform or change their policies. Furthermore, reform is a risky business because it

can change the distribution of power, and therefore ruling regimes are unwilling to risk this outcome.

Participants discussed the implications of reduced fertility rates. One participant pointed out that Iran is a singular case and does not represent a general trend in the Islamic world. Many Middle East countries have been working on this issue for decades, and it is unlikely that they will reach fertility rates similar to those in Europe in the near future. The current age structure means that population growth is likely to continue in the region. While the rate has declined, it remains relatively high. Several participants pointed out that current population projections assume couples will have at least two children, but the rate is well above that right now.

Many participants suggested that it is difficult to talk about the region in terms of generalizations about conditions or future outcomes. One participant suggested that what matters most are the policies implemented by these governments, not the initial conditions these countries faced. Ultimately, he argued, the outcome is difficult to predict as it depends heavily on government policies and how they are implemented.

Cultural Drivers

Judith Yaphe, from the National Defense University, served as moderator of this panel, and opened this session with a few comments. She argued that it is very difficult for the U.S. to move the hearts and minds of the Arab world, and that conspiracy theories regarding U.S. intentions and actions are rife in the region. The key question, she suggested, is whether the reactions in this region to the U.S. will produce a clash of civilizations.

Robert Hefner

Dr. Hefner is Professor of Anthropology at Boston University. He is also the Director of the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture (ISEC) and a Research Fellow working in the program on Religion and Democracy at the Institute for Religion and World Affairs at Boston University. His research interests vary widely and include: anthropology and sociology of late

modernity, the role of identity and social memory, the politics of religious traditions, pluralism and social change, economic culture, and political economy.

Robert Hefner, who has been studying the relationship between democracy and radical politics in Southeast Asia, argued that the events of 9/11 demonstrated that a small but well-organized segment of the Islamic community sees itself locked in conflict with the West. He argued that many of these movements have global reach, and that their membership is dominated by well educated and technologically trained individuals who have skillfully exploited globalization and the global economy to expand their influence beyond state borders.

Hefner summarized his comments into five main points. First, he argued that despite serious political and economic mismanagement in many of these countries, the majority of the Muslim population remains politically moderate. Most Muslims are eager to share in the technological and economic benefits of market economies. This popular enthusiasm for sustained economic growth provides an advantage to moderates over radicals, whose economic policies remain in every sense incoherent. Second, Hefner argued that radical movements are viable only in cases of large-scale economic devastation. These groups find far less support in regions where there are relatively stable economic conditions. The inability to mobilize popular support has prompted the use of violence against quiescent domestic majorities, not just Western targets. Third, he argued that one must distinguish between everyday social conservatism and radical Islamic movements. One should not confuse the mainstream version of Sufism with the more radical version, neo-Sufism, which holds the conviction that the United States, aided by India and Russia, is on a mission to destroy Islam. Fourth, and related to the third point, recent history shows that neo-Sufism generates intense resentment by most Muslims, who find the exclusion of women and other characteristics of the religion to be offensive. Afghanistan demonstrated that mainstream Muslims chafe against this new version of the religion. Fifth, Hefner argued that the key to producing stability in the region is the promotion of moderation over the long term, including commitments to education, balanced social and economic development, and social peace, not just focusing on short-term security concerns.

Hefner concluded that there is in fact a clash of cultures, but that this clash is above all one of Muslim against Muslim. Radical Muslims will continue to try to polarize the relationship between the West and the Muslim world. This is the tactical aim of groups such as Al Qaeda and of other radical Muslim movements. However, these movements have not been very successful, and moderates continue to seek economic development and moderation in religion.

Fawaz Gerges

Dr. Gerges holds the Christian A. Johnson Chair in International Affairs and Middle Eastern Studies at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. His research interests include: Islam and the political process, fringe Islamic movements, Arab politics, American foreign policy in the Middle East, the modern history of the Middle East, and international relations.

(Note: Although Dr. Gerges was unable to attend the conference. Dr. Yaphe provided a brief presentation of his comments, which are summarized in the following paragraphs.)

Fawaz Gerges' paper focused on two main themes: the image of the U.S. in the Arab world, and the ways in which the tensions between the West and the Arab world can best be reduced.

Gerges argued that anti-American sentiment has become deeply embedded in the Middle East and has become a staple of Arab politics. This sentiment is similar regardless of the political orientation of the group. These groups are consistent in their criticism of U.S. policies in the region. A constant theme is the victimization of Arabs at the hands of Western powers. The West in general, and the U.S. in particular, has become a scapegoat for the ills of the Muslim world since the 1950s. Arab regimes have used this anti-Western sentiment to punish those promoting liberal policies, and these regimes have joined ranks with more radical elements in order to preserve the political status quo. Gerges argued that these beliefs are not irrational, but rather should be understood as a result of the perception of U.S. foreign policy and its impact on the Arab world, where citizens find it hard to distinguish between U.S. foreign policy and U.S. values. Globalization is seen as just another instrument of U.S. hegemony, which is used to keep Arabs weak, poor, and divided.

Gerges provided some good news: the Islamist goal of capturing the state has been shattered. However, democracy is not fast in coming to the Middle East, and the Arab political system has fiercely refused the democratic way. He argued that opening the political process is a prerequisite for economic viability and social renewal in the region. In addition, the provision of a venue for open discussion and the generation of a stake in the political process and its outcome would greatly reduce the prospects for radicalism.

Peter Mandaville

Dr. Mandaville is Assistant Professor of Government and Politics at George Mason University. Previously, Mandaville served as Director of Research for Kissinger Associates.

Peter Mandaville noted that the phenomenon of transnational Islam is nothing new. The linkages between Islamic movements have been standard since the mid-late 19th century, and large networks have since developed across state borders. While recent concerns over this transnational network has tended to focus on bin Laden and other radical movements, Mandaville argued that the evidence suggests more in the way of a reformist discourse circulating in these transnational links. Media technology is important to these linkages. However, while the Internet is important it is not a major force, and the emphasis remains on low-tech print media

Mandaville emphasized that the notion of a social contract is absolutely crucial. He also pointed out the need to differentiate within the Muslim world about the sources of discourse, the differences in discourse, and how the drivers of this discourse vary across countries. He argued that encouraging the national development of new agendas is vital, but that this needs to be done with subtlety. While foreign aid is welcomed in some circles, it is also seen with skepticism. The West, he argued, needs to keep a certain distance from policies in order to avoid the perception that these policies are associated with the hegemonic West. The main question is how to best change the social contract in a positive way. He argued that new media spaces offer one option, and the emergence of open forums (e.g., Al Jazeera) is important. While he agreed that these outlets can offer the opportunity for voicing anti-Western messages, he also argued that this concern is less of an issue than many think, and that the positive impact of openness far

outweighs this concern because in situations where grievances are high and there is no outlet for expressing concerns, the potential for violence increases. He concluded by agreeing with other presenters that we are not facing a clash of civilizations between the West and the Islamic world. However, he suggested that the clash we are seeing is one between mythologies, a clash of imaginings of people on both sides.

Discussion

Much of the discussion focused on what kind of message the West should send, and to whom it should be sent. Some argued that the issue is not whether to target the elites or masses, but rather there is a need to target those in society who can circulate in both circles, and who enjoy a good reputation within both communities, possess good religious credentials, and who are seen as upstanding citizens. The message itself, many argued, cannot be shaped by the U.S., but must come from the region itself. The U.S. does have a role, but it is to encourage those with moderate voices, not to design the message itself. Many expressed concerns about the focus of the U.S. on the radical elements, and the use of phrases such as “crusades” and “axis of evil.” They argued for a need to emphasize the issues of human rights, participation, social decency and freedom from intimidation. One participant argued that the focus should not be on anti-West sentiment, but rather on the anti-universal values rhetoric of many radical groups. Opinion makers and policy makers in the region need a way of addressing these universal values, and need support to create effective spokespersons for countervailing values. There is some new space for alternative views and criticisms of current regimes, but there is also a lot of anti-U.S. discourse as well. However, the important point is that in the long run the reformist potential outweighs the dangerous underside of it. Where there has been a turn to radicalism and violence, it is not clear that it was U.S. symbols or policies that produced this reaction, but rather local conditions and daily life situations that prompted this response.

Many suggested that the West should not focus so heavily on the seeming radicalism of Muslim countries, but rather on why support for radicalism exists. They argued that this support is not as anti-American in spirit as it is a reaction against the global economic configuration and the poor living conditions of these populations. Again, many participants pointed out that they find little

support in the Muslim world for radicalism and the use of violence to achieve radical ends. One participant suggested that in some cases U.S. policies have been appropriate. For example, the U.S. has used effective and targeted support for police or military operations against unpopular radical movements in places such as Singapore.

Many agreed on the point that the West needs to rethink not only the message it sends, but also how it sends it. One participant suggested that the focus should be on institutions not traditionally associated with politics, i.e., alternative spaces for discourse, because these will be more open to discussion. Several participants suggested that this dialogue must take place not only at the local level, but also at regional and international levels. One participant countered this idea by stating that local politics is the more decisive factor (although admitting that local politics possesses regional and international dimensions).

Keynote Address:

Democratization and Modernization in the Islamic World

Francis Fukuyama

Dr. Fukuyama is Bernard Schwartz Professor of International Political Economy at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Fukuyama has written widely on issues relating to questions concerning democratization and international political economy, including the well-known book "The End of History."

Francis Fukuyama began his talk with a brief discussion of the differences between his work and that of Samuel Huntington. Fukuyama confirmed his belief in the universal nature of institutions, and their universal applicability across cultures. Huntington, on the other hand, argues that there can be a culturally diverse set of modernizations. Yet, Fukuyama suggested that they disagree less than may be apparent, and that Huntington takes a more moderate view of his own thesis when asked to apply it to the post-9/11 world. Indeed, Fukuyama stated that he agreed with Huntington's thesis that culture matters in that culture shapes the way people see the world and the nature of political, economic and social institutions.

Fukuyama argued that democracy does have a modern nature, and that there are certain prerequisites for the development of democracy. He agreed with Huntington that modern liberal democracy has a non-accidental relationship to western Christianity. He suggested that the two, religion and democracy, share a belief in the universality of values, and therefore it is no accident that liberal democracy first developed in Western Europe. However, he argued that, once established, the appeal of democracy and these universal values goes far beyond the culture that produced them. Fukuyama emphasized that he has “not retreated an iota from the end of history thesis,” arguing that there is only one plausible set of institutions for any country that wants to be modern. He suggested that while the Taliban and bin Laden may represent a challenge to the freight train of liberal democracy, they do not offer an alternative to it.

Fukuyama argued that economic development is a coherent process, i.e., that it is not a different process in Southeast Asia than in Africa or Europe because it is based on a set of universal human traits: the desire for accumulation and the desire to enrich oneself. The mechanism for this process of development begins with the desire for a higher standard of living, a desire for economic growth and prosperity, and not with a desire for democracy. However, there appears to be a trend of economic development leading to political liberalization, and a high correlation between a high level of economic development and a stable democracy. Over time, there is a convergence between market economies and democratic polities. However, this same convergence does not occur with regard to cultural matters.

Fukuyama argued that cultural differences are unlikely to disappear in the future. However, he suggested that in modern societies culture “gets put in a box,” and is therefore separated from economics and politics. He pointed to the secular division of church and state as an example of this phenomenon. He also pointed to the differences and similarities of responses to “the freight train of liberal democracy.” While he argued that different cultures have reacted in various ways to democratization, the initial confrontation with liberal democracy was identical. Each culture, each region, has reacted violently to the perceived imposition of a foreign way of life because democracy and market economies were perceived to threaten established ways of life. However, after a rather bloody period of time, countries in Asia have accepted this new modern path. Fukuyama argued that part of the reason for this is the pre-existing pluralism in the Asian world.

He noted that accommodation would be much harder in the Arab world due to its monotheistic culture and relative intolerance toward “differences.”

Fukuyama suggested two analogies as frameworks for understanding the rise of radical Islamic groups in the Middle East. The first analogy was European fascism. Fascism, as the argument goes, developed in areas that experienced rapid modernization because this change led to the alienation and disorientation of many previously comfortable and secure groups. Thus fascism offered an alternative to the threatening impact of modernization. The second analogy was the Protestant Reformation, and the confrontation between traditionalists and modernists that paved the way for change. Fukuyama suggested that these are two possible ways of understanding the reaction in Muslim countries to the process of modernization, but acquiesced that further discussion is needed to understand better this phenomenon and how best to respond to it.

The Politics of Islam

Emile Nakhleh, serving as moderator, opened the session with a few brief comments. He suggested that in the post-9/11 period we need to take a wider view of what drives these radical movements and the people that support them, rather than the narrow perspective that focuses on identifying members of radical groups. He suggested the U.S. needs to rethink its approach to the region and to radical groups given the fact that past policies have been only moderately effective in discrediting and marginalizing radical movements.

Ibrahim Karawan

Dr. Karawan is the Director of the Middle East Center and an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Utah. His research interests include: Islamist movements, the political role of Arab military institutions, and inter-Arab relations.

Ibrahim Karawan summarized his comments in four key points. First, he argued that, given the economic situation in these countries and the strong reliance on religious rhetoric to garner support, radical movements should have been more successful than they have been. Instead, we see a mix of both moderate and radical movements. Second, he argued that regimes would

continue to use repression when necessary to address radical threats to their power. However, he suggested that this will not lead to repression all of the time, but rather massive repression when necessary, and the use of other methods during less violent times. The other modes of preventing the rise of radical Islamic movements include: the use of the media, providing alternatives to radical movements, distancing oneself from the U.S. when necessary, and banning alcohol on national flights to demonstrate the government's respect for Islamic doctrine. Third, he argued that the main roads to power for radical movements have been blocked. These paths include: military coup, assassination of political leaders, sharing political power in parliament, and "Islamicizing" society from below. He argued that Arab regimes are not afraid of these radical groups because they have no options for truly gaining political power.

Karawan concluded by arguing that the U.S. should not put too much emphasis on 9/11. Instead, the U.S. should assist in promoting reforms in these countries at a time when reform is possible because these regimes do not feel threatened by the domestic situation. However, one participant strongly disagreed with this assessment, stating that some regimes in the region are desperately afraid of popular mobilization. Karawan responded that while this may be the case, most regimes are far more secure than they were in the 1970s.

Shibley Telhami

Dr. Telhami is the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, and is a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Shibley Telhami argued that opposition groups use Islam as a vehicle for reaching their goals. For these groups, religion serves as an effective mobilizing tool for garnering popular support. However, this is true for all groups in the region, not just radical groups. To some extent, the cooptation of Islamic groups into the political system has decreased the levels of violence used by the more radical movements. However, violence has offered a means of achieving particular goals, and therefore continues to offer one method for success. But, as Telhami pointed out, both those in power and those seeking to gain power use violence.

Telhami also addressed the issue of to what extent these movements possess and promote a set of core beliefs. He focused his comments on bin Laden. He argued that bin Laden is clearly motivated by a belief system and is calling for the creation of an Islamic state. Furthermore, he argued that bin Laden's message does resonate with the population. However, it is important to understand the nature of this resonance and support for bin Laden. While most Arabs and Muslims do not support the use of violent tactics and do not support events such as 9/11, they also do not believe that bin Laden was responsible for the events of 9/11. Those who support bin Laden see him as empowering individuals by demonstrating the vulnerability of the powerful states. His message resonates because it gives these people hope of challenging a corrupt and unresponsive state apparatus.

Telhami reminded participants that the attitudes between the U.S. and Islamic countries have not always been the same. In the 1950s-60s, the U.S. believed Islamic religious movements were a stabilizing force in the region in response to many nationalist movements because the religious movements tended to be very passive and non-violent. Today, the main question is whether sentiments in the region are driven by religious values or by perceptions of Western policies. Telhami stated that results from recent surveys conducted in the region suggest that the majority of the disaffection with the United States results from negative assessments of U.S. policies and, in particular, the U.S. role in the Middle East peace process.

Marius Deeb

Dr. Deeb is a Professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at the School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University. Deeb's research interests include: Political Islam, militant Islamic movements, Lebanon and Syria.

Marius Deeb argued that there are three variants of Muslim fundamentalism: the Muslim Brothers of Egypt, Wahhabism, and the Khomeini revolution. He argued that all three have been consistently anti-Western and have used violence to achieve their goals. He then posed the question of what the U.S. can do about these groups. He suggested, with respect to the first type, the main emphasis should be on the liberalization of regimes, as this would eliminate a major source of fundamentalism. With regard to the second type, the U.S. has few options for action.

The U.S. cannot ask a country such as Saudi Arabia to simply end Wahhabism, a fundamental element of the state and of society. Instead, the crisis in Islam must be dealt with by Muslims themselves. He argued that President Bush's program after 9/11 to define and eliminate terrorism would take care of the third kind of fundamentalism.

Deeb asserted that there is a crisis in Islam; a crisis in the way in which politics is run in these countries. The fundamental lack of freedom is at the heart of the fundamentalist movement. There are two options for addressing this issue. The first is to do nothing, because there is little that outsiders can do. The second is to promote change. In some cases, where the U.S. and the West can push for reform, this should be done by promoting democracy and peaceful change, and by punishing those who oppose these reforms.

Richard Norton

Dr. Norton is a Professor of International Relations and Anthropology at Boston University. His research interests include: strategies of reform in authoritarian regimes and the role of civil society in the Middle East.

Richard Norton argued that the current debate is not about the West versus the Muslim world, but rather about a national vision versus a universal vision. He suggested that the history of communism offers a rough parallel to today's situation in the Middle East. He pointed out that the tension between localists and globalists can be observed in some contemporary movements in the Middle East. For example, he argued that Hezbollah is a movement that turned its focus inwards, while others argued that the focus should turn outward. He suggested that the same kind of debate is taking place within the Palestinian coalition between Hamas and the young nationalists. These examples, he argued, reflect not a blind following of ideology but a rational calculation of options in which the domestic context plays a very important role.

In addition to the domestic context, international events also influence the calculations of these movements and the sentiments in the region. Norton argued that Muslims in the Middle East identify with Muslims elsewhere, and thus what happens to Muslims in Iraq and Iran is as important as what happens to Muslims in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Indonesia and Kosovo. The issue

of civilian deaths of Muslims everywhere is an issue, as is the treatment of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. since 9/11. Also at issue is the language coming out of Washington, especially the use of the terms “crusade,” “evil,” and, most recently, “evil axis.” The Arab-Israeli conflict and the perceptions of the U.S. role in this conflict are the issues that resonate most with Muslims.

Discussion

Discussion focused on the tensions between the radical movements and the regimes in power. Many agreed that there is little middle ground between these two options, which forces the population to choose sides. This decreases the room for moderates to speak, but even more importantly, the moderates have offered no alternative answers to the issues, and therefore offer no viable alternative path to change. One participant argued that the collapse of the Camp David peace accords led to the collapse of a moderate package for Islamic countries, and thus their voices are no longer heard amidst the radicals. Another participant agreed, stating that as long as opposition voices and moderate platforms do not have the open opportunity to put forth their programs, there is no pressure on either the government or the radical movements to develop alternative programs, and thus there is no way to expose the weaknesses of both sides.

Participants agreed that the bin Laden phenomenon cannot be explained by poverty because the Middle East is far less poor than most of the world. In addition, there is more poverty and more terrorism in other regions than in the Middle East. Instead, bin Laden’s message has to do with the larger issue of the crisis of civilization. It is not an attempt to appeal to the poor, but is instead an attempt to mobilize the powerless against the powerful. The real drivers of the situation are hopelessness and humiliation, not poverty. Furthermore, as one participant noted, terrorism is a matter of supply and demand, and because these groups have learned that suicide bombing is a tremendously effective tool they will continue to use it to achieve their goals. Two negative scenarios were offered: the first is the continuation of polarization due to the rising numbers of unemployed, educated youths who will seek violent means to address their grievances, and the second is the potential for demonstration effects of 9/11 to appear in the copying of these tactics by other groups.

Concluding Remarks

Paul Pillar

Dr. Pillar is the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia at the National Intelligence Council.

Paul Pillar suggested that one way to view these phenomena is to interpret them as inputs (i.e., roots or drivers of events) and outputs (consequences to U.S. policy). On the input side, the three most important questions focus on which factors are important, which trends are obvious, and what can be done to affect change in the region. On the issue of important factors, Pillar highlighted the contributions of unequal economic opportunities, high levels of unemployment, unrealized aspirations, and the lack of alternatives to the radicalism and anti-Western sentiments in the region. Pillar suggested that it is impossible to identify any one condition as sufficient for giving rise to the current situation, but rather it is a complex combination of factors, combinations that are neither clear nor consistent across cases.

With regard to the trends in the region, Pillar noted that there is both good and bad news. The demographic situation offers some good news in Iran, but the rest of the Middle East still faces high population growth rates due to the size of the youth population. Outside of the region the news is also good and bad. While globalization and integration into the global economy offer the potential for reform, modernization and economic prosperity, the current economic slowdown suggests there is less hope for these countries to amass the same benefits as others have experienced in the past.

Pillar suggested that the U.S. could make a difference, but that this will be only a small part of the equation. He argued the U.S. must act very gingerly in the region, and that any overt U.S. initiatives to produce change are likely to prove counterproductive. He stated that reform must come from within these countries, and that there is an increasing need for the majority of the Muslim population, that portion that is moderate, to speak out against religious bullies.

On the output side of the equation, three issues are important: the policies of the regimes in the Islamic world, the stability of these regimes, and the behavior of radical elements in this region and their global reach to other parts of the world. Pillar argued that the policies and stability of the regimes might be at odds as far as U.S. interests are concerned. Policies to liberalize regimes, as advocated by the U.S., may in fact produce more instability in the short term. In addition, many regimes are feeling the pressure to distance themselves from the West and from U.S. influence in order to placate domestic critics. While U.S. interests often parallel those of governments in the region, these interests are not completely congruent. In some cases, regimes define stability in far more stringent terms, whereby they not only reject the ascension of radical regimes, but also favor the continuation of their regime and define stability in these terms. These tensions might lead to unfavorable situations in which the roots of terrorism have room to grow. However, Pillar suggested that terrorism may reflect not strength but weakness, and may indicate an act of desperation against “the freight train of modernization,” and the inability of current regimes to develop broader more effective support for modernization.

John Steinbruner

Dr. Steinbruner is a professor in Public Policy and the Director of the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland. Steinbruner, serving as co-chair and moderator of the conference, provided some concluding remarks focusing on the notion of a social contract in Islamic countries and the implications for U.S. policy of the rising anti-American sentiment in the region.

John Steinbruner highlighted three themes from the day’s discussion. First, he suggested that there is a need to think hard about the notion of a global social contract. This is especially important, he argued, given the population projections for 2025 and the fact that 95% of the population additions will live in the lowest quintile in terms of income and wealth. This disparity and the continued concentration of economic growth at the top pose a huge problem for the future in terms of political and economic instability. Second, he summarized that the adverse reactions to the U.S. are not a function of Islamic political movements. Instead, the resentment is global, and results from the high degree of economic privilege the U.S. enjoys, as well as the ways in which the U.S. chooses to engage in foreign affairs, especially military exercises, that

make other countries nervous. Finally, Steinbruner argued that, whatever the capacity of the Islamic radicals, they are not intrinsically dangerous. This does not mean the U.S. should not worry about them, but that the threat comes more from the context in which these groups act. These groups may be exceedingly dangerous as a catalytic force if they provoke dysfunctional reactions. Steinbruner suggested that, so far, the U.S. has responded in a productive fashion to the events of 9/11. However, he also suggested that the U.S. faces problems in Afghanistan, where the situation is starting to unravel, as well as in Iraq and Iran. He argued that the current policy track is on a dangerous trajectory, but that this track remains amenable to change if addressed sooner rather than later.