ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY
A Foundation for Ending Extremism and Preventing Conflict

J.E. Rash

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PREFACE


Activities for the Religion, Human Rights & Democracy program took place in the United States and in Taraz, Shymkent, and Turkistan, in southern Kazakhstan. Four phases of exchange, from 2003 - 2005, promoted in-depth interaction. The original idea to create the volume based came from those Kazakh community leaders who participated in the exchange. It was designed for readers in Central Asia and published in Kazakh, Russian, and English. The exchange activities and the publication of the original limited edition were supported by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, as part of its mandate “to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations …and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.”

Because of the timeliness of the topics addressed in this publication, and the general call for more dialogue – both political and inter-religious – on the subject, Legacy is undertaking another limited edition in English.

Legacy International is a non-profit educational organization based in Virginia, USA. Legacy has created domestic and international programs in leadership training, sustainable development, cross-cultural relations, and inter-community dialogue for more than twenty-five years. Projects have included the Dialogue Workshop for oil companies and environmental activists; Leadership Development Initiative (designing curriculum and trainings in leadership and citizen participation for schools of the Archdiocese of New York City); Community Connections (a US Department of State initiative providing internships for Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Central Asian professionals); and the Virginia Growth Management Forum, to mention a very few. Legacy’s annual Global Youth Village, founded in 1979, has served more than 3,800 participants from 110 countries.
INTRODUCTION

This publication is designed to stimulate constructive dialogue among various audiences, be they lay people or religious leaders, educators or NGO workers, government representatives or academicians. I invite readers to take the bold step off the ‘ivory tower’ of philosophy to mingle with those practically-minded individuals who work at a grassroots level to create a pre-emptive peace, and a stable civil society. Through such exchanges, I hope we can further understanding of the foundations for a positive relationship between Islam and democracy and counteract the unfortunate effects of extremism on real people at a critical time in human history.

Legacy International is a non-profit with a wide scope of concerns. As President of Legacy, I strive to support the organization’s work promoting dialogue and exchange among people of widely varying backgrounds, races, ethnicities, religions, professional niches, and political philosophies. It is work that both Legacy staff and I undertake, trusting that there is a place at the table for every different voice, and that the diversity of these voices is part of the strength of humanity’s highest potential. As an American Muslim involved in peace building, I have been compelled in the last decade to look Islam in light of contemporary events and in light of the methodologies currently being utilized in Legacy’s work. I offer my perspectives in hopes that they can further the social dialogue of this decade.

The idea for this book came participants in a two-way exchange program Legacy offered for American and Kazakh religious leaders, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. I had the honor to address the Kazakh participants several times, and they asked me to make my talks available to them in printed form.

Chapter One, “Islam, Democracy, Modernity and Education: An Essay for Muslim Moderation, Progressiveness and Renewal,” was written as a separate publication and is complete in and of itself. I include it here to provide a solid basis for understanding our perspective on the relationship between Islam, Modernity, and Democracy. Although not initially written for a Kazakh audience, the ideas expressed in this article are relevant and valuable to the goals of this publication.

Chapters Two through Four were developed out of lectures I gave specifically to the Kazakh delegates. These articles focus on the issues that face many societies around the world. The questions of how to create democratic institutions that reflect the values and history of a given society and how to utilize Islam as a tool for counteracting extremism and divisiveness are addressed in these chapters.

Chapter Two entitled “From Origin to Institution: Implementing the Compatibility of Democracy and Islam,” focuses on the underlying compatibilities between democratic and Islamic principles and institutions. By exploring the evolution of U.S. Democracy, it is shown that a true and stable democracy must be inclusive of the citizens’ values and subsequent rights and careful not to abridge them.
Chapter Three, “Islam at the Crossroads of Extremism and Moderation,” begins to look at the cultural, political and religious phenomenon of extremism and fundamentalism as the unfortunate by-product of centuries of political and social complexities. In this chapter, I rely upon Olivier Roy’s concept of “neo fundamentalism,” in unraveling these complexities. Scrutinizing the causes of extremism through a Sufic perspective reveals the potential for moderation.

In Chapter Four, “Toward Pre-Emptive Peace: Deterring Conflict with the Tools of Islam,” I discuss the concept of pre-emptive peace, which goes beyond conflict prevention and resolution, by using the Islamic principles of security, safety and inner contentment to actively address the personal, social, and political issues that underlie conflict. Here the reader is invited to think and construct civil institutions and policies from a positive point of view rather than one that is reactive.

We live in a time of rapid change where ideas, like the technologies around us, are often out-of-date no sooner than they are introduced. Due to the speed of changing global events, ideas need to be reexamined on a daily basis. As such, this book will be dated by the time it reaches its readers, yet, even so, I believe it can provide a basis for further discussion and mental stimulation, as well as help to defuse the highly charged view that Islam and Democracy are incompatible. It is my intention that A Cooperative Approach Toward Understanding Democracy will serve to open lines of communication between parties and, on a personal note, encourage people of all faiths to reexamine the subtleties of their beliefs and strive to adhere to the founding principles and attitudes of their religious and social founders. I firmly believe that if this is sincerely done on a daily basis – especially by our leaders and policy makers – there is great hope for this world and its citizens. Truth will regain its superiority over imposters, humility take hold over arrogance, and faith triumph over disbelief.

J.E. Rash
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I would also like to thank the members of Legacy International’s U.S. delegation for their efforts in bringing their understanding of Islam and its relationship to democracy to citizens of southern Kazakhstan. They are Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf of the ASMA Society in New York City; Wael Alkairo, Board member of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area; Khaled Hassouna, International Manager of Conservation Management Institute (CMI) of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; and Sang Hwang, program officer, Legacy International.

It was my pleasure to host the following members of the Kazakh delegation: from Shymkent they are Ruslan Abdullin, founder of the non-governmental organization, “Faith;” Dr. Bahadyr Aitayev, senior professor of Faculty of History and Philosophy at Otyrar University; Abdurkarim Omir, director of the nonprofit organization “Omir;” Imam Muhibulla Hodhzaev, head of Amaly-Salih Mosque, Roza Yerekhanova, City Council Secretary and Director of the Department of Education represented Turkistan. From Taraz, they are Svetlana Beissova, executive director of non-governmental organizational “Taraz Initiative Centre;” Sergei Kislov, senior specialist for the administration of the Mayor of Zhambyl Region; Imam Yerbol Kospagar, Chief Imam of Aulie-Ata Mosque, representative of Kazakhstani Muslims’ Religious Department in Zhambyl Oblast; and Varvara Naidenova, chairwomen for nongovernmental organization “Veronica.” And from the Almaty region, Imam Asylhan Amankulov, Imam of Abay Mosque.

With gratitude I commend the dedicated civil servants of the United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs who day after day seek ways to promote better understanding between the citizens of this world.

Finally, I am indebted to Maryam Brown and Atefeh Leavitt who took on the task of editors and researchers for this book. I also want to recognize the dedication and hours of work that Marlene Ginsberg has contributed to this and many of Legacy’s programs, and for her tireless efforts to bring this book to completion.

J.E. Rash.
The Authors

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J.E. Rash has spoken at many national and international forums, including the Asian Conference on Religion for Peace in New Delhi; the Golda Meir Center for Political Leadership at the University of Colorado; the International Symposium on Science and Consciousness; the United Nations Environment Program; and the World Bank. He was a delegate to the Millennium UN World Conference of 1000 global spiritual leaders, and also a presenter at the 2000 State of the World Forum. In 1987, he received the Friends of the United Nations Environment Program (FUNEP) 500 Award for significant contributions to the environment.

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Mr. Waldbaum was a member of a small team supporting the U.S. food industry's Ad Hoc Committee on the Uniform Grocery Product Code (UPC), which investigated the potential for, promulgated and directed implementation of the industry standard (bar code) symbol to facilitate automatic scanning by advanced point of sale electronic equipment.
Islam, democracy, modernity and education: An essay for Muslim moderation, progressiveness and renewal

By J. E. Rash and Eric Walbaum
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Executive Summary

The subject of Islam and democracy has received wide attention from both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Some western scholars present Islam as anti-democratic. Inviting (indeed, provoking) such assessments are the Islamic extremists who reject democracy. They declare that democracy is the rule of Man—contrary to Islam, the rule of God. The 9/11/01 attacks and subsequent events have heightened attention on whether Islam and democracy are compatible. Yet, given the long history of Muslims living in non-Muslim lands—in peace and with mutual respect—the question might never have been raised.

Today, moderate Muslims everywhere are forced to acknowledge actions done in the name of Islam that insult the purity of the peaceful, progressive and compassionate message. Also, clearly, not all Muslim societies are living up to the Islamic ideals of economic and social equity, justice, tolerance, and educational opportunity. Moreover, domestic strategies (supported by U.S. interest and diplomacy) to suppress so-called Islamist opposition can be seen as antithetical to efforts to advocate and propagate democracy.

Can Islam and democracy co-exist? First, we would have to answer: Whose democracy? Whose Islam? Both Islam and democracy have become charged terms—twisted by advocates as well as adversaries. Will understanding triumph? Can the West spread democracy to the Middle East? Throughout the Muslim world? In the hearts of those of us who have tasted both Western democracy and Islam the answer is yes. There are yearnings for democracy among most Muslims. After all, early Islam was the flowering of values that we have come to cherish as democratic. But a true marriage is possible only if we return to the roots and real meanings of both Islam and democracy.

Some of the U.S. founding fathers expressed grave doubts about democracy. They understood that for democracy to bring peace would depend on establishing peace within human beings. None of the founding fathers of the U.S. doubted the supremacy of God’s law. No believer would ascribe to a democracy the power to negate God’s law. No believing Christian, Jew nor Muslim today would deny the superiority of Divine law over human laws. However, if democracy is to find a place in Muslim countries, differences in approaches will have to air (among and between both Muslims and non-Muslims) in ways that extend beyond rhetoric towards reconciliation.

In our efforts to share the legacy of democracy with Iraqis and other Muslims, Americans should be mindful that, for democracy to take root successfully in Muslim countries, the cultural and religious values of Islam must be acknowledged and become its allies. For, just as the roots of democracy, as we know it, lie in the Christian principles of our founding fathers, so too these principles also are found in the Qur’an and the Hadith of the Prophet Mohammed. Furthermore, just as there have been controversial (and apparently contravening) ideological disagreements between some Christian principles that, over time, still are being reconciled with democracy, so too similar challenges and opportunities exist to align Islamic doctrine with democracy.

Sometimes obscured in the flood of scholarly writings on the subject of Islam and democracy is the reality that there are substantial Muslim communities in democratic nations. Given that many of the world’s approximately 1.3 billion Muslims have no practical experience with western democracy, Muslims living in democratic countries have distinctive standing. Indeed, it is in the diversity of cultures and experiences among those Muslims (including converts to Islam) that “Islamic” democracy can be expected to
In Muslim societies, a mixing of Islam with distinctive cultural traditions has tended to hold back the development of global Islamic thought. It is important that clear majorities of both Muslims and non-Muslims come to understand that Islam, like other religions, can have a role in democratic politics. If democracy is to spread farther in the Muslim world, Muslims—especially those living in the U.S. (and also the E.U.)—can bring their experiences to bear on critical issues. In Western schools, businesses and organizations, Muslims from Malaysia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, India, the United States, and other nations are living and working together. These Muslims (and non-Muslims) bring talk about democracy abroad. A strong approach to modern education for Muslims will provide for numerous exchanges, internships, training events and other contact between key individuals in Muslim countries and Muslim communities in the democratic world.

The American melting pot has welcomed peoples of diverse backgrounds. Over the centuries, Americans of all backgrounds have come to work together to protect values of pluralism, democracy, civil society, equal opportunity, economic security, minority rights and equality before the law. Both Muslim and non-Muslim Americans can make better efforts to overcome the practice of presenting Islam in the United States as no more than an immigrants’ religion, rather than as a faith that shares the human values—deeply rooted in Islam as well as in American history. American Muslims need to search out the values that Islam holds in common with those of our nation’s founders.

Education has a rich significance in Islam. Muslims and non-Muslims alike should encourage an Islamic commitment to reeducating Muslims in the primary teachings—teachings that are moderate and progressive at their core. The result can be a stage set for Muslims to consider (closely and confidently) democracy.

If there is one element in the raging debates about Islam and democracy on which most discussants might agree it is that education will play a key role in the outcome. Civic education is a primary means toward achieving democracy in the Muslim world—a democracy that will be compatible with Islam. In addition to schools that can deliver civic education, other institutions must support the effort as well.

One usually thinks of education as teaching the basics. It is also about tolerance, logical thinking, freedom, human rights, individual values and responsibilities, equality before the law (and, indeed, democracy). If we are not vigilant, however, other teachings can negate the democratic spirituality on which peace depends.

One wonderful contribution that the United States might make to global education for democracy would be to sponsor Hollywood efforts to generate cross-culturally sensitive multimedia presentations of The Federalist Papers and other key writings and events that led to American-style democracy. If we are going to achieve real understanding by the world’s Muslims about democracy (and particularly its ability to transfer to other cultures) we will have to search beyond the form to reenergize the aspirations of democracy. Some notable U.S. programs that can support further efforts include:

*Citizen Exchanges.* The U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) already fosters mutual understanding between the United States and other countries through international educational and training programs. These efforts can be expanded and linked with other efforts to rebuild the education system of Iraq.

*Dialogue on Freedom.* This program eloquently presents the difference between
law and right, fostering among youth a better understanding of fundamental American values and those universal moral precepts that all free people share.

Powerful forces for education reform in predominantly Muslim countries stem from autocracies not [even fledgling] democracies. Some Western pundits condemn all “Islamic” countries to the label of unenlightened or backward. Yet, in the field of education, there are noteworthy achievements in the Muslim world that rival or surpass those in the U.S. Three efforts stand out: Jordan’s Education Initiative; Qatar’s Education City, and the United Arab Emirates’ Knowledge Village. Malaysia, Morocco, Turkey and Syria also offer significant contributions and opportunities for helping to strengthen education in their respective and other Islamic countries.

Introduction

The subject of Islam and democracy has received wide attention from both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Some western scholars present Islam as anti-democratic. It is inherently (and hopelessly) authoritarian, they suggest. They see no hope for democratization in the Muslim world. Inviting (indeed, provoking) such assessments are the Islamic extremists who reject democracy. They declare that democracy is the rule of Man—contrary to Islam, the rule of God.

Islam and democracy

Can Islam and democracy co-exist? First, we would have to answer: Whose democracy? Whose Islam? While the handiwork of Man hardly compares with the design of God, all human systems—including those for seeking the highest aspirations—inevitably sprout mutations. So it is with Islam. So it is with Christianity. And so it is with democracy. All of these systems, as history records, have experienced revisions and spawned sects. At times, they also have produced some misguided, deeply troubled would-be champions.

Prof. John Voll astutely, if somewhat sardonically, sums up the bulk of what has been written on the subject of Islam and democracy:

Much has been written on “Islam and democracy” in the past decade and a standard format has emerged in the argumentation, in which some essential definition is given of “Islam” and of “democracy,” and then the analyst/advocate shows how those basic definitions are either complementary or contradictory. This leads to a conclusion that either Islam and democracy are compatible or that they are not, depending upon the views of the analyst (2003, 2-3)

1 There are some who suggest that Christianity and democracy are not compatible. Vide, e.g., Kraynak (2001). This work challenges the commonly accepted view that Christianity is inherently compatible with modern democratic society. Contrary to conventional wisdom, it argues that there is no necessary connection between Christianity and any form of government.

2 There are numerous forms of democracy. Notable among these is social democracy. Vide, e.g., Martell (2002). This work is particularly timely, exploring social democracy with respect to globalization from an interdisciplinary point of view. A seminal text on diversity in democracies is O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986). See also libertarianism, conservative democracy, liberal democracy, etc.
To strengthen efforts to combine Islam and democracy, it will be useful to return to the roots of both. We will have to match up points of common principles, discuss the points of departure and seek to strengthen the values as well as the systems that will make common vision a mutually beneficial reality.

Islam: A religion of peace or terrorism?

The 9/11/01 attacks and subsequent events have heightened attention on whether Islam and democracy are compatible. Unfortunately discussion often has been driven by narrow-minded agenda, laden with stereotypic assumptions and enervated by cultural as well as intellectual differences that preclude balanced consideration. Actually, the question might never have been raised. Skeptics should consider the long history of Muslims living in non-Muslim lands—in peace, with mutual respect.

Today, moderate Muslims everywhere are forced by the events of 9/11 and the suicide bombings (in Israel, Iraq, Bali) to acknowledge actions done in the name of Islam that contravene its message. Yet, in the minds of many Muslims, including those in the West and others throughout the Islamic world, the question arises: “If members of another religion, ethnicity or society committed similar crimes would they be treated in the manner in which Muslims are being treated and spoken about today?” The politics of suicide (or homicide) bombings have overcome expressions of humanity. Thoughtful human beings of whatever political or religious persuasion grieve over circumstances that have brought the world to witness these horrors.

Moderate Muslims have made clear statements about their faith, such as the following:

…Islam is a peaceful, progressive, inherently forgiving and compassionate religion. Anyone who believes otherwise misses the core values of Islam.

…how painful it was to accept that Islam, a religion whose name means “self surrender,” had been pressed into service by militant causes so often that, in many Western minds, it has become synonymous with violence (Wolfe 2002, p. xi-xii.).

All too often, these statements are ridiculed and dismissed in the West by the media, politicians and the leaders of other religious faiths. Too many have seized upon the tragic events as opportunities to raise anxieties about Islam.

Unequivocally, moderate Muslims—even many who may not be considered openly moderate—reject terrorism as against the deen of Islam. Moreover, many have spoken out in strong terms promptly after 9/11. But, such remarks have not received coverage in the media sufficient to dispel the statements that, three years later, continue to be heard: “Where are the Muslim leaders on the subject of terrorism? Why have they not spoken out?” Alas, in this era dominated by media soundbites, moderates of any variety find it hard to put forward their message.

3 In similar vein, Muslims cannot fail to notice that the political structure that has evolved in the U.S. more closely resembles the political concord of early Islam than does that in some Muslim states in the Middle East, including Iraq before the latest events.

4 The deen is the comprehensive system of life of a Muslim, who submits to the authority of God (Allah) with the promises and rewards for those who embrace and practice it and the punishments for those who disobey it.
Modernity and tradition

In the U.S., tradition has become equated with outdated, old-fashioned practices and customs. Those who hold too tightly to (non-American) tradition are considered unsophisticated, perhaps even backwards. They are dismissed as being out of touch with modern times. However, the marvels of modernity did not spring *de novo* from our minds. Rather technology and science have built carefully on the findings and achievements of our predecessors. Indeed, we climb high on backs of others. So, too, in zeal to embrace what is modern, we can lose sight, e.g., of that which brought our ancestors and predecessors to this country and, most importantly, of the cornerstones of this country’s values.

Too often, critics reduce the subject of Islam and modernity to the matter of women’s garb. The veil is depicted as a symbol of oppression, ignoring distinctions such as the dress of Muslim women than runs from full chador⁵, to head scarves to merely modest dress. As the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) notes: “The Islamic rules for modest dress apply to both women and men equally…. If a particular society oppresses women, it does so in spite of Islam, not because of it.”⁶ In similar vein, Muslim critics of Western mores might take note that not all U.S. women (including Christians) flout mini-skirts and skimpy tops or fishnet bras. A woman’s choice to cover herself has as little to do with Islam as one who chooses to expose herself has to do with democracy (or freedom).

The body of Islam is tradition and tradition is the body of Islam—as it is presented in the Qur’an and in the life of the Prophet Mohammad. As the Prophet (s.a.v.)⁷ pointed out, the traditions of Islam were intended neither to be monolithic nor static. Rather they were constantly shifting and changing (i.e., evolving). Islam is a religion with a rich reliance on oral transmission. As Allah (s.w.a.)⁸ says: “We sent [the Prophet Mohammad] not but as a Mercy for all creatures.” (Qur’an: 21.107). How can Muslims ignore tradition? The traditions reveal the prophet as a model to emulate. In so doing, Muslims should remember that Islam is designed to be dynamic and ever renewing. Its message, even when in response to specific historical events, has other depths, which can be applied in every generation. For example, its message of patience to avoid conflict or bloodshed is timeless.

Those who in the name of Islam reject all aspects of modernity will be relegated to irrelevance. Moreover, Muslims who denounce change per se and romanticize the idea of


⁶ <http://www.cair-net.org/asp/aboutislam.asp>

⁷ s.a.v. Sall Allahu alayhi wa sallam. Blessings of peace be upon him. Traditional Islamic usage calls for an honorific following the names of Prophets and Saints, whenever they are mentioned.

⁸ s.w.a. Subha nahu wa ta’-aala. May He be Glorified and Exalted.

⁹ “…one must beware of rendering…the religious terms used in the Qur’an in the sense that they have acquired after Islam had become ‘institutionalized’ into a definite set of laws, tenets and practices. …when …[the] contemporaries (of the Prophet) heard the words islam and muslim, they understood them as denoting man’s ‘self-surrender to God’ and ‘one who surrenders himself to God’ (kâna musliman), or in 3:52, where the disciples of Jesus say, ‘Bear thou witness that we have surrendered ourselves unto God’ (bi-annâ muslimûn). In Arabic, this original meaning has remained unimpaired, and no Arab scholar has ever become oblivious of the wide connotations of these terms. Not so, however, the non-Arab of our day, believer and non-believer alike: to him, islam and muslim usually bear a restricted, historically circumscribed significance and apply exclusively to the followers of the prophet Muhammad.” Source: Asad (1980). Forward, p. vi.
the past, while condemning modern science and technology, are outside the framework of the authentic tradition. If anything, the Prophet (sal) ushered in new thinking—new ways of relating not only to God and Truth, but also to gender, minorities, conflict, peace, reconciliation, civil society and other topics relevant then and still relevant today. No doubt his message should continue to urge people forward, not to embrace modernity but to understand it and shape it within the framework established by Allah (swt).

To follow in the footsteps of the Prophet is to affirm the continuing relevance, validity and vitality of the message. Muslims follow tradition by living its truth in the present. Islam is a code of conduct towards which the individual is to strive (with the understanding that human beings will fail and fail again but must continue to make every effort to succeed).

Dissension in the ranks

Since the advent of Islam, differences have arisen in interpreting what was set down and in practices and approaches. These differences can be a source of strength or they can weaken the ummah. Labels are to be overcome, if only because they are divisive. They lead to factions and splinter groups that sap the energy of the mainstream. For thoughtful Muslims, it should be clear that mastering the excellence of comportment reflects a higher state of personal development than merely performing the outward technicalities of worship. Whether that mastery comes through one or another set of practices, factions or paths is beside the point. In most instances, the differences among Muslims that are blown way out of proportion could be resolved or accommodated if the adherents of Islam would better apply the tolerance and understanding that Allah (swt) intended for His ummah to exemplify.

Moderate Muslims understand and accept that there are ways of approaching differences, ways to find, establish and sustain the common threads of Qur’an and Sunna. Otherwise, differences can reach such magnitude that allowing them to go on, unchallenged and unchecked, not only will detract—but indeed will damage—the verities and values treasured by large numbers of sincere and intelligent followers of Islam. It is the challenge of today, and the task of moderate Muslims, not only to understand but also to cull out these differences and to discuss them. The outcome can be the means to advance strongly into the future—away from the extremes. Moderate Muslims will have to work to find validity and harmony among the differences, to reject extremism and to seek ways to interface with modernity.

Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you [He hath made you as you are]. So vie one with another in good works. Unto Allah you will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein you differ (Qur’an 5:48).

Thus have We made of you an ummatan wasata [a community of the middle way], justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations and the Apostle a witness over you … (Qur’an 2:143).

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10 *Ummah* is a community or a people. It usually refers to the Muslim community. In this sense, the community is more than its parts. There are Pakistanis and Egyptians, Indonesians and Americans in the Islamic ummah.

11 Examples from the traditions (*hadith*) of Prophet Mohammad, which are to be followed by all Muslims.
Fall not into disputes, lest you lose heart and your power depart … (Qur’an 8:46).

The consequences of not resolving differences are more severe than ever. Therefore the time is ripe for expanded efforts at reconciliation and new beginnings.

**Society and individuals**

Democracy is composed of laws and political institutions for a society. These are intended to allow individuals to enjoy freedom and to engage in the pursuit of happiness. U.S. history is replete with questions of where freedom of the individual stops and where the rights of the society take precedence. Selfishness and disregard for other human beings exact their price. Moreover, the founding fathers of the U.S. were mindful that freedom of expression and other “rights” of the individual, as well as their responsibilities, are all subject to the power of a supreme Deity.

Alexis de Tocqueville, in his peculiar way, has insisted that religion is essential to the success of liberal democratic government. …Tocqueville repeatedly insists that the laws and institutions of liberal democracy, while critical, are not enough. More important, in the long run, are the beliefs that provide the foundation for the laws and institutions of liberal democracy. …

Ideal democracy may flourish (or, some might say, will become unnecessary) with individuals who practice the highest precepts of religion and spirituality. While such individuals may come to express God in all that they do, especially in the manner they show towards one another, democracy (and Islam) has to make do with individuals at less exalted or advanced levels of development.

**Distinctions and excellence**

Western media is remarkable for its inability to deal with nuances or gradations, which creates a number of obstacles for dealing with Islam. Islam was presented as a way of life. That it has become a religion perhaps is attributable to the framework and development of other religions more than might otherwise have occurred. As with the adherents of any religion, not all individuals are at the same point in their faith. Islam encompasses a range of what may be viewed as categories or ranks. An important distinction is the difference between a Muslim and a Mu’min. According to the Qur’an, there is a significant difference between a Muslim (one who has submitted to the One God) and a Mu’min (one who is a believer). Allah says:

The Bedouin said, “We have faith.” Say, you do not have faith. What you should say is, “we have submitted,” until faith is established in your hearts. … (Qur’an: 49:14).
Those who have faith and do righteous deeds— they are the best of creatures (Qur’an: 98:7).

The way of the Mu’min is clearly described in the Qur’an. Who among the Abrahamic religions can dispute the following instruction to Muslims? “Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to God, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in Faith? For God did take Abraham for a friend” (Qur’an: 4.125). The distinction between a Muslim and a Mu’min is underscored in the examples of righteousness that are revealed in the Qur’an.

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing (Qur’an: 2.177).

Note that the Qur’an does not limit this recitation of righteousness nor those who are the people of truth as pertaining only to Muslims.

Marketing creed

Democracy is promoted widely, with a virtual zeal heretofore set aside for religion. It is sold “off the shelf” like a product. (Like the Barbie doll or computer software, there is a constant stream of latest releases and garbs that must also be purchased in order to be fashionable and competitive.) Democracy is marketed to societies as well as to individuals. A minority would advance democracy as an evolving, dynamic process in which active participation will lead to societal improvements, but this is an exceptional rather than mainstream point of view.

There are Muslims who promote Islam as a product. (These often are the same groups that rail most vociferously against the globalism and materialism that have become linked with U.S. democracy.) Although one of the guidelines given to Muslims is to make daw’ a,12 those who promote Islam in the form of rigid canon ignore the instruction:

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things (Qur’an: 2:256).

Spreading democracy

Can democracy come to the Middle East? Throughout the Muslim world? In the hearts of those of us who have tasted both Western democracy and Islam the answer certainly is yes. Are there not yearnings for democracy among most Muslims? After all, early Islam was the flowering of values that we have come to cherish as democratic. God stands always at

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12 Sharing the message of the Qur’an with others to invite them to Islam.
the apex of Islam. He is the final arbiter, the absolute knower of Truth. Democracy espouses that individuals (albeit imperfect) are at the apogee of democracy.

Islam emerged and flourished in a wide region before the notion of democracy surfaced in its sphere. Over centuries, it continued to thrive under successive political systems and rulers. So clearly, one would conclude that Islam likely not only could endure, but also indeed prosper, under democracy. Hence, one must ask: what are the forces within Islam today that reject democracy and what are their agendas? An understanding of these will lead to how best they might be tempered that harmony might come forward.

Blending Islam and modern democracy will require more than historical treatises and simple answers. It will require careful institution building. Democracy must not be viewed as riding the wake of colonialism, which has devastated much of the Muslim world. Liberation not enslavement (neither real nor perceived, neither physical nor economic) must be seen as the goal.

The promotion of democracy and respect for human rights is … a very complex undertaking.…. there is still a wide gulf between the articulation of global principles and their application in the majority of national settings. … a large number of countries attempting to move toward democracy are suffering serious crises of state capacity and governance. And without a stable and efficient public sector that enjoys the confidence of the population, it is virtually impossible to uphold the basic rules of political competition on which democracy depends. UNRISD citation.

The effort is not only worthwhile but it may be essential. In the process, both Islam and democracy are likely to be enriched and revitalized.

**U.S. goal in the Middle East**

Having fought the war in Iraq and unseated Saddam Hussein, America is committed to bring about a sustainable peace—-with stability for the country and the region. By its actions, the U.S. has taken on the task of helping Iraq to restructure its political, social and education systems. The goal has been clearly and authoritatively stated by the Bush administration:

America and our friends and allies must commit ourselves to a long-term transformation [of] the Middle East. A region of 22 countries with a combined population of 300 million … is held back by what leading Arab intellectuals call a political and economic “freedom deficit.” In many quarters a sense of hopelessness provides a fertile ground for ideologies of hatred that persuade people to forsake university educations, careers and families and aspire instead to blow themselves up—taking as many innocent lives with them as possible.…. Our task is to work with those in the Middle East who seek progress toward greater democracy, tolerance, prosperity and freedom.

As President Bush said in February [2003], “The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values, because stable and free nations do not breed ideologies of murder. They encourage the peaceful pursuit of a better life.” Rice (2003).
There can be little question that establishing a viable democracy in the Middle East (e.g., in Iraq) would represent a significant milestone. In order to do so, however, efforts will have to proceed in ways that will integrate and link the region’s institutions with its cultural and Islamic roots. A joining of Islam and democracy is likely only if such a union is explored and pursued by all parties with sincerity and desire to make it work. It is possible only if we return to the authentic meanings of both Islam and democracy. It is these that must become the central parts of moderate and progressive education. Together they can cultivate and nourish the commonweal—the good of the community—that is the rightful pursuit of all individuals, according to both Islam and democracy.

**Democracy and education**

Civic education is the means by which citizens learn about democratic processes and develop the skills to consider the choices facing their communities and to contribute to effective political decision-making. Schools can deliver civic education. So can the media or civil society organizations. Only constant and continuing education will help to maintain an energetic democratic society. Indeed, progressive and moderate education (for Muslims and non-Muslims alike) can be considered an important social movement, in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson, who wrote:

> I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power. [Emphasis added.] Jefferson (1820).

**A role for education**

If Iraq and the Middle East are to enter, contribute to and help to sustain a new dimension of global safety and security, this will come only from clear, well-planned educational and social initiatives. Systemic changes are needed, particularly in education, to rise above the unimportant differences among Muslims. But if we are to foster change at all aspects and levels of the educational process, we must think not only in terms of schooling. The role of the family in education cannot be underplayed.

> …since the possibilities for happy and productive lives are largely opened up for youth by the quality and extent of their education, parents who work most effectively at providing their offspring with what it takes to lead flourishing lives take education very seriously. Bennett (1996).

Indeed, we must examine and support all institutions that interact with the citizenry.

> “Certainly, flaws exist in open societies…but freedom and prosperity are more likely to flourish [there]…. [We must go beyond] traditional civic education [to find] new way[s] for teachers to relate to their pupils” in the same way citizens must relate in new ways to governments and elected officials in societies trying to become more open and democratic. Fisher-Thompson (1998).

The tendrils of democracy are far reaching. Joining Islam and modern democracy is
likely to touch on issues ranging from globalism, technology transfer, debt reduction, restructuring of currencies and the development of energy resources (that will leave no one dependent on the singular resources of any country or region). To be successful, these initiatives will need to be based on equity, equality of access to knowledge and technology, and economic and financial mechanisms that consider the disparities of resources. Aims and aspirations, however high-sounding, will have to be accompanied by practical means for implementation. Changes will happen only when undertaken with cultural sensitivity. As Islam’s first and foremost spokesman, “The Prophet Muhammad (sall) said ‘The actions will be rewarded according to the intentions behind them, and every person will have what he had intended.’” Fiqh-us-Sunnah 5.31.

Education must be continually refreshed, renewed, reinvented. It is the sum of all of these interactions that results in education. Education affects students, teachers and administrators. It also affects parents and community members. Systemic changes in education require a dynamic process with persistent dialogue among the parties and recurring evaluations of progress against clear goals. Education is a prerequisite for making peace. Making peace starts at home.

Democracy and violence can ill go together. …Evolution of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side. …The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within. Ghandi (uncertain).

The same is true for Islam. Listening to others is so indispensable that the Qur’an speaks about the excellence of the Prophet Mohammad (sall) in this regard. “And say, ‘He is (all) ear.’ Say, ‘He listens to what is best for you; he believes in Allah, has faith in the believers, and is a Mercy to those of you who believe.’” (Qur’an 9:61).

Benevolence stems from relationships, not laws. Education is a process of building relationships. It both has form and is formless. It is both formal and informal. Vigilance in education is needed to continually refresh principles and to try to ensure that citizens will observe high ethics. While the fires of core ideologies may retain some of their powers over long time periods (as with both Islam and democracy), nonetheless, politicizing, commandeering and splitting up take a toll. Both Islam and democracy have become charged terms—twisted by advocates as well as adversaries, challenged by misunderstandings. Will understanding triumph?

We need intentions, a vision for the future and meritorious actions that are sufficient to introduce and sustain (for at least one and half generations) a major paradigm shift: a re-orientation of perspective that will acknowledge local and national concerns, while considering the interrelationships linking national, regional and global actors.

**U.S. Democracy**

The quiddity of democracy is that its supporters tend to conflate it with a sweeping number of other values, social issues and political agenda. Peace, human rights, civil liberties, individual freedom, freedom of the press, economic freedom, capitalism, free trade and other matters frequently are linked with democracy. Yet each of these subjects is a vast domain in its own right. Is democracy all of these? Clearly one can enjoy peace without democracy. One can have freedom of the press without democracy.
What is Democracy?

American democracy has many trappings, so it is useful to explore its various aspects. For example, while democracy is linked with, say, freedom of expression, the two are not the same. Freedom of expression can emerge in an autocracy (e.g., Al Jazeera “[t]he Qatari-based satellite TV station [that manages to] even-handedly offend and delight both sides by turns” The Freedom of Information Center (2003). Such values as equality before the law, tolerance and individualism sometimes emerge in countries without representative government. Elements of justice, domestic tranquility, common defense, general welfare, and liberty can be found in systems that otherwise are non-democratic.

Yet, we must acknowledge, a constellation of these characteristics tends to follow democracy. A problem is that we tend to discuss democracy and related values as binary systems. In fact, however, they are continua. A nation’s achievements in democracy do not automatically bring about equivalent ranking in other categories. An independent audit ranked the U.S. twelfth (among 149 countries) in democracy. It ranked first (among seven countries) for political rights but fifteenth (among 100 countries) for freedom of the press. See Table 1 below.

Table 1. World Democracy Audit—U.S. Ranking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Democracy Audit overall ranking</td>
<td>1-149</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Rights</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil Liberties</td>
<td>1-7</td>
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<td>Press Freedom</td>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>13</td>
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http://www.worldaudit.org/countries/us.htm

The heart of democracy is common consent. Winning (and earning) that consent is the substance of democracy. Perhaps we can say that the strength of democracy is that it is a platform for perpetual reassessment of the political system by the people and/or through their legally and freely elected representatives and practices that govern and serve individuals. Democracy is honoring broadness and diversity. Democracy’s vitally lies in its ability to tolerate and embrace differences. As the U.S. Southern saying and its jazz rendition go: “It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that zing.”

Avowedly, democracy has its fallibilities. It is not an especially efficient form of governance (although it is one of accountability). Democracies may not be able to act as quickly as a dictatorship or theocracy, but they draws strength from their citizenry, which has the potential to lead to more enduring actions. The test of a democracy is the exercise of accountability. The Pillars of democracy are stated by the U.S. Department of State:

THE PILLARS OF DEMOCRACY

Sovereignty of the people.
Government based upon consent of the governed.
Comparing democracy and Islam

One cannot justly compare a political system that evolved under tribal societies (i.e., early Islam) with one that emerged much later (i.e., modern democracy) after centuries of discussion and experimentation. Nonetheless, the similarity of principles is striking. In examining the matter, it will be important to remember that the principles of Islam were laid down more than 1200 years before the founding of the U.S. to a people who enjoyed quite a different existence from that of Revolutionary times. However, the compatibilities to be built upon are clear, as are the seeming differences to be reconciled.

The Federalist Papers

Democracy did not simply spring from the soil of our land. The founding fathers had many ideas about how they wanted to form a government as reflected in their assiduous and voluminous writings. For example: “Civil government being the sole object of forming societies, its administration must be conducted by common consent” Jefferson (1782). Similarly, American democracy did not simply spout from the pens of the founding fathers to become reality. It also had to be sold to the people. The Federalist Papers—created principally for that purpose—emerged to be far more than a mere public-relations campaign. In them, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay laid out not only the reasons to adopt the Constitution that they had drafted but also elaborated their views on many general problems of politics. From these foundations, American democracy evolved, reflecting the character and efforts of the nation’s various constituencies.

Renewing the legacy of U.S. democracy

The Federalist Papers\(^{13}\) continue to be relevant today.

\(^{13}\)“THE FEDERALIST PAPERS were written and printed from October 1787 until May 1788 to counter arguments of Antifederalists against ratification of the Constitution of 1787. Alexander Hamilton was the originator of this work and author of 51 essays; James Madison wrote 26 of the papers; [Hamilton and Madison jointly authored] three essays; and John Jay wrote five of the papers. However, when these essays appeared in THE INDEPENDENT JOURNAL and other New York newspapers, they were attributed to "Publius" (this pseudonym referred to Publius Valerius Publicola, a great defender of the ancient Roman
Ideas of THE FEDERALIST should be essential elements of civic education, because they are core values and principles of the American heritage and foundations of national unity in a pluralistic society. These ideas are also keys to understanding how American government works (Patrick 1988).

If presented imaginatively and sensitively, this legacy also can be shared with citizens of other nations. The United States could make a significant contribution to global education for democracy by sponsoring a Hollywood effort to generate cross-culturally sensitive modernized multimedia presentations of The Federalist Papers and other key writings and events that led to American-style democracy. Such courseware could be distributed worldwide as a gift of the American democracy. In our times, when the messages reaching our youths often are less those of our schools and families than those propelled by rap, MTV, sitcoms and movies, can we afford to have the essentials of democracy (e.g., the rich heritage of debates, teachings and examples of our founders) be obscured by dry histories? If we are going to achieve real understanding among the world’s Muslims about democracy (and particularly its ability to transfer to other cultures) we will have to search beyond the form to reenergize the aspirations of democracy. In the process, we may have to distinguish democracy from the economic system and political slogans that have become attached to it. See Appendix II: Selected Quotations from the Founders of the United States.

Admonitions of our founding fathers

One might do well to remember that what has emerged (after 200 years) as American-style democracy is steeped in the suspicion of its authors—which they struggled to overcome. It is deep-seated also in the soil of disputation—from which emerged informed grounds for a more permanent union, as had been directed by the Continental Congress in 1774.

However refined our views may have come to be, many of our founding fathers expressed grave doubts about democracy. Consider these excerpts from writings by James Madison, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin.

...a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. (Madison, )

...however small the Republic may be, the Representatives must be raised to a certain number, in order to guard against the cabals of a few; and...

...however large it may be, they must be limited to a certain number, in order to guard against the confusion of a multitude Madison (1787).

Democracy will soon degenerate into an anarchy, such an anarchy that every man will do what is right in his own eyes and no man’s life or property or reputation or liberty will be secure, and every one of these will

Republic). “The authors of THE FEDERALIST had varying and sometimes clashing ideas about government, but they agreed strongly on certain fundamental ideas: republicanism, federalism, separation of powers, and free government” Patrick (1988).

141 The government might invite such an effort, to be led by, say, an expert like Steve Jobs. Jobs is the CEO of Apple Computer, which he co-founded in 1976, and Pixar, the Academy-Award-winning animation studios, which he co-founded in 1986. He has exhibited a long-term commitment to education.
soon mould itself into a system of subordination of all the moral virtues and intellectual abilities, all the powers of wealth, beauty, wit and science, to the wanton pleasures, the capricious will, and the execrable cruelty of one or a very few (Adams, 1763).

In these moments … I agree to this Constitution, with all its faults… I believe, farther, that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic government, being incapable of any other. I doubt too, whether any other Convention we can obtain, may be able to make a better Constitution; for, when you assemble a number of men, to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does; and I think it will astonish our enemies…. (Franklin, in Jorgenson and Mott (1962).

The wisdom of the founding fathers is based not only on their civil and religious beliefs but also on their knowledge of history (something that is all too lacking in today’s society). Thomas Jefferson offered this prescription for protecting our republic from tyrants, one firmly rooted in his understanding of history.

… the people … are the ultimate, guardians of their own liberty. … History by apprizing them of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views. (Jefferson, 1781).

Checks and balances

Checks and balances (limiting the powers of separate branches of government over each other so that no branch will become supreme) are cornerstones of our government, established by the U.S. Constitution. The idea of checks and balances in government was not invented in the U.S. Rather it has a long history.

The concept of constitutional checks arose as an outgrowth of the classical theory of separation of powers…. The purpose of this …was to ensure that governmental power would not be used in an abusive manner…. Classical political philosophers from Aristotle onward favored a “mixed” government combining the elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. The English theorist James Harrington in his Oceana (1656) derived a theory akin to separation of powers from the old idea of mixed government. Later, John Locke, in his second treatise Of Civil Government (1690), urged that the best way to avoid a perverted government was to provide constitutionally for separation of the legislative and executive powers. Montesquieu, in his Spirit of the Laws (1748), added the third power of the judiciary to this concept, and the modern expression of
separation of powers came into being. The mechanics (sic) of checks and balances were refined by the founders of the American republic (Jefferson, 1781).

Nor is a doctrine of checks and balances limited to American-style democracy. A comparable idea is found in Islam. While the form is different (understandably, given the different circumstances) the principles are clear. Following the death of Prophet Muhammad (sal), Abu Bakr (raa)\textsuperscript{15} became the first Caliph by the general consent of the people. In his First Address, he spoke to the gathering as follows:

I have been given the authority over you and I am not the best of you. If I do well, help me; and if I do wrong, set me right. …Obey me so long as I obey God and His Messenger. But if I disobey God and His Messenger, you owe me no obedience. (Wustenfeld)

It would be an error to try to equate the domains of [the rhetoric, intention and actions of] a noble and trusted leader and the operation of a political system designed to reach [similar] aims without a ruler of such character. In modern societies, the nobility of our rulers is often questionable. Lofty ideals are all too easy to suppress. Coercion of the citizenry is all too easy to employ. One of the challenges in reconciling Islam with democracy is the difference with which values that have become linked with democracy (such as globalism and materialism) are regarded in the Muslim world. Also, Islam emerged as a teaching to reinforce the goal for human beings to worship Allah. At the outset, it thrived in a climate and with a system of values breeding benevolent leaders (although the system soon degenerated into despotism). In contrast, democracy emerged as a means of governance to insure individual rights, as defined by man. U.S. democracy sprang from earnest efforts to be free from monarchy and tyranny and to gain benevolent leadership, after unhappy experiences with under non-representative government.

If the ultimate power rests with God, clearly unrestrained power by any human being is to be eschewed. The circumstances of today should provide a common basis for embracing a democratic system that will guarantee the values treasured by all human beings, Muslim and non-Muslim. Would not the pride of democracy be its successes in elevating benevolent leaders to positions of power?\textsuperscript{16}

Ideologues who proclaim that the U.S. was founded as a Christian (or a Judeo-Christian) nation and that, by rights, U.S. democracy is a Christian concept are not only self-righteous but also wrong. The U.S. was founded by Europeans fleeing religious persecution. At that time, in Europe, the church—in the name of Christianity—was a powerful political force. Hence, another determination for separating church and state lay heavily upon the founders as they deliberated on creating a constitution. Our founding fathers had a keen sense of the outcome of unrestrained power.

It was under a solemn consciousness of the dangers from ecclesiastical ambition, the bigotry of spiritual pride, and the intolerance of sects, thus exemplified in our domestic, as well as foreign annals, that it was deemed advisable to exclude from the national government all power to act upon the subject. The situation, too, of the different states equally proclaimed the

\textsuperscript{15} raa radi Allahu anhu. May Allah be pleased with him.

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. the many plays of William Shakespeare that deal with the influences of power on the lives of rulers. E.g., Anthony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, Macbeth.
policy, as well as the necessity of such an exclusion. In some states, episcopalians constituted the predominant sect; in others, presbyterians; in others, congregationalists; in others, quakers; and in others again, there was a close numerical rivalry among contending sects. It was impossible, that there should not arise perpetual strife and perpetual jealousy on the subject of ecclesiastical ascendancy, if the national government were left free to create a religious establishment. The only security was in extirpating the power. But this alone would have been imperfect security, if it had not been followed up by a declaration of the right of the free exercise of religion, and a prohibition (as we have seen) of all religious tests. Thus, the whole power over the subject of religion is left exclusively to the state governments, to be acted upon according to their own sense of justice, and the state constitutions; and the Catholic and the Protestant, the Calvinist and the Arminian, the Jew and the Infidel, may sit down at the common table of the national councils, without any inquisition into their faith, or mode of worship” (Story, 1833).

History reflects that the founding fathers reached beyond the teachings of Christianity to shape a government. Some writers even have traced the roots of Revolutionary writings to Islamic ideas. Observations by the founding fathers of Native American governance also impacted to a large extent how our government was formed.

Democracy is and must remain inclusive and elastic. Beyond certain boundaries, it breaks down. One of those boundaries is developing and preserving a knowledgeable citizenry. The problem is what some have termed the dumbing down of America. This is a challenge to be overcome.

The good life

What is it that citizens of all faiths are seeking? In Plato’s Gorgias, Socrates proposes as axiomatic that everyone is seeking to live a good life. He goes on to demonstrate that there is a distinction between what is good and what is pleasant, arguing that one should choose what is good over what is pleasant. How does a Muslim regard the matter of the good life?

Muslims are called upon to turn away from infighting and towards their core responsibilities—to feed the poor, to house the homeless, to educate the ignorant, to relieve the oppressed, and to assist others in the attainment of the good life (hayat-i-tayybah).

An exchange between the Prophet Muhammad (sal) and a questioner relates the flexibility, tolerance and accommodation that typified the early expressions of Islam. After

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17 E.g., “…the ultimate actors in the world are neither civilizations nor states but individual persons. This is the basic thesis of representative government embodied in Islamic law and in the American Constitution. And the ultimate goal of every person, just as of human community at every level, whether we recognize it or not, is to be what God intends us to be” (Crane, ).

18 “From the very beginning, the founding fathers saw tribal government as something to be admired and emulated. …the U.S. Constitution is modeled after the oldest constitution in North America -- the constitution of the Seven Iroquois Nations … the traditions of Congressional debate are taken from American Indian tribal councils…”<http://www.nativeamericancaucus.com/tribal.shtml>

the Prophet (sal) had declared: “Giving of Sadaqa is essential for every Muslim” the following exchange was recorded.

It was said (to him): What do you say of him who does not find (the means) to do so? He said: Let him work with both his hands, thus doing benefit to himself and give Sadaqa. It was said to him: What about him who does not have (the means) to do so? He said: Then let him assist the needy, the aggrieved. It was said: What do you say of one who cannot even do this? He said: Then he should enjoin what is reputable or what is good. He said: What about him if he cannot do that? He (the Holy Prophet) said: He should then abstain from evil, for verily that is Sadaqa on his behalf.21

Muslims look to their religion for guidance in all matters and accept that all of their rights as human beings are established in the Qur’an: “…then we gave you a Shari’a in religion, follow it, and do not follow the lust of those who do not know….” (Qur’an 40:17) The Qur’an and the traditions of the prophet Muhammad (sal) imbue Islam with practical guidance, clear examples and flexible rules for daily life, including political matters.

Hasten, all of you to the achievement of your Lord’s forgiveness, and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-fearing, who spend in prosperity and in adversity, and restrain their anger, and forgive their fellowmen. Allah loves the benevolent (Qur’an 3: 133-134).

Certainly there are examples of abuses of power by modern Islamic rulers. But such departures from the deen stand out as deviations.

What’s at Stake?

The world is very much concerned with peace today. Unfortunately, too often, as for centuries, its pursuit is taking the form of war. Retributive justice is neither truly American nor Islamic, nor is it what the world needs today. Rather, what is needed is distributive justice, for it alone is based on the deepest principles of equity.

The search for peace

Everyone has experienced some measure of peace. That is why the search for peace is so rallying. Peace is composed of attributes that enter and exit our hearts and minds throughout our lives. Peace comes in moments of compassion, of patience, of error and repentance, of forgiveness. It comes in bursts of creativity, in the awareness of limitations, in a sense of destiny.

Ultimately, peace depends on more than structures, on more than laws, and on

20 Sadaqa is an act of voluntary kindness pleasing to God. Anything given away in charity for the pleasure of Allah is called Sadaqa.
21 Sa’id b. Abu Burda reported this Hadith on the authority of his grandfather. Sahih Muslim, Book 005, Number 2202.
22 For Muslims, Shari’at is the totality of guidance for religious, political, social, domestic and private life. It is a system of law inspired by the Qur’an, the Sunna (traditions or Hadith documented in such collections as Bukhariyyat, Tirmidhiyyat, etc.), older Arabic law systems, parallel traditions, and work of Muslim scholars over the first two centuries of Islam. It incorporates also aspects of law from conquered countries and Roman and Jewish law. Fiqh is the science of Shari’a and is sometimes used as synonymous with it.
more than social principles. It depends on establishing peace within human beings. ‘Alija ‘Ali Izetbegovic, former president of Bosnia and a former Muslim dissident who spent years in prison under the communists, wrote:

The human influence on the course of history depends on...the spiritual strength of the partaker[s] in events. Man, if he found himself among lions, would be lost, but this evident law does not apply to a lion tamer. History is a continuing story about small groups of decisive, courageous and clever people who have left an indelible stamp on the course of historical events and managed to change their flow (Izetbegovich, 1989, p. 232-33.).

Opportunities to change our state, our place, our means of livelihood, or our historical identity, are great threats to many. Change demands levels of trust and submission that most of us are unwilling to make. But it is possible to find a security of identity that allows us to respect others, their choices, and their identities. In a world constantly redefined by media, products, and slogans, the ability to interact in a positive way and remain inwardly secure in our belief requires strong character and faith. Taking responsibility for our own life can embrace feeling a sense of responsibility for others. In this understanding is the road to peace.

While its context is far broader, the Qur’an contains warnings about the dangers of selfish views.

Those who split up their Religion, and become (mere) Sects, each party rejoicing in that which is with itself!

When trouble touches human beings, they cry unto their Lord, turning back to Him in repentance: but when He gives them a taste of Mercy as from Himself, behold, some of them pay part-worship to other gods besides their Lord-

… So give what is due to kindred, the needy, and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek the Countenance, of Allah, and it is they who will prosper.

That which ye lay out for increase through the property of (other) people, will have no increase with Allah: but that which ye lay out for charity, seeking the Countenance of Allah, (will increase): it is these who will get a recompense multiplied (Qur’an 30:32-39).

Sharing the ideals of democracy

How can we measure success in educating about democracy? Is it the delivery and spreading of doctrine?

There is only one U.S. democracy. The U.S. has evolved over two centuries, taking steps to manifest the ideals and principles of its founders in enviable ways. Americans have come to enjoy a good life. Part of our heritage is to want to share our democratic legacy with others. But consider that, while exporting democracy has been a policy of the U.S. since the end of World War II, the word democracy appears neither in the U.S. Constitution nor in its Amendments nor in the Declaration of Independence.

Time and partisanship have created obstacles to understanding. The word democracy has become somewhat more a catchphrase than a meaningful term. It has taken on meanings not only perhaps contrary to its historical usage but also complicating
In our efforts to share the legacy of democracy with Iraqis and other Muslims, Americans should be mindful that, for democracy to take root successfully in Muslim countries, the cultural and religious values of Islam must be acknowledged and become its allies.

As it turns out, our notion of diversity, despite its central place in the focus and design of American higher education in America, may not be a universal academic value. Just as the Ford Motor Company places steering wheels on the left for cars sold in America and on the right for cars sold in the United Kingdom, American universities in search of overseas opportunities should consider what kind of adjustments may be necessary when contracting for the export of their finest educational products (Jones, 2002).

Moreover, the U.S. has a challenge to live up to its ideals. It is foolish to simply dismiss statements like the following critique of Western policies (not principles):

… the West's commitment to its ideals and values brought it the respect and admiration of millions of people, those keen enough to emulate western values and attempt to transfer them to their local societies. Many came to view the West as a symbol of human salvation, an oasis of freedom, and a safe heaven when troubles and disasters were continuously striking other parts of the world.

… While the West acts like protector and defender of these values at home, its behaviour abroad, especially towards non-Western countries, reflects the opposite.

… suspicion and mistrust today stands in the way of promoting full understanding between the East and the West. … for many Easterners, the West is ruthless and discriminatory, cynical and untrustworthy, its motives for meddling in their countries are about natural resources, power and imperialism.

… Today, many Easterners … believe America is not serious about promoting democratic and other values outside western societies.

Iraq is a test case in which the West could have proved its commitment to its ideals but so far has not done so. Besides, what was lost in the war in Iraq is perhaps the opportunity to demonstrate to Arabs and Muslims that the West acts according to its ideals whether at home or abroad. … (Al Sayegh, 2003). 23

The love hate relationship between many Muslims and the West can serve as a wedge from which to bridge difference. It also can be quite polarizing.

23 The writer is a Muslim who is a Visiting Scholar at Georgetown University's Center for Muslim Christian Understanding.
of the Soviet Union, in relation to other most frequently Islamic countries),
is bound to suffer because it is hard to dissociate it from the emotional
charge aroused by this mixture of fascination and repulsion, proximity and
otherness. Other cultures which have less impassioned relations with the
West are no doubt better able to make such a dissociation, separating the
democratic model from the real or supposed ambition to dominate of the
powers which are brandishing it. (Salamé, 2001).

**Barriers and bonding**

The U.S., of course, properly can be described as a representative republic rather than a
democracy. Unfortunately, a number of different interest groups have come to embrace
that distinction and to push it as part of their special issues political platforms. What these
groups have in common, it might be noted, is the belief that their own point of view is right
and that it alone is deserving of triumphant representation. Such self-righteous conduct is
far from the wise standard set by Judge Learned Hand:

> “The spirit of liberty,” he said “is the spirit which is not too sure that it is
> right; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds
> of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which weighs their
> interests alongside its own without bias” (Ehrlich, 2003).

That is a spirit with which Muslims can identify. Like the adherents of other religions, few
Muslims would disagree with:

> We the People … in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice,
> insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the
> general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our
> Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution … (The United States
> Constitution).

These words echo what is stated in the Qur’an: “O my people! Give full measure
and full weight in justice, and wrong not people in respect of their goods. And do not evil
in the earth, causing corruption.” (Qur’an 11:85).

**The evolution of U.S. democracy**

As citizens of a 200-year democracy, Americans, particularly, should recall that (especially
at its outset) forming a democracy is replete with contradictions, differences of opinion and
(on the whole) strain. We should take note that two great individuals responsible for the
founding of our country espoused different visions for the future of the U.S.

At the dawn of the American Republic… Jefferson, the main writer of the
Declaration of Independence … wanted the nation to have a weak national
government, an agrarian economy, and universal education. Hamilton
…wanted a strong national government, a mixed economy, and a limited
education system. The two men argued constantly…. Considering how
things are today, the outcome of the nation’s history was mostly in favor of
Although the youthful author of the essay discussed only Jefferson and Hamilton, other notables of the time also articulated competing positions as to how a new government might most successfully achieve a democracy. In the end, our founding fathers opted for a constitution that would allow changes to be made to fit future times and circumstances. The American Revolution was not designed to achieve freedom from God. The founding fathers wanted freedom of religion. Expressions of worship were not to be dictated by the state but rather left to individuals. One might say that the vibrancy of the American system lies in its independence from canon (while embracing shared values). Its strengths stem from having elevated a dialogue above sectarian interests to identify with universal values. That is why dissidents with many voices could form a union—our nation.

Today, more than ever, it is vital that all citizens keep vigilance against any efforts to reinterpret history or to pander to a sectarian agenda. In steering a course for the U.S. into the future, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists (and, indeed, agnostics) would do well to remember the value (and the responsibility) of upholding the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and of ensuring that others do the same. Herein—and herein only—lie the guarantees of freedom of religion and fairness, equity and justice for all.

In sharing our democracy product with other countries, it would be helpful to recall that flexibility was the watchword of our founding fathers. We should not try to impose on other countries only the form and appearance of our present democratic form of government. Also, we should strive to carefully distinguish democracy from its close links with capitalism and the global economy. Americans also need to remember that notwithstanding a desire on the part of other countries to emulate our form of government (and themselves to enjoy the fruits) the path is fraught with difficulties. Unless all parties actively seek, promote and support compatibilities, the result will be antagonism, not liberation.

Claiming the roots of U.S. democracy.

Political agendas help to cloak what should be a point of agreement between Muslims and Christians in today’s deliberations. Neither group would deny the superiority of Divine law over human laws. None of our founding fathers seems to have doubted the supremacy of God’s law. They were believers. Nor did they ascribe to any democracy the power to negate God’s law. As Alexander Hamilton wrote:

what is called the law of nature, “which, being coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is, of course, superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times. No human laws are of any validity, if contrary to this; and such of them as are valid, derive all their authority, mediately, or immediately, from this original.”
Blackstone. (Hamilton, 1775).

In the U.S. today, some advocates (e.g., certain spokespersons speaking in the name of “Christianity”) cite this statement and other sentiments similarly voiced by the

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24 An essay based on an assignment that asked students at New Trier High School in the U.S. to imagine that Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson have come back to life to witness the United States today. Which would be happier with the United States and why?
founding fathers in attempts to inject church into state. In recent controversies, some declarations have been panic-filled and put forward with such prattling pomposity that they tend to obscure the very point that the founding fathers (however reluctantly) concluded: namely, that separation of church and state is the only way to keep the state from running roughshod over [someone’s] church. It was even more important that the church be restrained from political control of the reins of government.

In a similar vein, from the outset, one of the prime doctrines of American government has been the supremacy of civilian authority over the military. Historically, the U.S. has denounced in other countries the role of the military in consolidating authoritarian relationships between states and civil societies. The emerging pattern of a U.S. president wearing a military uniform in staged ceremonies at military facilities portends perhaps the inverse of political order seized by the military—civilian authority embracing the military. The drift seems no less alarming. While the U.S. has not become a stratocracy, we can note a trend to sanction military and repressive solutions when there’s a job to be done. This is a clear departure from the fear of standing armies that was so pronounced in Colonial and Revolutionary times, which led our founding fathers to oppose all forms of unfettered military activity.

Irons of our times

It is ironic to recall that one of the prime concerns of the Framers of the Constitution was “domestic tranquility.” They meant to make sure that the federal government had powers to squash rebellions and to impose resolutions for disputes between the states.25 Today, we can lament just how far we have strayed from history.

Creating a Department of Homeland Security now is a direct fulfillment of the mission those feisty and principled Founders of ours gave those of us who are privileged to serve in our national government when they wrote the preamble to our Constitution more than two centuries ago. It reads, “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” When we come together in this 107th Session of Congress to create this new department, as I am confident we will, we will have formed a more perfect union, insured domestic tranquility, provided for the common defense, and secured the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity (Lieberman, 2002).

A second irony stems from the penchant of many U.S. politicians and pundits alike to prefer private sector solutions to governmental programs for solving public problems. While U.S. politicians voice concern about monocracy and self-serving bureaucracies in the governance of some other countries, for the most part, autocracies still reign in many work places in democratic states. This includes U.S. and transnational corporations that rule the market economy. Through rhetoric that idealizes the public sector and seeks to

25 Shay's Rebellion took place just before the Constitutional Convention. Pennsylvania and Connecticut had very nearly gone to war with each other (over Wilkes-Barre).
turn over to it all public utilities and social programs, in effect, U.S. politicians are endorsing, if not indeed promoting, the autocratic management style of industry over the bureaucratic management approach of democracy.

While domineering control may be the main styles of managing for many industrial leaders, successful industry managers tend to be ones who nonetheless have found it vital to align their teams behind decisions—even those reached neither by consensus nor majority rule. The rulers in some Islamic countries (indubitably, autocracies) would seem to have in common with the titans of industry no less sophisticated understandings of their real bases for power.

The substrates that frame such ironies and other apparent contradictions are matters that will have to be aired (among and between both Muslims and non-Muslims) if democracy is to find a place in Muslim countries.

**Moderate Progressive Islam**

**Compassion, Mercy, Peace**

The Qur’an explains that Compassion, Mercy, Peace and the other Divine attributes are legacies from God to every being of His creation, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.

Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans—whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right—surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve (Qur’an 2:62).

The challenge for all humans is the pursuit of the Divine attributes—learning to note, realize, embrace and activate them in our daily lives. We are not always successful.

Clearly, not all Muslim societies are living up to the Islamic ideals of economic and social equity, justice, tolerance, and educational opportunity. Indeed, among countries where Islam is the state religion, roughly four out of five have yet to establish functioning democratic governments; approximately 75% are reported by Amnesty International as allowing extra-judicial executions, arbitrary arrests, or unfair trials; and, in more than half, the illiteracy rate stands at 30% or higher (Smith, 1999 P. 52-53, 64-65, 70-71). Moreover, domestic strategies (supported by U.S. interest and diplomacy) to suppress so-called Islamist opposition can be seen as antithetical to efforts to advocate and propagate democracy. These are significant problems that Muslims must address. While acknowledging these problems, we can also find inspiration in communities where Islamic principles are operating and have helped to ensure peace.

Particularly in the U.S. and Europe, Islam too often is seen as a violent religion. But from the time of the prophet Muhammad (sal) onward, there have been numerous examples of those who lived in peace if not for peace. In the 12th century (A.D.), in the battles of the Third Crusade, Saladin26 fought the Crusaders to take back Jerusalem, which

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26 “Saladin, the Western name for the ruler Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub, was the great Muslim general who confronted the Crusaders in the Near East. Born to a Kurdish family active in Syria, Saladin reestablished a Sunni regime in Egypt in 1171 by putting an end to the last Shiite Fatimid caliph there.” (Gardner, ).
had been in Christian hands for almost a century. In contrast to the bloodbath when the Crusaders had taken Jerusalem, Saladin acted with restraint and nobility to the Christian and Jewish residents of the city. When he signed a truce with Richard the Lionhearted, the latter is said to have remarked on the refinement of this Muslim ruler.\textsuperscript{27} That many in the Middle East yet consider the Third Crusade to be but recent history is a tragic reality. However, the efforts of Saladin to reach peaceful compromises in the face of Richard’s hubris are perhaps meritorious examples for today.

One of the most successful modern-day practitioners of nonviolence was the Muslim leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who, in the 1930s and 1940s, mobilized the Pathans of the North-West Frontier into a nonviolent army on behalf of Indian independence. He wrote to his followers:

\begin{quote}
I am going to give you such a weapon that the police and the army will not be able to stand against it. It is the weapon of the Prophet (s.a.w) but you are not aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No power on earth can stand against it.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Muslims in the West

Sometimes obscured in the flood of scholarly writings on the subject of Islam and democracy is the reality that there are substantial Muslim communities in democratic nations.

Muslim communities in democratic nations

\textit{Table 2. Muslim populations in selected democratic nations.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated Muslim population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>5.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>0.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.2 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While many of the world’s approximately 1.3 billion\textsuperscript{29} Muslims have no practical experience with western democracy, Muslims (including converts to Islam) living in

\textsuperscript{27} In the context of citing peaceful actions, it may appear somewhat shocking to bring up Saladin, the Kurdish warrior who set up the Ayyubids dynasty in Egypt. However, consider the restraint towards the general population shown by the U.S. in its recent intervention in Iraq, despite the militant display of “shock and awe” intended for the leadership.


\textsuperscript{29} “Today there are more than 50 independent Muslim countries and there is a worldwide population of around 1.300-million Muslims.” Source: The World Bank Group. http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/encyclopedia/FaithsandEnvironmentFaithStatementsIslam See also Appendix I: Nations with Sizable Muslim Populations.
democratic countries have distinctive standing. Muslims living in democratic countries can play a unique role in reeducating Muslims to a moderate, progressive Islam. Indeed, it is in the diversity of cultures and experiences among those who embrace Islam that “Islamic” democracy can be expected to emerge.

In considering the compatibility of Islam and democracy, Muqtedar Khan noted, one must recognize that it is false to claim that there is no democracy in the Muslim world. At least 750 million Muslims live in democratic societies of one kind or another, including Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Europe, North America, Israel, and even Iran. Moreover, there is little historical precedent for mullahs controlling political power. One exception is Iran since the revolution in 1979 and the other is the Taliban in Afghanistan. For the preceding 1500 years since the advent of Islam, secular political elites have controlled political power (United States Institute of Peace).

It is important that majorities of both Muslims and non-Muslims come to understand that Islam, like other religions, can have a role in democratic politics. The faith of its constituents can become an ally of democracy rather than its foe. Certainly, Muslims will continue to operate in the democracies where they reside, as they (and others) have under numerous other political systems throughout the ages. But for Muslims in non-democratic countries to fully embrace democracy will require further efforts.

While diplomatic banter often can be dismissed as mere posturing or spin doctoring, U.S. diplomats seeking to project to the Muslim world a positive face for democracy would do well to consider the following:

[Saudi] Prince [Turki Al Faisal Al Saud] … said that he did not understand the need to bring more “democracy” and freedom of speech to Saudi Arabia when in the same time the U.S. for example is pressing the Saudi authorities to arrest anyone who speaks against the U.S. or speaks in favor of Mujahideens and Osama Bin Laden’s group, al-Qaeda (Al Faisal Al Saud, 2003).

The immigrant experience

Most immigrants to the U.S. are seeking better economic opportunities and socially upward mobility. Today’s new arrivals mostly plan to stay in the U.S. That is partly because there is little to attract them to return home. America is a dream realized. Here, they soon realize, indeed are opportunities for a better life. Here, their children have opportunities for a good education. Before very long, they stop even dreaming of returning home.

The ease of first generation cultural adjustment depends greatly on arriving well educated and with some fluency in English speaking. First-generation immigrants lacking such skills stand little chance of assimilating, particularly when they live among other immigrants from similar backgrounds and where they are not confronted with everyday challenges of speaking English. However, the children of these immigrants, although retaining some elements of their native culture, absorb English-language, U.S. “civic values,” as well as the elements of consumer and pop culture. The outcome is that they tend to regard Islam from a 21st century (rather than 8th century) outlook.
The U.S. melting pot

To understand the parallels between Islamic teachings and the principles of democracy, it will be helpful to look at certain aspects of democratic governance in detail. Over the centuries, Americans of all backgrounds have come to work together to protect values of pluralism, democracy, civil society, equal opportunity, economic security, minority rights and equality before the law. In theory, the American melting pot welcomes people of diverse backgrounds. Historically, those who already were here taunted first generation Irish, Polish, Jewish and other immigrants. But cross-cultural contacts alone do not always foster tolerance. Racial and regional bias, prejudice and historical events color relationships.

Muslims, whose civilization respected and built upon the achievements of the Greeks, Persians, Byzantines, and others, should, in theory also, readily recognize and participate in upholding the values embodied in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. These values are as fundamentally Islamic as they are American. Both Muslim and non-Muslim Americans can make better efforts to overcome the widespread practice of presenting Islam in the United States as an immigrants’ religion only, rather than as a faith that shares human values deeply rooted in Islam as well as in American history.

An astute Muslim scholar recently observed:

I think the American experience does something to people, that when you come to the United States, and you might come with a different perception, you might even come from these societies which feel that the U.S. has not treated them well in its foreign policy, but once you’re in the U.S. you’re under the protection of the Constitution, you’re under the umbrella of democracy; you’re sharing in all the economic...opportunities. And, you are meeting the average American who is a very decent person. And, suddenly what you find out is that your perception of the United States is changing, and that you’re becoming an American (al-Hibri, 2002).30

The United States presents an exciting opportunity for its Muslims—not only to benefit those in the U.S. but elsewhere as well. In Muslim societies, cultural overlays and the influence of Wahhabbi interpretation of Islam have tended to impede expressions of global Islamic thought. Monocultures tend to engender ethnocentricty—a commanding suppressant of change and affirmation of culture over an integrative world-view. The U.S., in contrast, is multicultural and pluralistic—by both tradition and, perhaps one might say, by design. Here, Muslims of all nationalities are interacting—with one another, with non-Muslims, and with the powerful trends that are shaping global civilization.

If democracy is to spread farther in the Muslim world, Muslims (especially those living in the U.S.) can play a unique role. In America’s schools, businesses and organizations, Muslims from Malaysia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, India, the United States, and other nations—Shiah31 and Sunni32, Hanafi33, Hanbali34 and

30 Bill Moyers introduced “the Muslim scholar Azizah al-Hibri [as] a Renaissance woman…. She’s a professor of law at the University of Richmond in Virginia, a securities and corporate lawyer, a careful reader of the Quran and the American Constitution. She’s also the founder and executive director of Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights.”

31 There are two distinct traditions within Islam. The “Shiah tradition…dates back to the time of the four caliphs [following the Prophet Mohammad]. The original supporters of Ali…were…deeply aggrieved by the
Maliki—are living and working, together. There can be no substitute for first-hand experience. Americans (Muslims or non-Muslims) can talk about democracy abroad. But it is another thing for a Muslim foreign visitor to share the experiences of living in a free democratic society (e.g., in the U.S.) among both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is for this reason that a strong approach to progressive and moderate Muslim education will provide for numerous exchanges, internships, training events and other contact between key individuals in Muslim countries and Muslim communities in the democratic world.

It is time that mosques in the U.S. come to reflect multicultural diversity. The huddled Pakistani, Egyptian or Syrian enclaves are (and should remain) first generation relics. The best assurance for successive generations lies in multicultural diversity within the Muslim community. That also is the best protection against Wahhabi and other fundamentalists’ efforts to own the minbars. Moreover, only through open acknowledgement and honest reevaluation of a long tradition (at least seven centuries) of Islamic teachings that legitimizes attacking non-combatants while waging jihad will a more considered moderation prevail. Comfort lies easily in similitude; rising above dissimilarities requires individual efforts to understand other points of view. American Muslims must search out the values that Islam holds in common with those of our nation’s founders.

Most important is that American Muslims find their public and private voices—to share with their brothers and sisters in other countries a portrait of the U.S. that goes beyond typecasting and name-calling, just as they want American non-Muslims to come to see Islam beyond stereotypes. We have the potential to contribute to building a lasting foundation for peace and security. We must find that will.

Islam and Education

martyrdom of Ali’s son Hussain, and believed that the caliphate should have been reserved for the Prophet’s descendants” (Frager, 2002. P. 61).
32 “The majority of Muslims [who] insisted that the [Shari'a], Islamic law, be based primarily on the Qur’an and the example (sunnah) of the Prophet (saw)” (Frager, 2002. P. 62)
33 Hanafi is one of four major legal schools in Sunni Islam, noted for the use of reason in legal opinions. It is named for Ali Numan Abu Hanifa (ca. 700-67).
34 Hanbali is one of four major legal schools in Sunni Islam. It was established by Ibn Hanbal (d. 855). A noted follower of this school was Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century and, consequently, it is the dominant school in Saudi Arabia.
35 Maliki is one of the major schools of Islamic legal scholarship. It is named after Malik ibn Anas (ca. 710-95).
36 Wahhabism is “a Muslim puritan movement founded in the 18th century by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. … Adopted by the ruling Saudi family in 1744, the movement … was assured of dominance on the Arabian Peninsula with the creation of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, and in the 20th century—supported by Saudi wealth—it engaged in widespread missionary work throughout the Islamic world.”<http://concise.britannica.com/ebc/article?eu=407522>
37 The minbar is a pulpit placed near the mihrab, which indicates the qibla or direction of prayer (i.e., towards Mecca). At the Friday (juma) prayer, the khatib delivers the sermon or Khutba. Wahhabi clerics have used the minbar to preach their brand of fundamentalism and often to take-over the “democratic” process of electing Masjid officials and transferring masjid property to Saudi Waqfs.
38 Dating back at least to the Hanbali scholar and jurist, Ibn Taymiya (1263-1328). His tafsir (Qur’anic exegesis or commentary: the term is derived from the Arabic root fassara—to explain or expound) is widely highly regarded. Nonetheless, a number of his other writings (some of which have been adopted by the Wahhabis) are considered to be extreme and in error.
If there is one element in the raging debates about Islam and Democracy on which most discussants might agree it is that education will play a key role in the outcome. In Islam, education (tarbiyya) has rich significance. Its goal is to become aware of the Divine presence in our lives. The Arabic roots carry the meanings of training, improvement, increase, growth, and loftiness. Notably, tarbiyya implies that the processes of education (both its teachings and the means) conform to Islamic guidelines and standards and are suffused with the message and example of the Prophet Muhammad (sal).

Returning to the roots of Islam

A Muslim is taught to think of others and to work cooperatively and for the good of the whole [community]. Imperfections and overcoming barriers, learning from failures and renewing efforts are all critical parts of the system of perfecting oneself. Muslims and non-Muslims alike should encourage an Islamic commitment to reeducating Muslims in Qur’anic, Sunnah and Shari’a teachings. The result can be a stage set for Muslims to consider (closely and confidently) democracy.

In [Laith] Kubba’s view the key to understanding the root cause of the democracy predicament in Muslim countries does not lie in the text or in the tradition of Islam but in the context of modernity, politics, and culture. …Although a solution may require addressing Islam and its interpretations, the basic issue is not about Islam but about modernity. It is not about religion but about modernity. Islam is only one element in the history and culture of the 55 Muslim nations in more than eight distinct regions. Their cultures are influenced to widely varying degrees by the traditions and values of Islam. They are as diverse as the cultures of predominantly Christian nations from Latin America to the Philippines.

Despite the rather bleak situation at present, Kubba noted that there are grounds for hope. Education is having a significant impact. [Emphasis added.] In addition, there are strong pressures toward liberalization, both because the media continuously provide alternative models from other countries and because states in the Muslim world can no longer function without fundamental structural reforms and without more effective partnerships being developed between the government and the governed. “Looking ahead, I am an optimist. We need to watch the discourse taking place among Muslim intellectuals by which they are bringing about authentic Islamic interpretation of how they should govern themselves in modern societies.

I have a lot of faith that this debate will lead to democracy and to full recognition of human rights, but it will come with local language and interpretation and it will be approached from a … different perspective than we are accustomed to in the West (United States Institute of Peace, 2002).”[Emphasis added.]

39 “…the Institute held a workshop, cosponsored by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), on Islam and democracy. The principal questions addressed were why the majority of Muslim
Education cannot narrowly be confined. There are traditional schools like madrasas\textsuperscript{40} and experimental schools like Summerhill\textsuperscript{41}. There are schoolrooms and home schooling. So, too, there is sincerity and there is indoctrination. There is education that invites creativity and individual thinking and education that seeks to instill cant, by repeating lies and propaganda. The choices are ours to install and protect.

**Extremism in Islamic education**

Ideally, education should be used to teach about tolerance, freedom, human rights, individual values and responsibilities, equality before the law (and, indeed, democracy), logical thinking and leadership development. Education (whether or not in the name of religion) also can be used to preach coerciveness, envy, revenge, hatred, selfishness, tribalism, materialism, and disregard for human rights and choices. Like their Christian, Jewish and counterparts of other religions, Islam has its dangerous extremists. Wahhabis, Salifis, Deobandis, the Taliban, Hizbul Tahrir and Takfir wa Hijrah negate the democratic spirituality on which peace depends. Under the guise of education, such groups have spent decades teaching hate and distorting Shari'a\textsuperscript{42} in ways that abrogate its fundamentally (sic) democratic principles. Osama bin Laden is both the product of and a recent spokesman for these misguided teachings. As UCLA law professor and noted Muslim and Sufi scholar, Prof. Khaled Abou el-Fadl,\textsuperscript{43} observes:

...bin Laden... and his followers are, very materialistic in the sense of how they understand the world and how they understand the hereafter. So when he thinks of evil, he can’t conceptualize of evil as a transcendental or a metaphysical concept, something abstract.... In many ways, it’s sort of like... when you deal with children. Often the intellectual capacity in the psychology of the bin Ladens of the world has not really developed or matured....

We cannot presume to be (or to remain) immune to the viruses of extremism. Rather, we need to educate ourselves, others and, particularly, future generations to learn how to diagnose the symptoms of such dis-eases and to build resistance to them. As one of the authors of this article wrote in a recently published book:

Islam is drowning in a sea of myths—not just myths held by non-Muslims, but myths contrived by extremists who glorify death and disregard believers’ responsibility to work toward a peaceful and contented life for all peoples (Rashid, 2003. p. 40-41.

*Fundamentalism* (as it has popularly, if not properly, come to be known) is

\textsuperscript{40} A school for Muslim learning, frequently but not necessarily attached to a mosque.

\textsuperscript{41} Vide, e.g., Anderson (2002).

\textsuperscript{42} See footnote 22.

\textsuperscript{43} Dr. el-Fadl is a leading critic of Islamic radicalism. He was recently appointed by President George W. Bush to serve on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), on which body he is the only Muslim.

\textsuperscript{44} [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/faith/interviews/elfadl.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/faith/interviews/elfadl.html)
fundamentally flawed because it attempts to enforce by fiat (and violence) what can only be the result of individual striving and development. The lives and teachings of the prophets (such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad—peace and blessings be upon them all) exemplify the goals of the individual’s sojourn in this world. Quality of life cannot be achieved or measured in solely material terms. Rather, quality of life depends on achieving a balance (mizan) between inner and outer. “Truly one succeeds that purifies [the self], and one fails that corrupts it” (Qur'an 91:9-10).

**U.S. resources adding to Muslim education**

There are numerous U.S. resources that can contribute to rebuilding education in Iraq and to support democratization efforts. Among them:

*Citizen Exchanges*

The U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) already fosters mutual understanding between the United States and other countries through international educational and training programs. It does so, inter alia, by promoting personal, professional, and institutional ties between private citizens and organizations in the United States and abroad, as well as by presenting U.S. history, society, art and culture in all of its diversity to overseas audiences.

A way of clearly and effectively bringing the message of democracy directly to the citizens of other countries is through citizens’ exchanges. The U.S. Department of State’s *Citizens Exchanges*45 creates professional, cultural and youth programs with non-profit American institutions, including voluntary community organizations, professional associations, and universities. Thematic categories for grants include civil society, NGO development, civic education, media development, judicial training, intellectual property rights, and public administration among other themes. These efforts can be expanded and linked with other efforts to rebuild the education system of Iraq.

*Dialogue on Freedom*

*Dialogue on Freedom* is a special initiative of the American Bar Association. Conceived of by Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, the program’s mission is, in his words, "to foster among our nation’s youth the identification and understanding of fundamental American values and those universal moral precepts that all free people share."

The September 11 terrorist attacks underscored the need for serious and constant discussions about American civic values and their compatibility with other cultures. Through school dialogues led by volunteer lawyers or judges, students are able to discuss our shared values as Americans in relation to our identities, civic traditions, and diverse world cultures. The program also emphasizes how our values are held in common with many other countries worldwide. Dialogues focus less on current issues, and more on the events, documents, and leaders that make the American experience and our democratic heritage meaningful.

45 [http://exchanges.state.gov/](http://exchanges.state.gov/) Note: Legacy International, whose president, J.E. Rash, is one of the authors of this article, has been awarded several contracts under these programs.
For more than two hundred years, the United States has been engaged in a unique experiment in federal constitutional democracy. For more than one hundred years, we have been a major power on the world stage. Today we exercise significant international responsibility, yet we must recognize that this is an increasingly interdependent global age. Justice Kennedy is eloquent in presenting the difference between law and right. Just because something is lawful does not make it right. He warns that legislatures should consider what is right when framing laws and not try to push on to the courts a responsibility which is not theirs (in the balance of powers). His views echo the sentiments of de Tocqueville, the renowned observer and commentator on early American civil society, who noted: “…while the law permits the Americans to do what they please, religion prevents them from conceiving, and forbids them to commit what is rash or unjust.”

Such programs as Dialogue on Freedom can and should be expanded in connection with efforts to rebuild the education system of Iraq.

**Information Technology in Education**

Technology and commerce are powering the global economy and the U.S. is leading the way. To earn credentials to compete, students (and their parents) in many other nations aspire to get (at least) the equivalent of a quality American education. But some parents worry also about negative influences on their children. In the Muslim world, such concerns are both pervasive and paramount.

The convergence of multimedia and telecommunications technologies—along with the Internet and World Wide Web—is bringing extraordinary tools for education. Today, teachers and their students can have access to curricula and supplementary materials gathered from virtually anywhere. They can follow the exploits of an adventure trek, monitor a scientific expedition or gather breaking news. Any assignment can be expanded with virtually unlimited collateral materials. With skillful school administration, all of these wonders can be introduced to many schools without unbalancing already strained budgets.

Accessibility to the Internet continues to be available to more people and has helped to create a global revolution. In turn, this has pointed the way to forge meaningful alliances. One such partnership can be a global education partnership for democracy. Indeed, the efficacy and means of partnerships are among subject matter that we can and should teach to our next generation.

An added advantage of engaging the Internet is that any society that wishes to imbue its own cultural values while delivering a modern education may be less compromised than otherwise. Parents who send their children to another country to become educated risk unwanted influences on the youth’s behavior, resulting from the host’s country’s mores (e.g., a Muslim youth being exposed to the heavy drinking that occurs on some campuses within the U.S.). The outcome of this kind of exposure can end up being either a total rejection of cultural identity or, alternatively, embracing of dogmatism in order to maintain one’s self-identity. Neither outcome is helpful or desirable.

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for bringing a youth to terms with his or her identity in today’s world. Moreover, the resulting confusions for many students contribute to disaffection, either with modernity or cultural roots. One result is the “brain drain” that many nations are undergoing. Another is retreat into extremism.

Living the faith is different than just having faith. For faith to be living, it must be demonstrated through action. A Muslim scholar observes, “A religion is not what one formally or ritualistically practices, but how one deals with others” (Bassiouini, 1988).

...the Prophet (s.w.s.) once entered a mosque and saw at prayer a venerable old man with a long white beard. He was told that the man was in the mosque all day long, worshipping and dispensing the words of Allah to others. The Prophet (s.w.s.) then asked how he earned his living and was told that a merchant, not known for his piety, supported him. The Prophet (s.w.s.) remarked that of the two, the merchant was indeed the more worthy (Bassiouini, 1988).

**Education Reformation in the Islamic World**

Some Western pundits condemn all Islamic countries to labels of unenlightened or backward. There is no question that exciting developments for education have originated in the U.S. Many of these make use of the computer and communications technologies that are transforming our world. But innovation is not the exclusive purview of the United States. In the Muslim world, there are powerful forces for education reform and noteworthy achievements in the field of modern education. Some of the programs rival or surpass those in the U.S. Any help from the United States to rebuild education in Iraq would be well advised to draw upon the experiences and best practices of such ventures, as well as the wisdom and good will of the leaders and education experts in Muslim countries.

Some of these advanced education programs originate from traditional autocracies not [even fledgling] democracies. Indeed, access, opportunity, pedagogy and the use of technology is well advanced in many of the institutions created in these states. There is, perhaps, somewhat of an incongruity in these circumstances. Nonetheless, an important lesson seems not to have escaped the leaders in these countries. What is taught, how it is taught and what is learned do matter. Likely, too, is that the autocratic rulers in the Middle East have taken note that education can gain and propel its own force. Witness the student activism in Iran, Mexico, Nigeria or South Korea…and in the U.S.

Three Arab nations stand out with progressive—indeed cutting edge—projects in education: Jordan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The leaders of these countries are coming up with education models that are inherently Islamic yet reach out to embrace modern technology and the global economy. They are trying to get the best of what each approach has to offer. In these three countries, the role and importance of education are emphasized.

Malaysia, Morocco and Turkey also have made significant contributions in their respective countries that present opportunities for helping to strengthen education in their respective and in other Islamic countries.
Jordan

Jordan is a Muslim country with close ties to the U.S. One of the Middle East’s more moderate Arab leaders, Jordan’s King Abdullah, is following in the noble tradition of his father King Hussein. “During almost 46 years on the throne, Hussein nurtured close ties with the United States, dealing with nine U.S. presidents....”

In June 2003, the World Economic Forum announced Jordan as the pilot nation for the implementation of an ambitious project for the delivery of effective e-learning to its citizens—the Jordan Education Initiative to Roll Out e-Learning across the Kingdom and beyond.

Ninety-six so-called “Discovery Schools” have been selected to pilot the scheme in Jordan. They will serve as a test bed of how ICT can enable new systems to be used and benefit schools and their pupils. The Initiative also supports the Jordanian government’s vision of building a knowledge economy by providing lifelong learning opportunities for all Jordanian citizens and providing them with the services and tools to become functioning members of the economy. The Jordan Education Initiative will be a key catalyst for social and economic development not just in Jordan but eventually across the region.

For many developing countries the delivery of quality education to their citizens is often difficult due to significant resource constraints and the lack of a coordinated and collaborative approach. The Jordan Education Initiative will change all that (Jordan Education Initiative, 2003).

Qatar

Qatar is a tiny state with a population of less than 1,000,000. However its stature belies its size. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of education.

Qatar Foundation is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1995 on the personal initiative of His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar. Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Misnad, Consort of His Highness, serves as the Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation and personally guides the organization’s objectives and programs.

The Qatar Foundation has envisioned Education City, a center of educational excellence in the region, where international scholars from prestigious universities share research and educate students in fields of critical importance to the GCC region. One of the major goals of Education City is to provide a forum for the exchange of research on

47 <http://www.hollandsentinel.com/stories/020899/newhusseinus.html>

48 The Jordan Education Initiative is a public-private partnership between the members of the World Economic Forum and the government of Jordan. The following organizations are engaged in the Jordan Education Initiative: BlueArc Corporation; CISCO Systems; Commercial Ware; Computer Associates; Connectivity Partners International; Corning Cable Systems; Cryptomatic A/S; Dell; Digital Envoy Inc.; HP; IBM; Intel; International Technologies; Microsoft; the Ministry of Education of Jordan; the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology of Jordan; the Ministry of Planning of Jordan; NIIT; Pearson; Siemens; Skillsoft; Sun Microsystems; and World Links.
innovative educational projects.\textsuperscript{49}

Qatar is designing its showcase education system with a pride that will be easily understandable by Americans. It is using its exceptional economic resources to try to reach, attract and indeed become among the best of the best.

In my discussions with representatives of the emir of Qatar during which we tried to hammer out questions related to mission, strategic goals, and program design for the Academic Bridge Program, prestige always furnished the guiding principle. The bridge program was designed to prepare students for admission to the best, most highly selective universities in the world – including the new university being planned for Qatar.\textellipsis

This passion for prestige is reflected in Qatar’s intention of establishing its own university of international rank in Doha. The new university, dubbed “Education City,” will actually be a consortium of American universities banding together to form a kind of confederation of the super-elite.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{United Arab Emirates}

The United Arab Emirates are but three decades old. Already the UAE have achieved a distinguished record in adapting to the modern world. While oil and natural gas industries are still critical to their economies, the Emirates increasingly have diversified. International banking, financial services and regional corporate headquarters have established regional presences there. A noteworthy education project is the Emirates showcase Knowledge Village.

Knowledge Village is a vibrant, connected learning community that will develop the region’s talent pool and accelerate its move to the knowledge economy.

It is set up to position the Dubai Technology and Media Free Zone as a center of excellence for learning and innovation. This new Education and Training hub is also set up to complement the Free Zone’s other two clusters: Dubai Internet City as IT hub and Dubai Media City as Media hub. Knowledge Village will provide the infrastructure for developing, sharing and applying knowledge. In addition, KV will facilitate, promote, and become the flagship for eLearning throughout the region. In summary, KV community is set to create a culture and access to the new learning: life long learning.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Turkey}

Turkey is a predominately Muslim country with an established democracy. Particularly because of its membership in NATO, the political course of Turkey is of critical

\textsuperscript{49} <http://www.innovationsineducation.org/qf/qf.html> Included within the framework of Education City is the Qatar Academy, The Learning Center, the Academic Bridge Program, Al Saad Plaza, Family Development Center, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar VCUQ, Weill Cornell Medical College-Qatar (WCMC-Q), Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP), Texas A&M University-Qatar (TAMU-Q), and the Rand Qatar Policy Institute.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} <http://www.kv.ae/>
importance to U.S. interests. Hence, it is an ideal partner for helping to evolve Islamic education for the 21st Century. There is an unusual and timely opportunity in Turkey that can be engaged.

The United States of America, through its Department of State … [has invited] expressions of interest from parties interested in acquiring all or part of its Consulate compound in Istanbul, Turkey …[with the condition that] licensor must use the Palazzo Corpi to create an international center for Muslim-Western dialogue, with the mission to promote democracy and to serve as a center for mutual cultural understanding. 52

Malaysia

Few countries have attempted to use information technology to transform itself into a knowledge-based nation with quite the far-reaching vision put forward by Malaysia’s Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Early in the 1990’s, he proposed a 2020 Vision—a blueprint for his nation’s development, aiming to achieve the status of a fully developed and industrialized country by the year 2020. The vision included smart homes, smart cities, smart schools, smart partnerships and even smart cards—to be built on the backbone of a MultiMedia Super Corridor (MSC) with a sophisticated telecommunications network. Recognizing that his country would need smart people to run smart things in a smart manner, Malaysia’s program for education emphasized training in technology—particularly information technology. While there have been bumps and criticisms of the plan’s execution, its achievements already are laudable.

The Smart School Multimedia Super Corridor Flagship Application Technology Infrastructure completed;
Installation completed in 79 “B” schools, 2 “B+” schools and 9 “A” schools;
Data Center and Help desk are fully operational; and Smart School Rollout being prepared. 53

Syria

Few writings about the Middle East ignore the strategic importance of Syria. Once the centre of the Islamic Empire, this land has experienced invasions and occupations over the ages by most of the great powers that have established in the region—the Romans, Mongols, Crusaders and Turks. Syria is home to many diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Alawite Shi’ittes and Druze, as well as its Arab Sunni Muslim majority.

Bashar al-Assad assumed the mantle of leadership upon the death of his long-ruling father, Hafez al-Assad. Hafez’s eldest son, Basil, who was his political heir apparent, was killed in 1994 in a car accident, after which Bashar was groomed as Hafez’s successor. President Bashar al-Assad is proving to be a leader with strong views, a cool head and a desire for propagating Arab solidarity and seeking an equal relationship with the U.S.

Where possible, participation by Syria in the process of rebuilding education in Iraq

52 Contact: D. Presley, OBO/REPM/AQD, U.S. Department of State, 1701 N. Fort Myer Drive – SA6 916C, Arlington, VA 22219 USA.
will yield advantages.

Syria has increasingly become aware of the importance of education, as the cornerstone in building the future. … Thus, Syria has adopted the policy of free and democratic education at all educational stages considering this to be a basic human right…. Our educational system is characterized by its Arab identity and origins and considers the education of all generations without discrimination as the way to progress and development. …The State stresses the use of modern technology in education. Hence, information technology is taught to all university students to benefit them in their specializations…. There is] an urgent call … to contribute to the evolution of higher education and academic research within an objective and comprehensive vision, a vision that rejects, among other things, tyranny and subordination, that believes in the sanctity of liberation and the right of a man to live in dignity in his land; a man who enjoys the blessing of education and who is imbued with elevation of spirit, love and benevolence…. In the name of Syria, the cradle of history and civilization and where the first alphabet in history was invented, we … firmly hope [for the] enhancement of “true” education [that will] safeguard humanity from falling into the abyss of tyranny and despotism (Sounkur, 1998).

**Morocco**

Morocco is one of America’s longest-standing friends in the Middle East. It is a close ally, with numerous commercial and cultural exchanges.

Ninety members of the US Congress …representing both the majority Republican party and the Democratic party …said that “Morocco has consistently demonstrated a strong Commitment to peace, stability and constitutional Democracy…. [It] continues to stand as a bulwark against the extremism prevalent in the Region…. Morocco’s commitment to democracy and human rights is an example for the region….‖ [The Kingdom] was the first nation in the region where opposition parties came to power freely and peacefully through popular Elections (Arabicnews.com, 1998).

Hence, it is important that close contact be maintained with Morocco. Moreover, like the other countries from which we propose to invite participation, reforming education is a priority for Morocco as well.

King Hassan II [stated that] education, justice, administration and employment are top priority issues that Morocco should immediately take up…. [He] called on the nation to set itself with determination to reform the education sector…. The state and the nation, with all its components, is more than ever determined to invest all the necessary means to prepare Morocco’s youth to take up competition with the same arms provided to their peers around the world and in all fields… (Arabicnews.com, 1999).

His son, King Mohammed Ben Al-Hassan, is continuing in that tradition.
Part of Morocco's endeavors to continuously consolidate human rights, King Mohammed VI said that he instructed the Government, mainly the minister of education, to ensure that our children and young people are provided with courses in which special emphasis is put on civics and an ethical values similar to those inculcated in my generation, especially with respect to commitment to the nation's sacred institutions and dedication to the protection of its reputation (Arabicnews.com, 2003).

Summary

It is perhaps not surprising that such leaders as the King of Jordan, the Emir of Qatar, several rulers in the U.A.E. and Prime Minister Mahathir in Malaysia have chosen education as their showpieces. While governing autocratically, under (mostly) historical traditions, it would seem that these leaders have an inclination for listening to their people and to nurture and educate the populace for the future.

Iraq, like any nation with a predominantly Muslim population, is fiercely committed to Islam. No measure of e-learning, multimedia courseware or access to the World Wide Web will succeed without a suffusion of Islam. Hence, we would propose to weave a union of education (so to speak) engaging these countries that have creatively approached education. We might call it the Union of Moderate Muslim Associations (UMMA).

Establishing Iraq as a viable democracy in the Middle East would represent a significant milestone for U.S. interests. Civic education is a means to achieve that solution. Schools can deliver civic education. But, in the Muslim world, where concerns about outside influences are both pervasive and paramount, the form, substance and teaching of such curricula are critical. If democracy is to find a place in countries like Iraq, airing these matters in ways that extend beyond rhetoric will have to take place (among and between both Muslims and non-Muslims).

The Qur'an and the traditions of the prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) imbue Islam with practical guidance, examples and flexible rules for daily life, including political matters. Not all Muslim societies are living up to the Islamic ideals of economic and social equity, justice, tolerance, and educational opportunity. But, in our efforts to share the legacy of democracy with Iraqis and other Muslims, Americans should be mindful that, for democracy to take root successfully in Muslim countries, the cultural and religious values of Islam must be acknowledged and become its allies.
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### Appendix I: Nations with Sizable Muslim Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Member of the Arab League</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Muslim population</th>
<th>Estimated Muslim population (rounded -000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td></td>
<td>234,893,453</td>
<td>88.00%</td>
<td>206,796,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td></td>
<td>150,964,740</td>
<td>97.00%</td>
<td>146,174,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,049,700,118</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
<td>125,964,000</td>
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<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td></td>
<td>138,448,210</td>
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<td>114,912,000</td>
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<td>74,718,797</td>
<td>94.00%</td>
<td>70,236,000</td>
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<td>Turkey</td>
<td></td>
<td>68,109,469</td>
<td>99.80%</td>
<td>67,973,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td></td>
<td>68,278,826</td>
<td>99.00%</td>
<td>67,596,000</td>
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<td>Nigeria</td>
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<td>66,941,000</td>
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<td>32,818,500</td>
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<td>32,490,000</td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>24,293,844</td>
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<td>23,943,000</td>
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<td>19,349,881</td>
<td>98.00%</td>
<td>18,963,000</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
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<td>23,092,940</td>
<td>50% (est.)</td>
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<td>Russia (note)</td>
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<td>144,526,278</td>
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<td>Mali</td>
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<td>Senegal</td>
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<td>10,580,307</td>
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<td>Niger</td>
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<td>Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>16,763,795</td>
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<td>Azerbaijan</td>
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<td>Tajikistan</td>
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<td>Cote D'Ivoire</td>
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<td>5,334,000</td>
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<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5,460,265</td>
<td>92.00%</td>
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<td>Chad</td>
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<td>51.00%</td>
<td>4,719,000</td>
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<td>Philippines</td>
<td></td>
<td>84,619,974</td>
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<td>4,231,000</td>
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<td>United States</td>
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<td>290,342,554</td>
<td>1.38%</td>
<td>4,000,000</td>
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<td>Sierra Leone</td>
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<td>5,732,681</td>
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<td>3,440,000</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>82,398,326</td>
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<td>3,049,000</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Mauritania</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Country</td>
<td>Arab League</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1990 (est.)</td>
<td>2004 (est.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
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<td>2,807,125</td>
<td>95%</td>
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Where the estimated Muslim population for a country was given as a range, the lowest estimate was used. The total estimated Muslim population (per the table) is 1,285,713,000.


The CIA World Factbook includes estimates for Muslim populations in such countries as Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada and New Zealand under “Other religions.” Estimates for these countries are not included in Table 2.
Quotations by the founding fathers of the U.S. can be found in numerous sources. These were taken from an Internet site.

Children should be educated and instructed in the principles of freedom. (John Adams, 1787).

It should be your care, therefore, and mine, to elevate the minds of our children and exalt their courage; to accelerate and animate their industry and activity; to excite in them an habitual contempt of meanness, abhorrence of injustice and inhumanity, and an ambition to excel in every capacity, faculty, and virtue. If we suffer their minds to grovel and creep in infancy, they will grovel all their lives. (John Adams, 1756).

The fundamental source of all your errors, sophisms and false reasoning is a total ignorance of the natural rights of mankind. Were you once to become acquainted with these, you could never entertain a thought, that all men are not, by nature, entitled to a parity of privileges. You would be convinced, that natural liberty is a gift of the beneficent Creator to the whole human race, and that civil liberty is founded in that; and cannot be wrested from any people, without the most manifest violation of justice. (Alexander Hamilton, 1775).

The American war is over; but this far from being the case with the American revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the drama is closed. It remains yet to establish and perfect our new forms of government, and to prepare the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens for these forms of government after they are established and brought to perfection. (Benjamin Rush, 1786).

If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself. (James Madison, 1788).

There are more instances of the abridgment of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations. (James Madison, 1788).

But the safety of the people of America against dangers from foreign force depends not only on their forbearing to give just causes of war to other nations, but also on their placing and continuing themselves in such a situation as not to invite hostility or insult; for it need not be observed that

54 Defense of the Constitutions.
55 Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law.
56 The Farmer Refuted.
57 May 25, 1786.
58 Federalist No. 51, February 8, 1788.
59 Speech to the Virginia Ratifying Convention, June 16, 1788.
there are pretended as well as just causes of war. (John Jay, 1788).⁶⁰
There is not a single instance in history in which civil liberty was lost, and
religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield up our temporal
property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage. (John
Witherspoon, 1776).⁶¹
He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy
from oppression; for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that
will reach to himself. (Thomas Paine, 1795).⁶²
[R]eligion, or the duty which we owe to our creator, and the manner of
discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force
or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise
of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and this is the mutual
duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards
each other. (Virginia Bill of Rights).⁶³

⁶⁰ Federalist No. 4.
⁶¹ The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men, 1776.
⁶² Dissertation on First Principles of Government.
⁶³ Virginia Bill of Rights, June 12, 1776.
From Origin to Institution: Implementing the Compatibility of Democracy and Islam

By J.E. Rash
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We live in a complex time of rapid change from which emerges previously unpredicted possibilities with profound effects. Whether we live in the United States or in Central Asia, in North Africa or in China, among the wealthy or the poor; our long held definitions of right and wrong, good and evil, friend and foe, have begun to change, as have the relationships between nations. The changes are obvious to those who look and who love real freedom and democracy. These changes are obvious to those who have in their hearts love and respect for justice, equity, and freedom of expression; those who believe in the rule of law above ideological agenda, and those who see peace and cooperation as the solution to the pressing problems of our global community. The change is clear to all who understand that each of us has a responsibility to one another and to finding ways to end poverty, address food security, and to eliminate the root causes of terrorism and the problems of ignorance. The change is obvious to those who see Compassion, Mercy, Peace and Truth to be a legacy from God (or Allah) to all of His creatures, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.

In the linear world of Newtonian physics and Cartesian thought, we speak of probabilities. But in the new universe described by Einstein, Heisenberg, Planck and others, the world of quantum physics and chaos theory, we must speak of possibilities. In today’s complex societies and global interrelationships, we find that there is a possibility, and, moreover, a necessity, for democracy to flourish in new and exciting ways. These ways can be based on religious values and concepts and yet remain deeply committed to justice for all, equity, rights of minorities and it is possible to have, as U.S. President Abraham Lincoln said, a “government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

We are at a global crossroads where the name of democracy, and related terms such as justice, freedom, liberty and patriotism, are being used as rallying terms for ideological and political purposes. Many use these terms, yet do not adhere to or protect democratic values and institutions. Regardless of whether we are living in what has been called the world’s most successful democracy, the United States, or if we are living in a fledgling democracy, a question for all of us is: “Are we truly committed to a legitimate and sustained form of democracy?”

For those who live in a country with a dominant Islamic culture, there is an additional concept to consider. This, perhaps, was best put by the ninth century Central Asian mystic, Syed Ali bin Uthman al-Hujwiri, when he said, “Islam was once a reality without a name, and now it is a name without a reality.” We must consider that “reality” and ask: “How can we not only create the environment for manifesting it, but also sustain it?” Whether we are speaking about democracy, Islam, or both together, it is important that we seek out and sustain the reality behind these concepts.

Islamic societies today often are singled out as challenged with issues that are implied to be solved, ones that are non-existent in Western democracies. In fact, however, both are facing similar challenges. Among the challenging issues are gender tolerance, women’s rights with regard to politics and education, social and sexual equality or equity, minority rights, religion and state issues, independent judiciary, and citizen power—just to name a few. One of the central questions being asked in today’s changing global society is: “Can the democratic principles that underlie Western governments be translated to other cultures—specifically cultures with predominately
Muslim populations and traditions?"

According to some scholars, the answer is “no.” They regard democracy as a cultural-specific phenomenon that only can flourish in Western societies. But other scholars take the opposite view, arguing that democracy is compatible with many different cultures, including Muslim societies. Dr. Anwar Ibrahim, former deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, said in a speech on this topic,

Clearly… it is not Islam but the exploitation of the fear factor that has precluded the democratization of the Muslim world. I call on Islamists who are opposed to democracy to change their mind set and work towards developing a vibrant democracy. Marshall the forces of freedom and harness them so that Muslims may stand up for their fundamental dignity and establish the institutions of democracy, freedom and civil society.ii

At first glance, placing the principles of classical democratic thought alongside the principles of essential Islam may seem improbable to one untrained in either. In fact, though, the placement gives a stunning example of possibilities. These possibilities are not only for the 1.4 billion Muslims in the world, but for everyone who seeks both freedom and a basis in spiritual, religious values without imposing one form on everyone and without reverting to oppressive theocratic bureaucracy or dictatorial government. The principles both of democracy and of Islam define, encourage, and guarantee, individually and institutionally, justice, equity and equality. These commonalities form a bridge between a uniquely spiritually based, social-political system, and a uniquely socially-egalitarian, community based religion, on both theoretical and practical levels. The focus of this essay will be to illustrate those compatibilities, first between the values of classical democracy and essential Islam, and second between the institutions that have evolved to ensure democracy in our society and the Islamic values that allow for and support such institutions.

To realize the possibilities for Islam and democracy we must begin by defining our meanings and distinguishing between name and reality. In the case of the term “democracy,” we need to start by understanding that democracy may take many forms. Democracy is perhaps the most complex and difficult of all forms of governance. It is replete with contradictions and strain, and it demands that its adherents work diligently in order to make it serve the people and to survive. Democracy is not an especially efficient form of governance, but it is one of accountability. It may not be able to act as quickly as a dictatorship, theocracy, or totalitarian government, but it draws its strength from its citizens. Moreover, and most importantly, it evolves with the world, as people, technologies and knowledge evolve. What has emerged as “American-style” democracy is suited to the United States because it took root and grew in the given context of a society of former Europeans seeking religious freedom. It has evolved to include individuality, consumerism, and all the other features that the American lifestyle has come to imply. It is not surprising or unusual that realities of culture have supplanted or redefined founding principles and beliefs that were previously assumed to be factual realities. Nor is re-definition a factor only with secular democracy. It similarly is found in religious history and apparent factual reality to this very day. So, when we examine both democracy and religious beliefs, we must begin to discern the cultural nuances that color essential foundational beliefs, principles, and values.

A paper prepared for U.S. State Department officials in the early 1990’s illustrates
that every democracy need not be identical to the United States’ model. No single set of actual institutions, practices or values embodies democracy. [Nations] that reject authoritarian rule and begin a regime transition move, not toward democracy, but towards democracies. They may mix different components to produce (eventually) different democracies.iii

That same paper also emphasized that individuals and groups outside the U.S. who are trying to establish democratic governments “can be assured that their level of development, their religious or secular belief system, their national identity, their social structure or their external context does not condemn them [from the outset] to failure.”iv

This statement might come as a surprise to those who assume that Islam is incompatible with democracy. Yet the Qur’an supports many of the principles of Western democracy. Here again the problem is a matter of definitions, and understanding that some of what currently attempts to pass as pure Islam is distorted and politicized imitation. As a result of a well-planned agenda and near endless funding from oil sources, a small but unfortunately effective minority has gained media attention and unsuspecting followers from among the poor, discontent and criminals. They have become the most vocal and media covered form of Islam, controlling many mosques through both votes and the exploitation of discontent, poverty and historical colonial attitudes that still live in the hearts of the common people. The principled and moderate essential teachings of Islam have been eclipsed by this other contradictory form of activities, purporting to be in the name of Islam but bereft of its essential holistic, moderate message of tolerance and personal responsibility.

Notwithstanding such unauthentic representation, there can be and are legitimate disagreements among Muslims with certain policies and actions by democratic countries while there remains a deep commitment to the founding principles of democracy. Similarly, there can be and are disagreements within Islamic societies and communities regarding interpretations of Islam, all the while embracing, promoting and implementing agreed upon core Islamic values and principles. Let us now look at some of those core principles and values as they correspond to nine principles of classical democracy.

Nine Principles of Classical Democracy Supported by Islamic Principles

1. The dignity of the individual is guaranteed in a classical democracy through an emphasis on the sanctity of life, mutual respect, and individual effort and worth. In the words of Thomas Jefferson: “Nothing... is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man.”v In Islam, the same value is expressed by the following statements from the Qur’an and Hadith:vi “…If anyone slays a human being...it shall be as though he had slain all of humanity; whereas if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all of humanity....” (Qur’an, 5:32) And also, “I never fail to reward any worker among you for any work you do, be you male or female - you are equal to one another.” (Qur’an 3:195) And in a Hadith the Prophet (pbuh)vii said: "Man is the brother of his fellow men, whether he likes it or not.” (Hadith)

2. Individual liberty is preserved through classical democracy in that individuals are
entitled to a private sphere that is protected from outside interference, including intrusion, spying and suspicion. In the words of Thomas Jefferson: "The first foundations of the social contract would be broken up were we definitely to refuse to its members the protection of their persons and property while in their lawful pursuits." According to the Qur’an: “O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than your own until ye have asked permission...” (Qur’an, 24:27) And later, “O you who believe, you shall avoid any suspicion, for even a little bit of suspicion is sinful. You shall not spy on one another, nor shall you backbite one another...” (Qur’an, 49:12) And also, “O you who believe, if an iniquitous person brings any slanderous news to you, first ascertain the truth, lest you harm others unwittingly...” (Qur’an, 49:6)

3. Private property, including the right of self-ownership and the uninhibited ownership of land and belongings, is guaranteed by classical democracy. In the words of John Adams, “Each individual of the society has a right to be protected by it in the enjoyment of his life, liberty, and property, according to standing laws... But no part of the property of any individual can, with justice, be taken from him, or applied to public uses, without his own consent, or that of the representative body of the people.” The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) spoke on the same subject, “No doubt your blood, your property, and your honor (chastity) are sacred to one another...” (Hadith - Bukhari) And also, “Whoever takes a false oath so as to take the property of a Muslim (illegally) will meet Allah while He will be angry with him...” (Hadith - Bukhari)

4. Natural rights are affirmed by classical democracy, as they are by Islam. Among these rights are “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” as well as rights anterior to the government which may be used against state power, if need be. As stated in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and pursuit of Happiness...” Muslims are taught in the Qur’an that they have the right to defend these rights, "Why should you not defend yourself in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated and oppressed? — Men, women, and children whose cry is, 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and raise for us out of Your grace a protector; raise for us out of Your grace one who will help!'” (Qur’an, 4:75)

5. Limited government, meaning a government restrained from impinging upon citizens' rights, was an element of classical democracy. According to Thomas Jefferson, “A... chief [executive] strictly limited ...will go far towards keeping the government honest and unoppressive.” In the case of classical Islam, the principle is expressed in the following way. "It is obligatory for one to listen to and obey one’s ruler (or government) unless these orders involve one’s disobedience (to Allah).” (Hadith - Bukhari) Or, as one scholar stated, "An Islamic State is not theocratic but ideological. The rights and responsibilities of its citizens shall be determined by the extent to which they identify themselves with this ideology.”

6. Rule of law and the equal application of the law to all citizens including the agents of the state are essential to classical democracy, as well as to classical Islam. In the words of
founding father Benjamin Rush, “[W]here there is no law, there is no liberty; and nothing deserves the name of law but that which is certain and universal in its operation upon all the members of the community.”

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said on this same subject, “What destroyed the nations preceding you was that if a noble amongst them stole, they would forgive him, and if a poor person amongst them stole, they would inflict Allah's legal punishment on him. By Allah, if Fatima, [my daughter] stole, I would [mete the same punishment].” (Hadith - Bukhari) And in the Qur’an it says, "O you who believe, you shall be absolutely equitable and observe God when you serve as witnesses, even against yourselves, or your parents, or your relatives. Whether the accused is rich or poor, God takes care of both." (Qur’an, 4:135)

7. Religious toleration in classical democracy extends to all religions as well as to all unorthodox thought and (non-injurious) behavior. As James Madison notes, “Among the features peculiar to the political system of the United States, is the perfect equality of rights which it secures to every religious sect.”

The same principle of religious toleration and equality can be seen in classical Islam. "Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.” (Qur’an 5:48) And also in the Qur’an, “Let there be no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error.” (Qur’an 2:256) And, “Tell My servants that they should speak in the most kindly manner [to those who do not share their beliefs]; verily, Satan is always ready to stir up discord between people….” (Qur’an 17:53)

8. Peace and harmony, in the view of classical democracy, included non-interference in the affairs of other nations and the use of international arbitration to solve disputes. In the words of one of the founding fathers, “An honorable Peace is and always was my first wish! I can take no delight in the effusion of human Blood…” It should therefore be difficult in a republic to declare war, but not to make peace.” Islam also puts forth this principle. As it says in the Qur’an, “All believers are but brothers: therefore, make peace between your brothers, and remain conscious of God, so that you might be graced with His mercy.” (Qur’an 49:10) The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also said, “A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe and a believer is one in whom people place their trust in regard to their life and wealth.” (Hadith) “If [the enemy] withdraws from you and fights you not, but sends you [guarantees of] peace, then Allah allows no way for you [to war against them].” (Qur’an 4:90) “…And should they seek but to deceive thee [by their show of peace] behold, God is enough for you!” (Qur’an 8:61-62)

9. The right of “exit” including rebellion against an unjust state or a tyrant was key to classical democracy. Thomas Jefferson said, “‘I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.” And Thomas Paine wrote, “Not all the treasures of the world, so far as I believe, could have induced me to support an offensive war, for I think it murder; but if a thief breaks into my house, burns and destroys my property, and kills or threatens to kill me, or those that are in it,
and to ‘bind me in all cases whatsoever’ to his absolute will, am I to suffer it?”
A form of this is reflected in classical Islam as stated in a Hadith, “Whoever walks with a tyrant to empower him, knowing that he is a tyrant, has indeed gone out of Islam.” (Hadith - Baihaqi) It also says in Qur’an, “Permission to fight is given to those who have been wronged - those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: “Our Lord is God.” For had it not been for God repelling some people by means of others, monasteries and churches and synagogues and masajid, in which the name of God is often mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down.” (Qur’an 22:39-41)

Ten Democratic Institutions Supported with Islamic Principles

As one studies, on the one hand, the Qur’an, Islamic Social Principles, Institutions, and Individual Rights and, on the other hand, reads the writings of the framers of the American Constitution and Bill of Rights, it becomes obvious that the foundations of both, vis à vis human relationships, institutional roles, social duties and societal goals not only have a basic commonality but also share spiritual, faith-based principles. To understand a deeper level of the compatibility between democracy and Islamic teachings, it is helpful to look at how certain basic principles of democratic governance have developed into institutions, and to compare them with the Quranic and Hadith foundations that allow for and support such institutions and methods.

1. The basis of American Democracy lies in a unique and highly effective Constitution, and more specifically in The Constitution’s Bill of Rights. This constitution serves several functions. It outlines the way laws are to be made and changed. It also lays out the powers of the branches of governance and the limits on their authority. In addition, the Bill of Rights guarantees that certain significant areas, such as the rights of individuals, are off limits to the whims of majority rule. The framers of the constitution and those who followed them determined that the Constitution should be open to amendment while safeguarding its integrity by making the process of amending the Constitution somewhat difficult. Therefore, any amendment to the U.S. constitution must be proposed by two-thirds of the members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Then, it must to be approved by at least three-quarters of the states. Since the US Constitution was ratified in 1787, it has been amended only 27 times. Most of those amendments have extended democracy by expanding individual rights, or by removing differences based on race or gender. Thomas Jefferson wrote, “Whatever be the Constitution, great care must be taken to provide a mode of amendment when experience or change of circumstances shall have manifested that any part of it is unadapted to the good of the nation.”

Paralleling this expansive approach to safeguarding human rights, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), taught that it is the duty of every individual to look after and protect the rights of those who are less fortunate, saying, “Beware of the invocation of the oppressed person, because he will ask his right of Allah, and Allah does not deny the right of a person having rights.”

2. A government cannot be considered democratic without democratic elections ensuring that the leadership is elected by the citizens from amongst them in a way that is
both perceived to be and is in fact open and fair to all. For success, it is important that qualified voters are encouraged to vote, the method of which is made clear and accessible, and assured that their vote is counted. Underlying the concept of election is the conviction that human beings know the difference between right and wrong. "God... has formed us moral agents... that we may promote the happiness of those with whom He has placed us in society, by acting honestly towards all, benevolently to those who fall within our way, respecting sacredly their rights, bodily and mental, and cherishing especially their freedom of conscience, as we value our own." "

According to Islamic teachings, rightful leaders are to be selected by those they lead. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) noted the importance of individuals choosing a leader when he said, “Even if just three people are traveling together, they should choose one of them as their leader.” In the Qur’an, Allah (swt) makes it clear that human beings do indeed have this capacity. “The Most Gracious, Teacher of the Qur’an, Creator of the human beings, [has] taught them how to distinguish.... “(55:1+) Umar, the second caliph, added on this subject, "There is no good in them (citizens) if they do not speak out, and there is no good in us if we do not listen to what they say.”

3. The creation of a federal system of government, where power and authority are divided among national, state, and local governments, forms the basis of institutions and agencies that provide practical and effective expression to democratic values. These opportunities for expression are provided vis à vis access to authority, means to express opinions, redress grievances and make and uphold laws pertinent to each area, region and the country as a whole.

We see that the farther away government is from the average person, the less the people trust it, and therefore the less effective it is. Through local government, citizens can interact with their elected officials and can express their needs, feeling confident that their voices are being heard. This dialogue between citizens and their local government is one of the axial points of democracy, because government policies and programs only work when they address the actual problems of a community, and give the citizenry confidence that such is the case.

Federalism also provides the checks and balances that safeguard against officials at any given level making illegitimate changes in government or policy. "The first principle of a good government is certainly a distribution of its powers into executive, judiciary, and legislative, and a subdivision of the latter into two or three branches." Although the term “federalism” did not exist at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his successors, we do know that during this era provincial governors and tribal leaders were often relied upon to implement and enforce Islamic policies. In certain cases, this would mean that an independent judgment, based on precedent, would have to be developed at a local level. For example, when the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) appointed Muadh ibn Jabal to be governor of Yemen. He asked Muadh by what criteria he would judge issues that arose.

He replied, “The Quran.”
"And what if you do not find an answer there?” he was asked by the Prophet.
“By the Sunnah.”
“And if you do not find the answer from those two?”
Muadh replied, “Then I will make a personal effort (ijtihad) and act according to
that.” The Prophet heard this and approved.

4. History shows that for over five millennia human beings have engaged in the creation of laws. The methods of making formal laws have differed among societies, including everything from edicts issued by “divine right rulers” to popular voting. In the United States, law is made on many levels from village or local councils to the US Congress. Assuming people pay attention throughout the law-making process, the people have the opportunity to have input. The Framing Fathers of the United States put faith in the ability of citizens to be vigilant over this process, as Thomas Jefferson said, “My confidence is that there will for a long time be virtue and good sense enough in our countrymen to correct abuses.” Unfortunately throughout the world, there are politicians who take advantage of the fact that most people miss the details. Ideally, law-making bodies recognize that they are responsible to their constituents and should try to legislate in their constituents’ best interests. Of course, we all know that this is the most optimal situation. Whether the law-making system reaches its potential really depends on the character and ethics of the individuals who hold the authority. It is obvious to one who is directed inwardly and outwardly by their faith that success depends on one’s humility and their love of God, because ultimately they believe that they will face justice, God’s Justice.

The Qur’an also emphasizes the need to act responsibly and justly in establishing laws. “The heavens and the earth are full of proofs for the believers. We then appointed you to establish the correct laws; you shall follow this, and do not follow the wishes of those who do not know.” (45:3)

5. Perhaps the greatest guarantor of democracy lies in a truly independent judiciary. Functionally, “justice” is a set of universal principles that guides people in judging what is right and what is wrong, no matter what culture and society they live in. Usually this is codified into law or stated and accepted as custom. Justice is a means of creating and sustaining balance and harmony, safety and security, boundaries and standards for all people, equally, in a society or community.

It is interesting to note that in Western symbolism justice is a blindfolded woman holding balance scales. The implication is that justice has a compassionate nature that is compelled to be fair by the presence of the blindfold, and the scales represent equity. Similarly, in Arabic the term for justice is ‘adl’ which also carries the meaning “equalizing, equitable, making of the same weight.”

In the United States the courts may declare acts of Congress and the state legislatures invalid because they conflict with the Constitution. The courts may even enjoin presidential actions on the same grounds. Historically, the greatest defender of individual rights in the U.S. has been the court system. Nonetheless, political parties and elected officials regularly try to gain power over the judiciary by placing their people into the court systems, in an attempt to bias the system towards their goals.

Islamic teachings also stress the importance of an unbiased judicial system. We read in the Qur’an:

Stand firm for justice and bear true witness for the sake of Allah, even though it be against yourselves, your parents or your relatives. It does not matter whether the party is rich or poor—Allah is well wisher of both. So let not your selfish desires swerve you from justice. If you distort your testimony or decline to give it, then you should remember that Allah is fully aware of your actions. (Qur’an
And also, “O believers! Be steadfast for the sake of Allah and bear true witness and let not the enmity of a people incite you to do injustice. Do justice; that is nearer to piety.” (Qur’an 5:8)

6. The **Office of the president** in a democracy should be viewed as representing the rights, needs, and aspirations of all the citizens as well as the national interests as a whole. At times, the expectations of the president may exceed the capabilities of the individual and in such instances the unelected advisors and staff of the Executive Branch often wield a great deal of power and influence. Clearly, a very fine line exists between giving the executive and his advisors sufficient authority to do his or her job effectively, while limiting that authority to prevent a dictatorship. The strength of the Office of President in a democratic system derives from the consent of the governed, the ability for the President to work well with the other branches of government, and adhering to the constraints imposed upon that office by the constitution, in order to guarantee the separation of powers. In a democracy, a president should rule through his or her political skill, creating a framework of cooperation with the legislature and the people. Benjamin Franklin wrote, “In free governments [democracy] the rulers are the servants and the people their superiors and sovereigns.” Furthermore, Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, in 1813, “[The people] are in truth the only legitimate proprietors of the soil and government.”

In the Qur’an we find similar guidance given directly to the Prophet Muhammad in his role as a head of state, which extends to all rulers in the Islamic system. “O Muhammad…Consult them in the conduct of affairs.” (Qur’an 3:159), in reference to his constituents and advisors. Furthermore, the importance in an Islamic society of limiting power of the chief executive was clearly demonstrated by the example of Khalif Abu Bakr (ra), who said, in his inaugural address after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) "Cooperate with me when I am right but correct me when I commit error; obey me so long as I follow the commandments of Allah and His Prophet; but turn away from me when I deviate."

7 and 8. Two closely related institutions are the publics right-to-know and a free media. The deliberations and decision-making of the government should be in the public eye and be self-explanatory. The media also should be able to investigate the workings of the government and to report on them without fear of prosecution. Certainly, not all government actions lend themselves to full disclosure; but citizens have a right to know how their taxes dollars are spent, how new laws will effect them, and have the access to enough information to determine for themselves that they are receiving fair treatment by the court system, among other things. As political philosopher Alexis de Toqueville wrote, “In countries where the doctrine of sovereignty of the people ostensibly prevails, the censorship of the press is not only dangerous, but absurd…The sovereignty of the people and the liberty of the press may therefore be regarded as correlative…”

From an Islamic point of view, factual knowledge is essential to decision-making. The Qur’an instructs, “You shall not accept any information, unless you verify it for yourself. I have given you the hearing, the eyesight, and the brain, and you are responsible for using them. (Qur’an 17:36)
Although the media ideally acts as an agent in protecting and serving the peoples’ right to know, it is important that the citizens are critical consumers of what the media presents. Over time, the media relies more and more on the usage of ideographical language and associations, which can cloud the clarity and truth of its new coverage. Communications scholar Michael Calvin McGee defines an ideograph as "an ordinary-language term, which takes on cultural and social meaning in addition to or instead of its literal meaning when it is used in political discourse." xxvii As a result, "such terms as 'liberty' ... constitute by our very use of them in political discourse an ideology that governs or 'dominates' our consciousness." xxviii An example of this can be found in recent U.S. history, “In the news media since September 11, the ideographs "terrorism" and "terror" have been clustered with other ideographs such as "freedom," "democracy," "safety," and "security," and almost always presented as their opposite.”xxix

However, when the use of ideographs is understood, people begin to feel uncomfortable at the thought of being propagandized or manipulated by repetitions of associative words and visuals. Regardless of whether we are speaking of a democratic society or an Islamic community, these subtle ideological associations are an insult to human intelligence and independence.

The counterbalance to ideographical redefining or revision of truth is knowledge. The guarantee of the right of each person not only to educate themselves but to the free expression of ideas as well as the right to redress issues and question the leadership without threat or fear of reprisal is an essential part of the working democracy. Just as The Prophet Mohamed (pbuh) taught when he said, “Seek out knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” Thomas Jefferson also spoke on the importance of an educated consumer of the media, when he wrote “Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe.”xxx He went on to write, "Our liberty cannot be guarded but by the freedom of the press, nor that be limited without danger of losing it.”xxxi

9. Perhaps one of most effective guarantors that the government upholds democratic principles is found in the activities and the role of interest groups. In the U.S. in the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century law making represented primarily a dialogue between the voters and their elected representatives in various levels of local, state, and federal governments. Because the population was small, governmental programs were limited and communications were simpler; there was little need for citizens to resort to mediating organizations for assistance. However, in the twentieth century society grew more complex and the role of government expanded. As a result, we now have non-governmental organizations that are devoted to making either their views or others’ views known.

Islam teaches clearly that it is up to individuals to take independent initiative to vocalize their needs, and the needs of those not well represented by their ruler. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “The best struggle in the path of Allah (jihad) is to speak a word of justice to an oppressive ruler.”

In addition to interest groups, many non-governmental organizations also provide directly for the less fortunate, filling the gap between the needs of the people and the provision of the government.

On this topic, the Qur’an states:

O you who believe, you shall give to charity from the good things you earn, and
from what we have produced for you from the earth. Do not pick out the bad	herein to give away, when you yourselves would not accept it unless your eyes
were closed. You should know that God is Rich, Praiseworthy. (2:267)

10. Protecting minority rights. If by “democracy” we mean rule by the majority, then
one of its greatest problems lies in how minorities (of race, religion or ethnicity) are
treated. It is part of the evolutionary nature of democracy to become more inclusive over
time, and to grant to those who are different from the majority not only protection against
persecution, but also the opportunity to participate as full and equal citizens. This
evolutionary process is not always fast or simple, in the 1800’s the U.S. had a civil war
that centered on the issue of slavery, and even after the war ended it took another century
before people of color had free exercise of their constitutional rights. In the US alone
there are many more examples of persecution of minorities, from the internment of
Japanese citizens during World War II or the discrimination against Vietnamese after the
Vietnam War, to decades of discrimination against Jews (until the early 1960’s) to
modern day racial profiling of Muslims and Middle Easterners.

Islam warns against this kind of discrimination. In the Qur’an Allah reminds us, “O
humanity! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into
nations and tribes that you might come to know one another…” (Qur’an 49:13) And we
know that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said in his farewell khutba, “There is no
superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab and for a non-Arab over an Arab, or for the
white over the black nor for the black over the white, except in piety.”

From the analysis of these nine principles, we can see that while there is not, in all
cases, a direct correlation between the institutions of U.S. Democracy and those in an
Islamic society, the principles espoused by the Quran and Hadith allow for and support
the development of such institutions.

Religion’s Role in the Founding of the U.S. & Its Democratic Structures

The principles of democracy are the essential values imbued equally in the hearts of men
and women. This means women and men also have equal responsibility in promoting and
sustaining these principles. As mentioned above, despite a significant difference in
concept of origination, the parallels and similarities between what might be called Islamic
Democracy and Secular or Western Democracy are obvious and are both founded in the
beliefs and faith of human beings. Unfortunately, the blindness that often accompanies
religious belief, nationalism, cultural bias and historical events gives rise to a
disconnect—or rather a reluctance to make an honest and documented comparison
between the two. The concept of freedom, personal and collective, in a democratic
society assumes a willingness and an ability of common individuals to distinguish what is
just, free, equal and equitable, and tolerant. Such citizens of a country, or members of a
faith, as diverse as they may be as individuals, collectively have a potential and power to
create balance and harmony, if and only if, they share at the core common values
regardless of specific differences in ‘belief.’

Therefore, all discussion of democracy in terms of the United States must begin
with an implicit understanding of the basic role that religion has played, and continues to
play, in the founding and establishment of a democratic government. The roots of modern
democracy, from 1776 onward, are deep in the fertile soil of religious and spiritual
principles and values. Moreover, those same specific values are found at the very core of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Notwithstanding the perennial debate on the separation of church and state and our familiarity with the arguments for and against it, very few students of history or religious leaders argue against the value of the principles of democracy. Tyrants, dictators, fanatics and extremists take full advantage of the difference of origins of Islam and democracy and assume that they are two disparate and irreconcilable systems; misinterpreting both to their own destructive and selfish ends. I propose that the reality of both, spiritual values that are based in an equitable, fair and just Divinity and the secular, reasonable and humanistic (yet spiritually based) reality of essential and historical democratic thought, are linked by God, Nature, and Reason through their common foundation in faith and belief in a higher and omniscient Authority.

Prior to the U.S. Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine wrote that he “believed the Almighty would separate America from England because of [England’s] abuses against humanity.” The Declaration of Independence states, “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights....” The founders of this country understood that religious values help to contain the rival impulses set loose by democracy. “Liberal democracy unleashes the natural appetites of individuals and a restlessness of the soul that must be tempered, but are not easily tempered, within a liberal framework. Religion is necessary to teach ‘self-interest rightly understood.’” Or as our fourth president, James Madison, said, “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked it upon the capacity of mankind to self govern; upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves according to the commandments of God.”

Many of the first European settlers came here in pursuit of religious freedom. Having been persecuted as religious minorities in Europe, they tried to create a more tolerant society in North America. Yet Americans have avoided trying to impose a single, uniform religion on all citizens. Thomas Jefferson said,

Almighty God has created the mind free, and manifested His supreme Will that free it shall remain [by making it altogether unsusceptible of restraint;] that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishment, [or burdens, or by civil incapacitations,] tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the will of God [the plan of the holy author of our religion.]

In the early 1820s, an observer from France, Alexis deTocqueville noted that “while the law permits the Americans to do what they please, religion prevents them from conceiving, and forbids them to commit what is rash or unjust.” Tocqueville understood that all national ethics and values derive from religious belief and scripture, yet at the same time (as others pointed out) there should not be one religion legislated by the nation-state. In other words, he affirmed the principle of separating church and state.

Originally, the separation of church and state was intended as a necessary safeguard, to protect religious groups from government interference. Many early European settlers came here in pursuit of religious freedom. Having been persecuted as religious minorities in Europe, they tried to create a more tolerant society in North
America.

In a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut in 1802, Thomas Jefferson wrote,

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between church and State.

Respect for diverse religious beliefs and for religious minorities is still a critical feature of our democracy. Frank McCourt (the Pulitzer-prize winning author of Angela’s Ashes) wrote:

America’s God is vaguely defined. Ours is not a monocultural nation like, say, Iran, Italy or Ireland, but a proudly diverse one. In many countries, the state, so entwined with a national religion, paints a picture of God no less stark than a portrait of the ayatollah [or] the pope. America, in contrast, supports, protects and nurtures minority viewpoints, values and traditions.

Unfortunately, over time, variations in how people interpret this principle have led to much confusion regarding the appropriate role of religious values in politics. Some people assert that all expressions of religion should be kept private, but others think that is going too far: after all, sessions of Congress have traditionally started with a prayer, as have sessions of the U.S. Supreme Court. The principle of separating church and state is not to ban public religious expression, but to avoid imposing a state religion that everybody must adhere to, because people’s natures are different.

In Islam, we say there is no separation of religion and state. But this, to a moderate Muslim, means that Islam has built into it spiritual and religious values which encompass human life, and that it encourages people to live their values (whether they are Christian, Jew, or Muslim). It does not mean that an Islamic government should compel everyone to be a Muslim. This philosophy was lived and taught by the Prophet (pbuh) when he and his followers moved to Medina. “The Muslims and the Jews were to live peaceably with the pagans of Medina…Muhammad never asked them to convert to his religion… unless they particularly wished to convert.” By not compelling religion, Islam recognizes the importance of spiritual freedom of the individual. Giving the individual the right to choose his/her religion makes that choice to embrace more valid and more powerful, and makes the believer more loyal and faithful to his/her religion. In addition, if everyone were compelled into being the same there would be no diversity. Muslims and non-Muslims recognize diversity within the community as strength because it provides new ways of looking at things and incentives to seek knowledge.

Conclusion

Democracy finds its inception in faith, and in sincere religious and spiritual principles. If
one looks at Islam and asks oneself the question, “If I took these principles of religion and extrapolated from that a secular form of government, what would it look like?” The answer would be “democracy,” which naturally gives rise to what can be described as a democratic institution. A sincere believer in Islam, who understands the core principles of Islam, cannot but extrapolate from that a democratically based form of governance.

In this article we have explored the compatibility between democracy and Islam as mutually supportive systems, both in principle and in practice. This begs the question, “Why is this relationship not more clearly and commonly understood? Why is it not a prevalent partnership in these times?” The answer lies in the humanly distorted, politicized religious principles, and in the humanly distorted, politicized democratic principles that characterize many of the governments in these times. The issues that we, as educators, religious leaders, parents and moral supporters have to address is how to help human beings not be so arrogant, opportunistic, self-aggrandizing, and manipulative, both of democracy and of religion. In doing so the people may come to understand the reality of these principles, where they come from, and that such values are universal.
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(Armstrong 154-155).
Islam at the Crossroads of Extremism and Moderation: A New Point of View

By J.E. Rash
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The ingredients for discussion of Islamic extremism versus moderation are familiar. On the one hand, we have the picture of Islam as gentle, peaceful, and tolerant that rarely is presented by the media, but which is emphasized by Muslims. On the other hand, we find the stereotype of Islam, touted by neo-conservatives and reinforced by the tragedies of September 11, 2001, suicide bombings, and certain biased media outlets, as the new great Global Evil; or equally misrepresented as a politicized religion. On the one hand, the former Grand Mufti of Syria, Shaykh Ahmad Kaftaro, said; “To be a good Muslim, one must first be a good Jew and a good Christian;” (private discussion with author in 1995); while on the other hand, Osama Bin Laden and Iraqi insurgents declare all Muslims duty-bound to fight the Americans, regardless of whether they are soldiers or civilians.

There is more to these contrasts than the obvious chasm that divides them. At stake in their interplay lies the potential for a significant segment (about one-sixth) of our global population either to re-assert Islam as a world view with the capacity for uplifting individuals and benefiting humanity, or to allow extremists to marginalize moderates, using partial ‘truths’ and the normal challenges each generation faces in finding its place in history, to distort the potential for dynamic civilizational development, and to impose doctrinaire and dangerous interpretations of Islam—interpretations rejected by the vast majority of Muslims, be they practitioners or religious scholars.

Many authors have postulated explanations for the realities of extremism and conflict in today’s world. We hear talk of a “clash of civilizations” that pits the West against the Muslim world. Articulator of this theory, Samuel Huntington, writes, “The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and obsessed with the inferiority of their power.” Even observers who are skeptical of such overarching, simplistic paradigms have trouble denying that some such clash underlay the attacks of September 11, 2001. But seeing the world in terms of civilizational clashes is little help to those looking for practical ways to ease tensions. Rather, it plays into stereotypes and racial /ethnic bias. Such an outlook has become a tool for manipulation and political opportunism that objectifies individuals and masks real issues that need to be addressed, not only between the West and Islam but also between Muslims and those who operate falsely in the name of Islam.

According to Hans-Peter Dürr, a quantum physicist and former Director of the Max Planck Institute, who brings his scientific knowledge to peace studies, we must recognize that the real clash at hand need not be a clash of civilizations, but rather it is a clash of centuries of old and new perspectives on an ever-changing universe. A key ingredient in today’s conflicts is the attempt to hold onto nineteenth-century thinking. Professor Dürr describes this thinking as centering on a mechanistic or materially oriented view of reality, according to which the future unfolds from the present in a deterministic progression governed by immutable laws of nature. Struggle dominates interactions in a world where only the fittest survive. Differentiation breeds conflict.

Twentieth-century thinkers began to realize that such a deterministic, competition-oriented worldview fails to acknowledge deeper, more profound elements underlying outer phenomena. Discoveries in quantum physics suggested that nature was surprisingly
unpredictable, disorderly, and non-linear. Scientists in particular started to awaken to the role of human consciousness, which defied explanation in conventional scientific terms; to see science as a metaphor, revealing not just one truth, but many dimensions of truth; and to regard the future as open-ended.

According to this newer worldview, differentiation among peoples allows for a pooling of wide-ranging capabilities, a cross-fertilization of insights, and an array of options for organizing and re-organizing society, as circumstances warrant. Peace is possible: not, Dürr explains, peace as a “tension-free state of static equilibrium,” but peace that “has color, variety, and tensions, and has challenges, even disagreements and conflicts struggling for balance.” Peace is regarded as “a poised, statically unstable state that seeks a dynamic equilibrium through an interaction of forces and counterforces. Like life it is a homeostasis, in which the counterforce is not the enemy of the force it opposes, but only the combination of the two makes vitality, openness, and freedom possible.”

This definition rejects the nineteenth-century view that peace happens when one competitor neutralizes others. It equally rejects the idea that the road to harmony lies in the type of economic globalization we are witnessing today. As social commentator Benjamin Barber points out, thus far international market forces have done little to “improve the chances for civic responsibility, accountability, or democracy.” Instead, they have imposed the “sterile cultural monism” that he dubs “McWorld.” Side effects include “the resentments and spiritual unease of those for whom the trivialization and homogenization of values is an affront to cultural diversity and spiritual and moral seriousness.”

Rather than tapping each person’s and each civilization’s unique riches, globalization buries them. Dürr writes, “...we should not forget that the modern doctrine of salvation, namely the Western scientific, technical, and economic ideology, is today in danger of becoming the worst fundamentalism, and is putting other major cultures, that are very important for the survivability of humanity, in great difficulties.”

In contrast to a “clash of civilizations” approach, the writings of Dürr, Barber, and others point to the importance of re-thinking conflict and peace. They suggest that solutions lie neither in the nineteenth-century paradigms of “good versus evil,” nor in the new neo-conservatism of today with its roots in Trotskyism, but in philosophical constructs and practical structures that respect, value, and benefit from human diversity. The solutions lie in core spiritual and human values that emphasize trust, personal responsibility, social conscience, economic equity, and minority rights, just to mention a few.

This paper will begin to look at the cultural, political and religious phenomena of extremism and fundamentalism through the lens of moderate, Sufic Islam, recognizing that extremism is neither an inevitability of modern history nor a product of a violent faith, but rather the unfortunate by-product of centuries of political and social complexities, aggravated by ignorance and power-mongering, local and regional conflicts, ethno/nationalistic world views, and the extreme economic disparities that feed poverty, disillusionment, and fear of life itself.
Labels and Definitions

Before embarking on a discussion of this subject, however, let’s deal with defining our terms, an important step that often is overlooked in the heated environment that characterizes discussions on the subjects of extremism, fundamentalism, terrorism, and related concepts. We live in a time of sound bites and ideographic terminology. Many terms can be and are used by stakeholders in today’s conflicts, to exploit issues, ethnicity, religion and race to further ends that are undefined by terms, but clearly defined by acts of terror.

Inherently there is nothing pejorative about the word fundamentalism, yet it has come to mean a great deal more than the core and fundamental beliefs of any religion. It has come to indicate an aberration in action and thought that is unacceptable in modern progressive societies. The term fundamentalist itself comes originally from Evangelical American Protestant Christianity of the 1920’s and referred to an individual who believes in the core tenets of Christianity and takes them to be ‘literal’. In this sense one could say that any Muslim who believes in the “fundamentals” of Islam, specifically the belief in One God and the Prophets (Old Testament prophets as well as Mohammad (pbuh), the prophetic texts ending with the Qur’an, the Day of Judgment, and the responsibilities toward God and God’s creatures, is a “fundamentalist.” However, in today’s world the word fundamentalism, whether referring to Christians, Jews, Muslims, or others, is inextricably linked to politics, social change, and personal security.

Because of this multi-layered historical and linguistic context, I propose that we consider the term “neo-fundamentalism,” defined by distinguished social scientist Olivier Roy as “…a closed, scripturalist and conservative view of Islam that rejects the national and state dimension in favor of the ummah, the universal community of all Muslims, based on Sharia.” According to Roy, it is among the poor and the young children of immigrants to the West that one finds a more neo-fundamentalist point of view. This point of view exists, he says, …[p]articularly among second-and third-generation migrants in the West. Even if only a small minority is involved, the phenomenon feeds new forms of radicalization, among them support for Al-Qaeda, but also a new sectarian communitarian discourse advocating multiculturalism as a means of rejecting integration into Western society.

What is significant about neo-fundamentalism is the tendency not to identify with any country, but rather to rally around the concept of “Islamization” and the imposition of Islamic ‘norms’ in Muslim societies and their minorities, in the attempt to revive what they imagine to be a universal Muslim Ummah. This radicalization of Islam, even by a small minority, gives rise to such groups as the Taliban; militant groups that abandon conservative doctrine for neo-conservative ideology. I would suggest that although Roy uses this term specifically in regard to Muslims and Islam in his book, Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah, “neo-fundamentalism” can be applied to the followers of other faiths, as I shall do from time to time in this article.

What is left for yet another essay is the discussion of culture versus religion and the desire to find, or rediscover, the ‘pure’ religion of the Salafi, original Muslims. Such
an article would deal with the essential errors of perception and assumptions, hopefully clarifying the confusion between labels and realities of terms and concepts like: ‘Arab’ and ‘Middle East’, ‘Muslim and Arab’, ‘The Golden Age’ and “Modern Poverty in Islamic Countries.” However, because of the scope of this topic, we are limited to a preliminary discussion of extremism and fundamentalism, as it relates to faith and politics.

In summary, the terms extremism, fundamentalism, and terrorism, have been thrown around casually with little effort given to refining our understandings of their meanings. Consequently, they have developed connotations that are too strong to make them useful to this discussion, as the assumptions they engender in the reader may detract from the focus of this discourse. In this article, I will use two terms interchangeably: “neo-fundamentalism,” as defined above, and extremist. Extremism in this paper will refer to those individuals and groups who position themselves at the far right of religious law, tradition and doctrine, almost always taking positions long repudiated by scholars of those religions and, more often than not, radically outside the accepted guidance, teachings and prophetic examples.

The Neo-Fundamentalist Ideology

If fascism is the political extreme that negates the democratic frameworks necessary for peace, then movements like Wahhabism, the Taliban, Hizbu-l Tahrir, Takfir wa Hijrah, and their Christian and Jewish counterparts represent a corresponding religious extreme that negates the spirituality on which peace depends. Islam, as interpreted by such extremists, has been used to cultivate qualities that are anathema to peace and reconciliation (salaam and sulh); including coerciveness, envy, revenge, hatred, selfishness, materialism, tribalism, and disregard for human rights and choices. Under the guise of education, such extremists have spent decades teaching hate and misrepresenting Islam’s essential teachings. They have distorted Shari‘a in ways that abrogates its democratic principles.

Three aspects of the extremist/neo-fundamentalist doctrines are especially disruptive: their insistence that they are sole proprietors of “pure” Islam; their attempts to legislate human beings’ relationship with God through rigid and oppressive rules of conduct; and their failure to honor any rules of engagement in their relations with perceived enemies (of which they have many).

1. The claim of propriety over pure Islam

Islam is based on submission to God vis-à-vis private acts and personal priorities. The goal is to create highly moral individuals with personal piety (taqwa). This is accomplished by those who accept Islam as a deen, or religious creed (from the root ‘to owe’ or ‘to be indebted to’) by integrating its values into the totality of their life through standards of conduct, accepted norms of behavior, and prescriptions that apply to the family, orphans, and destitute. In addition, Islam’s ethical and juristic philosophy focuses in a macro view on the issue of human rights, not only for Muslims, but for all people.
In such comprehensive approach of Islam as a way of life, the state’s role in regulating personal life is very restricted. Thus, any attempt to coerce, speak for, or in the name of others, even Allah, is considered *shirk* and outside of Islam’s basic tenet of guaranteeing a personal relationship with Allah. Extremists and neo-fundamentalists take the opposite view, interpreting and evaluating others’ Islam; politicizing what should be freedoms of choice.

Members of the first such movement in Islam were known as Kharajites: literally, “those who depart.” In the seventh-century civil war over succession, the Kharajites did indeed depart from the mainstream, declaring both sides wrong and launching attacks on both parties’ leaders. On the intellectual front, narrow, exclusionary understandings of Islam found voice in the works of eleventh-century scholar Ibn Hazm, who denounced “all forms of deduction, analogy, opinion... [and] theological discourse....” In the thirteenth century, Ibn Taymiyah confined the legitimate sources of truth to “the Qur’an and the hadith as interpreted by the Companions of the Prophet or their immediate successors,” Subsequent movements, such as the Wahhabis (founded in the eighteenth century), have continued to strictly circumscribe the sources of spiritual knowledge. Some have reinforced their monopoly on truth by going so far as to modify hadith or to attribute to weak hadith the status of affirmed/strong. Their claims to proprietorship over the only “pure” Islam have been matched by their denunciation of variant interpretations, particularly Sufism.

Muslim extremists’ claims of exclusivity run counter to the Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The central, non-negotiable teaching of Islam is belief in One God—the same God worshiped by other monotheistic faiths. The Qur’an states,

> “God has ordained for you the faith that He commended to Noah, and that which We inspire in you [Muhammad], and that which We commended to Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: ‘Establish the religion, and be not divided therein’” (42:13).

Although the Qur’an indicates that by the time of its revelation in the early seventh century C.E., misinterpretations had crept into some of the doctrines and practices of both Jews and Christians, the Qur’an also made clear that nevertheless many of their believers were rightly guided:

> “…Among those who received earlier revelation are a portion that stand [for the right]; they recite God’s messages throughout the night and prostrate themselves before Him; they believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and vie with one another in doing good works: they are in the ranks of the righteous…” (Qur’an 3:113-115).

Muslim nonviolent activist Karim Crow notes that these and other Islamic teachings allow no room for “religious exclusivity or ethnic election.” Rather, they call for “a harmonious religious pluralism.”

Islam denounces and condemns terrorism in all its forms; following the example of the Prophet (sal) who was a pacifist for most of his life, only fighting defensive battles when faced with no other options, and thereafter returning to non-violence. Avoiding
violence aimed at one’s self also is prohibited: “And make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction.” 2:195. This clearly condemns suicide bombing.

Regardless of background or school, all sincere Muslims agree with these and other injunctions absolutely prohibiting the taking of human life for private or ideological aims. There is a uniform code of essential beliefs; the fact that all Muslims, or so-called Muslims, do not pay heed to that code does not mean that these essential beliefs are responsible for terrorism or extremism; rather that such responsibility lies clearly with the deviant interpreters of Islam.

2. **Attempts to legislate individual’s relationship with God through oppression**

Not only are Muslims to respect other faiths, but also to avoid engaging in segmenting Islam and competing with other Muslims in interpretations. As it says in Qur’an, “And I will not worship what you worship, and you will not worship what I worship. To you your religion and to me my religion”(109:4-6).

As for Muslim sects that assert their interpretation of Islam as superior to other Muslims’, the Qur’an cautions, “And be not among those...who split up their religion and become [mere] sects, each party rejoicing in that which is with itself!” (30:31-32). Another passage warns, “Fall not into disputes, lest you lose heart and your power depart...” (8:46).

Nevertheless, extremists’ are convinced that they alone are right—and that this justifies making rigid rules for behavior. In their eyes, “religious correctness” is not just desirable, but mandatory and subject to imposition through legal penalties and appointed enforcers. The strictures imposed by the government of Saudi Arabia on individuals’ attire, women’s ability to travel, non-Muslims’ right to worship, public dancing, movie viewing, and other aspects of day-to-day life demonstrate a highly narrow, selective understanding of permissible behavior. The Taliban went further, banning television, music CDs, kite flying, chess, and the building of snowmen. Beyond crippling huge venues of human activity, such extremists’ policies undermine the dignity and capacity of those whom they govern or control.

Distrustful and dictatorial approaches belie the trust that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) exemplified in his dealings with every individual. He is reported to have said, “Beware of excessiveness in religion, before you have perished as a result of such excessiveness.” In keeping with this guidance, he strove always for the middle way, for balance and harmony. When approached by particularly devout individuals who wished to fast continually or to opt for celibacy instead of marriage, he recommended a more moderate spiritual course, reminding them that Muslims have a duty to respect the body’s physical needs. In political terms, he strove to harmonize the Jewish and Muslim populations of Medina by establishing a written constitution, according to which both parties were equal before the law; each was to guarantee the rights of the other, and each was to aid the other if either was attacked.

The Prophet Muhammad’s moderate approach reflected a deep understanding of Islam in its most universal sense. It is valuable to recall that the Arabic language has no capital letters, and that therefore, when Muhammad (pbuh) spoke of Islam, he was not
invoking a capitalized label. For him, and for those who first heard the revelations of Qur’an as he recited them, “islam” meant surrender or submission. Extracted from the same root as salaam, it connoted an active process of coming to peace, safety, security, wholeness, and well being through consciousness in the Presence of the Divine. Nothing in the term implied institutional structure, hierarchy, or dogma. Nor did the term prescribe a political agenda. For these early Muslims, Islam was first and foremost a framework for deepening the relationship between individuals and their Creator in moment-to-moment life.

In general, this framework was neither arduous nor inflexible. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “Make things easy, not difficult.” He was sensitive to his followers’ tendency to take every aspect of his example as incumbent to imitate. During Ramadan, he often performed a superogatory prayer known as Taraweeh. One night, he arrived at the mosque for Taraweeh, saw people gathered, and left, realizing that if he did the prayer every evening, it would be interpreted as a mandatory practice.

Once as a party of Muslims was leaving the Prophet (pbuh) instructed them, “Do not perform the mid-afternoon prayer until you get to the place of Banu Qurayzah.” The time of the prayer came before they had reached their destination. Some companions said, “We will not pray until we get to the place of Banu Qurayzah [their destination].” Others said, “We should pray here, on time. The saying of the Prophet will not prevent us from praying now.” When the matter was brought before the Prophet (pbuh), he did not disapprove of either group. These and other teachings make evident the degree to which Islam recommends flexible approaches rather than dictatorially rules of behavior.

How, in the face of this moderate message can there be such oppressive and rigid misinterpretation and exploitation of faith? When a person or group feels they are in the position of having to defend their faith, the extremists and hard-liners gain power and influence. Usually, their method of “protecting the faith” is to re-entrench themselves in the past and to expound dogma in an exclusionary, self-righteous mode of expression. To an individual who feels convinced that they are the objects of society’s derision and modernity’s immorality, such reactive behaviors seem to create a communal security and psychological comfort in their deluded mindset. This method of reinforcing the individuals’ often unquestioning loyalty is accomplished by claiming that the religion is under attack, whether the threat is real or imagined. Note some of the rhetoric of fundamentalist Christians today in America who, despite having a huge following and even a President who claims to be one of them, continually put out the message that they, and by extension all Christians and Christianity itself, are under attack from within and without. As stated on one fundamentalist Christian website, “In case you haven't noticed, Christianity has been and is still under attack in America and around the world. Enemies of the Faith know how to neutralize Christianity – erode its foundation.”

Part of the neo fundamentalist philosophy is to use the insecurity of those feeling attacked, in the name of Islam or Christianity or Judaism, to perpetuate their immoral and illegal activity. It is unjustifiable and regrettable, yet attempts to justify it abound in the history of most faiths.

History has dealt an irony, in that Islam has often been controlled by priests though the faith rejects the institution of organized priesthood. By
the term ‘priest’ I do not include the great saints, mystics, traditionalist thinkers and other men of piety and learning who form a distinct class. For centuries the ill educated mullahs have periodically monopolized the pulpit. With one hand, the mullah has woven into Islam a crazy network of fantasy and fanaticism. With the other hand, has often used it as an elastic cloak for political power and expediencies.”

What we find ourselves faced with is a tautological dilemma that is caused by the manipulation of religion to serve patently irreligious goals. In addition, their cause is, across the board, a reductive and anti-progressive, anti-modern agenda. That means it does not truly address human rights, tolerance, and the utilization of modern forms and technology for the common good. The unfortunate irony is that such people seem at the same time to be anxious and desirous of using that very same modern technology (media or military) for destructive and deceptive purposes.

Using the framework of tolerance, peace, and service one gains the strength to reject extremism as it raises its ugly head in our masjid or community, knowing that the true and inclusive framework, which was constructed at the advent of Islam by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers, remains at the core of Islam.

In a recent U.S. News and World Report, Muslim scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl reflected on his transformation from a rigidly doctrinaire youth to an open-minded adult. Contrary to what one might expect, the change came about as a result of learning more about the teachings of his faith. Having driven his family to exasperation by “railing against television, trousers, and mixed gatherings” (not to mention ruining his sister’s Rod Stewart cassettes), he finally took up their challenge to study at the local Shari‘a school. There, he “...was shocked when the sheik handily dismantled his pious pronouncements on everything from the proper manner of dress to the sinfulness of all music and art. ‘If I cited a single hadith,’ Abou El Fadl recalls, ‘I would be challenged with ten others plus the precedent of [the Prophet’s] Companions and a meticulous accounting of the evidence at hand.’ The experience reduced him to tears, he says, but it changed the course of his life by spurring him to master the traditional learning that had defeated him.”

Open-minded teachers helped Abou El Fadl learn to apply Shari‘a flexibly to today’s world. In contrast, those who adopt exclusivist interpretations of truth and insist on rigid rules place themselves at odds with their surroundings. The Taliban roused antagonism long before September 11th, 2001 through their “refusal to cooperate with UN humanitarian agencies or foreign donor countries, or to compromise their principles in exchange for international recognition, and [in] their rejection of all Muslim ruling elites as corrupt.”

3. Failure to honor rules of engagement

Extremists perceive outside influences of any kind as a threat; feeling threatened, they believe they have grounds to take any steps necessary to neutralize the threats’ sources. Hizballah ideologue Sheikh Fadlallah has argued “when Islam fights a war, it fights like any other power in the world, defending itself in order to preserve its existence
and its liberty, forced to undertake preventative operations when it is in danger.”

Dr. Magnus Ranstorp observes that “the totality of the struggle...purely defined in dialectic and cosmic terms as believers against unbelievers, order against chaos, and justice against injustice...is mirrored in the total and uncompromising nature of the cause.” The perception of being engaged in an all-out war “is often used to justify the level and intensity of the violence” of these extremists turned terrorists. In their minds, no parameters for engagement and disengagement need apply. They are totally outside of Islam.

Most Muslims believe there are the believers and the disbelievers but Qur’an says there is another group, this group consider themselves Muslim but break the laws and rules of Islam, using Islam to justify acts of terror. They are the misguided spoken about the Qur’an: “…And for whoever Allah leaves astray there is no one to guide.” 40:33.

“…Say, ‘to Allah belongs the East and the West. He guides whom He wills to the straight path.’ 2:142. They are not kafir (disbelievers who can change and become believers) or munafiqun (hypocrites who can change) but the ‘misguided’ who cannot be guided. In modern terms they are identity thieves, stealing the good name and sincere moderation of the majority of Muslims by using their name and their identifiers. These extremists’ frequent failure to observe limits placed on armed engagement contradicts Islamic guidelines for using force. To be a Muslim is by definition to be a person who actively works for the peace, security, and the well being of all people. In this context, there are circumstances under which Islam permits or even mandates the use of force—but always, the use of force must support long-term peace. As Shaykh Ahmad Kaftaro, the late Grand Mufti of Syria, has noted, “The Prophet (pbuh) never said, ‘I have been raised for militancy or for fighting.’ Rather, he said, ‘I have been raised as a teacher, to complete the structure of moral values.’”

Muslims were first authorized to fight in the following words: “Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged...those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, ‘Our Lord is God.’ For had it not been for God repelling some people by means of others, monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques, in which the name of God is often remembered, would surely have been pulled down...” (Qur’an 22:39-40).

What are Muslims obligated to defend? The freedom to say, “Our Lord is God,” and the spaces where people meditate, pray, and turn their attention to the Divine—be those spaces sacred to Jews, Christians, Muslims, or other believers.

Elsewhere the Qur’an poses the question:

“And why should you not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated [and oppressed]?—men, women, and children whose cry is, ‘Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and raise for us out of Your Grace a protector; raise for us out of Your Grace one who will help!’” (4:75).

The limited use of force in Islam to defend “basic human rights—security, [life] and property, freedom of thought—corresponds to what [we might call] “humanitarian intervention.” Social Scientist, Mark Juergensmeyer notes that even within the
Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence, “conditions could be so extreme that those who stood for truth were faced with the necessity of choosing between violent resistance and none at all. Gandhi said that in these cases ‘vengeance is any day superior to passive and helpless submission.’”

In keeping with its humanitarian ends, the use of force permitted by Islam is strictly limited, as follows.

- Force may not be employed for any other purpose other than in defense of religion, which, as mentioned before, does not refer exclusively to Islam. During the civil strife that followed the death of the caliph ‘Ali, one party tried to enlist the support of the eldest remaining companion of the Prophet (pbuh). In an effort to prove that he was obligated to take part the party members quoted Qur’an to him. He retorted that the Qur’an calls for battling religious coercion, not for political infighting.

- Muslims’ responses to violence must be proportionate and measured. According to the Qur’an, “If you have to retaliate, let your retaliation be commensurate with the wrong which was done to you” (16:126).

- Muslims should not harm innocent people or destroy an enemy’s livelihood. The caliph Abu Bakr instructed his soldiers, “Do not kill the [enemy’s] children, old people, and women. Do not...burn their harvest, nor cut the fruit-bearing trees.”

- Muslims must terminate hostilities as soon as possible. The Qur’an states, “If the enemy inclines towards peace, you also incline towards peace, and trust in Allah...” (8:61–62).

**Contributing Causes of extremism**

Extremists tend to preach and act in ways that contradict the teachings of the Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and the historical examples of the earliest Muslim leaders and societies. Open-mindedness, flexibility, and restraint are firmly established concepts in Islam. Why, then, do the statements and actions of subgroups of Muslims today reflect the opposite? Although a comprehensive answer is outside the scope of this paper, contributing factors include:

**Cultural Overlays:** As Islam spread in the 7th and 8th centuries C.E., its teachings and practices often became mixed with already existing customs. Some customs gave rise to distorted interpretations. For example, the complete covering of women in public reflects Persian customs that pre-date Islam. In the Qur’an, both men and women are enjoined to dress modestly. The Qur’an does not specify that women must cover themselves completely from head to foot nor does it prohibit such dress, as it is the custom of some individuals and groups.
**Politicization of Faith:** Competing claims to leadership splintered the Muslim community soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). During the last 400 years, many Muslims’ of Arab and African ethnicities experienced European colonialism and exploitation. In the past century a great influx of citizens of these former colonies have exercised their dual citizenship or come to Europe as guest workers. Unfortunately they have been met with prejudice and at times hostility and have brought their anti-colonial feelings with them. This and their second-class status has given rise to new forms of resistance and in some instances kindled the flames of political Islam, despite the predominance of secularity among many if not most of the immigrants. In some Muslim countries, Western-styles and tastes in dress and entertainment have fueled extremist political opportunism through invoking Islamic principles that are held by a majority of Muslims. Bigotry flourishes on both sides.

Bigotry is an infection of fear or hate, pillaging through the immunities of the heart. Bigotry is the quintessential disruption of the magnanimity of the mind….the disease of colonialism had infected our hearts, our minds, our limbs, and our sight. We saw our history as a corruption and aberration to be apologetically denied. With bigotry, in our imbalance, we idealized the beginning of our history and the rest —we demonized. Whether it is the bigotry of fear or hate, the bigotry of the colonizer or colonized, the bigotry of friend or foe, the same ugliness corrupts the scales of the Lord.iii

Ongoing superpower intrusions (real and perceived) into the affairs of Muslim countries further bolstered extremists’ popularity. In the quest for autonomy and prosperity, the word “Islam” became an umbrella excuse for actions motivated less by piety than by political expediency.

**Demographic Pressures:** Population trends have also contributed to extremism/neo-fundamentalism. Many Muslim societies are experiencing a “youth bulge.” For example, on average, 65% of the Arab world’s population is under the age of 18.iv Countries either lack sufficient schools and jobs for this mass of young adults, or the schools are strictly Islamic madrassas, with teachers who have a more Salafi agenda and are not qualified to teach the comprehensive required curriculum that fosters respect for the nation and people of different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds while remaining protective of and also focused on Islamic studies. Parents are sending their children to schools that are sectarian and have a political agenda out of desperation for Islamic educational values or because this is as close as they can hope to come to a minimal academic education due to the lack of educational alternatives.

In Britain this dilemma has fostered the growth of a number of alternatives to the “austere Wahhabi-Salafist vision of a global community living under strict Islamic law.”v Manifesting in the form of Muslim schools like north London’s Islamia Primary school, “a state-funded school that offers religious instruction and the study of Arabic along with the standard national curriculum.”vi This school, along with others, attempts to provide an antidote to the extremist message by “exposing students to the classical
Islamic traditions, whose richness was derived partly from their own openness to changing cultural conditions. Unfortunately, schools such as this are still a struggling minority, struggling to present the simple truth of the inclusivity at the foundation of Islam, without the centuries of cultural and political baggage. It is curious that the Truth is held to a much higher standard than twisted fabrications claiming to be Truth.

Meanwhile, the numbers of unemployed youths are swelling. This phenomenon is not restricted to Middle Eastern or under-developed countries, but has become a growing issue in Europe, as illustrated by the recent riots in France. “Unemployment in France remains a brutal reality—the rate has been permanently stuck around 10 percent nationally for the past 15 years. If you are young, Arab, or black, it’s even worse… approach[ing] 40 percent for 19-29 year olds whose parents are Moroccan or Algerian.” In some countries scores of young men and women from rural areas have flocked to the cities in search of work. There they confront the chasm between traditional and more Western ways of life. Again, a frustration experience by French immigrant youth, “Locked out of European society but alienated from their parent’s culture, they are stuck in decaying neighborhoods where violence is nothing new.” Caught between old and new, East and West, Islamic and secular, frustrated by the inequities of a materialist world, and goaded by personal experiences of discrimination or humiliation, some have found a voice and promise of future power and security in the simplistic world view offered by neo fundamentalism in the form of Wahabbism, Hizbul Tahrir, and others. In return for this misguided sense of hope, these youth permit themselves to be led blindly by leaders with multiple agendas, worldly agendas in the guise of promises of Paradise.

As important as it is to understand the contributing causes of extremist movements, there is a danger, however, in dwelling too long on these points as it may give the reader the impression that extremism is the dominant strain of Islam or justifiably excused. Even in Pakistan, prior to President Musharraf’s recent crackdown, extremist parties had never won more than ten percent of the vote. In Egypt, they are a significant, but by no means a dominant force.

The strength of such minority movements lies not in numbers but in their power to co-opt existing social situations and ‘spin’ them to a perception of relevancy and hope in the minds of both the uneducated and the youth who have little hope and support for a future of change and success. Education, both in its secular sense and education based on core Islamic principles, has to be integrated into and form the foundation for a hopeful future, here and hereafter.

Despite their minority status, extremists frequently have benefited from the Western media’s tendency to portray them as spokespersons for Islam. Some (like Osama Bin Laden) have been able to manipulate public opinion and portray Islam as the enemy of the West and its values. Some United States policymakers buy into this portrayal or cleverly use it for reasons that may serve shortsighted political agendas more than the nation’s long-term well-being.

The question of who may legitimately speak for Islam is complex, which makes manipulation of Islam’s public image easier. According to Shi’i Muslims, the Ayatollahs represent Islam. But Shi’as make up only about ten percent of the Muslim population worldwide. The Sunni majority views the question “who speaks for Islam?” in a different
way, one that is simultaneously liberating and disabling. Sunnis hold that unless there is a living Amir al-Mu‘mineen—that is, a “commander of the faithful”—then anyone may speak for Islam in the sense of advancing her or his interpretation, yet no one is authorized to speak for Islam with binding authority. Muslims have not been unified behind a single Amir al-Mu‘mineen since Mu‘awiya came to power in 660 C.E. (and some would say the invalidation of the Amir’s position began even earlier), nor is any framework in place for authorizing a new Amir al-Mu‘mineen. (Although the Taliban called Mullah Omar the Amir al-Mu‘mineen, in fact, no sect has the power to bestow this title). As a result, while any Muslim is free to speak about Islam, and many movements would like the world at large to believe that they speak for Islam, it is critical to weigh which individuals or movements speak with greatest legitimacy.

Perhaps the most obvious sign of the crossroads between extremism and moderation in Islam lies in the gap between the voices that speak most loudly and the majority opinion. Those who were once on the margin have become spokespersons for the mainstream, neither by virtue of their merit nor by consensus of those they claim to represent, but through the force of their actions, the loudness of their rhetoric, the global media’s attention, and the power of sheer terror.

A Sufic approach

In my work and travels, I have spent many years dealing with the grassroots implications of various political and social/cultural realities. Most significant has been the extent to which issues are influenced not just by outer conditions, but also by people’s spiritual condition. In recent years we have begun to see an effort to blur the boundaries between culture and nation/state, where in the past, spiritual or religious markers traditionally transcended cultural and national identifiers. Specifically, strange and sometimes strained alliances form between disparate groups: Bosnian and Croat; Chechen Sufi and Daghestani Wahabbi, Secular Palestinian movements and Hamas, to name a few. And it becomes more and more difficult to understand the goals of disparate groups as being anything other than resistance to Westernization. I have found the lens of Sufism to be helpful in understanding the interior dimensions of the human psyche and its tendency to blame instead of to accept responsibility for its condition. Consider, for example, developments in Chechnya during the 1990s. Traditionally, the Chechens’ understanding and practice of Islam reflected Sufi or mystical teachings; but, after Russia’s incursions in the 1980’s, neo-fundamentalist attitudes displaced Sufism. This shift is certainly significant on the level of political and religious institutions. Yet, it could have even deeper repercussions in shaping thousands of people’s understanding of faith, of the purpose of life, and of their relationship with the Divine. In the long run, its impacts on individuals’ inner sense of balance, security, and peace could influence events in the region as much as changes in government and religious structures will influence them.

Muslims believe that human beings are essentially good (fitruh). From this capacity for goodness grow qualities that are conducive to collective well-being, such as tolerance, compassion, generosity, justice, and a willingness to sacrifice and serve.
Thomas Jefferson, when reflecting on the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan, detected in these qualities the working of something more than human reason:

It has been said that we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, bind up the wounds of the man beaten by thieves, pour oil and wine into them, set him on our own beast and bring him to the inn, because we receive ourselves pleasure from these acts.... These good acts give us pleasure, but how happens it that they give us pleasure? Because nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and to succor their distresses.... The Creator would indeed have been a bungling artist had He intended man for a social animal without planting in him social dispositions.

A Sufi would agree with Jefferson’s assessment, and would perhaps add that these dispositions, seeded in us by our Creator, are potentials that each of us is responsible for bringing forth in himself or herself, step by step, through intention, knowledge, and experience. The fulfillment of these potentials cannot be legislated or enforced by one group upon another. Nor are religious rituals any guarantee of their realization. The Qur’an cautions, “Woe to those praying ones who are heedless of their prayer; those who make a show [of worship], yet refuse to share the necessities of life” (107:4-7).

If legislation, enforcement, and ritual cannot compel people to live up to their highest potential, what can? Sufis address this question through the concept of ihsan, which may be interpreted as seeing God in everything, and if an individual is not able to accomplish this, then knowing that God is seeing them is extremely important. In this act of consciousness, the Sufi strives for attunement to a Power higher than oneself—to a timeless, unchangeable Truth. In the tranquility of the mosque, in the call to prayer, in the five daily pauses for reflection, in the guidelines of Shari‘a, Muslims find constant metaphor that appeals to the core of one who looks behind the apparent phenomena called life. The beauty of the recitation of Qur’an, the contemplative calm of meditation, the natural satisfaction found in serving others, the heart’s yearning to experience a nearness to the Divine—all foster inner peace. All help to create a means of communication between the outer realities of day-to-day life and the inner reality of one’s self.

It is said that God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), “Who knows himself knows his Lord,” emphasizing that a person’s identity ultimately lies in his or her relationship with God. A similar understanding is reflected in the Biblical statement attributed to Jesus’ “…the kingdom of Heaven is within you” (Luke 17:20). These realizations foster harmony within and without. In this Sufism differs from religious sects that regard the material world as a barrier and threat to piety. Life, to the Sufi, is a series of experiences that lead one towards Truth, that is, to see the Truth/Divine Presence in all aspects and experiences of life. It is, in a sense, the search for the consistency and interrelatedness of life. The processes used by sincere seeker of Truth and Harmony are reflective and inclusive; they provide the opportunity to refine the self and to serve God by serving God’s creatures. Much is to be learned by working towards the “good life”(hayati-tayybah) for oneself and others in the material world, while respecting values that precede and extend beyond this physical existence. Thus the Sufic adage, “be in the world and not of the world.”
When properly understanding Sufism, many would agree that it demonstrates Islam at its most progressive, its most personal, its most genuinely reflective of fundamental principles, its most democratic, and its most conducive to peace. Sufi scholar Fadhlalla Haeri writes, “Islam is not an historical phenomenon that began 1400 years ago. It is the timeless art of awakening by means of submission. Sufism is the heart of Islam. It is as ancient as the rise of human consciousness.”

Islam and Extremism in America

Islam is not alone in confronting a crossroads where question of progressiveness and disparate perspectives must be addressed; each person, community, and nation must address the extremist elements they are faced with. A brief case study of the United States shows the critical juncture at which so many communities now stand, a juncture with the potential to impact the future of moderate Islam and the voice of extremism around the world.

Prior to September 11th, 2001, many American Muslims had come to the conclusion that the best hope for a revivification of moderate Islam lay in the United States. Its democratic institutions, multiculturalism, and wide spectrum of educational and professional opportunities hold promise for enabling Muslims to live Islam as a dynamic and progressive faith. The religious and personal freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights create an environment where Muslims can integrate their values and beliefs with the world of the twenty-first century, not by imposing monolithic interpretations, but rather by tapping Islam’s capacity to be flexible without losing its firm foundation.

American Muslims approach Islam differently than do many of their counterparts in the Muslim world. What they see in Islam is democracy, diversity, a commitment to justice, equity, equality, reluctance to stereotype, and a commitment to community well-being, among other strengths. They recognize and appreciate the parallels between Islamic concepts such as *ijma*, *ijtihada*, and the affirmation of individuals’ rights, and the structures established by the Constitution.

At this time it is critical that moderates within the Muslim community be acknowledged and supported rather than undermined in their efforts to play a constructive role in society. Certain extremists have worked diligently over the last century, and in the last fifty years especially, to introduce or to strengthen narrow and often ethnocentric attitudes in the minds, politics, and social structures of Muslim peoples and countries from India to Indonesia, from Central Asia to Europe. Islamic institutions in the United States are not immune to these efforts. Khaled Abou El Fadl, whose teenage reformation experience we mentioned earlier, when speaking at the Islamic Center of Greater Austin (Texas), was jeered by a group of audience members who then followed him out to his car, threatening violence. Other congregations have displayed similar hostility. The president of the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences in Leesburg, Virginia, Dr. Taha Alawwani, “worries that many of [the] imams [in America’s mosques and Islamic centers] ‘are just Islamists,’ often supported by ultra orthodox organizations and more concerned with ideology than with complexities of faith. ‘I would love to see the Muslim community try to enrich their traditions and revive their values,
and I try to encourage this in my school,’ he says. ‘Unfortunately, many imams think in
different way.’”

Just as in many countries, the potentials for doctrinaire and exclusivist interpretations of Islam to gain footholds in U.S. mosques make the decisions that face policymakers all the more challenging. Since September 11, recognition of the parallels between Islamic teachings and the United States’ founding ideals of democracy, pluralism, and diversity has become more difficult. Extremists’ acts have overshadowed the voices of moderate Muslims. Some Americans’ attention has shifted to guarding against the perceived threat of Islam rather than proactively affirming moderate Islam. The result is a negative feedback loop, in which the potentials for progressive Islam, on the one hand, and the potentials for the United States to provide a genuinely inclusive and moderating environment for religious expression, on the other, are moving out of phase.

If Muslims are to revivify Islamic teachings of tolerance, justice, open-mindedness, and respect for diversity, then the best environment conducive to that effort is in the United States. Future developments within the Muslim American community cannot be separated from choices facing U.S. policymakers as they decide how to interpret principles of democracy, civil liberty, and civil rights in the post-9/11 era. Worries prevail among Muslims in the United States regarding the course of political policies and the extent and motivators for what appears to be an erosion of civil liberties. The rise of neo-conservative influence has created an echo of previous places and times in the hearts and minds of many in the Muslim community who came to the United States precisely for its guarantee of freedom and human rights. American Muslims are increasingly feeling isolated due to their minority status and to what they perceive as a pattern of targeting by individuals and government agencies—an experience shared by Muslims in many other nations.

For Muslims worldwide, the horrific reality of terrorism, as witnessed all too much recently, could be a nexus that inspires some who had looked for security in the false promises of extremism to trade in that allegiance for the security of moderation. The Kharajites—“those who depart[ed]”—were as marginalized as their name implied. However, during the latest phase of politicization of Islam, the extremist minority has been allowed to permeate the Muslim world, moving in from the fringe to influence a significant portion of Islamic thought and education. September 11th has forced previously passive Muslims to identify and to understand more deeply the moderate message of Islam by having to defend it. This may be a first step towards taking the groups that have traditionally been marginalized, and marginalizing them again.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, “When principles are well understood, their application is less embarrassing.” Human beings have proven their skill in applying principles that they presume to understand through decisions that end up being embarrassing or—more ominously—dangerous. Today, Islam and the United States stand at intersecting crossroads. In-depth understanding, not nineteenth-century rhetoric, is needed to chart the course ahead. Muslims the world over have an opportunity to revivify the essential democratic and pluralistic principles of their heritage.
The desire to ‘universalize’ religion is also an attempt to return to its fundamental roots. The global spread of Islam, not unlike Christianity, began quite early. As it spread, over time, its new adherents re-culturalized Islam to fit their biases and ‘tastes’. Yet Islam, due to its Arabic roots and the preservation of the revelation and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), has always remained partially identified with its Arab birthplace and character. After the Western assisted overthrow of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th Century, Saudi Arabia gained control over the Haram Shareef (in Mecca). And, being under the control of a small and questionable sect of Islam (Wahabbism), combined this control with its new-found oil wealth, to empowering and self-directed the export of its form of Islam throughout the Islamic societies of the world.

At the same time the de-colonizing of much of the Muslim world created greater and greater gaps between the classes of people. Economic disenfranchisement, inequity in education, old, cultural, and non-Islamic attitudes toward women all added to a growing instability, allowing for the growth of dictatorships from the Middle East to South East Asia. The former colonizers, at times exhibiting their arrogant prejudices, found themselves not only inheriting populations from their former colonies in the form of immigrants but also in need of the human and material resources of their former colonies. The hypocrisy of ‘preaching’ democracy and freedom while working hand in glove with dictators and pseudo-democrats, monarchists, and religious zealots has led inevitably, not to a clash of civilizations, but rather one of values. Perhaps it should be more correctly called a clash of materialism vs. humanism.

From this milieu the potential for violence and terrorism raises its ugly head as the opportunities are seized by criminal and zealrous elements in society. They prey upon the beliefs and piety of the common person and co-opt religion as the core of conflict and means of rebellion. The fact that this trend can be seen both in the Islamic—faith world and the Christian world—in the return to fundamentalism creating a virtual neo-Christianity with overtones and justifications that go back to the Crusades—is worth serious scholarly and personal attention.

How ironic this tendency is, when religion is the attempt to express Universal truths across the boundaries of culture and ethnicity. The fact is that Islam is not the principal identifier of ‘Muslim’ countries any more than Christianity is the principal identifier of the United States or Western countries. One just needs to look at the votes garnered by religious parties in many parts of the world to surmise how many people identify themselves with politicized religion, especially Islam.

What is more disturbing is that the conflicts in today’s world are often labeled conflicts between Islam and the West, not Islam and Christianity, or even Eastern cultural, political, and economic realities versus Western economic, political and cultural realities. Instead, we now live in a world where the words, ‘Muslim,’ ‘Christian,’ and ‘Jew,’ have taken on deep political meanings. They “refer not to a religion but to some sort of neo-ethnic [groups ed.] that [are] defined in …opposition to the ‘West,’” as the case of Islam. While the wars of today are predominantly in the Muslim countries, most of the issues have little to do with religion. Iraq, Kashmir, Iran, Israel/Palestine,
Chechnya, and by extension the conflict found among impoverished youth-population majorities, and the social/political/economic class system that ignited riots just recently in France, all these take on the appearance of conflict between Islam and the West. And yet, there is always more to the story.

It is my hope that this paper has stimulated the reader to seek and find correct and comprehensive discourses on the subject of extremism. I also hope that it has excited the reader to pursue true democratization, as it is consistent with the Islamic community’s core values, as well as to hold Western ‘democrats’ accountable to true democratic values. Regardless of the religious majority of their country, citizens around the world can recognize the truth of the values espoused by the Framers of the Constitution of the United States or the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in the French constitution. We all, each in our own way, stand at the cross-roads between moderation and extremism, able to look down one road towards further clashes, violence, and neo-fundamentalism, or along another road, towards moderation, peace, and security; the true values of Islam.
References


xxxvii All quotations from and references to comments made by Hans-Peter Durr are taken from the speech, “Peace and Crisis” (delivered at the meeting of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg and the Association of German Scientists, Berlin, October 12, 2001), and from private conversations with the author, April 2002.


xxxix See “neo-conservative” www.Wikipedia.net


xlii Hadith (reports of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are classified from most to least reliable; knowing the status of a given hadith helps Muslims weigh its validity relative to other Islamic sources.


xlvi Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, qtd. In Magnus Ranstorp, “Terrorism in the Name of

Ibid.


ibid.

ibid.


*Ihsan*, which ranks with Islam (submission) and *iman* (faith) as one of the cornerstones of Muslim life, was defined by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as “to worship God as though you are seeing Him, and while you see Him not yet truly He sees you.”


*Remapping the World: Civilization, Religion and Strategy* Roy p.332
Toward Pre-Emptive Peace:
Deterring Conflict with the Tools of Islam

By J.E. Rash
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In the year 2000 there were 36 major armed conflicts in countries around the world, including international armed conflicts, civil wars, and wars of national liberation. In that same year, 21 additional countries were experiencing serious violent social unrest and there were four major genocides taking place. Unfortunately six years later, the world has not gotten much better. We have only to look at television to see news reports daily of suicide bombings in Iraq, genocide in the Darfour region of Sudan, military oppression in Chechnya, or reports of torture in China, Saudi Arabia, and Guantanamo.

When we look through history there has always been some type of conflict. At its worst, it takes the form of war and genocide or ‘ethnic cleansing’. Often conflict is between religious and ethnic groups. Invariably, persecution, and as well as overt and subtle forms of oppression accompanies conflict. Regardless of its expression, there have always been conflicts. Therefore, the questions arise, “Is it possible to prevent conflict?" Is peace simply the absence of conflict? Real peace is the active creation of an equitable, open and secure environment. While conflict prevention and resolution is simply trying to avoid or resolve conflict, pre-emptive peace uses the tools of peace, security, safety and inner contentment to actively create an environment that addresses the personal, social and political issues that create and promote the underlying causes of conflict. There are many tools for creating pre-emptive peace. Among Muslims, the best tools for creating a pre-emptive peace and thus avoid conflict prevention are the Qur’an, the Shariah, and the Sunnah.

Because of the nature of Islam, I believe that there is an exceptional opportunity in Muslim countries to establish pre-emptive peace and perhaps, in time, become a model environment for peace building and reconciliation, for leaders and societies around the world. Islam’s model of conflict management, prevention, and resolution comes from Muslims’ commitment to seeking peace, inner and outer, for the sake of Allah. Because of Islam’s emphasis on personal submission, inner peace, and security, Muslims should be predisposed to conflict prevention. This predisposition for seeking inner peace is, ideally, reflected in peace in the community.

Islam emphasizes community well-being, sacrifice for the benefit of others, brotherhood/sisterhood, and the greater jihad—struggle with the nafs (ego). This jihad is a Muslim’s struggle with attitudes of selfishness and greed on a daily basis in an attempt to turn the focus of his or her life away from the self and the world towards actions that reflect good intentions for others. A true Muslim measures his or her success by the ability to balance inner and outer life and to refine his or her character. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “I was sent to complete the noble qualities of dispositions.” And also, “By Him in whose hand is my life, no one shall enter paradise except the one who has a positive dispositions.” Through this guidance, in a model Muslim community, conflict is prevented and pre-empted by the sincere inner struggle and refinement of the character of the members of the community.

Islamic Principles that Promote Pre-Emptive Peace

Despite the affirmation of cultural stability and pluralism put forward by various nations, including those with a majority of Muslims, there are tensions between ethnic and religious groups. In a majority of countries there exist degrees of bigotry and prejudice,
Conflicts do not begin when two sides start shooting. They begin months, years, and even decades before fighting breaks out, in the enmities and resentments that grow out of an impoverished population with no voice in government, treated with injustice, and kept in a state of ignorance. In a university study of conflict management it is stated that, “polarization of peaceful (normal) relations and the increasing isolation between groups, are…often seen as the major factors leading to the escalation of conflict. Polarization [is] caused by a number of related psychological, sociological and political processes.” The origins of these conflict-causing processes may stretch back centuries, rooted in cultural prejudice and inequality. Former president Mikhail Gorbachev writes, “We need a policy of ‘preventative engagement’: international and individual solidarity and action to meet the challenges of poverty, disease, environmental degradation and conflict in a sustainable and nonviolent way.”

Ironically, perhaps, given the influence of Islam on decisions leading to Perestroika, Islam addresses each of these social ills.

- To reduce poverty, Muslims are enjoined to assist the poor. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “He is not a man of faith who eats his fill when his neighbor is hungry.”

- To give people a voice in government, Islam calls for consultation and consensus in community affairs. Upon being confirmed by consensus as successor to the Prophet (pbuh), Abu Bakr As-Siddique said, addressing the community present in the Medina Mosque, “I have been given authority over you, but I am not the best among you. Obey me so long as I obey God in the administration of your affairs. Where I disobey God, you owe me no obedience.”

- To prevent injustice, Allah (swt) guides Muslims to “…bear true witness…even though it be against yourselves, your parents or your relatives. It does not matter whether the party is rich or poor—Allah is well wisher of both. So let not your selfish desires swerve you from justice…” (Qur’an 4:135).

- To reduce ignorance, Muslims are guided to “seek knowledge from cradle to grave,” and to transmit their knowledge to others.

- To reduce prejudice, Islam promotes ethnic and racial tolerance. It also teaches religious tolerance. Allah states in the Qur’an: “Those who believe, and those who follow the Jewish [Scriptures], and the Christians, and the Sabaeans—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right—surely their reward is with their Lord…” (2:62)

Of course, this is not a comprehensive presentation of Islam’s measures to address social ills, nor do all Muslim societies live up to these ideals of equity, justice, and tolerance. Among countries which have Islam as their state religion:

- only about 1 in 5 has a functioning democratic government;
- roughly 75% of these countries allow extra-judicial executions, arbitrary arrests, or unfair trials;
- in more than half of these countries, the illiteracy rate is 30% or higher.
These are issues that Muslims must address as part of realizing the potential within Islam to pre-empt conflict. But while addressing these existing challenges, we can also find inspiration in the communities where Islamic principles have operated, and have helped to ensure peace. Ultimately, peace depends on more than social principles. It depends on establishing peace within human beings.

**Utilizing the Principle of Sulh**

As simplistic as it might sound, the foundation of conflict prevention, management, and resolution lies in opposing individuals or communities uncovering the benefits of cooperation. Inherent in cooperation is some degree of peace, reconciliation, and restitution. In Islamic terms these concepts fall under the rubric of *sulh* meaning righteousness and by extension reconciliation, settlement, and peace making.

It is increasingly important that in Western, democratic countries Islam be understood not simply as a religion of peace (rather than one of hostility – an idea that is still not widely understood and accepted by non-Muslims) but furthermore that within Islam resides this powerful tool: the concept of *sulh*. Through this understanding and acceptance, such Islamic tools may be utilized within the Muslim populations and be accepted by others as a force for preventing and resolving conflict, not seen as a source of conflict, as is too often the case now.

What exactly does conflict resolution through *sulh* mean? It means individuals and communities establishing a social contract; a truthful relationship based on mutual benefit and promoting a comprehensive and fair, democratic and spiritually equitable society. This mutual agreement is defined by John Rails as “...the principle that free and rational persons, concerned to further their own interests, would accept in an initial position of equality and defining the fundamental terms of their association.”\(^{lxxiii}\) Such a defining process requires of the participants a sense of value and perpetuity in the commitment to reconciliation and peace.

What factors make conflict undesirable to its participants? From a purely secular perspective, there are often economic issues, levels of destruction, time and discomfort of large portions of the citizenry. In addition, to a believer in Islam there is the most important factor of accountability in one’s personal relationship with Allah. Because this is such an important aspect of the Muslim’s life, whoever defines this relationship usually controls the actors and actions that play out in the context of a conflict. The twisted and false attribution to God of qualities of revenge, hate, destruction of property, and the killing of innocent people, leads to spiritually distorted attitudes and un-Islamic actions such as suicide bombings, and the indiscriminate destruction of property and life. An understanding of Islam, in word and action, demands peace with Allah, His Messenger, and with the rule of law that leads to an attitude of *sulh* (reconciliation). Allah reveals in the Qur’an, “God does call to the House of Peace, And He guides whom He chooses to the straight path.” (10:25). And also, “The servants of ar-Rahman (the Compassionate), are those who walk on the earth in humbleness, and when the ignorant address them, they say “Peace”! (25:63)

These and other *ayat* (verses) from the Qur’an formed the basis of the treaties made by the Prophet (pbuh) with the Christians and Jews in Medina.
The Prophet… made a covenant of mutual obligation between his followers and the Jews of the oasis, forming them into a single community of believers but allowing for difference between the two religions. Muslims and Jews were to have equal status. If a Jew was wronged, then he must be helped to his rights by both Muslim and Jew, and so also if a Muslim was wronged.\textsuperscript{44}

This example of good faith toward other religions is just one of many historical examples of pre-empting conflict. When the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) was building a new society in Medina, he went to extreme ends to avoid conflict between people. To build a model society at a time when many people questioned the success of this new revelation was necessary to maintain peace and for the message to be accepted. Indeed, it is not so different from what we face in many communities and countries today.

A discussion of historical examples is easy and proving their historical and theologically validity is clear; however, applying such systems in today’s world, especially in the West where Muslims are a minority and often 2\textsuperscript{nd} class citizens, is elusive and complex. Greed, selfishness, culture, history, education, wealth and poverty, all leave their signature on the members of society. These impressions form tendencies and bias that can eventually give rise to conflict. Yet, Allah reminds us in the Qur’an, “…to each one of you We have prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His Plan) is to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God: it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute.” (5:51).

In fulfilling their side of the social contract, Muslims must look to Islam as a way of life and at the same time regard themselves as citizens of the country they abide and work in, and whose services they accept. Correspondingly, the state, especially a democratic state, is meant to include all its members, especially "commoners." There is a reason why in England the lower parliament is called the House of Commons and why in the early days of American independence there was a great deal of discussion and writing on the "commonwealth." Each citizen of a country expects, and not unreasonably, to be an equal citizen of that country, whether a minority or not.

Through a believer’s covenant with Allah and their contract with the state as a citizen who seeks peace and reconciliation, an individual is guaranteed peace and security, within and without. In this system, one’s life, property, dignity, religion, rights to education, and other rights are protected, forming a strong bond of inter-dependence that acts as a bulwark against internal and external conflict.

**Conflict Prevention: A Cost-benefit Analysis**

What we know from Islam, Christianity, and other religions is that people should be responsible for themselves and through their life experiences maintain their own well-being. What we should know from experience with honest, good governance, is that people feel much more secure when their security comes from within their own community, rather than from outside of it. Yet despite our own personal experiences with the power of conflict prevention and the value of peace and security, we still tend to address conflict resolution in a reactive way. Is it not reasonable and logical to think of
the money, time, and misery that could be saved by avoiding conflict? Can one even assess the meaning of one life saved, let alone thousands, or hundreds of thousands? In Qur’an we read, “…if anyone slew a person unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.” (5:32)

A complete assessment of costs would not only include economic costs, but the social, political, ecological, cultural, psychological, and spiritual destruction that takes place in conflict. These dimensions of destruction of conflict can give us an idea of the size and complexity of peace and rebuilding. The tools for developing an environment supportive of pre-emptive peace are to be found right before our very eyes, beginning with a simple cost-benefit analysis.

When an individual is proactive, one does a cost-benefit analysis. When an individual is reactive, one is only looking at the hard variables such as territory, size of military forces, material gain, and power. To be proactive it is necessary to look at the soft variables like culture, language, and religion. Which means, included in that analysis must be people’s hopes, people’s view of the future, their ideas on education, their cultural sensitivity. When one is reactive, there is only one-dimensional analysis. Proactive assessment is a multi-dimensional, cross-impact analysis. How does ‘this variable deal with that variable’? How does language affect conflict? How does educational opportunity affect people’s security? How does what they are hearing from the katib or the imam (in a Muslim society) reflect what is actually happening in society?

Here is just one example of the value of prevention. The international community refused adequate financing of a disarmament effort by the United Nations West African peacekeeping forces in 1990 and 1993. Because of the reluctance to finance this preventative measure, which would have cost about 20 million dollars, the United States ended up pouring 500 million dollars of aid into that country between 1990 and 1996. Now consider if even one percent of that 500 million had been spent in proactive measures, like education and peace building? Could you endow a university? Or provide health care? Address poverty in a region of the world? Or build social institutions in a country? From a material point of view, the costs of post-conflict reconstruction, rebuilding of infrastructure are far greater than what the cost would be to prevent conflict, let alone the cost in human suffering, which is incalculable and unimaginable.

Let me give you another example of missed opportunities, this time in the Balkans. Ten years after the Dayton Peace Agreement it is clear that “the international community’s lack of political will meant that many earlier opportunities to intervene and bring the fighting to a swifter conclusion were missed.” If serious pressure had been brought to bear on the parties in conflict and the parties seized early opportunities in 1992, the conflict might have been stopped and thousands who died might be alive today. Even though intervention in the short term might be more difficult politically, it is less costly in the long term and politically less volatile. Because the global pattern is to react, not prevent, Bosnia-Herzegovina is just one more of a growing list of complex and immeasurably destructive conflicts that might have been avoided, had pre-emption been a global priority.
Obstacles to conflict prevention

The rules of conflict and the benefits of avoiding it are well documented in Islam. The Prophet (pbuh) said, “A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe, and the believer is one in whom people place their trust in regard to their life and their wealth.” And in the Qur’an, Allah reveals, “…And never let your hatred of people bar you from the inviolable House of Worship and lead you into the sin of aggression. But rather help one another in furthering virtue and consciousness of Allah, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity” (5:2).

Indeed, non-Islamic societies can benefit from these guidelines as well. But due to the circumstances of today’s world and its conflicts, few people consider looking toward Islamic thought for inspiration and leadership. Unfortunately, this reluctance is reinforced by the degree of deviation within Islamic societies and nations from these principles. Ironically, in the few situations where there actually have been efforts to resolve conflict in Muslim dominated nations, either from a secular ideology or a faith-based approach, receptivity is minimal. Tribal mentalities dominate in Muslim countries around the world, including countries struggling with conflict, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and some Central Asian countries. As stated in a RAND report made on the Muslim world after 9/11, “Ethnic communities, tribes, and clans often constitute the principal basis of individual and group identity and the primary engine of political behavior.”

These divisive identities are often cloaked in the guise of Islam, a guise which could easily be discredited by scholars, had they the inclination or courage to do so. Tragically, these definitions are all too often accepted by persons who are ignorant of Islamic guidelines or who are misguided by others who are misguided.

Perhaps because of historical circumstances such as the Crusades and the disbanding of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims tend to be suspicious and resistant to bringing what appears to be the introduction of foreign ideas and culture into an Islamic society. As one result of this fear, we find antagonistic, defensive attitudes and responses, as opposed to thoughtful and reconciling discourse. Much needed dialogue between cultures and individuals can only be fruitful when there is a level of mutual respect and understanding of the other’s point-of-view. The Qur’an states, “And tell My servants that they should speak in the most kindly manner to those who do not share their beliefs. Truly Satan is always ready to stir up discord between people. Truly Satan is an open foe.” (17:53) Unfortunately, this type of respect is often lacking in the dialogue between the West and the East, specifically between Western Democratic and Islamic political and social entities. Sadly, many of the suspicions that fuel this lack of dialogue and respect are justified by deceptive assertions of democratic efforts, poorly monitored elections, corruption at high levels of government and in NGO’s, and apathy from the world community, especially the West, except when the availability of resources is concerned. Political scientist Eric Brahm writes that, “The key to transforming conflict is to build strong equitable relations where distrust and fear were once the norm.” To begin to prevent and reconcile conflicts, we must firmly strive for this goal. Furthermore,
the reality is that unless the movement for conflict prevention reaches a level of acceptance where it becomes the preferred initial means of addressing potential or actual conflict, all we are going to see in the future is military and civilian aggression as the solution to threats: be they political or cultural, actual or perceived, like those often emotionally described as threats to ‘freedom’ or to ‘our way of life.’

For people in emerging democracies, honing their conflict prevention abilities is potentially the greatest source of security and hope for building a constructive, equitable future in their communities. Individuals and institutions that embrace this type of thought are considered visionaries: academically, institutionally, and socially. Kazakhstan, being the largest country in the Central Asian region and having perhaps the most ethnic and religious diversity, has a unique potential for establishing such a future. Establishing an environment of understanding from within the population, rather than as a result of the intervention of other countries, provides Kazakhstan with a unique role to play in creating religious and secular peace in the region.

**Causes of the failure of Conflict Prevention**

To practically address the possibility of future success in pre-empting conflict, we must look at the reason for its past failure. A few of these causes are: a lack of foresight, the absence of vital interest, and a lack of conflict resolution skills.

**First** let us address the lack of foresight. When people do not have the foresight, they do not have early warning systems for conflict. Despite recent efforts made by major non-governmental organization, like the UN, NATO, and the European Union, as well as countless academic institutions, to improve diagnostic and prognostic tools, a lot has to be done to get better insight into conflict dynamics.

Leaders and respected individuals who are in a position to advise and influence governments should hold themselves responsible and accountable for conflict prevention and conflict resolution. The community should hold its leaders accountable, and surrounding communities should pressure conflict sites to use prevention tools. Accountability is an incredible tool that breeds foresight, especially if it is encouraged by material leverage, cooperative economic pressures, world opinion, moral and ethical admonishment, realistic financial benefits, and actual rewards and punishments.

The **second** factor is the lack of interest on the part of the world community. An unfortunate example of this is the multiple conflicts and issues in the continent of Africa: Genocides, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, hostile and oppressive governments, and some of the world’s most impoverished nations. Yet as long as the dominant western countries or international organizations do not see it in their interest to prevent further conflict in Africa or indeed any other region, by addressing such social, health, and economic issues, not only will conflict resolution be a distant hope, but the possibility of sensitive and long term pre-emptive peace will be a dream. It is going to take a lot of effort to convince the international community that a complex, interdependent, worldwide pre-emptive peace effort is a vital interest. In that respect, unfortunately, it is in a category with Global Warming and Fair Trade.
Is ignorance bliss, as the English poet Thomas Gray so famously asserted? If a vast number of people in this world realize the cost to themselves, they will begin to take a vital interest in resolving the conflicts of the world. It is unfortunate that opportunistic and insecure politicians the world over find a perverse sense of personal security in keeping their constituents ill-informed and impoverished. For example, Americans should ask themselves: “How much is it costing me personally to fight a war in Iraq?” When we see the personal cost of war, that’s when we challenge the reasons, the benefits, and the risks of conflict and weigh them against the same factors with regard to prevention. While it is in the nature of many to help the less fortunate, few people want to have government reaching into their pockets and taking freely of their assets or potential wealth without adequate explanation. And yet it happens, actually and metaphorically, every day throughout the world. Though not a comprehensive psychological explanation, suffice it to say that many people accept the justifications of short-term discomfort, and don’t focus on the detrimental long-term consequences.

The truth is, we live in a time of economic not moral realities. And yet, it is the job of the kahibs, the priests, of the ministers, of the religious leaders to tell people clearly that the will of God as espoused in diverse religious texts is to abhor and condemn murder, rape, and mayhem, not to commit such acts. In fact, the will of God is that believers guarantee the economic well being of people, their social safety and security. That is the reality of religion. When individuals are self-serving, they are no different than any other dictator or bigot or prejudiced human being in the world.

The third cause of failure of conflict prevention is a lack of conflict transformational skills. For most of the serious problems in the world one finds institutions and training. We have law schools to learn the law, medical schools to learn to deal with diseases, and scientific institutions to expand our horizons. Indeed every issue that deals with a human being’s well being has institutions and academic training associated with those issues. Certainly institutions and training programs exist that address conflict skills, yet what is needed still eludes most of these institutions: creative approaches that encourage and teach creative thinking to the daring and courageous individuals who are committed to creating and sustaining peace and equity. Such individuals are committed to shifting the global paradigm from one of elitism, characterized by such categorizations as “the haves and have-nots”, to a more moral, ethical, and equitable paradigm of mutual benefit and constructive growth. Institutions and programs committed to creating pre-emptive peace.

In dealing with large-scale violence, there are very few comprehensive academic programs provided anywhere in the world. Until recently, international conflict management training was considered only the domain of diplomats and soldiers.

**Peace-building and Islam**

Peace-building tends to be loosely defined in political spheres, and treated more as a “Track Two diplomacy” approach to conflict, or peace-making as a result of conflict in the rebuilding of society. Peace-building is actually more a process of step-by-step addressing conflict. It is a preventative or at least an early attempt to avoid extended conflict; a method based on the articulated principles above, it focuses on long term
transitioning from historical or political differences to a position of mutual benefit and at
the least beneficial coexistence. John Paul Lederach describes Peace building as
[a] process which involves a wide variety of roles and activities, the goal
of which is ‘create and sustain transformation and the movement toward
restructured relationships.’ Peacemaking roles and activities include
educator, advocate, conciliator, trainer, envisioner, mediator, guarantor,
observer, enforcer, rehabilitator and developer. Peace-building draws on
many of these activities and applies them at various stages and levels of
conflict.\textsuperscript{xix}

Peace-building within an Islamic context is an inherent principle and favored
principle. A Muslim is a person who brings peace, security, and safety for all people.
The proscriptions and prohibitions of Islam and the example of the Prophet Mohammed
are the means for building and sustaining this peace. Peace-building refers to the
creation of an objective and a subjective context, which enhances a constructive
transformation of conflicts, and leads to sustainable peace and harmony. A sustainable
peace is a legitimate peace, meaning it is for the benefit of and supported by the people
involved in conflict, regardless of their differences. That means the transformational
process must move the population from the status of extreme volatility and dependency
on those in power, to one of self-sufficiency and well being. In that later state,
individuals are dependent only on the values and principles they share with those with
whom they were formerly engaged in conflict. This is called conflict progression, to
which reconciliation (\textit{sulh}) is key. Reconciliation has a profound human quality and the
potential to engender a new moral and socially human climate that enables the parties to
construct a peace based, prevention oriented future. It implies not only reconciliation
with regard to the present situation, but with the past and its historical prejudice. Healing
historical wounds. Reconciliation of the past, present, and future is necessary for
sustainable peace. Instead of longing for acknowledgment of painful losses and
experiences, one finds inner peace and the foundation for respect. Allah says in Qur’an,
‘...Repel [evil] with that which is better; then will he, between whom and you was hatred,
become as it were your friend and intimate!  (Qur’an 41:34)

We know that violence breeds hatred as exemplified in former and current
conflict sites the world over: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Iran, Kurdistan, Chechnya,
and Iraq. It sows destruction on physical, emotional, and mental levels. In contrast,
choosing to create a pre-emptive peace and to commit to nonviolence inspires people to
re-make their lives. One of the most successful modern-day practitioners of nonviolence
was the Muslim leader Khan Ghaffar Khan, who mobilized the Pathans of the North-
West Frontier in the 1930s and 1940s into a nonviolent army on behalf of Indian
independence. He wrote to his followers: “I am going to give you such a weapon that
the police and the army will not be able to stand against it. It is the weapon of the
Prophet, but you are not aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No
power on earth can stand against it.”\textsuperscript{xix} Khan Ghaffar Khan’s efforts reflect the hadith:
“Allah grants to gentleness what He does not grant to violence.”

\textbf{Conclusion}
The concept of pre-emption has been used predominately in terms of war. But I hope I have presented it to you as a means of conflict prevention. Understanding that people live under different conditions in different parts of the world, the principle of pre-emptive conflict prevention is still efficacious, regardless of cultural or social background.

Today, in some places in the world one can feel very safe and secure, and in other places one can feel very insecure, depending on what your ethnicity and what your religion is; what part of the country you come from or your tribe. If you are Abkhazian living in Georgia, or if you are Protestant living in Ireland, if you are a Palestinian living in Israel, or a black person living in a white neighborhood in America, a Kurd in Turkey a Bosnian in Serbia: it must be recognized that factors exist that must be seriously considered and addressed in order to preempt conflict. These are the factors that are used to justify war and genocide, distrust and oppression, the factors that create the “other” and dehumanize the ‘enemy.’

By affirming in word and action that people are essentially good and that we all have similar personal goals and values, such as justice, peace, honesty, and the desire for the ability to earn a living and educational opportunity, we counteract the factors that create conflict. As societies progress and old ways are challenged we must believe that history and ignorance, disinformation and short term goals, greed for power and material wealth, and all the things that have corrupted people over centuries can and will be overcome through personal and collective struggle (jihad) and the search for peace and reconciliation (sulh).

It is our responsibility to provide the means, to seek the education and seek the ways to contribute to our own well being as well as the well being of others, in order to build a strong and viable society. For this we should have the very best tools to work with to accomplish our goals. Those tools are to be found in each culture in different sources and with different emphasis. Sensitivity to these cultural differences and habits is necessary for successful dialogue.

Real peace-building depends on far more than simply addressing superficial geopolitical issues. The accords that emerge from Camp David, Dayton, Belfast, or The Hague may lead to a cessation of violence, but clearly peace is not simply the absence of violence. Pre-emptive peace is an active commitment to co-existence in an atmosphere of security, trust, love, faith, and understanding. These are the qualities around which Islam grew, and the tools for establishing a pre-emptive peace towards which Islam guides us today.
References


“(pbuh)” following the name of the Prophet Muhammad stands for “peace be upon him,” the traditional invocation offered by Muslims in respect and gratitude whenever Muhammad is mentioned.


Martin Lings. “Muhammad: his life based on the earliest sources.” (p125)


RAND report. “.”


