

# **The challenge posed to Western values and Western dominance within the international system by Radical Islam.**

**(This is a contribution of academic discussions on this subject)**

## **Part one**

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### ***Introduction***

After the collapse of the Iron Curtain dividing the world into two ideological rivalries, as stated by Huntington, the world has entered into a new era of conflicts where main wars will be fought between civilizations fault lines. In this process, pondering its anti-Western stands, Islam is considered in the West to form the growing future menace against the Western dominance in the international political arena. In the Western hemisphere there is growing concern that Radical Islam has declared to wage a holy war against the Western Civilization. This essay will examine the credibility of this claim. To what extend is this perceived threat politically motivated like creating fear among the public and what is the breeding ground for extremism? This essay will scrutinize both ideological school of thought and the current political climate along with probable solutions for the progressive future relationship between Islam and the West.

### ***Analysis***

Islam as the fastest growing universal faith is emerging as a powerful global and political force which after the demise of Communism is considered by the West to be the main threat to the Western World. The traditional school of thought such as Neoconservatives, interest groups like AIPAC, Christian fundamentalist and New Wilsonian, consider Islam a strategic threat and as such it needs to be challenged. Huntington advised to the West “in order to hold their grip of their current world supremacy, it needs to use every available source in their disposal to diminish the hostile civilizations by playing them off each other in the balance of power”. Conversely, many realistic scholars like George Barnard Shaw believe that the perceived threat is politically motivated and purely aimed at not only to discredit and depict Islam but to create havoc and panic among the public.

## ***The green menace***

According to Western theologians, media outlets and politicians argue Islam is by nature violent, man-dominated and intolerant; an anti-modernity religion. It discriminates against women and non-Muslims, spread by sword and incompatible with Western values namely: the basic principle of democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, personal liberty, political pluralism, and market driven economy. According to this school the Islam lacks the concept of rationality and free society in which individuals could realize their potentials.

With such an intimidating background, in recent history we are witnessing insurgence- revival of lethal Islamic radicals. Djerejian school of thought believes that the Western troubles with the Islam as a political establishment is that it is embodied with extremism, violence, denial, political intolerance, coercion and terror. Therefore it is automatically the “green menace.” He accused the Islamist and their rigid religious doctrine that historically they never knew democracy as we know it in the Western world. In the West there is belief that the contemporary Islamists are so backward that they live socio-economically, politically, cultural and technologically in the Medieval age. According to this school of thought Islamists’ dislike and hatred towards the West, stems from their jealousy and abhorrence towards Western core values and achievements. Namely, booming economically, highly advanced and intricate sciences and technology, military superiority, human rights, good governance and the dominance of the international order compared with their ailing socio-economical and political situation, and almost non-existence of science, technology and military inferiority.

As Emmanuel Sivan described the Islamists are thirsty and determined to come to power and therefore “adopt various tactics to seize it, namely through force, ballot box or mix of the two”. Others preferred to engender social fabric in favor of their religious dogmas. In this way they establish their own “social-culture” present in their communities. Such a combined tactics includes forming NGO’s as Sivan termed it “semi-legal” services in order to legalize their activities but also to influence youth and use them to counter “government’s societal modernization programs”. Such a power base within their communities, the Islamist is increasingly becoming popular, appealing, determinant and powerful. Not surprisingly, they withstood years of oppression and maltreatments from the part of the ruling elites. E. Sivan envisioned that this clear societal shift is where the future menace will burst. In compliance with this argument the Muslim secularist capitals as well as Western governments, there are mounting concerns in this societal re-Islamisation process. Islamists are dedicated and active in various fronts, for instance, lots of well programmed satellite TV channels, Radio programs are 24/7 on air, digitalized sources, books and promotional materials and CDs/DVDs all aimed at familiarizing with Islam and calling people to Islam all the while raising the concern of many of these capitals. The Number of Islamic charities have increased in recent years, Islamic schools are increasingly becoming very popular, and number of students enrolling at Islamic faculties is increasing. Moreover, Muslims have become very active in universities, colleges and

government institutions resulting in many Arab secular countries to try to halt or at least disturb the surge by (a) refusing to grant license or credentials to the private Islamic colleges/schools/universities (b) by limiting number of Sharia-providing faculties at the national universities and (c) constant scrutiny or vetting procedures within the government institutions where suspected Islamist or their sympathizers are systematically laid off.

In public they claim that they are firmly committed to the democracy, however, in the West there is a strong conviction that they are hiding behind democratic rhetoric to seize the power. However there is no reliable evidence presented to back up such a claim. Skeptics in the Western world and secular regimes in the Arab world cast doubts the revival of Islamist leader's commitment to democracy and therefore accused them "a pro forma conversion." With this concern in mind, president Clinton expressed that America is determined to help democracy take hold in the Arab world, but would not accept that the Islamist hijack and misuse the democracy. Even though, some of them might not be committed to democracy, it is extremely difficult to infer exactly what they might have done, unless they are not allowed to prove themselves. However, it is proved that secular Arab regimes are undemocratic, more oppressive to their citizens and anti-Western machinery than doctrinaire religion, as Nasser's Egypt, Algeria under the National Liberation Front, and Baathist in Iraq and Syria are unequivocally manifested.

Another argument is that the Islamist knowing US/West's energy thirst and oil dependence from this oil-rich region their real aim is to disturb oil flow by using oil as strategic weapons. In addition, they are not only determined to curb Western influences in the Middle East but resolute to expel the West from the region. Hence, pose as serious threat to the Western strategic interest and political –cultural dominance of the region. Equally, pondering their inimical rhetoric towards the West, the Islamic fundamentalists are believed to have committed to the destruction of the Western civilization. This alarmist school is sheer nonsense and huffing and puffing. The Western economical, technological and military superiority and the preponderance of the international world order what some loose and bewildered individuals can do about it? It is believed that their harsh rhetoric towards the West is mainly for domestic consumptions.

### ***Paranoid or manipulative?***

Many security experts in the West as well as Muslim world share an unanimous conviction that intelligence regarding the threat posed by the Islamist is distorted, manipulated and fixed around politics.

As demonstrated by John Mueller, more than 200 security experts in the US have unanimously issued a nationwide alert, by saying that Al Qaeda will "strike more devastating than 9/11 within a year." However, that attach never turn out. A year later, attorney general John Ashroft has panicked the public by explicitly stating that "Al Qaeda will hit hard within few months, this time with WMD." Ashroft could not be more exact "Al Qaeda has completed 90% of its preparation." Same tactic was repeated, this time by the recently created department of the Homeland Security

“today’s terrorist can strike at any place, at any time and with virtually any weapons.” If the terrorist are so capable and competent why did they not do what we are told, they are capable of doing.” Asked John Mueller. Mueller concluded that, the fact that these inferred and much publicized threat never occurred means that (a) the terrorists are not competent or dedicated to carry out any such attack(b) they don’t want to or (C) there is no credible threat, but gravely exploited and exaggerated claims for political gain.

According to Graham Fuller, “In 2006, 498 terrorist attacks took place in European Union. 424 of those were perpetrated by separatist groups, 55 by left-wing extremist, and 18 by various other groups. Only 1 was carried out by Islamist.” Likewise, Europol report 2008, in 2007, 583 successfully executed and foiled attacks were recorded in EU member states. According to that report 517 were attributed to the separatist terrorist groups, 21 for the left-wing groups, one for the right-wing terrorist groups and 25 for other groups. With regard to the Islamist 4 (2 executed and 2 attempts) were reported. However these last 4 were extremely exaggerated and exploited. Moreover, many law abiding Muslims in the West are wrongly suspected, detained and interrogated simply they look differently or they are Muslims. According to Mueller “80,000 Arab and Muslim immigrants have been subjected to fingerprinting and registration, another 8,000 have been called in for interviews with the FBI, and over 5,000 foreign nationals have been imprisoned in initiatives designed to prevent terrorism.” As professor David Cole (cited by Mueller) confessed none of these activities has lead to any convictions.

In line with this argument, Leon Hader stressed that the Western regimes and their intelligences usually rely on leaks, misinformation and media spins to help construct the Middle East dangers” He accused the governments and intelligence communities by using “questionable evidence and exaggerating credible information against Islam and terrorism.” In addition, Some Western media outlets and academics become “transmission belt” for spearheading unreliable-smear campaigns against Islam. These motivated authors subscribe pejoratively loaded terms like Islamic fundamentalist, extremist, terrorist to different and unrelated movements, ranging from CIA supported –initiated Islamic guerilla’s , freedom fighters to ideologically anti American Mullahs, and Islamic political parties. The relentless anti Islam campaign is taking ugly shape and rekindling the ancient, deep rooted mistrust as Leon Hader described it “search in the West for an explanation that distinguishes between the good guys and the villains with the Islamist being usually placed in the later drawer is futile and simplistic. ----- the crusade against political Islam is in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.” Equally, G. B. Shaw has described the anti-Islamic campaign within the Western intellectuals/media outlets “Medieval ecclesiastic, either through their ignorance or bigotry, painted Prophet Muhammad PBUH in the darkest colours. They were in fact, trained to hate both the prophet and his religion.” In this respect, the Western fear comprises of the continuation of centuries old antagonism between

irreconcilable ideologies. However, now under new alias the West is utilizing their economical and military and media powers, and dominance of the international systems to prevent any resurgence of future strategic challenges from the Muslim world.

In the West, there is growing concern that the credibility of Western intelligence communities as independent and professional institutions are at stake as the Iraq fiasco has clearly demonstrated. Information and reliability wise they are severely compromised for political purposes by the politicians to back up their deeds as former British Intelligence chief Sir Richard Dearlove has admittedly recognized “intelligence and the facts were fixed around the policy.” The so called M5 “Dodgy dossier” fiasco and the role of Downing Street in manipulating intelligence gathering; in particular the distorted assertion of Saddam Hussein’s capability to launch his WMD within “48 hours,” The link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, and the Iraq’s alleged WMD were unambiguous examples of this ill-fated business.

Realistically speaking the vast majority of the Muslims vehemently reject radicalism and violence. It is crucial to comprehend that Islamic Movements are not unified global ideology like capitalism or communism or any other ideology. Islamists are heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, geographical locations, their overall objectives, ideologies and adopted strategies to achieve their goals.

Even those in same countries differ greatly from each other. Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria does not have coordinated policy with the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) which split from GIA. Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Jihad Group, Islamic Group and Muslim Brotherhood, all in Egypt have no central command, policy and strategies. In Palestine, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Popular Front have only same enemy but no more than that. In Somalia, the Union of Islamic Courts who strengthened each other in their fight against the West backed Transitional Federal Government and her Ethiopian backers, tore apart and turned weapons against each other. The examples can go on. Therefore, they lack central gravity or unified leadership, resources and military might. What they have in common is the fact that they are inward oriented rather than outward. This means their main focus is to reform their ailing and bankrupted political, social and economical systems rather than international project of global Islamization. Their harsh rhetoric against the West is mainly for the domestic consumptions. Hence, the threat posed by Islamist is extremely exaggerated and aimed to create hysterics among the public.

Islam is by definition a peaceful faith and has contributed a lot to the Western civilization. As president Clinton admitted “America has nothing against Islam, one of the world’s greatest faiths -----a historic civilized force among the many they have influenced and enriched our culture.” This corresponds with A.M. Stoddard from the very beginning “the realm of Islam was the most civilized and progressive portion of the world. Studded with splendid cities, gracious mosques, and quiet universities where their wisdom of the ancient world was preserved and appreciated. The Muslim

world offered a striking contrast to the Christian West then sunk into the Ages.” According to the H.G.Wells the current European modernity is not from the Latin but from the Arabs “If the Greek was the father, then the Arabs was the foster-father of scientific methods of dealing with reality, that is to say, by absolute frankness, the utmost simplicity of statement and explanation, exact record and exhaustive criticism. Through the Arabs it was and not the Latin route that the modern world received that gift of light and power.”

Despite of this invaluable and undisputable contribution to the well being of the West, Islam is wrongly accused of backwardness by those who benefited the most. Muslims witness almost on daily basis humiliation and denial of their basic rights as A. Ramsay has put it “they see that we have eroded much of the advances we claim credit for our own societies by suspending the normal operations of justice in pursuit of the same objectives where once again they see themselves as a principle victims.” According to Ramsay “the claim that the West faces unprecedented challenges from the Islam in the form of Islamic terrorism is based on ignorance.” Rightly, Ramsay suggested that the more deadly challenges the World/ West are facing today are mainly “misunderstanding, prejudices that will become entrenched in bitterness and hatred lasting for generation.” In this self-annihilation business envisioned by Ramsay, I have to add the human greediness, arrogance, recklessness and the ensued ecological disasters.

With regard to Islam and alleged intolerance, in retrospect to history Islam has better credentials when it comes to tolerance toward religious minorities than Christianity. Muslims ruled Spain for 800 years and flourished significantly. Ruled India 1000 years, 80% of Indians remained and practiced their religion freely.

A forced conversion to Islam was never recorded in these countries, in contrary, their churches or other sacred places were intact and respected. Conversely, the Christian Crusades later on, wiped out the Muslims in Spain, Balkans and Philippine. In the Arab world, there are today 14 millions of Arab Coptic Christians who proudly and freely practice their faith. Likewise, millions of Jewish people persecuted in Europe by the Christians made their homes in the Muslim world.

According to H.A.R. Gibb, has praised Islam its social cohesion, sense of unity and equality regardless of social class, gender and nationality. Islam abolished racism from the beginning. “The extinction of race consciousness and tolerance Islam championed compared to all other Scripts. “--one of the outstanding achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, extinction of racism and intolerance as it happens, and there is crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue in the world.”

The Islamists orchestrated violence is disappearing steadily in the Middle East. As Emmanuel Sivan has put it they are “unrecoverable defeated or laid down their arms.” Commentators like Emmanuel Sivan predict that due to that loss, it is almost impractical that they take over power in their countries either by bullet or by ballots. I think this constitutes gross miscalculations and misunderstanding on the parts of the

Islamic movements and their growing local legitimacy-popularity and power base they have established in their local communities. The unexpected sweeping electoral victories achieved by HAMAS in the Palestinian area, FIS in Algeria, Muslim Brotherhood mainly in Egypt and Jordan; and Hezbollah in Lebanon contradict such scenario. I do have little doubts that if free and fair elections would have held today in the Middle East that Islamic movements would have come out the victorious parties. For instance, in Egypt Muslim Brotherhood has done extremely well in the last local and national elections notwithstanding continued harassments they subjected from the government's security forces. Many of their candidates were arrested, tortured, banned from running for election. However, I do agree that the vast majority of the Islamic movements realized now that it is impossible for them to overthrow the current regimes by force. In realizing this fact, they forged a new strategy to win the hearts and minds of the local people by filling the service vacuum created by the governments.

Some Western security experts and politicians very often wrongly link the Islamic resurgence in the Muslim world to the economic stagnations. According to this hypothesis the impoverishments caused by the economic crisis and illiteracy negatively contribute to the rise of radicalism in the Middle East. I think such an association is gravely misplaced and misleading. From Osama bin Laden to those foot soldiers perpetuated 9/11, Madrid bombing, 7/7 in London and Bali bombing were at least college graduates, middle class people and financially well off. In this sense, it is perplexing to attribute Hamas's or any other Islamic movements' electoral victories to the sole dire economical down turn in these countries. The reality of these organizations increasing popularity is mainly due to the public services they provide, their good government, integrity and high morality, created sense of belonging and communal cohesion on the one hand, and the corruption –menace, lack of political vision and ineptness of the Palestinian authority (and wider Arab world) on the other hand. All these combined with the disappointments caused by the socio-political and economical frustrations, lack of future perspectives and disillusionments due to the failure of the Oslo accord and conceived betrayal from part of US/Western world.

Part two will follow very soon

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