U.S. Policy Toward Islamism: A Theoretical and Operational Overview

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Foreword

Understanding and dealing with Islamic fundamentalism has been one of the more difficult foreign policy challenges for the United States in the last decade. Few policymakers seem to comprehend the ideology behind so-called fundamentalist groups, or the rationales behind their actions. While some analysts call it the successor to the Red Scare and have dubbed it the Green Menace, others contend that these groups are essentially social movements with a religious emphasis. Whichever view is correct, there is broad agreement that the topic of Islamic fundamentalism requires further attention, and the papers from the Muslim Politics Project hope to address this issue.

The goal of the Muslim Politics Project, which began in 1994, was to counter the misperceptions that prevail in influential circles and to present Islamic intellectual and political agendas in all their complexity and diversity. One of its several undertakings was to commission papers on Islamist foreign policy in order to better understand the international political attitudes and policies of various Islamist groups. This resulted in papers on the following movements: Jama'at-i Islami in Pakistan, Hamas, Hizballah, the Taliban, the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party, as well as an analysis of U.S. policy toward Islamism. Each of these papers goes into detail not only about the movements themselves, but how it affects U.S. foreign policy. We believe that they provide insights on a topic that challenges policymakers and will help prevent future misunderstandings.

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For policymakers, Islamism, Islamist states, and Islamist movements pose a set of awkward and unusual problems.[1] By default as well as by design, the U.S. government, and especially its national security establishment, is at its best when dealing with crises—preventing them (just barely), managing them, and resolving them. Though solutions are rarely neat and linear, the threat itself is usually acute, the problem is well defined, and the target (either the state, its interests, or those of one of its allies) is clear. Governments sometimes devise comprehensive strategies for dealing with longer-term challenges, but that is more often than not the exception to the rule, one that is usually slow in developing (e.g., the debate over missile defense, now two decades old) and one that emerges as a result of a grand national consensus on an issue (e.g., the bipartisan agreement on the containment of communism) that is usually rare and difficult to muster in a vibrant democracy.

Islamism—the pursuit of political power with the aim of establishing regimes based on Sharia law—does not fit easily into this mix. The role of religion in policymaking itself is a major complicating factor. Two corollaries of America's own strict separation of religion and state that seem to have developed among the policy/political elite have defined the context for addressing Islamism: first, U.S. officials are profoundly reluctant to view (or have great difficulty in assimilating) the organic connection between religion and state that exists in many other societies. Second and somewhat contradictorily, U.S. officials tend to evince

an exaggerated deference to religious sensibilities when they are claimed by others. The former, for example, is one of the reasons why the "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnians by Serbs is rarely defined as "religious cleansing" of Muslims by Christians; the latter is one of the reasons why, for example, senior U.S. officials (including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, then-National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, and then-Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk) have publicly legitimized the "Islamic" nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as though the U.S. government ought to take positions on this matter and despite Iran's heterodox a manifestation of Islam (and even Shiite Islam). In general, Americans prefer characterizations along national grounds over religious ones, but are quick to sanctify—if that term can be used—virtually all religious claims with official status. (Actually, the two trends are not so contradictory—the latter is a natural outgrowth of the deep reticence to engage in any religiously tinged policy debates.) Hence, the challenges posed by Islamism and Islamist movements–i.e., the basic claim that religion (indeed, a certain religion, and a certain interpretation of that religion, no less) is the chief determinant of right and wrong—is both alien and unnerving to American policymakers.

Despite this structural and quintessentially American problem, Islamism has over the past two decades provoked a keen policy debate inside the United States, among both policy practitioners and the academic community. During the lifespan of the Clinton administration, Islamism and related topics have been the subject of major addresses by the president, secretary of state, national security adviser, and any number of lower-level officials responsible for relations with the Middle East and the wider Muslim world; numerous academic conferences, learned tomes, edited volumes, and journal articles have been devoted to Islamism. In fact, Islamism fuels one of the few remaining substantive and intellectual debates on U.S. foreign policy. While other seminal debates—e.g., on Vietnam and the Cold War—still resonate, the combatants are fighting old battles. But the Islam debate—summed up in the question "Who lost Iran?"—is very much alive, because in many ways the events of 1978–1979

still haunt America in its dealings with governments and political movements throughout the Muslim world.[2] U.S. officialdom has not yet reached consensus on whether it "lost Iran" because the United States was too tough on the Shah or because it was too easy, or whether the United States was too tough on Khomeini or too easy on him, or even on whether Iran was really lost or, for that matter, whether it was America's to lose. But how one answers those questions does color one's response to the array of issues that constitute the Islamist challenge facing regimes from North Africa to the Gulf to central and East Asia—and by extension America, too.

Even without the policy elite having adopted a clear "conventional wisdom" set of replies to these questions, the record of U.S. policy toward Islamism and especially toward Islamist political parties and movements, over the last decade, has on balance been positive. Indeed, it has improved over time—much better at the end of the 1990s than it was in the decade's early years—and is now reasonably coherent and beneficial to U.S. interests. Namely, the United States recognizes that Islamist political movements almost invariably pose threats to key U.S. interests and, often, to the stability and security of U.S. allies. This is because Islamist movements are generally believed to seek the establishment, through various means, of Sharia-based regimes whose fundamental policies and interests—anti-West, antidemocratic, antiliberal, antipeace process, and anti-status quo—are inimical to those of the United States. In practice, this recognition has been manifested, first and foremost, in a policy that has avoided statements and, more importantly, actions, which are inimical to U.S. interests, the most important of which is to do little to assist Islamist movements in their efforts to overthrow existing regimes. This reflects the preeminent rule of policymaking—do no harm. On occasion, the United States has taken initiatives, adopted measures, or issued statements that have provided material or moral support to local governments engaged in their own face-off with Islamists. Rarer still, but not unknown, have been those U.S. initiatives in the Muslim world that advance a (relatively) liberal, secular, Western-oriented

alternative to the Islamists' appeal—such as President Clinton's 1994 address to the Jordanian parliament or, after a bumpy start, Washington's vigilant support for a secular Turkey, despite the emergence of an Islamist government there.

The most important test of U.S. policy toward Islamic movements is, of course, its effectiveness. Since the Islamic revolution in Iran, only two states in the Muslim world have come under the political control of Islamist movements: Sudan and Afghanistan. Despite its self-proclaimed policy of exporting the revolution, Islamist Iran has not managed to transform a single neighbor into an Islamic republic but (in delicious irony) now has on its border the one Islamist regime that even the ayatollahs find insufferable—the Afghan Taliban. Without derogating the significance of Islamist dominance in Sudan and Afghanistan or the negative impact Islamist rule there has had on citizens, it is important that neither Sudan nor Afghanistan is a "pivotal state," neither is a regional power, and neither has much influence (political, cultural, economic, or otherwise) on its environs. Though both may seek to export their brand of Islamism to neighboring states, neither has found much sympathy, but quite the opposite.

Washington, of course, should not (and does not) take credit for stymieing the export of the Islamist revolution around the globe. Many factors, largely local and unaffected by U.S. policy, have combined to limit the potential for Islamist political success. But to the extent that Washington has contributed to this effort and has (unofficially, at least) deemed it important to help prevent the expansion of Islamism, U.S. efforts can be deemed moderately successful. Of special note are cases where the prevention of Islamist expansion has been a top priority, including Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Algeria, and Turkey. Throughout, U.S. officials seem to recognize that such success can be fleeting, so after a period of inconsistency they began to articulate a more coherent and sustained approach, based more in actions than in words to ensure that, at the least, the United States did not inadvertently assist in the undermining of anti-Islamist regimes.

U.S. POLICY AND ISLAMISM: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

To assess the development of U.S. policy toward Islam, Islamism, and Islamist political movements, it is useful to ask two basic questions: "Does the United States have a policy toward Islam and/or Islamism?" and "What is the official U.S. definition of Islamism?"

The first is not a trick question. Though large and ponderous, the U.S. government does not have policies on every item under the sun, and religious issues are among those that Washington tends to avoid. The U.S. government, for example, has no view of the merits of Hinduism or Buddhism, despite the important role those religions play in animating politics and societies in strategic corners of the globe. On Islam, however, few would dismiss the notion that the United States should have a policy and many would insist that the United States have a policy. Viewed differently, there is a fundamental distinction between a reactive policy of "confronting" or "dealing" with Islamism, on the one hand, and a proactive policy of advancing certain U.S. interests, such as stability, peace, democracy, commercial access, on the other. Here, U.S. policy has evolved profoundly over the past decade. For illustrative purposes, it is useful to compare early with more recent analyses of Islamism and U.S. policy by a series of State Department officials responsible for the Middle East.

(It is interesting to note that the Near East Bureau has taken the lead in discussions of Islam and Islamism, rather than other geographic bureaus or functional bureaus, such as those in charge of "democracy, human rights and labor" or the undersecretariat for global issues. While the relevance of Islamism to the work of the Near East Bureau is obvious, there are important side benefits to be had for officials from other bureaus who bring different perspectives to the issue. Not only could this highlight the diversity of experience with Islamism among the Muslim-majority states of Turkey, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and East Asia, but it would have the beneficial impact of

reminding the world that Arabs and Iranians together constitute only a minority of the world's one billion Muslims.)

In June 1992, Edward P. Djerejian, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs and a former U.S. ambassador to Syria and Israel, delivered the first official statement on U.S. policy toward Islamism, titled "The United States, Islam and the Middle East in a Changing World."[3] Though only the last half of the speech dealt with issues of Islam and U.S. policy—the first half being focused on the positive political change registered in the Middle East since the end of the Cold War—the speech has come to be viewed as the founding text of U.S. official documents on Islam and Islamism. (Interestingly, as Islamism has become more of an accepted item on the foreign policy agenda, subsequent State Department officials have apparently felt more comfortable devoting entire addresses to the topic.) Since 1992, Djerejian has continued to make pronouncements on Islam and Islamism, including the publication of an important 1995 paper titled "United States Policy Toward Islam and the Arc of Crisis," published by the influential James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, which he heads. [4]

As the founding text of U.S. policy on the issue, Djerejian's 1992 speech contained a number of important, if rudimentary, statements on Islam and Islamism. Its principal theme was summed up in this oft-quoted sentence: "If there is one thought I can leave with you tonight, it is that the United States government does not view Islam as the next 'ism' confronting the West of threatening world peace." Later on, he added that "simply-stated, religion is not a determinant—positive or negative—in the nature of quality of our relations with others countries. Our quarrel is with extremism, and the violence, denial, intolerance, intimidation, coercion and terror which too often accompany it." In essence, Djerejian argued that Islamism was a non-issue, that the policy challenge for the United States was focused almost totally on "extremism," defined mainly in its violent manifestation. Except for offering one important (and quotable) caveat to U.S. efforts to expand political participation around the globe—"While we believe in the principle of one person,

one vote, we do not support 'one person, one vote, one time' "—Djerejian did not engage on the most perplexing and troubling aspect of the Islamist phenomenon, i.e., the objective of Islamists to establish Sharia-based governments and whether that would constitute a threat to U.S. interests. In place of political analysis, he offered cultural generalities and historical platitudes, such as the tolerance toward minorities that characterized Muslim Spain, and Islam's reverence of the major figures of the Judeo-Christian heritage: Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Interestingly, if in 1992 Djerejian seemed to support a policy that was religion-blind and proactive regarding U.S. interests, he took a different tack in addressing the topic just three years later. The opening sentence of the 1995 Baker Institute report argues: "A coherent policy framework toward Islam has become a compelling need as foreign policy challenges erupt, involving an arc of crisis." Later, he asked, "What should United States policy be toward Islam?" In other words, by 1995, the author of the argument that Washington should assertively propound the "principles on which our country is founded [because] we know they work" instead argued for the need for a reactive policy—not just toward Islamist political movements but toward Islam itself.

Djerejian's successor as assistant secretary of state, Robert H. Pelletreau III, seemed to adopt a somewhat different approach, though not at the beginning of his tenure and sometimes in contradictory fashion. In May 1994, he delivered a speech to the United States Institute of Peace whose very title—"Islam and United States Policy"—presaged Djerejian's 1995 formulation, i.e., Islam was the starting point and U.S. policy inherently reactive.[5] One year later, however, he gave an interview to the *Middle East Quarterly* that offered the opposite argument: "We must deal with fundamentalist Islam in a variety of contexts—how it impacts on issues of importance to the United States, such as the peace process, combating terrorism, or encouraging open markets, or respect for human rights. The starting point is our objectives, not political Islam as such."[6] One year later, in a major address on the topic to the Council on Foreign Relations, subtly titled "Dealing with the Muslim Politics of the Middle East," he was both more

specific and more emphatic. "We don't even have a policy pigeonhole called 'political Islam,'" he said. "Islamic political activism becomes a factor for us only when it impinges on a specific U.S. foreign policy goal or interest."[7] While acknowledging the existence of an "informal internal [State Department] study group on militant Islam," he concluded his talk with a defense against the charge that the U.S. government lacks a "more coherent policy" toward Islam. He said: "At bottom, our policy toward the Middle East is like our policy toward other regions of the world: practical, focused on deeds, and aimed at expanding the benefits of peace, prosperity and tolerance wherever we can."

While the successor to Djerejian and Pelletreau, Martin S. Indyk, has apparently not delivered a major address specifically on Islamism, one of his senior deputies—a lower ranking but very experienced State Department veteran—did give one of the most definitive government statements on the issue in June 1998.[8] In a speech to a conference on Islam-West relations, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Ronald Neumann left no doubt about U.S. views on the need for a policy toward Islam: "Let me be clear and emphatic: the United States of America does not and should not have a political policy toward Islam." Instead, he did say that the United States does "have policies towards states, against terrorism and violence and in support of democracy." This was reaffirmed in September 1999, when Neumann delivered a speech on a similar topic in which he opened as follows: "Let me begin with a pair of broad generalizations and work from there. First. U.S. policy, in the Near East and elsewhere, is based on national interests, not religions. Second, the United States does not have a policy toward Islam and should not have such a policy. In our decision-making . . . religion is not a factor. Rather our calculations take into account what we can do to further peace, stability and prosperity, both for Americans and our allies in the region."[9]

Viewing the corpus of U.S. policy statements from 1992 to 1999, it is clear that Washington's approach to Islamism matured. In retrospect, to have ever suggested that the United States should have a policy toward Islam per se, or even toward Is-

lamism, was an error. The United States has policies toward states, toward institutions (e.g., the United Nations), toward principles (e.g., democracy and human rights), but not toward individual religions. Discarding any hint of advocating a policy toward Islam or toward Islamism and doing so as emphatically as Neumann suggested was no simple rhetorical shift; rather, the move to a wholly proactive approach was a positive development that reflected two changes in Washington: the mixed experience of dealing with the Islamist challenge for more than a decade, and its assessment that defining U.S. policy in terms of "responding to the Islamists" permits the latter to determine the parameters of the debate and, in effect, cedes the ideological initiative to them.

As for the question "what is Islamism," reviewing the statements of senior policymakers provides evidence of a similar evolution in their definition of Islamism and, especially, in their characterization of the extremist element within it. In his 1992 address, Djerejian offered this early definition: "We see groups or movements seeking to reform their society in keeping with Islamic ideals. There is considerable diversity in how these ideals are expressed. What we see are believers in different countries placing renewed emphasis on Islamic principles." In retrospect, this was a fairly basic attempt to characterize different aspects of the Islamist phenomenon. Later on, Djerejian did refer specifically to "extremism," but only in terms of terrorism. That is, extremism within the Islamist phenomenon was limited to specific acts, not to ideas or objectives.

In May 1994, then-National Security Adviser Anthony Lake took a different approach. "What distinguishes Islamic extremism from other forms of extremism is not terrorism," he said in an address to The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, but is "[t]he naked pursuit of political power." [10] This important statement is the first to equate extremism not with an act but with an objective.

At almost exactly the same moment as Lake's speech, Pelletreau of the State Department delivered an address in which he reverted to Djerejian's formula of defining extremism only as

an act, not as an objective. He then went on to offer the problematic—and short-lived—proposition that defined extremism in a legal context. "Groups or individuals who operate outside the law," he said, "are properly called extremists."[11] Three years later, the 1997 designation of Hizbollah as a "foreign terrorist organization" under a U.S. statute underscored the misjudgment of using legality as a measure of extremism. Legality, after all, is a relative and geographically specific term; Hizbollah is a legal organization in Lebanon but not in the United States. Groups or individuals who operate outside the law are more accurately described as criminals in that jurisdiction, not necessarily extremists. Although some residue of this approach exists, especially in academic circles, it is no longer cited by government officials as a useful criterion for defining extremism.

In his May 1996 address to the Council on Foreign Relations, Pelletreau offered the most extensive official U.S. definition of Islamism. "Islamists," he said, are "Muslims who draw upon the belief, symbols, and language of Islam to inspire, shape, and animate political activity. We do not automatically seek to exclude moderate, tolerant, peaceful Islamists who seek to apply their religious values to domestic political problems and foreign policy. We do, however, object strongly to Islamists who preach intolerance and espouse violence in the domestic and international arenas. Extremists in the Middle East as elsewhere can be secular as well as religious."

Several observations can be made. First, Pelletreau defined a very large body of political activity as "Islamist"—indeed, perhaps drawing the circle so wide that almost any pious Muslim (or nonpious Muslim with political pretensions) qualifies as Islamist. According to this definition, Saddam Hussein, who put the phrase "Allahu Akbar" on the Iraqi flag, could lay claim to being an Islamist, and the kings of Morocco and Jordan, who draw legitimacy from the claims of lineage to Prophet Muhammad, should certainly be labeled Islamist; none of these figures, however, is "Islamist" by the general understanding of the term. Second, Pelletreau then divided Islamists into two categories—peaceful and extremist. Interestingly, the "peaceful" Islamists do

not *automatically* qualify for political exclusion, with the implication being that they may still earn it; also, "extremists" are defined as such not by their actions, but by their declarations of intent (i.e., *preaching* intolerance, *espousing* violence). In sum, Pelletreau's definition both dilutes the overall meaning of Islamism and expands considerably the realm of those that would be termed "extremists."

Picking up that theme, Pelletreau later made the important point that "extremists around the world use whatever resources they have to achieve their goals. In the Middle East, religious rhetoric can be made into one of those resources. A *fatwa* or incitement to violence can be just as dangerous as bombs and bullets." This statement comes close to affirming Lake's earlier comment connecting extremism with objectives, not acts, and it reflects a complete about-face from the "extremism equals illegality" formulation Pelletreau had proposed two years earlier.

However, even this positive construction begs the question regarding the goals of "peaceful Islamists." Having characterized "extremists" as those who use whatever resources available to them to achieve their goals, the distinction between peaceful and violent "Islamists" makes little sense. The key question, it seems, is whether peaceful Islamists have the same goal as violent Islamists—i.e., getting and keeping political power so as to establish a Sharia-based state—with the only difference being that they have opted to use nonviolent means (or to exploit the existence of democratic institutions and procedures) to attain their goal. Despite the important improvements in U.S. policy evident in the Pelletreau speech on this key issue—recognizing that "moderates" and "extremists" share strategic aims though perhaps not tactical means—the United States has historically taken no position. For some reason, U.S. policymakers frequently talk about Islamist "reform" or Islamist "traditional values," but these are American political terms that mean something very different in the Islamist lexicon. For Islamists, reform is not a goal; it is a way station along the road to an Islamist state. Nevertheless, this is rarely addressed. As Pelletreau said, "We differ with Islamic extremists on many issues"—not adding

whether the United States also differs with nonextremist Islamists on many issues.

In his June 1998 address, which was otherwise quite forward-leaning in outlining the appropriate policy priorities for U.S. action vis-à-vis the Islamist challenge, Neumann seemed to take a step backward on the issue of nonviolent Islamism. In offering a stinging critique of the "clash of civilizations" thesis, he took issue with virtually any attempt to impede the legitimate (i.e., peaceful) activity of those who may be seeking to advance revolutionary ideas (i.e., the replacement of a status-quo state with a Sharia-based regime).

> Our history and laws have built an important division between, on the one hand, nearly absolute freedom to advance ideas and, on the other, sometimes quite stringent restrictions on the means which are legitimate to implement those ideas. We do not make policy on the basis of others' thought because to do so could be destructive of the ideas and values we hold dear.[12]

Apart from the questionable nature of this logic, nowhere in his remarks is a discussion of the "one man, one vote, one time" trap that is at the heart of the policy dilemma on Islamism.

Similarly, Neumann also goes further than his predecessors in entering the fray over a related issue—the question of the "rule of law." Respect for the "rule of law" is deeply entrenched in American political culture and has an important place in U.S. foreign policy; few would deny that respect for the rule of law and the institutions that implement it is a vital safeguard against capriciousness, authoritarianism, and the abuse of human rights. But when Americans refer to the "rule of law," they generally do not mean the rule of *any* laws—that is, they do not mean the strict, procedural, and impartial implementation of laws that themselves violate recognized norms. Americans do not equate the "rule of law" with the imposition of Sharia law (or for that matter, the extension of Halachic law in place of civil law in Israel). Nevertheless, that is what is implied in this excerpt from Neumann's address:

> One good example of the dynamism of Islam is the situation in Iran, in which some religious-political authorities are saying loud and clear that participation and rule of law are not only compatible with, but intrinsic parts of Islamic law and practice. It is important that we understand that this is not a repudiation of Islam but a critically important debate within the religion.

While the current debate inside Iran, with President Muhammad Khatami as the chief protagonist, may center on the "rule of law," it more accurately revolves around the full implementation of *Islamic* law—purifying the system of inequities, corruption, and nepotism so as to ensure (in the eyes of its advocates) the fair and accurate implementation of Sharia law. However, in the context of recognized norms at the turn of the 21st century, Sharia law as propounded by the clerics in Iran—whether of the Khatami or of the Khamenei variety—includes too many inequities toward minorities, women, and others for its imposition to be viewed as an advance by most Americans.

This issue of "moderate Islam," of which the question of the "rule of law" is a subset, is not merely an esoteric, intellectual question. It is the core issue in dealing with Islamists, having an operational impact on such issues as whether U.S. officials should have "dialogue" with various Islamist groups, what sort of electoral systems the United States should recommend to Muslim-majority friends, and how much leeway Washington should give to its allies (such as Egypt and Turkey) in using questionable, semilegal or extra-legal means to deal with their own Islamist problems. Confronting the obvious extremists—the terrorists and their vocal supporters and sympathizers—is operationally difficult but intellectually easy; responding to the nonviolent Islamists—those who Washington has reason to believe may adopt a policy of "one man, one vote, one time"—is both more complicated and where the policy debate on Islamism should rightly be focused. However, U.S. officials rarely enter this fray.

Perhaps by way of explaining the government's nonpolicy on this issue, Pelletreau (first in his 1995 interview and then in his 1996 Council on Foreign Relations address) offered two interesting formulations. Referring to the question of when to engage in

official "dialogue" with Islamist groups, he told an interviewer in 1995 that "Our starting point in the decision of whether to have a dialogue with a group is our total opposition to terrorism and those who practice it. Beyond that, it is ad hoc. We examine local conditions, the history of the particular group or movement, and, most importantly, how specific U.S. policy interests would be affected." This brutally honest response does appear to characterize how the United States addresses all the items on the agenda of dealing with the nonviolent Islamist challenge.

In his 1996 speech, Pelletreau offered a different type of explanation. "If we *treat* [emphasis added] Islamist political activism as a monolithic political movement implacably or unalterably opposed to the West, we run the risk of alienating the broader Muslim world and paralyzing our own ability to act with discrimination and effectiveness. Such an attitude," he went on to say, "would make many enemies where there are, in reality, only a handful." This is an insightful comment in two respects. First, Pelletreau sidestepped the politically explosive issue of whether or not there is an "Islamist international" that links, in monolithic fashion, Islamist movements around the globe in Comintern-like fashion. Previous administration spokespeople, including Djerejian and Pelletreau himself, had addressed this question, usually responding in the negative but often with subtle variations in the response. In an oft-quoted line, Djerejian declared in his 1992 address that the U.S. government "detect[s] no monolithic or coordinated international effort behind these movements." Two years later, Pelletreau's formulation was slightly different: "We see no monolithic international control being exercised over the various Islamic movements," implying that coordination may exist among the various movements, but not control. In 1996, Pelletreau gave a different answer—a policymaker's, not an analyst's, response—when he said that "treating" Islamism as though it was monolithic could have negative repercussions. (Analytically, this statement is suspect, since the vast majority of Islamists do not need any special provocation to hold their views; the West is as

it is and they confront it as such. Nevertheless, Pelletreau's comment does make sound policy sense.)

Second, Pelletreau's response is useful because he noted that Islamists number only a relative "handful" among the world's one-billion Muslims. Reminding Muslims of the true proportion of Islamists is an important weapon in the arsenal of those opposed to Islamism. U.S. officials, however, use it infrequently. All too rarely does Washington cite the fact that Islamist parties have never won a majority in a free election in the Muslim world, that they rarely win more than 30 percent of the vote, and that secularist parties almost always trounce Islamist parties. U.S. policy statements, however, do frequently make semantic errors that redound to the benefit of the Islamists, such as then-National Security Adviser Anthony Lake's mischaracterization of Turkey as an "Islamic state" (a normative term, much different than the descriptive term "Muslim-majority state") in 1994, and then-State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns' statement after the formation of the Necmettin Erbakan government in 1996 that "secularism" is not a key element of U.S. policy toward Turkey. Pelletreau's comment about Islamists constituting only a "handful" of all Muslims was a small but important step in the right direction.

One other positive change that crept into Pelletreau's Council on Foreign Relations address was his reference to the role of the state.

> Islam is not a determining factor in our foreign policy toward any region, state, or group. . . . Our concern is with the practical doings of governments and people, not religion itself. We carefully examine how specific countries or groups, including those that identify themselves politically with Islam, affect issues of importance to the United States, such as the Middle East peace process, terrorism, free markets, political stability, and respect for human rights. Then we react accordingly.

Given that perhaps the greatest lacuna in U.S. policy statements on Islamism is any discussion of the role of the state, Pelletreau's comment constitutes a significant step forward. (It has since become standard fare. Both Neumann addresses, in 1998 and

1999, underscore the role of the state.) Analytically, the critical variable in every case study of the Islamist political challenge has not been the strength of the Islamist movement itself but rather the strength of the state. Islamist movements rarely, if ever, "win"; rather, regimes lose—they give up, lose allies, seek an early compromise, or the like. Conversely, the successful defense of regimes against Islamist challenges has been largely a factor of the strength, backbone, and will of the regime, not the lack of effort, ingenuity, or determination on the part of the Islamists. (Such was the case, for example, in Syria during the bloody early 1980s and it remains the situation today in Algeria, Egypt, and elsewhere.) The independent variable appears to be the staying power of the state; Islamist movements will fill the vacuum left by a receding state, but they themselves have great difficulty in overthrowing a state that is fully committed to its own survival. (In the Afghan example, there was hardly a state to overthrow.) An emphasis on the state as the crux of the Islamist challenge has historically been absent from U.S. declaratory policy, though it constitutes a central element of operational policy, via economic and military assistance, political support, and counterterrorism coordination. Pelletreau's comment that "extremists around the world use whatever resources they have to achieve their goals" hints at the role of the state in understanding the breadth and complexity of the Islamist challenge but by no means does it justice. (In his 1999 speech, for example, Neumann reverts to the old and unsatisfactory formula of focusing on those who "use violence to advance their agenda.")

U.S. POLICY IN ACTION

Viewed solely through the lens of declaratory statements, U.S. policy toward Islamism has been uneven, analytically suspect, and at times counterproductive, although several positive trends have emerged in recent years (as noted above). Operationally, U.S. policy has also undergone an evolution—which is mostly, but not entirely, positive. In general, U.S. policy *in practice* can be defined as follows:

1) The United States recognizes that Islamism poses a series of direct and indirect threats to U.S. interests and the interests of its allies.
2) The United States recognizes that this threat emanates from two types of sources: sovereign states (e.g., Iran, Sudan) and political movements (e.g., Hamas, Hizbollah).
3) Regarding states, the United States has devised a strategy of containment whose objectives range from retribution to resource denial to behavioral change. While containment does not target regime change per se, if that were a consequence of U.S. efforts, few would mourn the passing of the Islamist regimes in Tehran and Khartoum.
4) Regarding movements, U.S. strategy emphasizes three themes:
   a) counterterrorism and strong police action, including cooperative efforts by many states inside and outside the Muslim world (including European countries and others that have suffered from the terrorism of Islamist organizations, such as Argentina, the Philippines, and Israel);
   b) gradual political reform in host countries, focusing principally on the promotion of individual liberties and then elections, and generally leaving operational decisions on the pace and content of political reform to its partner governments; and
   c) significant doses of economic assistance, either through direct transfers or support for third-party efforts, such as those by international financial institutions. Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority stand out as three examples of countries or regimes that either receive large doses of U.S. assistance or benefit from strenuous efforts by U.S. officials to elicit international assistance, at least partly as a way to signal strong U.S. support of their governments in their ongoing contests with Islamists.
5) Advancing the Arab-Israeli peace process is a key element in the overall anti-Islamism effort.

Analytically, this is not a simple argument to make. After all, for most Islamists the Zionist challenge is distant; they are

mainly focused on changing the regime within their own country, either peacefully or violently. Moreover, for most Islamists the establishment of Israel is only one manifestation of the West's hegemony over Islam, not the cause of it. For Islamists in Algeria, Pakistan, Malaysia, and elsewhere, fighting the Zionists is on par with Bosnia and Chechnya—important but not directly relevant to their own political agendas. Nevertheless, promoting the peace process is often defined by U.S. officials as an arrow in the anti-Islamist quiver. Anthony Lake made the most detailed case for this in May 1994: "Through the peace process, a new regional environment will be created—even now it is taking form—in which moderate Islamic [sic] states from Turkey in the north to Saudi Arabia in the south and from Morocco in the west and Pakistan in the east—will constrain the capacity of rogue states and organizations to extend their influence. . . ."[13]

In linear form, this argument runs as follows. Peace between Israel and the Arabs will give Arab and non-Arab Muslim governments the freedom to counter extremism at home more vigorously; at the same time, peace will free resources that the state can redirect into development and use to attract investment that will promote economic growth; that growth will, in turn, decrease the frustration on which Islamism feeds; and once governments are able to meet the economic needs of their people, they will then feel more secure in meeting their political demands as well; meanwhile, those demands will themselves diminish as the economy grows. Though this sequence raises analytical problems—e.g., many regimes will be loath to meet local demands for political participation for their own reasons, unconnected to peace or the impact of economic reform or growth—in general terms and especially in the long run, the basic argument is valid. Peace is good for stability, though the immediate repercussions of peace may be destabilization for some regimes.

There have been two significant changes in this overall policy in recent years: a more assertive effort to target the most violent Islamist movements, and a de facto decision to loosen the containment on Iran precisely at a moment when its Islamist regime appears most politically and economically vulnerable. In

effect, at the end of the 1990s, Washington has adopted policies that sought to remove any doubt about accommodation with Islamist movements that advocate violence, while at the same time it adopted policies that raise considerable doubt about the firmness of containment and the prospects for accommodation with the world's leading Islamist regime.

The change regarding Islamist movements has been most evidenced in a series of innovations in U.S. counterterrorism policy. Traditionally, the United States has focused its counterterrorism efforts on states, and when a state employs a group as a surrogate, on that state's role as a sponsor of terrorism. Numerous sanctions have been implemented against state sponsors of terrorism, including against the two Islamist regimes of Iran and Sudan. Until the mid-1990s, however, U.S. law did not target substate units, such as organizations or individuals. In January 1995, that policy changed with the promulgation of an executive order freezing the assets of eighteen individuals and twelve organizations all deemed as terrorists. Of these groups, five were Islamist in orientation: Lebanon's Hizbollah; Egypt's Islamic Group; Egypt's Jihad; the Palestinian Hamas; and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Two years later, after the U.S. Congress and President Clinton approved the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, the State Department officially designated thirty groups as "foreign terrorist organizations," making it a criminal offense for one who, "within the United States or subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, knowingly provides material support or resources to [such groups] or attempts or conspires to do so." [14] In addition to the five named above, three other Islamist organizations were included on the list: Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (GIA); the Pakistani Harakat-ul Ansar, and the Philippines' Abu Sayyaf Group.[15] (Several other named organizations have ties with Islamists and sometimes flirt with Islamism but cannot be deemed Islamist.) Though these statutes have not been as rigorously implemented as their wording promised, and despite the absence of several groups that may have deserved inclusion on the list of sanctioned organizations, this targeting of Islamist movements does

constitute an important evolution in U.S. strategy. It is particularly significant that Hamas and Hizbollah—organizations whose activities include substantial social-welfare components in addition to vast terrorist infrastructures and who claim not inconsequential mass followings—were included on the list.

The change vis-à-vis Iran, a complicated story whose many dimensions deserve their own full-length study, moves in the opposite direction. At its core are two 1997 decisions. First was a decision to avoid conflict with Europe by not vigorously implementing the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, a law designed to exacerbate Iran's hard-currency problems, and therefore its overall economic stability, by imposing economic sanctions on foreign companies that make significant investments in Iran's energy sector. Second was a decision to interpret Iran's 1997 presidential election as a victory for Muhammad Khatami rather than as a defeat for the clerical regime. The two are not necessarily synonymous and depend on whether one views Khatami as the moderate face of the Khomeini regime or as an anti-Khomeinist liberal masquerading in a cleric's garb. The Clinton administration has effectively chosen the latter path and has taken a number of steps designed to reach out, encourage, and perhaps even strengthen Khatami within Iran. In a declarative way, perhaps the most important of these steps was a major June 1998 address on Iran policy by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in which she stated inter alia the following: "As the wall of mistrust comes down, we can develop with the Islamic Republic, when it is ready, a roadmap leading to normal relations."[16] By offering normal relations not just with Iran but with the "Islamic Republic," Albright effectively legitimized the regime's Islamicness—a major victory for a regime whose religious ideology (and its manifestation in terms of both foreign and internal policies) is precisely at the core of what U.S. policy should typically dislike. (A subsequent Asia Society address in October 1999 by then-Assistant Secretary of State Indyk echoed this construction.) Despite this shift in approach, there has so far been little substantive change in relations, though not for lack of U.S. effort. Largely due to the domestic ferment inside Iran, Al-

bright's offer has gone unrequited. Indeed, at the end of the twentieth century, Iran is the only country in the world that refuses to talk with the United States.

CASE STUDIES: ALGERIA AND TURKEY

To assess more fully U.S. policy toward Islamism and Islamist political movements, a brief analysis of individual cases is useful. While there are many candidates for examination, it is instructive to look at how the United States has dealt with Islamists at different points along their quest for political power. The cases of Algeria and Turkey provide interesting contrasts. Algeria is a country of relatively marginal importance to direct U.S. interests that has witnessed horrific violence by Islamist extremists and a full-scale military intervention to prevent Islamist advances. Turkey, in contrast, is an example of a country of enormous strategic significance to the United States in which the military acted with relative restraint when "peaceful" Islamists assumed at least some of the reins of power. In both cases, U.S. strategic objectives are clear—to prevent the coming to power of regimes inimical to U.S. interests and, should that come to pass, to minimize the damage to U.S. interest and continue to advance those interests despite local politics. In both cases, the United States—at only certain times and perhaps inadvertently—adopted policies or issued statements that seemed to run counter to these objectives. And in both cases, the United States eventually settled on a more coherent, more straightforward, less subtle approach that sacrificed a certain flexibility in dealing with the Islamists in exchange for a decreased risk of advancing their cause.

Algeria

Despite Algeria's historical antagonism toward the United States, its location of relatively marginal interest to the United States, its limited (although important) commercial connections to the United States and virtually no cultural or demographic commonalities, the threat of an Islamist takeover in Al-

geria, either through the ballot box or via insurgency, posed a peculiar challenge—or, depending on one's perspective, opportunity—for U.S. policymakers. For some, the stakes were enormous–the first, great domino that would fall across North Africa and eventually land on strategic allies in Cairo and Rabat, along the way imperiling the stability of southern Europe with millions of Algerians fleeing for their lives. For others, noting that Algerian extremists were careful not to kill a single American citizen in their years of terror, Algeria was perhaps one place in the Arab and Muslim worlds where America could support its democratic ideals and side with the reformist, moderate Islamists against an authoritarian, oligarchical clique, while not suffering too seriously in strategic coin.

The competing trends in U.S. policy toward Algeria are evident in the way two branches of the same department, let alone two arms of the government, have described the origins of that country's decade of turmoil. For example, in October 1995, David C. Welch, then-principal deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, delivered congressional testimony in which he noted that "[v]iolence has risen steadily since the Algerian regime suspended the electoral process in 1992 and outlawed the Islamic Salvation Front—FIS."[17] According to Welch (and other State Department officials who offered similar testimony over the years), the triggering event was the regime's preemptive coup against FIS. In contrast, the State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1997* report offered a different trigger, stating that "[A]t least 70,000 Algerians have been killed since Algeria militants began their campaign to topple the government in 1992."[18] Apparently, to the counterterrorism professionals, the militants—not the regime—bear responsibility for Algeria's troubles.

These contradictory approaches manifested themselves in policies that seemed to advance the competing goals of, bolstering Algiers and the region's other anti-Islamist regimes, on the one hand, and never quite closing the door on the Islamists' dream of undermining the will of the Algerian rulers by earning Washington's sympathy, on the other hand. Liamine Zeroual's strong victory in the November 1995 presidential elections set-

tled, more or less, the "first order" debate over whether the Islamists can win in Algeria; since then, attention has been focused on the "second order" issues of the still-considerable violence and terrorism that plague Algeria and the political question of how the regime can most effectively and efficiently reconstitute political life to be as stable, secure, and at the same time inclusive as possible.

To the extent the "first order" debate has played out in public, it has revolved around two questions: whether publicly to urge the Algerian regime to reach out to "non-violent Islamists" as a way to untie the country's political Gordian knot, and to a lesser extent whether the U.S. government should hold a dialogue with or even permit the U.S. residence of FIS representative Anwar Khaddam. After several years flirting with the riskier approach of holding out some olive branch to the Islamists, the U.S. government has, with the passage of time, sided more firmly with the Algerian regime on both issues.

In his May 1994 speech to the United States Institute of Peace, Pelletreau summed up the "flirtation" approach: "We agree with the major Algerian parties which insist that the process of political dialogue must involve a broadening of political participation to encompass all political forces in the country, including Islamist leaders who reject terrorism." A slightly watered-down version of this approach was reaffirmed even after Zeroual's victory, when Pelletreau delivered congressional testimony on Algeria in April 1996: "We believe that reconciliation among all Algerians who reject violence and accept the rule of law, be they secular or Islamist, offers the best hope for democratic pluralism in Algeria."[19] That, however, seems to have been the last occasion when U.S. officials specifically called for the inclusion of Islamists as part of Algeria's political reconciliation effort. Since then, they have adopted a much more modest approach, refraining from defining Islamist participation itself as a prerequisite for the success of political reform. As a result, on the eve of parliamentary elections in June 1997, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns issued a statement noting simply—and accurately—that "Algerian popular acceptance

of the results will be the key test of the credibility of the election."[20] And in congressional testimony in February 1998, former ambassador to Algeria Ronald Neumann summarized this new approach.[21]

> A longer-term solution must combine political and economic reform. Consequently, our policy in Algeria is properly a long-term one that encourages the growth of democratic institutions, and the liberalization of the economy. The form of such changes is properly an Algerian concern, because only Algerians will be able to solve Algeria's crisis. At the same time, we strongly believe that political reform must be credible to Algerians themselves. They, not we, must believe that the reforms open the way for people to affect how they are governed. Only if this happens will there be a broadening of participation and support for the state so that extremists and terrorists will be isolated and, eventually, eliminated. We continue to believe that all Algerians who renounce terrorism and violence should be able to participate.

Though Neumann's closing sentence closely echoes Pelletreau's, the lack of any direct reference to Islamists is an important improvement. The United States, after all, has no particular interest in whether Islamists should or should not be permitted access to the political process in any country; the United States has a more fundamental interest in stability and, in terms of democratic development, an interest that the local population freely judge the procedures and their outcome as legitimate. In a situation like Algeria's, the appropriate U.S. interest is to seek a solution that works—one that is acceptable to enough Algerians so as to make it viable. Apart from general concern over the legality and propriety of an election, the United States should be largely disinterested in litmus tests based on individuals or particular parties. After several years, Washington came to this conclusion—the best way for it to assist the Algerian regime in putting its own house in order was to let the Algerians pursue that goal in their own way.

The story of Anwar Khaddam is a similar account of Washington sending mixed messages to the Islamists and the Algerian government and then, eventually, siding firmly with the

regime. A leading FIS member, Khaddam was elected to parliament during the 1991 election and then fled to Europe following the cancellation of the elections, where he was a key official of the FIS Parliamentary delegation in exile. In early 1993, Khaddam gained entry to the United States by claiming political asylum and sought to establish "dialogue" with U.S. officials so as to drive a political lever between Washington and Algiers. At first, Washington sought a balance between competing interests—the desire to encourage moderation within Algeria's Islamist movement, the need for better information about the various Islamist trends in Algeria, and the fear of weakening the resolve of the ruling secularists. This led to "dialogue" with Khaddam, but at low echelons of the State Department and with a certain noninterference in Khaddam's political activity in Washington. With Zeroual's election in November 1995, the administration's effort to display a balance between the Islamists and the government shifted to a more uniform policy of support for the regime; one casualty was Khaddam himself. In December 1996, Khaddam was placed under arrest, pending deportation, when his application for political asylum was rejected. He is currently in a Virginia prison appealing the deportation order. (In 1997, a fringe but extremely violent Algerian Islamist extremist organization, the Groupe Islamist d'Algeria [GIA], was placed on the U.S. government's list of proscribed terrorist organizations; importantly, FIS was not.)

U.S. policy on Algeria is, today, on the proper course. Whereas the State Department was assiduous in assigning to the regime and its Islamist opponents more-or-less equal blame for the country's violence as recently as 1995, today it reserves its harshest judgements for the latter and the lion's share of its sympathies for the former. Compare, for example, the testimony of two deputy assistant secretaries of state, David Welch in 1995 and Neumann in 1998:

> *Welch.* In the early phase of the conflict, extremists on both sides believed violence could solve their problem; both have been proved wrong. . . . Violations of human rights have taken place

> on both sides, helping fuel acts of extreme violence within the armed conflict.
>
> *Neumann.* We continue to believe that the Islamic extremist organization, the GIA, is responsible for the great majority of the atrocities. You will recall that in October 1997, we included this vicious group in our designation of foreign terrorist organizations. The government has a right to protect itself, and a duty to protect its citizens against this bloodthirsty group, consistent with the rule of law. However, some security forces personnel may also be involved, to some extent, in some of the killings. The situation is complex, and as long as there continue to be differing accounts of what is going on, and many questions about why civilians are not better protected, the need for greater openness remains. . . .

To be sure, the most significant developments in this interval were the success of the Algerian regime in holding relatively peaceful elections with impressive voter turnouts and the internecine divisions and bloodletting within the various Islamist movements themselves. U.S. policy was marginal to the Algerian experience, important more for its demonstration effect elsewhere in the Arab and Muslim worlds than in determining the course of the intra-Algerian contest for power. At its most basic level, that contest now seems to have been resolved—the Islamists will not win and the regime will not lose. Whether the regime itself wins a complete victory—i.e., whether it fully suppresses the Islamists and restores civil life without the threat of violence or terrorism—remains an open question but one that has as much to do with sound economic policy and good governance as it does with an existential conflict between Islamists and secularists.

TURKEY

If, despite its size and energy resources, Algeria is a country of relatively marginal importance to U.S. interests, Turkey is truly one of the world's "pivotal states" and a country of great strategic significance to the United States. It has been a bulwark of NATO for nearly 50 years, a frontline state on the border of three state sponsors of terrorism, a state at the crossroads be-

tween the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East, a gateway to the Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union, an emerging ally of Israel, and—perhaps most of all—a model of a staunchly secular, democratic, liberal Muslim-majority state. The coming to power of a government led by the veteran Islamist politician Necmettin Erbakan in June 1996 threatened the Turkish status quo, posing a major challenge to U.S. interests and a profound quandary for U.S. policymakers. Turkey expert Alan Makovsky defined the problem: "What should be done when the political leadership of a friendly and allied regime falls into the hands of someone who harbors views inimical to U.S. interests?"[22]

Of course, what "leadership" Erbakan wielded was circumscribed from the start. His party, Refah, won only 21 percent of the popular vote in the December 1995 parliamentary elections, placing it first—but barely so—in a deeply divided field. More than seventy percent of the vote went to secular political parties, one of which—Tansu Ciller's True Path Party—eventually agreed to join a coalition with Refah to form a government, principally so its leader could maintain parliamentary immunity to avoid criminal prosecution on corruption charges. Even though Erbakan was, from the outset, constrained by secularist coalition partners on the one side and the powerful, secular Turkish military establishment on the other side, the challenges his accession to the prime ministry posed to the United States were real, nonetheless. They ranged from bureaucratic headaches (rendering more difficult the already-uphill administration battle to gain congressional approval for military sales to Turkey); to security fears (raising the prospect that Erbakan, as a member of Turkey's national security council, might compromise NATO secrets or take steps toward building parallel military alliances with Islamist or other radical states); to perhaps the most serious, profound sociocultural realignment (engineering vast changes inside Turkish politics and society that would move Turkey away from the secular tradition of the past 75 years). Given that Erbakan and his party had, for many years, lambasted U.S. "imperialism," denounced NATO, ridiculed

Europeanized Turks, rejected ties with Israel, and urged Turkey to turn its sights from the West to the Muslim world, there was considerable reason to view with concern and consternation a government actually led by Erbakan.[23]

Inside the U.S. government, opinion was apparently divided on how to respond to Erbakan. Some argued for Washington to distance itself from Erbakan from the very outset of his prime ministry and send a strong signal to Turkish secularists (inside and outside the army) that American support remains firm. Others argued against providing Erbakan with a provocation and instead urged a policy of "wait and see," prepared to judge Erbakan on his actual words and deeds while in power, not on his long career as an Islamist politician. Still others were even more restrained, suggesting that the United States should focus solely on whether Erbakan took specific actions that directly threatened U.S. interests. And still others, at the far end of the spectrum, noted that the Islamist share of the vote had increased in every Turkish parliamentary election for a decade and counseled a warm embrace of Erbakan as the early representative of Turkey's Islamist "wave of the future." Refah, it was argued, was about as moderate an Islamist party as one was bound to find in the Islamic world and, therefore, one that Washington should accept so as to lend credibility to America's advocacy of democratic procedures around the world.

In the ad hoc fashion that Pelletreau described as the key element of U.S. policy toward Islamism, Washington eventually went through several phases of relations with Erbakan during the short life of his government. Despite an early desire to keep Erbakan at arm's length and adopt the "wait and see approach," the U.S. government initially took steps that seemed quite solicitous of Erbakan. These ranged from high-level visits to Ankara by two senior State Department officials (then-U.N. Ambassador Madeleine Albright and then-Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff) to two declaratory statements from the State Department that had the effect of signaling U.S. support for Erbakan (and distancing from America's traditional secular allies). These statements were particularly counterproductive; one, praising

Erbakan's "stable government" even before it had received a parliamentary vote of confidence; the other, an apparently impromptu remark by the State Department spokesman that secularism was "not a condition" for strong U.S.-Turkish relations. Though the latter statement was effectively retracted by other senior officials, the damage was done, as it convinced many in Turkey—Islamists and secularists alike—that America had put its finger to the wind and discerned that Islamism's day had come. (That this perception persists is at least partly due to the fact that many non-Americans hold a deeply entrenched belief, a first cousin to conspiracy theories, that no one in Washington ever errs, misspeaks or does something without permission or authorization. Would that it were true!)[24]

Eventually, Erbakan himself gave Washington the pretext for distancing its relationship with his government when, in one of his first official acts of foreign policy, he traveled to Iran in August 1996 to sign a multi-billion-dollar pipeline contract. This was viewed as a direct slap to President Clinton, who only days earlier had signed into law the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act designed to discourage foreign investment in Iran's energy sector. As Erbakan pursued other iconoclastic foreign policy initiatives—visiting Muammar Qadhafi in Libya, hosting then-Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in Ankara, proposing "defense industrial cooperation" with the Iranians—Washington grew frostier. Though always correct, the Clinton administration emitted clear signals that, as one analyst noted, "it wished the narrow majority government would simply go away."[25] For a brief period in early 1997, after Erbakan won a parliamentary vote of confidence, the U.S. government did engage Refah on a more sustained basis, inviting two Islamist junior ministers to visit Washington. In late February 1997, however, Turkey's army-dominated National Security Council issued the first of a series of demands for a government crackdown on antisecularist trends supported by Refah that eventually led to Erbakan's downfall that summer, granting Washington its wish.

The closing months of the Erbakan government provide an interesting window to view how Washington balanced two objectives—providing strategic support for America's pro-Western,

pro-American, prosecularist allies in the army, national security establishment, and political elite, while cautioning against an antidemocratic military intervention as the way to terminate Islamist-led rule. It took several months before the U.S. government was able to implement phase one of the dual-track policy—"Turkey an ally, Erbakan no friend"—but by the time the Turkish army took its own initiative, it took Washington less time to respond with phase two of this dual-track policy: "political change, yes; coup, no." As the confrontation between the army and Erbakan heated up in early summer 1997, Secretary of State Albright took a firm stand against military intervention: "We have made it very clear that it is essential that Turkey continue in a democratic—secular democratic—way. We have also made clear that it's very important that whatever issues are going on there . . . that they have to be in a democratic context, with no extra-constitutional approach. We appreciate the way that Turkey has, in fact, been a secular democracy."[26] There is reason to believe that the administration's stand against military intervention was a major factor in channeling the military's effort into engineering a peaceful, procedurally correct, parliamentary end to Erbakan's government in June 1997.

With Turkey, Washington could afford the luxury of issuing such a public caution against the use of military force as the way to terminate the Islamist-led government. After all, Turkey is a country with established democratic institutions and, despite the three coups that have marred the record of the Turkish republic, it can even boast a military with strong democratic instincts, evidenced by the fact that the Turkish army always returns to the barracks after its military interventions to give the civilian politicians another chance to govern. Algeria, by contrast, may have a military that historically prefers to rule from the shadows but it lacks any deeply entrenched democratic institutions. More importantly, the Islamists in Algeria were poised in January 1992 to win an overwhelming parliamentary majority, with the possibility that they could take full reins of the civilian side of government and thereby eat away at the secularists in the military, hence the urgency in the military's intervention and the U.S. acquiescence in that action. In contrast, Erbakan's Refah had garnered just one-

fifth of the votes in Turkey's election and was merely the lead party in an Islamist-secularist coalition; Refah itself had only one seat—Erbakan's—on the country's powerful National Security Council. In Turkey, therefore, the institutional safeguards against a full Islamist victory were much stronger than in Algeria and, as a result, Washington was less compelled to sit on the sidelines as the Turkish military reordered the country's political balance.

So far, from the perspective of U.S. strategic interests, both Turkey and Algeria have turned out reasonably well. Secularists remain firmly in charge in both Ankara and Algiers. However, both countries have probably only passed through the first phase of their ongoing challenges with Islamism. In Algeria, the existential military threat to the regime has been defeated, but terrorism remains a horrific problem. Perhaps more importantly, the regime still faces the uphill battle of restructuring its electoral and governmental system so as to cement its popular legitimacy without providing easy access for "moderate" Islamists to win via politics what they were poised to win in 1992 or what their more violent allies sought to win in intervening years. In Turkey, the Islamist-led government may be gone, Refah outlawed, and Erbakan banned from politics, but the Islamist challenge is certainly not over. The fact that as many as one-quarter of Turks—a phenomenally high number in the most secularized of Muslim-majority states—responded to a U.S. government poll in autumn 1996 that their country should be governed according to Sharia law suggests that Islamism remains the major threat to the maintenance of Ataturkism.[27] And if the Islamist challenge to these regimes has not passed, then the policy quandaries for the United States have not passed either.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

For the United States, the challenge of Islamism seems to be entering a new and potentially critical phase. In retrospect, phase one was the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its attempt to export the revolution, through violent means, around the globe; this appears to have run its course. Phase two was the blossoming of numerous Islamist organizations, many with vi-

olent methodologies and often with nationalist hues, all committed to changing existing regimes and establishing Sharia states in their place. This effort also appears to have been effectively countered, largely through forceful countermeasures by the states in question (e.g., Syria, Egypt, and Algeria). While U.S. policy has played only a modest role in preventing the spread of Islamism, for this is principally an intra-Muslim contest, the results have been beneficial to U.S. interests. As noted at the outset, more than twenty years after the fall of the shah, the fact that only two relatively marginal Muslim countries (Sudan and Afghanistan) have fallen to Islamist rule is a better record than U.S. policymakers had any reason to expect.

As Islamism and the threat it poses evolves the results of the next phase may not be as rosy. This is likely to be the phase in which Islamists use the considerable experience they have garnered over the last twenty years to exploit the machinery and institutions of the state to bring about revolutionary change through evolutionary, incremental means. This will test that aspect of U.S. policy about which policymakers have been so mum over the years, the political challenge of so-called "moderate" or nonviolent Islamists. There are many countries in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world, some of great strategic significance to the United States, that lie somewhere on the spectrum between Turkey and Algeria—countries that do not have a regime-sustaining institution as strong as the Turkish army and where the threat to the status quo is not as urgent and immediate as was the case in Algeria. Although in these countries U.S. policy is also unlikely to be the deciding factor in the contest between the state and Islamists, in some of them the United States role could tip the balance, especially in terms of strengthening or eroding the regime's confidence. How the United States defines policies that secure traditional U.S. strategic interests, support pro-West forces, and advance important U.S. values of promoting democracy, widening political participation, and encouraging respect of human rights could, in the future, pose even more serious dilemmas for U.S. officials than the challenges of the past 20 years.

[1] This article builds on themes and arguments first advanced in a paper delivered at a conference on Islamism held by the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, March 1996. See the author's "Islamism Seen from Washington," in the proceedings of that conference, published as *The Islamism Debate*, Martin Kramer, ed.(Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1997).

[2] The most recent Clinton administration statement-of-policy on Islam and U.S. Policy rejects this argument in no uncertain terms. In September 1999, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Ronald E. Neumann declared: "I've seen it suggested that the challenge of dealing with Islamism is one of the few remaining intellectual debates in U.S. foreign policy and that the goal of American policy over the last eighteen years has been to contain the spread of Islamic movement and Islamist regimes. In other words, no more Irans. As a diplomat who has been practicing his trade in this region for the past 26 years, I would strongly disagree with these simplifications. Whether or not a regime is religious is not the issue. . . ." Neumann, of course, raises a red herring. The issue is—and has always been—Islamism, not Islam. See Neumann's speech, "American Perspective on Islam and U.S. Policy," delivered to the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, September 23, 1999.

[3] Edward P. Djerejian, "The United States, Islam and the Middle East in a Changing World," address delivered at the Meridian International Center, Washington, D.C., June 2, 1992.

[4] Edward P. Djerejian, *United States Policy Toward Islam and the Arc of Crisis*, a paper published by the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, December 1995.

[5] Robert H. Pelletreau III, "Islam and United States Policy," speech delivered to a symposium on "Resurgent Islam in the Middle East," United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., May 26, 1994.

[6] See the interview with Assistant Secretary of State Robert H. Pelletreau in "Not Every Fundamentalist is a Terrorist," *Middle East Quarterly* (September 1995) 2:3.

[7]Robert H. Pelletreau, "Dealing with the Muslim Politics of the Middle East: Algeria, Hamas, Iran," address to the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, May 8, 1996.

[8] Ronald E. Neumann's remarks at the Conference on The Future of Islam-West Relations, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., June 30, 1998.

[9] Ronald E. Neumann's remarks at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, September 23, 1999.

[10] Anthony Lake's address to The Washington Institute's Soref Symposium, Washington, D.C., May 17, 1994.

[11] Pelletreau, USIP speech.

[12] Ronald E. Neumann's remarks at the Conference on The Future of Islam-West Relations, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., June 30, 1998.

[13] Anthony Lake's address, May 17, 1994.

[14] See 18 U.S.C. 239b. For details, see the factsheet and background materials issued by the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, October 8, 1997.

[15] According to the State Department, the Harakat ul-Ansar (HUA), an Islamic militant group based in Pakistan and operating primarily in Kashmir, was formed in October 1993. It has been linked to the Kashmiri militant group Al-Faran that kidnapped and later killed five Western tourists in July 1995. The HUA reportedly has several thousand armed supporters located in various parts of Kashmir, Indian and Pakistani and received financial support from private individuals in the Gulf. See *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1997*, p. 60. According to the State Department, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is an Islamic extremist group operating in the southern Philippines led by Abdurajik Abubakar Janjalani. The group, which is believed to have about 200 members, split from the Moro National Liberation Front in 1991. See *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1997*, p. 54.

[16] Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, address to the Asia Society, New York, June 17, 1998.

[17] Statement by David C. Welch, principal deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, before the Subcommittee on Africa of the House International Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., October 11, 1995.

[18] U.S. Department of State, "Middle East Overview," *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1997,* Washington, D.C.

[19] Statement by Robert H. Pelletreau, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, before the Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 16, 1996.

[20] Press Statement by Nicholas Burns, U.S. State Department spokesman, June 4, 1997.

[21] Statement by Ronald E. Neumann, deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, February 5, 1998.

[22] Alan Makovsky, "The Making of U.S. Foreign Policy on Turkey," speech delivered to the Ataturk Society of America, April 6, 1997. I am grateful to Mr. Makovsky for permitting me to base my comments on U.S. policy toward Turkey on this and other articles he has written on the subject.

[23] Alan Makovksy, "How to Deal with Erbakan," *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 1997.

[24] Makovksy, "The Making of U.S. Foreign Policy on Turkey."

[25] Makovsky, "The Making of U.S. Foreign Policy on Turkey."

[26] Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's comments made before a meeting with the Latvian foreign minister, as released by the Office of the State Department Spokesman, June 13, 1997.

[27] Cited in Makovsky, "The Making of U.S. Foreign Policy on Turkey."

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