

**America and the "Islamic Revival":
Reconstituting US Foreign Policy in the Muslim World**

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Preface

With the end of the Cold War and resolution of the global ideological conflict between the US and USSR, scholars and practitioners of American foreign policy searched in vain during the 1990s for a new universal frame of reference to guide them in their quest to simplify the reality of a complex, often chaotic international system. The diversity of perspectives displayed during the Clinton era reflected a system that was undeniably in flux, with some proposing that the "end of history"¹ had arrived while others struggled to define American objectives in light of the fleeting "unipolar moment."² However, what was common to all of these endeavors was an almost desperate quest for the next grand idea that could effectively classify the diverse challenges facing the "last superpower" into approachable, neat theoretical categories. The optimism that pervaded this era in foreign policy dialogue in fact made theories of another global clash between opposing dichotomous forces seem ridiculous. Those, such as Samuel Huntington, who proposed theories of a shift from ideological to cultural clashes were branded as "fear-rakers" by many academics.

However, this era of creativity and flexibility in American foreign policy tragically came to a close with the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Foreign policy debates became centered around the idea of another global conflict, with distinctions being drawn between those who proposed the changing world order should be characterized by a "dialogue of civilizations"³ and those arguing that "clash" was more reflective of reality. Suddenly, the world was once again transformed into spheres of good and evil, with the American President drawing almost

¹ See Francis Fukuyama. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York Free Press; New York)

² See Charles Krauthammer. 1990. "The Unipolar Moment." *Foreign Affairs* (Vol.7, no.1) pp23-34.

³ Coined first by President Khatami of Iran, but later a rallying cry for many opposed to the idea of Huntington's clash coming to fruition

verbatim from Cold War rhetoric in his description of a world where powerful forces conspired across borders to invoke a worldwide revolution aimed at ending the liberty, prosperity, and peace of Western democracies. Although criticism of such rhetoric has been loud and varied across the ideological spectrum, the idea that there are currently two different world systems facing off has undeniably gained momentum over the last three years with the spike in popular titles referring to the "Muslim World" and "Jihad" perpetually dominating best-selling non-fiction charts. Furthermore, the idea of a threatening menace opposed to "everything we stand for"⁴ has been coupled with the doctrine of pre-emptive warfare to justify the first major war of the twenty-first century, designed to put America at the forefront of "democratizing the Middle East."⁵

Yet, such projections reflect a deep misunderstanding in US policy circles as to what contributes to and motivates the rise of Islamic-oriented politics in many Muslim countries. This paper seeks to address issues revolving around the strengthening of Islamist parties and the re-assertion of Islamic values into the public sphere of many countries, vis-à-vis the interests of the United States, with the ultimate goal of constructing a more flexible, nuanced American foreign policy response to the phenomenon of "Islamism."⁶ The first section of the paper is devoted to cases studies of an assortment of Islamist movements within the various national settings where they have

⁴ George W. Bush speech theme, see "President Bush Discusses Iraq in Saturday Morning Radio Address." 10 Apr 2004. White House Website. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/04/20040410.html>.

⁵ "Greater Middle East Initiative" or Secretary of State Powell. "The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative: Building Hope for the Years Ahead" (The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC) December 12, 2002. State Department Website. Accessed 3 Apr 2004. <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2002/15920.htm>>.

⁶ This term has been used in a variety of different contexts to refer to various phenomenon. In this paper, it will be used to refer in general to the rise or revival or reassertion of a more publicly oriented, political Islam in the world today. It is the only term ambiguous enough to characterize the diversity of movements that currently concern the American government, which for all intents and purposes share very little beyond their claim to rely on Islamic principles as their guidance.

arisen. Drawing upon the idea that Islamism represents vastly diverse movements that often contradict one another and are grounded in unique historical and contextual spaces, the ultimate goal of this depiction is to develop a frame of reference through which the movements and the larger phenomenon of Islamism can constructively be approached by US foreign policy-makers.⁷ In each of the chapters, American interests in regard to the challenges posed to the status quo by the Islamist movements will be defined based upon the national context in which they arise. The second major section of the paper will build upon the themes presented in the case studies to develop a broad policy outline for American foreign policy-makers that prevents unneeded and mutually detrimental clashes of misperception between America and the millions of Muslims worldwide who associate themselves with Islamist movements. This section of the paper will endeavor to redefine how Islamism challenges Western interests in various Muslim countries from the perspective of mutual gain in social and political development, rather than zero-sum projections of inevitable clash between two unitary, dichotomous forces.

⁷ Unfortunately, it is too great an undertaking to include more case studies in this paper due to time constraints and thus some valuable case studies have been left out. Most noticeably are the Central Asian countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, or any country where Muslims are a minority. The exclusion of these cases is unfortunate as they have been greatly, and often detrimentally, affected by the recent American preoccupation with the global "War on Terrorism." However, broader implications of this paper address their experience and they will be mentioned in the concluding chapter.

Part One

Political Islam:

Case Studies of Islamic Rhetoric in

Modern National Politics

Introduction

In the often blinding quest to address the challenges to the new world order presented by the rise of terrorist organizations, some of the lessons in misperception and miscalculation of the Cold War have been overlooked and thus perpetuated in various foreign policy circles. In fact, it is the proposal of this paper that criticism waged at Marx and Engel by scholars writing on the rise of twentieth century nationalism contains important and oft overlooked warnings to academics and policy-makers attempting to construct a grand theory capable of encapsulating the interests of America vis-à-vis the "Muslim World" today. These lessons carry special significance in light of the dominance of neo-conservatism in influential policy circles under the current American administration, providing a valuable springboard from which the main issues highlighted by the following case studies can be placed within the larger context of policy formation in a complex, dynamic world system. Writing in *Nationalism*, Craig Calhoun rails;

"their [Marx and Engel] greatest error was their assumption that people would respond to the material challenges of global economic integration as workers: However, 'workers suffered economic privations as heads of households, as members of communities, as religious people, as citizens—not just as workers'"⁸

Thus, as history foretold, the ensuing rise of nationalism and its cataclysmic effect on social orders around the world poignantly revealed the shortcomings of any theory's ability--no matter how comprehensive and rational--to explain the actions of diverse groupings of people with single-minded emphasis on only one aspect of their identity. The events of the twentieth century furthered this realization, showing that even in the face of powerful international ideological movements, people closely guarded affiliation

⁸ Quoted in Phillip Spencer. 2002. *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Sage Publications; Thousand Oaks, CA) p26.

with a multiplicity of social groupings that could relate their existence to the larger world around them. Whether these be ethnic, national, sectarian, or religious ties, the resilience of communal loyalties in every corner of the globe challenged the notion that man had indeed reached the "end of history."

Thus, it is evident that grand theories have to account for the fact that identities are complex, changing, constructed and multiple. Approaching any movement or group of social movements sharing a common frame of textual reference as homogenous and unitary is destined to be conceptually misleading since it ignores the important interplay of the local and the universal in articulating opposition to the status quo. For communism this meant that Marxist-inspired thought could be flexibly referenced by a variety of different movements, often becoming a tool donned by leaders whose primary objective was in fact nationalistic, rather than communist. In the age of Islamism, it means that vastly different movements in a variety of locales can call on the same "fundamentals of Islam" to accomplish extremely divergent goals.

Therefore, the first lesson to be derived from Marx and Engel's intellectual failure was revealed in the lack of a cohesive, unitary communist movement from the very outset of what was supposed to be a transnational revolution. In fact, the historical evolution of communism unwittingly displayed how easily diverse and often antagonistic movements could seek reference to orthodoxy in the same textual, moral and philosophical heritage while maintaining diametrically opposed objectives within their given contexts. The Iraqi Communist Party, for example, focused its endeavors on ousting imperialism, while Maoist China was busy berating Khrushchev and the Soviets as revisionists. The same pattern can now be found in regards to Islamist movements in the various nations in

which they arise. As the cases studies below reflect, many extremely different movements utilize the same textual references to "orthodox Islam," the Quran, the Hadith, and the Sunna, while maintaining few similarities in the lessons they derive from such references or the political goals they construct from these morals. In this way, groups that superficially appear to be natural allies, such as women fighting to wear *turban* in Turkish government offices and Iranian women seeking to be released to take off the *chador* in their public spaces, often view one another across deep ideological, cultural, and political divides which cause them to approach one another with suspicion, rather than friendship.⁹

The second important lesson that can be derived from Marx and Engel's folly is related to the first, but reveals how the diversity within movements sharing the same textual heritage is structured. Specifically, the point must be made that context and locality matter. There is inevitably diversity created within any global ideological current not only based upon the diversity represented by those who subscribe to it, but also by the environment in which the movement is operating, further magnified by a litany of factors such as why its subscribers find it desirable to identify with the larger movement, the interplay of different opposition voices upon the dominant ideology, the reception of their objective by the larger society, and so on. Even individuals within the same community may have different reasons for seeking solace in the encompassing theory or identity, with important distinctions carrying great significance and giving rise to multiple forces

⁹ This is a reference to a story reported in: Robert Olson. 2001. *Turkey's Relations with Iran, Syria, Israel and Russia, 1991-2000: The Kurdish and Islamist Questions* (Mazda Publishers Inc; Costa Mesa, CA). According to Olson, after a national crisis in Turkey caused an uproar when elected Islamist VT parliamentarian Kavacki attempted to enter the government building wearing *turban* in 1999, the daughter of former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani who was also a parliamentary member in her respective country sent Kavakci a letter of support. However, Kavakci was reported in the *Iran Times* to have responded to the show of solidarity with a curt response saying she wanted "no support from a country such as Iran where there is no freedom," p53.

claiming to legitimately represent the same cause in any given locality and even within any given organization.

Further complicating the picture, in various different places "conservative" and "radical" elements may also have more in common with one another than their radical or conservative counterparts in another locality. Thus, even though no modern Islamist movements are occurring in an intellectual vacuum, it is important that the universal is not overemphasized to such a degree that it obscures what for most movements is the primary focus: local reform. Since there is great debate within each of the movements as to what method should be applied to solve these problems and competing, often unconnected rivals for Islamist support in each country, talking about Islamist movements as though they were unitary, monolithic entities that significantly differ from other secular movements in their given localities is misleading. In the communist world realization of this fact required flexibility from Moscow in defining whether various movements were indeed Marxist and strenuous efforts to hold together warring factions within any given national party. In the Muslim world today, it means that Islamist movements often operate more similarly to other secular or ideological parties within their state than to Islamist movements in other countries. In addition, it can also, and often does, mean that they reserve their harshest criticism and most virulent attacks for each other, rather than non-Islamists.

Finally, the last lesson to be ascertained from Marx and Engel's theoretical blunder apropos to the current American foreign policy situation is that pursuing "grand theories" which seek to explain all international events and provide a rubric from which we can approach any nation as either "for us or against it" runs into serious cognitive

problems that ultimately undermine the effectiveness of rational policy calculations. Like Marx and Engels' folly displays, overzealous commitment to viewing the world through only one prism, inhibits policy-makers' ability to reconcile conflicting information, forcing them toward simply factoring out particulars. In this sense then, the danger of recreating Marx and Engels' dismissal of the single greatest motivation for state affiliation of their time, nationalism, because it could not be explained in terms of their own ideological predilection, foreshadows the dangers of an American policy so preoccupied with the idea of Islamic radicalism that it misses out on capitalizing on the benefits offered by the larger social phenomenon that is concurrently taking place. Even Marxism was eventually forced to capitulate, however reluctantly, to recognition of this fact, finally including in its dictums that the realization of the international movement might have to be preceded by nationalist uprisings in some places. Such a recognition really marked the end of the commitment to a global class revolution and a forced refocusing of priorities on addressing local issues. Likewise, pragmatic policy concerns today will eventually force the American government to nuance its rhetoric pertaining to Islamist movements in order to accomplish its objectives in several key states.

All of these themes will be drawn out and repeated in the cases studies¹⁰ that follow. Although a comprehensive survey of Islamist movements in every Muslim country is far beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible to ascertain the diversity of ideas and perspectives encompassed by Islamist parties through the use of a few carefully chosen examples. In order to illustrate both the importance of context and the elements of commonality that exist between many of the movements, I have chosen to address movements within their national settings, but have selected an assortment of nation-states

¹⁰ Two of these cases studies, Nigeria and China, are redrafts of essays used in prior classes.

that fall over a wide geographic range. The case studies are also sometimes addressed to different periods in the development of the Islamic revival in the country in an attempt to capture issues pertaining to their popular prominence as commonly cited "hot-beds" of Islamist activism. Analysis of the construction of the Islamist parties within these localities brings to the forefront the significance of many of them as moderate groups proposing the introduction of ethical considerations into state structures as well as the vastly different challenges their existences pose to the status quo in their respective countries. Out of necessity, each chapter will take a different approach to the Islamist question, which highlights the specific lessons to be drawn from each nation's attempt to reconcile rising Islamist demands with state institutions. Although each chapter also addresses the movements' implications vis-à-vis the United States, final analysis of the global implications of such diversity will be the subject of Part II of this paper.

Chapter 1

Turkey: Islamism in a Liberalizing Democracy

Understanding the modern political history of the Turkish nation-state is virtually impossible without first understanding the historical background of its formation and the political ideology that was adopted by its creator, Mustafa Kemal "Attaturk," to legitimize its existence. Formed from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of Turkey as an ethnic nationalist entity in the Anatolian heartlands and northwest Kurdish regions of the Middle East was by no means a foregone conclusion at the end of World War I. Rather in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres signed by the Ottoman sultan and the victorious European powers, what is now Turkey was divided between an independent Armenian state, a semi-independent Turkish nation under European financial control, and a Greek occupied zone. However, the proud inheritors of the Ottoman empire rose up against such ignominious peace terms, and were eventually organized and led to victory against their would-be occupiers by a triumvirate of Ottoman field commanders. Thus, the will of the new Turkish nation was forged out of resistance to external domination, relying heavily upon an Ottoman elite class which had been a the heart of late Ottoman attempts to reform along Western lines. Successive moves to abolish the sultanate and caliphate by its new leaders clearly demarcated the new Turkish state as a nationalist construction free of the responsibilities entailed by Ottoman Islamic leadership and determined to end the influence of "traditional" segments in the old society on the government.

The abolition of the sultanate and caliphate were, in fact, representative of a much larger phenomenon occurring under the guise of Attaturk's leadership. As historian William Cleveland articulates, Attaturk was "a fervent admirer of European institutions

and attitudes, [and] was determined to mold the new Turkey in the image of the West."¹¹ This meant, when necessary, a forced secularization and nationalization of the Turkish state and public space that scrapped the call to prayer in Arabic, changed the written alphabet to Roman characters, forbade acknowledgement of ethnic minority rights, and dismantled the traditional leadership of the rural ulama. Constitutional guarantees safeguarding the existence of the Turkish Republic as a secular entity forbade the use of religious terminology in government offices and the Parliament, becoming one of the foundational principles of the state. This led to a Turkish nation characterized by what Eisenstadt terms "radical Jacobian" laicism, which firmly upheld the primacy of politics and thus confirmed the belief that society could be reconstituted through the political will of the state.¹² Through this process, the intense and far-reaching Western reforms of the Turkish nation became a project of state coercion, when necessary, to achieve elite-determined goals deemed to be socially desirable over the long-run.

However, the imposition of virulent secularism on the Turkish population was never entirely successful in eliminating the role of Islam in the public political sphere, despite Attaturk's resort to adjustment of "social mores by fiat at times."¹³ After his death, those frustrated by the rapid pace of reform and the leadership of Attaturk's Republican People's Party began to coalesce around the Democrat Party, which took over control of the government through elections in 1950. This political liberalization quickly initiated the first banning of a political party for "exploiting religion" in 1954, when the Nation

¹¹ William Cleveland. *A History of the Modern Middle East, Second Edition* (Westview Press; Boulder, CO) 2000, p176.

¹² S.N. Eisenstadt. *Fundamentalism, Secularism, and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*. New York: Cambridge UP. 1999. p73.

¹³ George S. Harris. "Republic of Turkey" in *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa, Fourth Edition* ed. Long, David and Bernard Reich (Westview Press; Cambridge, MA) 2002, p11.

Party was forcefully closed down by the ruling government. However, by the 1970s the key swing party in the Turkish Parliament was a religious-oriented group called the National Salvation Party. Protests, strikes, and demonstrations on the streets coupled with rising attendance at mosques witnessed to the resilience of the population's determination to see their religious convictions acknowledged by successive regimes. Yet, Turkey had become a nation divided between vastly different perspectives on the nature of the state with no dominant force able to move the country past its political impasse, thus forcing the military to step in to "control the rising threat of terrorism" in 1980 for the third time in just thirty years. Still, despite their best efforts to maintain the secular and nationalist origins of the Turkish state, by 1997 the military was again forced to weigh in on the political arena for a fourth time when the avowedly Islamist Welfare Party under Necmettin Erbakan took over the helm of civilian governance. Since that time, a successive group of parties have survived periodical banishment from the political arena to maintain the continuance of popularly-elected Islamist representation at the very pinnacle of Turkish parliamentary politics. In 2002, this process reached its zenith when the head of the Islamist Justice and Salvation Party, Reccip Tayyip Erdogan, took over the premiership of the country after winning the largest single block in parliamentary elections.

Thus, a brief overview of the political history of the Turkish state reveals the consistent prevalence of Islamist-oriented politics despite the fact that the country's modern history has allowed for relatively free political expression and can not be accused of the harsh repression seen to be fueling Islamist parties in other regions by many scholars. Nor have the participation of these parties in democratic politics led to the

collapse of Turkey's democracy, with the virulently secularized Turkish military playing the only role in overthrowing the popular will of the electorate. However, much has been touted in the media, especially after the tragic terrorist attacks last year in Istanbul, about the possible take-over of the Turkish state by a fundamentalist regime. Further complicating the picture is the fact that other prominent social groups have also coalesced recently around religiously defined entities through the revival of Sufi *tariqahs* and the reassertion of minority identities, such as the heterodox Alevi community. As Ergun Ozbudun notes, all of these factors constitute a major challenge to the creativity and supremacy of the traditional Turkish elites since compromise with the Islamist parties will "depend on a fundamental redefinition of the Turkish state" because according to Attaturk's design, the two basic pillars of the Turkish Republic "have always been nationalism and secularism."¹⁴ For these reasons, the practice of Islamist politics in Turkey presents an interesting case study for the purpose of this paper.

The following section addresses the rise of popular mass-based Islamist politics in Turkey with a focus on the most centralized, successful, and nationalized movement which is currently represented by the ruling Justice and Development Party. This section will draw out what the addition of an Islamic party has meant to Turkish democracy in general, especially given the historic chance granted to Justice in its current leadership of the state in what has been a volatile time for Turkey and the region as a whole. The second section looks beyond this national party at the more personal expressions of Islamist political ideology and their effective incorporation of Turkey's tolerant Sufi traditions, ultimately resulting in the call for a state that is both "Islamic, democratic, and

¹⁴ Ergun Ozbudun. *Contemporary Turkish Politics: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation* (Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boulder, CO) 2000, p151.

pluralistic." In particular, the "neo-Nur" inspired movements coalescing around the writings and teachings of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen will be looked at. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, the very different political role of the Alevis sect will be examined. Members of this heterodox Muslim group have long provided one of the strongest social bases for the Kemalist legacy, but the recent opening of the political arena to parties whose positions appear antagonistic to the Alevis has contributed to a rebirth of identification with a unique Alevi political identity.

Popular Mass Politics:

The Predecessors and Leadership of the Justice and Development Party

The first mass-based Islamist party to appear on the Turkish political scene was led by a Western-educated, upper-class business man who was disappointed by his rejected attempt to join the conservative Justice Party in 1969, a far cry from any Western preconceptions of an aging mullah hell-bent on overthrowing the state. Left with few options, he reluctantly decided to run for parliament as an independent and although he was successful, the party he later formed was quickly shut down by the military during their second coup in 1971. However, this would not be the end of the story. This man was in fact Necmettin Erbakan, who would later play a pivotal role in the development of other Islamist parties and rise to be Turkey's first Islamist prime minister in 1996. Although this road to the pinnacle of Turkish politics was fraught with setbacks, political exile, and the dissolution of several parties, it is possible to trace the leadership of the current Justice and Development Party back to Erbakan's original organizational formulation. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the National Salvation Party, the Welfare Party (Refah), the Virtue Party (Fizelat), and their widely accepted successor, the

Justice and Development Party (AKP), will be dealt with as symbolic of a larger phenomenon of mass Islamist political party politics. Fortunately, an analysis of this party's platform and its future impact on Turkish democracy is aided by the fact that it now has over a decade of practical governing experience. Not only was Erbakan himself able to hold important positions throughout the 1990s, but the current head of the Justice and Development Party, Reccip Tayyip Erdogan, is the acting prime minister with an overwhelming parliamentary majority behind his administration.

In fact, despite secularist-led diatribes berating the Justice and Development Party throughout its history and warning of a fundamentalist conspiracy to radically revamp the government once in power, an examination of the records of the party members and the demographics of the Islamist constituency seems to be characterized by a much different image. The party's behavior has been more in line with Western conceptions of the functioning of an institutionalized political party than any of its Turkish competitors. Namely, it has maintained an organized structure for decision-making that addresses internal conflicts between its members, developed a socially broad but consistently loyal segment of the voting population who identify with its platform, displayed itself to be willing to engage in democratic compromise, and proven to be competent at government administration once in power. As recent articles explaining its landslide victory in the local 2004 elections acknowledge, it is not hard to see why people would support the party in droves since "the ruling party ushered in the first period of political and economic stability Turkey has enjoyed for some 20 years."¹⁵

¹⁵ Vincent Boland. "Commanding Win for Turkey's Ruling Party in Elections " *Financial Times (London)* March 29, 2004. Lexis-Nexis On-line Database. Accessed 1 April, 2004.

Foremost among its achievements, the modern and highly organized nature of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been touted by many experts as an important key to its electoral successes. Resembling most national parties in developed states, the AKP has vigorously pursued the establishment of a vast network of activists throughout the country who participate in get-out-the-vote efforts as well as outreach programs designed to spread information about the platform and activities of its leaders. Turkish political party expert, Birol Yesilada highlights the effectiveness of this structure which consists of a party divan (council) in every district that meets "on a regular basis and evaluates the party's activities in their area of responsibility...neighborhood representatives who maintain an information database...[and] spread the party message through dialogue and distribution of audio and videocassettes...[as well as] teachers who engage people in discussion at the local teahouses and other gathering places."¹⁶ In this respect, the party has utilized modern organizational principles to build a political entity grounded in intellectual discussion and connected to grass-roots concerns among its members. Even skeptics of the party's true intentions have been forced to concede that the Welfare Party possesses "what is without the slightest doubt the most advanced and modern party organization in Turkey."¹⁷

Building such a network has led to diversification within the organization, which has transformed itself into a mass-based party capable of projecting a variety of concerns onto the national political scene which often have very little to do directly with its Islamic inspired foundations. For instance, the party has been known for its attention to the pressing economic concerns of the Turkish state and its willingness to engage in difficult

¹⁶ Birol A. Yesilada, 2002, p173

¹⁷ David Shankland, 1999, p104.

measures aimed at alleviating the burden of perpetual bouts of spiraling inflation on the lower economic echelons of Turkish society. Second-in-command of the party and a Western-trained economist, Abdullah Gul, explains that "our main priority is the economy...we promised we will really concentrate investment in production and job creation."¹⁸ Although skeptics might doubt the veracity of this statement, all indicators since the assumption of power by the AKP two years ago have seemed to indicate the authenticity of Gul's commitment. In fact, Turkey has managed to draw out of a two year economic crisis, with projected inflation for 2003 reaching even lower than expected figures. This success stands in sharp contrast to the economic irresponsibility of preceding governments, and has undeniably contributed to the further gains by the AKP in the 2004 local elections. It seems that a party full of well-trained, suit-wearing members of the business community can be extremely gifted economic administrators despite their open proclivity for attributing their success to higher powers.

In fact, overall reports of the AKP's first two years at the helm have been extremely positive. Despite fears that Erdogan would attempt to use his parliamentary majority to undermine the secular foundations of the state, the Prime Minister has remained loyal to his election day promises to "respect the rights of all Turks, impose no changes in lifestyles and continue to push for Turkey's entry into the European Union."¹⁹ Like the other successful Islamist candidates in Turkey's democracy, he has shown a willingness to compromise with the secular segments of the society and significantly moderated his views on a variety of issues once in office. This process seems to be

¹⁸ Marvine Howe, p30.

¹⁹ quoted in Jonathon Mann and Walter Rodgers. "Landslide Win for Islamic Party in Turkey." *CNN*. 4 Nov 2002. On-line Resource. Accessed 1 April, 2004.
<<<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/11/03/turkey.elections/>>>.

deepening even further through the continued broadening of the AKP's social support base, with Erdogan recognizing in his speech after the announcement that the party had made significant gains in the 2004 local elections that,

"...the voting base of the AKP has expanded even further. We are aware of the fact that this situation increases the burden on our shoulders, and we will continue to be aware of this. We will show the determination and effort to take what we have been entrusted with into a bright future. We will take care to represent all the people; and in giving service, we will never be discriminatory..."²⁰

This perpetuates a long history in the Turkish Islamist movement since even the more hard-line Islamist government led by Erbakan in the late 1990s, for all intents and purposes, "did not deviate far from Turkish mainstream politics,"²¹ according to most Western scholars. Thus, it seems that fears of a radical overthrow of Turkey's democracy have proven to be irrational hyperbole thrown out by a fading statist elite in a vain attempt to reign in the increasingly independent, assertive Turkish civil society.

The Erdogan government has also shown positive signs of progress in resolving many outstanding and contentious issues that have hindered the Turkish government's attempts to draw closer to the West. Chief among these have been the AKP's effort to resolve the Cyprus issue under UN mediation, a task that has proved elusive under nearly 50 years of hard-line secularist rule. Although many generals have expressed dismay over the UN plan, the AKP has resolutely pressed for a fair and just end to the long stand-off. Likewise, on the Kurdish front, the AKP has striven to use its popularity among the second largest ethnic group in Turkey to solidify reconciliation of the long-simmering

²⁰ Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Turkish Premier Says Local Elections Prove Support for his Policies." *BBC Worldwide*, Lexis-Nexus On-line Database. Accessed 1 Apr 2004. p6.

²¹ Heinz Kramer, 2000, p71.

feud over Kurdish cultural rights and political autonomy. Although progress on this front has been stalled by the war in Iraq, the commitment of many top AKP leaders to ending the conflict through compromise rather than repression, coupled with the organization's popularity in the Kurdish regions, presents the most hopeful outlook in a long time to ending decades of bloodshed in the neglected minority underbelly of the Turkish state.

Rather than conceding that all of these positive signs of Islamist involvement in governance are merely temporary, a look at the long-term trends of the Justice and Development Party's voting constituency reveals the likelihood that the current political tactics will continue since they are expressive of the values held by its supporters. Most importantly, in contrast to the assumption that its members are inherently undemocratic, research findings into its electorate reflect that supporters of the movement "consistently identified democracy as the most desired form of government and the most likely system for egalitarian economic growth and public order."²² In addition, as noted above, the Justice and Development Party relies on a broad range of social groupings within Turkey for its support, forcing it toward moderation as it seeks to satisfy a constituency marked by cross-cutting social cleavages. Indeed, it has shown a remarkable capacity for drawing diverse groupings of Turkey's social stratum into party ranks, a goal other party's have yet to master. As one researcher notes, the inclusion of the Kurdish population reflects in its voting patterns that it was initially brought under the "Islamic umbrella of the RP/FP"²³ that offered a supra-identity that transcended tribal, ethnic, and national identities,²⁴ not

²² Birol A. Yesilada. "Realignment and Party Adaptation: The Case of the Refah and Fazilet Parties." *Politics, parties, and Elections in Turkey*, ed. Sabri Sayari and Yilmaz Esmer (Lynne Rienner Publishers; Boulder, CO) 2002, p169.

²³ RP stands for the Welfare Party, based on its Turkish name Refah. FP is the Turkish acronym for the Virtue or Fazileh Party.

²⁴ Gunes-Ataya and Ataya, 2002, p149.

an insignificant finding in a country that has been challenged by bloody ethnic clashes for the majority of its history.

Thus, it is no surprise that party analysts would note that the Islamists are "the one political party in Turkey, Refah/Fazilet, that has a remarkable track record of successful adaptation to change and voter realignment."²⁵ Most notable among these efforts has been the rise in the AKP of the young moderate, modernists led by Erdogan and Gul, who successfully took over the helm of the party from the more conservative Erbakan faction in an effort to broaden the appeal of the party to non-Islamist voters. The electoral success of 2002 and 2004 seem to have vindicated this strategy, reflecting the fact that the Islamist parties are just as subject to built-in democratic incentives for moderation as their secular counterparts. As Ozbudun's research into the importance of class and non-ideological determinants in support for the Islamist parties reflects, "to appeal to the more centrist voters who have no desire to see an Islamic state in Turkey, the WP must moderate its position to move to the center."²⁶ Thus, a gradual tendency to support more liberal economic policies, strengthening of ties with the West, political liberalization, and anti-corruption measures have become integral to the central platform of the AKP.²⁷

Yet perhaps the most resounding endorsement of the AKP has been its' officials proven administrative ability once elected to office. In a state marked by corruption and inefficiency, AKP officials have shown themselves to be responsible to a tightly-controlled internal party hierarchy which strictly monitors any allegation of bribery or extortion among its members. At the local and municipal level, this efficiency has

²⁵ Biro I Yesilada, 2002, p175.

²⁶ Ergun Ozbudun, 2000, p91.

²⁷ All of these tendencies can be found in the review of the first year in office of the government, Ilter Turan. "The Justice and Development Party: The First Year in Power." *Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association: Washington Office*. Accessed 1 Apr 2004. <<<http://www.tusaid.us>>>.

translated into increased faith in the ability of state institutions to meet the needs of their electorates. As mayor of Istanbul, for example, Erdogan was credited with cleaning up the notoriously polluted city, stamping out police corruption, and providing better public transportation for lower income workers. Even after he moved on to parliamentary politics, other Refah officials that took over posts in places like the Beyoglu District "won the endorsement of the American consulate general, which canceled its decision to move to the suburb of Sariyer because Beyoglu's streets are so much cleaner now and the area looks so much better."²⁸ Thus, it is no wonder that a party acknowledged even by its detractors to put forth Islamist mayors who "have managed to provide more efficient and honest administrations for their communities than their predecessors from the traditional centrist political parties,"²⁹ should be enjoying so much electoral success.

Nothing displays the impact of the tolerant inclusion of mass-based Islamist political parties on the Turkish democracy as a whole like the contrast between the state of the nation now and its depressing prospects just 6 years ago, at the height of the government crackdown on the Welfare Party. Writing in 1998, Fred Halliday aptly describes the worrisome state of affairs in the country where,

"the challenges faced by the semi-democratic institutions of Turkey are not imagined: in addition to the authoritarian immobilism of the military elite, there is hyperinflation in the economy, a retrograde, devious, and fecklessly vacuous Islamism at the mass level, a Kurdish opposition that replicates the worst of the

²⁸ Marvine Howe, p6.

²⁹ Ayse Gunes-Ayata and Sencer Ayata, p151. Other reports confirm this based on empirical data, although the perception of improvement among the population is really the key determinant in the elections process. See David Shankland, p105, for confirmation of improvement in the services under Islamists in the district municipalities.

authoritarian Marxist past, but which has now, in the face of state intransigence, come to hegemonize Kurdish politics in the country."³⁰

Contrast that doomsday portrayal with the Turkey of today, which tells a much different story of the future prospects of the nation. With low inflation, relative calm in the eastern provinces despite a possibly inflammatory situation created by the war in Iraq, ongoing legislative reforms, a UN backed peace proposal for Cyprus pushed by the government, and a newly emancipated civil society enjoying its increased freedom to call government officials to reckoning for their actions, Turkey seems to be on the verge of finally consolidating its democratic transition. All of this despite the fact that the "vacuous" Islamists have taken over the reigns of government and with the only speed-bump on the horizon being renewed paranoia among Turkey's overzealous guardians of secularism, the military elite. It seems that Fehmi Kuru was right when he described in a Council of Foreign Relations report the harmlessness of a party where "leaders are not clerics. The party program is not based on the Sharia. Campaign issues can easily be called secular," and thus concluding it would not be completely incorrect to say "Welfare is the Turkish equivalent of Christian Democratic parties in the West."³¹

Piety and Politics:

Islamism as a Public Ethical Discourse

Another hallmark of the religious revival in Turkey has been the re-emergence of active *tariqahs* (mystical Sufi brotherhoods built around a religious figure) that had previously been targeted for extinction by the early Kemalist state. Although these groups

³⁰ Fred Halliday, 2000, p188.

³¹ Fehmi Kuru. Sept 1996. "Democracy and Islam: The Turkish Experiment." *Muslim Politics Report*. Council on Foreign Relations.

continue to be viewed with suspicion by virulent Turkish secularists and their leaders sometimes face prosecution by the Turkish courts, the same opening that has allowed formal, orthodox Islamist parties to enter mass politics has also aided these groups in disseminating their views on a variety of issues. Like the Justice and Development Party, they have capitalized on the information technology revolution to build national membership webs and successfully appealed to emerging sections of the educated Turkish population that are disgruntled with the status quo.

One of the most prominent of these groups is led by Fetullah Gulen, whose followers have tended in the past to overwhelmingly support conservative political parties such as Ozal's Motherland Party (1980s) and Ciller's True Path Party (1990s). Although they eschew any sort of violence aimed at undermining the state, members of the movement place the re-Islamization of Turkey at the pinnacle of their political agenda. As Heinz Kramer explains, these groups "work through society rather than the state...their goal, however, is to replace the Kemalist state by a political system that obeys religious rules." For this reason, he extrapolates, "many in Turkey regard this indirect attack on the republic to be more dangerous than the open political work of the Islamist parties."³² However, it was the military's desire in the early 1980s to reconstruct Turkish social cohesion after the disastrous chaos of the 1970s which originally led to the revival of movements such as Gulen's, who benefited from increased state funding to religious education and programs designed to undermine the radical leftist parties seen as the main threat to state security at the time. The willingness and support of Turkish premier Turgot Ozal-- who was thought to be closely affiliated with the neo-Nur movement himself--to

³² Heinz Kramer. 2000. *A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States*. Brookings Institution Press: Washington, DC) p60.

open the political arena to new ideological voices and refocus government attention on an economic resurrection through neo-liberal reforms, provided Gulen and his followers with the space they needed to carve out a vital role in the provision of social services.

Although, the neo-Nur ideology tends to draw as much on the *Quran* as on modern scientific knowledge, some members of Turkish society have accused Gulen of practicing *takkiye*, a religious doctrine that allows one to conceal one's true ambitions when striving for Islamic goals. Scandals such as the release of a 1999 video in which he urges his followers to acquire positions in the Turkish military and bureaucracy in hopes of transforming the state have led to mass expulsions of those known to be affiliated with him from the military.³³ However, the Gulen movement itself has fastidiously denied any revolutionary intent, instead characterizing its political goals as the desire to "re-establish the link between religion and state that existed in the Ottoman era, when leaders were expected to live their private lives based on Islamic regulations."³⁴ Accordingly, some scholars view the movement as a positive step toward reconciling Islam and modernity in a constructive, tolerant manner. In this sense, the movement's use of Islamic terminology and its appeal to various social groups can be seen as an attempt in what Yavuz and Esposito describe as an effort "vernacularize modernity," rather than "the fearsome 'return of the repressed'" that Islamist movements are often painted as.³⁵

The ideology of Gulen and his supporters would seem to support this classification, as they urge personal enlightenment through the acquisition and balancing of both rational and spiritual knowledge. Furthermore, politically, Gulen has supported

³³ According to Heinz Kramer, most expulsions from the military in the past four years have in fact been due to affiliation with Gulen's community, 2000, p67.

³⁴ Bulent Aras and Omer Caha. "Fetullah Gulen and his Liberal 'Turkish Islam' Movement." *MERIA Journal* (Vol. 4; December 2000).

³⁵ M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito, 2003, pxxiii.

ties to the West based upon the fact that Turkish society has much to gain from the achievements of rational knowledge there. In addition, he has highlighted the need for peace, tolerance, and dialogue within the Turkish community and between nations as an integral part of Turkish Islam. According to M. Hakan Yavuz's work on the movement, the Gulen network is in fact unique in its stresses on "Turkish nationalism, the free market, and modern education" as means to achieving a Turkish nation where modernity is defined "not as Westernization, but rather as a set of new economic, technological, and legal opportunities for authentic societal transformation."³⁶ The role of individual morality is pivotal in this perspective to building, strengthening, and preserving a just political order upon the foundations of the modern Turkish state.

Highly critical of the entrance of the Refah/Fazilet parties into Turkish politics, Gulen has continuously focused on building an extensive network of religious schools throughout the country and Central Asia as opposed to direct participation in party politics. Thus, as John Voll articulates, Gulen represents a Turkish attempt to reconcile the "glocalization" of the current epoch with the realization that the modern world consists of a "pluralistic experience rather than within an assumed homogeneity of truth."³⁷ For this reason, Gulen has been very critical of any attempt to introduce Iranian or "tribal Arab Islam" into Turkey, which he considers to have created "a negative image of Islam by reducing Islam to an ideology."³⁸ So far his political interference has been minimal and confined to support of the state, while his educational and media outlets

³⁶ M. Hakan Yavuz, 2003. "The Gulen Movement" in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gulen Movement*, eds. Yavuz, M. Hakan and John L Esposito. 2003. (Syracuse UP; Syracuse, NY), p21.

³⁷ John O. Voll. 2003. "Transcending Modernity." in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gulen Movement*, eds. Yavuz, M. Hakan and John L Esposito (Syracuse UP; Syracuse, NY), p245.

³⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz. "Towards an Islamic Liberalism? The Nurcu Movement and Fetullah Gulen" *The Middle East Journal* (Washington, DC; Autumn 1999) p14.

spread throughout the region with their message of personal enrichment through both spiritual and scientific endeavor. As one of the leading figures in what has been described as the "unprecedented Islamization of the public sphere,"³⁹ it is likely that Gulen's influence will continue to expand along with his media empire.

Reasserting Religious Difference: Renewed Identity Among the Alevi

The Alevi in Turkey are composed of a variety of ethnic Turks, Arabs, and Kurds, but are distinguished from the larger population by their heterodox Islamic practices, which are thought to be derived from early forms of Shiism. Although historically this group has been one of the main supporters of the Kemalist legacy, seeking refuge from persecution from the Sunni majority of the Turkish state in the removal of religion from the public sphere, recent acts that have led to a more public role for Islamism have left some of the members of this community more attune to their uniqueness. As Marvine Howe notes, like other groups in Turkey "the Alevis increasingly identify themselves as Alevis, rather than socialists or progressives, and can no longer be taken for granted."⁴⁰ Encouraged by the success of Sunni groups and determined to capitalize on the broadening of the political discourse, they too have established parties that seek to identify themselves as representative of the larger Alevi community. The result has been a major shift, as Ayse Gunes-Ayata and Sencer Ayata's research has shown, from an Alevi community that used to vote overwhelmingly for the CHP to one "where votes are split among different political parties...[with] no single party able to claim their

³⁹ M. Hakan Yavuz. "Search for a New Social Contract in Turkey: Fethullah Gulen, the Virtue Party, and the Kurds." in *Turkey's Role in the Twenty-first Century* (SAIS Review; Winter 1999) p123..

⁴⁰ Marvine Howe, p44.

representation in politics."⁴¹ This politicization of Alevi identity however, has been coupled with sociological trends within the community that have simultaneously decreased the importance of religious doctrine to Alevi identity in favor of a more culturally-oriented sense of community.⁴²

However, many Alevi groups have recently been active in asserting the Turkishness of their belief--which they view to be more representative of Turkish Islam than Sunni practices--and demanding official government recognition of their legitimate place in Turkish society that corresponds justly to the new funding of Sunni educational programs and other state-sponsored activities. As M. Hakan Yavuz notes, this activism had met with some success, especially after the 1997 ousting of Erbakan, when the state engaged in a number of programs designed "to present the Alevi understanding of Islam (as created by the state) as an authentic Turkish form of Islam."⁴³ However, such moves towards official state recognition of their distinct religious community have been greeted with consternation by many Alevis. David Shankland explains this ambivalence towards rapprochement by the state as a manifestation of conflicting ideas within the Alevi community as to what constitutes "Alevilik," or belonging.⁴⁴

Despite these divisions, it is clear that a "revival" has occurred among the Turkish Alevi, expressed in a variety of associations and even political parties. As Martin van Bruinessen explains,

"Whereas in the 1970s most of the young Alevis had completely rejected religion as nothing but ideology and had only taken pride in Alevism as a democratic

⁴¹ Ayse Gunes-Ayata and Sencer Ayata, p146.

⁴² David Shankland, 1999, p135.

⁴³ M. Hakan Yavuz, 2003, p253.

⁴⁴ David Shankland. 2003. *The Alevis in Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition* (Routledge Curzon; London) p161.

social movement, the failure of the left movement in Turkey made many reflect on Alevism as a cultural and then as a religious identity... Under the sponsorship of these associations, Alevi rituals (cem), which like the rituals of the Sunni Sufi orders had been practically banned since 1925, were publicly performed and houses of worship (cemevi) were opened. There was a sudden tidal wave of publications by Alevi intellectuals, purporting to explain history, doctrine and ritual of Alevism... These developments marked an important change in the nature of Alevism, the transition from a secret, initiatory, locally anchored and orally transmitted religion, which it had been for centuries, to a public religion with formalised, or at least written, doctrine and ritual."⁴⁵

Most notable in the efforts of these groups to see their concerns expressed through representation in the parliament, has been the formation of the Baris (Peace) Party led by Reha Camuroglu and the spread of associations using titles such as Pir Sultan Abdal, a famous Alevi poet. Although the movement has not solidified politically as forcefully as the Sunni mainstream parties, it is evident that Alevi's "traditional passivity has turned into an activism that has created an independent political force separate from state and parties."⁴⁶ Turkish politics and the widening of the public discourse on religion will likely support this tendency in the near future, providing a balancing effect against any hegemonic attempt to claim the right to speak in the name of Islam from the mainstream Sunni political parties. As the Alevi community has progressively reasserted its unique identity the beginning of this process of co-option has already begun, with various

⁴⁵ Martin van Bruinessen. "Kurds, Turks and the Alevi revival in Turkey." Accessed 7 Apr 2004. <<<http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/alevivanb.html>>>.

⁴⁶ David Zeiban. Dec 1995. "The Alevi of Anatolia." Accessed 7 Apr 2004. <<<http://www.angelfire.com/az/rescon/ALEVI.html>>>.

Turkish political parties trying to incorporate policies in their platforms that can appeal to what is evolving into an important minority Alevi voting block.

Conclusion:

Turkish Islamism and American Interests

Thus, as this examination of various Turkish Islamist parties shows, the recent political religious revival in the country is congruent with what expert David Shankland describes as the "gradual, varied upsurge of faith within a society that is simultaneously growing increasingly heterogeneous."⁴⁷ For this reason, American acquiescence to the rise of prominent Islamist parties in Turkey could go far in achieving its objectives vis-à-vis the Turkish state, but any effective policy formulation will require the application of a nuanced and varied approach. From its very inception, the Turkish state has been characterized by the forced exclusion of anyone unwilling to conform to an idealized ideological view of a homogenous nation-state. Whether this has meant the denial of Kurdish cultural rights or the skewed representation of Westernized elite classes in parliament, very few scholars would argue the fact that after almost a century of republicanism Turkey has failed to consolidate into a stable democracy. Lacking any tolerance for pluralism, the Turkish state and its military have become what John Esposito and M. Hakan Yavuz describe as the defenders of a positivistic outlook on socio-political relations that draws a "sharp division between moral community and the political sphere."⁴⁸ This has meant the absence of moral rhetoric from state activities, thus contributing to the institutional decay of a parliamentary government riddled with

⁴⁷ David Shankland. 1999. *Islam and Society in Turkey* (The Eothen Press; Cambridgehire, England) p3.

⁴⁸ M Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito. 2003. *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gulen Movement* (Syracuse UP; Syracuse, NY) pxxiii.

corruption and prone to reprehensible coercive actions against its own population. In fact, most Islamist parties represent one facet or branch of a popularly-based movement designed to reform the Turkish democracy into a more representative, responsible, and responsive political system. Although the parties above have vastly different ideas about what such a reformation would entail, they all draw upon the foundations of their faith and a desire to see their personal mores reflected in the public institutions which act in their name. Thus, it is the proposition of this paper that instead of hindering the realization of American interests vis-à-vis Turkey, the active engagement of these parties in the Turkish political process can further American objectives in several key ways.

First, the entrance of Islamist parties into Turkish politics presents the only foreseeable chance for Turkey's democracy to progress further towards consolidated status by broadening its inclusion of concerns held by the mass of the populace. As Turkish scholar Ergun Ozbudun conceded at the end of the twentieth century, the WP is "the only Turkish party that comes close to the model of a mass party, or a party of social integration."⁴⁹ Even secular Turks agree that the Islamist parties' successes are in large part the result of their attention to the needs of previously ostracized groups, with extensive welfare and social service networks throughout the country making political participation an attainable reality for millions who would otherwise have no access to political empowerment. Likewise, a burgeoning civil society with private institutions that parallel state-run organizations have blossomed around the organizational determination of the Islamist parties outreach efforts. In a country that has long been criticized for state-controlled, elite top-down management of even minute affairs, the streets in today's Turkey seem to look increasingly like those of Western democracies, complete with a

⁴⁹ Ergun Ozbudun, 2000, p92.

range of women's organizations, student associations, and competing civil society voices vying for political attention. The vitality which the Islamist parties have relied on to organize these groups has had a rippling effect on society as a whole, where previously dormant groups across the ideological spectrum have responded to the call for their own institutions.

This leads to the second benefit for Turkish democracy derived from the rise of Islamist voices, because accepting the Islamist policy positions will not only benefit Islamist-oriented parties, but will also require the Turkish state to broaden and strengthen its tolerance of genuine pluralism in the political arena. As noted above, the traditional Turkish democracy held no place for dissenters such as Necmettin Erbakan, who was rejected by the conservative Justice Party in his 1969 bid for membership. Thus, it was his exclusion from the democratic process that led him to found the first Islamist group, whose success encouraged the entrance of other social groups into the political arena. In fact, perhaps the one thing that all of the major Islamist movements share in their respective platforms, is the idea that an opening of the political competition for parliament should be extended to the Kurds as well. From the Alevis to the Justice and Development Party, the idea that state repression of legitimate grievances is counterproductive to establishing a just and peaceful Turkish state has meant a softer line toward the idea of ethnic and cultural plurality in the state as well. It is this tolerance that has led to the overwhelming increase in the popularity of the AKP, which has vocalized its determination to respond to the needs of the people and work to be as inclusive as possible.⁵⁰ Besides being preferable to the current situation of state-sponsored racism on

⁵⁰ Leyla Boulton. "After a Year in Power, The Government Eases Suspicions." *Financial Times (London)* March 28, 2004, p2. Lexis-Nexus On-line Database. Accessed 1 Apr 2004.

moral grounds, such a conciliatory and incorporating view of the Kurdish problem is strategically in the best interests of the US given its already precarious position in Iraq. In the long-run, peace in Kurdistan of Turkey could even pave the road to Turkish ascension into Western organizations it has previously been prevented from participating in. Certainly, the large number of reforms passed by the AKP since it has been in office, coupled with Erdogan's avowed commitment to pursue membership as symbolic of Turkey's being a bridge between east and west/Islam and democracy, has made this once distant goal more realistic.⁵¹

Third, the Islamist's participation in democracy provides an outlet for lower income groups that are undergoing difficult transitions into the global economy. Besides the Kurdish issue, the only other thing that the various Islamist groups all have in common is their condemnation of violent attacks against the democratically-elected state, such as occurred last year. Unified in their revulsion at the civilian casualties and the rhetoric coming from groups such as the Turkish Hezbollah, IBDA-C (Islamic Front of Fighter of the Great East), and IHO (Islamic Activists Organization), mainstream Islamist groups all support the idea of reform through constitutional, democratic means, not coercion. In fact, many of the groups, as shown above, have actually formed in response to what they deemed an overly coercive, centralized, and intrusive state. The Justice and Development Party thus pursues as one of its central policy platforms, the decentralization of state authority and the widening of non-state areas of influence. Furthermore, most of the Islamist groups have sought to incorporate discontented segments of Turkish society by directing state policies toward redress of their concerns.

⁵¹ Pamela Sampson. "Turkish Prime Minister: Terror Bombings Strengthen Ties with West." *Associated Press Worldstream*. 23 Nov 2003. Lexis-Nexus On-line Database. Accessed 1 Apr 2004.

As Ayse Gunes-Ayata and Sencer Ayata's work on the development of Islamist parties displays "the expansion of the parties' constituency from small town and the peripheral provinces to the metropolitan centers was primarily due to its success in appealing to the recent migrants and the urban poor."⁵² This was the result of extensive networks set up by the parties to aid the inclusion of these disjointed groups into the larger social framework of their new societies. Rather than becoming disgruntled, anti-statist segments of the population, these groups have actually been transformed into active and concerned participants of democratic Turkish politics.

Fourth, the Islamist parties' provide a much-needed addition to Turkish politics in their commitment to anti-corruption, responsible, and responsive government. As shown above, the Justice and Development Party as well as its forbearers have had astounding records once in office in bringing a bureaucracy known for its bloated ineptitude to bear. Clean streets and clean hands has become the rallying cry of a group of Islamist politicians who have filled the gap left in public confidence by a series of government scandals that rocked the Turkish regime in the last few decades. Efficient local governance will ultimately mean a reduction in the funds allocated to provinces, which are now beginning to rely increasingly on their own funds by reforming wasteful spending. This could mean a higher chance that Turkey will be able to make the difficult cuts at the national level necessary to bring its perpetually high budget deficits into check. AKP efforts to do just that, have been coupled over the last two years with the privatization of many services that have historically drained the federal budget.

⁵² Ayse Gunes-Ayata and Sencer Ayata. "Ethnic and Religious Bases of Voting." *Politics, parties, and Elections in Turkey*, ed. Sabri Sayari and Yilmaz Esmer (Lynne Rienner Publishers; Boulder, CO) 2002, p148.

The realization of all of these goals are not only laudable on moral grounds, but will also serve to strengthen the stability of the Turkish state by broadening the social groups who feel an affinity and connection to its institutions. A healthy and enduring consolidation of Turkish democracy will eventually require such actions, which can be achieved gradually through constitutional means or be forced into more open confrontational street politics as the gap between broadly held social expectations and popular reality widens beyond control. Resisting the gradual change will not only further the already dominant impression in the Middle East that America only wants "controllable democracies" in the region, but will also hinder the advancement of strategic US concerns in spreading the "peace dividend."

As difficult as overcoming irrational impressions gained from frightening images of the Iranian Revolution and the development of the Sudanese state can be, it is the responsibility of American foreign policy-makers to look beyond the misinformed bias of what constitutes an "Islamic state." This concept indeed means many different things to those who call for its realization, but even vocal recognition of this fact does not mean that rational policy calculations necessarily result. Instead, as experienced journalist Marvine Howe, who has spent a significant amount of time in Turkey reveals in her account of *Turkey Today*, engrained fear of the repressive nature of a state ruled by Islamism can distort the ability of policy-makers to constructively engage Islamist ideology even if they admit that "Turkey's Islamic society is hardly monolithic."⁵³ Howe's description of an interview with an avowedly Islamist and conservative man, for example, is riddled with her mental references to Saudi Arabian restrictions on driving or Iranian theocratic mullahs, despite her interviewees portrayal of his idea of a *shariah*

⁵³ Marvine Howe, *Turkey Today*, p5

ruled Islamic state as one where his wife drives because he doesn't have a license, there is no pressure on women, and anyone would be free to choose not to live by the Islamic codes as in the old Ottoman *millet* system.⁵⁴ Notwithstanding his best attempts to portray what is a rational, well-thought out position on the future of Turkish democracy, Howe throughout the interview is unable to shake her unease with the idea of a man who requires his state to be answerable to his moral convictions, finally causing the interview to be broken off when he is so exacerbated by her inability to move past basic prejudices that he is forced to launch into what she deems a "diatribe" against the US and Western press, asking "Why do American journalists only talk about the Sudan?!"⁵⁵

Instead of following Howe's well-intentioned but revealing example, American policy-makers would in fact be wise to listen to the sage advice of secular Turkish journalist, Ilnur Cevik, whose columns in the *Turkish Daily News* repeatedly warn that a generalized crackdown on Islamist parties that makes the tragic mistake of classifying all Muslim organizations as synonymous with fundamentalism will only alienate the moderate Islamist masses and provoke violence, for Refah and its kinds will never disappear by force if they stand for "the deprived masses who are facing serious hardships because of the current [2000] economic disaster that we are going through in this country."⁵⁶ In fact, any action taken to forcibly revert Turkish politics to its virulent Kemalist roots will inevitably lead to violence in a society where educational, economic, and information technology advancements have broadened the arena of mass mobilization along irrevocably pluralist lines. The pragmatic consensus of the Turkish

⁵⁴ Marvine Howe, pp7-8.

⁵⁵ Marvine Howe, p8.

⁵⁶ Ilnur Cevik. 1998. "They Have Finally Closed Refah, or Have They." *Turkish Daily News*. February 23, 1998.

military elite and its Western allies that led them to encourage the inclusion of Islam into the public discourse as an "unofficial basis for reconstructing state and society after the 1980 coup,"⁵⁷ must be revived if Turkey is to transition into a fully-fledged, consolidated democracy.

⁵⁷ Heinz Kramer, 2000, p65.

Chapter 2

Iran: Islamism in a Theocratic State

Although Iran recently had the iniquitous honor of being included as one of Bush's evil axis--thus slating it for the projection of malevolence to liberality and justice throughout the world--the inner workings of the Iranian political scene since the infamous revolution in 1979 have been far more complex than this description articulates. In fact, even in this theocratic, Shi'a-dominated state, various Islamist organizations have become the most vocal opponents of the clerical regime. Articulating grievances similar to those expressed by other Islamically-oriented movements, opponents both during the revolution and after of the incorporation of the religious clerics into the formal state structures have coalesced into groups that present very different versions of the meaning of an "Islamic state." This opposition has not received the attention of the international media that secular opponents to the Iranian theocracy have until the landslide presidential election victory of reformist Mohammed Khatami in 1997. Since this time, the struggle between various Islamist parties within the regime has become a heightened topic for political debates in the West, yet this newfound attention continues to reflect low-levels of comprehension as to what exactly the internal Iranian debate means for the larger prospectus of the theocratic project.

Rather than falling into neat categories of "good guys"(ie. the reformers) and the "bad guys" (ie. the "hardline clerics"), the positions staked around the relationship between Islam and the state in Iran are drawn over a wide kaleidoscope of opinions informed by twenty years of theocracy. In general, these parties articulate plans for the future of the Iranian state that are far more developed, coherent, comprehensive, and

practical than the American-funded opposition in exile. Although they often call for rapprochement with the US in international relations, more important to the long-term interests of the American government is the fact that many of the organizations have gone through a process of *internal* adjustment and ideological formation to come to conclusions about nationhood not vastly different from American ideals, but rooted in the particular context of the Iranian experience. Instead of calling for another revolution that would further destabilize the region and undermine the development of the state, many reformers have established action plans designed to meet the spiritual needs of the Iranian community while still enshrining the politico-civil rights of its citizens. Even in the face of conservative attacks on some of these groups, it is clear why most scholars agree that "the Iran of today is a far more democratic and open society than the Iran of either the shah or the Ayatollah Khomeini."⁵⁸

However, it is also a country undergoing tremendous pressure to reconcile the fervor of an ideological revolution with the pragmatic requirements of running a modern nation-state. The theocratic Iranian state itself has produced a new political and economic elite among the religious authorities and their allies, who--for very worldly reasons--loathe the idea of reforming the state structures they have disproportionately benefited from. At the same time, the youth of Iran born after the revolution constitute around half of the population. Although they are nationalistic like the generation before them and for the most part would detest witnessing the re-emergence of overt foreign interference in their affairs, they are also frustrated by the slow-moving pace of reforms, the high jobless rate, and the overzealous implementation of conservative religious restrictions on their

⁵⁸ Monte Palmer. 2002. *The Politics of the Middle East* (Wadsworth/Thomson Learning; Belmont, CA) p363.

actions. They have coalesced around factions within the ruling elite who propose more far-reaching reforms of the current system, but the implications of this growing discontent should not be exaggerated. Since the very foundation of the Islamic Republic the heart of what constitutes an "Islamic republic" has been a matter of intense debate within the clergy itself, and much of the conflict between different segments of the population continues to be framed in an Islamist discourse.

Thus, even factoring out the issue of dissenters among minority ethnic groups or secularists, the Islamist project in Iran has never been the uncontested monolith of Western perception. As Mehdi Moslem argues, "since the ayatollah's death in June 1989 these differences [among Khomeini's disciples] have solidified and intensified to the extent that ideological discord among the governing elite has become the most salient feature of politics in the Islamic Republic."⁵⁹ In this sense, Iran provides a perfect example of how Islamist groups can call on the same principles embedded in Islamic doctrines to espouse very different ideas about the application and realization of such ideals. Although each faction claims its own version to be the authentic, legitimately, Islamic path to social justice and equality, no one group has managed to establish hegemonic control of the state. Even within the various blocs there is sometimes ferocious dissent over what Islamic ideals have to say about economic, political, and social woes affecting modern nation-states. Each group in the debate has sought to call upon Islamic principles to legitimize its stance on the future direction of the state in policies ranging from economic property rights to political liberalization to the development of civil society.

⁵⁹ Mehdi Moslem. 2002. *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse Univ. Press; Syracuse, New York) p2.

Thus, this chapter will focus on the different formulations of the Islamic state propagated by several major Iranian groups. It is important to note that these groupings are dynamic, like most modern political coalitions, as a result of their effort to present real solutions to the evolving issues confronting the Islamic Republic. Even the mythologized Western embodiment of static traditionalism himself, Ayatollah Khomeini, was forced to rescind many of his more virulent policies in lieu of their failure to sufficiently improve the overall condition of the Iranian populace. In fact, one of the most frequently waged criticisms of the Islamic Republic from both inside the country and out has been the often vacillating, inert character of many of its programs for development. Lacking the charismatic leadership of a universally legitimate supreme arbitrator and an uncontested system of dividing institutional powers, the Iranian state's proclivity toward debilitating stand-offs between various Islamist groups has become particularly pronounced in the post-Khomeini era.

Finally, although secularly-oriented groups are an important segment of the growing number of discontented in Iran, they will not be included directly in this discussion since the primary focus is to draw out the diversity within Islamist movements. Most scholars and policy-makers are adequately aware of the positions staked against the Islamic regime, but many are not as informed about the alternatives presented from the dynamic Islamists within the state. Hopefully, this paper will draw out how divergent these various Islamist opinions really are.

History of the Iranian Regime

Most of the history of the Iranian regime is familiar to Western audiences since it has become popular fodder for media documentaries. However, when approaching the Islamic Republic today, it is important to correct a few commonly held misperceptions

about the nature of the Revolution and its development since the death of Khomeini. A brief history of the development of the nation over the last twenty years is therefore appropriate to clarifying the ideological and political debates of the factions.

First, it is critical to note that the 1978-1979 Islamic Revolution was not the product of a sudden outburst of rage amongst discontented, religious reactionaries in Iran. Rather, the events leading up to the flight of the shah were the result of a broad-based social movement wrought with various ideological, economic, and political coalitions in Iranian society. The American-backed shah was never a popular, nor a very legitimate, ruler in a country that is ethnically and socially diverse. The Pahlavi dynasty, in fact, dated only as far back as 1925 and relied on the support of external powers for its authority almost from its very inception. This allowed the state, of which the shah was the supreme embodiment, to become increasingly unresponsive to the concerns of the Iranian populace.

As the shah became more important to American security policy during the Cold War, his delusions of grandeur and often haphazard reforms continued to alienate large sectors of the Iranian population. Many liberals, for example were frustrated with the lack of political opening in the state, the repressive tactics of the shah's security services, and the disgraceful Western puppeteering of the government. The traditionally powerful *bazaari* merchants and small rural landowners of the middle class, on the other hand, were alienated by the shah's "White Revolution" of the 1960s, which undermined their economic self-sufficiency without producing the promised benefits. Finally, the ulema and many of the underemployed chafed under the monarchy's unwillingness to implement extensive state social services that would uphold widely-held perceptions of

Islamic social justice and equality. Thus, by the time of the Revolution, a broad array of different segments of the Iranian society were ready to join the revolt against their corrupt, venal leadership.

However, the consolidation of the Islamic regime in the wake of the Revolution was not guaranteed, and has since gone through a series of evolutionary stages that have included amendments to the original constitution. During its first few years, the state was plunged into a defensive war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq while it was simultaneously seeking to define the nature of the new state and combat internal civil violence. In this effort, the clerics around Khomeini faced-off against a group of radical Islamist leftists, who soon coalesced around the Republic's first democratically-elected president, Abu al-Hasan Bani Sadr. The leftists used their urban guerilla army, the Mujahedin-e-Khalq, to launch a campaign of terror that included assassinations of conservative clerics, massive car bombings, and general terror tactics.⁶⁰ However, by the mid-1980s they and their supporters had been defeated by the conservatively inclined clerical branch and were forced underground or into Iraqi exile. Yet this did not mean controversy over the parameters of the new state was non-existent within Khomeini's support group. As Limbert and Gasiorowski note, feuding among the radical Islamists was intense throughout the 1980s, during which time "the most important dispute was between the Islamic leftists associated with Prime Minister Musavi, who favored a radical redistribution of wealth and statist economic policies, and the Islamic conservatives associated with the traditional clerical elite and the bazaar, who favored laissez-faire economic policies."⁶¹ This rendered economic policy virtually impotent in the state, and

⁶⁰ For a more complete and detailed account of this internal civil strife, see Long and Reich, 2002, pp57-60.

⁶¹ Limbert and Gasiorowski, 2002, p59.

was later compounded by the crisis surrounding Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Montazari, who was thought by many to be too liberal.

The ensuing move to push Montazari aside in favor of another cleric carried grave ramifications for the Iranian Republic. In the ratified draft of the constitution the "Supreme Leader" was required to be a cleric who could be elected through an established "Assembly of Experts" or through a popular vote, such as the one conducted to place Ayatollah Khomeini in his position as the first leader. However, concern over the succession removed the role of the popular vote in the selection of the leader and downgraded the religious qualifications needed for the post.⁶² The fact that Iran has not been a static theocratic entity was thus highlighted by the death of Khomeini which fundamentally undermined the original construction of the Islamic republic in its design to completely fuse the position of religious and political authority in the post of the "supreme leader." Since no religious scholar capable of fusing the required posts of Islamic legal expert (*faqih*) and object of emulation (*majra'*) supported Khomeini's political philosophy of the *vilayet-e faqh*, a compromise candidate and former President, the Ayatollah Khamenei, was chosen instead. As drawn out by Bakhsh's analysis, this meant that rival sources of religious authority, some of whom held no official state position but were more well-respected on a religious level, existed in the republic and could theoretically challenge the "supreme" rulings of Khamenei.⁶³ Although many radical clerics defended the position of the leader as unassailable, the natural development of the increasingly polarized political spectrum and the rising electoral popularity of reformers who called the status quo allotment of powers between the

⁶² "Leadership." The Islamic Republic of Iran Embassy, Ottawa, Canada Homepage. Accessed 4 Apr 2004. <<<http://www.salamiran.org/IranInfo/State/Leadership/leadership.html>>>.

⁶³ Shaul Bakhsh, 1995, pp100-105.

different branches of government into question, confirmed the fact that Iran has yet to articulate a specific model of the Islamic state.⁶⁴

Thus, given recent events in the country, Iran is entering a particularly volatile stage in its history as it seeks to find common ground between various visions for the future. The overwhelming electoral success of reformers such as Khatami, who now control both the presidency and majlis, has forced conservatives in the regime to use the heavy hand of the Council of Guardians to intervene in the election process. By disqualifying reformist candidates from running, including Khatami's younger brother who is the head of the largest majlis political coalition,⁶⁵ they have undermined the legitimacy of the very state institutions they are seeking to protect. Compromise from all involved in the government will be necessary to break out of the resulting impasse and preserve the Islamic nature of the state, but how exactly this compromise should be formulated is highly contested. The following sections look at some of the positions being articulated for the future of Iran, but it is important to note that at the moment, Iran only has two formal political parties.⁶⁶ Instead of a more formalized democratic process revolving around party institutions, Iranian politics has been characterized by the shifting nature of "factions." The uncertainty created by this system can make it difficult to identify specific groups, but it is fairly evident what the largest factions are broadly

⁶⁴ Farhad Khosrokhavar. 2002. "Postrevolutionary Iran and the New Social Movements." *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transformation in Iran since 1979*, ed. Eric Hooglund (Syracuse Univ. Press; Syracuse, New York) p24.

⁶⁵ For the reaction to this disqualification see Babak Dehghanpisheh. "Mohammed Reza Khatami: Iran's Other Khatami" *Newsweek* (International Edition; New York) 1 Mar 2004. p62.

⁶⁶ These two parties are the Islamic Iran Participation Front led by President Khatami's younger brother Mohammed-Reza Khatami, who was recently barred from participating in elections for the majlis by the clerical Advisory Council, and the Labor Party. Both groups are considered to be part of the reformist block.

supporting even if the interests of some members causes them to shift between rival factions under changing circumstances.

The Convergence of the Religious and Political Authority in the "Supreme Leader"

And Khomeini's *Vilayat-e Faqih*

The original foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran were in large part reflective of the political and religious thought of the regime's first charismatic leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Breaking with a long Shi'a tradition of political quietism, Khomeini began advocating the idea that political as well as religious knowledge was necessary for the just implementation of *sharia* law. Seen as the foundations of creating a society reflective of Islamic principles of social justice and egalitarianism, Khomeini argued against the legitimacy of the ridiculously opulent shah throughout the 1960s, because he did not govern based upon codified Islamic principles or have any religious credentials. Drawing upon the old Iranian concept of the religious jurist, he went on to argue in favor of combining the Shi'a religious establishment with the structures of the state. In fact, once in power Khomeini's political thought came to have a very centralizing, authoritarian strain to it, replacing the idea that the government could be ruled by a supreme religious council with the assertion that a "supreme leader" qualified to act as both head legal scholar and top source of emulation (*marja'*) should sit atop the Islamic Republic hierarchy. He also asserted that since the "rule of the jurist" was established, the supreme religious leader could have ultimate authority to interpret the needs of the Muslim community and could even implement laws that contradicted any other "derivative commandments" found in the religion.

Many have found this thinking difficult to reconcile with the orthodox practice of Shi'a Islam, and it is indeed evident that Khomeini's political attitudes were profoundly impacted by what he saw as the needs of the Iranian community at the time. In an attempt to alleviate his concerns for the development of the modern Iranian state, Khomeini thus drew heavily on not only Islamic principles, but also on non-Islamic ancient and modern political thought. As Anthony Black notes, the constitution of the Republic in "seeking to balance expertise and accountability, combined (in theory) the three types of rule in classical Greco-European constitutional theory: rule by one, by a few wise, and by the people."⁶⁷ Thus, Khomeini's vision of an Islamic state was really a synthesis of specific historical Shi'a religious jurisprudence and modern political theory. Far from being rooted only in tradition, this new political theory reinterpreted Shi'a Islamic concepts of the vice-regency of the jurist (*velayat-e faqih*) and general Muslim prescriptions of consultation (*shura*)⁶⁸ in uniquely modern ways. As his son Ahmed Khomeini has commented, part of what made Ayatollah Khomeini the revolutionary leader that he was resided in the fact that "he fought the backward, stupid, pretentious, reactionary clergy,"⁶⁹ rather than purely upholding the status quo.

So Khomeini's creation of the ideal Islamic state was not necessarily a reflection of Shi'a religious traditions, nor was Khomeini's ideology static over the course of his career. Like any ruling ideologue, he was forced to relinquish many of his more Western-repugnant beliefs for pragmatic reasons once in power. Most notably, was the contradiction between his earlier philosophical writings on women and the role that they

⁶⁷ Anthony Black. 2001. *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present* (Edinburgh Univ. Press; Edinburgh) p334.

⁶⁸ *Shura* in Khomeini's ideology came to mean popular elections as well as more traditional sources of consultation, such as dialogue with recognized scholars and community leaders.

⁶⁹ Quoted in B. Moin. 1999. *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (I.B. Tauris: London) p276.

came to play in the Revolution. As Haleh Esfandiari notes in her work, Khomeini virulently spoke out against the right of women to vote in the shah's regime, because it would constitute "moral corruption" under Islamic law. Yet, his reliance on the female vote in the referendum to determine the structure of the post-revolutionary government forced him to recognize their right to suffrage even if he later sought to undermine their public role in governance by the institution of strict dress codes and the purging of top female bureaucrats.⁷⁰

Another example of this pragmatic flexibility was witnessed by Khomeini's incremental moves toward a consolidation of power in the hands of the "supreme leader" in response to the legislative grid-lock of the Islamic Republic. By setting up the "supreme guide" as the unquestionable guarantor of the government, Khomeini was able to use his charismatic, revolutionary-derived legitimacy to arbitrate disputes between the warring, uncompromising clerical factions in Parliament. This ensured that no partisan faction was able to dominate state policy for too long, and contributed to the general aura of Khomeini's image as being "above the fray." What is important however, is that in both cases Khomeini's original ideological stance was compromised by the practical necessity of governing a temporal state.

Some within the clerical establishment likewise responded to these perceived needs of the state, not only supporting what Khomeini had to say, but even capitalizing on taking the concept of the *velayat-e faqih* further as a way to shore up the stability of the often fragmented political elite. Among these followers, Ayatollah Beheshti and Ayatollah Saduqi were particularly fond of attributing Khomeini with the authority of

⁷⁰ Haleh Esfandiari. 1994. "The Majles and Women's Issues in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-revolutionary Iran*, ed. by Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl (Syracuse Univ Press; Syracuse, New York) p62.

"unquestioned obedience" and claimed that the state derived its legitimacy to govern "by virtue of the 'permission' granted by Khomeini" alone.⁷¹ Khomeini responded to their support of the broadening affirmation of the role that an Islamic state could play in enacting legislation through his issuance of decrees. Especially revolutionary, were the 1988 decrees in which he argued that an Islamic state could "revoke any lawful agreements it concluded with the people...[and can] prohibit any matter whether religious or secular." It could also suspend the five pillars of the faith or exercise "other, greater" powers which he didn't elaborate on, an indication to most that he was leaving the door open for anything the leader might see fit to enact in the future.⁷² This sort of relativism extended in to the foreign policy realm, sanctioning Khomeini's conduct of secret arms deals with the "great Satan" to avoid "defeat, annihilation, and being buried right to the end" in the Iraqi war, since "common sense and humanity" were to trump Quranic injunctions when the state of the nation was in question.⁷³

However, Khomeini's vision of the Islamist state was contested from within the conservative clerical ranks from the beginning. Rather than expressive of Islamic law in general, many scholars and Iranians understood these measures by Khomeini and his followers as being an attempt to end the impotency of the Islamic Republic resulting from the internal divisions that wracked its first decade of legislation. Rivals within Khomeini's own clique hotly contested even broad ideological policy affiliations, making

⁷¹ Shaul Bakhash. "Iran: The Crisis of Legitimacy." *Middle East Lectures, Number 1, 1995* (Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies; Tel Aviv University and Syracuse Univ Press; New York) p100-101.

⁷² Quoted in Shaul Bakhash. "Iran: The Crisis of Legitimacy." *Middle East Lectures, Number 1, 1995* (Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies; Tel Aviv University and Syracuse Univ Press; New York) p102.

⁷³ Quoted in R.K. Ramazani. 1989. "Iran's Foreign Policy: Contending Orientations." *Middle East Journal* (Vol 42; No.2) p212.

governance almost impossible.⁷⁴ As previously state above, further consolidating power in the hands of the supreme leader and setting limitless powers on the ability of the government to enact any reforms it deemed necessary, essentially freed the Islamic state of following the commonly agreed on historical foundations of the Islamic faith and undermined the clerical opposition. They also imbued Khomeini with the ability to purge the regime of rivals for power and promoted the interests of a certain faction within the clerical establishment above others. In this sense, Khomeini was innovative in his approach to applying general Islamic ideas to the modern situation in Iran. As Ali Ansari notes, he was known to rebuke "his fellow *ulema* on more than one occasion for their tendency, as he saw it, to stay in the Middle Ages."⁷⁵ Thus, divisions within the Islamic regime were already present during Khomeini's reign, expressed both in the unwillingness of several senior clerics to participate in the established state institutions and the internal factional strife among supporters of the *vilayat-e faqih*. These divisions would become even more pronounced upon his death, with the ascension of "compromise" candidate Ayatollah Khamenei to the position of Supreme Leader.

What was really at stake in these factional battles were temporal matters, with religious theory being unable to provide suitable explanations because of the ambiguity that enabled various groups to interpret different doctrines in ways befitting their preference for the future development of the state. In lieu of reconciliation based on Islamic scriptures then, the ruling regime was increasingly pushed toward defining the role of the supreme leader based not only upon religious precepts, but also upon

⁷⁴ For information on the development of these factions after Khomeini's death, see Farzin Sarabi's account of the presidential and parliamentary elections during the Rafsanjani era "The Post Khomeini Era in Iran: The Elections of the Fourth Islamic Majlis" *Middle East Journal* (Vol. 48, no. 1) 1994, pp89-107.

⁷⁵ Ali M. Ansari. 2000. *Iran, Islam, and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change* (Royal Institute of International Affairs; London) p47.

pragmatic necessity for a supreme arbitrator. As Shaul Bakhash acknowledges, "the battles over the definition of the supreme jurist's authority and role were disguised political battles over disputed matters of policy—for example, the sanctity of property, the distribution of wealth, and the balance of power between various organs over the government."⁷⁶ Iran's clerical leaders soon found that there were no religious doctrines that could decisively determine the debate between statist-led models of economic development and liberal philosophies of private sector-led growth. All could agree that Islam demanded active state engagement to ensure the community's economic prosperity, but did this mean forced redistribution of wealth that would egalitarianize society but leave most worse off or laissez-faire policies that might increase the divide between social classes but benefit the economy as a whole? Or did Islam in its call for moderation demand a "middle way"? Even Khomeini himself was not able to answer these questions resolutely, leading him to utilize his position as "supreme leader" to play rival factions off against one another rather than promoting a consistent ideological approach to governance.

Thus, like all modern nation-states, the Islamic Republic was forced to navigate between different ideological perspectives on the best policy mechanisms to use in order to attain broad and vague ideals such as social justice. Even those that supported the Khomeini model of the state did not agree on appropriate policy objectives, and so (in summation) some of the clerics who agreed with Khomeini's temporal vision sought to find Islamic justification for increasing the power of the "supreme leader" to arbitrate disputes between the elected bodies of the government. Compounding this situation, engrained interests within the Khomeini party that had benefited financially from the

⁷⁶ Shaul Bakhash, 1995, p103.

Revolution where loathe to relinquish their hard-fought gains. Among these groups were certain segments of the bazaaris, who were able to translate close ties with *'ulema*, who were now government officials, into influence over the inner mechanisms of policy formation. Thus, the Iranian state came to resemble most modern democracies with competing spheres of interest vying for power within the institutionalized state structures. However, what set the Islamic Republic apart, was the philosophy under-girding the unelected role of the *'ulema* to determine the future course of the state. Atop this structure sat a supreme arbitrator, who progressively moved toward being unelected and all-powerful based upon the perceived interests of the state at the time. Far from being uncontested even within the ruling elite, this paper now turns to the most visible critics of Khomeini's Islamist formulation as it developed in practice, who have called upon many of the same doctrinal precepts to present very different versions of the "just order."

President Khatami and the Liberal Reformist Ideal

The death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the assuming of the mantle of "supreme leader" by Khamenei called into question many of the ideological principles behind the *vilayat-e faqih*. First and foremost, the fact that Ayatollah Khamenei was not a high enough ranking religious scholar to be called a "source of emulation ("marja") and his lack of the overwhelming popular support of the masses enjoyed by Khomeini, seemed to indicate that a fundamental power shift would have to occur within the institutions of the regime for the state to continue functioning. Although the chief of the judiciary, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, and other supporters of the Khomeini model attempted to put forth the idea that the "supreme leader" should be obeyed completely since religion and politics were inseparable in an Islamic state where there could not be "multiple

sources of religious authority,"⁷⁷ many within the clerical establishment resented the politicization of the holy centers this would entail. As Abdulaziz Sachedina articulates, although Shi'a Muslims had always looked to the guidance of the *mujtahid* in political and social matters,⁷⁸ the idea that this should translate into his leadership in governance was highly suspect from a theological point-of-view and was largely made acceptable to the Iranian populace only through the vast popularity of Ayatollah Khomeini.⁷⁹

Without this supreme guidance for arbitration, the crisis of the Islamic regime's inability to reconcile different ideological trends among clerics became acute. According to Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "the antiquity and the private character of *shariah* law made it rather ill equipped to deal with the legal and public needs of a modern, stratified, and revolutionary polity."⁸⁰ Thus, those opposed to the idea of Khomeini's Iran became more varied and vocal from within the clerical establishment. Before his death, most of the religious establishment that had contested the concept of the "*vilayat-e faqih*" were either purged or remained politically quiescent, but they were now able in the more unstable post-Khomeini era to re-enter the public discourse about the foundations of an Islamic state. Yet, while some of the new voices of opposition questioned the very foundation of including religious scholars in the political institutions of the state,⁸¹ others chose instead to question the distribution of the power formulated by the particular construction of the "supreme leader" and elected bodies as it came to be practiced. Rather than disavowing

⁷⁷ Quoted in Shaul Bakhash, p111. Also see for a more complete articulation of the

⁷⁸ Note that this point is made in contrast to Sunni Islamic traditions, which prescribe a much more restricted and less institutionalized role for 'ulema. In effect, Sunni Islam does not have a "clerical" structure.

⁷⁹ Abdulaziz Sachedina. "The Rule of the Religious Jurist in Iran." *Iran at the Crossroads*, eds. Esposito, John L. and R.K. Ramazani (Palgrave; New York) 2001, pp123-148.

⁸⁰ Mehrzad Boroujerdi. "The Paradoxes of Politics in Postrevolutionary Iran." *Iran at the Crossroads*, eds. Esposito, John L. and R.K. Ramazani (Palgrave; New York) 2001, p21.

⁸¹ This group will be discussed later in the paper.

the *vilayat-e faqih*, this new group of clerical reformers claimed to be instituting the *essence* of Khomeini's Revolution in contrast to the conservatives' proclivity for the literal word of constitutional prescriptions regarding the supremacy of the *faqih*. They declared themselves to be reviving the ideals of the revolution, and with the support of many of Khomeini's descendants, gathered around the candidacy of Khatami in 1996.

The position of this group, which came to be called the "reformers," rested on a defense of the liberal doctrine of state-society relations. As Mohsen Milani observes, Khatami's "mantra was political development—strengthening civil society, respecting the rule of law, cherishing freedom, and institutionalizing tolerance—all of which, in the convoluted vernacular of revolutionary Iran, meant democracy."⁸² Rather than questioning the formulation of the Islamic state, Khatami argued in favor of a rebalancing of the power of the various institutions which would make the *faqih* and state more responsive to the demands of popular sovereignty and Islamic scripture. According to him, the key to the Islamic revolution was always the institutionalization of popular sovereignty to prevent tyranny over the masses by a few. As noted above, the fact that Khomeini himself has vacillated so much during the first decade of the Republic "allowed for increasingly discretionary interpretations of his true vision of the fundamental objectives and governing principles of the Islamic state."⁸³

Accordingly, whether the oppressive few was monarchical or clerical, reformers asserted that they and the *faqih* had to be responsive to the popular will of the people or the voice of the masses would be completely hollow. To them this required that religious scholars should play a supervisory role, instead of trumping the legitimate practice of

⁸² Mohsen M. Milani. 2001. "Reform and Resistance in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Iran at the Crossroads*, eds. Esposito, John L. and R.K. Ramazani (Palgrave; New York) p30.

⁸³ Mehdi Moslem. 2002, p99.

executive authority by the elected governmental bodies. Dating back to arguments over the balancing of power between the Islamic and republican nature of the regime that had first been addressed at the constitutional conventions after the revolution,⁸⁴ the goal of Khatami's contention is not for an overthrow of the rule of the clerics, but a promotion of the will of the people.

Still the basis of his argument involves at the very least a rapprochement with widely held Western political ideals, and implicitly involves an adoption of many of them into Iran's unique cultural tradition.⁸⁵ Reflecting ideas of the "dialogue of civilizations," Khatami has embraced the idea of working with other governments across religious and cultural divides and included "dialogue with the West" prominently in the campaign literature that got him elected.⁸⁶ All of this has spelled out a desire to re-engage the West, not mimic it, that is supported by Iranians who view such measures as critical to moving the country forward economically, politically, and socially. As Olivier Roy points out, presuming this wave of support continues, it can not be ignored by even the most virulent supporters of traditionalism since "the regime has to accommodate popular disaffection and protest, because it is supposed to be based on popular consent."⁸⁷ In this sense, the fact that Khatami has highlighted the positive aspects of Western culture and ensured that "discussion of its benefits and liabilities became a legitimate issue for public

⁸⁴ Notable among the clerics for this position was Ayatollah Naser Makarem-Shirazi and Ayatollah Hojjati-Kermani, see Mehdi Moslem, 2002, pp28-31.

⁸⁵ For a more detailed explanation of Khatami's synthesis of Western advancements and Iranian cultural traditions, see Muhammed Khatami. 1997. "Our Revolution and the Future of Islam." *Hope and Challenge: The Iranian President Speaks*, Alidad Mafinezam trans. (Binghamton University; New York) pp18-30.

⁸⁶ Farhad Kazemi. 1999. "Why Iran Chose Khatami (1)." *Middle East Lecture Series, Number 3, 1999*. (Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies; Tel Aviv University and Syracuse Univ Press; New York) p10.

⁸⁷ Olivier Roy. 1999. "Why Iran Chose Khatami (2)." *Middle East Lecture Series, Number 3, 1999*. (Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies; Tel Aviv University and Syracuse Univ Press; New York) p18.

debate,⁸⁸ indicates a new era of Iranian-American relations that could be based on dialogue rather than confrontation, humiliation, and zero-sum maneuvers.

Furthermore, the reformers support of decentralization and depersonalization of the regime also harbings well for the deepening rationality of the Iranian state. Indeed, Khatami has made the normalization of the country one of the pillars of his administration, as well as promoting economic liberalization and foreign investment inside the country. It is difficult to imagine a policy more in line with American interests from a security standpoint, given concern over the possibility of Iran's development of nuclear weapons program and the desire to diversify access to cheap Gulf oil. However, Khatami is dependant upon continued electoral popularity for his legitimacy, which is by no means a given due to the diversity of his original coalition, the stagnation of many of his domestic attempts to reform in lieu of conservative opposition, and the humiliating response of the United States to his overtures.

AbdolKarim Soroush and the Traditional Clerics: Institutionalized Islam in Question

An intellectual who participated in the Iranian Revolution as a proclaimed Islamist, AbdolKarim Soroush has since come to articulate a position notably different than his idealistic perspective of an Islamic Republic in 1979. As the 1990s progressed, a growing number of intellectuals and youth in Iran were attracted to his critiques of the regime, which warned that "without reform, the Islamic project in Iran was doomed."⁸⁹ Although Soroush still proclaims himself to be an Islamist, he placed a growing stress on the relative nature of the religion handed down by God to men, who in their limited

⁸⁸ David Menashri. 2001. *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society, and Power* (Frank Cass; Portland, OR) p205.

⁸⁹ Judith Miller. "The Charismatic Islamists." *Middle East Lectures, Number 2, 1997* (Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies; Tel Aviv University and Syracuse Univ Press; New York) p44.

ability to understand the Divine Message could only know a portion of the absolute Truth. Accordingly, he asserted the dependency of any interpretation of Islam on "time, space, and circumstances, [which meant] competing paradigms should not be silenced."⁹⁰ In this sense, Ansari explains that he felt that "Islam the religion should be distinguished from those who interpreted it, and that much that had been handed down through the generations and articulated as the faith was in fact little more than human interpretation and therefore subject to human fallibilities."⁹¹ Thus, the religion was open to perpetual interpretation through *ijtihad*, not only by the clerics, but also by the masses themselves. Of course this position put him in opposition to the prevailing philosophy of the day, leading to continuous attacks on him and his followers throughout the 1990s by supporters of hard-line clerics.

However, Soroush went beyond his calls for the withdrawal of the clerics from government to attack the very essence of what he deemed to be the "authoritarian nature" of the Shi'a religious establishment. Not only did he question the sagacity of including religious jurisprudence in political structures that were destined to undermine their ability to interpret holy scriptures, but he also claimed that for a truly Islamic state to be established there had to be a democratization of both political and religious institutions. Only this could return religion to the lives of the Shi'a masses, whereas the current formulation would merely secularize religion and the religious establishment. This secularization process would naturally deepen as religion became "tied up with the material interest and political consideration of a particular group (and thus became an

⁹⁰ Dariush Zahedi. 2000. *The Iranian Revolution Then and Now: Indicators of Regime Instability* (Westview Press; Boulder, CO) p49.

⁹¹ Ali M. Ansari, 2001, p71.

ideology), [deleteriously effecting] its opportunity to develop and progress."⁹² Moreover, Soroush points the blame for this situation squarely at the feet of the clergy "whose very organization and ritual encouraged consensus and the stagnation of creative, innovative thought" that had been produced during the time of Islam's expansion.⁹³

Essentially then, Soroush's position on the relationship between the religious establishment and the government has evolved into a condemnation of the current direct merger between the two organizations. From an Islamic perspective, he argues, such an occurrence has undermined the universality and flawlessness of the faith by politicizing its message. Unlike Khatami, he has therefore discarded the notion of the *vilayat-e faqih* altogether, advocating instead a return to an Islamic society based on personal choice and a private commitment to faith. Soroush argues that a populace rooted in this sort of Islam will naturally make the government accountable to its morality and religious preconceptions through their practice of popular sovereignty. Real lovers of the faith would also be released from the bonds of political rule to engage in their personal development, rather than being distracted by the immediate concerns of governing.

Another important group that has also campaigned in favor of discarding Khomeini's approach from the very beginning of his rise to power is within the clerical establishment itself. This group of mainly traditional clerics were reticent about the idea of instituting an Islamic Republic where clerics would have direct political roles in governance. Although they agreed with the position of the clerical hierarchy in the religious sphere, they felt that its entrance into politics would necessarily politicize and particularize what should be the universality of its message. Perhaps the most vocal

⁹² Mehrzad Boroujerdi, 2001, p22.

⁹³ Ali M. Ansari, 2001, p72.

proponent of this opinion--which many believe the majority of Shi'a clerics are inclined to--during Khomeini's era was Ayatollah Shariatmadrai. However, Khomeini's treatment of the Ayatollah served as a harbinger of things to come. In January 1980, Shariatmadrai was placed under house arrest and stripped of his clerical title, which Mark Downes notes was a "turning point in the new regime where Khomeini showed his intolerance of any sort of opposition, even from within the Shi'a clergy."⁹⁴ This attempt to disrobe the cleric was unprecedented, serving as a staunch signal to all those opposed to the idea of the *vilayat-e faqih* to stay out of the political arena.

However, recently this group of clerics has been growing as it becomes evident that the actions of the ruling clergy are having a detrimental impact on the overall status of the clerical hierarchy in popular opinion. Important clerics such as Ayatollah Hariri-Yazdi for example, have asserted the fact that legitimate governments, whether religious or secular, must not rely on force to implement religious rules that must be freely chosen by the populace.⁹⁵ Likewise, two of the most vocal critics of the regime have been highly respected clerics, Ayatollah Hosainali Montazeri and Hojatoleslam Mohsen Kadivar⁹⁶, who have repeatedly asserted the need for the people to determine policy positions and circumscribed any religious authority by jurists to only "exercising a veto of anti-Islamic laws."⁹⁷ This is particularly interesting in indicating the dramatic shift that has taken

⁹⁴ Mark Downes. 2002. *Iran's Unresolved Revolution* (Ashgate Publishers; Burlington, VT) p122.

⁹⁵ Judith Miller. 1996. *God Has Ninety-Nine Names*. (Simon and Schuster; New York) p458.

⁹⁶ Kadivar was prosecuted for his vocal opposition to what he deemed the authoritarian practice of the *faqih* in 1999.

⁹⁷ Farhad Khosrokhavar. 2002. "Postrevolutionary Iran and the New Social Movements." *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transformation in Iran since 1979*, ed. Eric Hooglund (Syracuse Univ. Press; Syracuse, New York) p11.

place over the course of the regime, since Montazeri had been the first to articulate the need for the *faqih* in governance at the constitutional convention after the revolution.⁹⁸

Unlike Khatami, many in this group of clerics directly challenge Khomeini's notion of the *vilayat-e faqih* from the perspective that it violates the foundations of Shi'a religious belief. As Kadivar noted in his writings, "the absolute guardianship of the *faqih* over the lives of the people is devoid of historical, religious precedent, and the *faqih* should be an elected not an appointed official."⁹⁹ Kadivar in particular was popular among students, while others of this persuasion remained fairly politically quiescent and rooted in the traditional centers of religious scholarship. However, their potential and authority to contest the rulings of Ayatollah Khamenei remains a latent threat to the stability of the *vilayat-e faqih*.

Implications for American Engagement

The gradual rapprochement between the US and the Islamic Republic instigated by President Khatami's overwhelming electoral successes in the late 1990s has hit a brick wall with Bush's classification of the regime as a pillar of the axis of evil. Not only was such verbiage inane and unnecessary at a time when American-Iranians relations were progressively moving toward normalization after years of tense, mutually destructive stand-off, but it also displayed a stark misunderstanding of the role that the United States could potentially play in driving the Republic away from its commitment to reform. As described in this chapter, many Iranians have come to support the idea of re-engaging the international community for pragmatic and sometimes ideological reasons, but this group

⁹⁸ Mehdi Moslem, 2002, p27.

⁹⁹ Mehdi Moslem, 2002, p255.

is hardly uncontested in its vision for the future of the state. Although the repressive cruelty of the American-backed monarchy has faded from the memory of the young Iranian populace, it is still a prevalent and important part of the collective reckoning of the politically-active Iranian community. Rapprochement and liberalization are dependant at least in part on how the American government treats the Iranian state, since the process of Islamism as described above is defined by attempts to "critically re-read the ethical core of the founding texts directly into contemporary contexts" without the required intervention of centuries of dogmatic theology.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the project of constructing an Islamist regime in Iran is far from a completed process. As this paper has shown, from its very inception the formulization of the state has been contested, not only on secular grounds, but on Islamic ones as well. Rather than being an Islamic monolith, the political spectrum within Iran is spread over a wide range of ideological persuasions that pragmatically contend for predominance. Through this process of internal adjustment and compromise, the state has been forced to recognize the plurality of Islamic interpretations and resembles most vacillating transitional democracies, something reflected in its practical and ideological condemnation of the only two other avowedly Islamic nations, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Taliban Afghanistan.

American reticence in accepting these facts unfortunately confirms the world views of the aging conservatives in the regime, who can still remember the humiliation of Western interference in the Pahlavi era. Undermining those--such as President Khatami--who seek to reconcile engagement with the West with the preservation of hard-fought

¹⁰⁰ Peter Mandaville. 2001. *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (Routledge; New York) p4.

revolutionary cultural, religious, and national gains, has increasingly hampered their ability to push hard-liners toward reform of mal-functioning state institutions. Thus, rather than allowing for an evolutionary democratization and liberalization of the Islamic regime, US foreign policy positions have edged Iran closer to another chaotic showdown that will destabilize the important Persian Gulf region at a time when American troops are embroiled and vulnerable in neighboring Iraq.

Chapter 3

Indonesia: Islamism as a Force for Democratization

Much of the recent media attention paid to Bush's attempt to "bring democracy to the Middle East" has dealt with the issue of whether democracy is in fact compatible with Islam. The references to the Muslim faith by terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda combined with the paucity of democracies in predominantly Islamic states have given added credence to critics from the West who claim that specific doctrinal aspects of Islam are inherently undemocratic, authoritarian, and unrecognizing of individual human rights. All of these perceptions of Islam are indeed false and assume a level of adherence to a monolithic, uncontested, "universal truth" in the religion that is far from its realistic practice in any Muslim community. However, setting aside such concerns for the relevance of discussing the applicability of religious principles to the actions of secular states, it is apparent that what many scholars are actually debating is whether Islamism, or the legitimate assertion of references to Islamic values in the political process, fundamentally hinders the democratic process. Nowhere in the world is a better counterargument for such a position waged than in the experience of Indonesia. While Western officials incorrectly describe Turkey as the only democracy in the Muslim world and express hope for the future of Iraq, the great contribution made to democratization in Indonesia by civil Islam is regrettably overlooked.¹⁰¹

Thus, it is vitally necessary to the perceived conflict between Islam and democracy, that Islam's transformation in Indonesia into a civil force be examined. Indeed, the role of civil Islam in Indonesia has played an undeniably critical part in the

¹⁰¹ See US Secretary of State Colin Powell's Press Conference, April 15, 2003 for reference. Note the reference to Turkey as the only democracy in the Muslim world and the question of Islam and democracy being referred to as a problem for the Middle East and North Africa to address.

process of democratization by calling upon the rich traditions of the Islamic faith that denounce authoritarianism and embolden people to organize for self-determination, justice, tolerance, and equality. Without the role and legitimacy given to the movement for democracy in Indonesia by Islam, it is unlikely that Soeharto would have been overthrown. Furthermore, in this same capacity-- as a societal check on government excess—civil and political Islam will continue to play a fundamental role in the preservation and development of democracy in Indonesia. By examining the development of this democratizing civil Islam, a clear model for how Muslim reformist leaders may be able to apply some of the lessons in civil organization utilized by Indonesian groups to foster democratic change in their own societies, while preserving the authenticity and respect due their religion, is sketched out. As Nakamura Mitsuo asserts, the “Islamic civil society of Southeast Asia has been underrepresented and has not been given the due attention it deserves in spite of its resilience, continuity, and pervasiveness at the grassroots level.”¹⁰² This problem must be redressed for the benefit of the entire Islamic community in Indonesia as it seeks to make the transition from Islamism as a protest movement to the participation of a variety of different groups articulating particular interpretations of their ideal society in a pluralistic, democratic state.

The Development of Civil Islam in Indonesia

Islam in Indonesia has always had a strong tolerant and pluralistic strain to it, due in large part to the nature of its pre-Islamic society and the means in which Islam was

¹⁰² Nakamura Mitsuo, “Introduction” in *Islam and Civil Society in Southeast Asia* ed. Nakamura Mitsuo, Sharon Siddique, and Omar Farouk Bajunid. (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: 2001) 4.

spread throughout the region. As Hefner notes in *Civil Islam*, Islam was brought to Indonesia amidst an already rich spiritual life.¹⁰³ Unlike in other Muslim areas where Islam was the first organized or universalistic religion introduced, Indonesians had already been initiated to the structured religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz, describes this situation as one where Islam in fact moved into “one of Asia’s greatest political, aesthetic, religious, and social creations, the Hindu-Buddhist Javanese state...that had cast its roots so deeply into Indonesian society that its impress remained proof...[even] to modern nationalism.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, Islam in Indonesia was from the very beginning an amalgam of differing practices overlaying a rich tribal, spiritual inheritance that was strong enough to endure into the modern era.

In addition, the nature in which Islam spread throughout the continent contributed to a further pluralization of its practices. Typically, conversion of a community followed the conversion of the ruler, who sometimes made his decision based upon perceived trade advantages. It was not done by an invading army and its distance from the central Islamic structure ensured that no omnipresent clergy was on scene to dictate a particular brand of Islamic law.

On the contrary, as Hefner describes, Islam thrived in Indonesia in more of a "pluricentric formation" of mercantile states that allowed it to develop along separate paths.¹⁰⁵ The political form of these mercantile states contributed further to this diversification, for as pointed out in McCloud, the power structure ebbed and flowed in

¹⁰³ Robert Hefner *Civil Islam* (Princeton University Press, Princeton: 2000) 15.

¹⁰⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1968) 11.

¹⁰⁵ Hefner 2000: 16.

such a manner that the states sat very lightly upon their populations.¹⁰⁶ The rulers also subjugated the *ulama* (religious scholars) to their own authority, and through their elaborate court rituals both legitimized their rule as God-given and perpetuated the diversification of Islam. Each court continued to practice its own traditions while blending them with the new Islamic requirements in such a manner, as Hefner argues, that the concern for Islamic orthodoxy was relaxed and local syncretic traditions survived in court ritual and folk religion.¹⁰⁷

Thus, a pluralistic, tolerant form of Islam was allowed to take root throughout the Indonesian peninsula during the pre-colonial period, with only brief exceptions resulting from the attempt of rulers to strengthen their hold over society. Islamic education was spread throughout the countryside by *pondok pesantren* (boarding schools), which continue to play an important role in Islamic civil society even today. In addition, pilgrimages to Mecca, teacher-disciple relationships, and Sufism all contributed to the development of extensive religiously-based networks throughout the region. Hefner refers to this epoch as similar to the Enlightenment in Europe, so that when the Dutch arrived they were frustrated by their inability to find one ruler who could be subjugated on behalf of the region.¹⁰⁸

The new era that Dutch colonialism brought to Indonesia did little to alter these characteristics, and in fact greatly strengthened the infrastructure of civil Islam. In an effort to monopolize trade and power in the region, the Dutch destroyed most of the Muslim sultanates or principalities. The few that were left intact were reduced to mere

¹⁰⁶ Donald McCloud. *Southeast Asia: Tradition and Modernity in the Contemporary World*. (Westview Press, San Francisco: 1995) 33.

¹⁰⁷ Hefner 2000, 30.

¹⁰⁸ Hefner 2000, 33.

historical relics as the Dutch sought to impose Enlightenment ideas of clear separation between church and state on the Indonesian population. To this end, Hefner notes some of the strict limits placed on Islam in the public arena such as restricting travel to Mecca, requiring all Muslim clerics to apply for travel throughout the region, forcing examinations of those who had gone on the *hajj*, requiring state education to be secular, undermining Islamic law codes, disclaiming Islamic literature, and promoting pre-Islamic cultural accomplishments.¹⁰⁹ However, by attacking political Islam, the Dutch merely pushed religion into a civil role where it remained untainted by association with the colonialists. In addition, the clerics were then freed to establish vast networks of Quranic schools in the 18th and 19th century, whose graduates would later play a key role in the independence movement and the establishment of one of Indonesia's largest and most long-lived Muslim civil associations: the Nahdlatul Ulama. Before nationalism struck, it was in fact Islam which was seen as the bastion of resistance to the colonial authority, which then set the table for a large political role for Islam in the new nation-state. So the Dutch purposefully destroyed imperial Islam, only to accidentally establish a popular, civil Islam that was cautious and critical of government, and capable of regeneration through its own institutions that were independent of state support.

All of these Indonesian specific aspects allowed for the rise of a vibrant and dynamic Islam that could capitalize on the particular traditions in Islam that call for an active, engaged, pluralistic civil society. The two major groups that came to represent civil Islam in Indonesia-- although there was and remains a proliferation of groups-- the Nahdlatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah, both utilized God's message that He had created the different tribes of the world in order that they might compete against one

¹⁰⁹ Hefner 2000, 32.

another in good works to call for a pluralistic temporal democracy in Indonesia. By utilizing the tolerant strains of Islamic thought, partly reflecting the diversity of their own constituencies, these groups were able to develop modern institutions for health care, schooling, and community affairs irregardless of the political system in power. Throughout the procession of Indonesian history, they were marginalized from political participation in such a manner that they increasingly focused their efforts on the rejuvenation of a civil society that could provide citizens with necessary services and an outlet for their political frustrations. To this end, Islam has been liberated from the restraints it has faced in many other countries, so that in Indonesia it has played a perpetual role in the evolution toward political democracy.

The first such opportunity for civil Islam to show its nature came with independence in Indonesia. At this critical time, Islamic groups bound together with other religious and ethnic associations in calling for a plural, democratic state. Many Muslims were heavily influenced by nationalism, and some who practiced more *abangan* ways found refuge from the onslaught of orthodox *santri* practices by joining new secular, nationalist groups. In addition, civil Islam was able to use the vast networks established by the Islamic schools as a primary vehicle for the rapid transmission and spread of new nationalist ideas that contributed to the independence movement. Members of civil groups such as the Muhammadiyah, which was decidedly modernist in character, lent their knowledge and experience in internal bureaucratic, merit-based organization to the evolving structures of the new nation.

As the infant nation then attempted to build a constitution and execute democratic elections, the vast majority of civil Islamic groups chose to participate in the elections

and the democratic debate surrounding the Constitution. Although many felt that Islam should be the basis for governance, they actively sought to do so through democratic means, with the exception of a rebellion led by the DI and TII. Even when they failed to win the majority of the vote they had expected in the 1955 elections, the major Muslims groupings-- Masyumi and the Nahdlatul Ulama-- continued to pursue democratic means to their ends. Not surprisingly then, the most vocal opposition to Sukarno's proposal of "Guided Democracy" came from the modernist, Islamic Masyumi, which felt that the proposal was a front for authoritarianism.

Thus, it can be seen even from the early stages of the Indonesian state that Islam was a powerful force for democratization. Although the other major Islamic grouping, the NU, conceded to Sukarno's "guided democracy" scheme, it continued to use its civil organizations to foster resistance to the increasingly despotic nature of the regime. Masyumi, on the other hand, faced a different fate. Due to its vocal opposition of Sukarno and deeply-rooted democratic proceduralism, Sukarno moved first to marginalize its authority and then banned it completely. Many of its supporters were then left to turn to statist Islamic groups, student organizations such as the Association of Islamic Students (HMI), or Muhammadiyah. During this period of political marginalization, modernists thus increased their proselytization and civil efforts with a resulting rise in their membership. According to Hefner, this movement then paved the way for the Islamic resurgence and *dakwah* of the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹⁰

Unfortunately, as these two groups diverged to pursue their own means of opposing Sukarno's despotic rule, many Muslims and the NU became caught in the scramble to shed the hated regime. In their excitement to free themselves of Sukarno, the

¹¹⁰ Hefner 2000, 59.

NU and other civil Islamic groups allowed anti-Communist sentiment to fuel the mass discontent that culminated in the participation of many Muslim groups in the horrific bloodshed surrounding Sukarno's ultimate collapse. As Hefner notes, this was the most dangerous time for civil Islam in Indonesia, where its pluralist and tolerant strains were threatened by the call for *jihad*. He attributes this perilous tilt to the fact that NU had been forced to compete with other organizations to spread its influence by establishing women, student, and other associations under Sukarno's rule in an unhealthy competition for mass popular mobilization that turned civil society into an arena for a power battle.¹¹¹ The result was the unfortunate bloodshed, but it must be remembered that Islamic groups were not the only to take part in these actions. Instead it was the culmination of a fierce power rivalry that had occurred in the unhealthy, stifling environment of destructive authoritarian rule. In this atmosphere it was easy to see how the HMI would be drawn into a coalition organization known as KAMI, which would be pivotal in allying with conservatives in the army to instigate the street disruptions that would be the beginning of Sukarno's end.¹¹²

However, out of this darkness would emerge some of the most prominent pro-democracy supporters of modern Indonesia. As Hefner points out, these men and women became known as the "generation of '66" and would later use their experience with open debate and political activism to become prominent journalists, artists, and legal rights activists.¹¹³ Thus, civil Islam transcended these dark days to rejuvenate its tolerant, pluralistic tendency. When faced with its first major crossroads, Islamic civil organizations by-and-large chose to expunge themselves of their authoritarian tendencies

¹¹¹ Hefner 2000, 72.

¹¹² Also important in the effort to overthrow Sukarno was Persami, the Union of Muslim Scholars

¹¹³ Hefner 2000, 86.

to renew their push for democracy. This would not be the last time the community in Indonesia would face such a crossroads, but it was the beginning of a consistent pattern of choosing democracy and pluralism when faced with competing discourses.

Thus, out of the maelstrom of the 60s, a legitimate movement of Muslim democratic renewal emerged in Indonesia. The Muslims had felt they would have a large role to play in the new regime they had helped to install, but instead Soeharto developed a strict policy of combining severe controls on political Islam with guarded support for Islamic spirituality during the first five years of his rule. This policy was bred from a conflict with NU over the role it felt Islam and the shariah should play in the New Order. This led to an open confrontation with Soeharto over the Jakarta Charter and the nature of a *Pancasila* state. The conflict eventually culminated in the refusal by NU of a government proposal in 1967 that would have allowed 20% of the deputies to the parliament to be appointed by the government. Although their protests had little effect on Soeharto, they effectively turned NU into the harshest critic of the government by the 1970s.

In addition, the policy of severely controlling political Islam had the effect of promoting depoliticized forms of Islam and helped it to penetrate into all corners of society. This growth in the breadth of Islam's reach also opened the door to more diversity within Islamic civil groups. The organizations were then able to serve as centers for frank discussions of politics and public morality, which had been marginalized from the political arena through the strict control of Soeharto. The modernists Muslims sensed Soeharto's opposition, Hefner argues, to their political return and instead engaged in an

ambitious program of religious predication or *dakwah*.¹¹⁴ This decision split the community along both generational and ideological lines, where conservative, elder modernists chose to pursue a policy of principled non-cooperation with the regime while the younger modernists pursued a path of constructive engagement and societal reform. For the older generation, their retreat into civil society was separated from the political arena that was increasingly hostile to their views. Yet, the younger generation felt that civil development should have the goal of regaining an effective political voice. In their view, focusing on social welfare and education would invoke political progress toward democracy.

The ultimate result of this was a diversification in Islamic thought that contributed to a newfound confidence in experimenting with new initiatives. As economic success led to the growth of a middle class, the rise of what became known as “Muslim intellectuals” also contributed to the increasingly sophisticated nature of the Islamic debate in Indonesia. These individuals were heavily influenced by Western socialism and their secular educations, but combined this knowledge with a firm commitment to Islam. The distance of these intellectuals and other Muslims from the government enabled them to speak more freely than some of their counterparts. Working through discussion groups in large urban areas, they rejected mass politics and sought to address modern concerns in relation to Islam. The leader most associated with this movement was Nurcholish Madjid, who chose to deal intellectually with the issue of secularism versus secularization. He argued that Islamic learning had to be revived and separated from man-made deviations that had been unnaturally imposed upon it. His conclusion was that an Islamic state was not prescribed in either the Quran or the Sunnah, but had later been

¹¹⁴ Hefner 2000, 95.

added to Islamic legal doctrine. In his opinion, it was these sorts of perversions which were holding the Islamic community back from competing with modern groups in Indonesia. For him and other Muslim intellectuals, moral and cultural development was fundamental to political or economic ends. Therefore, they provided yet another impetus for Muslims to move increasingly out of formal politics and into social and educational activities. Hefner argues, that this movement critically contributed to a giant leap forward in the social and intellectual vitality of the Muslim community from 1978-1988.¹¹⁵

Thus in trying to create a compliant Islam, Soeharto encouraged pro-democracy elements within Islam that would later play a large role in his ousting. Even as he repressed Muslim political initiatives, Soeharto made concessions to NU and other Muslim organizations on matters of religious education. The sheer amount of New Order subsidies to religious programs was unprecedented in Indonesia. This coincided with economic growth and educational expansion so that more Muslims were receiving formal education in their religion at a time when a global resurgence of Islam was engulfing the region. Many Indonesians were able to turn to Islam for answers to the pressures they faced under modernity, pressures that an authoritarian regime couldn't compensate for within its rigid discourse. As Howard Federspiel examines extensively in his field studies, these Muslims developed a sophisticated Islamic discourse through their activities in Indonesian civil associations that addressed not only morality, but also economics, politics, social welfare, and many other prominent issues of modernity. The focus of these efforts, he argues, was the promotion of "development and the Islamic role in society in general...primarily they believed that development must be controlled by a

¹¹⁵ Hefner 2000, 119.

set of absolute standards to guarantee that modernization will be for the real good of humankind.”¹¹⁶ In addition, the global resurgence also led to an increase in *santri* practices and conversions to Islam by those whose religious beliefs were now outlawed by Soeharto’s strict implementation of Pancasila.

The pressures of the Islamic revival became so great that in the late-80s, Soeharto began to court moderate Muslims by “greening” his policy. This included establishing an Islamic bank, expanding the authority of Muslim courts, ending the prohibition against wearing the veil in schools, expanding Muslim programming on television, further increasing funding for Islamic schools, and appointing armed forces leaders that were sympathetic to conservative Islam. Yet, he still did not allow Muslim voices that were too critical or democratic to participate in government. Hefner calls this an attempt to create a regimist Islam, rather than his previous plan that encouraged civil Islam.¹¹⁷

However, the Muslim community resisted Soeharto’s attempt to transform its movement into a pillar of support for his authoritarian regime. It is during this time that the truly deep-rooted nature of democratic and pluralistic civil Islam in Indonesia began to shine through. The proliferation of Muslim organizations and the rise of Muslim intellectuals during the 80s had given the community a new sense of identity and confidence in their cause. Now in the 90s, many were increasingly sure that their calls for representation in government would be heeded. Perhaps this was most evident in the booming urban areas where universities had become a bastion for Muslim student groups that rejected both the scholastic arguments of the ulama and the harshly exclusivist style of the modernists. They wore relaxed clothing and interacted across sexual boundaries,

¹¹⁶ Howard Federspiel. Indonesia in Transition: Muslim Intellectuals and National Development. (NOVA Science Publishers, Inc. Huntington, New York: 1998) 19.

¹¹⁷ Hefner 2000, 129.

while still adhering to Muslim morality and devotion. Most importantly though, they continued to develop the civil Islamic movement through social and cultural events, as well as programs to help the poor in their communities. These actions effectively spread the movement throughout the urban poor and middle class, extending Muslim authority far beyond the traditional ulama.

It was in fact this popularization that forced Soeharto to finally “play the Muslim card” in an attempt to silence increasing criticism of his authoritarian ways. He feared that Muslim democrats were increasingly allying themselves with non-Muslim reformers, in a move that could threaten his legitimacy, thus he sought to cultivate alliances with the ultraconservative ulama that were more receptive to his advances and more conservative in their assessment of his regime. Through the ICMI, ultraconservative Muslims were gradually given more prominence in the New Order.

The effect was devastating for the rich, pluralistic, and tolerant Islam that had been built around a litany of civil organizations. Suddenly, Islam was transformed from the hope that its resurgence would carry the banner of democracy to fear that it might fall prey to Soeharto’s attempt at using ethno-religious tension to block political reform. However, Soeharto would find that the moderate Muslims had succeeded in embedding themselves staunchly in civil society, becoming a force that was confident in its convictions and capable of making them a reality. By courting the ultraconservatives, he challenged the moderates from within their own movement so that they were forced to mobilize their civil power to once again invoke political change. NU under Abdurrahman Wahid became the fiercest critic of the ICMI, referring to it as a sectarian movement seeking to re-confessionalize politics and society. This came at great cost to the Islamic

scholar and cleric whose character was viciously attacked by Soeharto and his cronies, especially as he grew closer to the democratic opposition led by Megawati. Greg Barton tells of one such incidence at a 1995 rally in his biography of Wahid, which is said to be one of Wahid's favorite recollections from this dark time:

“General Syarwan Hamid was present. At one point in a botched attempt at intimidation, Syarwan got up to address the audience. ‘I am deeply worried about this apparent alliance with Gus Dur and Megawati,’ he said. ‘It is not a good thing at all, it’s bad for society—it’s destabilizing and destructive. They think they are in the Phillipines—it is as if Megawati is Cory Aquino and Gus Dur is Cardinal Sin—who do these people think they are!’ To which Abdurrahman replied: “Well Syarwan, if Mbak Mega is Cory Aquino and I am Cardinal Jamie Sin, then who is Ferdinand Marcos?!” At which point Syarwan got up to leave the auditorium and the audience began chiming in: “Ya Wan, Wan, who is Ferdinand Marcos Wan!”¹¹⁸

Others would come much later to heed Wahid's call, waiting as Hefner describes, until the mid-90s to recognize the dangerous tilt that Islam was taking by being incorporated into the Soeharto regime. As he states, the closing of three major newspapers in 1994 that were critical of Habibie's actions, led some to realize that the hope they saw in allowing a larger role for Islam within the state could not be realized in a truly Muslim manner under dictatorship.¹¹⁹ The battle between these opposing groups and the reinvigoration of the

¹¹⁸ Gregg Barton. Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President. (University of Hawaii, Honolulu: 2002) 213.

¹¹⁹ Robert Hefner “Islam and Democratization in Indonesia” in Islam in the Era of Nation–States. (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu: 1997) 114-5.

democratic, Islamic opposition, spawned from the recognition that their most sacred trust was being hijacked.

Thus, civil Islamic groups were in an ideal position by the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis to play a major role in Soeharto's overthrow. The commitment of the two largest organizations to democratic proceduralism, along with their historical criticism of Soeharto's regimist Islam, made them prime candidates to lead the massive street demonstrations that would finally loosen the iron grip of a long-standing dictator. Although Wahid had been speaking out against Soeharto for some time, it was Amien from the modernists who led many of the street demonstrations and became one of the first public figures to call for Soeharto's resignation. Thus, on the eve of Soeharto's downfall, the powers of civil Islam were aligned for transformation.

These same groups continue to play a vital role in the furtherance of democracy within Indonesia through their intellectual and spiritual support for a pluralistic polity. As Mohammad Fajrul Fallaakh notes, the NU continues to engage in a process that seeks to "transform its classical religious discourse by expounding and emphasizing its democratic elements." This includes efforts to engage the world community in religious dialogue, install civil virtues within Indonesian society, promote education, and strengthen respect for civil and political rights that protects vulnerable groups within society.¹²⁰ Likewise, the largest modernist Muslim group, the Muhammadiyah, also supports "community development as the basis of [its] organizational activities." These activities are designed, according to M. Amin Abdullah, to "empower society and to

¹²⁰ Mohammad Fajrul Falaakh. "Nahdlatul Ulama and Civil Society in Indonesia" in Islam and Civil Society in Southeast Asia, ed. Nakamura Mitsuo, Sharon Siddique, and Omar Farouk Bajunid. (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: 2001) 39.

promote community development” and are focused on a social and cultural progress.¹²¹

These two organizations, as the largest Muslim civil associations in Indonesia with extensive networks reaching into all levels of society, will obviously play a key role in the development of civil Islam in the future. Although they now face many challenges in seeking a political voice in the new democratic arena, both groups have remained committed to their civil obligations and the preservation of a tolerant, pluralistic Indonesia.

My historical account of the role of civil Islam in Indonesia has touched on the strains that have contributed fundamentally to the process of democratization. However, that is not to say that all Muslim civil groups shared the aspirations of these groups. On the contrary, many Muslim civil groups advocated an Islamic state and some even organized into armed resistance of the regime, not because it was despotic but because it was secular. Groups such as the Indonesian Council for Islamic Predication (DDII) and its splinter group the KISDI used their status as civil organizations to try and foster anti-Western, pro-Islamicist sentiment during the Soeharto years. However, when allowed to compete with other Islamic organizations, these groups failed to win the mass popular support that was enjoyed by either the Muhammadiyah or Nahdlatul Ulama. In fact, if such hard-line groups were absent from the scene in Indonesia then there would indeed be a lack of liberality and a degree of suppression, for even in the United States it can be seen that freedom often allows some voices to be raised that the majority of the population would like to suppress. The nature of democracy allows for this competition of differing views, and only when it is allowed, can the voice of radicals be truly

¹²¹ M.Amin Abdullah. “Muhammadiyah’s Experience in Promoting Civil Society” in Islam and Civil Society in Southeast Asia ed. Nakamura Mitsuo, Sharon Siddique, and Omar Farouk Bajunid. (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: 2001) 45.

undermined. Thus, in a sense, all the voices of civil Islam in Indonesia are a positive sign of its democratic transformation. Overwhelmingly, the voices which have historically gained prominence in civil Islam in Indonesia have been those which appealed to the democratic tenants of Islamic precepts. These voices are critical, because the development of civil society can check the power of a strong state and gives people the tools they need to enforce their will on reluctant governments.

Clearly then civil Islam in Indonesia has played a vital role in the state's progress toward democracy. Contrary to common Western thinking about Islam, Muslim countries are often undemocratic not because they are Islamic, but because the rich pluralistic and tolerant traditions that Islam can lend to democratic movements is stifled under the weight of illegitimate, secular rulers who cling to power on the remnants of a colonial past. Soeharto was one such dictator, and it was civil Islam and the global revivalism of Islam that helped to bring him down, not propped him up. So contrary to popular academic belief, Islam is only a source for authoritarianism when its tolerant tendencies are suppressed, whether by the heavy hand of the state, Western condemnation, or other such circumstances. As Indonesia's experience so clearly illustrates, Islam and Islamism can indeed be an impetus for democracy and change. Thus, it is up to Western academics and politicians to re-examine their monolithic approach to Islam as a civil force calling for political change. Islamic revivalism does not need to be made synonymous with Islamic fundamentalism. However, continued suppression of a fundamental source of identity for a large segment of the population in an unstable, globalizing world, is creating a dire situation with potentially explosive consequences. As noted Islamic peace scholar Abdul Aziz Said often states in his writings, "Islam is tolerant and pluralist when

it is strong and confident, but reactionary and oppressive when it is weak and unsure."¹²²

Like all the great religions of the world, Islam has many precepts for both authoritarianism and democracy. The authoritarian strain has won the 20th century in some places, and now the question remains: what precepts will dictate the 21st? In Indonesia at least, it seems that the majority of groups have used Islam to speak for democracy.

¹²² Abdul Aziz Said, "Islamic Approaches to Peace and Conflict Resolution," in Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: Precept and Practice, 2001, pp. 19. or for similar statements see Paul Salem, Conflict Resolution in the Arab World.

Chapter 4

Nigeria: Islamism in a Divided Nation

The recent global headlines over the move to institutionalize and uniformly apply sharia law to Muslims in the northern states of Nigeria, have raised the ire of many Western scholars, missionaries, and diplomats. However, upon close examination of the recent occurrences in West Africa's most populous country, the rise of Islamism among the Hausa-Fulani is less a matter of Muslim revivalism or anti-Christian sentiment, and more representative of a battle in a lengthy war *between* the Muslims in present-day Nigeria over who has the legitimate authority to define what Islam is and how it should be practiced. Furthermore, the highly visible conflicts that occur between the various religious groups in Nigeria have far more varied underlying causes than simplistic attributions to religious difference begin to illuminate. Thus, for Nigeria, the issue of Islamism within the Muslim community is a complex issue that has been made even more murky by the social complexity of the state itself.

In this chapter, I argue that the current preoccupation with the implications of *shari'a* law in Nigeria is in fact most profound within the Muslim community. While violent clashes between Muslims and Christians provoke national headlines, fierce battles rage within Nigerian Muslim groups over who holds legitimate authority to interpret the Qur'an and dictate appropriate Islamic conduct. Secondly, I hold that what appear superficially to be cases of inter-religious strife are actually complex battles over the distribution of economic and political rights that ultimately have much more to do with state ineptitude, elite manipulation, economic disintegration, and globalization than with real matters of religious difference between the Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Thus,

it is these two more covert battles which truly challenge the viability of the Muslim community in Nigeria and its prospects for constructive interaction with the non-Muslim and minority groups it cohabitates with.

In making this argument, the first section of the chapter will briefly address the historical legacy of Islam's introduction into the Hausa-Fulani communities as well as its most common expressions within the context of northern Nigeria. In so doing, I will attempt to illuminate the nature of the current ideological conflict that is raging within this community and its possible outcomes. The second section will draw upon this information to analyze the parameters of the superficial context of religious strife in present-day Nigeria. I will attempt to draw out the underlying tensions that provoke violence between religious groups, making them an easy target for elite manipulation and civil mayhem. Finally, in the last section of the paper, I will use these assertions to illuminate the larger significance of the Nigerian dilemma in relation to current global intellectual trends. Acting as the conclusion, this section will focus on the importance of approaching conflicts in Nigeria and elsewhere from an intellectual paradigm that goes beyond simple religious explanations for complex conflicts within groups and between constructed identities.

The Historical Legacy of Islam in Nigeria and Recognition of the Intra-Muslim Debate

Without going into minute details regarding the spread of Islam in present-day Nigeria, it is central to the argument of this paper to have a minimal understanding of how Islam has been applied to the local cultural context of the region. Furthermore, in order to ascertain why the conflict over the application of shari'a law has been so profound, it is necessary to have a firm historical grounding in who the contestants in the struggle over Islamic practices are and what they are fighting for.

As in Southeast Asia, Islam first came to the Hausa via merchant traders, traveling Sufis, and Muslim scholars. Originally this contact was predominantly commercial as North African Muslim traders in the eighth century sought to extend their trade routes from the Arab Middle East to Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the Hausa did not immediately take to the idea of universalistic monotheism, preferring instead to maintain their indigenous pagan beliefs. For this reason, the spread of Islam in the Hausa community resembled its spread in Southeast Asia, taking root first among the political and economic elites who had finite reasons for at least nominally adopting the new faith. As in Indonesia and Malaysia, these converts were favored over their non-Muslim counterparts in neighboring city-states by the North and West African Muslim traders. According to historian Mervyn Hiskett, these traders were not Arabs and came to the Hausa area in search of new markets for the burgeoning inter-African slave trade. Often this meant that Muslim city-states would outstrip the surrounding communities, whose rulers and merchants would quickly be hard-pressed not to set aside some of their previous practices in favor of Islamic worship.¹²³

Ultimately, this gradual conversion to Islam and its encapsulation within the boundaries of competing Hausa kingdoms led to extremely diverse Islamic practices within the Muslim communities which now make up modern-day Nigeria. Even the coming of the Fulani jihad in the early nineteenth century failed in its adroit effort to reform the Hausa communities along more orthodox Islamic lines, witnessed in the prevalence of *bori* cults well into the twenty-first century.¹²⁴ In fact, Don Fodio's

¹²³ Mervyn Hiskett. "Northern Nigeria," p287. For further information see Lapidus, *The History of Islamic Societies*, pp 400-449.

¹²⁴ For more information on these cult practices and their relationship to Islam, see Coles and Mack, *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, 1991.

nineteenth century jihad is but the most visible and cited part of a historical legacy of conflict between the official religious establishment and the various Sufi orders which permeate Nigerian Hausa communities.¹²⁵ These conflicts revolve not only around religious matters, but have long used the application of religious law as a symbol for the rectification of real economic and political grievances. In fact, as Allan Christelow notes in his extensive research into Islamic law in the Hausa communities, two recurring themes historically stand out clearly despite the passage of time: the use of shari'a in arguing for or against the legitimacy of rulers and the use of law to define the parameters of the Islamic community as unique from non-Muslims.¹²⁶

In congruence with this observation, Nigerian Muslims engaged in civil violence today continue to cover a broad swath of different doctrinal persuasions derived from this time period. They are the descendants of a legacy that springs from Don Fodio's jihad, which was also primarily a reform movement aimed at lax Muslims not the conversion of pagans, and was thus "ideologically less concerned with the kufr of pagans than with the kufr of those Muslims who opposed jihad."¹²⁷ This observation contests the idea that the current Muslim revivalism which draws so heavily upon the Don Fodio legacy is primarily concerned with the encroachment of other sectarian Nigerian groups on its traditional sources of power. Instead, by historicizing and localizing the nature of the emerging conflict, it slowly becomes clear that far more is at play in the recent violence

¹²⁵ A detailed account from don Fodio's perspective of this conflict between the official religious establishment and his own reformist Sufi background is beyond the scope of this work, but can be found in Robert Collins *Western African History*, pp62-70. Furthermore, this volume contains a response from another local Sheikh to don Fodio's campaign that reveals the extent of the inter-Sufi conflict at the time and the prevalence of non-religious concerns in the drive to jihad, pp70-72.

¹²⁶ Allan Christelow, p379.

¹²⁷ Murray Last 1979, p273.

than the conceptualization of average Nigerian Hausa as members of a broader global Islamic revival.

Furthermore, the current division of the Muslim community into smaller political units is not a historical anomaly; for the Sokoto Caliphate was never the united, uncontested Muslim polity that scholarly mythmaking has made it into. In reality, after its founding, “growing discontent...led to resistance and rebellion. The discontented withdrew to distant regions and erected a number of rebel enclaves far away from the immediate control of the center at Sokoto.”¹²⁸ Out of these enclaves and through the work of al-Hajj ‘Umar Tal al-Futi within the Sokoto Caliphate, the legitimacy of the official state relationship with the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood was undermined as larger numbers of Hausa began to identify with the new Tijaniyya tariqah. The implications for this rivalry were both religious and political, with both sides engaging in intellectual and physical warfare in order to show the supremacy of their doctrine.

The fact that this inheritance of contested versions of Islam is still predominant in Hausa societies today is perhaps nowhere more vividly evidenced than in the constantly recurring intellectual pieces published among the Hausa that fervently debate the possibility that the great Hausa leader and Don Fodio’s descendant Muhammad Bello might have changed his allegiances in his dying days from the Qadiriya tariqah to the other major Sufi following in Nigeria, the Tijaniyya.¹²⁹ The ferocity of this debate, as well as the continuous alignments of various religious scholars with the different schools

¹²⁸ Roman Loiemeir 1997, p12.

¹²⁹ This debate has been so intense that it is even taken up by many Western scholars in their works on the Hausa, one such rendition can be found in John Paden’s *Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto* and a detailed look of the debate is articulated in Murray Last 1967, pp215-230.

is a clear indication of how important these divisions have been and still are in Nigeria.¹³⁰ These divisions also play a role in the debate surrounding the application of shari'a law, which is itself hotly contested among Muslim intellectuals from various backgrounds, as witnessed in the recent debates published over the sentencing of Safiya Hussaini to death for adultery.¹³¹ Thus, to stipulate that the Hausa Muslims in Nigeria are somehow a homogenous, united entity capable of defining a coherent set of objectives in regards to their own governorship--much less the larger Nigerian community-- is simply an intellectually-constructed mirage that belies the true and long-contested diversity that is prevalent within the Muslim community.

Although merely a vignette of the history of Islam among the Hausa in Nigeria, this background sets the stage for the modern conflicts which are raging between the official religious establishment, the leaders of various Sufi orders and a preponderance of unofficial, localized Muslim leaders that some have referred to as the new religious elite. The conflict in fact encompasses genuine religious concerns over fundamentalist versus syncretic forms of worship as well as secular competitions over access to scarce political and economic resources.¹³² Like its predecessors, the conflict has often turned violent and created a spill-over into clashes with other non-Muslim local groups; yet the primary

¹³⁰ A full historical discussion of this debate between the Tijaniyaa and Qadiriya in Nigeria is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the two orders have presented vastly different political proclivities throughout the last few centuries in Hausaland, with the Tijaniya usually representing the more anti-establishment opposition group regardless of whether the protest was against Qadiriya domination or the imposition of British colonial rule. For a full discussion see Tahir 1975 or Loiemeir 1997, pp12-17.

¹³¹ There are many articles of this nature that were published in local Nigerian papers between religious leaders, but one that can easily be accessed is Ibraheem Waziri "Shari'a and the Practicalization of Ideological Postulates: Between Sanusi and the Rest of Us."

¹³² The term fundamentalist here is not used in the common form as intimating some type of violent resurgent religious movement. Instead, I use it merely to articulate the leanings of those Muslims in Nigeria who profess a return to the fundamental texts of Islamic worship and scholarship. Furthermore, this comparison is not meant to construct a strict dichotomy between those with more fundamentalist leanings and those who are most syncretic in orientation. Rather my use of the word *more* here is stressed to present the image of a kaleidoscope of different opinions among the Muslim Hausa in Nigeria with varying shades of each in all positions.

focus of the tension is control over intra-religious authority rather than Muslim determination to dominate other groups.¹³³ As correctly articulated by Jeff Haynes, the addition of the shari'a into this debate has been perpetuated in part because it can act as a sort of "ideological tabula rasa" whereby a variety of leaders can hold up the code in the midst of "universal faith that the introduction of the Sharia law will produce a just society" without actually committing to the specifics of any given plan for reforming Nigeria's economic woes.¹³⁴

The reality of this statement is very evident upon examination of the recent Nigerian conflicts, yet the majority of scholars willingly choose to overlook the intellectual complexity of dealing with such an assertion in order to address flashier and more easily explained conflicts between the Muslims and Christians in Nigeria over the application of the shari'a. The vast majority of scholarly work even among those who present genuinely informed critiques of the situation is devoted to the inter-religious dimension of the violence. A primary example of this misguided phenomenon is Jan Boer's recent series on Nigeria's "religious" street riots, whose sole purpose is to present theological reasons for reconciliation between the Nigerian Muslims and Christians. However, his arguments are all buttressed by reference to particular writings by northern Muslims who are highly controversial figures *within* the Muslim community. His analysis belies the fact that he has failed to grasp even the major divisions that exist within the northern Islamic communities, so that he has fallen into the reductionist trap of those who participate in the street riots claiming that they are fighting on behalf of all Muslims against all Christians. The reality is that Boer, who has spent nearly two decades in

¹³³ Violent conflicts between the Hausa Muslims and their Islamic neighbors have been ongoing since the spread of Islam in West Africa. A complete history of these wars can be found in Ira Lapidus, pp416-428.

¹³⁴ Jeff Haynes 1996, p216.

Nigeria as a missionary, has chosen—whether consciously or not-- to ignore this dimension as inconsequential, because his own work reveals his familiarity with all of the necessary information for a more holistic approach to the root causes of the riots. In his rendition of the very first major riots known as the Maitatsine Riots, for example, he admits that “due to its character, it is best described as Muslim versus Muslim.”¹³⁵ Yet no further mention is made of this intra-Muslim conflict, as though it does not deserve the same sort of intellectual probing that conflicts between religions might warrant. He even goes so far as to explicitly state that “intra-Muslim riots are not the primary focus...since they do not deal directly with Christian-Muslim relations,” while simultaneously admitting that it is impossible to even approach the topic of the recent violence without touching on intra-Muslim riots.¹³⁶ The problem with this line of reasoning is that Muslim-Christian relations can not be understood without dealing with the internal convulsions of the Nigerian Muslim community. There will be no peace between Christian and Muslims until the driving impetus behind the discontent of the rioters is addressed; a problem which itself has little, if anything, to do with religion or theology at all.

Many would contest such an assumption implicitly through their presentation of the "Muslim Nigerian viewpoint," but the reality remains that this intellectual trend remonstrates back to the mirage of a united community that the fundamentalists themselves use to arouse mob violence. It is, in fact, not only Western writers who strive to minimize the importance of the debate within Muslim communities. Perhaps no one so fervently pursues such a silencing of oppositional voices as the reformist leaders of the Muslim communities themselves, whose patronized religious scholars and intellectuals

¹³⁵ Jan Boer 2003, p38.

¹³⁶ Jan Boer 2003, p38.

vigorously attempt to convince their respective audiences that they in fact represent the “one true path” to Islamic redemption. Yet despite their best efforts,¹³⁷ little has been realized in the way of Muslim-Hausa solidarity. In fact, the current era of mass inter-religious violence on the streets has coincided with equally violent clashes between Muslim religious establishments. After nearly every riot regardless of its original provocation, there is inevitably a battle waged between the young men involved, backed by their respective Muslim associations, and the official Muslim political elite, backed by their own ‘ulama organizations.¹³⁸ In fact, the period preceding the outbreak of inter-religious violence was marked by 34 violent incidents between Izala¹³⁹ and Sufi adherents, reflecting the fact that “Izala is an orthodox movement for reforming local varieties of Islam and not primarily concerned with combating Christianity.”¹⁴⁰ Likewise, actions by other major Islamic groups involved in the violence and the fight for shari’a law first occurred against Muslim targets before spilling over into Christian-Muslim violence.¹⁴¹ The situation had in fact gotten so dire in Kano during the 1980s that many described the situation as “all-out warfare between the reformists and the brotherhood traditionalists.”¹⁴²

¹³⁷ -Most admit that any real chance they may have had of realization of their goal was effectively ended with the killing of the charismatic Ahmadu Bello in 1966.

¹³⁸ This fact is prevalent even in the brief sketches of the conflicts contained in work such as Jan Boer’s. Although these accounts often skim over the tension between the various Muslim groups in their accounts, it is still easily to recognize the references to official clashes with armed guards of the governors and the young men involved in the rioting, as well as youth attacks on elite political and religious institutions in the aftermath of the violence with Christians. See Jan Boer, pp130-178.

¹³⁹ ¹³⁹ ‘Yan Izala is a reformist movement which believes itself to articulate the true version of Islam as it should be practiced in Nigeria. Although it has become very popular in Nigeria, the majority of its members are relatively young, uneducated, and under-achieving.

¹⁴⁰ The period referred to is 1978-80, Christopher Steed, p77.

¹⁴¹ Yan Tatsine, the other group responsible for much of the inter-religious violence first came to mass public attention with their attack on the central mosque in Kano that ended with the death of 4,000 people in 1980. Although the group has gone through several changes in leadership and name, the core membership has remained pretty constant.

¹⁴² See Jeff Haynes, p217

Thus, the current riots display more than simplistic references to Christian-Muslim antagonism begin to articulate, for Islam in Nigeria has in fact come to symbolize the class conflict among Hausa Muslims as “an encompassing basis for social identity with sufficient internal differentiation to articulate conflicting interests in a complex society.”¹⁴³ The fact that Yan Izala members have been involved in frequent attacks on leaders of the Sufi brotherhoods clearly displays how controversial the application of shari’a law and the proliferation of other Islamic images are within the Muslim community itself. There is little doubt that the struggle to see shari’a courts reinstated in the northern Muslim states is more symbolic than substantive in relation to other religious groups, as witnessed by the fact that the laws will only apply to Muslims themselves. However, the conflict between different Muslim groups on the application is by no means merely symbolic, for the traditional ‘ulama have utilized its reinstatement as a carrot to the increasingly vocal Muslim opposition groups who have been attacking them for corruption and incompetence. The fervency of these attacks are witnessed by the rhetoric of the new Muslim intelligentsia, who often compare the current Muslim government in the northern states to the ancient pre-jihad Hausa empires claiming that “although the government elites would call themselves ‘Muslim,’ in reality they should be regarded as representatives of a system of *jahiliyya* and therefore should be fought in a second jihad if they do not consent to establish a truly Islamic state.”¹⁴⁴

Therefore, it is quite evident in the intellectual discourses stemming from the leaders of the Islamic movements engaged in the recent street violence, that the primary concern of Islamic reformers in Nigeria is change within the Islamic community rather

¹⁴³ Ira Lapidus, p754.

¹⁴⁴ Interviews Sulaiman 9 Sept 1987, Abdullahi 5 Feb 1987, Maikarfi 5 Feb 1987, Kurawa 23 Feb 1987 quoted in Loiemeier 1997, p4.

than the domination of non-Muslims. Like the grievances from which Don Fodio's jihad sprung, Muslims in Nigeria's Hausaland today are still grappling with the role of Islam in informing and checking the excesses of political elites. Thus, conflicts between Muslims and Christians, although attention-grabbing, are really peripheral cases of violence which belie the true foci of the conflict. Although they are tragic and could seriously destabilize the fragile unity of Nigeria, they can not legitimately be projected as Muslim-Christian civil strife since they do not represent any real widespread mobilization of the Muslim community behind a set of goals which run contrary to the majority of the Christian community. As Christopher Steed and other scholars who have worked with leaders of these young Islamic movements note, they are too "preoccupied with purging Islam of Sufi influence" and official dogmatic corruption to focus their efforts on purposefully antagonizing other religious entities.¹⁴⁵

Overt Inter-Religious Tension as a Catch-All Phrase for Complex Competition among Nigeria's Various Groups

The legacy of the arbitrary colonial imposition of illegitimate boundaries is often pointed to in reference to the development of overt inter-religious and inter-ethnic tensions in Nigeria. Although the mixing of the 250-400 ethnic groups within the boundaries of the nation-state has undeniably exacerbated inter-communal conflicts, the roots of Nigeria's highly visible social strife are far more complicated than they first appear. For one, inter-religious conflict is actually a fairly new phenomenon among Nigerians. Dating back only twenty years, the rise of social mobilization based along broadly defined religious affiliations came as a shock to many Nigerian and international

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Steed, p75.

scholars, who had long held ethnicity as the overriding social cleavage in the country. Thus, the current presumption in most scholarly writing about Nigeria which holds that close contact between two major religions within one state inevitably leads to conflict should be intellectually challenged.¹⁴⁶ Questions regarding why the mobilization took twenty-five years to initiate, and whether it is in fact a religious conflict at all must be addressed within the Nigerian context if a solution to the current tension is to be found.

Upon such an examination, it becomes evident that the street battles taking place between Muslims and Christians are really not a religious matter at all. Instead, the participants and their leaders are articulating the reality of years of pent-up repression and economic disintegration under corrupt military regimes. Similar to what occurred in Malaysia during the same time frame, the traditionally dominant Hausa-Muslim north in Nigeria during the late 1960s saw a gradual erosion of their political power. Harking back to colonial times, the Muslims had seen their political power as more than a right of passage stemming from their numerical superiority over other Nigerian groups. Instead, the political influence of the Muslim north was viewed by the Hausa as a necessity for maintaining any semblance of concern for their interests at the national level, since the South clearly outstripped them economically and educationally.¹⁴⁷ The extent of the

¹⁴⁶ This is the major assumption behind most work done on Nigeria recently, with little regard paid to why conflict has occurred along religious lines. See Jan Boer, *Nigeria's Decades of Blood: 1980-2002*.

¹⁴⁷ The comparison to Malaysia's situation presents an interesting point of reference for the Nigerian situation, because of the similarities involved in the conflicts over political rights based on tangible fears of complete domination by an economically superior minority. As was the case in Malaysia, the increasing success of the Southern groups, who happened also to be different ethnically and religiously, sparked the street violence that began the current conflicts. However, at that point the similarities ended as Malaysia allayed concerns by restructuring "the bargain" between the contesting groups and engaged in a vigorous economic and educational stimulus plan aimed at closing the gap between the two groups. At least for the time being the success of the NEP seems to have calmed the situation and allowed for the creation of a stable environment for all to prosper (even the Chinese under the NEP saw economic and educational gains despite the programs codified bias toward Malays). The prescription for the problem in Nigeria, by contrast, was unfortunately a return to harsh military dictatorship and the heavy arm of the state. This policy has seemed to exacerbate the grievances of all parties involved in the conflict.

economic and educational disparity between the north and south was indeed enormous in 1960, with the number of secondary schools in the south exceeding those in the north 20 to 1 and southern university graduates numbering in the hundreds, while the north could only boast of one. This gap had “grave consequences for political competition as well as competition for socio-economic goods like employment in the public service.” Further compounding the disparities was the significant lack of modern political movements in the north, relatively less infrastructural development, and a dearth in media outlets.¹⁴⁸ In a sense then, the Hausa came to view their holding of the top political post as the “Nigerian bargain” and thus, its erosion contributed to a profound sense of loss among the northerners. Adding to this, as Roman Loimeier points out, was the gradual territorial and social erosion of the Muslim leaders in the heterogeneous Middle Belt of the country.¹⁴⁹

Ultimately, this gave credence to the proselytization of Muslim intellectuals and ‘ulama who claimed that the division of the North along various sectarian lines was going to be the downfall of the community. Yet from its outset, the religious element of this call rang largely hallow among the Hausa Muslims as they clung to their personal religious heritages and localized loyalties while realizing finite economic gains from the influx of oil money. As John Paden’s sociological work in Kano revealed in the mid 1960s, even “the attempt at charismatic religiously based leadership of Usmaniyya by Premier Ahmadu Bello was perceived in Kano as incongruous, since his real power was bureaucratic.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, even the most popular and widespread of the religious movements could not attain religious authority among the widely diverse Islamic

¹⁴⁸ Eghosa Osaghae 1998, pp5-7.

¹⁴⁹ Roman Loimeier 1997, p7-10.

¹⁵⁰ John Paden 1973, p389.

communities in northern Nigeria. Furthermore, the outbreak of the civil war that racked the country till the 1970s undermined the religious call to action, in part because most Nigerians were focused on the reunification of their country and the implications of ethno-nationalism for their future developmental prospects.

However, the reunification of the country and the “solution” to the perils of inter-ethnic warfare laid the foundations for the rise of religiously-based mobilization, namely because of the division of the formerly politically unitary North into various “states” without a subsequent redress of the economic disparities that continued to divide the country into distinct economic units. As economic conditions in the North further deteriorated in response to the global recession, finite grievances over resources and access to development funds were taken up by corrupt politicians as rallying points for religious mobilization, springing from a dual recognition of its potential for expanding their political base and avoiding accusations of guilt in siphoning off state funds for their own familial enrichment.¹⁵¹ It is no coincidence that the appearance of widespread religious violence began in the early 1980s just as world oil prices declined by 8%, with the net effect in Nigeria being the continued enjoyment of the good life by the business and political elite who were enriching their overseas coffers while the “urban poor suffered unemployment and inflation of up to 50% per year.”¹⁵²

Yet it would be remiss to paint the Nigerian Hausa merely as unwitting pawns in the power struggles of political entrepreneurs. Instead, there were real changes in the

¹⁵¹ The corruption of Nigerian politicians is no secret and for those familiar with the country it hardly requires a citation for such an observation. Since evidence abounds in every work on the extent of the corruption, suffice it to say here that in several studies done of political corruption and cronyism, Nigeria has consistently ranked in the top five internationally. See Karl Maier 2000 for a more detailed listing of Nigeria’s various corruption “dishonors.”

¹⁵² Karl Maier, p16.

situation of the Muslims in the North that directed their economic grievances and political insecurity into religious manifestations. First, the unification of the country and infrastructural improvements from oil revenue allowed for increased mobility between various Nigerian groups which had previously remained largely isolated from one another. Urbanization gradually threw larger numbers of Nigerian Christian converts and Muslims together especially in the newly created and heterogeneous Middle Belt. Even in the heartland of Muslim Hausaland, Christian communities began to appear in Muslim cities as their economic engagements brought them North. All of this occurred during a time when the lower and middle classes were experiencing a dramatic decrease in real wages under a “Structural Adjustment Plan” that they renamed “Speedily Approaching Poverty.” The situation got so bad in fact for most Nigerians that Nigeria was ranked as the thirteenth poorest country in 1991 and had one of the worst records of human deprivation in the third world with declining living wages to prove its malaise.¹⁵³ The northern states where the shari’a debate became prominent were particularly hard hit by the retreat of the state and the economic collapse, experiencing poverty rates as high as 92% living on less than \$2 a day.¹⁵⁴ Access to basic health care, government transportation services, and the social justice system was virtually non-existent in these states as a widespread return to lawlessness frightened many Nigerians away from leaving their homes.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile the traditional political and religious class remained largely unscathed, and the new immigrants lived markedly better lives than the growing numbers of impoverished Muslims.

¹⁵³ Eghosa Osaghae, p204.

¹⁵⁴ Federal Office of Statistics, Nigeria, “Poverty Profile for Nigeria 1980-1996.” April 1999.

¹⁵⁵ Interviews with many common Muslim supporters in Nigeria have brought attention the fact that Islamic shari’a courts are often the only source of justice in a virtually lawless and endemically corrupt state, see David Finkel, “Crime and Holy Punishment.”

Thus, there was significant rational support during the 1980s and 1990s for Muslim religious associations that provided important social services and a sense of community in the often alienating world of urban poverty. These associations received significant funding from the Gulf States and marked a tendency for Islam to move from “becoming a national religion...to becoming the religion of lower and middle class opposition to the dominant elites.”¹⁵⁶ Accompanying this was a significant shift in the leadership of the Muslim communities themselves, where the “most visible representatives of Islamic views” moved away from conservative northern leaders such as the Sardauna of Sokoto in favor of more socially radical young leaders like Abubakar Gumi.¹⁵⁷

Groups related to these “new religious elites,” such as Yan ‘Izala and Yan Tatsine provided an outlet for unemployed, restless youth who felt empowered by the willingness of their new spiritual leaders to listen to their concerns about exploitation, poverty, and social degradation. It is undeniable that for them there was much to be worried over, for in an economy where 96% of export revenues were tied to oil production in 1980, the crash of the 1980s had dramatic consequences on the social services provided to urbanites as basic foodstuffs and commodities were scarce. Furthermore, radical changes in the social structure of these communities, such as the larger role ascribed to women provided further emotional strain on an already tenuous situation.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the new religious organizations, which were more radical in their promotion of Islamic symbols of social justice than their traditional predecessors, remained autonomous from

¹⁵⁶ Ira Lapidus, p753.

¹⁵⁷ John Voll, p353.

¹⁵⁸ Catherine Coles, “Hausa Women’s Work in a Declining Urban Economy,” in Coles and Mack *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, pp163-190.

the disintegrating official state structure and provided both a physical and emotional outlet for the growing population of young unemployed Hausa men.

The anger that they played on over the sliding fortunes of the urban and middle classes was originally directed solely toward the political elites of the communities, drawing on the tradition of Don Fodio's jihad which used religious reform as a viable means for attacking the legitimacy of corrupt rulers. However, the historic message of the great reformer was bound to take on a different orientation when translated across the span of nearly two centuries. The fact that the Nigerian Hausa-Fulani community was no longer the sole domain of Muslim groups set the reformists on a collision course with not only the indigenous belief structures and Sufi orders this time, but also the new opposition group: the Christians. Yet, it is critical in approaching the advent of this antagonism to realize that it is only a secondary outcome of a larger phenomenon, which is the battle between the dispossessed and the elites of the Hausa Muslim societies over issues inherent to the practice of a universal faith that promotes social justice, egalitarianism, and empowerment.

Likewise, the militant Christian groups involved in the conflicts also spring from a certain subset of the larger social make-up of Christian Nigerians that has suffered particularly acute trauma in the transition to modernity. Just like the Muslim brothers they engage in street battles, they have been left behind by the failure of the nation-state to construct a viable political entity that can offer its citizens more than merely a government that exists to prey on, rather than to serve.¹⁵⁹ The reality of the failure of the state of Nigeria to do so is not contestable, with the last few years of civilian government

¹⁵⁹ Karl Maier has remarked on this widespread mentality in Nigeria, making reference to the fact that the newest Nigerian government's biggest problem is to "convince the majority of their people that the government exists to serve rather than to prey upon them," pxxviii.

being by far the exception to the rule.¹⁶⁰ Coups and countercoups, widespread corruption, and blatant mismanagement have led the largest and potentially most wealthy African nation to the brink of disaster, where the average citizen is unable to participate constructively in the political life of his country and thus turns to the streets for acknowledgement of his woes. Indeed, the recent street violence has very little to do with either Islam or Christianity. It is a universal expression of human degradation and alienation, of the desire to achieve the calling of social justice here on earth that is palpable in all three Abrahamaic traditions. Thus, long-time observers of the recent conflict acknowledge the fact that “while it may be presented in religious or ethnic terms, it is really at heart over economic resources or political power...exacerbated by current economic stagnation and joblessness” that gives rise to equally intense intra-communal clashes that never make international headlines.¹⁶¹

Therefore, addressing doctrinal differences between the two predominant monotheist traditions in Nigeria will do little to stem the riotous malaises on the streets. As in days past, the elites of Nigeria will only be able to hand out carrot sticks of symbolic gestures such as the implementation of shari’a law for so long before the disillusioned mass of the Nigerian population responds with a crackling of sticks. To avoid this tragedy, real socio-economic and political grievances will have to be addressed.

Implications of the Nigerian Experience

¹⁶⁰ In the first forty years of independence, Nigeria experienced only 10 years of civilian rule, 6 of which were during its initial transition to independence. Furthermore, the civilian governments that did reign were often more poorly managed and corrupt than some of the venal military despots.

¹⁶¹ James Wunsch, pp177-178.

In an attempt to approach the recent attention-grabbing debate over the application of Islamic law in Northern Nigeria and rising inter-religious tensions from a new analytical angle, this chapter was designed to rather briefly draw out the intense and important dialogue within the northern Nigerian Muslim community that is so often subsumed by its more visible inter-group expressions. From this analysis, it becomes evident that much of the current social tension in Nigeria is firmly rooted in a historical struggle with issues of self-identification and religious authority. Within this framework, Nigerians of all religions are fighting a desperate struggle for social, economic, and political justice that leaves them vulnerable to elite manipulation and inter-religious stratification. Although there are real issues revolving around the legitimate role of religion in Nigerian life, this debate is largely occurring within various religious communities despite its outward manifestations as a debate between them.

The multiplicity of conflicts brought out by the preceding analysis carries important implications for the way in which Islamist conflicts around the world are approached by American policy-makers and scholars. In fact, this Nigerian case study reveals the continuing prevalence in both Western and Muslim scholarship of Orientalist analytical paradigms. Nearly thirty years after Edward Said's now infamous probe into the self-perpetuating nature of such knowledge, it is clear that only the superficial roots of it have been dug up from the foundation of our knowledge about Muslim communities. Ready evidence of this is found in the fact that it is still too easy when dealing specifically with the Muslim world to allow the debate to be framed in terms of religion and inter-religious issues, despite the fact that the actual conflict has very little to do with such superficial explanations. The still pervasive image of the Muslim "other" allows this

debate to occur, while Muslim scholars themselves are drawn into its intellectual simplicity as they find themselves defending the entire Muslim world and the core of its world-view from derogatory, uninformed critiques and internal miscomprehension. The result is a simplified debate which excludes pertinent information and promotes the legitimacy of arguments put forth by those who provoke the idea of religious war in the first place. If analysis of conflicts is boiled down to reflections on religion alone, the idea that religious differences can somehow explain all human interactions is unwittingly (or not so unwittingly) perpetuated.

Therefore, it is important to draw from this short case study of Nigeria, the centrality of alternative modes of analysis that reach beyond simple pronouncements of “inter-religious strife.” In this endeavor, analysis of intra-group conflicts should not be ignored as insignificant, for they play a vital role in preserving moderate and rational calculations by their members that are less susceptible to inflammatory manipulation by self-serving elites. In such a limited space it is impossible to delve into the specifics of the Muslim conflict in any respectable matter, a realization that in and of itself speaks to the diversity of Nigerian thought on the public and private role of Islam in the lives of believers. Instead, the point of this piece was to draw out the need for such examination in any analysis of the current volatility in the streets of Nigeria, which can not merely be painted as they have been for so long as solely instances of inter-religious violence.

Examining these differences within Islamic communities is also important to the effort of revitalizing the diversity of intellectual discourses that has long-played an indispensable role in Hausa communal vitality. In fact, it is this debate which should not be relegated to the side of history in favor of overarching siege-like solidarity within

Muslim communities. The questions it presents are real matters for debate that drive at the heart of the very identification of what it means to be Muslim. Certainly they deserve to have proposed answers which challenge the ability of the Muslim communities asking them to reassert their own syncretic dynamism from within, before they seek to revolutionize from without. Pluralism and tolerance are values inherent to Islamic intellectual life, despite the contemporary tragedy that has befallen some of the Nigerian discourses in favor of broad pronouncements on minute details of religious observance and the overriding modern impetus toward homogenization of intercultural interaction.¹⁶²

Furthermore, allowing serious conflicts over the failure of the modern-state and the demographic crisis to be subsumed under the guise of inter-religious conflict in Nigeria conveniently allows the often corrupt, illegitimate, and venal leadership of its government to be relieved of their responsibility in the broader societal malaise. Adding insult to injury, these leaders now seek to manipulate pent-up and legitimate frustrations among their communities over finite economic, political, and social grievances toward the equally disillusioned and distraught members of other social groups (in many cases along religious or ethnic lines). This reactionary response conveniently avoids discussion of the real issues that could affect change in the lives of the suffering. For Nigerian Muslims, this means recognizing the fact that stealing from other impoverished or even

¹⁶² Of course, this drive toward homogenization has a modern counter-measure, but reference here is indirectly implicating the power toward homogenization occurring within modern Islamic societies due to the vast wealth disparity between most of these societies and particular states whose world-views arguably perpetuate an intra-Muslim form of cultural imperialism that rivals any claim to Western foreign domination. In the case of Nigeria, both Iran and Saudi Arabia have funded groups in opposition to the traditional political and religious elites of the country. The extent of their influence has led many observers to mistakenly classify some of the groups engaged in violence as being “Shi’a,” when in reality the actual population adhering to Shiism in Nigeria is almost non-existent. Instead, these groups affiliate themselves with Iran through financial support and what they believe to be a shared understanding of the Islamic requirement of a theocratic state. They have been heavily involved along with the Saudi-backed groups in the recent violence against other Muslims, see William Miles “Religious Pluralism in Northern Nigeria,” p220.

middle class Christians *or* Muslims isn't going to put food on the table in the long-run. Burning churches or looting stores isn't going to rectify the problems of the larger society, for the question must not be why do my neighbors seem to have more than me? But, why after over forty years of self-rule under predominantly Muslim leadership do we still not have enough to go around? In fact, most prominent Islamists are asking these questions. Conflicts between religious communities must not be allowed to subsume the broader quest for realization of ideals of social justice and human development within communities or these admirable qualities will remain surreal goals for *all* of Nigeria's 130 million citizens.¹⁶³

The implications of such a reality for the American government would be undesirable, for the role of Islamists in reforming the Nigerian state might have much to offer toward the construction of a more stable political entity in the country as a whole. Having attained the infamous title of the most corrupt regime in the world, Nigeria with its sizable oil resources, large population, and strategic location has the potential, in fact, to become a major regional engine for driving African development if it is able to put its democratically-elected institutions to work for its populace. Since the Northern region in particular has proven susceptible to corruption and lags behind the rest of the country in key economic development indicators, the introduction of legitimate, committed Islamist representatives into the formal government apparatus is vital to embarking on the larger national reconciliation of the country. As long as a corrupt, socially irresponsible traditional elite class continues to dominate Hausaland, the prospects for the Nigerian state as a whole will remain bleak. The sketch of the conflict between this group and the

¹⁶³ All statistical information used in this paper was attained from US Department Background Notes and CIA World Factbook statistics from FY 2002, unless otherwise footnoted.

new Islamist-oriented parties above indicates that there is the potential for change and moderation. Uproar over harsh sentences handed down by the new shariah courts have been mitigated by decisions to reduce the sentences by appeal, a trend that will probably continue in the near future as the predominant impetus of the main Islamist movements continues to be directed against traditional elites and government institutions, rather than radical social change.

Unlike other Muslim countries, increased American attention to the evolving situation in Nigeria could be helpful in smoothing over this process if it seeks to maintain a balance between protecting the safety of the Christian community in the country and recognizing the ability of the Islamist parties to articulate genuine grievances among the disenfranchised majority of the Northern states. Working with Islamist groups to make their voices heard through constitutional means rather than street violence could serve to tie a new generation of Muslim activists to the currently illegitimate state structures and broaden the basis of the ethical concerns they have for their community to the nation as a whole. Such development aid, which seeks to use the indigenous resources of the culture to improve the functioning of democratic institutions, would be much more effective in achieving the consolidation of the Nigerian state than hopeless ventures aimed at building more institutions that will quickly come to replicate the failures of the current ones. This does not mean that the US should condone human rights violations or capitulate to radical elements within the Hausa society, but instead that nuance is necessary as a guide in addressing a situation as complex and challenging as the unrest in northern Nigeria. American policy-makers may well find that they can not work with some groups, but these decisions should be based upon reasoned calculus of the long-term interests of the

state, rather than misinformed, knee-jerk reactions intended to protect Christian communities against "radical Islamic fundamentalists."

Chapter 5

China: Islamism, Nationalism, and the Fight for Autonomy

A precious few astute observers of recent events have lamented the reversal of US policies in Central Asia, where alliances harkening back to Cold War era diplomacy have led the US government to embrace illegitimate, military dictators in their oppression of opposition voices. Organizations that were registered just two years ago as “freedom fighters” in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, to name only a few, are now heading up the list of terrorist organizations on the State Department’s website.¹⁶⁴ Other scholars have even decried American complacency in the gross violations of human rights imposed by the Russian regime on the Chechen separatists, but all complaints have been for naught because the suppression of these groups has now been legitimized within the framework of the international war on terror. Yet, while these issues and many others remain serious sticking points for rational calculations of US foreign policy objectives, less visible and perhaps equally threatening conflicts between centralized authoritarian state regimes and opposition groups rage with little effective response by the United States government. Pre-occupied with its battles in the Middle East and Afghanistan and no longer able to criticize brutalities committed against groups with even the weakest affiliation to Islamic doctrines, the Bush administration has set America on a dangerous collision course with the “hearts and minds” of Muslim populations around the world.

Nowhere is this more evident than in China, where a group of ethnic Uyghurs in the northwest province of Xinjiang have used religious slights as a rallying point for a political, socio-cultural movement for self-determination against the central Communist

¹⁶⁴ The Islamic Front of Kyrgyzstan and the Islamic Democratic Party in Uzbekistan are two examples of the broader phenomenon of redefinition of resistance and opposition movements in Central Asia over the last two years.

regime. The ability of the Chinese government to construct their brutal suppression of this group around the legitimizing force of the global war on terror brings to light the problems of perception and rational narrowing which lie at the heart of Bush's overriding policy objective "to root out and destroy terrorism wherever it is found." Thus, this chapter seeks to draw out the larger implications of the Uyghur struggle for autonomy in Xinjiang by first addressing the construction of a Uyghur identity among the ethnic Muslim Turks in the province. This examination underlines the non-religious impetus for the current disruptions and conflicts with central authorities in Beijing by re-evaluating the way in which opposition to the government has been constructed over time. The third section will build upon this deeper understanding of the conflict, in order to address the latent biases that account for the willingness of Westerners and the media to accept the probability that the conflict is indeed religious in nature. As an indication of the subversive dangers that exist in the tendency toward mutual miscomprehension between many Muslims and Westerners, this part of the chapter will also highlight the way in which this miscomprehension could create an irrational and dangerous identity conflict between the two groups and legitimize the assertion made by fundamentalists that the West is indeed out to destroy Islam.¹⁶⁵ The fourth section will extrapolate upon the difficulties this situation creates, including the inability of the Bush administration to implement a viable, effective policy to promote America's long-term interests in the conflict because of the global war on terror. Acting as the conclusion, this section will

¹⁶⁵ The fact that this perception of East Turkestan groups as terrorist organizations in Western media exists is hardly debatable, but for the sake of this argument it is critical to understand the pervasiveness of the recent falsification of the actual struggle in various media outlets. This can clearly be seen in the repetition of ridiculous claims in the such reputable publications as the *Financial Times* which redistributed on July 6, 2003 a story from CIS news organizations a report which claimed, "terrorist Uyghur organizations led by envoys from the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous District in China stepped up noticeably their activities recently..." Accessed 1 December, 2003 from Lexis -Nexis. "Uyghur Extremists Step up Activities in Central Asian Region." *Financial Times*. 6 July, 2003.

draw together the implications of this study to show the possible dangers it presents for the long-term security of the American homeland and global peace.

The Historical Construction (or Lack Thereof) of a “Pan-Uyghur” Identity

The construction of a modern Uyghur ethnic identity is actually a fairly recent phenomenon, despite the historical legacy of a Uyghur state dating back centuries. In fact, most experts date the grouping together of the current population known as Uyghurs to the era of Soviet advisement to China on minority issues in the 1930s.¹⁶⁶ However, modern Uyghur intellectuals have attempted to tap into the legacy of the historical group known as Uyghurs to create a sense of national pride in the contemporary period despite the questionable status of their actual descent from this ancient group. For this reason, it is critical to any examination of the current parameters of the conflict in Xinjiang to understand the background of the lengthy battle for control of the province between the Chinese and the indigenous Turkic Muslims who consider it their homeland.

Reflecting on the dramatic impact that the two groups have indeed had on the construction of one another’s identity, it becomes apparent that the very concept of modern Uyghur-ness was at least partially drawn from the inherent dilemma that the group of Muslim Turks in Xinjiang presented for the security and centralization policies of the Chinese state. As noted by Katherine Palmer Kaup, the history of pre-Twentieth century China was “riddled with bloody conflicts between various minority groups and the majority Han populations...[which resulted] in the Chinese leadership allowing

¹⁶⁶ Gladney 1990; Rudelson 2003.

minorities to govern themselves in exchange for nominal tutelage to the emperor.”¹⁶⁷

The purpose of this classification was to allow groups like the Muslims in Xinjiang a sufficient modicum of self-governance that could simultaneously satisfy their desire to maintain their own unique political, cultural, social, and religious habits while still providing the central Chinese authority with the prestige and border security it felt were fundamentally necessary to its survival.

Therefore, although the Uyghurs may have been seen as loosely a part of the Chinese empire historically, no measurable sense of loyalty or duty was felt beyond the payment of traditional taxes. Certainly, no sense of citizenship or belonging to the various Chinese empires could be found among the Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, who continued to look toward local religious and political leaders for guidance in the conduct of public affairs. As Owen Lattimore observed in his travels in the area during the early twentieth century, the Muslims in Sinkiang felt “themselves to be subjects, rather than citizens, of the Chinese Republic.”¹⁶⁸ Yet their nominal incorporation into the Chinese empire and natural geographic boundaries also allowed them to construct an identity that was unique from other Turkic groups further west along the Silk Road.

Far from maintaining an easy relationship with the central Chinese authority, even during this time Uyghurs were engaging their Chinese rulers in open military conflicts to secure their own independence. One example of this virtually perpetual state of conflict occurred in the 1860s around Kashgar, which continues to be a hot-spot for Uyghur nationalism in the contemporary period. Well aware of the historical legacy of this revolt,

¹⁶⁷ Katherine Palmer Kaup, “China: Ethnic Conflict in the World’s Largest Multinational State.” in *Encyclopedia of Modern Ethnic Conflict*, Joseph R. Rudolph, ed. (Greenwood; Westport, Connecticut, 2003) p48.

¹⁶⁸ Owen Lattimore 1950, p3.

modern Uyghur intellectuals express pride over the success of its leader, Yakub Beg, and others like him, who were able to throw off the yoke of Chinese oppression. The history of this and other such conflicts with the ancient Chinese empires are used to exemplify the epic nature of the Uyghur struggle for self-rule among the population today, while simultaneously encouraging a sense of hope that finite advances can be made toward autonomy through warfare and inter-oasis unity. Thus, the ideological and intellectual framework that informed these battles with Chinese empires now lay the groundwork for modern Uyghur constructions of resistance to political domination.

For this reason, it is crucial to the argument presented by the Chinese government-- which asserts that the recent riots are religiously motivated-- to explain how the contemporary proliferation and virtual deification of Beg's image is tied to Islam. A simple look into history makes this task difficult in that it reveals clearly that although Beg and the revolt he led used religious overtones in its rallying of the local population to more unified uprisings against the Chinese regime, the movement itself remained overtly nationalist in nature in that Beg and the Khoja tribe he descended from used their traditional role as ruling elites in the area to legitimize their leadership. Furthermore, Beg's ability to solidify control and unity within the Uyghur population proved to be short-lived, lasting only a decade and never installing any sort of religious figure in a political position. In an area as heterogeneous culturally, linguistically, and religiously as Xinjiang, Beg in fact failed to instill a larger national sense of pride to rival the faith placed in local oasis identities, thus caving in any hope for the Uyghurs of staving off the advance of the great empires around them. This factionalism undid the Uyghur government even in lieu of the overwhelming religious legitimacy it was able to

garner from the conferring upon Beg by the Sultan of Istanbul the religious title of Commander of the Faithful.¹⁶⁹ Thus, even in its heyday among the Uyghurs, religion was not able to overcome the inherent factionalism apparent in the different cultural traditions of the oases. This lack of national consensus ultimately weakened the ability of the regime to defend its hostile frontiers leading to the Manchu warlords again overrunning the area in the 1870s.

The contemporary Uyghurs are able to use these brief eras of self-rule historically to bolster their claims that they have never been fully incorporated into a broader sense of Chinese identity. Further evidence of the nominal suzerainty held by the Chinese over the region during this epoch is also readily available and often used by Uyghur nationalists today in their struggles. For instance, they assert that Xinjiang was a central pivot in the “great game” fought between the British and Russian empires in the region both because of its geo-strategic location and its lack of reverence or affiliation with any form of Chinese nationalism. Scholars indeed agree with this assessment, reporting that the result of the “great game” in Xinjiang was a two hundred year oscillation in political domination over the area whereby it was only “intermittingly under Chinese influence, control, or sovereignty”¹⁷⁰ right up to the modern era.

Indeed, it is hardly debatable that the tenuous relationship between the central Chinese authorities and the Uyghurs continued well through the nationalist era and into communist rule. Under the nationalists, the Muslims in Xinjiang had in fact “continued to be nominally a province like any other province; but in actuality the tendency of governors of the province has always been to rule as independent war lords...[this

¹⁶⁹ Owen Lattimore 1950, p35.

¹⁷⁰ Owen Lattimore 1950, p5.

autonomy from the center] has carried so far that governors have conducted their own foreign relations and have treated the National Government of China almost as if it were a foreign power”¹⁷¹ During the nationalist era, the governors of Xinjiang were able to achieve so much autonomy from the center that they even maintained ties with the USSR after Chiang Kai-shek broke off relations in 1927.

Yet, paradoxically this collapse of control throughout the empire dramatically impacted Uyghur hostility toward the central Chinese government, as corrupt governors appointed by the Chinese used the opportunity to extract any surplus profits from the labors of their Muslim wards and to rule over the area as though they were personal fiefdoms. The rampant corruption and venality of these officials in fact drove the traditionally fractious Xinjiang Muslims into a unified rebel force which seriously threatened Chinese control throughout the 1930s, culminating with an independent government being set up under the title of the Eastern Turkistan Republic in Kashgar. The movement drew on the precepts of Beg’s revolt to attract others in Xinjiang to the battlefield, thus showing itself to be overwhelmingly nationalistic rather than religious in nature. As noted in Andrew Forbes work on the era, the revolt showed its true character despite the participation of religious figures in several oases when after its success “Khoja Niyas Hajji, the spiritual leader of the Uyghur forces...found himself on the periphery of the secessionist movement.”¹⁷² Yet despite its impact on a growing sense of Uyghur-ness, the movement would again be short-lived as internal dissension opened the gates for a Tungan military re-occupation to install the new Manchu governor Sheng Shih-ts’ ai.

¹⁷¹ Owen Lattimore 1950, p17

¹⁷² Andrew Forbes, p113.

Hardly discouraged by their multiple military defeats, there seemed to be no end to the determination of the Muslims in Xinjiang to attain a legitimate form of self-rule that would spare them their constant suffering under the corruption of the new Chinese governors appointed by the center. After Sheng Shih-ts'ai's departure and new policies designed to undermine their unique status within the Chinese government were implemented,¹⁷³ the group now defined as the Uyghurs rose up yet again against the administration and installed an independent government under the pseudonym of the Republic of Eastern Turkistan. This time the government that was installed in Xinjiang was not in a predominantly Uyghur area of the province and was headed by a three man council designed to represent the interests of all of Xinjiang's various ethnic groups. So strong was the determination to throw off the yoke of Chinese rule that Uyghurs often faced the Chinese military without weapons, "most armed only with hand grenades."¹⁷⁴ For the first time since the adoption of the term Uyghurs in 1934, the results of nearly a decade of common classification began to show through. As noted by Owen Lattimore at the time, "the growing use of the name Uighur is a measure of increasing national consciousness among people who for several centuries have referred to themselves only as Kashgarliks, Trufanliks, [etc.]"¹⁷⁵

Known as the Ili Rebellion by most and the Yining Affair by others (ie the Chinese), this great uprising in Xinjiang from 1944-1949 clearly sent a message to the communists upon their ascension to power that the cultural, economic, political and social rights of the Uyghurs could only be ignored with great peril by any Chinese

¹⁷³ A full discussion of these policies is beyond the scope of this paper, but can be found in Owen Lattimore 1950, pp80-91.

¹⁷⁴ Owen Lattimore, p87.

¹⁷⁵ Owen Lattimore, pp125-6.

government. The official goal of the movement in fact was absent of religious fervor, declaring its objectives to be the “establishment of freedom and democracy for the Islamic peoples of the Turks’ ancient homeland, and to oust all Chinese from the whole of Turkestan.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, in the words of Uyghur scholar Linda Benson, the movement and its antecedents can not be viewed simply as a rebellion against Chinese rule or a religious jihad, but must be classified as a “national liberation struggle.”¹⁷⁷ Evidence of this suggestion can easily be found in the pamphlets used to draw Uyghurs to the fight, which clearly utilized ethnicity and political autonomy as the foundations for military action. The most prominent of these pamphlets unambiguously begins:

“Originally Eastern Turkestan, our Motherland, was the real territory of the Turkish Race...This land is our birthright left by our brave ancestors and it is our duty and responsibility to guard this heritage. The Chinese oppressors and usurpers came to this land two hundred years ago, like savages and bandits, seizing our territory, enslaving us, making our land a colony and dishonoring our holy religion...We must not forget how our country flourished of old under the leadership of such heroes of our race...Why did the Ili uprising occur? It was because we have the right to rise up against oppression for the sake of our liberty, the happiness and prosperity of our sons, and the renaissance of our religion...Ho, fellow countrymen, Men of Faith and members of the same blood. Fear not, strengthen your hearts... ”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Linda Benson, p3.

¹⁷⁷ Linda Benson, p8,

¹⁷⁸ Translated copy of the Rebel Pamphlet originally published by the U.S. Consulate in Urumqi can be found in Benson, Appendix F, p207.

Thus, it is quite evident through this examination that the role of a shared Islamic identity among the Uyghurs historically represented only one method by which the people could be mobilized for action against the rule of the Chinese government. Far from constructing any sense of the need for a religiously led government, this historical analysis shows that the objectives of the past Uyghur movements which inform the current struggle are clearly of a secular, nationalist origin. Likewise, the fact that the current struggle between the Uyghur nationalists and the Chinese central government dates back to the very inception of Chinese rule in the area dramatically underlines the ridiculous nature of recent Chinese claims that disturbances in Xinjiang represent the response of a couple groups of radicals who have been influenced by the recent spread of international terrorist ideologies. Far from accurate, these statements are clearly contradicted by this rather brief historical analysis of the long-standing acrimony in Xinjiang political events.

The Uyghurs under Communist Rule

Consequently, it is clear that despite military failures and internal stratifications,¹⁷⁹ the sense of a pan-Uyghur identity had begun to solidify even before the ultimate CCP victory in 1949. This feeling continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, strengthening into a clearly discernable modern nationalist movement among the Muslims in Xinjiang. Although the Chinese have attempted to paint this modern struggle as religious in nature, the reality is that deep internal religious fissures continue to exist between the various Uyghur groupings to this day. In fact, two main rival Sufi brotherhoods, both Naqshbandi in origin, have competed for legitimate religious leadership of the Uyghurs to no avail. In reality, there is no unified religious emblem to

¹⁷⁹ For a more detailed account of these internal rifts, see Benson, pp163-178.

which all Uyghurs can look for inspiration, yet since their mutual classification as a distinct minority in the 1930s there has been at least a nominal idea of a shared national right to self-determination under Communist rule.

Uyghur intellectuals in fact drew on this official recognition of their uniqueness and the last writings of Sun Yat-Sen to lobby for recognition in the early days of communism for their inherent right as a community set apart from the rest of China to obtain special political, economic, social, and religious guarantees. The nationalist ideal that they constructed in their early works still informs Uyghur protests against the Central Chinese authorities, although its call to action is undeniably led in certain localities by religiously-affiliated leaders who represent legitimate authority within their particular oases. Thus, the evolution of a modern sense of nationalism and a historical legacy of struggle against Chinese domination came together under the reign of the communists to inform the resolution of a new generation of Uyghurs in their judgment of CCP legitimacy. As events unfolded, it became clear to this generation that communism in China would not translate into recognition of their historical grievances, fueling the ever strengthening determination of the Uyghurs to rid Xinjiang of Han domination once and for all.

The advent of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution were keys to this consolidation of Uyghur disgust for Communist rule, serving to create an even stronger desire among the various oases to speed up the transition to autonomy. These two epochs were indeed times of great hardship, where traditional symbols of Islam and ethnic pride that had long been revered by the Uyghurs were seriously attacked, undermined, and even destroyed. For the first time, the large numbers of Han streaming

into the region attempted to force their views upon the Uyghur communities by attacking Uyghur cultural symbols as “reactionary.”¹⁸⁰ The response was a deepening feeling among the Uyghurs of a sense of uniqueness ultimately manifesting itself in the participation of many Uyghurs in internal Chinese struggles against Mao that erupted in the 60s throughout Xinjiang

As previously stated, the Han had always remained separate in their daily lives from the Muslims they dominated in Xinjiang, thus preferring to avoid direct control over Uyghur settlements for fear that such actions would invoke rebellion. The natural result then of their new interventionist tactics created a deeper sense of urgency among the Uyghur population to be rid of the Chinese menace. Dampened and brought under control by the fall of Mao, this sort of phenomenon has recently been repeated over concerns among the Uyghurs of a new round of cultural destruction instituted by Deng Xiaoping’s modernization efforts.¹⁸¹ Journalists who have returned from Uyghur areas such as Kashgar, for example, note that the general feeling is that the new modernization policies of the Chinese government that include the destruction of old neighborhoods hearken back to the earlier days of Chinese cultural imperialism. While forced modernization of housing structures might simply mean a sad move for Han Chinese, for many of the Uyghurs it spells “the destruction of our culture.”¹⁸² The reason that these events are perceived as an attack on their unique identity is in part a remnant of the historical antagonism between the two groups, but also stems from the fact that the new places they are forced to move to are constructed as high-rise flats which do not respect Muslim

¹⁸⁰ A detailed account of these conflicts and the Uyghur position in them can be found in McMillen, pp208-215.

¹⁸¹ Personal Interviews with Uyghurs at a Washington, DC protest, 8 December, 2003.

¹⁸² Louisa Lim, “China’s Uyghurs Mourn Way of Life,” *BBC News*. 4 October, 2003. Accessed on 2 December, 2003 from <<http://news.bbc.co.uk>>.

religious traditions of having a center courtyard leading only to the sky. Thus, to separate the Uyghurs from their God is both a religious slight and a troubling sign of the possibility of renewed Chinese intrusion into the very sanctities of the closely-guarded Uyghur private sphere. Failure to understand this connection to the past makes analysis of the 90s revival of uprisings in Xinjiang impossible.

Yet, as the cultural right to self-determination was historically a major source of contention between the Han and the Uyghurs, the recent conflicts also have an added economic element to them. Since the reforms of 1979, the Uyghurs have felt the dramatic ramifications of the Han areas' agricultural and industrial output tripling theirs, leading to the current situation where over half of the counties below the abject poverty line in China are minority areas despite the fact that minorities make up only 8% of the total Chinese population.¹⁸³ Most of the wealth and industry in Xinjiang is indeed owned by a Chinese military organization known as the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps,¹⁸⁴ whose gross exploitation of local natural resources has led to the perpetuation of a common Uyghur joke that trains arrive from the east chugging "hungry, hungry, hungry" but leave chugging "full, full, full."¹⁸⁵ Jokes like this one represent the secular origins of such grievances, although a definite religious element has been added to the condemnation more recently.

Therefore, the volatile combination created by the imposition of an atheistic Communist ideology, the penetration of a foreign cultural influence into the sanctities of the Turkic homeland, and the palpable economic exploitation of their wealth for the enrichment of the Han has created what should rightly be deemed a political socio-

¹⁸³ Katherine Palmer Kaup, p49.

¹⁸⁴ Dillon, p29.

¹⁸⁵ Personal Interviews with Uyghur-Americans, December 6, 2003.

economic struggle for self-determination among some of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.¹⁸⁶

The idea that there is a parallel growth in a widely shared religious sense of Uyghur-ness, belies the true diversity in religious and cultural practices which still permeates the social fabric of Xinjiang's Uyghurs. In fact, most Uyghurs continue to practice endogamy even as they coalesce into clandestine pan-oases organizations that express a common rejection of Han rule. For this reason, although there are definite universal themes to the rebellion in Xinjiang against communist rule, it is perhaps better to classify the revolts as a series of movements against the intensification of the cultural, economic, political, and social intrusion perpetuated under communist policies of assimilation and centralization.

Yet despite the fact that the Uyghur movements have historically been and continue to be overwhelmingly dominated by nationalistic rhetoric and focused on the rectification of socio-economic grievances, to completely ignore or discredit the impact of recent Islamic religious revivalism would be an academic travesty. Indeed, the local reassertion of Islam has played a fundamental role in the cultural awakening of the Uyghurs in light of Deng Xiaoping's gradual opening of Xinjiang to the outside world. There are many reasons why such a religious revival is perceived to be challenging to the hegemony of the Chinese state, foremost among them being the idea that religious resurgence highlights the perpetuation among the Uyghurs of a strong sense of uniqueness and identification with their ethnic Turkic cousins in Central Asia. Still the Chinese state and other observers would do well to look beyond these obvious and

¹⁸⁶ It is important to note however, as the fieldwork of many researchers has revealed, that the sense of a pan-Uyghur movement against the Han Chinese is mistaken in its creation of a false sense of an agreed upon, overarching Uyghur identity. In reality, fieldwork done among the Uyghurs reveals the prevalence of conflict within the oasis communities that make the construction of a pan-Uyghur sense of identity difficult to formulate among the diverse groupings that the Chinese have marked with the name (Dillon 20; Rudelson 2003) In fact, the Uyghurs often view one another with heavy skepticism, and rarely marry outside of their own oasis even amongst intellectual classes which have left their homeland.

frequently repeated observations of the dangers of Islam's reawakening in Xinjiang to examine the underlying reasons for the general applicability of Muslim concepts to the Uyghur plight. Such an inspection correctly illustrates the function of Islam in Uyghur discourses of resistance to Chinese oppression. Far from being the sole impetus behind Uyghur discontent, Islamic precepts have instead come to play an essential role in legitimizing already existent hostilities and thus represent only one segment of a much more protracted conflict over just political leadership in Xinjiang.

The first important reason for the construction of the more prominent role of Islam in Xinjiang, is at least partially a result of having seen the best and brightest of Uyghur secular elites being co-opted by the state, imprisoned, or killed. The outcome of these communist policies have left the Uyghur communities with little public leadership outside of a handful of secret mosques and a somewhat limited intellectual class that has survived to see the gradual opening of the Chinese state. Therefore, one reason for the religious leadership of some movements and the limited infusion of Islamic doctrine into the struggle against the Han can be traced to the lack of viable alternatives in a society that has seen the greatest proportion of its leaders flee across state borders.¹⁸⁷ The remainder of the politically ambitious and intellectually gifted among the Uyghurs is usually co-opted by the Communist party through programs designed to assimilate them more closely with mainstream Han culture such as educational exchange programs at Beijing University.

Furthermore, the incorporation of Islamic appeals is particularly effective in its use--as the case has been historically--as one symbol of Chinese cultural oppression

¹⁸⁷ Rudelson 2003.

rather than a galvanizing factor in and of itself.¹⁸⁸ The gradual opening of the state and the rebuilding of mosques have come to constitute fiercely guarded foci for the Uyghurs of a larger effort at cultural revitalization after the disastrous early years under Communism. For this reason, attempts to close down mosques or arrest religious leaders have led to protests against the government in many areas throughout Xinjiang, most notably Gulja (Yining) in 1997. Although peaceful, these protests become violent when they are set upon by Chinese military and police, yet they are far from exercises in a growing assertion of religious fundamentalism. On the contrary, as many Western reporters have noticed in their work, the open violence that result from such cases only springs from a situation that is already a tinderbox where “small humiliations are inflicted constantly upon Uighur elders by brash young Chinese newcomers.”¹⁸⁹ In this sort of atmosphere, even slight reversals of the gains made by the Uighurs in the cultural arena are zealously guarded and vigorously defended when attacked.

Finally, the third set of reasons for the incorporation of religious rhetoric into the struggle over legitimate political authority in Xinjiang revolves around the preponderance of Islamic teachings on the essential equality of all of God’s creations, the importance placed on preserving the dignity of the community, and the deeply engrained calling for environmental protection in the Koran. Traditionally Islam, perhaps more so than any of the other great Abrahamaic faiths, has placed a premium on social egalitarianism that has historically been used by the disadvantaged in struggles for social justice against exploitative elites. In fact, the religion itself was born out of the economic, political, and moral morass of the ruling clan in Mecca, which had effectively forgotten its

¹⁸⁸ Personal Interview, Chairman Alim, Uyghur American Association, 3 December, 2003.

¹⁸⁹ Christian Tyler, “Terror, Revolt, and Repression in the Wild West: China’s Secret Tibet.” in *The Times (London)*. 21 August, 2003. Lexis -Nexus Database. Accessed 2 December, 2003.

responsibility to the less fortunate. The great prophet of Islam, Muhammad, brought to the suffering masses in Mecca the word of God, which explicitly stated that one of the fundamental qualities of any Muslim society had to first and foremost be social, economic, and political justice for all the members of the community. Certainly, this call reverberates with the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, who have born the brunt of extreme exploitation for over two hundred years by repressive Chinese rule.

The Koran called on Muslims to actively seek to create such a society and resist its destruction from without *or* from within when necessary. This signifies the fundamental importance of ‘jihad’ or struggle to the Muslim sense of community. Unlike in Christianity, a Muslim can not hope for moral redemption without actively taking up his communal responsibility to create the social parameters needed for personal flowering. Adding to this, a unique sense of environment is created from this heavenly rationale that is also different from its Christian forbearer in that it places a special emphasis on man’s responsibility to the land loaned to him from God. Although all that is created is available for the benefit of man, he is constantly reminded by the Koran that it is not his to destroy for he was not the one to create it. Acting as God’s viceroy on Earth, man is thus effectively called upon to defend the sanctity of both his human and natural environment when needed.

All of these central doctrines of the Islamic faith have led some to coin Islamic movements across the globe as a manifestation of the “new Left,” which has arisen among the have-nots of Muslim communities as a viable and legitimate expression of the exploitative nature of their plight. For the Uyghurs in Xinjiang this is certainly no exaggeration, for in Islam they can find the answers to all of their grievances against Han

rule. The removal of Uyghur land for Han households, the testing of nuclear weapons, repetitive over-planting of land, and the general rape of the vast resources found in the Uyghur homestead have seriously undermined the traditional relationship of the Uyghurs to their land. Depending upon its bounty for their very survival, many Uyghurs have felt that the intrusion of the Chinese government and its economic reforms are seriously challenging the viability of their communities. Therefore, some have used the ready verbiage of great Muslim caliphs such as Abu Bakar--who commanded his followers before battle to not only avoid any harm to women and children but to also not cut down a single tree or take from the land more booty than needed for their survival--to critically analyze the legitimacy of the Chinese government to rule over a Muslim population.

Far from being a solely religious matter, the Uyghur populations have thus effectively utilized the unquestionable language of Islam to express their controversial discontentment with the Communist regime. In so doing, they have given added legitimacy to their struggle among the diverse Uyghur populations and presented the only viable resistance to an exploitative, repressive system of governance. One such example of this use of Islamic precepts as a tool for resistance can be found in the 1985 protests that were held in Urumqi, which official government reports placed at 2,000 strong. These riots utilized in part Islamic doctrines on the sanctity of nature to protest continued nuclear testing and Han settlement in Xinjiang.¹⁹⁰

Similarly, the idea of egalitarianism inherent in Islamic doctrines can also be used to further criticize the new economic reforms of the Chinese government and the growing wealth disparities between the Han and Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Although many Uyghurs

¹⁹⁰ Some scholars have placed the actual participants in the street rallies much higher, given the government proclivity to play down assaults on its policies, Benson and Svanberg, p190.

were able to significantly raise their standards of living under Deng Xiaoping's government, as previously stated, the vast majority of the enormous wealth taken from the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang continues to be exported to Beijing or taken into the personal coffers of the Han who head nearly all of the industry in the area. For the Uyghur communities, this was originally overlooked because of the separation of the two communities or expressed in purely secular terms. Yet, as the economic divide has increased and cross-border connections have given the Uyghurs increased opportunities for improving their lot, the fundamental inequities of a system that overwhelmingly favors Han has become more pressing. Further incensing Uyghur dissatisfaction with this situation, is the perception that even those Uyghurs who are able to compete and overcome the obstacles set against them, such as Rabiya Kadir, are thrown in prison by the Chinese without explanation of their crimes.¹⁹¹ Islam can thus be used to inform and formalize dissatisfaction with the situation, whereby current grievances and frustrations become powerfully grounded in the overriding logic of divine right.

Yet, despite the variety in religious critiques of the Chinese government among the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, as previously asserted, the overwhelming theme of the discontent is nationalistic rather than religious in nature. Street demonstrations often led by students, such as those occurring on June 15, 1988 in Urumqi, feature the shouting of slogans such as "drive out the Hans" and "we don't want to be ethnic slaves."¹⁹²

Likewise, intellectual protests on character posters have focused on the false "formulation

¹⁹¹ Personal Interviews have displayed this frustration and feeling of oppression caused by this particular case, other indications could be seen in the recent rally outside of the Chinese Embassy in Washington, DC where several Uyghur expatriots held up signs demanding an explanation for her imprisonment. When questioned about their connection to the women, they informed the translator that they didn't know her but they felt that her situation might be a warning to other Uyghurs to not try and become too successful or ambitious. 8 December, 2003.

¹⁹² Quotes taken from newspaper clippings in China, Benson and Svanberg, p190.

that Xinjiang has been part of China since the ancient past.”¹⁹³ Thus, although it is difficult to obtain reliable information on the exact number of uprisings since their numbers have multiplied throughout the 1990s, it is reasonable to assume that the hundreds-of-years old theme of Uyghur separatism from the central Chinese state has remained consistent over the last decades. With the opening of the Central Asian Republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ethnic Turkic core of this nationalistic movement has undeniably been strengthened rather than weakened. In the words of one Uyghur nationalist:

“how can we even begin to present a religious movement against the state in China, when we don’t even know all the rules of our religion anymore? We are not even allowed to attend mosques to hear the mullahs installed in them by the Chinese government until a certain age, so what scriptures, what verses unknown to us should we be fighting for? No, this idea is ridiculous! We are fighting for the right to choose whether we want to go to mosque, these simple political guarantees to just be ourselves. In such a situation, there can be no grand scheme to set up some religious order. We just want to be Uyghurs first and then we might be able to be good Muslims too...we want justice, human justice, and if the Koran supports that why not use this to help our claim to these rights. Isn’t that what Americans do with Christianity?”¹⁹⁴

Thus, with the passion known only to the truly repressed, this young Uyghur articulates the continuation of what has been a centuries long struggle for self-determination among

¹⁹³ Quotes taken from newspaper clippings in China, Benson and Svanberg, p190.

¹⁹⁴ Phone Interview with a Uyghur graduate student who refused to identify himself for fear of retribution for even talking about the idea of an East Turkestan when he returns to China after his graduation next semester. 6 December, 2003.

the Muslims in Xinjiang. Although this movement and its manifestations in small-scale attacks on symbols of Chinese rule might appear to be remotely linked to the larger revival of religious fundamentalism, the reality is that the core of the Uyghur movement has remained overwhelmingly, undeniably nationalistic.

However, this paper is not meant to be a complete denial of the presence of connections between some national separatists in Xinjiang and religious revival movements in other Central Asian Republics. Recent arrests in Kyrgyzstan,¹⁹⁵ for example, arguably establish at least a semblance of coordination and mutual support between these groups. Yet that does not mean that the movement in Xinjiang can be classified as part and parcel of the larger “war on terror,” for any affiliation with other resistance movements in the region is obviously based predominantly on a shared sense of oppression by illegitimate rulers.

Furthermore, the groups in question have vehemently denied any affiliation with al-Qaeda operations and represent only a miniscule number of exiled Uyghurs. One such recently branded “terrorist group,” the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO) for example, has recently received published accounts of interviews with its leader in which he explains that despite the classification he holds no ill will toward the Chinese themselves for “the Chinese people are not our enemy, our problem is with the government which violates the human rights of the Uyghur people...we have not and will not be involved in any kind of terrorist action...we have been trying to solve the problem

¹⁹⁵ Key leaders of the hunted East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) have been arrested in Krygstan over the last few months. The Chinese government has used this fact and the presence of other Uyghur detainees from the recent Coalition campaign in Afghanistan to argue that the Uyghur separatist movement is tied to al-Qaeda. See “Krygz Paper Discusses Latest Events in Case of Uighur Separatist” in *Asia-Africa Intelligence Wire*. 28 July, 2003. Reprinted on the BBC website. Lexis -Nexus, Accessed 2 December, 2003.

through peaceful means.”¹⁹⁶ Yet, even assuming that his statements are false and a rag-tag bunch of free-lancers with terrorist connections does exist, they can hardly be said to represent an entire nationalist movement that has been fighting for recognition for over two hundred years. The exact role of such obscure groups in the larger Uyghur movement can best be summarized by the response of a young Uyghur who originally fled Chinese oppression through Central Asia to Europe, and finally to America where he has taken a job as a server in a restaurant:

“Who? The East Turkestan Islamic what? I don’t know anything about them, never heard the name but what I can tell you is that there is an East Turkestan. We do not fight like the other people I saw in my travels through Kashmir and Turkey, because we are patient and peace-loving, but that does not mean that we don’t exist or know our difference. We are Uyghurs and we always have been. The Chinese will either have to recognize this or kill us, but otherwise we will wait and remain separate like we have always been. We don’t talk to the Han, we don’t eat with them, we just allow them to wait with us...wait for the day when we are again free of the m, free to be who we know we are and have always been. We will wait and protest for our rights forever or they will kill all of us, but we will *never, never* be Chinese. It just isn’t possible to be born anything than what you are, and I myself am a Uyghur.”¹⁹⁷

The Uyghur Struggle through Western Eyes

¹⁹⁶ “Separatist Leader Vows to Target Chinese Government,” *The Yearbook of Experts, Authorities, and Spokespersons*. Broadcast Interview Services, 10 Nov, 2003. Lexus-Nexus Database. Accessed 24 Nov 2003.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with a young protestor at the Chinese Embassy, Washington, DC, 8 December, 2003.

Given the above examination of the conflict between the Chinese Communist government and the Uyghur nationalists, it seems rather surprising that the recent suppression of the movement for autonomy in Xinjiang has been commented on by various Western media outlets as a war against Islamic insurgency, terrorism, and religious fundamentalism. Despite the obvious interests of the Chinese government in attempting to have the conflict portrayed in this manner, the question must be asked as to why Western populations and media outlets are so willing to overlook centuries of historic struggle for self-determination by a people in order to paint black-and-white depictions of “good stable state versus bad religious radicals.” Why has the case in Tibet met with international sympathy as a “just cause” when its most prominent spokesman is also its political and religious leader? Beyond the logistics of effective organization and public campaigning, one must ask themselves whether a Uyghur Muslim cleric would evoke such reverence if he gave the exact same speech on the anniversary of September 11, 2001 at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC as the Dalai Lama did this past year.

Obviously the answer to this question is no, and the feelings which make such a response inevitable stem from the same underlying bias that is prevalent among even the best-educated and most well-trained Western scholars, making it possible for the Chinese government to manipulate the events in Xinjiang in order to implement policies of gross human rights violations on their Uyghur populations with all but a peep from the international community.¹⁹⁸ Dubbed “Orientalism” twenty-five years ago by the

¹⁹⁸ These abuses are clearly documented in the work of NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. In a report entitled “Extensive Crackdown on Uighurs to Counter ‘Terrorism’ Must Stop” (Amnesty International, 2003), Amnesty International has documented the illegitimate use by the Chinese government of the term terrorism over the last six months to detain thousands of Uighurs and execute

renowned scholar Edward Said, this underlying cultural bias perpetuates, distorts, and even creates its own system of knowledge about non-Western societies that have dramatic implications for the ability of modern Muslim and Western communities to communicate across the cultural divide. Although it would be a gross intellectual distortion to classify this perceived conflict as religious--since this is only one aspect of a multitude of different social aspects which foster the creation of personal identity in both communities--or gloss over the deep and more prominent divisions that have erupted within each of these societies, there is a growing irrational sense in both communities that there is something inherently contradictory to their own identity within the society of the "other." As has been the case in almost every major war fought in the era of modern statehood, the idea that the opposing camp is somehow antithetical to all that one's own group stands for has been on the rise within many Islamic and Western communities.

Thus, at the beginning of a new century in human history, the entire international community is faced with a definitive challenge to identify and overcome the intellectual barbarism that has kept many away from mutually enriching dialogue on both sides for far too long. In fact, there is no real divergence between the two communities or opposition in their worldviews, except those of the most dangerous kind: the ones created out of fear of the unknown. Thus, each member of the human community must recognize their personal responsibility to critically engage the information streaming in about the "other," rooting out their own internal tendency towards derogatory bias and swift

others with no protest from the global community, despite the fact that these arrests come after no documented, factual 'terrorist' acts and represent "human rights violations." Another more detailed recent report by the group entitled "China's Anti-Terrorism Legislation and Repression in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region" traces the changes in treatment of the Uighurs legally, which has also received little attention by the international community. Human Rights Watch has produced similar findings in their reports entitled "Condemning the Crackdown in Western China" (16 December, 2003) that additionally condemn recent US and UN moves to support the harsh actions in China by agreeing to label "obscure Uighur groups" such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement as terrorist.

stereotyping. Engaging every political or cultural movement for recognition in the Muslim world as stemming from religious revivalism, is a gross reduction of historic struggles waged for the simple human rights that citizens of the West hold most dear. The two groups, Western patriots and Muslim “separatists” in most cases have far more that binds them intellectually than that which should possibly divide. The challenge is to identify those issues of mutual concern by wiping clean the fogged lenses of mutual miscomprehension. Like it or not, in the words of one Uyghur, “whether the US betrays us or not, we [Muslims fighting for our political rights] always come back to them. If we can not turn to the West, to where should we go for help? Who will hear our cries?”¹⁹⁹

Therefore, citizens of the West when approaching conflicts such as those occurring in Xinjiang must begin to ask themselves fundamental questions about modern definitions of the appropriate use of force. If all can agree that the targeting of civilians and non-combatants for the purpose of instituting general fear among a populace is indeed terrorism, then not just the actions of a small band of Muslim separatists over the last few months can be deemed terrorism. The Chinese government, as well as many other governments around the world who are viewed as occupation forces by the populations they have sought to dominate,²⁰⁰ has engaged in brutal acts of terror which have resulted in much higher casualties than those produced by the so-called “religious right.” Thus, if we are to combat terrorism in the modern world, we must also seek to combat the repressive state terrorism which drives increasingly large numbers of unemployed, hopeless youth into the awaiting arms of social ferment. Without this dual battle then there is in effect no war on terrorism at all, for the two forms of modern terror

¹⁹⁹ Personal Interview at a December 8, 2003 protest in front of the Chinese Embassy in Washington, DC.

²⁰⁰ The Turkish military could undoubtedly head up the list of terrorist states for its actions in Kurdistan, for example.

are intimately and irrevocably intertwined. Setting this agenda is the challenge for transformative, responsible leaders across the globe, which brings this analysis to the implications of what is occurring in Xinjiang for the foreign policy of the American government.

Larger Implications for America's Response to the Plight of the Uyghurs

Many have touted recent speeches given by the President of the United States, George W. Bush, as harkening in a new era in American foreign policy, whereby friend and foe alike will be subject to just scrutiny in their efforts to implement democratic governance and respect basic human rights. Although this would seem to be the necessary prescription to the two forms of terrorism described above, the reality of the “new” American foreign policy is far from such a laudable goal. In fact, the astute listener with any experience in the Middle East would undoubtedly have noticed that it is not a great distance to travel from Tehran to Damascus, and thus be left wondering whether any significant change has occurred in the framework for setting American policy objectives in the 21st century.²⁰¹ Actions in Central Asia seem to belie that the opposite is actually the case, with the US government reverting to the same Cold War-style power politics that created the reprehensible syndrome of “blowback” that America seems to have learned precious little from since 9/11.

Yet, as the examination of the conflict between the Uyghurs and the Chinese Communist state in this paper reflects, many nationalists in Muslim communities

²⁰¹ The reference here is to recent speeches made by Bush which have created a buzz in the media and political pundit circles about a new frame of reference for American foreign policy that specifically stated that the policy in Iraq was meant to place all corrupt regimes on notice, “from Tehran to Damascus,” that their time for brutal repression and economic exploitation of their societies was over. Yet, if the Muslim world’s dictators were indeed the target of such a threat, one might legitimately question why the President did not say from Karachi to Rabat.

throughout the world continue to place their hopes and dreams on official American recognition of their cause. For the Uyghurs, the recent actions by the Bush administration have seemed to imply that no such concern shall be forthcoming. Anxious to set aside “sticky” issues like human rights abuses in order to make progress on trade issues and more public cases of injustice, the Bush administration and the UN have recently begun referring to some obscure religiously based movements among East Turkestan exiles as terrorist organizations.²⁰² Given the fact that reports issued from the region have increasingly dubbed any group using the name East Turkistan as “terrorist Uyghur organizations led by envoys from the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous District of China”²⁰³ and the creation of a five member Shanghai Cooperation Organization explicitly designed to combat “terrorist groups” in Central Asia, American waffling appears to be an ominous sign of impending genocide to many in the Uyghur population. The fear that America will continue to remain silent if such actions are taken, has led many to worry that Xinjiang may soon evolve into China’s Chechnya, even amongst more liberal Chinese themselves.²⁰⁴

The fact that the failure to clarify the parameters of the American led “global war on terror” is responsible for creating such a situation is clear. Attempting to evade further criticism of its own ambiguous position on the matter, the State Department has even

²⁰² One such example is the previously mentioned East Turkestan Islamic Movement, which the US government in several State Department Press Briefings has identified as being terrorist-related. This contrasts with previous statements made by State Department Spokesman Boucher who in a January 22, 2002 interview marked a notable change in US policy toward the Uyghur movements by implying that they might be part of the larger war on terror. A full transcript of the interview can be found by accessing the State Department’s daily press records on the aforementioned date on their website. Reports on the recent UN and US classification of Uighur groups as terrorism, and the implied support for Chinese actions that entails can be found on the homepage of Human Rights Watch
<<http://www.hrw.org/editorials/2002/china1216.htm>>.

²⁰³ “Uyghur Extremists Step up Activities...” *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Many Chinese have expressed a fear the Xinjiang may become like Kosovo or Kashmir for them, see previously cited (29) article by Christian Tyler, “Terror, Revolt, and Repression in the Wild West: China’s Secret Tibet.”

been forced to change the language of reporters' questions at press briefings in regard to events in Xinjiang. In the first major press briefing after September 11, 2001, for example the following exchange left many reeling on the sudden change in US policy:

“Question: The Chinese government issued a statement linking East Turkestan to terrorism activities in China. Does the US agree with this new classification?

Answer (Spokesman Boucher): What did you call it? East Turkestan?

Question: East Turkestan

Answer: Who uses that name? The Xinjiang separatists?...China and the US have both been victims of terrorist violence and face a threat from international terrorism. We certainly value our counter-terrorism cooperation with China and we oppose terrorist violence in Xinjiang.”²⁰⁵

Thus, scrambling for some semblance of international support for its recent “pre-emptive strikes,” the Bush administration has fallen into a dangerous diplomatic trap that could have long-term implications for the safety of the American homeland. Creating a sense that oppression and even genocidal tendencies against Muslims in many hotspots around the world is justified in the American worldview, adds fuel to an already raging fire of discontent with US-led leadership in the Muslim world. Supporting the claims of the most radical elements in these societies, the voices of Muslims who have traditionally proclaimed themselves “natural allies”²⁰⁶ of the American government are increasingly silenced, confused, betrayed, and isolated. Many have been left to wonder whether any

²⁰⁵ State Department Press Briefing, 22 January, 2003.

²⁰⁶ Ironically enough, this phrase appears on many Kurdish websites as well as the Uyghur American Association website, two groups which have historically felt the goals of their nationalist struggles to be in line with American ideals. The Kurds have undeniably suffered from such optimism, and it is beginning to appear that the Uyghurs may soon follow them. Many scholars and laymen have indeed picked up on this parallelism between the two groups, with Uyghur scholar Dru Gladney of the University of Hawaii recently commenting to a paper that the “Uighurs are becoming the new Kurds of Central Asia.” See Robert Marquand, “Pressure to Conform in West China,” *Christian Science Monitor*. 29 Sept. 2003.

leadership still exists in the global community capable of representing the liberal ideal of fundamental human rights. A real fear that no strong call for justice will be heard if the so-called “Xinjiang strike-hard campaign” becomes a full-fledged exercise in cultural annihilation, represents just one case in a growing global threat to the liberal ideal both in developing countries and within the Western world itself.

Rectifying this situation is crucial to the creation of a world order where mutually shared goals of peace and justice can be perpetuated for all of the world’s citizens. Such an undertaking requires truly courageous and transformative leaders who are willing to take the high road despite the criticisms that may lie ahead. These actions can not only be taken when there is much to be gained (ie. Iraq), but must be vigorously pursued when there is much to lose as well. Although the current situation in China does not warrant an overly or overtly hard-line by the American government, it certainly does not merit a complete capitulation to the desires of the Chinese government to have the Uyghurs classified as terrorist agitators. American leaders must begin to learn from the past mistakes of their predecessors in Afghanistan and now Chechnya, realizing that a trepid voice of acquiescence can have major implications well into the future. Creating a sense of abject fear for the very survival of a community undeniably radicalizes even the most peace-loving and God-fearing of movements until hostilities between the state and the oppressed become horrific quagmires for both sides. In the case of Xinjiang, Chinese and American leaders alike would do well to begin to ask themselves how long moderate voices, such as those emanating from the peaceful protestors quoted earlier, will prevail over those calling for more radical measures. For how long will the Uyghurs suffer and wait, before they explode? Can either side afford to ignore the issue for too long, and if

so, what will the world look like if the rising dragon in the East is thrown into the traumatic battles of internal turmoil and terrorism?

Part Two: Conclusion

"Today, Saddam Hussein added the slogan: 'Allahu Akbar' [God is Great] to the Iraqi National flag."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ *Al-Jumhuriyya*, 15 January 1991. One day before the Allied attack to drive him out of Kuwait began.

General Implications for American Foreign Policy

The intent of this paper and the preceding case studies has been to illustrate indirectly the shortfalls of current American foreign policy vis-à-vis Islamism. Although many have criticized Bush's policies for their short-sighted obfuscation of complex phenomenon into a battle between the "forces of democracy and liberalism" and those of "fear and oppression," it seemed most effective to address the intellectual fallacy of this line of thinking by drawing out the unique challenges posed to their societies by each of the discussed Islamist movements, rather than merely condemning his rhetoric on moral grounds. The diversity reflected in Part One, both within countries and among them, illustrates the truth behind Fred Halliday's assertion that;

" The rise of Islamist movements and the invocation of Islam as a justification for political action do not represent some general, transhistorical phenomena; they reflect particular forces within specific societies in the contemporary world...they are a response to current problems...Where Islamist movements arise, or where particular groups identify themselves primarily as 'Muslim', they are responding not to a timeless influence, but to the issues their societies and communities face today."²⁰⁸

This stands in direct refutation of such preposterous claims as those made by Robert Satloff, the Executive Director of the Washington Institute for Near East policy, who recently stated, "Islam, a religion, is too often confused with Islamism, a profoundly radical political ideology that seeks to replace existing states and political structures, either through revolutionary or evolutionary means, with a shariah-based state whose

²⁰⁸ Fred Halliday. *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (IB Tauris; New York) 2003, p118.

basic goals are inimical to US interests and values."²⁰⁹ Not only does this statement succumb to gross oversimplification of the movements discussed above, but it also sets American foreign policy against the will of a growing number of Muslims, who for various reasons, identify their critique of modern conditions in their countries with Islamist movements. Such a position sets the stage for a conflict between an increasingly confident, assertive group of modern Muslims that are no longer willing to accept the idea that "progress" and "development" are synonymous with acceptance of Westernization and an inflexible, intolerant American administration incapable of responding to the nuanced challenges of an increasingly complex world. Rather than advancing American interests, such a position both undermines the image of the US abroad and gives credence to the idea that America engages in a unique form of hypocrisy that advocates liberalism only when the will of the majority is prepared to capitulate to its version of the "truth."

The implications of such a study extend beyond the idea that the US should develop various policies targeted to address particular events, for it seems that despite its grand ideological rhetoric the administration has managed to continue at least the appearance of pragmatism in its recognition that democratization must be targeted only from "Damascus to Tehren."²¹⁰ However, the ideology that has been used to justify regime change in Iraq rests on the foundation that Islamist movements are indeed a unitary phenomenon that can be addressed solely by rectification of oppressive regimes

²⁰⁹ Quoted in "Foreign Policy Debate: Propaganda, the Satans, and Other Misunderstandings" *SAIS Review*. 21.2 (2001) p139.

²¹⁰ The reference here is to recent speeches made by Bush which have created a buzz in media and political pundit circles about a new frame of reference for American foreign policy that specifically stated that the policy in Iraq was meant to place all corrupt regimes on notice, "from Tehran to Damascus," that their time for brutal repression and economic exploitation of their societies was over. Yet, if the Muslim world's dictators were indeed the target of such a threat, one might legitimately question why the President did not say from Karachi to Rabat.

and the reversal of poor economic performance. In reality, the diversity of the goals, aspirations, and motivations of the movements articulated in the previous case studies reveal that the eradication of Islamism will not be so simple, certainly is not possible through coercion, and may indeed not be in the best interests of the American government. The fact that many of the movements represent the key force for the introduction of notions of popular participation and ethical state-societal responsibilities in their communities may render them useful allies, rather than enemies, of long-term American strategic interests.

Furthermore, the fact that the movements have more depth than merely reactionary responses to the "crisis of modernity" or structural state short-falls implies that redressing economic and political failures in various Muslim states may impact but not erase support for Islamist movements in general. As Jose Casanova's work on religious movements during the 1980s demonstrates, politicized religion has a "Janus" face that allows it to act as both a vehicle for the assertion of "exclusive, particularist, and primordial identities" as well as a conduit for "inclusive, universalist, and transcending ones."²¹¹ Given this context, a rethinking of American foreign policy approaches to Islamist movements is needed that should embody a more flexible response to the diversity represented by political Islam, a concerted effort to promote Islamic movements and their goals in certain contexts, and an appreciation of the contributions that Islamic opposition discourses may hold for strengthening the liberal foundations of own society.

²¹¹ Jose Casanova. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. (University of Chicago Press; Chicago) p4.

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²¹² Due to the large number of articles, interviews, and books quoted in the paper, not all articles and interviews are included in the bibliography. However, newspaper articles and interviews are fully referenced in the footnotes were they are found.

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