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UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD ISLAM AND THE ARC OF CRISIS

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A coherent policy framework toward Islam has become a compelling need as foreign policy challenges erupt involving an "arc of crisis" extending from the Balkans, the Caucasus, North Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South Asia. In Bosnia, Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabagh, Algeria, Gaza and the West Bank, Southern Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Kashmir, the rallying cry of Muslim fighters — "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great") — is heard in a complex web of violent conflicts.

Each of these situations has its own historic, ethnic, and political context. However, the common thread is Muslims asserting their identity and political goals against both non-Muslim and Muslim regimes. In the former instance we have the examples of Muslims versus Serbs in Bosnia, Chechens versus Russians in Chechnya, Azeris versus Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh, Muslim radical groups versus Israelis, and Muslims versus Hindus in Kashmir. In the latter instance we have Muslim groups opposing established regimes in the Islamic world, for example, in Algeria and Egypt. And outside the arc of crisis we have Muslim extremists engaged in acts of terrorism, as exemplified by the World Trade Center bombing in New York and the hijacking of an Air France flight and bombings by Algerian Islamic extremists in France. Parts of this mosaic comprise the militant Islamic regimes in Iran and the Sudan which preach and export a militant version of Islam aimed at the secular world — Muslim and non-Muslim.

Is this a "clash of civilizations" that Professor Samuel Huntington refers to, or the manifestation of particular political, ethnic, religious and cultural conflicts which have intensified in the post-Cold War era? It is most likely the latter but, regardless, it is evident that policy makers must now address religious, ethnic, and cultural factors in a way which was not readily apparent during the bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. In fact, the realpolitik approach to foreign policy which prevailed during the Cold War was based largely on balance of power considerations and is insufficient to deal effectively and comprehensively with today's realities. The international community now finds itself without a coherent policy framework as it reacts to individual fires as they erupt along the arc of crisis.

The Stakes

In this context, what should United States policy be toward Islam, and how can the United States in its leadership role develop a considered, comprehensive policy toward the arc of crisis and the role of Islam in it?

First, the United States must recognize that the disturbing proliferation of local and regional conflicts in the arc threaten major, even vital, U.S. interests. Underscoring the importance to the interests of the United States and the industrialized democracies is the critical geographical factor that in the arc of crisis are located vast oil and natural gas reserves and points of pipeline delivery. The arc is home to approximately three-quarters of the world's oil and gas reserves. We must take into consideration the impact conflicts in this region have on energy supply, energy security, and pricing. Indeed, we recently fought a war in the Persian Gulf to reverse aggression and protect precisely such interests. As we look ahead into the twenty-first century, energy needs will increase, especially as countries such as China and India proceed with their economic development.

Continuing turmoil in Bosnia could ignite a broader war in the Balkans with serious implications for European security, NATO and Russia. A prolonged conflict in Chechnya could undermine Russia's stability and divert Moscow from democratization and economic reforms. The Nagorno-Karabagh conflict can drag Turkey in on the side of the Azeris against the Armenians, risking Russian intervention and causing tensions in Turkey's relations with Europe and the United States. The overthrow of the Algerian regime by Islamic extremists would create a dangerous precedent in the Maghreb and the Arab World, with serious implications for European countries, especially France with its large immigrant population from the Maghreb. In the absence of timely forward movement in the Arab-Israeli peace process in the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks, groups like Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hizbollah can be counted on to maximize their efforts to scuttle the whole effort. The failure to move the peace process forward would have serious implications for Egypt, the cornerstone for the structure of Arab/Israeli peace, itself facing threats from Muslim extremists.

Further East, Kashmir remains a potential powder keg. Tensions between Muslims and Hindus there could exacerbate Indo-

Pak relations and lead to another military conflict. The situation in Afghanistan, where various Islamist groups are vying for power, could impact negatively on Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and beyond, where Russian ethnic populations are coping with the new situation in the Central Asian Republics following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Concomitantly, the regimes in Iran and the Sudan will continue to seek targets of opportunity to export their militant brand of Islam.

Official U.S. Policy Toward Islam

Understanding these stakes is just the first step toward developing an effective policy. When I was Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, we elaborated a policy approach toward Islam which became the official position on this subject in both the Bush and Clinton Administrations. The major points of that initial approach were as follows:

- The United States Government does not view Islam as the next "ism" confronting the West or threatening world peace. That is a simplistic response to a complex reality. Further, such a perception plays into the hands of the extremists. (It should be noted that Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, on the sixteenth anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran this year, claimed that "the West and particularly the United States wants to confront Islamic fundamentalism the same way they challenged Communism. It is a mistaken comparison and a policy that will only strengthen the movement." Further, at an international Islamic conference in Khartoum, Sudan, in March, 1995, one theme emerged: The current revival of Islam as a political force has caused the West, the United States specifically, to treat Muslims as enemies in a new cold war.)

- The Cold War is not being replaced with a new competition between Islam and the West. The Crusades have been over for a long time.

- Americans recognize Islam as one of the world's great faiths. It is practiced on every continent. It counts among its adherents millions of citizens of the United States. As Westerners, we acknowledge Islam as a historic civilizing force among the many that have influenced and enriched our culture.

- Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, we see groups or movements seeking to reform their societies in keeping with Islamic ideals. There is considerable diversity in how these ideals are expressed. Of the nearly one billion Muslims in the world, more than half live outside the Arab world and differ linguistically, ethnically, racially and culturally. There are large Muslim populations in South and Southeast Asia, China, and Africa. The Muslim world is also diversified by its two major sects—Sunnis and Shiites, as well as the various cultures in which it lives.

- We detect no monolithic bloc or international effort behind Islamic groups and movements, but we are seriously concerned over Iran's exploitation of extremist groups throughout the region and over Sudan's role in supporting such groups in North Africa. Increasing coordination between such regimes and extremist groups and their resort to terrorism demands our vigilance. In the last analysis, however, it is social injustice — the lack of economic, social, educational, and political opportunity — that provides the extremists a constituency.

- Those governments which seek to broaden political participation in the region will find us supportive. At the same time, we suspect those who would use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance. We believe in the principle of one person, one vote. However, we do not support one person, one vote, one time.

- We differ with those who, whatever their religion, practice

terrorism, resort to violence, reject the peaceful resolution of conflicts, oppress minorities, preach intolerance, disdain political pluralism, or who violate internationally accepted standards regarding human rights.

- It is for just these reasons that we have such basic differences with the secular governments in Iraq and Libya. Simply stated, religion does not determine, positively or negatively, the nature of our relations with other countries. Our quarrel is with extremism *per se*, and the violence, denial, intolerance, intimidation, coercion, and terror which accompany it.

Beyond Current Policy

While this approach constitutes a valid basis for U.S. policy on this increasingly important issue, the time has come to move beyond it in a more comprehensive way to face the challenges in the arc of crisis as we enter the twenty-first century. What now needs to be done? To go beyond our present approach we need to frame a policy which acknowledges the broad scope of the challenge and departs from the following principles of action:

Organizational Approach

First, in terms of organization, the United States government must better understand the depth and complexity of the forces at play in the arc of crisis as a whole and, thereby, form the basis for realistic and effective policy planning and formulation. This should be a priority for the CIA and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research which should focus their efforts to provide policy makers with the knowledge and information they need to construct realistic and effective policies toward this key region. While establishing counter-terrorism policies and operations directed against financial and other support mechanisms for extremist groups is very important, this cannot be the major focus of policy. The role of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff should be central to this overall effort. The U.S. Foreign Service must also develop in a major way the necessary regional expertise through area studies and the training of officers in the languages of the countries in the arc of crisis. Special emphasis should be placed on Turkic languages and Persian.

Islam and Extremism

Second, while accepting Islam as one of the world's great religions with its mainstream message of tolerance and recognition of the "people of the book" (i.e., Jews, Christians and Muslims), U.S. policy must strongly differentiate in word and deed between this mainstream of Islam on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Muslim individuals, groups, and regimes which work against U.S. interests by, *inter alia*, their advocacy of terrorism, violence, repression, and quest for authoritarian rule. The United States should also strengthen its support of and work more closely with moderate Islamic governments which are, at least, making a serious effort to be responsive to the needs of their people for social justice, more participatory government, and economic growth through free market economics. We need to engage more directly with such countries in elaborating our approach to Islam. In this respect, we must not forget to include Indonesia (the world's most populous Muslim state where an important Islamic revivalist movement is underway) and Malaysia in our policy considerations.

Indeed, several countries can serve as positive forces for moderate Islam beyond their borders. They should be considered as potential bridges of mainstream Islam to the Muslim world in the Middle East and Central Asia. Examples include Turkey with its secularist model of Islamic society and potential outreach to the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia; Egypt, home to an important debate between moderate and radical Islamic thinkers and

where Islam's greatest university—Al Azhar is located; and Saudi Arabia with its resources and as custodian of Islam's holiest places—Mecca and Medina. In this respect, it is noteworthy that, at the conclusion of a conference of Arab Interior Ministers in Tunis in January, 1995, Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Naif Bin Abdul Azziz emphasized the necessity of collective Arab action to fight terrorism and show the inaccuracy of the notion linking terrorism with Islam. He said terrorism and extremism have no connection with Islam. "Islam is a religion of peace, love and security." Prince Naif added that it is wrong to use Islam to serve political purposes. "Islam must not be used to serve a group or an individual. All (Muslim) persons, organizations, societies or governments should serve Islam and highlight the honorable face of true Islam."

However, we need to proceed realistically and without any grand illusions. In individual countries we will find religious figures expressing a diversity of views from moderate to radical and each country has to deal effectively with internal problems involving Islamist political movements and groups. Also, shortly after the demise of the Soviet Union, the conventional wisdom was that there would be a contest between Turkey and Iran, another "great game," to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim peoples in Central Asia. In fact, neither country has been able to exert a defining influence over the region, given the complexity of local nationalist, religious (i.e., Shia and Sunni differences) and other factors.

As for Bosnia, an historic opportunity may have been lost for the creation of a diverse religious, ethnic and democratic entity in the heart of Europe which could have served as a point of multicultural, multi-ethnic, and religious interaction between Muslims and Christians. The emergence of a dispute amongst Bosnia's seven-member presidency over the extent of the Bosnian Army's affiliation with Islam reflects, as reported in the New York Times early in 1995, the "tension between those who favor a secular, multi-ethnic model for society and those who favor a strong affiliation with Islam. . . . The dispute reflects the basic tensions in a society living under the pressure of a devastating war. Still, the public airing of the dispute, and the democratic habits that such an airing reflects, suggests that support still exists in Bosnia for diversity and democracy."

Hopefully, a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic democratic society will emerge in Bosnia. The prospects today for such an outcome appear dim. Here the point needs to be made that while tensions have always existed, historically, the Bosnian Muslims, Serbs, and Croats have not, as conventional political wisdom has it, been killing each other for centuries. In fact, the historical record shows that they have experienced more multicultural and religious coexistence than violent confrontation. As for the Europeans, they have demonstrated, despite their historic knowledge of and direct experience in the Middle East region, a kind of myopia when dealing with Islam. The pressing economic and security requirements of large Muslim immigrant populations, while obviously important in their domestic political calculations, have dominated their decision-making and they have not focused on the need for a more comprehensive approach. Indeed, some Europeans, instead of viewing the creation of such a Bosnian entity in Europe as an opportunity for multicultural contact and a bridge to the Muslim world beyond, have seen Bosnia simply as an Islamic threat.

Dual Track Approach

Third, the United States should as a consistent policy urge and work actively with governments in the Muslim world to reach out to their societies on the dual track of broadening participatory government and free market forces as expeditiously as their particular circumstances permit. Jordan's parliamentary opening to

the Muslim Brotherhood is a bold and important development and case study in political reform. At the same time, the United States should promote privatization and market economies as the most effective approach, in the final analysis, to diminish the manifestations of social injustice which give rise to extremism. In so doing, however, we must be sensitive to the complexities involved. The modernization process of the West is viewed in parts of the world with suspicion and even hostility and as alien to their culture and beliefs. Imposition of secular ideas can lead to resistance. This is certainly the case of those individuals, groups, and classes in these countries who are not sharing in the modernization process and who see themselves as largely dispossessed victims. This is the breeding ground of extremism. That is why it is essential in launching and fostering modernization programs to assure that the fruits of political participation, market reforms, and economic and social development are shared by the greatest number of people.

A key element here, therefore, is effective political dialogue between governments and a broad spectrum of their societies, coupled with viable economic policies that benefit large sectors of the populations involved and the creation of middle classes. The United States should tailor its approach to each country, with the understanding that we should not try to establish Western political models in many of these societies which are traditionalist in nature and have their own forms of political consultation ("shura") which can be expanded along the lines of our democratic principles. This is where we should place our emphasis.

On the economic side, with the fall of communism and the acknowledged failings of Marxist and socialist models within and outside of the Muslim world, the merits of private enterprise and free market economies are increasingly evident. The United States in concert with the Europeans and Japanese must adopt a more assertive role in encouraging the governments of this region to initiate and sustain market reforms, especially in those countries which are hamstrung by archaic and inefficient statist systems. (Again, it is important in this effort to tailor our approach to the particular political, economic, cultural, and religious context in each country.)

Arab-Israeli Conflict

Fourth, the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict will help to defuse anti-Western sentiment among Muslims and undercut the influence and spoiler potential of the Islamist extremist groups, especially in the Levant. This conflict has been an important factor in forming Muslim attitudes toward the West. Indeed, we have seen how the secular dictator of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, cynically wrapped himself in the cloak of Islam during the Gulf War to attack Israel and its Western supporters, and how the militantly Islamist regime of mullahs in Iran have translated their strident public stance against Israel and the West into active support of violence and terrorism through groups such as Hizbollah, Hamas, the PFLP-GC, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

In this context, it becomes even more important that the efforts of the United States to advance the Arab-Israeli peace process be accelerated. Political options will narrow in 1996, when the United States and Israel hold national elections. The race has intensified between the negotiations and the violence and terrorism on the ground which erodes Israelis' support of the peace process. The worst case scenario is when terrorism is on the rise and the peace process is not moving forward. The President and Secretary of State, using their influence and status as the valid interlocutors between Israel and its Arab negotiating parties should adopt a more active, direct and sustained role to bring key aspects of the negotiations to closure in the remaining time available, lest this historic opportunity be missed. On the Israeli-Palestinian track, Palestinian elections and expanded self-government are minimal goals

which should be realized in 1995 and the path paved for final status negotiations which can start addressing the sensitive issues of settlements and Jerusalem. On the geopolitically critical Israeli-Syrian track, the substantive issues of land, peace, and security have been ready for some time to be moved forward by an assertive U.S. role between Israel and Syria. The meetings between the Israeli and Syrian military chiefs of staff were a procedural breakthrough and should be built on to overcome Israeli and Syrian differences on security arrangements. Forward movement would also elicit parallel progress on the Lebanese track and lead to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement on all fronts.

The Role of Religion

Fifth, the United States Government in the elaboration of its policies after the Cold War and on the eve of the next century must also take cognizance of the underestimated role of religion in international affairs. We must be prepared to complement our political, economic and security policies with efforts aimed at fostering, wherever appropriate, a dialogue among different religious groups. It is clear that enhanced exchanges among Jews, Christians, and Muslims can only help promote peace and understanding in the Middle East. The establishment of diplomatic ties between the Vatican and Israel is an important step toward enhancing religious dialogue between Christianity and Judaism. Even within the context of Israel, itself, the role of the religious parties is important in terms of the peace process. Prime Minister Rabin's efforts in the past to have the Ultraorthodox Shas Party join his government coalition could have had an important impact on the Israeli/Syrian negotiations. Shas' religious leader, the Rabbi Ovadia Yossef, preaches the sanctity of life over the sanctity of land. In 1995 two of the Arab world's leading religious authorities, Sheikh Ibn Baz of Saudi Arabia and Sheikh Mohammad Sayid Tantawi of Egypt, have stated in religious edicts (called "fatwas") that Arab rulers have the right, according to the Koran, to seek peace with Jews. These statements produced a counter reaction by other sheikhs who claimed that, according to the same text in the Koran, peace with Jews was not possible under prevailing circumstances. This debate will doubtless continue, but an important taboo has been broken. In the Balkans, a dialogue among Eastern Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, and Muslims could help serve the cause of peace. The Organization of the

Islamic Conference and the Muslim World League can expand their education programs and efforts in helping to resolve inter-Arab disputes, for example, by reaching out as a point of contact with other religious groups and organizations to promote inter-faith dialogue. In the South Asian context, efforts to promote dialogue between Hindus and Muslims should be fostered.

Bridges versus Walls

There are case studies and examples of people of religious faith who have engaged in political action when other approaches failed in conflict situations. In the Christian context alone one could cite: the Moral Re-Armament Movement following World War II and reconciliation between France and Germany; the role of the Mennonite Church in the conciliation talks between the Sandinista government and the Miskito Indians of eastern Nicaragua in the 1980's; the Catholic Church in the Philippines during the 1986 revolution; the Quakers and their role in the Nigerian civil war; the Churches and the end of Apartheid in South Africa. So we can see that while there is a common perception that religious differences have been and remain a cause or pretext for conflict and wars, there is the other side of the coin where the work and actions of religious groups and individuals can help foster the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

In sum, instead of building walls, we need to build bridges. Indeed, the challenge before us on the eve of the new Century is to determine how we can maintain and develop our own set of values and, at the same time, co-exist and interact with other value systems and cultures which will continue on their own paths. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz contends that "you can't assert yourself in the world as if nobody else was there. Because this is not a clash of ideas. There are people attached to these ideas. If you want to live without violence, you have to realize that other people are as real as you are." In terms of the arc of crisis and its Islamic component, there is a compelling need for the elaboration of a coherent policy approach. The elements of a comprehensive policy as outlined in this study would enhance the prospects for preventive diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution. By acting creatively and assertively, the United States can demonstrate real leadership at this important historic crossroads in a vitally important region of the world.

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