

BOOK REVIEW

Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies

By Cheryl Benard

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As of now the United States is engaged in two types of battles, that is, battle of arms & the Battle of Ideas. In the battle of arms, her air-force, her marines, and her ground troops are busy in Afghanistan & Iraq mercilessly killing hundreds of thousands innocent men, women and children. They have virtually demolished & devastated both these countries. Their physical occupation has enabled them to plunder the natural resources of these occupied lands & brutally disgrace & humiliate the vanquished. In Lebanon, even though Israel—the U.S. front-line state in the Middle East—has suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Hassan Nasrullah & his rag-tag Hezbollah guerrilla forces, but still it managed to demolish the entire infra-structure of this small Middle Eastern State. The U.S. air-force has played a similar havoc in Somalia. Its frequent incursions into Waziristan have done the same in Pakistan. Of late, the U.S. & its war-partners/allies are engaged in frantic preparations for Iran invasion. In fact the Muslim world including the Middle East have been served a war notice by Pentagon plans wherein the U.S. want to redraw the map of the Muslim world according to its own hearty desires.¹

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In any case, let us leave their Battle of Arms here and move on to their planned Battle of Ideas. It may be underlined that the U.S. and its print & electronic media, hundreds of its Think-Tanks, innumerable intellectuals & diplomats, countless priests including Pope Benedict, all are busy in the Battle of Ideas. Their aim is to launch a socio-cultural and religious war against the Muslims. For them it is a new round of crusades. They are engaged in invading the fundamentals of Islam. You may recall the vicious campaign of a Denmark newspaper wherein he could dare to publish Cartoons presenting the Prophet (SAW) as a terrorist. The same cartoons were later published in Britain, Germany and in some of the U.S. newspapers. And when Muslims protested against this vicious & vilification campaign, their protests were brushed aside by insisting on the so-called freedom of thought & expression. Purpose was first to provoke the Muslims by insulting their religious sentiments; & when they would protest against this campaign, brand them as religious fanatics & terrorists urging the international community to isolate the Muslims.

Likewise you may recall Pope Benedict XVI lecture wherein he quoted with approval what an emperor of 14th century had to say about Islam. It reads:

“Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached”².

Similarly Stephan Cohen in his book: *The Idea of Pakistan* goes far beyond his colleagues. He insists that the Quran recommends to the Muslim Ummah that it should always keep itself ready on war-footing so that their own enemies & enemies of God are “frightened” & “terrorized” & as such dare not to attack the Muslim State(s). Cohen

contends that by implication, all Muslim States are obliged to use “terrorism” as an instrument of their foreign policy.³

In brief, the Battle of Ideas is aimed at attacking the Quran & the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW). Further, they are propagating that the backwardness and helplessness of the Muslim world is a logical corollary of the absence of democracy, the inequitable status of women, & the poor & inadequate system of education prevalent in the Muslim world. They insist that unless Muslims switch-over to secularism & modernism both in its ideology & governance – where there is separation of the Church & the State – & their future generations are also detached from Islamic ethos & Islamic Ideology & culture, they won’t be able to catch-up with the modern world.

It may be underlined that the purpose of both these forms of battles (i.e. battle of arms & the battle of Ideas) is to dominate and control the Muslim world. Noam Chomsky has rightly observed⁴ that the international relations are run like a mafia. God-father can’t tolerate disobedience. Cuba, Korea, Chili, Venezuela & Iran – all are guilty of a successful non-compliance. Their struggle for sovereignty & independence is infectious in nature. Other countries can follow suit & the global hegemony & imperialism of the United States would crumble the same way as British Imperialism did in 20th century. Hence they are relentlessly planning to punish these defiant States. Since Iran could set a bad example for other Middle Eastern States, it needs immediate attention. Besides these geo-political considerations, geo-economic considerations of Iran are no less vital and tempting. Since Iran hold massive oil reserves, it adds a new attraction for the U.S. to go for Iran invasion. Iraq invasion was also prompted by similar considerations although the official pretext was Saddam’s WMD & his active contacts

with Osama bin Laden & his Al Qaeda organization. And when both these contentions were falsified by ground realities, Bush & Blair immediately announced that their intentions were to introduce Western brand of democracy & freedom in Iraq & set it as a model for the entire Middle East.

If we piece-together both these forms of crusades, it can help us to understand the motives of the U.S. war against terrorism. End goal is to subjugate, dominate & control the Muslim world & exploit its natural/mineral resources (especially its oil) & thereby gain a veto-power against the rest of the industrial world.

The U.S. & the West have produced innumerable books, countless Think-Tank reports, and innumerable articles for advancing the cause of their Battle of Ideas. However, we will focus our attention on Benard's report on Civil Democratic Islam sponsored by RAND – National Security Research Division.

In this report Benard contends that Islamic world has suffered from a long period of backwardness & powerlessness. Many different solutions such as, nationalism, Pan-Arabism, Arab-Socialism, & Islamic revolution have been tried without success. And this failure has led to frustration & anger. Further, the Islamic world has fallen out of step with contemporary global culture, an uncomfortable situation for both sides. Benard contends that Islamic world is passing through a clash within its own civilization. Different segments of the society wish to define its own nature & identity from their own perspective. This struggle within is obviously fraught with dangerous implications. But that is only one dimension of the problem. Another dimension is its socio-political & economic bearing on the rest of the world. Our concern, Benard identifies, is to watch carefully these segments & see which of them can

be co-opted by the U.S. & its Western allies & which of them is incompatible with our values & hence to be isolated & weakened. These groups hold different positions on some of the fundamental issues which are a matter of our deep concern. These issues are:

1. Political & individual freedom (i.e. democracy);
2. Education;
3. Status of women;
4. Criminal justice;
5. legitimacy of reform & change;
6. Above-all their attitude towards the West.

Overriding objective is to put these segments at war with each other, destroy their internal unity & cohesion, dominate & control them politically & exploit them economically. End goal should be to strengthen our hegemonic design. Let us turn to the various segments within the Muslim world.

Fundamentalists

Fundamentalists want a puritanical state that will implement the Islamic law & morality in letter & spirit. They reject contemporary Western culture & values and are hostile to the West and the U.S. in particular. They put-forth an aggressive and expansionist version of Islam and are not shy of militancy & violence. They want to gain political power (i.e. establish an Islamic Caliphate) & then exercise this power for ensuring a strict public observance of Islam. They are global in their out-look and address the whole Muslim Ummah. Fundamentalists, it may be underlined are of two kinds:

i) Scriptural Fundamentalists, such as, Iranian Shiism or Saudi Wahhabism; &

ii) Radical Fundamentalists, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Hizbut Tahrir could be the instances in point. They tend to ignore more egalitarian, progressive and tolerant aspects of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW). All fundamentalists, it may be observed, are not terrorists but on the whole their stance is incompatible with the Western vision of civilization and is opposed to Western socio-political & cultural values.

In brief “We know that the radical fundamentalists are hostile to modern democracy, to Western values in general, and to the United States in particular; that their overall goals and visions are incompatible with ours; and that they oppose us and we oppose them.”⁵

It may be highlighted that radical fundamentalists have been very successful in mobilizing the Muslim youth. The Revolutionary Guards, the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hamas in Palestine, Hassan Nasrullah & his guerrilla forces in Lebanon and al Qaeda – the terrorists with global reach – all have relied heavily on the Muslim youth. Its attractiveness to youth is based on the fact that it is provocative and radical and seems to stand for justice for the downtrodden and the destitutes. Its program is broad but vague. It is committed to end corruption from the state & society and achieve social justice. It wants to attain higher moral standards and to make the rest of the world to respect Islam and the Muslims. Fundamentalists offer a quick fix. It gives to Muslim youth a sense of purpose & a sense of unity. It gives them a sense of belonging to the Ummah. Their sense of loyalty transcends the national & territorial boundaries and makes them an integral part of the global Muslim community.

Cheryl Benard, however, feels that radical fundamentalism tends to alienate large segments of the population because of their oppressive & repressive approach. She recommends that the West should position

itself to enhance that alienation and utilize the backlash effect. Populations that are exposed to particularly repressive fundamentalism can respond by finding modernism and secularism more attractive. Repressive measures, he thinks, are so often counter-productive. Failures of orthodox Shiite Islam in Iran & the Taliban's Islam in Afghanistan, she thinks, should be highlighted. Iran, in particular, she holds is still plagued by drugs & growing number of prostitutes in the country.

Benard contends that the West (i.e. the U.S.) could have only tactical relations with the fundamentalists such as Saudi Arabia. She holds that the possibility of some sort of rapprochement and renegotiated political relationship with Iran cannot be ruled out either. However, such tactical relations have their own hazards. For instance, they can weaken our credibility and make us seem lacking in fortitude and moral principles. Benard contends that in the past there were some suggestions that we should develop just working relationship with the fundamentalists in power & ignore their general conduct. But after 9/11 we have come to realize that this easy-going policy won't do. We are now facing a massive threat of fundamentalist extremism.

Benard recommends that the West & the U.S. should stir up the women & the youth (that is, nearly the 70% of the population of the Muslim world) against their adults and elders. We should tell them that their elders don't value their lives very highly. We should persuade them that by appealing to their youthful idealism & to their sense of drama & heroics, radical Islam is turning them into suicide bombers. Youth should be urged to raise the question: why most suicide bombers and martyrs are under the age of 30. If it's such a wonderful thing to do, why aren't more adults doing it? Purpose of such persuasion & propaganda should be to incite the youth to revolt against their elders who are driving them to

death. Fundamentalists are also inimical to women. They are against their education and their employment. They want to condemn them to the four-walls of their homes. Strict segregation of sexes, they hold is the key to moral life. The United States (& the West) would be well-advised to focus on these two layers of the Muslim world. We should persuade the Muslim women and the Muslim youth that these fundamentalists (who breed terrorists & extremists) are their enemies as well as ours. We can have peaceful co-existence if we join hands against these fundamentalists & challenge their monopoly over religion. We should exploit their internal dissensions & conflicts and put the traditionalists, the modernist, & the secularists against the fundamentalists.

Benard holds that of all the segments and factions of the Muslim world the fundamentalists (who are inherently prone to terrorism & extremism) are the most dangerous threat to the U.S. & the Western civilization and culture. These fundamentalists – especially the Wahhabi brand of it – should be the prime target of our religio-cultural invasion or the battle of ideas. *Overriding purpose of our Battle of Ideas should be to keep the Muslim world divided & disunited. We should promote amongst them ethnic, racial, religious & sectarian disputes and discourage them from forming any alliances amongst themselves. The end game of the U.S. and its allies should be to make the Muslims internally weak and vulnerable. Sovereign and independent Muslim states are indeed a serious threat to the U.S. Imperialism.* Sustained efforts should be made to exploit religious tensions amongst various factions and sections of the Muslim Community. Ideally, we should drive the Muslims to Shia-Sunni Sectarian war similar to that of Iraq-Iran war of 1980s. This will bleed them to death and remove them from our way to global imperialism.

Traditionalists

They are relatively moderate but are generally quite close to the Fundamentalists. They too, like the fundamentalists, are opposed to the Western culture and values. They want a conservative society and are suspicious of modernity, innovation and change. They are also divided into two factions: -

- i) **Conservative Traditionalists:** They seek guidance from conventional Islamic sources such as, the Quran, the Sunnah, the Islamic law and opinions of their respected religious scholars. They contend that Islamic laws and traditions ought to be vigorously and literally followed. State and society should facilitate this process. As a rule, they are not in favor of violence & terrorism. But they won't mind providing physical protection & financial assistance to the terrorists. In the social realm, their goal is to preserve orthodox norms & values. Their general posture is one of resistance to change.
- ii) **Reformist Traditionalists:** They too use the same sources, such as, the Quran, the Sunnah, the Islamic law and opinions of their respected religious scholars. But they tend to be more innovative and aggressive in exploring alternative interpretations. They believe that Muslims should be ready to make some concession in the literal application of orthodoxy. They are willing to entertain reforms & fresh interpretations of Islam. Their general posture is one of cautious adaptation to change – being flexible on the letter of the law to conserve the spirit of the law.

Traditionalists represent more normal slice of the society. They are useful counter-weight to the fundamentalists and their repressive and

authoritarian stance on the basics of Islam. They enjoy wide spread public legitimacy in the eyes of the Muslims. They tend to be more “middle of the road”, more moderate, a calming influence. They are open to inter-faith dialogue. They have funds & resources & publish books & literature. They are well-organized, hold conferences for public contact. They are visible and easy to find. It is interesting to note that Benard is willing to concede that Orthodox Islam does contain elements supportive of democratic, participatory and egalitarian values. These can be filtered out and used to justify reforms.⁶

For all these reasons, it is tempting to choose the traditionalists as the primary agents for fostering democratic Islam. But here too we have a problem. Reformist Traditionalists like the radical fundamentalists also wish to pursue aggressive Islamic foreign policy. They contend that Muslims should support all Jihadi Movements that are engaged in the liberation of their homelands. They have a general distrust, resentment & hostility towards the West & the U.S. in particular. So in the ultimate analysis there is only a thin-line of difference between them. Traditionalists also contend that the Quran and Sharia should be followed in letter & spirit. They can never be negated, ignored or compromised. It may be underlined that Traditionalism was the dominant version of Islam. But, somehow, it remained unable to eradicate poverty, backwardness & unemployment.

Benard refers here to one of the UNDP-Arab Human Development Report (2002).⁷ The said report identifies three key elements of the backwardness of the Arab world. These elements are:

- i) The absence of Democracy;
- ii) Inequitable status of Woman; and
- iii) The neglect of Education.

Benard tries hard to develop the causal relationship between adherence to Islam (i.e. the cause) and the consequent poverty and backwardness (i.e. the effect). Likewise, Benard is engaged in painstaking efforts to establish a causal relationship between democracy & Western values (as the cause) & the consequent economic prosperity & development (the effect).

[While the fact of the matter is that when Muslims were truly Muslims, that is, were committed to the establishment of a just socio-moral order in this world, they were offering intellectual & moral leadership to the world. The dignity of man & his right to freedom of thought & action were the cornerstone of their socio-political & moral system. But when they turned their back to Islam, especially to its religio-moral ethos, they were pushed to the back-benches of human civilization. If Muslims are anxious to reclaim their lost glory, the process is not to forget Islam & switch-over to the Western model as is recommended by Benard and his cohorts. Instead we should return to Islam, eliminate all sorts of sectarian differences, evolve a true sense of unity & Muslim Brotherhood. This sense of unity can be preserved and promoted by the establishment of justice in our states & societies. We must not forget that in Islam, democracy is not governed by brute majority. Instead, it is hedged by moral constraints. In education too, Islam recommends a unique model. It wants us to cultivate a sense of *Taqwa* (or God-consciousness) along with the cultivation of scientific & professional acumen. For if education is shorn off moral contents, it would produce one-sided individuals—fit to look after the needs of their stomach, but their souls & minds would be lost in wilderness]

In brief, Benard condemns Traditionalism too as, in his opinion, it is more authority bound than democratic & is more wary of modern,

secular education. Further, he contends, that by accommodating traditionalism to an excessive degree, we can weaken our credibility and moral persuasiveness. It can be misunderstood as “appeasement & fear”. We should rather be holding firm to our own values – (whilst raising dust and difficulties for the values and the world-view of the Muslims). He insists that suspending our basic values in the hope of inviting a reciprocal tolerance is a risky approach. However, she is not shy of recommending to the Muslims that they should suspend their values in order to catch-up with the so-called Western development & democracy.

Modernists

Modernists want the Islamic world to become part of the global modernity. They want to reform Islam & bring it in line with the age. They wish to apply reason to revelation in order to meet fresh problems in accordance with the spirit of Islam. They seek far-reaching changes into the current orthodox understanding & practice of Islam. They want to purge Islam of the paganistic elements that have intertwined with Islam. Their core values, such as, the supremacy of individual conscience (as opposed to submission to external compulsion), and a community based on social responsibility, equality & freedom, are easily compatible with modern democratic norms. Benard thinks that the modernist vision matches their own. Of all the groups, this one is most congenial to the values and the spirit of modern democratic society. It is modernism (rather than traditionalism) which is closest to the West. Modernist, he contends, hold that “good of the Community” is of paramount importance & it can over-rule or silently gloss-over the doctrinal recommendations or injunctions of Islam. Benard contends that the Old Testament & the Quran are similar in their rules & values. Both should

be treated as matter of history & legend. Let us read her in her own words:

“The Old Testament is not different from the Quran in endorsing conduct and containing a number of rules and values that are literally unthinkable, not to mention illegal, in today’s society. This does not pose a problem because few people would today insist that we should all be living in the exact literal manner of the Biblical patriarchs. Instead, we allow our vision of Judaism’s or Christianity’s true message to dominate over the literal text, which we regard as history and legend. That is exactly the approach that Islamic modernists also propose.”⁸

In brief, modernists in Benard’s opinion, are the most credible vehicle for developing and transmitting democratic Islam. But the Modernists are handicapped because of:

- i) Financial constraints;
- ii) Uncommon religio-political contentions which exposes them to serious dangers including persecution;
- iii) They are a lonely class & have poor visibility. They don’t have large followings.

The West should be well-advised to help them find their own roots in their own respective communities. Subsidize their works & popularize their thoughts and views on essentials of Islam. Attempts should be made to make their views an integral part of the educational curriculum. As of now, Traditionalist’s and Fundamentalist’s books & literature (especially of Maulana Maududi’s) are dominating the Western markets. Their monopoly should be challenged by patronizing the Modernists. The West should also try to project the Western Islam – i.e. European Islam, the U.S. Islam, etc, as a viable option.

Benard recommends that the West should exploit their thoughts & views to weaken both the Fundamentalists & the Traditionalists. Their internal inconsistencies should be brought to light. We should stir up a war between the fundamentalists & the Traditionalists. Attack them both with arsenal provided to us by the Modernists & the Secularists. We should multiply the moral & intellectual confusion by adding to it the interpretations of the Muslims living in the West. *Our ultimate goal should be to isolate the Muslims & make them weak & vulnerable from within. It may be underlined that frequent attacks on the revelational character of the Quran and the personal life (referred to as the Model for mankind) of the Prophet (SAW) are meant to realize the same goal.* After the removal of Soviet Communism from the global scene, Muslims are deemed as the only obstacle in their way to global Imperialism. Both these types of battles, that is, the Battles of Arms & the Battles of Ideas, are waged to realize the same objective – global Imperialism.

Secularists

Secularists insist upon the separation of the Church & the State. They want religion to be relegated to the private sphere. They too are divided into two factions.

i) Moderate Secularists want the state to guarantee people's right to practice their faith while insisting that religion should remain a private matter & shouldn't be allowed to infringe upon the human rights or civil law.

ii) Radical Secularists, like the Communist, on the other hand, are opposed to religion altogether. In brief, they contend that State should transcend all forms of religion. But if, in spite of our all-out efforts to banish religion it still persists in some form or the other, then religion

should be placed under the strict control of the State. It should never be allowed to trample upon human freedom & other basic rights.

Benard holds that as a rule, the West should sponsor the Secularists as our natural ally: Because they too are committed to the separation of the Church & the State – the foundational principle of Western democracy. But here too we have problem. Muslim secularists are so often strongly wedded to the left and are staunch supporters of nationalism & are anti-U.S. and anti-Imperialism. Moreover they are in a negligible minority & we will be ill-advised to tie ourselves with the Secularists. At best we can help them on selective basis. At the same time, we shouldn't forget that Kamal Ata Turk was able to transform his country from a Muslim Ottoman State to a Secular state. This gives us a lead. The West may try to extend the Turkish model of secularism to the rest of the Muslim world. This option, Richard Clarke contends, can be made more attractive & viable if we could somehow help Turkey to join European Union, boost its economy & stabilize the country.

Sufism

Sufism offers us yet another option. Sufism is in fact, inclined towards modernism. It offers us more philosophical, intellectual & spiritualistic interpretation of Islam. Sufism stresses diversity, tolerance & non-violence. The West should encourage Sufi influence over school curriculum & cultural life in general. Sufi way of life & moral ethos should be promoted in countries, such as, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Central Asia,, etc. which are known to have rich Sufi traditions.

It may not be out of place to mention here that Iqbal in his *Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*⁹ laments that after Al-Ghazali the intellectuals of the Muslim world migrated from pure orthodoxy to mysticism. This led to two most unfortunate &

unpleasant consequences. For instance, in the field of religion, it led to stagnation as the door of *Ijtihad* was closed & the Ummah was left to hold on to one School of *Fiqh* or the other. Fresh problems were left unattended & we failed to make Islam relevant to our lives. Likewise, in the field of politics, we were left with mediocre leadership who were unable to offer us much needed political guidance. As a result, it led to the decline of Muslim Empire & we were gradually subjugated by one colonial power or the other.

In one of his article: "Islam & Mysticism"¹⁰ Iqbal further laments that our Muslim youth is intoxicated by mysticism & is fascinated by its dark smoky cells. But if our youth is anxious to have a true taste of Islam, they should leave these dark smoky cells behind & come to the open deserts of Hijaz.

Benard doesn't leave there issue here. Instead, she moves further to attack the nature of *Hadith* under the title of *Hadith* wars. She questioned the authenticity of *Hadith* literature. Her contention is: "In reality, *Hadith* operates on the level of folk sayings, gaining credibility and popularity through repetition and pithiness. She holds that *Hadith* is at best a dubious, flawed instrument. Consider that Al-Bukhari is the compiler of what is generally considered to be the most authoritative and reliable collections of *Hadith*. He collected 600,000 *Hadith*, examined them for their authenticity, eliminated all but 7,600 of them, deleted some for redundancy, and was left with a collection of about 4,000".¹¹

Benard is trying to suggest that the authenticity of whatever is retained could also be logically open to doubt & skepticism and as such it can't be taken as a reliable guide.

Now if we recapitulate what has gone before, we could see that for Benard the Quran like the Old Testament is no more than a matter of

history & legend. Likewise, *Hadith* is at best a dubious & flawed instrument whose authenticity can be questioned. One can see the goals of this Battle of Ideas. Obviously, it is meant to weaken the Muslim world from within, destroy whatever semblance of unity & cohesion is left in its rank and file & damage their defense potential by putting one segment of society against the other. And when Muslims are intellectually, morally & religiously defeated, it would not be difficult to control them militarily and rob them of their natural & mineral resources.

Proposed Strategy for winning the Battle of Ideas

A firm and decisive commitment to our own fundamental values, Benard contends, is a precondition to deal with radical Islam. She admits that there is no ready-made answer to radical Islam. At best she can recommend a “mixed” approach. This approach seeks to foster & strengthen the development of civil, democratic Islam and of modernization & development. The following outline describes what such a strategy might look like.¹²

Support the Modernists First

- Support the modernists first, enhancing their vision of Islam over that of the traditionalists by providing them with a broad platform to articulate and disseminate their views. They, not the traditionalists, should be cultivated and publicly presented as the face of contemporary Islam.
- Support the secularists on a case-by-case basis.
- Encourage secular civic and cultural institutions and programs.
- Back the traditionalists enough to keep them viable against the fundamentalists and to prevent a closer alliance between these two groups. We have already noted that there is only a thin

difference between the two as they wish too pursue extremely aggressive foreign policy vis-à-vis the Western world. Our job should be to widen that difference & keep them apart.

- Within the traditionalists, we should selectively encourage those who are relatively better match for modern civil society. For example, some Islamic law schools are far more amenable to our view of justice and human rights than are others.
- Oppose the fundamentalists energetically by striking at vulnerabilities in their Islamic and ideological postures, exposing things that neither the youthful idealists in their target audience nor the pious traditionalists can approve of: their corruption, their brutality, their ignorance, the bias and manifest errors in their application of Islam, and their inability to lead and govern.
- Help break the Fundamentalists' traditionalists' monopoly on defining, explaining, and interpreting Islam.
- Identify appropriate modernist scholars to manage a Web site that answers questions related to daily conduct and offers modernist Islamic legal opinions.
- Encourage modernist scholars to write textbooks and develop curricula. Our goal should be to focus on future generation.
- Publish introductory books at subsidized rates to make them available to the common readers.
- Use popular regional media, such as radio, T.V. etc. to introduce the thoughts and practices of modernist Muslims to broaden the international view of what Islam means and can mean.

Benard now addresses the question as to how these recommendations could be implemented. For this purpose she advances the following strategy.¹³

Build Up a Modernist Leadership

- Build-up a Modernists Leadership. Create role models and leaders. Modernists who risk persecution should be built up as courageous civil rights leaders which indeed they are. Nawal Al-Sadaawi of Egypt, Sima Samar of Afghanistan took a bold stand on human rights, civil law & democracy for which they received death threats. Characters such as these should be venerated & publicized.
- We should avoid artificially “over-Islamizing the Muslims”; instead, accustom them to the idea that Islam can be just one part of their identity. We should refer to ethnic, racial & linguistic identities rather than Islam as their mark of identification. In this way, we can damage Islam as a unifying cementing force amongst the Muslims.
- Support civil society in the Islamic world. Civic associations are an infra-structure that can lead to political education and moderate modern leadership.
- Develop Western Islam such as, European Islam; U.S. Islam, etc. try to codify their views as opposed to the Fundamentalists’ & Traditionalists’ views.
- Go on the Offensive Against Fundamentalists. Delegitimize individuals and positions associated with extremist Islam. Make public the immoral and hypocritical deeds and statements of self-styled fundamentalist authorities. Allegations of Western immorality and shallowness are a cherished part of the fundamentalist arsenal, but they are themselves highly vulnerable on these fronts. Their weakness should be exploited.

- Encourage Arab journalists in popular media to do investigative reporting on the lives and personal habits and corruption of fundamentalist leaders. Publicize incidents that highlight their brutality and their hypocrisy. The role of “charitable organizations” in financing terror and extremism has received some attention after 9/11. It should be further publicized so that we could starve out the terrorists organizations.
- Assertively Promote the Values of Western Democratic Modernity. Create and propagate a model for prosperous, moderate Islam by identifying and actively aiding countries or regions or groups with the appropriate views. Publicize their successes. For example, the 1999 Beirut Declaration for Justice and the National Action Charter of Bahrain broke new ground in the application of Islamic law and should be made more widely known.
- Criticize the flaws of traditionalism. Show the causal relationship between traditionalism and underdevelopment, as well as the causal relationship between modernity, democracy, progress, and prosperity. UNDP social development report¹⁴ points clearly to the linkage between a stagnant social order, oppression of women, poor educational quality, and backwardness. This theme should be highlighted.
- Focus on Education and Youth. Committed adult adherents of radical Islamic movements can’t be influenced so easily to change their views. Focus on next generation. *Focus on their education & transform it to make room for democratic Islam. As of now, the fundamentalists have a firm hold on education. This*

need to be broken. Attempts should be made to secularize the system of education in the Muslim world.

Specific Activities that may be undertaken to support this strategy

- 1) Support the modernists and mainstream secularists first, by publishing and distributing their works. We should encourage them to write for masses and youth in particular. Introduce their views into the curriculum of Islamic education. Help them to find their roots in their respective communities. Popularize their views on the essentials of Islam in competition to the Fundamentalists' & Traditionalists'. We should present modernism as a viable counter-culture especially to the disaffected Islamic youth. We should facilitate & encourage awareness of pre & non-Islamic history & culture, in the media & in the curricula of relevant countries. We should support secular civic and cultural institutions & program.
- 2) Support the traditionalists against the fundamentalists, by publicizing traditionalist criticism of fundamentalist violence and extremism and by encouraging disagreements between two segments. We should do everything possible to prevent alliances between traditionalists and fundamentalists. On the other hand, we should encourage cooperation between modernists and traditionalists who are closer to each other. We should sponsor such law school (such as the Hanafi) who are closer to Wahhabi or Hanbali Law School which is inclined to Fundamentalism. We should try to promote Sufi culture in the Muslim world.
- 3) We should confront & oppose the fundamentalists, by exposing the inaccuracies in their interpretation of Islamic injunctions. We should demonstrate their inability to rule their communities

/countries. We should focus on youth & women & incite them to revolt against their elders. We should avoid praising their heroic deeds & cast them as disturbed & cowardly individuals. We should encourage journalists to investigate issues of corruption, hypocrisy, and immorality in fundamentalist and terrorist circles.

- 4) Selectively support secularists. We should help them to recognize fundamentalists as our common enemy. We should encourage Secularists to stay away from anti-U.S. & anti-Imperialist alliances. We should support the Secularist that State & the Church should be separate in Islam too & that this would not endanger their faith.

If the above mentioned recommendations are read in conjunction with the recommends of the Task Force Report: *Defeating the Jihadists: A Blue-print for Action*,¹⁵ we can fully appreciate the aims & objectives as well as the strategy for this Battle of Ideas. Here we quote only two highly pertinent passages:

*“But the challenge posed by the jihadists fundamentally threatens our nation and the world order, and seems sure to be with us for more than a generation. During World War II and the Cold War, the United States and its allies triumphed over comparably grave threats through fortitude, ingenuity, and substantial sacrifice. We will triumph again over the jihadists. But to do so will require a much greater demonstration of our national strengths than we have put forward to date.”*¹⁶

“In order to win the “Battle of Ideas,” the United States must leverage the power and attractiveness of common values that we share with the Islamic world. In the wake of Abu Ghraib, we must work even harder to overcome misunderstandings and the propaganda that terrorists

use to expand their spheres of influence. *Together with the Europeans, we must engage in a concerted program to fight religious intolerance against Islam, at home and abroad.* These efforts must support human rights agendas and strengthen educational systems and economic opportunities, especially for women.

In addition to countering the jihadist terrorists with law enforcement, intelligence, and military measures, we must erode support for them in the Islamic world through what the 9/11 Commission called the “Battle of Ideas.”¹⁷ Nations other than the United States (including both Islamic and non-Islamic countries) and nongovernmental organizations must take the lead in active programs to appeal to Muslims to denounce intolerance and terrorist violence done in the name of Islam. These efforts must stress our common values and overcome misunderstandings and terrorist propaganda. Reactivating the Israel-Palestine peace process must be a part of this larger effort.

As part of the Battle of Ideas, the United States and Europe must demonstrably welcome Islam as a part of their cultures. For Europe, that means both fighting anti-Islamic discrimination in European Union countries and initiating discussions on Turkey’s accession to the European Union.

Turkey is an Islamic democracy, with a free press and equal rights for women. It allows religious freedom and combats the jihadists. Yet Turkey’s long-term stability and its ability to resist jihadist forces is dependent upon its economic health. That health is, in turn, almost certainly dependent upon its admission to the European Union. Turkey can be a model and a partner for other Islamic nations, or it can devolve into the kind of chaos that we have witnessed in Pakistan and Algeria. The difference depends upon whether the EU nations can overcome their

own racism and prejudices, whether they will insist that the EU is a “Christian” entity. Thus, for both the European Union and the United States, winning the Battle of Ideas means a concerted program to fight religious intolerance against Islam on every front.

Although jihadist terrorists are often not poor or uneducated, they use the underprivileged populations in some Islamic nations as one base for their support and as a lever for undermining national stability. The United States, the European Union, and the international financial institutions must greatly expand their financial and programmatic support for development efforts in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Jordan, Morocco, and other economically challenged Islamic nations. These efforts must support human rights efforts and strengthen educational systems and economic opportunities, especially for women.”¹⁸

Summary

Cheryl Benard’s RAND Report titled: *Civil Democratic Islam* can be rephrased as: U.S. & its Battle of Ideas.

A preview of this report can be summed up as:

- The end game of the Battle of Ideas is to weaken Islam from within. Initial plans are to push the Muslim world to Shia-Sunni sectarian war. Integral part of this plan is also to set the Sunnis against the Sunnis and Shias against the Shias by exploiting their socio-political and sectarian disputes. But that is only part of the game. The other part is to isolate the Muslims from the rest of the world by labeling them as terrorists, extremists, and militants. Main objective of this Battle of Ideas is to defeat the Muslims on

intellectual & ideological grounds on the same lines in which Communists were defeated earlier on.

- The West, so to say, is engaged in another round of crusades against Islam & the Muslims.
- Iran, it seems, has understood in part the U.S. plans. As a result, she has transcended sectarianism & has embraced Sunnism especially in its foreign policy. As of now, Iran stands committed to two main objectives: i) Liberation of Palestine; ii) Confronting U.S. hegemonic designs in this region. Obviously both of these objectives are as much a matter of Sunni concerns as they are of Shias’.
- The Muslim world would be well-advised to understand in depth the U.S. launched Battle of Ideas & do everything possible to avoid this potential internal strife and fraternal war.

End Notes:

¹ Ralph Peters, *Blood Borders: How a better Middle East would look*, Armed Forces Journal, 2006. Available at:

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² Speech given by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg in Germany: *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflection*, University of Regensburg, September 2006, Available at:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html, retrieved on March 3, 2007

³ Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, Brookings Institution Press, September 2004, pp: 118-120

⁴ Noam Chomsky interviewed by Michael Shank: *Chomsky on Iran, Iraq, and the Rest of the World*, Foreign Policy in Focus, Feb. 2007, Available at:

<http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/3999>, retrieved on May 5, 2007

⁵ Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*, RAND Corporation, April, 2004, p.27

⁶ Ibid; 29

⁷ *Arab Human Development Report (2002)*, United Nations Development Programme, Available at: <http://www.undp.org/arabstates/ahdr2002.shtml>, retrieved on April 27, 2004

⁸ Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*, p.37

⁹ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Kitab Bhavan, 2000

¹⁰ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Speeches, Writing and Statements of Iqbal*, edited by compiled and edited by Latif Ahmed Sherwani, Iqbal Academy, , Lahore, Pakistan.1977

¹¹ Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*, p.51

¹² Ibid; pp. 47-48

¹³ Ibid; pp. 61-64

¹⁴ *Arab Human Development Report 2002*

¹⁵ Richard A. Clarke, *Defeating the Jihadist, A Blueprint for Action*, The Century Foundation, pp. 1-13; 101-106. Available at:

<http://centuryfoundation.org/list.asp?type=PB&pubid=498>, retrieved on June 23, 2006

¹⁶ Ibid; p. 13

¹⁷ *9/11 Commission Report*, The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, July, 2004. Available at:

<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>, retrieved on April 19, 2003

¹⁸ Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*, pp. 105-106