



Radical Islam and International Security Challenges and responses

Edited by Hillel Frisch and Efraim Inbar

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*Tauseef Ahmad Parray**

Radical Islam and International Security, a compendium of a dozen of articles, is a result of conference held on May 2006, by the Begin–Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. This conference convened a number of international experts exploring the radical Islamic challenge and the ways to respond to this phenomenon. The contributors include distinguished researchers from Europe, North America and the Middle East. Divided into three parts – part I: ‘*The challenge of radical Islam: general themes*’; part II: ‘*The Islamist challenge: case studies*’; and part III: ‘*Responding to the Islamist challenge*’ – the book consists of 12 essays (chapters) preceded by ‘List of illustrations’, ‘Notes on contributors’, and 7 page ‘Introduction: radical Islam and international security: Challenges and responses’ (pp. 1-7) by the Editors, Hillel Frisch (senior lecturer in the Departments of Political Science and History of the Middle East at Bar-Ilan University, Israel) and Efraim Inbar (Professor in Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University and the Director of its BESA Center for Strategic Studies, Israel), and followed by Index (pp. 220-27).

Radical Islam poses a political challenge in the modern world which is like that of no other radical religious movement. Ideologically, it is perceived by Western policy makers as threatening the liberal-democratic ideology by which most states in the West abide and which most other states rhetorically espouse. This book serves as a welcome addition to the intellectual and policy debate on the nature of the radical Islam phenomenon and how to respond to it. It is obvious that meeting any challenge requires much more than writing articles and books, but it is also true that intellectual clarity is unquestionably a prerequisite for

* *Doctoral Candidate, Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India*

effective strategic action. The goal of this collection, in the words of editors “is modest: to clarify the radical Islam phenomenon and to discuss ways to combat the challenge” (p.7).

The first part (consisting of chapters 1- 3) seeks to understand the Islamic challenge in broad comparative and historical terms; the second part (spanning over chapters 4- 8) deals with specific regional case studies, seeking to identify contrasting patterns of uniformity and variation in radical Islam across a wide swath of terrain; while the third part (consists of chapters 9- 12) is policy-oriented, suggesting possible responses to the Islamic challenge.

The first chapter of the book is ‘Religious extremism or religionization of politics? The ideological foundations of political Islam’ (pp. 11-37) by Bassam Tibi (Professor of International Relations at the University of Gottingen and a Visiting Faculty Member at Cornell University as the A.D. White Professor-at-large), who argues that radical Islam has little to do with traditional Islamic precepts, and since the “Arab defeat in Six Day War” (p. 11) there has been a religionization of politics along with a politicization of Islam. An emerging irregular war waged in the name of Islam in the context of a religio-culturalization is the major feature of the Islamist challenge, and the conflict over the “Holy Land” of Israel/Palestine is its major arena. Tibi rebukes European cultural and political elites for not recognizing the magnitude of the danger posed by the Islamists and their conviction and sincerity which will hardly be swayed by strategies of “engagement.” Similarly, Tibi rejects Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations,” not because a clash does not exist but because the Islamism these extremists espouse is an invention of tradition, not Islam itself. Rather than this clash of civilizations, he believes there is a clash between Islamists and proponents of free and democratic societies (p.29). Refuting the idea of “multiple modernities”, Tibi concludes (among others) that “Islamism is not modernity; it alienates Muslims from the rest of humanity in a modern world” (p. 31).

In chapter 2, ‘Islam from flexibility to ferocity’ (pp. 38-43), Ze’ev Maghen (Research Associate at the BESA and Senior Lecturer in Middle Eastern History and Persian Language at Bar-Ilan University) – concurring with Tibi’s prognosis that views Islam in evolutionary rather than essential terms – asks why, in the minds of most Westerners and some Easterners, is Islam associated today with fury, fierceness, fanaticism and intransigence? Perceived to be a “harsh and uncompromising faith” now, for most periods of Islam’s 1400-year history and across the length and breadth of “the Abode of Islam,” the *Shari’ah* (Islamic law) was in fact rarely enforced, and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was almost a paragon of flexibility to the point of championing canonical laxity (see p. 38). His answer paradoxically lies in the tremendous influence of Western thought on the Islamic world rather than in its rejection, as argued by Bernard Lewis and others.

Maghen’s reading of recently written fundamentalist tracts and treatises provides evidence that this new Western way of looking at things had begun to penetrate the consciousness of the educated classes in Middle Eastern countries by the end of the first half of the twentieth century. The Islamists were no exception. This is when a fascinating and monstrous hybrid began to grow. Suddenly, the blurry lines and rounded edges characterizing Islamic law and life were unacceptable. “Islam, they frowned, is no laughing matter!” Maghen concludes with a fervent wish to see the “Religious corner-cutting, legal laxity and a ‘laid-back’ outlook” on life formerly characterizing Islam renewed or “what pristine Islam was all about” (p. 42).

In Chapter 3, 'An economic perspective on radical Islam' (pp. 44-69) Arye Hillman (Senior Research Associate at the BESA) warns that the world-view of the Islamists is inimical to economic development and, inasmuch as they have political influence, reduces the chances of such integration. A focus on economic consequences of radical Islam introduces two explanatory concepts: supreme values and rent-seeking behavior (p. 45). A supreme-value system delegitimizes trade-offs and distractions that compromise the achievement of as-yet unattained priority goals, and it subordinates economic achievement to religiously ordained geo-political goals.

Hillman shows that the greater the influence of the Islamist value-system and ideology, the poorer the economic performance of that society is compared both to states with similar physical endowment yet different political cultures and, to a lesser degree, compared to states with an Islamic majority where Islamist thought has less influence on the state and society. Hillman concludes with the following words:

"A change in values could be sought through education but, when the value system is embedded in the content of education, education reinforces the supreme values and does not promote tolerance. Radical Islam can accommodate temporary compromise or truce if, . . . , the supreme-value objectives is thereby enhanced. As long as other societies remain unwilling to accept the supreme values (. . .), it seems that the challenge will remain for longer run conciliation between radical Islam and the societies whose institutions (and beliefs) radical Islam seeks (or is required by its own values) to change". (p. 62)

This is followed by part II, beginning by chapter 4, 'The rise of jihadi trends in Saudi Arabia: the post Iraq–Kuwait war phase' (pp. 73-92) by Joseph Kostiner (Senior Research Fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies and Associate Professor in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University). Kostiner credits the Saudi Arabian elite for embarking on a policy of reconciliation between the different religious groups.

For Kostiner, the infrastructure of many young Saudi cells still exists and could be reset into operational mode, especially since Wahhabism continues to be the official state doctrine. For him, in summary, "the radical potential in the Wahhabi upbringing of Saudi extremists and the globalized connection with radical Muslims in other states and centers still exists. The readiness of bin Laden to start another campaign is also in no doubt. The possibility of a new extremist, or terrorist, wave in Saudi Arabia is most tangible", he concludes (p. 89).

In Chapter 5, 'Islamic radicalism and terrorism in the European Union: the Maghrebi factor' (pp. 93-120) Michael Laskier (Professor of Middle Eastern History and Director of the Menachem Begin Center for Underground & Resistance Movements at Bar-Ilan University) looks specifically at the involvement of Islamists from the Maghreb (North Africa). He presents four basic theses. First, growing numbers of young Maghrebi Muslim immigrants as well as second and third generation Maghrebi Europeans are a potential threat to the continent's internal security, in addition to becoming increasingly burdensome to Europe's social welfare system. Second, he discards claims that Islamists opposing European values and rejecting their Western surroundings are a negligible force. Third, as far-fetched as the dream of transforming the EU into an Islamic bastion, annexing it to the Maghreb, and creating a greater Islamist state, there are a variety of Islamist groups who take these goals seriously.

Fourth, Maghrebi Islamist organizations have emerged in several key member-states of the EU due to immigration, the presence of foreign students, prisoners in European jails, and second/third generation European Muslims (see p. 94). He presents six recommendations to “curb these developments” (see pp. 115-17). For him, the threat of Islamism in Europe is real, and greater than any other domestic problem. Should large segments of European Muslims and new immigrants “fail to accept the values of the host societies, Europe and the Muslims will find themselves on a collision course”, there can be no doubt, concludes Ladhakier, that in the past decade as well as at the present time, an increasing number of “radical Islamists and their followers are bent on challenging European society – culturally and/or by means of terrorism” (p. 117).

Combating ideas with ideas is the solution Jonathan S. Paris (a London-based Middle East and Islamic movement analyst and an Adjunct Fellow at the Hudson Institute) proposes in Chapter 6, ‘Explaining the causes of radical Islam in Europe’ (pp. 121-133). This chapter examines identity issues among Muslims in the Europe and the new sense of global solidarity shared by European Muslims with other Muslims throughout world. Two factors, radicalizing European Muslims today, are: identity crisis and a growing global Muslim connectedness and pride. The focus, although is only on the UK and France (based on interviews mostly), it addresses “a phenomenon that is occurring broadly throughout Western Europe” (see p. 121).

For Paris, it is difficult to pinpoint the “myriad factors” that give rise to Muslim identity issues. Keeping in view some of the important background issues – from unemployment, social exclusion, erosion of traditional authority and national identity and decline in support for European liberal democratic values, and the failure of a pan-European identity to replace eroding national identities – along with “European hyper-secularism and hostility to faith”, one finds fertile grounds for “radicalization”. Thus, it may require a “forthright assertion of European values, and a recalibration of European laws” in order to isolate the imam preceptors and prevent them from spewing their “hatred in a way that attracts young Muslim followers” (see pp. 130, 131).

Patrick James and Yasemin Akbaba (Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California, and Assistant Professor at Gettysburg College and is Officer-at large in Foreign Policy Analysis for the International Studies Association, 2006–2008, respectively) in chapter 7, ‘The evolution of Iranian interventionism: support for radical Islam in Turkey, 1982–2003’ (pp. 134-152) employ the tools of International Relations (IR) theory to study radical Islam in Turkey, particularly as it was influenced by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran and Turkey form an interesting dyad due to their contrasting ideologies. The study focuses on, in James and Akbaba’s words “Iranian support for radical Islam in Turkey following the transition from the 1979 Revolution through 2003” (p. 134). While Turkey disregards the role of religion in its state identity, Iran designates Islam as its reason for existence. In their analysis, Iran is by far the more aggressive state and uses radical Muslim organizations as tools both in leveraging against Turkey and in bolstering domestic legitimacy. James and Akbaba inadvertently demonstrate how in the war on Islamic terror it is crucial to deal with the state powers behind the proxies.

The state-proxy nexus takes on much greater importance in Rushda Siddiqui’s (an Associate Fellow with the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi) analysis of the Islamic dimension of Pakistan’s foreign policy, where support for proxy

insurgents is a means to balance against a vastly more powerful neighbor, in chapter 8, ‘The Islamic dimension of Pakistan’s foreign policy’ (pp. 153-168). According to Siddiqui, Pakistan has been one of the first states in contemporary history to employ non-state proxies to safeguard its interests in the region and in the international arena. Initially, Pakistan benefited from its non-state actors and the mechanisms they employed to support terrorist activities in Kashmir. In the long run, however, the use of non-state actors backfired, increasing the state’s vulnerability to a backlash not only by the states affected by Pakistan’s terrorist proxies, but also by the non-state actors within Pakistan. Today, the country is considered a “state sponsor” “passive sponsor” of terrorism (see p. 153). Pakistan provides an interesting case study of how domestic politics influence International Relations and how international politics impact upon domestic politics; and to set Pakistan on a course for improvement, an economic system that addresses the issues of “population, poverty, unemployment and human security would need to be established”, she argues by way of conclusion (p.166). This is followed by part III.

Responding to the Islamist challenge is the focus of the chapters in Part III of the book. In Chapter 9, ‘The potential dangers of a “real” jihad’ (pp. 171-79), Max Singer (Senior Researcher at the BESA Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Senior Fellow Member of the Board of Directors at the Hudson Institute, and Research Director of the Institute for Zionist Strategies) presents an especially bold diagnosis and strategy to meet the challenge of preventing a greater jihad than the West faces at present. While many in the Muslim world support jihad, far less are actively involved in supporting “jihad-now” (by this he means “violent actions against the West or against Muslims who oppose” it, see p.171). Such terms as *jihad*, *jihad-now*, *real jihad*, *jihadi*, are the main key-words occurring throughout this paper. He suggests that US policy should focus on deterring passive supporters of jihad-now from becoming active supporters. The way to do this is through an intensive long-term campaign against the minority who are currently engaged in it. For him, the immediate danger “comes not from support for *jihad* but from *jihad-now*”. The choice between these two depends on decisions on which we can have a decisive influence by demonstrating how much harm will come to Muslims from *jihad-now*. He hopes that if the “current call for *jihad-now* is defeated” in the next years, it will give the world “a respite before the challenge is brought again” (p.178).

Singer’s combative strategy is more than echoed in Laurent Murawiec’s chapter entitled ‘Deterring those who are already dead?’ (pp. 180-187), which explores the possibility of deterring In a sharp rebuttal to Tibi, Murawiec (Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute, and a Senior International Policy Analyst with the RAND Corporation, 1999–2002) believes that jihad is integral to Islam and derives from its most fundamental tenets that world society cannot eliminate these beliefs, but fanatics, reaching the conclusion that it is not possible “to deter the modern Gnostics, the *jihadis*” (p. 180).

Can one of the tools in meeting the challenge of radical Islam be as benign as democratic regime change? Daniel Byman (Associate Professor and Director of the Security Studies Program and the Center for Peace and Security Studies at Georgetown University’s Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service) in Chapter 11, ‘Fighting terrorism with democracy?’ (pp.188-203) believes as much, provided that democracies, principally the United States, are selective in choosing their targets, and are creative and adaptive in fine-tuning the strategy. Essentially, regime change towards democracy highlights a difficult dilemma: the creation of a less suppressive environment for the radical Islamists to operate. The answer is

“neither to embrace democracy uncritically nor to reject it completely”. Rather, policy makers should recognize when the “promotion of democracy should be pursued and when it should be rejected” (p.189). Byman counsels (in his concluding remarks) by focusing on “consolidating democracy in Muslim countries that are already in transition [i.e. those where democratization has already begun] – a daunting task in itself”, for the simple reason that “there is less to lose”, and the “hope for success is stronger” of this ongoing democratization in such countries, and the best examples are Indonesia and Palestine (see pp.200 & 201).

This is followed by the final chapter of the book. Jonathan Stevenson (Professor of Strategic Studies in the Strategic Research Department of the Naval War College) in Chapter 12, ‘Counter-terrorist strategies’ (pp.204-219) calls to warmly embrace benign strategies them (if Byman is willing to recognize them). What is virtue to Singer and Murawiec amounts to the wrong strategy as far as Stevenson is concerned. Iraq, he argues, is the litmus test of overly aggressive strategies. The United States now “faces a dilemma: It can either expeditiously withdraw from Iraq or stay there indefinitely to complete the task of state-building”. Either way, the *jihadists* are handed a “propaganda victory: withdrawal reads as a superpower’s humiliation, ongoing occupation as its imperialism”. The only hope seems to be for the US to stay long enough to “prove itself to be a benevolent midwife rather than a malign hegemon”. For Stevenson, “the longer the US military stays”, in Iraq, “the longer this effect lingers” (see p.214).

He also argues that in Europe, an exclusively military strategy is also wide of the mark. In these societies, the rule of law prevails and social discontent feeds the radicals with recruits. The global jihad will collectively regard itself as better off as a maximally decentralized and virtual network fully infiltrated into locales in which the military instrument is subject to severe political and operational limitations. He counsels (in the conclusion) a removal of emphasis on direct military action in general, such that “hard” counter-terrorism becomes primarily a function of civilian intelligence and law-enforcement cooperation, and in his words:

“The premium should be an internationally coordinated blend of regional economic initiatives and proactive conflict management in key areas (especially the Middle East, but also Kashmir and Chechnya), and on quietly urging and supporting national efforts – customized according to particular circumstances – to better integrate alienated segments of society otherwise vulnerable to radicalization” (p.218).

The book, Radical Islam and International Security (begins with the term “Radical Islam” and ends with the term “radicalization”, presents different kinds of ideas in its three parts, viz: general themes, case studies and policy-oriented papers. It serves as a welcome addition to the intellectual and policy debate on the nature of the radical Islam phenomenon and how to respond to it. The editors deserve special appreciation for bringing out these 12 essays/chapters into one compendium and to wider audience. It clarifies the radical Islam phenomenon and to discusses ways how to combat these challenges. Hopefully, in this direction, this is a welcome addition to the intellectual and policy debate on the nature of the radical Islam phenomenon and on how to deal with the challenges it poses. It will be of much interest to students of Islamism, political violence, international security and Middle Eastern politics, alike.

About the Reviewer:

Tauseef Ahmad Parray is a Doctoral Candidate in the department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (India). He has 17 Book reviews and 7 Research papers (published and forthcoming), mostly in International Journals, from USA, UK, Malaysia, Philippines, Netherlands, Pakistan and India, to his credit. Email: tahir.tauseef@yahoo.com