

## ISLAM AND THE WEST

by Ghassan Salamé

Now that the Cold War is over, many Western strategists have identified a new enemy of the West: Islam. But among those strategists knowledge of Islam is minimal. What is the challenge? How powerful is it? Do Western policies help or hurt? How those questions are answered will determine to a significant degree the international agenda for the rest of this decade.

The political program of the Islamists, who are often inaccurately called "Islamic fundamentalists," seeks to restore a heavily idealized old order of things. It is driven in part by an alienation from the present world system, in which they consider the Muslim world's position as unjustly marginal in light of Islam's past glories. Their chief criticism of the nationalist powers that have ruled the Muslim countries since independence is that nationalism, though designed to repel Western military and political domination, did not dare to challenge Western concepts and modes of government and reinstate the Islamic tradition (*al-turath*). Islamists would like to be viewed as the true anti-imperialist force, pushing the struggle a step further by resisting not only the West's political hegemony but also its intrusive ideas like liberalism, socialism, and secularism.

Opposed to the Islamist program, governments of the Muslim world face a triple embarrassment. First, because they rarely challenged the Western world view, they have failed to develop alternative legitimating factors other than an obsession with political independence and cultural authenticity. Second, the regimes have been unable to convince their peoples of any outstanding successes in the tasks they proclaimed for themselves: the "liberation of

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Palestine," pan-Arab or pan-Islamic reunification, political participation, and social and economic prosperity. Third, they are relying, more and more, on foreign support to stay in power and to fend off their domestic opposition or their neighbors' aggressions. That dependence on the West was demonstrated most spectacularly in the American-led campaign to retrieve Kuwait from Iraqi annexation. It was also confirmed by the West's relief, too openly expressed, at the military's interruption of the electoral process in Algeria, which threatened to bring pro-Islamist forces to power.

Hence, most current regimes suffer intrinsic weaknesses against the emerging Islamist challenge. The Islamists gain popular appeal by endeavoring to accomplish the very program nationalist regimes had devised but were unable to achieve—be it because of the regimes' widespread corruption, their squandering of oil revenues, their reliance on the West, their more recent submission to International Monetary Fund strictures, or their persistent lack of interest in tradition.

Islamists in essence espouse the nationalists' program, translate it into religious terms, and promise to achieve it the moment they gain power. Islamists thus embody an ambiguous mixture of continuity in policy and radical shift in elite identity. Algerian Islamist leader Abassi Madani, himself a former militant of the National Liberation Front (FLN in French), which has ruled the country since independence, insists that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) program is a return to the FLN's "authentic" foundations during the war of liberation that ended 30 years ago. Elsewhere, Islamist groups attract thousands of militants who had political experience in nationalist, Baathist, Nasserist, or Mossadeghist parties and who have been disappointed by those parties' inability to keep their promises. One Lebanese thinker, Munah al-Solh, noted 20 years ago that Arab elites were basically nationalist while Arab masses were religious. The formula may be simplistic, but it is fairly accurate. In some sense, the Islamic revival is a kind of elite adjustment to the popular preference.

Because "the FIS is the son of the FLN," as the Algerian sociologist Mohammed Harbi has

put it, it would be a grave error to believe that today's Islamist groups originated in those traditional sectors of Muslim societies that opposed post-independence modernization policies. Sociological surveys in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon indicate that Islamist activists tend to come from university campuses rather than from among illiterates. One striking finding is the Islamists' strength in university science departments as compared to literary or legal studies. Science students feel that their rejection of Western-style modernity stems from a basic understanding of where modernity can lead them. They are very critical of the traditional religious establishment, which they deem too passive or too subservient to the government. Religious intellectuals (*ulama*), in fact, are on the government payroll in most countries. Thus, in the case of post-revolution Iran, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini imposed his own disciples and partisans on the traditional Shiite "clergy."

Not surprisingly, Islamist militants generally received a lukewarm reception from the traditional religious establishment of their countries. In Egypt, *ulama* at Al-Azhar (a religious university that recently celebrated a millennium of existence) are generally on the government's side. In Saudi Arabia, most of them support Saud family rule and operate as the regime's spokesmen and advocates. And in Algeria, most of the religious establishment did not participate in the FIS attempt to take power.

Today's Islamists actually represent the third generation of militants inspired by religion. The first was part and parcel of the national liberation movement against foreign domination, and in places like the Maghreb and Iran sometimes represented the largest trend within that movement. When Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, it was conceived as part of the Egyptian national struggle against the British colonialists and came to represent some 3 million militants in the wake of the 1952 Free Officers coup. In Iraq, religious and nationalist supporters of the "1920 revolution" against the imposition of British rule were indistinguishable. The Algerian FLN was as Islamic as it was nationalistic in its struggle against French colonialism.

After independence, nationalists achieved a monopoly over the state. In most Middle Eastern countries, nationalist and secularist military officers took over the state apparatus and ostracized the religious elements of the anti-Western struggle. Muslim Brothers were killed in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria; Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser had the leader of the Brotherhood executed in Cairo, and the Baath party was extremely tough on religious movements in Iraq and Syria. Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) of Turkey, the Shah of Iran, and Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia embarked on clearly Western-inspired policies, notably in matters of women's rights, public observance of the Ramadan fast, and even personal dress. The second generation of Islamic militants was thus composed of "martyrs"—those killed, jailed, or exiled by their one-time comrades.

Governments now face a third generation of militants, fostered by the spread of mass education and disenchantment with the current regimes. The new wave is drawn mostly from well-educated cadres who had some access to a Western-style education but who did not easily find a job. They have seen that Islamism now has a chance to repeal the nationalist monopoly on power, as was demonstrated in Iran and Sudan, and as was nearly won in Algeria. Generally speaking, they are more patient than their predecessors about attaining political power; they intend to pressure governments to gradually implement the Islamist program before directly challenging a regime's rule. For example, Islamists in 1980 forced an amendment to the Egyptian constitution introducing *sharia*, Islamic law, as the main source of legislation, and engineered the *sharia*'s actual imposition in Mauritania in 1983 and in Pakistan in 1985. They pressured Algeria's FLN to amend the family code in 1984 and forced changes in Sudan's penal code while General Gaafar al-Nimeiry was still in power. Governments have tended to offer concessions to reduce the Islamist thirst for power. However, the concessions do not prevent Islamist groups from attempting to control professional unions (such as those of engineers, lawyers, physicians, and professors) or from creating "Islamist areas" where government control is phased out and

replaced by direct management of public order and provision of social services by the Islamist militants themselves. Those areas include certain neighborhoods in Cairo, some governorates in Upper Egypt, the city of Hama in Syria before its destruction by the army, the southern outskirts of Beirut, most of the Gaza Strip, and now some of southern Iraq's marshlands.

It is thus shortsighted to concentrate exclusively on the most spectacular Islamist-inspired events, such as the revolution in Iran, the assassination of Anwar el-Sadat, the coup d'état in Sudan, and the results of the Algerian elections. It is just as important to note the points Islamists are scoring almost everywhere in pushing governments to adopt Islamist measures and to tolerate their hold over professional unions, university campuses, and inner-city neighborhoods. [Whatever the outcome of Islamist attempts to dominate governments, the re-Islamization of societies is proceeding.] That fact is becoming an obsessive worry of non-Muslim minorities and of secular members of the intelligentsia, though not necessarily of the man on the street. Most governments seem unable to stop the movement, when they do not inadvertently accelerate it through indiscriminate punishments.

The movement has gained in particular when natural disasters have struck, such as the earthquakes in Tipasa, Algeria, in 1989 and in Egypt in 1992 and the 1990 floods in southern Tunisia. Islamists then have been quick to show their efficiency in bringing relief and compassion to the victims, while ineffective governments show the overall waning of state authority in the Third World, with or without an Islamist challenge. Aside from those crises, Islamists are offering help to many: distributing photocopies of expensive textbooks on campuses, making available free medical treatment, defending and serving squatters on the outskirts of cities, cleaning streets, extending protection to *trabendists* (smugglers), and providing all kinds of social services. Meanwhile, governments—stuck with impotent and corrupt bureaucracies, financial austerity programs, and heavy demographic challenges—can hardly respond.

Even while growing, the third wave of Islamism is being diversified. It would be a serious mistake to lump Islamist groups together as a monolith: Some Islamist groups backed Iraq during the Persian Gulf war; others supported the coalition or issued contradictory statements. Some seek the kind of honorable behavior and large appeal they know are necessary to attain power, while others operate in small, secretive, violence-prone groups known as *gamaat*.

In Egypt, for example, most analysts (and the government in normal times) make a clear distinction between the well-established Muslim Brotherhood, which has won most of the recent professional union elections, and, the *gamaat* that attack or kill government officials (as in the October 1990 assassination of the speaker of parliament), secularist thinkers, and, more recently, Western tourists. The distinction between those groups, though justified, does not necessarily mean that they are a nuisance to each other. The extremists' methods, paradoxically, enhance the moderate Islamists' respectability. In the professional union elections, extremist Islamists do not hesitate to help moderate Islamists win a majority of seats. Their combined pressure pushes the government to Islamize some policies, in order to accommodate the moderates and hit at the extremists. Recent arrests of members of the mainstream Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood suggest that the distinction between the two groups is becoming less clear. Governments face a Catch-22 dilemma: If they lump Islamists together, they tend to help the most extremist; if they distinguish between them, they have to placate the moderates with new concessions.

#### *Islamist World View*

The Islamists have a deep interest in international politics. To them, Afghanistan is a success story: Islamists of many countries rushed to support their brothers against an atheistic "Western" power, the Soviet Union. Indeed, Afghanistan is viewed as a spectacular example of Islamists' ability to win a war against an alien expansionist power. Many returnees from the Afghan war play leading roles in the most extremist of the groups in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, and the Gulf countries. They are the infa-

mous "Afghans," the current worst headache of those regimes.

Islamists draw another kind of lesson from the Algerian episode: Do not trust local regimes or Western governments when they call for democratic elections; when the population shows its preference for Islamist candidates, the electoral process is brutally interrupted. From the Gulf war, Islamists have concluded that the West is ready to fight on behalf of rich Muslims against the poorer ones, and that the West is now more willing to engage in military operations in the Muslim world than it was during the Cold War. They also draw a lesson about the West from the contrast between the handling of the Somali and Bosnian crises: The West is ready to intervene militarily when Muslims are killing other Muslims but remains passive and hypocritical when (Muslim) Bosnians are killed by (Christian) Serbs. As for the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Islamists are gratified to see the collapse of an atheist power that was supporting their leftist rivals in the Muslim world, but Islamists also worry about the new opportunities and increased power available to the West following the dismemberment of the Soviet empire.

At home, Islamist groups have succeeded in extracting funds from Islamist-oriented governments. Iran keeps providing financial and logistical support to many groups, and Sudan is certainly sheltering and possibly training thousands of militants from around the Muslim world. Yet other governments are also paying their dues, either out of genuine identification with some Islamist group or in reaction to pure intimidation. That dual approach has characterized the policy of the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, which has bankrolled many Islamist organizations in order to use them against more secular regimes in the region.

More recently, they have continued generous funding to prevent those groups from turning exclusively to Iran for support and becoming tools of expanding Iranian influence.

The Gulf war led to widespread suspicion and sometimes open feuding between the Islamist groups that supported Iraq and their Gulf benefactors, but not to the point of clear-cut repudiation: Gulf governments are still

supporting some of them out of fear, and wealthy Gulf individuals (including some members of the ruling families) are helping fund groups ostracized by Gulf governments because they identify with Islamist goals. Islamist groups also receive support from Arab expatriates who have amassed wealth in the Gulf.

More generally, the Gulf war has created side effects that are not usually acknowledged in the West. By defeating and maintaining sanctions against a secularist regime in Baghdad, the West has indirectly strengthened regional powers with an avowed religious orientation, be it of the ritualistic, status-quo Saudi type or of the Iranian revolutionary model. Iraq's defeat may have fed the appetite of Iranian leaders for asserting their influence in the Middle East. Hence, the Arab governments were reluctant to condone, let alone support, new Western military attacks on Iraq in January 1993.

Iraq's defeat (like the Egyptian/Syrian defeat by Israel in 1967) has also given Islamist groups strong arguments that nationalist, secular-oriented regimes are no match for the West. By contrast, the fear that Islamist groups trigger in the West offers reason to believe that their attachment to the Islamist discourse is efficient. Otherwise why would Western governments be so concerned? The idea that the Christian West is panicked by Islam's revival therefore plays into the Islamists' hands. Indeed, Islamists surmise that Israel's existence as a Jewish—that is, a religious—state explains Israel's success in its wars against the Arabs. Islamists often state that Israel wins because it is faithful to its religion, and Arabs are defeated because they are insufficiently devoted to Islam. That has been an Iranian cliché over the past 15 years, and it is now the main argument used by the Islamist group Hamas against Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) "secular" politics.

### *The Fruits of Repression*

What is to be done? Many Westerners call, naturally, for more democracy as an alternative to the current regimes that are nonreligious or only mildly religious. That advice, of course, is too simplistic to work. Indeed, the source of the present impasse is to be found less in the ruling regimes' failures than in the consummate

weakness of the nonreligious opposition. In most Muslim countries, decades of repression of nationalist, liberal, and Marxist trends left a wide-open, depoliticized society, a political and intellectual vacuum, that is now filled mostly by Islamist militants. Khomeini saw his revolution greatly facilitated by the Shah's suppression of republican, liberal, and leftist groups. In Egypt, the Islamist *gamaat* have been greatly helped by the regime's failure to co-opt the liberal and secular opposition with meaningful governmental roles or to organize truly competitive elections. In Algeria, the FLN ran a monolithic single-party system, operating in a political desert of its own making, until the FIS mounted its challenge.

The rise of the Islamists has been aggravated by the regimes' own complacency, too. After decades of ostracism, Islamists of late have been more tolerated than the secular rivals, and have even been encouraged to attack and denounce them. Egypt's el-Sadat supported their return to counterbalance the Nasserist opposition to his rule, while al-Nimeiry in Sudan tolerated the Islamists and espoused some of their demands while he was fighting the Sudanese communist and democratic parties. Islamists were, for four decades or so, allies of King Hussein of Jordan against radical Palestinians and Arab nationalists. Now, amid the Islamist tide, ruling regimes are warily trying to involve secular opposition forces in their defense against the Islamist challenge. But mutual suspicion and the weakness of secular groups mitigate against a significant bolstering of the regimes' power.

In retrospect, it seems the real moment to democratize was a decade or two ago, when a secular alternative to the ruling regimes remained. Then, Islamists were still politically marginal, the political discourse was predominantly secular, most elites were Western-educated, governments were still able to control societies, the demographic bomb had not yet exploded, urbanization was still manageable, and secular parties had not yet been discredited. But the regimes were too authoritarian to understand the urgency of such a shift, let alone to embrace it; the Soviet model was not yet invalidated; and the West was much less preoc-

cupied with human rights and democracy.

Today, those regimes face a problem similar to the one many European governments experienced immediately after World War II: how to deal with large communist parties, representing 20 to 30 per cent of the electorate, when those parties were not ready to commit themselves to the basic principles of democratic, peaceful alternation of governments. Governments in France and Italy chose to let the communists be represented in parliaments and city councils but kept them away from the executive for decades until communist parties were waning from the political scene in the early 1980s.

If today's Muslim governments followed a similar path, they would allow Islamist groups to register supporters and elect members of parliament to present their views, represent their ties and constituents, and take over municipal or provincial governments. Doing so might expose the Islamists' inability to govern or devise economic and social policies that are radically different from (let alone superior to) those of the governments in place.

The governments do not accept that argument. They regard such an opening to the Islamists as too risky. Islamist groups might well register more than 20 or 30 per cent of the vote in a fair and free contest. Such support was demonstrated in Algeria's December 26, 1991, elections. The electorate, unused to free elections and unaware of what is at stake, could prove to be volatile and unpredictable. In a burst of populist enthusiasm, it could put the Islamists in power, especially if winning a plurality is sufficient to govern. Moreover, while West European countries had a Marshall Plan pumping more than \$100 billion (in today's dollars) into their coffers and benefited from legitimate, charismatic figures like Charles de Gaulle, Alcide De Gasperi, and Konrad Adenauer, who could face down the communist challenge, the secular leaders in today's Muslim world are hardly inspiring, and no Marshall Plan is available to them. Those who do sit on oil riches tend to use them to strengthen their (and their neighbors') authoritarian rule rather than to democratize.

The West, for its part, seems as embarrassed by the Islamist challenge as do the local gov-

ernments. What can the West do beyond its rather successful repression of Islamist-inspired international violence? Unqualified support for democracy antagonizes local governments and triggers mixed feelings in the West. No Western government wants to be faced with President Jimmy Carter's misfortune of having "lost" Iran to an obscurantist force through democratic means. On the other hand, a policy that punishes any interruption of a democratic process—except those in Muslim countries—is not tenable over the long run. Islamists undoubtedly have a point when they compare Western sanctions against Haiti's military junta, Burma's military dictatorship, or President Alberto Fujimori's post-coup regime in Peru with the West's ill-concealed relief after the coup in Algiers. The West cannot indefinitely pursue a policy by which it consoles the leader of the Burmese opposition with a Nobel Peace Prize while it embraces the generals in Algeria, or condemns Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and Iran's "obscurantist rule" while it overlooks other Middle Eastern dictators and absolute monarchs.

To find a realistic way out of their hypocrisy, Western governments should consider a few guidelines: First, they should seek to know who the Islamist groups are and what they are doing. That cannot be achieved if the West views the Islamist challenge solely from the perspective of a security threat, nor if it is preoccupied with content analysis of the Islamists' frequently contradictory statements. Too often, Islamist groups are lumped together as a single threat to Western interests. That is both unfair and self-deluding; it ignores the diversity among Islamists and implicitly assumes that they are the only anti-Western force in their societies. The West's security-driven approach to the Islamists underestimates the societal services they provide and the validity of some of their demands. And the West can hardly rely on frightened, isolated local governments to properly educate it on opposition forces.

More generally, the West has to learn that its model of the secular nation-state is not as universal as it presumes, and other forms of political organization may be as valid. Even if the world has ceased to be strategically multipolar,

it remains so in the cultural sphere. Too often, the Western triumph in the Cold War is mistakenly equated with a triumph of Western political and intellectual models.

Some popular "truths" about Islam also need to be revised. Shallow and obsessive references to the religion of Islam by Western observers do not explain the lack of democracy in Muslim societies, nor the condition of women, nor the lack of economic prosperity. After all, authoritarianism has reigned as the most common form of government from time immemorial, not only in the Muslim world but in such areas as China, Russia, Latin America, and much of Europe. Economic mismanagement and squandering of resources are not peculiarly Islamic features, either; they are all too typical throughout the Third World. Moreover, one can even argue that women's status in most Muslim countries is better than in many non-Muslim Asian societies.

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Western attacks on Islam and negative media stereotypes of Muslims help confirm Islamist paranoia about a supposed Western plot to eradicate Islam. Some self-appointed Western "experts" also play into the hands of the most extreme Islamists through their excessive characterization of Islam's uniqueness as a religion. Islamists, too, would like their fellow Muslims to believe that Islam is really too self-contained to adjust to modernity or democracy. It is high time to denounce the implicit alliance between old-guard Western orientalisks and new-wave local Islamists on the ill-defined presumed uniqueness of Islam.

Second, the West should encourage the present regimes to gradually associate moderate Islamist forces with their governments. The Islamist ideological trend can no longer be ignored; Islamists should take part in states' legislative bodies and later in the executive branches. To begin, pre-electoral pacts should be negotiated between the government and other political forces, including the Islamists.

The pacts should guarantee that the democratic process, though gradual, will not be reversed by any party. It should never be forgotten that most governments and even many secular opposition groups have not shown themselves to be any more committed to democracy than are the Islamists. In addition, electoral laws must preclude a winner-take-all system, which is utterly inappropriate for countries where democracy is too fragile to be submitted to such a brutal form of leader selection.

Some countries have reached pacts preceding the organization of elections. Kuwait produced the Jiddah covenant, Lebanon the Taif accords, Jordan the National Charter, and Yemen the Unity Charter. Unfortunately, those experiments in gradual democratization, including guarantees for the permanence of the process itself, have been victims of manipulation by the government, in Yemen's case, or by some mighty neighbor, in Lebanon's. Such experiments have not been adopted in larger, more influential countries. But neither limitation diminishes the validity of reaching pre-electoral mutual guarantees.

Third, the West should criticize human rights violations and cheating in the electoral process whenever they occur. The West has little credibility on those issues: Saddam Hussein is justifiably condemned but none of his neighbors, some of them no less dictatorial, are so systematically scrutinized. The West's discourse on human rights and democracy always seems conditioned on strategic considerations. Such conditionality may be legitimate—crusades for morality stop where interests start—but then Western governments cannot claim a higher ethical standard than those of anti-Western forces. The West is selective indeed in its choice of enemies as well as in the United Nations resolutions it wishes to see implemented, so it should not be surprised if its moral discourse is ridiculed in the Third World.

Fourth, Western states ought to acknowledge that democracy is not necessarily built upon a one-person, one-vote system. In complex developing societies, established ethnic or sectarian group rights are as important as human or individual rights. Individualism is not a universal, nor a morally superior, philosophy; com-

munitarianism is still valid as a shield against authoritarianism and arbitrary rule. Hence, the protection of minorities must be part of any approach to the Middle East. Islam has historically provided formulas for maintaining several bodies of legislation within the same polity that apply to individuals on the basis of their religious affiliation. If Muslims are to be ruled according to the *sharia*, non-Muslims need the right to be ruled according to their own legislation and customs. Returning to those unique forms of legal and social plurality is easier, and possibly more urgent, than creating Western-style pluralism. Islamists are more willing to abide by those forms than by Westminster-type pluralist politics.

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Fifth, the West must help achieve substantial results in resolving the Arab-Israeli question. The rapid realization of Palestinian self-determination, and the eventual emergence of a Palestinian state, are the only antidotes to the growing Islamist radicalism among Palestinians. A balanced end to that conflict would also help minimize the military control over Arab polities and help dispel the deeply held view that the (Christian) West backs (Jewish) Israel against (mainly Muslim) Palestinian Arabs. Arab governments may be preoccupied with issues other than fighting Israel (such as dealing with the Islamist challenge to their own rule), but Muslim masses are still very concerned about the Palestinian issue as a case of foreign seizure of a mostly Muslim land.

Israel's apprehensions about Islamic groups in the Middle East and the Iranian military buildup have of late grown very loud. Yet, Israel for years has been playing Hamas against the PLO, and Hezbollah against the legitimate governmental authorities in South Lebanon. Israel was an important actor in the arms-for-hostages exchanges of the U.S. Iran-*contra* affair, sending arms to Khomeini's Iran. Now, Israel complains about the growing Islamist influence it helped

foster.

The new cliché of Israeli commentators is to contend that Israel and Arab governments should be allies against Iran and "Islamic fundamentalism." But Israel has a long way to go before it can realize such an alliance. It will have to admit its strange relationship to pro-Iranian groups in the past and its tilt toward Iran in the Iran-Iraq war; and it will also have to accept the politically pluralistic PLO as an interlocutor in the peace process and Palestinian statehood as an eventual outcome. The recent legalization by the Israeli Knesset of contacts with the PLO is a welcome, but insufficient, step in the right direction. There is some urgency in fully accepting the PLO; the ongoing peace process will shape the Palestinian leadership over the next three to five years. Israel's posture will also influence how strong the Islamist rejectionist challenge to the Arab governments supporting the peace process will become. To delay a settlement acceptable to the Palestinians is to encourage Hamas as an alternative to the PLO, and Islamists as a replacement for secular Arab governments. The Israeli deportation of hundreds of Islamists in December 1992, without any progress having been recorded in the peace talks with the Palestinians, has been a blow to Israel's credibility, to the peace process, and to Lebanon's sovereignty. It tells a lot about Israeli nervousness and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's inability to grasp that to decapitate Hamas without offering concessions to the Palestinians is to reinforce Hamas's position in their ranks.

Finally, the West will need to stop its highly selective approach to military intervention. Any Muslim, even one who does not support the Islamists, would observe that Western governments have been willing to intervene where Muslims were killing or threatening other Muslims (in Kuwait, in Kurdish areas, in Somalia) while those same governments remain passive where Muslims are killed by a non-Muslim force (in Bosnia). In the West, decisions on intervention are viewed as the product of varying strategic interests, military feasibility, and objectives. But to Muslims, it is at best the application of an old double standard.

Muslims have taken note of the rise of West-

ern, notably American, interventionism in the Muslim world over the past decade: Syria (1983), Libya (1986), Iran (1988), Iraq (1990-91), and Somalia (1992-93). While the motivations may differ in each case, Muslims recall that their part of the world had not previously experienced direct military intervention by the United States (with a minor exception in Lebanon in 1958). Westerners thus should not be surprised by a resurgence of Muslim xenophobia toward Western interference, even for humanitarian purposes. Islamists are likely to use that xenophobia to challenge, embarrass, and eventually topple regimes. Western interventions will only be acceptable if they are accompanied by an evenhanded approach to the area's problems, particularly the Palestinian-Israeli issue and the inequitable distribution of wealth among Middle Eastern countries. Otherwise, Western double standards, misconceived and selective military interventions, and an obsessive emphasis on security in the West's approach to the Muslim world may prove to be the push Islamists need to take power.