Culture's Mask: War & Change After Iraq

Michael Vlahos
The Cover: The images are meant to emphasize the deeper currents of this conflict over the pull of immediate events, thus the suggestion of an ancient rock-carving or stele. Likewise, Muslim colors in the American flag are meant to evoke (rather than prefigure!) what has become a historically open-ended relationship with the world of Islam.

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Abstract

What does this war mean? The invasion of Iraq was intended to bring clarity to the nature of the war and America’s purpose, but it has succeeded in muddying both. Yet it has also succeeded in accelerating change in, and deepening America's relationship with, the Muslim World, with consequences far beyond what we have surveyed to date. These essays are a meditation on the essential (if essentially untreated) theme of war as the ultimate bringer of change.

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Although America has fought a war for more than two years with a peacetime military, the situation is changing. Effective insurgency in Iraq is just the first step moving our military into long-term wartime. Over the decades that this war promises, an active U.S. engagement in the Muslim World will mean nothing less than a profoundly altered military establishment and military society—not, as assumed initially, a supreme force running the world, but rather a “soldiering” society and way of life.

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If the Islamist trajectory continues, in its elusive intertwining of violent and non-violent forms, then America’s intervention in the Muslim World will become increasingly enmeshed in Islamist issues. The decisive factor in the Muslim future will, in fact, be the relationship between the United States and Islamism. American actions are even now promoting change along Muslim trajectories rather than ours. Thus the United States has set in motion a “world-historical” process that will profoundly affect us as well.

Exhuming the “War of Ideas” (July 19–22, 2004)

American ideas and persuasion—what is now called “public diplomacy” but was once known as propaganda—worked reasonably well in the months after 9-11. Nevertheless, the invasion of Iraq and its subsequent unravelling ruined the U.S. message to the Muslim World. America has once again lost the “hearts and minds” of Muslims and must now struggle even to communicate with them, let alone persuade them. Yet the “war of ideas” is perhaps the key to this war. What is to be done?
Preface

The war challenges our understanding of the world and how it is changing. Both sides present a simple picture of two wholly opposite forces, and thus of a straightforward struggle of good against evil. But current circumstances can also be framed in terms of two conflicting views:

- **From the American standpoint:** the avowed grand strategy of the current administration is a vision of asserting secular Western modernity throughout the Muslim—and especially the Arab—World.

- **From the Muslim standpoint:** a struggle between conflicting visions within the world of Islam and one that is impacted strongly by the American vision. The urgent question central to the future of Islam is how to integrate Western modernity without losing the integrity of Islam itself.

Even though the situation can be described simply, its resolution will be extraordinarily complex, for we are witnessing nothing less than the creative and violent interaction of two civilizations. This is truly a “world-historical” story whose unfolding:

- Will require decades—or generations—to complete
- Is nearly worldwide in its scope and consequences
- Will be fully realized, paradoxically, through longstanding U.S. involvement
- Is highly dynamic, suggesting surprising changes along the way

The essays that follow, almost all of which have appeared in the online journal *TechCentral-Station.com*, are a meditation on an alternative rather than official explanation of the meaning of this war. They suggest that the so-called war in Iraq and “Global War on Terrorism” are really just episodes in a relatively new and evolving world relationship. By penetrating the world of Islam, the United States has become enmeshed in an association that is changing the world as we know it.

The themes in these essays deal with change at the level of identity and relationship by addressing the deepest elements of who we are and how we fit into the world we inhabit. We are therefore talking of transformation, not in the narrowly applied sense of new material agents or tools as in “new technology,” but rather, transformation that speaks to essential changes in the very order of things, as in the Greek understanding of the word *metamorphosis*.

An Imperial Transformation?

Is America creating a formal world empire? Some might argue that the American Empire was the significant outcome of World War II. But this was, at most, a federative empire, a commonwealth of like-minded and allied societies. The prospect of such an empire today could be starkly different. Many after 9-11 insisted that national security had become so existentially threatened that American society could be protected only through global military control. Even if some might welcome the protection offered by an American “world order,” others, it seems, would fight that prospect to the death. In Iraq, for example, the United States seems to have created not order but a sort of institutionalized disorder. This suggests perhaps that creating “empire”—or a new basis for world security—first requires breaking down the old order. Thus to date we have asserted a new precedent for the creative
destruction in the Muslim World, with Iraq as just the first breakdown of many. Our efforts to eradicate instability only accelerate its increase. The prospect is one of ever-increasing demands on U.S. military forces that, over historical time, could change American society, its role in the world, and its fundamental values.

**American Arms Transformed by a New War?**

The U.S. military entered the war convinced that it had transformed itself and transformed war, confident that it could master any enemy and any task. The world also believed this. Never had the American military entered combat with such endowed authority. But it was not prepared for the environment it encountered in Afghanistan and Iraq after the initial period of conflict. The military was expected not merely to defeat an enemy regime, but to “stabilize” society and oversee national “reconstruction” as well. Most visibly in Iraq, the military has been unable to master this task. The unique challenges posed by a resistant environment are slowly forcing the military to address quite another sort of transformation. In many ways the prewar vision of transformation enabled the military to perpetuate a more comfortable, essentially peacetime lifestyle while simultaneously permitting select elements to wage clean and controlled little wars. Today’s prospect is very different. It suggests a fighting military of long-service veterans geared to colonial management tasks and traditional combat: American soldiers must now rule as well as fight. Furthermore, the loss of American military authority to date in the Iraq war represents an additional burden in that our soldiers will be fighting emboldened and more numerous enemies. Thus we have transformation, but in cultural rather than simply operational or technological terms.

**Islam Reformed or Transformed?**

The attack on America has made the United States an intimate participant in a pivotal struggle within Islam. Muslims have been in search of a civilization-wide restoration of Islam ever since the failure of its flirtation with Western-style socialism after 1967. The resulting Islamic revival evolved into a contest over divergent visions of what restoration should look like. The United States, by intervening forcefully in this context, has assumed two roles in this drama. One is to sharpen and accelerate the momentum of transformation and restoration. The other is to inject new cultural concepts and constructs into emerging Muslim paradigms, which will have the effect not of making Muslims like America and its democracy, but rather of encouraging and bringing about creative, new frameworks for Islamic restoration. But the forcefulness of U.S. actions in pursuit of its goals is having a wholly unintended effect. By unwittingly serving as the decisive agent of violent change, the United States is also forcing Muslims to take a more active role in making their own future and is instilling the belief that change itself is at hand. The result is to encourage participation in the struggle across the world of Islam, both violent and peaceful. In this context, the situation in Iraq now begins to take on symbolic and catalytic power, creating a collective expectation among Muslims that an event will soon call History forth.

**The Transformation of Europe’s Relationship with Islam**

As the United States rushed into the Muslim World after 9-11, it ignored the trajectory of Europe’s relationship with Islam, one informed by Muslim immigration, geographic intimacy, growing economic ties, and colonial-era legacies. Of these, the prospect of surging Muslim minority populations in France, Italy, and Spain is the driving element. The implication, of course, is that a long, seemingly perpetual war prosecuted by the United States in the world of Islam could drive Europe—or at least Mediterranean Europe—away from America, rending forever the old Atlantic compact and creating in its place a new Latin–Muslim orbit. Such realignment also implies a more fundamental world reassessment of the United States. Since 1945, the great powers, eventually joined even by Russia and China, all seemed to accept that the United States was, in the end, the most reliable guarantor of world stability. This unstated consensus reached its brief peak in the months after 9-11. However, the invasion of Iraq has eroded this consensus. Furthermore, an eternal war between America and (parts of) the Muslim World could even destroy the prevailing consensus. This prospect might suggest a different basis of world order, regardless of whether the United States succeeds or fails in its current enterprise. Thus an American empire might not become universal after all, but take on a more traditional aspect, while an American retreat might not lead to renewed world confidence, but rather only cement its loss.

**The Transformation of America’s Relationship with Islam**

Although Muslims are a small minority in the United States, our ever-expanding involvement in the Muslim World has a double implication. One is that our unceasing engagement could mean millions more Muslims in the United States, since our ever-strengthening ties with the Muslim World will mean heightened levels of
human exchange. But it will also mean that the Muslim World becomes the central focus of American national energy. It is the place where more and more Americans will be engaged, a place of ever-unrequited national and personal commitments, and a place where our national hopes and fears are played out year after year. The United States slowly becomes a Middle Eastern power, just as it became a European and Asian power after 1945. Implicitly, whether we like it or not, Americans must begin to take the measure of the alien civilization that Islam represents and, by extension, must also learn how to help give the Muslim World what it wants.

These themes run through the following ten essays, written over the past year. Ultimately they speak to an abiding American cultural and historical tone-deafness that springs from messianic and millenarian impulses in the national ethos itself. Americans believe at heart that they can redeem the world and that culture and History both must bow to this unstoppable national trajectory. But culture and History may have caught up with us at last. If we are to continue on the majestic course of westernizing Islam, time, commitment, and raw force will be required beyond anything we have so far imagined. We may not like the America that emerges a century hence. If instead we choose to retreat, Americans will most certainly suffer a blow to the very font of our national ideology that will diminish not only our world position but our very future. And the war will still be there.

There remain alternatives—intermediate paths and approaches—and these essays suggest several. Nonetheless, what may work within the existential “either” and “or” will certainly lack the virtue of clarity, as in black and white. Putting alteratives into play will require that as Americans we stop trying to impose, and stop taking sides—and that we start feeling, even thinking, differently.
Defeating the Gods of War

What can the recent war with Iraq teach us? Commentators everywhere are telling us we are the greatest, almost Gods of War. Of course some aspects of the war are undeniably remarkable. Planning and execution were faultless; cost, time, and outcome couldn't get much better. The soldiering was outstanding; we saw the military's superlative performance on TV. And U.S. casualties were amazingly low, while tens of thousands of Iraqi fighters were killed. However, we must remember the true state of our enemy. The Iraqi forces were operationally degraded, fighting with third-rate equipment. There was no air opposition and only feeble air defense. Furthermore, their command and control was ripped.

We had other advantages as well. We enjoyed extended preparation time in-theater. Ours was the choice of when to attack and thus the initiative. We also had a comprehensive, integrated target picture, accumulated over many years, i.e., we were facing an intimately familiar, badly weakened, and fatally exposed enemy, passively awaiting our attack.

It is one thing to assert that we did a nice job. Indeed, given the expectations of the American people, we could do nothing less: we absolutely had to do a nice job. But let's not go overboard. For example, Ralph Peters writes: "The basic lesson that governments and militaries around the world just learned was this: Don't fight the United States. Period. This stunning war did more to foster peace than a hundred treaties could begin to do."

The strengths demonstrated by American military force were surely exceptional. Like true Gods of War, America now "bestrider[s] the narrow world like a Colossus." No military in its right mind should wish to challenge us. That does not mean, however, that war will be no more.

Americans inhabit a classical military reality, and why not? We like what we do best. In another time and place, say in the Victorian era, we could have truly believed that we had ended war forever. In those sunny days there was only one kind of war, and if no one dared fight us then war itself would surely be finished. Peters indeed gives us the reasoning of a sincere Victorian gentleman: "Consider the fear and impotent anger would-be opponents of the United States must feel today? The Iraqi defeat was a defeat for every other military in the world—in a sense, even for our allies, whose forces cannot begin to keep pace with our own."

In contrast, however, this is the real lesson of the war: The United States has indeed made war impossible—classical war, that is. No waiting enemy can take us on where we are strong, i.e., in the place we still think of as real war.

But today, unlike Victorian times, there is more than one way to make war. War is about using violence to achieve political objectives. It's not about how you make it, but what you achieve in the end. War isn't real because it's got tanks and planes and ships. It's real because somebody is fighting us, and fighting to win, no matter how they do it. In other words, war isn't about stuff (e.g., technology) but rather about a coherent concept of violent struggle. We are so attached to war that puts ordnance on target better than anyone else that we cannot see a completely different paradigm of war emerging in front of us. Yet we have seen its glimpses in places like Grozny and Jenin and Columbo. Call this new war "war by other means."

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2 Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, I, ii.
War by other means is about fighting us not where we are strong but where we are weak. And just as we have so magnificently demonstrated where we are strong, we have with equal clarity shown others where we are weak:

- U.S. military casualties: we now expect almost none; many means disaster.
- U.S. civilian casualties: the economy dives easily if our way of life is at risk.
- U.S. acting tyrannically: we cannot betray our values and sacred mission.
- Collective enemy hatred of us: if unbending, a signal of our failure.
- Enemy persistence in the face of material U.S. military dominance: the same.

The enemy that knows not simply where we are weak but figures out how to successfully attack our weakness has a shot at defeating the Gods of War.

This doesn't mean that the new war by other means will be easy for future enemies, or that Saddam Hussein was trying to fight such a war and failed. Indeed, Peters is quite correct to say, “[In] the final grudge match between Clausewitz and GI Joe, it was a shutout”—as though the Iraqis were mere military antiquarians.

It is remarkable how little the Iraqis, and the Russian advisers who helped plan their defense, grasped the profound changes in our military and the American way of war. They clearly had no sense of the battlefield awareness, speed, precision, and tactical ferocity of America’s 21st century forces.

So as an antique army, then, the Iraqis were simply roadkill on the highway of war. The past was knocked off by the enlightened present. But this is hardly the future. Even if we are so hip as to be fully “network-centric”—all knowing, pinpoint, and overwhelming—the “American way of war” is nonetheless still classical war, fought between nations and waged in full uniform with traditional weapons.

Again, what the U.S. has ended is simply classical war, and it has ended that paradigm by making it useless and thus uninteresting to others. History, in the form of desperate “others,” is even now creating the new paradigm. No one can hope to win fighting our kind of war, so they will make war they can win. Ironically, we have destroyed the war we do best, and we will come to ponder this recognition as we struggle to adapt to and defeat the new.

We will struggle with the new war for three reasons. (1) It is alien and unfamiliar to us as war. Even now we still deny it by calling its early signs “terrorism” or “asymmetrical.” (2) We will not want to give up the war we like, the war in whose practice we were supreme. (3) It may require us to act in ways we find distasteful. Just the other day, U.S. troops fired into a crowd at Fallujah, near Baghdad. This is just a taste of things to come. The French remember how they were defeated in Algeria, even as they won every battle. Talk to Sinhalese about the Tamil Tigers and find out how a hopeless, beleaguered insurgency turned the tide against a dominant government and its military.

In Saddam Hussein and his Iraq, we chose our enemy well, but we should be wary of the future enemy that chooses us.

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Military Identity in an Age of Empire

What do you say to a navy that will never see another fleet action, but instead a future searching dhows and rust-buckets for terror contraband? What about an army whose most dangerous enemy is the suicide bomber, where “combat” is an unending series of SWAT “events”? How do you tell air forces to forget the Red Baron and Blue Max and reincorporate as a trucking service for smart weapons?

The transformation of America’s military societies is not, as assumed, about technology. Indeed, technology is merely an agent or enabler of change. The real military transformation is about identity. Here is how the very culture of American military societies is changing.

America’s Legions

The United States is gathering the world together. September 11, 2001, showed Americans that the only true safety was no enemies anywhere—total world security management. We are told that the positive side of American world management will be a democratic free-market and secure world environment. Yet this has been America’s goal since World War II. The 9-11 attacks only accelerated the course of empire, they did not create it. American Empire is some 60 years old. This is an important benchmark for military identity because it tells us that the American military has had 60 years to get used to an identity not part of its original job description as “Shield of the Republic.” Now it has a world empire to run.

How will an American world empire change military identities? The deepest shift has already happened: going from citizen-soldier to professional military. Back when it became the latter, it seemed like a natural and normal response to the debacle of Vietnam and the draft. But calling today’s military a “volunteer force,” and the Guard and Reserve a legacy of our original militia ethos, cannot hide the bigger change. Although its ranks are volunteers in the narrowest sense and most are citizens, the force has slowly assumed the character of all great professional militaries. This profession means a way of life increasingly separate from the society it defends, whose agenda flows from its commander-in-chief and whose needs must be defended and fulfilled within the politics of the “imperial court.”

Each of these elements is part of the U.S. military today, though still at an early stage of development. What can we expect for the future? The current trend toward a military caste or “guild consciousness” will continue, encouraged by a social structure where both parents are often soldiers and the profession is passed down within the family. The full participation of women thus paradoxically cements the military’s cultural internalization. Also, more and more non-citizens will participate, for like ancient Rome this is a certain path to citizenship. World security will surely require more forces than national recruitment can supply, so today’s 2% could be tomorrow’s 20%. Finally, the Guard and Reserve will cease to represent any kind of legacy. The need for them is so great that they will likely be integrated into the active force through a flexible, on-call status.

The military’s role and stake in court politics will become more visible. Inasmuch as the commander-in-chief directs everything they do, their relationship with the executive is paramount to the livelihood and identity of military societies. This process of representation is truly court politics because the roles of the people and Congress are more distant.
and mediated through the person of the president. Already this relationship is openly celebrated. Before the Iraq War, servicemen asked by the media about impending war invariably replied: “We’re good to go when our commander-in-chief gives the word.” The intimacy of the commander’s relationship with his military has become a casual part of presidential presentation. Often he prefers to address the people from afar, surrounded by his troops. Front-page pictures show him, almost like pater familias, surrounded by rapt young soldiers reaching out to touch him.

The Bridge of Jointness

“Jointness” was a 1980s idea to improve military efficiency by breaking down barriers among the armed services so they could work better together. It’s done that. But by breaking down the lock each service had on its own people, jointness also has opened a bridge to cultural migration within the military. Thus jointness has become a path for subcultures within traditional military institutions to leave old identities behind and invent new identities better suited to new military conditions. The most visible example of this migration is SOCOM. Special Operations elements that once inhabited little niches in Army, Navy, and Air Force culture were now free to come together and create a new military society. Their origins are just legacy because their true identity is simply SOCOM, and a whole new military institution is emerging around it.

This process, however, is even more significant in larger terms. It permits a fundamental re-sorting of major military identities—and their powerful institutions—to better fit the needs of American world security management. Security management is not necessarily war and as such may require different organizational models, command relationships, and operational practices from those of “old war,” that is, actual battles with guys in uniform fighting tanks and planes and ships with tanks and planes and ships. Thus the Coast Guard can be seamlessly integrated into Homeland Security where, given the needs of the day, it will lose both of its twin former identities as the “boater’s friend” in peace and a junior navy in war, and gain a new and less benign one: coastal law enforcement.

This is a portent for the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Not only are old notions of “ownership” according to milieu (ground-sea-air) outdated, but there is no pure domain any longer even for war itself. In the Network World, the military is no longer master even of its most intimate domain of “battle.” Military societies will be forced to compete for their own jobs, while their own opportunistic subcultures look for bigger outside careers.

The imperatives of American world security management could lead to new hybrid or even mutant organizations, task groups, and permanent institutions whose ties to “parent” cultures, like SOCOM today, are at best nostalgic. Eventually the new institutions will become their own cultures with their own unique societies.

Old War’s High Ritual

American know-how, i.e., technology, has not transformed war, rather, it has made its future classic practice impossible. Classical or old war has become a U.S. enterprise only. Others of course continue to maintain “showcase” militaries, but they are more and more for show and less and less to challenge the United States. More demonstrations like the Iraq War mean even less motivation to compete on classic military terms. Thus the technology dimension of military transformation has served to turn old war into high ritual. Only Americans want to practice it, and they do it to make it always unappetizing for others.

To keep things this way, the U.S. military must forever worship at old war’s altar. The paradox is that by becoming the “gods” of one kind of war, Americans create unwanted consequences for their military selves. On one hand, in order to stay gods they must keep doing old war. But by continually parading the worthlessness of old war to others, the American military encourages, even teaches, its enemies to fight a different kind of war. This means that the United States will be putting enormous energy and resources into war that will not be fought. This will only further encourage enemies to fight what we might call “new war.” New war will be seen as a more equal struggle, not only because the balance of forces should be more equivalent, but also because the United States is less inclined to fight such a war, and certainly may fight it less well than old war.

The Work of New War

This presumes that the ways of old war will not be transferable to new war, and also that, by continuing to focus on old war, Americans will have less to invest in the new. New war by its very logic presumes that America’s enemies can fabricate a paradigm of war that engages the United States where it is weak.

Weaker, perhaps, compared to America’s immortal strength in old war, but it can be argued that almost nowhere will the United States be weak. What is likely is that dissuading others to compete in old war will always consume 80% or more of American military energy and resources. But the remaining 20%, honed on tracking down and killing the fighters of new war, will challenge even the toughest new wave insurgency. Also much of
It is important to stress here that new war thus becomes integrated into the continuum of military identity, but over time it seizes primacy as the emergent narrative of identity. The more arduous the battle experiences, the richer the mythic stories, and these mythic stories, remember, will come to form a new literary canon that in itself represents the passage to a new American military identity—its own journey of becoming.

America itself is in an imperial mid-passage. It is not surprising in the least, therefore, that the army and navy of the old republic—designed to defend American interests in peace and then to mobilize and lead the nation in war—is gone. In its place is a superb military institution now charged with securing world peace for all time.

The Roman metaphor is thus not entirely out of place. Like Rome’s legions in the first century AD, our military still retains traditional institutions and forms. The Roman legions were increasingly removed from the life of society and no longer served the republic, but rather the emperor. Over time, of course, Rome’s legions became less and less Italian. Those permanently stationed along the Rhine frontier, for example, took on a distinctly Germanic character and began to identify themselves not with the core of Mediterranean civilization but with the rough agenda of the world periphery.

All comparisons to Rome are of course mere metaphor. Nonetheless, the transformation the American military needs to think about has three passages: from serving a republic to serving an empire, from a national-tribal identity to a world-cosmopolitan identity, and from being a defender to being an enforcer.

Together these passages are not necessarily bad. There is no reason why America should not be, and every promise that it will be, an empire unlike any other. For military societies, however, the road there will bring many changes. Some, like those suggested earlier, will involve doing things that may seem out of character or inglorious, but others will involve doing things that are hard to do—even unbearable to do—and doing them may not lead initially to success.

Yet out of these experiences will emerge an American military that would astonish our ancient founders. What will set these legionnaires apart will not be fancy weapons but attitude, thinking, and identity. It is not too early for the American military to begin to ponder the myth and the honors that will attend its new destiny.

(This essay originally appeared in the online journal TechCentralStation.com on June 19, 2003.)
“Enemy Mine”

Who is the “enemy”? Victory depends on our answer. We think of the enemy as “the other,” either as our opposite or as a dark mirror of ourselves, so how we define the enemy also defines us. Furthermore, war is an expression of a relationship. Our relationship with the enemy in war is bound up in our past and future ties to them, so the “nature” of our enemy tells us a lot about our larger relationship with them. Finally, “victory” itself can be seen as changing the terms of that relationship in our favor. Therefore, how we answer the question—Who is the enemy?—also describes the parameters of victory.

Let’s take an example.

Defining Them, Defining Us

The Germans were the best enemy ever. As “Prussian militarists” in World War I, and “Nazis” in World War II, they bestowed on us, quite unwittingly, a great gift. They also spoiled us and badly skewed our understanding of “enemy mine.”

Modern Germany and the United States were both created in the 1860s. We were competitors, but also in our own eyes cultural mirrors of each other: both industrial powerhouses and emerging democracies, and both speaking similar languages, sharing real familial ties, speaking from the same canon of modern thought, and believing in the same transcendent vision of our own national futures. We were called the new century’s global “comers.” Future history was to be the outcome of our competition. In a way it was.

When we went to war in 1917 we aggressively defined our enemy in ways that flattered us and denigrated them. Prussian militarists who had led Germans to the Dark Side gave us the passionate motivation that comes from fighting evil. Yet we could look at the German people and see ourselves waiting to be redeemed. By defeating the Prussian, we were impossibly elevated: Americans had defeated the Gods of War! That was what we believed. A bunch of American boys from farm and factory had bested the world’s best.

We did not seek to punish Germany like the Pyrrhic victors, Britain and France. We came, we said, to renew a people like ourselves. Thus our definition of the enemy ended up as uplifting good karma. We defeated evil and did good toward our own.

We can glimpse this through the eye of postwar Hollywood. Movies morphed the great director-turned-actor Eric von Stroheim into the perfect evil Prussian: “the man you love to hate.” But these silent films also showed chivalrous German flyers dropping wreaths on the aerodromes of Allied airmen they’d shot down, while movies like The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (1920) and All Quiet on the Western Front (1930) portrayed Germans as like Americans.

In other words, we were able to have it both ways: the war made us feel better about ourselves by uplifting our deepest ego, while our empathy with a former enemy created the basis for a strong postwar relationship.

The Relationship

Much of U.S. diplomacy after World War I was about that relationship and encouraged a stable and truly democratic Germany, but the relationship failed in the 1930s. The stark symbolism of the 1936 Berlin Olympiad announced for all to see that the United States and Germany were once again world-historical competitors. It was time for a sequel.

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5 20th Century Fox, Kings Road Entertainment, 1985.
As national cinema, *Prussian Militarism. The Nazi Menace* was an even better sequel than the original. Nazis were a much better caricature than dignified Junkers, the stuffy but honorable Prussian aristocrats we fought in World War I. Nazis were so thoroughly evil that they goaded us into a more satisfying war relationship: their absolute and utter destruction.2

The more apocalyptic dramaturgy of this war also demanded a more passionate story of redemption for the German people because they had so unreservedly embraced Hitler’s vision. Thus the war relationship framed our postwar relationship. It was to be one of redeemer and redeemed, where the Germans could be saved only through their collective repentance, “de-Nazification.” In this fashion the war made of the Germans active participants in the American design. It was neither conquest nor liberation, but rather a form of religious conversion.

This conversion was made possible by the dramatic theater of the war. Allied bombing brought the life of German society and civilization to the edge of annihilation, and we could say that while their worship of Nazism had brought them there, we, their cultural brothers, had come to save them.

The Parameters of Victory

Three elements in our war relationship gave us the victory we wanted. First, we defined the enemy so that their defeat fulfilled our deepest expectations while the enemy accommodated us in every way. Second, we framed the war relationship so that the postwar relationship would “advantage” us in every way. Finally, the theater of the war itself gave us absolute authority among Germans so that they actively collaborated to realize our new relationship.

In two great wars, the Germans made us the new Gods of War and de facto Masters of the Universe. Our national karma increased a hundredfold. But this all came at a price. We were also spoiled by success. So in war we seek yet more lavish sequels to *Prussian Militarism*. Example: some call the History Channel the “Hitler Channel” for all its endless replay of World War II action. But red-blooded Americans don’t love the Nazis, they love beating the Nazis, again and again, 24/7—after 60 years. Kids who couldn’t tell you word one about the Versailles Treaty have made blockbuster hits out of *Castle Wolfenstein* and the *Medal of Honor* video game series because it is still an honor to kill Nazis. It is a form of sacred trust, part of what it means to be an American.

We have ironically come to love our best enemy too well. The downside to this is clear in today’s Global War on Terrorism. Who is the enemy now? Terrorism? Truth is, we are not defining the enemy … the enemy is defining us.

They Are Defining Us

America entered a world-historical relationship with Islam in 1973. Of course we didn’t see it that way, and still don’t, preferring to describe instead a menagerie of individual relationships with national regimes. The United States certainly does not admit to a relationship with a religion or a “civilization.”

But Islam does, in fact, have a relationship with the United States. The years 1967–1973 marked the beginning of a great struggle within Islam over its revival and future course. Its first great awakening was the Iranian revolution, which was followed by the triumphant Jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the defeat of Israel in Lebanon from 1982–2000, and two effective Intifadas by the Palestinians. The United States has been entangled in each of these enterprises without ever facing the overarching theme they shared.

Likewise, the United States has taken sides in the struggle, choosing the reactionary over the revivalist, the *ancien régime* over the insurgency, with the exemption of Afghanistan. There, America trained and financed the greatest Jihad of recent times, thus helping to ratify the viability of Jihadi-style war against an invading Unbeliever, even if that invader was a world-class power (the Soviet Union).

Every Muslim understands the brief against the United States as an Unbeliever colossus and a defiling invader. We have already been defined, but we cannot engage that definition because we refuse to recognize the relationship between this definition and the Muslim World. Thus by default we have become defined as the enemy.

Moreover, because we embody the mythic power of all that threatens Islam, every victory they score, no matter how small, emboldens them with a store of our mythic authority, which by the same small measure denigrates us. Every sacrifice, every martyrdom, represents a kind of karmic boost to their ultimate victory.

In contrast, we are fighting mere “terrorists” who are by definition no more than criminals. If captured they are not treated as colleagues of war—POWs. If to Muslims their fighters are true defenders of the faith, to us they are vermin. But what does that make of us? At best we are mere policemen, symbolically less than soldiers. How then do we look if as Gods of War we fail to root this vermin out? How do we look if they get the better

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2 We should remember here that the Third Reich deliberately hid its truest evil, the Shoah, until war’s end.
of any engagement, however small? We have deprived ourselves of war’s karmic boost.

This is a clear advantage for the enemy. They are elevated by the energy we expend in Muslim lands. We have, in fact, elevated them to the status of a powerful foe. We daily send out the message, quite inadvertently, that they are the great enemy. In exchange, we deny ourselves the satisfaction of engaging a great enemy. A great enemy raises you up, but a despicable enemy drags you down.3

Relationship Denial

In fact it’s worse than that. We cannot openly name our enemy for fear of elevating them even further. Any move to make them like the Germans—“enemy mine”—would legitimate them not only as the great enemy, but also as our political equivalent within Islam, instantly stripping our tremulous Muslim clients4 of their last shreds of legitimacy.

This is because the terrorists are fighters in an insurgent movement that has widespread support among Muslims. We cannot so elevate them that they become legitimated as the true defenders of Islam. But by denying their relationship to the Ummah as a whole we run the risk of legitimating them anyway, because defining them as criminals is an explicit form of defining all of Islam as something criminal or at least contemptible. Many, many Muslims believe that the United States is in the process of occupying their world so as to destroy their faith and their way of life. Furthermore, our unconditional support for corrupt and tyrannical regimes in Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and elsewhere underscores America’s choice of evil (à la Islamic law) over the good.

America has chosen to prosecute a war that denies any possible future legitimacy to the Islamic insurgency, and indeed, any authentic connection between it and the Muslim World as a whole. To further this denial, the United States also ignores its own relationship with Islam, persisting instead in describing only formal micro-relationships with individuals or regimes.

3 The great Israeli historian Martin van Creveld put it this way: “If you are strong, and you are fighting the weak for any period of time, you are going to become weak yourself … it’s only a question of time … The problem is that you cannot prove yourself against someone who is much weaker than yourself … No [the Israeli forces] have not yet lost, but they are as far as I can see, well on the way to losing.” World in Focus, Interview with Martin van Creveld, March 20, 2002, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/stories/s511530.htm.

No Name for Victory

Victory in this war can have no name because for us victory does not exist. How can we declare victory against a bunch of criminals? Is another year of absolute power for Saudi princes a victory for our side? Here we can see perhaps the fateful legacy of VE Day, the dream of perfect victory.

World War II was the historical centerpiece of the “Attack Iraqers.” To them, Iraq was truly Prussian Militarism: The Butcher of Baghdad. It was to be Part III in the series, except that here, instead of Germans, we would destroy an evil Arab regime and redeem a long-suffering Arab people. The Allied occupation of Germany and its attendant de-Nazification was held up like a sacred reliquary to silence the uncertain, for it held the authority of History itself. America’s all-powerful martial narrative, the Attack Iraqers assured us, would be repeated.

Hence the Iraq War was invented as a piece of necessary theater. It replaced a relationship denied and an enemy that could not be named with an instantly recognizable story line. But the claim of “enemy mine” meant that no one, not even trembling liberals, considered that this strategic ersatz might not work.

Beyond this, the Iraq War was designed to be more than a distracting episode. It was planned as a strategic changeling that would have an unstoppable ripple effect. First, “shock and awe” would give us so much natural authority that we could force peace in Palestine. Furthermore, as cheering Iraqis filled the rifle barrels of American liberators with flowers, Tehran’s freedom-loving students would rise up wholesale, sparking democratic revolution in Iran. Finally, armed with a peaceful, contented, and democratic Iraq, the United States might at last nudge its corrupt “friends in the region” toward a stately historical exit.

In short, “enemy mine” has become our debilitating mindset. Even while Americans talk breathlessly about innovation and “military transformation,” they cling to a historical paradigm where every successful war must be a sequel to World War II, even if this means wantonly imposing our sacred narrative on a hostile and alien culture.

We should start again from the beginning. This is not a Global War on Terrorism. In fact, it is not yet a classical war at all and may never be. Instead of war we are engaged in a strategic and cultural relationship with Islam. This relationship now dominates our national life, and indeed, world affairs.

How should this relationship be characterized? If it is not classical war, neither is it comparable to the national-cultural competition between 20th century Germany and America. It is unique in the American
national experience. Perhaps the Counter-Reformation and Thirty Years’ War work as a rough parable. Like Europe in the 17th century, the world of Islam is also in the throes of a great struggle with itself, and we are now a part of it. Moreover, the dynamic of change itself cannot be stopped. There will be an Islamic revival.

Nevertheless, the United States is denying its relationship with the whole while allying itself, regime by regime, piece by piece, with the “forces of reaction.” Americans need to decide if (1) they wish to continue on this course, (2) seek an alternative way to support Islamic revival without submitting to its “puritan” factions, or (3) take on Islam directly and forcibly convert its civilization to Western-style modernity.

Right now we are “at war” explicitly only with the puritan factions of the revival. If we remain committed to our corrupt clients we will never nudge them to give it all up for blissful democracy. That will come only through their death. In addition, by remaining in “occupation” of much of Islam’s core we also inevitably inspire a larger if yet unrealized movement against us. The puritan factions do not yet represent such a movement within Islam. We have the capacity to so legitimate them.

In contrast, however, it must be said that there is no safe way for the United States now to demonstrate sincere support for an Islamic revival. That opportunity was lost, perhaps forever, when we washed our hands of Afghanistan after 1989. Loss was cemented when the United States gave the word to Algerian generals in 1992 to overthrow the democratically elected new Islamist government. Our knee-jerk support of the Saudis since then has probably made this option irretrievable. If we decide to support an Islamic revival, doing so half-heartedly might well bring us the very thing we fear—energized entities more powerful than any Muslim nation we know of today.

That still leaves an alternative to the repressive and untenable status quo on the one hand, or the forced conversion of Islam to liberal modernity on the other. By embracing both our relationship with Islam and the necessity of an Islamic revival, we may yet be able to coax History away from an eventual, and truly apocalyptic, sequel to “enemy mine.”

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The Muslims Are Coming! The Muslims Are Coming!

France, Italy, and Spain together could be called “Roman Europe,” as they once formed the core of the old Western Empire. Alternatively we could say “Latin Europe,” as they speak what amounts to demotic Latin. Two generations hence, however, these countries might be called something quite different, like Arab-Muslim Europe, but in a way no one has thought of before.

We all have heard about Europe’s low birth rate and fertility. People actually talk about Italians disappearing in a hundred years.\(^1\) In contrast, we think of Arab fertility as huge, so it is commonplace to assume that Arab immigrants might eventually replace the Italians.

That won’t happen. Truth is, birth rates in the Arab World are nose-diving. This startling news, Phillip Longman tells us, is that Algeria, for example, will age as much in the next few years as the United States did in a whole century.\(^2\) In a recent issue of *Foreign Policy*, Omer Taspinar insisted that Muslim birth rates in Europe are three times higher than non-Muslims, but that won’t last.\(^3\)

Don’t look for a Muslim majority in Europe anytime soon. However, the Arab minority in Roman Europe will more than double by 2050, while there will be many millions fewer Spanish and Italians. The bulge of the Arab “boomer” generation, buoyed by aggressive illegal immigration, could still push the proportion of Muslims in France, Italy, and Spain up to a quarter or even a third of their populations.

Even more significant will be the comparative age structure over the next couple of generations. Because of the unexampled number of young Arabs that will enter adulthood during this time, the percentage of European Muslims will account for an even higher proportion of adults in their most productive years: their 20s, 30s, and 40s. As the Arab boomer generations move through time, they will come to occupy, for at least a slice of historical time, a unique demographic space. Even if Muslims in Roman Europe still only represent 20% to 25% of the total population, working adults may reach 40% or more. This will hold for the duration of an era—from 2010 to 2050—and could alter the nature of European civilization.

Demographic change is not just about bodies. The conventional paradigm of migrations and birth rates is a quintessentially American either-or: either newcomers or immigrant newborn assimilate into their host culture, or they are destined to hunker down in grim ghettos. This American expectation is neatly summed up in Peter Schwartz’s new book, *Inevitable Surprises*.\(^4\) Of the Muslim surge in Europe, either “this migration could revitalize the continent,” if they are embraced in the American fashion, or “we might see whole European cities evolve into ghettos for Muslim and African immigrants, virtually walled off from the rest of the continent, and festering with crime, disease, and random violence.”

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1. For projections to 2050, see Population Reference Bureau, 2003 World Population Data Sheet, http://www.prb.org/pdfs/WorldPopulationDS03_Eng.pdf. Actually this trajectory would take several hundred years!
This framing of the future as “optimistic” or “pessimistic,” of either this or that, misses a powerful dynamic in human interaction and relationships: the possibility of something new. “New” in the case of Roman Europe and its Arab Muslims means the possibility of a new cultural mix: a mélange civilization. Furthermore, this prospect has powerful, if overlooked, historical precedents.

One example was Muslim Spain—al Andalus—but that is shrouded in myth and was long ago overturned by North African radical Islamists in the 11th and 12th centuries. A bit closer to our times was the emergence of Ottoman civilization in the 14th and 15th centuries. In a new book, The Nature of the Early Ottoman State, Heath Lowry explodes the modern nationalist narratives of Greece and Turkey. These societies both perversely share the mythology of an alien Turkish Muslim culture subjugating the Byzantine Balkans.

Lowry says it just didn’t happen that way. Instead he shows that four men founded the Ottoman state—Miḥal, Evrenos, Turahan, and Othman—one of which was Greek and another a Catalan Christian. The Turks entering Greek Asia Minor did not subjugate, but rather accepted Christians (and Christianity!) as well as the Byzantine-cultural elites as members of their cause. What Lowry calls a “religio-social hybrid Islamochristian entity” emerged. For a century and more the Ottoman Empire was a new and unparalleled “melting pot”:

Its leadership was mixed—the families of the four founders ran the state in its first century—and encouraged intermarriage. For example, five of the six initial Ottoman rulers had Greek mothers. Thus Mehmet II, conqueror of Constantinople, was almost wholly Greek by blood.

Its elites were almost equally Christian and Muslim. In parts of the Balkans, half of the timariots—the soldier/state officials that collected taxes and made up the heavy cavalry—were Christian Greeks and Serbs: the local gentry.

Christianity and Islam were often preached as one religion. In the early 15th century, the Börklüce Mustafa movement “stressed fraternization between Muslims and Christians ... supported by a mystic love of God, in which all differences of religion were overlooked ... an attempt actually to unite two faiths as one.”

Of course this “syncretism” (an Islamochristian synthesis or fusion) could not last. As the Ottoman state became more established and empire-like in its administrative structure, it chose to push “High Islam” over the mélange vision of its first generations. But Lowry has unearthed a fascinating possibility. After all, he suggests: “What could be more natural than an attempt to develop a new religious synthesis as a reflection of the actual nature of the evolving political entity?” What indeed? Could we someday see a Roman-Arab cultural synthesisspread across Mediterranean Western Europe?

Muslims are not talking about such a path. Some boast of eventual majorities in some European countries, but again, that isn’t going to happen. If Italian and Spanish birth rates are plummeting, so are Muslim birth rates. It’s just that it will happen a bit later. In contrast, European Muslims that effectively integrate into elite life keep searching for ways to be equal participants within the European civic framework while still preserving their identity as good Muslims. Tariq Ramadan, for example, has written eloquently in To Be a European Muslim about reforming Islam in Europe so that Muslims there can aspire to be full and equal citizens. Some are calling him the Muslim Martin Luther.

European Muslims look at future possibility much like Americans and Europeans: as an either-or proposition. Either Muslims integrate, somehow without ceding identity, by reforming Islam (as Ramadan urges) or they hole up and hope that someday they will overcome not simply Euro-discrimination but European secular society and culture as well. Islam will triumph, and the dream of al Andalus will be restored to long-lost glory.

Europe’s next two Muslim generations might well pursue the path to full participation as good Italians or Spaniards. Likewise their anger as a great, indigestible community of true believers might, as Schwartz suggests, tear apart the European Union. But there is a third path, à la Ottoman—unexpected, but not unique.

The Ottomans came as conquerors: they could do as they pleased. Why would they recruit, elevate, and embrace the very people they were conquering? Perhaps they had no choice: they were but a tiny minority entering the Byzantine World. A mélange civilization was a strategic necessity for the Ottomans.

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7 Tariq Ramadan, To Be a European Muslim, The Islamic Foundation, 1998.
Arabs in Roman Europe have arrived not as conquerors but as lowly immigrants. They have lived at the margins, isolated and kept down. Of course they want to break out of their dead-end ghettos and share in the good life of the French and Spanish and Italians. Ramadan enjoins Muslims to reform Islam and integrate into modernity and become full European citizens. But why must this be the only path of betterment for Europe's Muslims?

This is where numbers activate the dynamic. At 10% say, of France, Muslims are a powerful minority, but they can still be "managed," i.e., denied the fruits of assimilation or forced to assimilate on Latin terms. At 25% or more, however, they can demand full entry into European life. At 40% or more of the active adult workforce, moreover, they can alter the terms of cultural identity and relationship. It is numbers—and the historical window they open for a time—that make this path possible. Muslims in Roman Europe can push for a mélangé civilization, if they wish to, because they can. The actual demographic impact of the Muslim minority gives a blended civilization in Western Europe's Mediterranean core its sense of possibility.

How might such a possibility take form and what, way off in 2050, would it look like? Three factors are critical: intermarriage, entry into the elite, and religious syncretism. None of these factors appear likely, but shifts in the composition of French, Spanish, and Italian societies could make them seem natural within a generation.

Moderate Islamists like Ramadan have been saying that Islam will reform and reconcile itself with Western modernity, but outside of traditional Muslim lands. Change in Islam will emerge out of Muslim minorities in America and Europe. Why must such change necessarily mean merely a narrow reinterpretation of Islam? Why not something that, while recognizably Islamic, is also something wholly new? Why not a new synthesis? A Muslim minority with dominant numbers will not only advance deep into European societies: it will do so with increasing confidence. And with confidence will come openness to cultural experimentation and a willingness to leave old ways behind. Ramadan himself speaks glowingly of this while assuming that such Islamic adaptation will remain unimpeachably Islamic. But why should it?

Islamic reinterpretation (Ijtihad) in the European context will happen against a backdrop of social breakthroughs. Dominant minority numbers will finally open all doors, meaning that more and more Muslims will enter the middle classes and leadership elites. Thus they will also actively intermarry. Remember, the Ottoman motivation to create a mixed and stirred civilization was in part the product of strategic necessity, but it was also something that just happened because Turks and Greeks in Western Asia Minor were mixing: living together after the fighting was over. So, to borrow Lowry's words, a "religio-social hybrid Islamochristian" Europe—at least its Western Mediterranean core—would also, in part, just happen.

In the next two generations there will be so many European Muslims that such cultural mixing, especially in Roman Europe, will be the norm. And like our Ottoman precedent, who will stop Islamochristians from also actively reinterpreting the sources of meaning in life—a sort of mutant Ijtihad gone wild? As it is with all religions, once unfettered reinterpretation is permitted, it just doesn't stop. In the 14th century Ottoman World religious syncretism was well on course to create a new religion. It wasn't going to stop: it was stopped. High Islam stepped in and down on it, and the rising Turkish imperial establishment had the power to make an unbending Islam stick.

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The Six Dilemmas of the Moderate Islamist

"Moderate Islamists" could ultimately decide if America wins or loses its War on Terror. Victory depends on their support, and thus also on our support of them, but ultimately as well on the support of Muslims everywhere.

Why? Because Islam is in the throes of renewal and the Muslim World is changing. Moreover, we cannot genetically modify Muslim societies so they become happy American replicants. The change must be in Islam itself, and the question is whether it will be a radical purification or a moderate reinterpretation?

What exactly is a moderate Islamist? The moderate Islamist should not be confused with the moderate Muslim. The moderate Muslim is the kind of Muslim America likes. Americans are comfortable with moderate religiosity, like the quiet churchgoer, we would prefer Muslims who are not above, for example, knocking back an occasional beer. But this is not what we should expect. Islam is a demanding religion and a demanding way of life. Islamic renewal will be full of piety and passion.

The moderate Islamist, like the radical Islamist, seeks to renew the Muslim World, not help it relax. The Islamist is dedicated to the Islamic cause, and he is an active proselytizer. Thus moderate Islamists like radical Islamists are dedicated to change within and expansion of the Muslim World. Unlike the radicals, however, they reject the path of aggressive struggle, or Jihad. Moderate Islamists would renew their faith and their world instead through Islamic reinterpretation, or Ijtihad.¹

Moderate Islamists are thus self-proclaimed leaders in the renewal of Islam. The moderate Islamist is highly educated, in contrast to many radical Islamists. The moderate Islamist is also receptive to Western ideas—but selectively receptive. Ultimately the moderate Islamist must compete with the radical Islamist for authority among Muslims. This competition will decide how Islam changes.

Yet, moderate Islamists are at a disadvantage. Six dilemmas threaten to undermine their cause.

The Vision of Western Modernity vs. the Islamic Canon

Modernity has been a disaster for the Muslim World, so the moderate Islamist must approach Western modernity with great care. The approach taken is a practical parsing of modernity—to distance themselves from past, failed flirtations with modernity within the Muslim World. Thus they can embrace attractive (and some might say, necessary) Western values.

Some moderate Islamists say that the West has gone so far as to actually ditch "modernity" for an almost valueless "post-modernity," thereby moving toward a belief system unacceptable to Muslims. This permits moderate Islamists to say they support traditional modern values like pluralism and democracy while simultaneously scolding the West as corrupted by its value-relativism.

¹ Some Muslim reformists with moderate views were suggested by our guests: Muhammad Abduh, Shakeeb Arsalan, Malik Bennabi, Fahmi Huwaidi, Saleem Awa, and Tareq al-Bishri. None of them, of course, were present at our meeting.
Moderate Islamists must also deny the radical’s assertion of the Islamic canon as pure and closed to interpretation. This means defining the radicals in the same way they define the West: as good gone astray. The West lost its grounding in guiding religious values, while radical Islamists lost their way through ignorance and zealotry. The West no longer knows its own true spirit, they say, while radicals no longer know the true spirit of Islam.

The problem is that both the West and the Jihadis are enterprises beyond such criticism: each is sure it owns the true spirit of its civilization, so the moderate Islamist, at a minimum, pleases no one.

**One’s Identity as a National Citizen vs. One’s Identity as Part of the Ummah**

Moderate Islamism is most creative among Muslims in the United States and Europe, but such ferment among Muslims here brings an inevitable question: Are they citizens first or Muslims first? Their response is often like Tariq Ramadan’s: “When I speak about citizenship, I am Swiss with a Muslim background. But when I speak of philosophy, my perception of life, I am a Muslim with a Swiss nationality.”

But Islamic tradition emphasizes Muslim over Citizenship, especially in an unbeliever society. Moreover, Islamic law is muddy over the issue of how Muslims should behave in non-Muslim lands. Thus, a large majority in some European countries consider themselves Muslim first, Euro-nationals second.

The moderate Islamist must therefore be as pro-Ummah as he dare while still urging Muslims to be good citizens. This means also calling for Muslim civic autonomy in Western societies, going beyond even the most liberal vision of “diversity.” Furthermore, Muslims are charged to be active proselytizers in a culture that is very cool to overt missionary activity. The moderate Islamist in the West must therefore try to dampen fears that Muslims put their religion above majority civic ideals and law.

This dilemma may seem irresolvable. Good Muslims can never truly accommodate to the Western ethos and its belief system without in effect becoming moderate (bad) Muslims. The moderate Islamist must fight accommodation by the Muslim community and urge Islamic conversion throughout the West while allaying suspicions in the larger society. The path some have chosen is to argue that both active proselytizing and civic autonomy for the Muslim community are good things for Western society as a whole. They promote true diversity, and thus Islamic “pluralism” benefits everyone. This is a very tough sell.

**Islamic Renewal vs. the New**

Traditions of revivalism within Islam favor the radical over the moderate Islamist. In part this is because Muslim history is a repeated rhythm of renewal and purification, beginning of course with Muhammad himself, the first renewer, sweeping down from the mountain and out of the wilderness to rescue a people who had lost their way. This is the legitimated loom of History, of collective repetition and continuity through time, and it favors the radical Islamist.

There is also the lingering taint of a flirtation with Western modernity in the 1950s and 1960s. Moderate Islamists must paint this period as a failed and corrupted renewal.

First, the moderate Islamist must show that a very selective openness to Western values and practices does not suggest conversion to something so corrupting as wholesale Western modernity, in contrast to the socialist Pan-Arabists of the post-colonial era. It was they, after all, who visited disaster upon the Muslim World because they were not Islamists. Second, they must describe the period of heavy Western influence as creating a complete break with traditional Muslim culture. This makes the very secular 1950s and 1960s a true discontinuity for Islam. Then, the rhythm of renewal and purification was also broken, to be left behind with other long-lost traditions. Thus the Jihadi call is just a sort of marginal and archaic nostalgia, not an appropriate response to contemporary needs.

The alternative response held up by the moderate Islamist—_Ijtihad_—is not as canonized in popular tradition as purifying renewal. The task of the moderate Islamist is thus to argue that radical Islamism is both archaic and ignorant, and that _Ijtihad_ is the only appropriate course. However, _Ijtihad_ is also historically untested (in Sunni Islam) and thus truly a break, truly something new. Moderate Islamists admit that Islamic history is all about the _continuity_ of renewal. Pushing for something new, especially including Western ideas, brings back memories of the failed experiment with Western modernity.

The moderate Islamist must represent _Ijtihad_ as equal to Jihad as a path to Islamic renewal. This is very difficult when an increasing number of Muslims are uneducated in their civilization. Moderate protestations do nothing to diminish the siren call of the Jihadi.

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2 From Paul Donnelly’s interview with the prominent Swiss moderate Islamist: “Tariq Ramadan: The Muslim Martin Luther” Tariq Ramadan was not a guest at our meeting. http://www.salon.com/people/feature/2002/02/15/ramadan/index_np.html.

3 In a British Sunday Times poll after 9-11, 80% of British Muslims said that they considered themselves Muslims first and British citizens second. http://www.sunday-times.co.uk/news/pages/sti/2001/11/04/stiusausa01025.html.

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Let Us Change Ourselves vs. Supporting U.S. Strategy Is the Only Way

Moderate Islamists also understand that there is another bringer of change to the Muslim World: the United States. Should the moderate Islamist hope that America achieves his goals too, or is this prospect so precarious and remote that it is better for Muslims to change Muslims, even if it is the radicals who bring the change?

If the United States is to successfully bring the change, then Americans must realize that this does not mean change according to their own desires and political agendas. Above all it means that we must stop supporting “the despots.” American support for corrupt regimes, they say, makes the United States a “lightning rod” for conflict. Rather than promoting stability, America actually encourages Muslims—as one Islamist academic said—to do resistance on their own. People say the United States must be expelled, then we can fix the Muslim World.” They say Mubarak’s regime, for example, would not survive but for U.S. billions. When a moderate calls America the “external barrier to internal reform” he is saying that the United States is holding back reformation in Egypt and throughout the Muslim World.

Again, the moderate Islamist’s best hopes depend on the success of American actions. The United States has entered into an intimate relationship with the Muslim World, one that will not end soon and one that can only intensify the war. It is almost as if the moderate Islamist senses that an irrevocable choice is approaching for Muslims everywhere: between a benevolent American order or an insurgent coalescence under the banner of Jihad.

They clearly would prefer American Empire, but on their terms. “I’d rather have the United States as the dominant player”—but—“America must see the Muslim World as a longer-term partner.” The moderate Islamist can see a triumphant path ahead, but it must go like this:

The United States ushers in a democracy in Iraq, but according to Muslim traditions of civil society. Then it gives up control and lets Iraq go its own way.

The United States must also push for real change in Arabia and Egypt, even if that means, in their words, “regime change” there.

Once democracy truly takes hold, with Iraq as a model, anti-American sentiment will begin to abate. Popular concerns will begin to shift to the performance of local Arab government.

“Muslim compliance” should not be the U.S. objective. America will be secure only when Arab societies are thriving and feel that “their country is their country.” Then U.S. military presence there will become “irrelevant.”

A happy vision indeed.

Upheaval Is Necessary to Change vs. Enlightened Policy Brings Gentler Change

Even though Americans and moderate Islamists both want democracy to succeed in Iraq, how does the Muslim World as a whole get from here to there? The United States talks of “democratic reform” but does nothing about it with authoritarian regimes it continues to support. Moderate Islamists want these regimes replaced by popular Islamic governments, but offer no alternative to violent revolution, that is, change by radical Islamists.

Here moderate Islamists have a hopeful story. First, they insist that the Taliban was a “distortion of natural evolution in Islam.” They suggest that Islamist revolutions in the “civilized centers” of the Muslim World (in contrast to uncivilized places like Sudan and Afghanistan) “would not inevitably be extremist in their true nature even if they appeared to be radical when they assumed power.”

Notably, the Sunni Islamists at our meeting praised the Iranian revolution for bringing true pluralism. For example, they say that demanding women to wear the chador was not enslaving but liberating. In the days of the Shah, only elite women participated in public life, but now all women do, as long as they wear the chador. Perhaps praising Iran is a sign that moderate Islamists feel that they must be prepared to join successful future Islamist movements, even if more radical groups dominate them.

They also have another story. Moderate Islamists complain that Muslims everywhere are uneducated and no longer understand Islam. This suggests that not simply the Taliban, but Islam everywhere has become “distorted,” hence, implicitly, the Taliban’s appeal. In this degraded Islamic context the authority of the moderate Islamist would decline.

They tell the story of Al Fatah. As an Islamist movement it brought 20% of Palestinians to an Islamic identity, but then failed politically. Hamas then “hijacked the modest achievements of Al Fatah and radicalized Islamic fervor into terrorism. This is what is happening at the global level.” In their own words, “peaceful Islamists historically have failed to deliver the vision of society they had been promising for 70 years.” No wonder, they say, that Al Qaeda has had such success among Muslims!
Why have “peaceful Islamists” failed to deliver? They say the corrupt and apostate regimes like Saudi Arabia and Egypt (the despots) have not only “ruined Muslim economies and societies,” but also have crushed peaceful Islamist movements from Algeria to Syria to Egypt. Only violent overthrow can remove them.

The moderate Islamist desperately wants to overthrow the corrupt and bring good Islamic governance to the Muslim World through enlightened means. But they confess that this can be achieved realistically only through unenlightened means. Moreover they must ultimately support such change even though the unenlightened radicals think of them as the enemy.

The moderate proclaims: “Islamists have the solution.” Their words, however, tell us that it is radicals who will do the solving.

Moderate Islamists believe change is inevitable. One Islamist academic put it in historical terms: “People in the Muslim World are not feeling as though they are defeated. In fact many people believe that things are moving in the right direction, and that the dictators will eventually be kicked out. There is a completely different mindset here. These people are willing to perish. As long as the current paradigm exists for the United States, it will ultimately lose. Look at Israel: almost in retreat. Twenty or fifty years, it doesn’t matter how long it takes. Palestinians refuse to submit even when controlled.” The longer the United States supports, say, Mubarak, the more certain “an initial extremist successor state” in Egypt. The United States today is merely “delaying change.”

Thus the United States is at once both the bringer of change to the Muslim World and its primary resistance. When things finally break—in the historical narrative-to-be of the moderate Islamist—a choice must be made.

**Truly Islamic yet Still Democratic vs. The Only and Stainless Right Path**

The foregoing, of course, suggests the sixth dilemma: How does the moderate Islamist survive radical Islamist victory?

Moderate Islamists chant the deviance of radical Islam. They would prefer a sort of Western–Islamic syncretism in politics, i.e., a Western-style electoral system, with traditional Islamic institutions forming civil society. Thus communities within society would have some internal autonomy. The ideal they describe is more pluralistic in some ways than in the West, and government is more limited.

Radical Islamists are not so encumbered either by Islamic tradition or respect for the West, and they grimly challenge this ideal. Moderate Islamists insist that ostensibly radical Islamic revolutions like the one in Iran in 1979 were both less radical than they appeared while also open to democratic evolution. It is, however, much harder to address the unpredictability of future Islamic republics in a cultural and theological context where the “uneducated” have broken Islam into primitive or deviant pieces. The moderate Islamist may be confident, for example, that Iran is a good model of democratic evolution: “What is needed now is nothing more than to fine-tune this system, reduce the power of unelected officials, and suddenly, democratic Islamic society is possible! Western stereotypes of Islam prevent them from seeing democratic change.”

This is a brave face to put on the great unknown of what even moderate Islamists admit is the prospect of “extremist successor states,” where their own prospect would be simply physically surviving 20 or 30 years of “democratic change.”

The moderate Islamist proudly paints himself as the champion of enlightened governing traditions. Yet however enlightened, however congenial to American political values, the moderate Islamist must reckon with a changed world. The radical Islamist may be theologically ignorant and politically deviant in terms of true Islamic traditions, but the radicals are fighting on the frontline and believe that theirs is the only and stainless Right Path. Moreover, millions and millions of regular Muslims, equally uneducated, believe in the legitimacy of the radicals’ vision.

**Some Thoughts in Retrospect**

It is not difficult to find some sympathy for the moderate Islamist. He seeks a convergence both of interest and spirit with Western modernity and yet knows that it nonetheless still threatens his faith and way of life. He would therefore like to change the West, making it more Islamic, but knows that to do so ultimately risks his appearance of loyalty there. He wants to lead Islam on a new path but must always try to represent his efforts as properly steeped in tradition—a weaker tradition than his rival radical Islamists. He would even embrace U.S. imposition of a new order in the Muslim World through force majeure, but only if it sought the same Islamist vision that inspires him, and he knows that will never be. He therefore must confront the possibility that change may in the end come to Islam as a violent upheaval, a revolution likely to be championed and led by the most radical. He knows further that in such circumstance there will likely also be little place for him, or that it will be a fragile and perilous perch. In the relentless purgative of revolution, moreover, he might even become extinct.
Nonetheless the moderate Islamist is important to the United States, even if this part-Western Islamist is today a diminished voice within Islam.

First, he reminds us that America has become inextricably part of a great struggle within Islam, and we appear to most Muslims to have taken the side of the tyrants, the apostate regimes.

Second, he tells us unequivocally that if the United States wants to be a trusted change-agent in this struggle, it must assert a sincere support of Islamism and must wholly renounce the tyrants.

Third, the temperate theology and political philosophy of the moderate Islamist is the only sort of Islam that we in the West can live with over historical time. But if moderate Islamism goes under, the unlivable will prevail.

Fourth, the longer Americans persist in talking about terrorism instead of the broader struggle behind it, while at the same time both bringing and resisting change, the more certain will be the eventual coalescence of the Muslim World against us. In this instance the moderate Islamist would also, at last, turn against us too.

(This essay originally appeared in the online journal TechCentralStation.com on October 16, 2003.)
The Story of This War

There was a story once, a complete narrative of the future on which the administration had come to rely. What happened to this story? What new narrative will succeed it?

All wars have stories, but a war’s story is not necessarily the same as its strategy. It tells how a war is broadly understood and remembered. It is a form of literary narrative.

What about this war? We have many themes for a story: from terrorism to WMD, from fighting evil to building democracy. But after two years of fighting and two countries taken, what is the story?

The moderate Islamists\(^1\) gave us a story with very different themes:

- What we think of as a war on terrorism is really a struggle within Islam over change and the future of the Muslim World.
- The United States is bringing change to Iraq, but instead of American-style democracy this change may end up as something very different and very Islamist.
- Through its occupation of Iraq the United States is actually making the radical Islamist case—that we are invading Islam—encouraging the Muslim World to unite against us.

This is not a story the administration likes. However, it represents a coherent alternative narrative made more compelling by recent events. It also suggests that new narratives of the war and its future are emerging, and that the administration no longer has a competing story to offer. The recent Rumsfeld “snowflake” memo\(^2\) makes this plain.

Nevertheless, there was a story once, a complete narrative of things to come on which the administration had come to rely. What happened to this story of the future? What new narrative will succeed it?

How the Future Got Made

The future may not exist, but its prospect alone, especially in war, can have authority over our lives. We give it authority by collectively accepting a particular story of the future as the preferred reality. The American people, by supporting the administration and the war, accepted just such a story.

The future of Iraq and of Islam itself was spun in the spring of 2002. A small but highly placed and dedicated “circle,” whose names are now well known, including key

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\(^1\) See “The Six Dilemmas of the Moderate Islamist” included in this monograph.

\(^2\) For the full text of the famous Rumsfeld memo (his memos are called “snowflakes” inside the Pentagon) of October 16, 2003, see http://usatoday.printthis.clickability.com/pi/ct?action=pt&nl=usatoday&urlID-8012943&fb=Y&partnerID=1660.

\(^3\) This “circle” (but hardly a “cabal”) represented a widespread worldview within both Washington and the administration. The worldview of this school of thought is covered in iconic if sympathetic terms by Avi Shavit in “White Man’s Burden,” from Haaretz (May 4, 2003). A similar treatment also appeared in a New York Times article by Todd S. Purdum, “The Brains Behind Bush’s War” (February 3, 2003). A Los Angeles Times story by Greg Miller, “Democracy Domino Theory ‘Not Credible’” (March 14, 2003) quotes Paul Wolfowitz as saying that Iraq could be “the first Arab democracy,” which would cast a very large shadow, starting with Syria and Iran but across the whole Arab world. Miller cites Richard Perle as saying that a reformed Iraq “has the potential to transform the thinking of people around the world about the potential for democracy, even in Arab countries where people have been disparaging of their potential.” William Kristol was always the most outspoken about the need to address the threat of radical Islam. Shavit’s interview of Kristol characterizes his thinking like this: “[H]is opinion is that it is impossible to let Saudi Arabia just continue what it is doing. It is impossible to accept the anti-Americanism it is disseminating. The fanatic Wahhabism that Saudi Arabia engenders is undermining the stability of the entire region. It’s the same with Egypt, he says: ‘we mustn’t accept the status quo there. For Egypt too, the horizon has to be liberal democracy.’” At a Congressional hearing in May 2002, Kristol said, “For we are now at war—a war with terror and a war with terror’s main sponsor in the world, radical Islam.” http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/2016112.stm.
administration figures such Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, and Douglas Feith and influential Washington commentators such as Charles Krauthammer and William Kristol concluded that “terrorism” was linked to a bigger struggle within Islam. What they called “radical Islam” was the real enemy, and radical Islam could only be defeated if the United States fundamentally changed the Muslim World.

These Washington insiders defined winning as bringing two essential Muslim societies—Iran and Saudi Arabia (the seat of Wahhabism)—into the American way through democratic conversion. These societies are central in their respective worlds, and each, as the main sources of radical Islam, is also a threat to the United States. But a strategy against the sources of radical Islam was thought too sensitive to lay out openly as the official story. Thus a very different narrative was needed. If Iran and Saudi Arabia were to be converted, then the path to their conversion lay through Baghdad.

So in that spring of 2002 a literary narrative of prospective history began to emerge. The narrative focused on the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, but invading Iraq was really just the means to a much bigger end. To realize that end, the U.S. invasion of Iraq had to achieve three goals:

1. The dramatic theater of war itself must be staggering, like a force of nature, something so majestic and irresistible as to paralyze the will. This requirement was later codified by the shibboleth “shock and awe,” meaning, of course, shock and awe among Iranians and Saudis—and perhaps Syrians as well—and not simply Iraqis. It also was intended for the world as a whole to create the impression that even the thought of resisting future U.S. action was futile.

2. The majestic drama of war must be succeeded by the exultant drama of liberation. Here the active, if mixed metaphor would be The Good War: picture the liberation of Paris, with flowers protruding from gun barrels; recall the occupation of Germany and Japan from which inevitable democracy and permanent friendship would surely flow. Twin outcomes—of an Iraqi embrace of American liberators and dutiful Iraqi compliance to democratic tutelage—were essential to create democratic pressure on Arabia and Iran.

3. The drama of the United States going it alone, with only its fastest friends at its side, would eventually serve both to shame those who scolded and hung back and create the foundation for future U.S. interventions for the good of the world. The dramatic power of the experience and its obvious benefit to humankind would transform "preemption" into a new working model for world security. Iraq would legitimate an American Empire.

As this literary narrative became History, however, History quickly revealed its flaws. The paradox is that although we were told the invasion achieved all of its goals, it achieved them just that much short of expectation so as to create the impression that it had failed on all three counts:

1. American military majesty was irresistibly demonstrated, but the succeeding guerilla campaign showed that it was still possible to effectively confront the United States in alternative military venues. Moreover, the persistence of the campaign has raised the possibility that in these venues the United States might even be defeated. Thus resistance is paradoxically encouraged.

2. Initial scenes of liberation did not live up to flowery expectations, but more significantly, the failure to get Iraqi infrastructure up and running—combined with the collateral mayhem of the guerilla war—squandered initial goodwill. Not only was the bloom off; now popular opposition to the United States has begun. Americans have come to look like occupiers, and just as important, are universally portrayed as such in Muslim media.

3. The United States succeeded in acting preemptively, but instead of acquiescing to the inevitability of American power, our allies seemed to turn against us as the liberation narrative failed, only to be followed by unexpected insurgency. In the future they will, at the very least, extract regulating concessions before any intervention is legitimated. Now all expect that U.S. unilateral action, if it is undertaken, will succeed only at the level of brute force, hardly a happy norm for the American electorate.

Why the Future Was Undone

Asserting the future through presumptive literary narrative is an essential part of policymaking, particularly for a policy of change. Successfully initiating change and securing some new historical outcome depends on presenting a story that wins over key audiences, i.e., the electorate, our allies, and those in the policy target zone itself.

The literary narrative of 2002, however, ignored the war story’s three rules:

1. Renounce wish fulfillment.
2. Ensure that the narrative corresponds to strategy.
3. Do not lose control of the change narrative.

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Wish Fulfillment

Wish fulfillment becomes dangerous narcissism if the change outcome preferred becomes the change outcome announced, and in the case of Iraq, announced loudly many times in advance.

The wish fulfillment announced was that everyone at heart wants what America has: not simply its “good life” but also its “democratic values” and “system.” The storytellers assumed American democracy to be not only a universal good but also a universal good “fit” for all cultures. Thus any society that is oppressed can be liberated and converted in short order into an American “eaglet.” The problem with this existential assumption is not that it is wholly wrong. Most Muslims want democracy and pluralism too. But their democracy might look very different from ours, and just as important, Muslims might actually want to make it themselves rather than simply accept it from us.

The narcissism reached its pinnacle in prewar discussions. The rebuilding of Iraq was compared prospectively to the occupation and democratic transformation of Germany and Japan. Yet these had been great enemies that we had beaten down and broken in apocalyptic struggle. Our achievement was surely great, but it was inextricably tied to the overwhelming experience of the war itself.

Invoking the occupation of Germany and Japan could be compared to ancients bringing out their sacred fetishes of mythic tribal achievement, ritually parading them to find strength and to seek divine support for the great enterprise ahead. But Iraq at most was a tiny colonial-style campaign to overthrow a tin-pot potentate in a few weeks, not a mighty war of years where our very survival was on the line.

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Narrative and Strategy

Narrative and strategy must correspond or risk at some point losing public confidence in either the narrative or the strategy, or both. This is exactly what happened with the Iraq War.

Likening the war to the great wars of America’s past created the impression that the administration was truly interested in the redemption of the Iraqi people, and that this would be but a first step to uplifting all those Muslim societies living under tyranny.

This had not been the administration’s official, actual strategy. In contrast, it had publicly announced only that we were engaged in a Global War on Terrorism, and thus, that the strategy of the war was “tracking them down and bringing them to justice.” But the administration had come to accept that this outcome, narrowly defined, could never be attained. Therefore the emergent strategy was one of undermining radical Islam, that is, undermining its primary sources, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, however, the administration could not bring itself to make radical Islam the focus of its public strategy. This explains the 2002 focus on WMD in the celebrated “Axis of Evil” speech. By shifting the problem from radical Islam to WMD, the administration could at least identify Iran for future regime-elimination and also signal that Baghdad was but a way station to Riyadh. North Korea was tossed in to keep the American mission properly universalist.

Thus skirting volatile political shoals violated the rule: actual strategy and its literary narrative of historical change must correspond as closely as possible. But the American people accepted the administration’s very mixed message that the invasion of Iraq was somehow central to the war on terrorism, whether in terms of terror-sponsorship, WMD, or general evilness. We were actually quite uncritical and accommodating, in contrast to our allies, because we believed that the administration’s literary narrative and its strategy were one. And, of course, we still believed deeply in our mythic meta-narrative of defeating evil and redeeming the world. The president had only to invoke it to make the sale.

A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform the Middle East, by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions. … The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values. … Success in Iraq could also begin a new stage for Middle Eastern peace, and set in motion progress toward a truly democratic Palestinian state. …It will be difficult to cultivate liberty and peace in the Middle East …[yet] we trust in the power of human freedom to change lives and nations.4

4 Note how his language resonates with the storytellers’. The president paid public homage to their contribution on this occasion: “At the American Enterprise Institute, some of the finest minds in our nation are at work on some of the greatest challenges to our nation. You do such good work that my administration has borrowed 20 such minds,” http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/print/20030226-11.htm.
The great narrative was in place—and ratified. The American people had been told that military victory would bring a sense of liberation whose energies would create a wave of democratic change. They had come to expect this outcome. So the absence of a cascade of democratic change has come to imply American defeat. Yet from the administration standpoint—whose strategy is more cynical than the public narrative it sold—the war has been a success. Saudi Arabia has been pressured and is coming around, and Iran is talking (maybe even secretly negotiating). 5

But the failure of the narrative has served to encourage opposing narratives from both the enemy and the administration’s domestic opposition. Most important, this means that the administration and its Washington circle have lost control of the change narrative.

Losing Control

Losing control of the change narrative may not seem as calamitous as losing control of the strategic initiative, but it must be remembered that strategy and its public story are intertwined in democratic war efforts. Recall how tight this weave was in our own mythic wars like the “Great War” and the “Good War.” Nevertheless, we can also see how strategy founndered in Vietnam, when story and strategy were decoupled. The U.S. narrative—defense against Communism—began to lose out to the competing enemy narrative: a local civil war between a corrupt U.S.-backed regime and an authentic insurrection. The radicals’ insurrection has ensured the emergent authority of the Jihadis. The United States has unwittingly elevated them as the real (rather than merely rhetorical) defenders of an al-’Ummah under attack. The mythic story they have craved—that is, their own awaited literary narrative—is being created for them by us in Iraq, just as it was by the Soviets in Afghanistan.

By invading the heart of classical Islam, the United States asserted a grand strategy of change. From a historical vantage this was a breathtaking gambit because creating such space for change ensures eventual loss of control. The trick is somehow to lose control only after major goals have been achieved, or to lose control with change galloping off in the desired direction. But the American future for the Muslim World depended at every turn on an almost prodigy-like control, which we lost almost immediately.

It is tempting to believe that controlled change is possible, especially when it is introduced into a world that has not seen real change for decades. Thus, for example, most people in the mid-1980s thought Gorbachev would succeed in his reforms. After all, his was a frozen, sclerotic world, we thought. Change could only come, bit by bit, to a place so unused to it. Just the same, the Soviet world had a powerful, pent-up longing for change, so opening up space for change sent instead a very different signal. Once permission for serious change was granted it was like a public Klaxon blaring that the controllers had lost control, that anything now was possible, and that the only way to make it so would be to push hard and keep pushing. The pushing didn’t stop until the whole thing had come apart.

New Futures Rising

Likewise, opening up space for historical change in Islam is today creating a similar surge in Muslim expectations. Ironically too, only the United States had the authority to make such an opening. The radicals’ insurgency could bite and claw and pinprick but it had yet to topple even one of the old tyrants.

Now the United States has taken down the first tyrant, not for the Jihadi’s benefit but for all Muslims seeking change. Today, however, the actual story primarily benefits the Jihadis. The United States has unwittingly elevated them as the real (rather than merely rhetorical) defenders of an al-’Ummah under attack. The mythic story they have craved—that is, their own awaited literary narrative—is being created for them by us in Iraq, just as it was by the Soviets in Afghanistan.

In other words, the failure of the Washington storytellers’ narrative has ensured the emergent authority of competing narratives of the future. And so administration strategy must contend with very different and rising expectations that draw authority not just from the failure, but also from the paradoxical gift that in failure it has given to others.

For example the Jihadis now have a narrative that leads to imminent victory if the administration is defeated in next year’s election. The mere defeat of a sitting president in the midst of a great (if poorly explained) war would constitute strategic defeat. It would electrify the Muslim World and forever enshrine the Jihadis as its defenders. Had they not challenged the U.S. commander-in-chief?

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5 See the ongoing commentary of Stratfor, which stresses the nexus in U.S. Iraq strategy with collateral objectives vis-à-vis Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. This recent report is available online: http://www.stratfor.com/corp/Corporate/neo/vs-SULbac-bstoryId=221940

6 The British Empire faced similar problems of story/strategy decoupling in both the Crimean and Boer Wars.
Had he not thrown the might of the United States against them? And was he not now defeated, his cause in ruins?

Likewise the administration's domestic opposition now also has a narrative: their victory in November is the only way to salvage what has been this administration's failure in Iraq. They must believe this, even though they must also know that a Democratic victory would inevitably make that failure all the worse—administration defeat would be the functional equivalent to Muslims of American national defeat as well.

The administration's strategic problem currently centers on rehabilitating or re-creating its narrative of the future. Although strategy itself can be put into high gear, in the absence of a good story that explains what high activity means and promises, the strategy itself cannot succeed.

Here we come full circle to the dilemmas of the moderate Islamist. Because there is no place for the moderate in his own literary narrative, the story of the future is no longer his. The administration has very little time to come up with a good story that is also a true story. Increasingly, belief and its authority are migrating to new narratives. Thus, like the moderate Islamist, for this administration the story of the future is no longer theirs.

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Enemies of the Good

The administration is missing a strategic opportunity, if it has not already lost it, to change the way Muslims understand this war. Although this change may not result in the outcome Americans desire, it could promote the best possible and only practical resolution of the war. The problem is that what we desired, an all-American “triumph of democracy,” makes the “perfect” the enemy of the “good.”

The president’s November 6, 2003 speech was an eloquent summation of why we fight, directed toward an American and Western audience. Its language sends a very different message to Muslims, however. We think of this language as universal, but its cherished meanings are very much culturally coded.

> Every nation has learned, or should have learned, an important lesson. Freedom is worth fighting for, dying for, and standing for, and the advance of freedom leads to peace. And now we must apply that lesson in our own time. We’ve reached another great turning point, and the resolve we show will shape the next stage of the world democratic movement.

Culturally Coded

Americans immediately understand “terrorism” as “evil” that must be destroyed. Equally, Americans understand that destroying this evil should also mean bringing “democracy” to the places terrorism comes from. We have tried to do this in all the great American wars: the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. Destroy evil and then redeem those who both created it and suffered under it.

The examples of Germany and Japan are used often to explain what we are attempting in Iraq, but the reconstruction of Germany and Japan also shows how this war is different from the great wars of our nation’s past.

When we fought Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan we fought both evil regimes and their people. Germans and Japanese, almost to a man and a woman, loyally supported their evil regimes. To defeat Germany and Japan we had to both defeat their armies in the field and break the spirit of the people and their will to fight. We therefore undertook to destroy both countries and decimate their people. When we occupied Germany and Japan we took over two very compliant societies.

In this war, in contrast, we have separated the people from both their regimes and the fighting groups that have attacked us. Thus we can talk about “tyrants” and “terrorists” as distinct from Muslims. We are not in a position to make war on both regimes and their Muslim peoples. We do not have the luxury of that elegant simplicity in this war. We must be against tyrannical regimes and terrorists, but for Muslims.

Of necessity, then, the war must meet the needs of Muslims. By our definition they are oppressed by tyrannical regimes and are innocent of complicity in terrorism. If we say that (much of) what we are doing in this war is for them, we have also foreclosed making them part of the enemy war effort or even part of the problem. If we are doing it for them and they are guiltless, then we are not in a position to righteously uplift them on our terms and according to our preferences. We certainly do not have permission to impose our preferences on them. We have officially obligated ourselves to give Muslims what they want.
But we are not doing this. Our language, in fact, convinces Muslims every day that we have no intention of giving them what they want. Talking about terrorism and democracy actually alienates most Muslims. For example, even though most Muslims do not support radical Islamist groups, most do support the defense of Islam, as they see it, under attack. Thus many Iraqis and the majority of world Muslims do support the Jihadi fighters in Iraq because, fairly or unfairly, they see them as defending Islam against the unbeliever. The invasion of Iraq has galvanized Muslim opinion against the United States and in favor of the Jihadis (as recent polling shows). Likewise, most Muslims see Palestinian fighters as defending Islam against Israel. Therefore, when we talk about terrorism, most Muslims hear an Israeli-ingrained code word for an armed struggle that they believe is right and true.

Similarly, when we talk about democracy, most Muslims—again, fairly or not—hear a code word for the destruction of Islam. To them, democracy means more or less than the imposition of an anti-Islamic way of life on the Muslim World.

By anchoring our story in these two words—terrorism and democracy—we drive most Muslims from us and potentially into the arms of the radical Islamists. In addition, talking about the need for democratic reform among tyrannical regimes that we also call “friends and allies” makes us look like hypocrites. Most Muslims believe that we will do nothing risky to force the tyrants to stop being tyrannical. For example, the president recently asserted in London that “we will expect a higher standard from our friends in the region.” This means little when the Saudis are simultaneously complimented for fig-leaf local concessions or when the United States remains mute about the Russian-rigged election in Muslim Chechnya.

**What Muslims Want**

Truth is, Muslims want the tyrants to go, and in their place they want pluralistic and democratic, but also authentically Muslim, governance. What does this mean? We can’t know exactly until it happens. Would Arab Muslims go down the path of moderately Islamist Tur-

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1. See The Pew Research Center, “A Year After Iraq War,” March 2004. Among Arabs, for example, large majorities even see suicide bombing against Americans as justifiable.

in place of the people's choice. Everyone knows that we can ultimately insist only on an initial democratic environment in Iraq. If after that an Islamic republic is declared, with its constitution duly amended, what could the United States do? Should we act like those Algerian generals and disallow elections, dismiss parliament, and imprison elected imams?

In his presentation the president must also show that he really knows and understands Islam, much in the same way he showed how well he knew and understood British culture and traditions in his November 19, 2003 speech in the Royal Banqueting House at Whitehall Palace. Just as he spoke easily of Wilberforce, Tyndale, Wesley, and Booth, so he must be able to range across Islamic thought from Ibn Taymiyya to Syed Qutb. Not only would such unexpected fluency catch Muslims off-guard, it would help establish his message that America is committed to real Islamic change.

What is the great risk here? Understand: this would be no approval of radical Islam. Instead it would demonstrate to all Islam that the radicals are no longer needed. Remember: the radicals have standing only because most Muslims believe that America is the real obstacle to change. The president can show that the United States, far from being the obstacle to History, is committed to real change, and change most wanted, in Islam.

Naturally such a message could also set in motion real historical consequences, like the eventual replacement of the Saudi Kingdom. But we need to recognize that having introduced change into the Islamic World, we cannot forever control it. The Saudis must be succeeded by more pluralistic governance anyway, and if we succeed in Iraq we will have made such succession certain.

Who Will Change the Muslim World?

The United States is in a race now with the radical Islamists over who will change the Muslim World. The radicals want to effect an Islamic revival on their terms, while we want to redeem that world through American-style democracy. The great paradox is that the two change-agents are actually working together: the longer they fight, the more passionate their contest, and the greater the momentum of change itself.

Moreover, however much we talk about staying the course until democracy is “up and running” in Iraq, the signals going out now sound like “Iraqification,” a hasty handing over of the war to an interim Iraqi armed authority just as fast as we can. “Imperial” Washington is abuzz with the scent of “exit strategy,” meaning that we might have to settle for less. Redefining our goal as authentic Muslim governance instead of maintaining expectations of American-style democracy could make an initial Iraqi government seem like more, rather than less, of a success.

Nevertheless, the bigger picture of History also needs to be kept in view. As the situation is developing now, the United States is bringing change but ultimately may not benefit from it, since revolutionary change could begin to outstrip our vision of enforced democratic change. Already we have seen Muslim attitudes shift strongly against America, even in states that strongly supported us after 9-11 such as Indonesia. We may still pull off our local goal of democratic government in Iraq, and be able to sustain it as long as American troops guarantee security.

Yet to fully guarantee controlled democratic change throughout Arab Islam would also mean an American readiness to duplicate our actions in Egypt, Arabia, Syria, Yemen, and others—or, when the time comes, be forced to accept revolutionary political changes there. The only alternative is to make a virtue of less-than-perfect change in the Muslim World in exchange for something acceptably good, from the ideological as well as the practical perspective.

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The Soldiering Ethos

America has fought a war for more than two years with its peacetime military. Moreover this is what both the nation and the military have wanted. But the situation is changing. Effective insurgency in Iraq is just the first step moving America's military into long-term wartime.

Like so many others before us, we find that the enemy is the real instrument of change in us. In today’s context, thus, it is America’s enemies that are bringing true “transformation” in the form of a modern and yet also ancient soldiering ethos. The current war will not be won by citizen soldiers and loyal allies but by a professional veteran soldiery and U.S.-led local (once called “native”) forces. This is the long-awaited transformation, and it comes at a price, but then, victory always has a price.

How could our nation’s armed forces, officially at war, still be a “peacetime” military? What has peacetime meant to Americans? We must remember that to America’s first seven generations, peacetime meant just that. No war. The United States created itself as The People’s answer to corrupt European monarchies whose kings fought wars at their whim. Thus in the 18th century, at the time of America’s founding, it could be said that there was no such thing as peacetime in Europe.

A new America only reluctantly allowed a military at all. It was finally created to protect the national interest in time of peace and to give The People a small, professional soldiering corps to assist in mobilization and offer trained leadership in time of war.

To Americans, war meant mustering the militia. The citizenry fought our nation’s wars, and war was about the mobilization of citizen-soldiers.

So it can be said in truth that—since the United States turned over its defense to a professional military, and since this military has begun to fight real wars with only the merest demur from us about mustering the citizenry—there has been no traditional peacetime for some time.

Expectations Game

Peacetime means one thing to the nation and quite another to military societies. Since Americans and their military were officially separated in 1973, military ethos has sought to successfully juggle two expectations that promised someday to bring us to a national existential contradiction. One was the expectation that the military would take care of all our national security needs unless some unimaginable (and thus nearly impossible) emergency arose, like the resurrection of Hitler or Stalin. Thus the military would not simply, as in ancient tradition, protect the national interest abroad; it would fight any and all small-to-medium wars without resorting to national mobilization. The other expectation was that an American military designed to fight wars without mobilization would still embody a bit of the old Republic’s militia ethos to avoid becoming legionnaires with the eagle-standards of emperors and kings. This means keeping somehow to the Founders’ Cincinnatus tradition, in which the citizen lays down his plough to take up the sword in time of national need. The army that fights America’s wars must always be, at least in part, part-time. It must not become wholly the hard-bitten kept force of our leaders.

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1 After Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, the Roman consul who put down the plough to defeat first the Aequi and then the Volscians, thereby saving Rome. Hence, the Society of the Cincinnati, founded by American Revolutionary War officers. It survives even today as a reminder to us. See http://www.barteby.com/65/Cincinnatu.html.
Hence, two responses: the volunteer force and military transformation. The so-called volunteer force is really a professional military supplemented by reservists. These supplemental forces were designed to be used sparingly. Inasmuch as some were veterans with unmatched skills, reserve forces were a way to keep valuable soldier-experience in the force. But as necessary as supplemental forces might be, they also have had an essential cultural mission: to preserve at least the symbol of a republic defended by citizen-soldiers. Thus the conundrum: use them sparingly or they cease to look like citizen-soldiers.

The Transformation

How could the volunteer force, with only a light touch on its own reserves, be enough to fight America's future wars? The answer that emerged during the 1990s was “transformation.” Transformation seemed to be all about technology, but of course it meant much more than just building a better military. It was a big concept because it promised that just over a million people on the ground (the Army’s “total force”) could fully meet America’s global national security needs. Military transformation sought to achieve this with a mix of new and old: new technology and new ways of war in concert with an old, established orchestra of “friends and allies.”

What the volunteer force and transformation offered may not have been peacetime as in the days of young America or the Gilded Age or the Roaring Twenties. But neither, suggested its visionaries, would it entail national sacrifice on the scale of, say, the Cold War’s Vietnam and Koreas. There would be some actual war “events,” certainly a fair share of “combat,” and lots of “peacekeeping” and “peacemaking.” America could rely on volunteers and on technology, enough still to take us to the Promised Land. Call it New Age Peacetime.

Why bring up ancient history? Because for a golden decade this solution worked, but it worked to set us up.

Three Vignettes

Surprise!

In September I had lunch with a thoughtful Flag Officer. He told me that all through the summer, while casualties from the Iraq insurgency piled up, his Pentagon colleagues were still on the old lifestyle clock, punching out promptly each day for their 1700 golf date at the Army-Navy Country Club. We know the government was surprised by the “postwar” Iraqi insurgency, but that should come as no surprise. The real surprise is that they have taken so long to take the measure of what the resistance really means—not in terms of tactical responses “on the ground,” but rather in terms of fundamental reassessments required by the true nature of the war.

The “forever war”

A long story appeared in the metro section of the Washington Times, hardly critical of the war, dated December 20, 2003. The byline: “I’m Never Wearing Tan Again.” It was about returning soldiers from the 115th Military Police Battalion, Maryland National Guard. They had been deployed, active-duty, for 27 months. The supplemental citizen-soldiers have outdone themselves in service to their country. But a “forever war” is not what they signed up for. And a forever war is what we have.

Do the math

The Army’s active-reserve force, according to an accountant, has over a third of its people deployed overseas. New Age Peacetime was above all a lifestyle military. But America cannot keep a third of its active (and supplemental) force deployed “out of area” (away from home). The law of New Age Peacetime is clear: only one battalion out of every four (or even five) can be deployed. This ratio worked out OK in the 1990s for Bosnia and Kosovo: it was just enough.

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2 In truth, military transformation is also a bigger and more inclusive concept than the original meanings of its creators. It has become something of a loose ideology, to be used sometimes even as a talisman or fetish protecting America’s military societies.


5 By late October, some 370,000 U.S. Army active and reserve component troops were deployed overseas—more than one-third of that service’s total active-reserve force of just over one million. Jeffrey Record, “Is the War on Terrorism Sustainable?” Naval Institute Proceedings, December 2003, pp. 44–46.
When unexpected challenge came, it came in the form of something as significant as any world war. Yet this big challenge would not let us face it like a world war, in other words, it would not let us do what we do best!

So we were left with the military of New Age Peacetime. We rushed the Muslim World with what we had and hoped that would be enough. After two years and some, a national existential contradiction is finally upon us. The United States and The People can no longer sustain both Big War and Old Identity.

Military transformation suggested, if not actually promised, that war had become a sort of premium service that only the United States could afford. Campaigns would be blisteringly brief, and only a very few in war paint would ever taste the fetid dust of combat. “Shock and awe” would prevail. Modernity’s “all-seeing-eye”—Network Centric Warfare—would catch the slightest rustle of disobedience, just as it does in that Lockheed-Martin TV ad: “Bring it on,” it whispers.6

Administration strategists calculated that the Global War on Terrorism could still be handled by the just-enough paradigm of New Age Peacetime. Thus even periods of relatively intense combat operations could be sustained through a plussed-up overhead of world security management.

**Just the Beginning**

Iraqi insurgency is slowly destroying this calculation, not because budget deficits will blow the overhead, not because we will take too many casualties, and not because we won’t win in Iraq. New Age Peacetime is winning in Iraq in the sense of containing and ultimately eradicating resistance there.

But this is not a war about Iraq. This war is only beginning, America faces the prospect of continuing conflict in the Muslim World. Future conflict may look like what we have encountered in Iraq, but on a much greater scale. Future preemptive interventions already under active discussion by the Washington establishment include Syria—an Iraqi “comparable”—and Iran—a conflict of incomparably greater magnitude. Saudi Arabia and Egypt are fragile and unstable, and Pakistan is even more so.

Americans will almost certainly fight in places that, like Baghdad and Kabul, once seemed unimaginable. Now they are not only imaginable but also imminent. We must come to terms with the true nature of the war and realize that it is not about “terrorism” but a deep struggle within Muslim identity over the very spirit of Islam. Thus, to turn a Churchillian quip, Iraq will not mark the beginning of the end, nor even the end of the beginning, but rather only our own end of innocence.

The American military, and especially the Army, must find a way to effectively prosecute this war over an expanding theater of operations and for an indefinite period of historical time. Furthermore, it must do so without resorting to national mobilization and without becoming an imperial service. Or at least it must disguise the latter for a while.

Something has to give. Maybe not right now, but in five or ten years from now—or very possibly even next year. Chances are we will give up a treasured part of our national identity as the price of victory.

**The Payment**

*More Toward Leadership Based on Battlefield Performance—and Local Horse Sense*

Peacetime military performance is assessed on three criteria: (1) program delivery means securing big money or managing a big money program well, (2) status delivery means elevating the agency or department you represent within the larger defense community hierarchy, and (3) political delivery means demonstrating your utility to the White House and to Congress. Thus, the war in Kosovo was won through air power alone, and shock and awe was sold as the vehicle for bringing democracy to the Middle East.

Wartime military performance, in contrast, is based on winning. This should be obvious, but its essential truth is obscured by our semiotics of war. For example, Operation Iraqi Freedom was not a war, but rather reminiscent of a live-fire exercise in the sense that it was not merely foreordained but completely controlled from moment to moment. Military leadership, especially at the top, could not “lose,” they could only screw up the media modalities of “winning.”

The situation in Iraq today is more difficult. If winning should not be uncertain, then neither should the precedent of new war that Iraq presents. It promises that future campaigns in the Muslim World will put a premium on a new kind of American soldiering. We earnestly hope that Iraq will soon be put to bed, but the possible U.S. occupation of Arabia or Egypt or invasion of Syria or Iran is creating a new standard for battlefield performance.

Just what does battlefield performance really mean in a war of quick campaigns and long counterinsurgency?

Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers* has been playing in the Pentagon since summer, and is now showing in downtown DC. It is the best *cinema vérité* ever made about counterinsurgency war. But the war in Algeria is

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6 One such ad is included in Bill Moyers’ PBS program, *NOW with Bill Moyers*, January 31, 2003 transcript: [http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript205_full.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript205_full.html)
not our war. The French were fighting an insurgency they understood: a national liberation movement with Western-style socialist trappings. We are fighting an insurgency within Islam, and it is not simply about liberation but the renewal of a civilization.

Thus battlefield performance necessitates cultural sensitivity—call it "civilizational horse sense." Americans must go in speaking Arabic (or Urdu or Farsi!), respect local customs and taboos, and move quickly to political cooptation. In Iraq, for example, this should mean early elections and a Shi'a government. We are not Victorians, and we cannot hope to set up, like the British in Egypt in 1882, a stooge Khedive (their version of regime change) and hope to pull strings and keep bases there for the next three score and ten.

What if the U.S. government keeps its ruling council in power instead? It is possible that our military will preside over a violent and unstable Iraq for years to come. Are we not still in Bosnia, a much lesser place?

Military leadership in the future will be judged by its ability to handle both fighters and society in several simultaneous countrywide battlefields. If a situation cannot be resolved or is politically extended, new leadership will be brought in. And if the situation continues to deteriorate, new leadership will be demanded wholesale throughout the Pentagon. In other words, long-term war in the Muslim World will demand—if not actually force—a very different U.S. military Top Brass.

The military has not faced this sort of forced leadership transformation since World War II, when scores of general officers were sacked for poor battlefield performance. Going further back, an even bigger leadership upheaval was required for Union armies to win the Civil War. Now, because the battlefield is everywhere, performance will be even harder to measure and harder to see. Killing insurgents will not be enough. Remember, U.S. Federals won on the battlefield only to lose a counterinsurgency war of "Reconstruction."

Our own Civil War carries an important warning. Political leadership may well make choices, as it is doing right now in Iraq, that make "battlefield" victory over an Islamist insurgency more elusive than ever. Yet it is in this milieu that battlefield performance will be judged.

\section*{Move Toward an “All-Fighting Force”}

An "all-fighting force" is a military in which everyone is a fighting soldier, sailor, or airman. Today’s peacetime military, in contrast, has been a class-based society, where until now only the first-class fight. There are only a tiny number of "Jedi Knights" among the 5,000-plus sailors on a carrier. Only a handful of men get to paint their faces and kill the enemy face-to-face, or, as celebrated by Donald Rumsfeld himself during Operation Enduring Freedom, ride Afghan ponies in flowing garb.

New Age Peacetime has never really been about fighting. Its recruiting campaigns, with the exception of the Marines, focus on lifestyle and life benefits. Its way of life makes officers like corporate managers and enlisted personnel like technicians or "specialists."

The war in Iraq is changing that. It’s an equal opportunity war when it comes to casualties, and this could have a profound cultural impact on the American military ethos. Sacrifice transforms everyone in uniform into an equal fighter and defender.

Military life now means being a fighting soldier, sailor, or airman. This in turn suggests not only a fighting military, but also one in which fighting is its constant profession, that is, soldiers that fight like teachers teach or drivers drive. Fighting is what it does. Moreover the scope of the Iraqi deployment and succeeding deployments sure to follow suggest that all future American soldiers can expect to serve the balance of their careers in the combat theater.

How can this ever be made to work? Right now the Army is at the breaking point, keeping a third of its total force deployed. If the volunteer force is a lifestyle military that can routinely deploy only a quarter or a fifth of its force, how can we ask it to deploy, say, two-thirds in the combat theater? In World War II, America put 12 million men in uniform, by war’s end, all of its 90 divisions and 5,000 ships were in combat theater. That war had an end as well as a beginning, however, and it was throughout a shared national experience. This war, in contrast, has no discernible finish, and its current dynamic suggests decades—some say even a century—of conflict.

In this forever war there can be no National Guard, no noncombat MOS (military occupational specialty or job identity) even, because everyone will inevitably be a true professional soldier in combat in the Muslim World. Moreover, the United States simply will not meet urgent future military commitments without all of its force being a combat force. We have two options, but be warned: they may threaten some core values.

\footnote{7 One standout leader who understands this need is Gen. Jim Mattis, USMC. Read about him in Ray L. Smith and Bing West, \emph{The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division}, Bantam, 2003. http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/055380376X/qid%3D1073170607/ref%3Dsr%2F1-10/05-0643830-8908705.}

\footnote{8 If the volunteer force is a lifestyle military that can routinely deploy only a quarter or a fifth of its force, how can we ask it to deploy, say, two-thirds in the combat theater? In World War II, America put 12 million men in uniform, by war’s end, all of its 90 divisions and 5,000 ships were in combat theater. That war had an end as well as a beginning, however, and it was throughout a shared national experience. This war, in contrast, has no discernible finish, and its current dynamic suggests decades—some say even a century—of conflict.}

\footnote{9 From presentations by James Woolsey and William Cohen at “Counterproliferation at Ten: Transforming the Fight Against Weapons of Mass Destruction,” hosted by The USAF Counterproliferation Center and The Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Hilton Alexandria Mark Center, December 8–9, 2003.}
1. Contract out most support (even some of the combat support and combat service support mission if possible). Make every military person a fighter, which is to say all military personnel are combat MOS instead of the hundreds of alternative and often implicitly noncombat jobs. The big upside in contracting out is easy: no military pensions for contractors, no training costs, and reduced liability. Save our national taxpayer dollar for the American soldier. We will eventually need all of them on the front line. The military’s goal should be two-thirds of the total force deployable in-theater for war’s duration.

2. Build strong local military and paramilitary forces across the Muslim World. To ensure their loyalty and reliability they must be well paid and American-managed, if not American-led. They can be quite large compared with the U.S. total force; the British found that in India, an effective “native” army could be double the size of their regimental force in-theater. At three to four times, however, their reliability, as evidenced in the Great Mutiny, declined.

To be effective, both options must be front and center. Then the nation must begin the delicate process of legitimating a military unlike any in our national experience.

Move Toward a New “Heroic Narrative”

There is a necessary third part to the soldiering ethos: a new identity, one that will be very different from the ideology of transformation.

The occupation of Iraq was expected to conform to U.S. experience in Bosnia and Kosovo, summed up by code words like “peacekeeping” and “nation-building.” Although the current counterinsurgency campaign may look on TV like a clip from Cops, it is not policing activity but real combat. What positive military identity can be extracted from a COIN-SWAT way of life—where Counter-Insurgency and Special Weapons and Tactics, military and police, become one? Yet if creatively handled, it could lead to a new “heroic narrative,” one that sustains our soldiers in the forever war but also one quite different from tradition.

All military societies build their identities on a canonized heroic narrative. For true soldiering societies, however, the narrative itself must take on almost liturgical authority, as exemplified by the French Foreign Legion, in British regimental traditions, or in the haunting words of Douglas MacArthur, spoken in that sacred moment at West Point. It was his farewell to the Corps, and no cadet ever forgot his words without a slight shudder of realization.

The long gray line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and gray, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words. Duty, Honor, Country. … Today marks my final roll call with you. But I want you to know that when I cross the river, my last conscious thoughts will be of the Corps, and the Corps, and the Corps.10

But as the United States slipped into Vietnam, MacArthur was out of place, a single representative of the soldiering ethos, a stranger in a strange land, a century before his time.

A soldiering ethos means a military society led by many MacArthurs. For example, the French Foreign Legion still celebrates a lost engagement of a forgotten war in a faraway land as the realization of its very identity. Surrounded by an army of Mexican insurgents, Captain Danjou’s small company holds out to the death. At the very end, like a scene from a movie, the last five men, out of ammunition, fix bayonets and charge into the teeth of insurgent fire. So today and always, Danjou’s wooden hand must still be taken from its shrine and revealed to new legionnaires. That moment, where identity is crystallized as though through the reliquary of a Medieval Saint, is the heroic liturgy of the soldiering ethos.11

Certainly American military societies have their own glorious traditions, but most are rooted in great national wars rather than in the stories of tight-knit societies such as old regiments and soldier brotherhoods. Thus the heroic narrative of this very different U.S. military in the making should be made to emerge de novo from experiences yet forthcoming in this war.

However, weaving these experiences into a heroic narrative of identity will require a new social framework in which our military can be assimilated and enshrined. Quite simply this means the creation of a new primary social structure for the U.S. military, one with the motivational authority of the French Foreign Legion or a British regiment, but one that also embodies uniquely American values.

What does this mean? The United States cannot long survive with a military that is a mercenary force of killers serving the state, nor can it abide a military

10The entire text can be found at http://www.nationalcenter.org/MacArthurFarewell.html
that is loyal only to the executive, like some European monarch or, God forbid, Roman emperor! But what sort of hard-bitten, gritty bunch of Legionnaires will still be able to call themselves Americans?

The puzzle is to discern a military identity from this war that is both supreme on the battlefield and yet somehow remains consonant with our national life and loyal to the American ethos. Perhaps MacArthur would have an answer.

**The Coming Soldiering Ethos**

Why is the soldiering ethos a good thing for our military? First, the United States cannot win this war with its current peacetime military, because over time the conflict will outpace peacetime’s ability to manage it. The war that seemed manageable in May is now showing its underlying dynamic. Even an acceptably successful outcome in Iraq will not necessarily slow the changes occurring within Islam in the form of a broader insurgency in the Muslim World.

Second, the United States cannot, for cultural reasons, return to the “nation-in-arms” solution of national military tradition—à la the Civil War and World War II—nor to the delicate balance of New Age Peacetime. America must fight and win this war with its standing professional military forces surprisingly transformed.

Third, if these forces are to prevail, they must believe in themselves and their leadership, i.e., they must be able to transcend both accumulating battlefield casualties and serious campaign setbacks, and even defeats. If setbacks are not welcomed (as they should not be!), perhaps they should not in the end be seen as all bad. Moreover, military setbacks, even if they cannot be foreseen, must be expected, given the world-historical scope and cultural intensity of this war. They are inevitable the longer this peacetime military leadership lingers.

If a soldiering ethos is in part the necessary stepchild of setback, this culture is also the surest way to surmount it. The soldiering ethos is the price of victory.

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The Muslim *Renovatio* and U.S. Strategy

For two years and more this war has had only two definitions. Think of them as working models to explain what is going on, and thus, frameworks for strategy and policy. However each, in fundamental ways, is wrong.

Most Americans, and their president, subscribe to the explanatory model of “terrorism.” This terrorism model describes the enemy as small groups that are marginal in their own world—generally accepted at this point as the Muslim World. They may have political objectives, but within their own societies they are considered no more than criminal. They can thus be addressed as criminals through eradication. However, their persistence suggests that broader societal ills are responsible for their emergence. Thus, encouraging democratic reform within societies that produce terrorism is indicated.

Others, in contrast, describe a Muslim “civil war.” This explanatory model says that terrorism is the expression of a broad struggle within Islam between moderates and radicals. Radicals have chosen the path of violence—hence, terrorism —while moderates, including most governments in the Muslim World, would prefer to pursue political contention peacefully. The United States should therefore oppose “radical Islam” generally and support moderate Muslim regimes. This model by implication suggests that U.S. strategy cannot merely encourage, but must insist upon the adoption of Western civic values in order to successfully defeat the vision of radical Islam.

There is, however, a third explanatory model, and it exposes what is wrong with the two prevailing frameworks. This model describes neither terrorism nor civil war, but rather a "world-historical" movement of Islamic revival. Terrorism in this "reality" framework is an expression neither of criminal evil nor of an evil vision. Instead, violent radical elements are only a small part of a much broader movement for Islamic restoration, or, in the traditional sense inherited from late antiquity, of *renovatio*. Renovatio, or another Roman favorite, *reparatio*, speaks more directly to Islamist visions than words like "revival," which in the Western consciousness at least refers more narrowly to simpler religious "awakenings." For Muslims, their vision is one of an entire order restored, of not simply religion but of an entire “rightly guided” way of life brought back as it should be. For a generation and more the drive for this Islamic restoration has been gathering strength and asserting itself.

This alternative model suggests that terrorism cannot be truly abstracted as a separate phenomenon within the Muslim World, it must be seen as part of a bigger change movement within that world. Likewise, there is no civil war between mythical “moderates”—i.e., “reasonable” Muslims who just want to live and let live—and wild-eyed radicals who would burn everything down. In contrast, the larger Islamist restoration movement seeks to purify the Muslim World of corrupt and apostate tyrants. The movement has many elements and agendas, and thus many paths to this goal. Like many broad movements with revolutionary goals, most are non-violent. The example of Islamists in Egypt and Turkey suggests that the majority of Islamists seek their goals through peaceful means, and the world they would create is couched in surprisingly moderate and tolerant terms.

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The goal shared by all Islamists is nonetheless a radical goal. The restoration of Islam would mean an end to Western-style secular civil society in the Muslim World, even if it led to an Islamic civil society that Westerners might not find uncomfortable.

If this model is closer to actual reality in the Muslim World than the two frameworks currently underpinning U.S. strategy and policy, it suggests strongly a rethinking of both strategy and policy. If the Islamist restoration movement is the core dynamic of change within the Muslim World, and truly of world-historical proportions, this suggests a very changed world, admittedly over the historical long-term. But if U.S. actions today materially affect even long-term outcomes, this is important:

American strategy may appear to be succeeding in the short-term, but may actually be helping to achieve the opposite of what it intends over the long-term.

How can we know whether the Islamist renovation is truly the core dynamic of change in the Muslim World, as opposed to either terrorism—a criminal assault on the Muslim establishment—or civil war—the vision of radical Islam versus the life of “regular” Muslim societies? This alternative model must be more deliberately explored before it can openly compete with our current explanatory frameworks. We cannot accomplish this in a single paper or through simple argument. Instead it is proposed here that to test this third model we should ask four questions:

What is the Islamist movement and what is its political strength?
What is the role of fighting groups in a broader Islamist movement?
What is the historical trajectory of the Islamist movement?
What is the role of the United States in this prospective big change?

What follows, then, is a suggestion of how we might go about thinking through these questions, if not actually answering them. Think of it as a critical hypothesis to be tested.

What Is the Islamist Movement, and What Is Its Political Strength?

Universalism and Particularism

Is Islamism a truly Pan-Muslim movement, or is it more of a country-by-country phenomenon? There has always been a tension within the Islamic World between its universal mission and the particular needs and identities of local societies. Therefore, is an Islamic renovation still of world-historical importance if it emerges in pieces, or will it be of significance to us only if it assumes some kind of coordinated coherence?

Islamist movements are seem wrapped up in their own national societies: Turkey, Algeria, Iran, Egypt, etc. Yet some also maintain extravagant missions, like Iran in Lebanon. Certainly there is much talk of Pan-Muslim fraternity, and both Shi’a and Sunni networks of religious authority form an intricate establishment of mullahs and imams. Islamists have no comparable establishment but nonetheless still have established strong networks. We see these mostly in terms of radical Islamism.

The Saudi Wahhabist mission may be the best-known example of Pan-Islamist activity, and yet it has proceeded paradoxically from one of the most corrupt and tyrannical of all Muslim regimes. Part of the paradox is perhaps explained by the kingdom’s desire to export its own radicals, which would have the double effect of increasing Saudi prestige across the Muslim World while simultaneously physically removing potential threats to Saudi authority at home.

The impact of the Wahhabist world mission seems to have gone beyond efforts to orchestrate other parts of the Muslim World through its own brand of radicalism. Rather, it has seeded that world with new local movements, from Indonesia to Pakistan to Bosnia, and helped to radicalize others, as in Algeria. Likewise, a single group such as al Qaeda, itself originally a Saudi-supported enterprise, has served to encourage the development of many local groups. To some extent this suggests an active and growing Pan-Islamist consciousness, at least among radical Islamists.

Failure of the Radical Islamists: A Failure of Ideology over Religiosity

The radical networks, which have been America’s exclusive focus since 9-11, may well represent a failed Pan-Islamist movement. The radicals failed in two ways: they either failed to win, or where they did win, they failed to lead.

3 Hegel is famous for this term, but its use here is determinedly nondeterministic.
4 Attacks on America and Europe have been a complex extension of what is ultimately a struggle within Islam.

In 1979, revolution in Iran raised the promise of a wave of popular Islamist uprisings. These uprisings occurred—in Algeria, Syria, and Egypt—but failed in each place. Repressive Arab regimes, learning quickly from the weakness and irresolution of the shah, spared nothing to beat back their own Islamist challenges. Syria’s dictator, Hafez al-Assad, thought nothing of slaughtering tens of thousands in Homs. Even more have died in Algeria’s civil war, which continues to this day. But among Islam’s core societies, the Iranian example has not been replicated.

Where Islamist radicals have insinuated themselves, often through Wahhabist Saudi support, they have managed to create agitating minority fortresses across the Muslim World; yet they have simultaneously alienated the larger societies in which they operate. This outcome may express in part what Geneive Abdo calls a failure of ideology over religiosity. This failure can be seen most visibly in Iran.

In Iran the revolution slowly lost the fervent support, and subsequently the loyalty, of its own people. Islam can perhaps best be understood—in contrast to religious life in the modern West—as a complete “blueprint for life.” Thus its success, both for the individual and society, depends on inner motivation and collective participation. The Islamic Republic of Iran, Abdo argues, reduced Islam to mere ideology, a set of rules enforced from above by the state. Rather than a way of life shared by all, and defended by all, Islam became just another recipe for state tyranny.

Thus radical Islam failed to take formal control in the Muslim World; where it did, for example, in Afghanistan, it failed effectively to lead. For this reason, as Judith Miller declared, Islamism is in steep decline at century’s end.

The Political Power of Piety

Another quieter brand of Islamists has been making real headway at the same time. These non-violent or so-called moderate Islamists have beliefs and goals that might be better served by Raymond Baker’s term, “New Islamists.” The success of the New Islamist movement in Egypt suggests a strong alternative path for an Islamic renovatio achieved without violent struggle. This path may be important now more than ever, given the failure of radical Islamist struggles.

Egypt is important because it represents the heart of the Arab-Sunni World. It is also at the core of Islamism. Radical Islamists attempted to overthrow the regime in the 1990s and were contained. But Islamist thinkers like Qutb, who themselves were non-violent, were also imprisoned and even executed as though they were radical fighters.

Nonetheless, Islamists in Egypt have still managed to bring the rest of society to their vision. Even if the corrupt Mubarak regime still rules, the heart of the people is with the Islamists. The regime acknowledges this in its genuflection to the Islamist message.

One of the most telling aspects of this evolution in Egyptian society, however, is not so much that the New Islamists succeeded where the radicals had failed, but rather that both the radicals and the state unconsciously conspired to solidify and legitimate the New Islamists. On one hand, the radicals alienated Muslim society through the viciousness of their violence, which at the same time exposed their inability to topple the state. But the state, for its part, showed itself to be incapable of addressing the urgent needs of society that had given the radicals their authority among the people to make change in the first place.

This is a prevailing theme in Islamic tradition, and one apropos to the possibility of Islamism as a world-historical movement. The state in Islam traditionally was never vested with the responsibility of regulating and sustaining civil society. Rather, Islam itself, through the Ulama, assumed that role. In Egypt today it is the New Islamists that have come to represent the leadership of society.

In contrast to Iran, this is an Islamic revolution from the bottom up and has been achieved without violent insurgency. The New Islamists may not yet wield formal political power, but their aims certainly follow that trajectory. New Islamists in Turkey have gone even further. Their strength has grown unexpectedly in places like Malaysia, where a religious state was thought impossible. It has resurfaced, with official acquiescence, in places like Syria, where it had formerly been all but wiped out. Piety, it seems, has a more enduring political pull than violent action.

Nevertheless, these precedents beg the question: Are New Islamists as in Egypt or Turkey the simple template for future change in the Muslim World? What role will

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8 Syed Qutb was a seminal thinker who helped to create modern Islamism, inspiring both radical and non-violent New Islamists through today. A commentary that illuminates his non-violent influence is at http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/fellows/khan20030728.htm, his radical influence is treated at http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/23/magazine/23GURU.html?ex=1090987200&en=5422539debb3e6441ae=5070.
9 Baker, 205.
the many still-vibrant and active militant groups play in unfolding historical change?

What Is the Role of Fighting Groups in a Broader Islamist Movement?

An Enshrined Tradition of Independent and Violent Action

How can fighter groups—what we call terrorists—even pretend to represent all Muslims, especially in the wake of repeated failures?

Such self-organized and self-initiated fighting groups seem criminal and illegitimate to us because we inhabit a world where all defense activity in society is regulated by the nation state. In Islamic tradition, however, it is incumbent on every individual Muslim to stand up for the whole. Each Muslim thus has equal grounds and is wrong. Muslim history is full of myth and stories of obligation, to defend Islam and its Ummah. They thus have a very special niche role to play in History. Arguably, they are playing out this role today.

This role has three parts. The first is to establish the dramatic narrative and give it force and authority. Thus, for example, 9-11 became an instant clarion call for defense of the Ummah and the casting out of apostate regimes. Its symbolic and theatrical power did not achieve material objectives; instead, it instilled a collective belief that deliverance was at hand—that the narrative of History was moving forward to a resolution. Call this a form of legitimating expectation.

The second role is to actually do the fighting. Even though marginal to the life of Muslim societies, the radicals nonetheless were, and are, engaged in a struggle for the whole. This is a struggle on three fronts: (1) against the invader, i.e., the United States, (2) against the occupier, i.e., Israel, and (3) against the apostate regimes, i.e., Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.

The third part the radicals play is in actually advancing History through their actions. Thus 9-11 led to a formal U.S. invasion of the Muslim World. Radicals rejoice in this, believing that it will lead inevitably to Muslim mobilization against the invader, with the militants as natural leaders. Ordinary Muslims may not be quite so enthusiastic, but they have since 9-11 consistently asserted their solidarity within a larger cause.

Informal Support for Violent Action

Arab and Pakistani support for the cause was strong after 9-11: support for Osama bin Laden was as high as 95% among Saudi men, even while other major Muslim societies like Indonesia were sympathetic to America. 

The U.S. invasion of Iraq tended to solidify opinion across the Muslim World against America. Favorable attitudes dropped from 61% to 15% in Indonesia, 52% to 15% in Turkey, and 25% to 1% in Jordan.

Recent surveys show that support for militant action is also high. Suicide bombing, for example, is strongly supported among Arab societies, 74% among Moroccans, 86% among Jordanians.

Thus we can say that fighter groups play both a symbolic and practical role within the Muslim imagination. What is less visible, and perhaps not well understood, is the relationship between fighter groups and broader Muslim civil society.

Beyond Protestation

Do non-violent Islamists support the activities of radicals? There is plenty of indication of intense interaction among the fighting groups themselves; for example, in the recent Waziristan operation, the Pakistani Army found itself attacking Uzbek, Chechen, and Uighur fighters from Xinjiang, China.

The more urgent question is the level of interconnection and mutual support among Islamist Ullama and their followers and fighter groups. In Pakistan, 20,000 Madrassas and many radical Ullama are both training ground and broad logistical support for fighter groups. Support extends to the army itself, with much of the officer corps reportedly Islamist.

But in many Muslim societies, especially where radicals have been either eradicated—like Syria—or beaten down and discredited—like Egypt—moderate Islamists pursue a course of quiet revolution from below. They remain true to their goal of restoration, but the ques-

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tions remain, still unanswered: Are non-violent Islamists nonetheless actively supporting Pan-Islamic fighting operations? Would such support become more visible and publicly legitimated if New Islamists, say, came to power in Egypt, Malaysia, or elsewhere?

Islamism is still a movement everywhere nascent, and the role that the fighting plays today is one of sustaining a sense of growing historical possibility. It elevates Muslim morale. Thus even if these groups are disconnected from non-violent Islamists they are still an organic part of the movement.

What comes across strongly is that, taken together across the Muslim World, Islamists represent a movement without visible coalescence, but one that is nonetheless a deeply interconnected phenomenon.

What Is the Historical Trajectory of the Islamist Movement?

"Historical trajectory" is an elusive idea. It is difficult because none of us has a capacity to define such a coherent momentum in advance of its announcement, which in itself cannot be comprehended until a final realization. Thus, if Islamist renovatio is to succeed historically, its debut, even its strenuous early activity, is incapable of telling us what all this activity will realize, if anything, in the future.

Even so, as a hypothetical excursion, let us say that Islamism—the prospect of an Islamic renovatio—is assured in the future. What, then, does that tell us about events today?

Looking back, it would suggest that what is happening now, including the specter of terrorism, is part of an unfolding ‘grand narrative.’ This is not a story that anyone in the West can accept. It is, however, exactly what Muslims everywhere, whether or not they support radical violence, look to as the future. The compelling question for us: Who is right?

Even if this war comes to form a grand narrative, its outcome will undoubtedly please no one. Yet it may be useful to posit a grand narrative in the sense of a big historical story full of upheaval and change. After all, there are some well-known examples of such stories full of people and ideas in conflict.

In fact, a favorite comparison already exists: the Protestant Reformation. “Islam has not yet had its Reformation,” we all declare. The Economist captures this sense of History’s lessons at work quite nicely. Its editors, commenting on their 1994 survey of Islam, wondered whether

[T]he anger and disillusionment that seemed to be sweeping through the world of Islam in the 1990s might turn in a more benign direction. Was it not similar to the disillusionment that began to sweep through Christendom in the 16th century, which led via the Reformation to the development of modern democracy?18

This comparison suggests that big change in Islam is only beginning and also elides the fact that good changes, like modern democracy, came only after a century and more of bitter war. A third of Germany died in the Thirty Years’ War.

The Reformation and the conflict it spawned may tell us something about this grand narrative in the making simply by encouraging us to think about these as big change times. What do these times have in common?

Big change takes a long time and covers a lot of space. The period from Luther’s first rebellious act to the Treaty of Westphalia spans 130 years. The struggle at one time or another pulled in most of Western Christendom. But the struggle was made up of many local conflicts. There was never, especially among the Protestant cause, a single group of decision makers. In other words, that long period we call the Protestant Reformation was messy, disaggregated, and civilization-wide. Western Christendom in those times bears a striking resemblance indeed to the Muslim World today.

American leaders talk about a war of generations, perhaps even a “hundred years’ war.” The Islamists cause and its struggles certainly encompass an entire civilization. There is time and space enough for grand narrative—and History’s big change.

Violent repression encourages rebellion and elevates insurgency. Repression works, but in mutually opposing ways. Killing an insurgent leadership and frightening its social base of support through random decimation can beat down a rebellious movement, but it can also create a stronger movement. The Catholic Counter-Reformation was brutally effective in some places, not unlike Syria’s slaughter

17There is a recent instance raising this question. Tariq Ramadan is perhaps the most celebrated moderate Islamist in Europe today, but there have been some vocal concerns raised about his possible radical connections and the possibly radical underpinnings of his religious interpretations. See http://www.jihadwatch.org/dhimmiwatch/archives/000295.php, http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/003/4292ncyt.asp?pg=2.

18In the name of God: A Survey of Islam and the West,” The Economist, September 13, 2003.

of its own Islamists, elsewhere, however, it pushed restive societies like Holland into open insurgency. Successful repressions in the Muslim World—most notably in Algeria, Syria, and Egypt—have not eradicated Islamism. Insurgency continues in Algeria and Islamists have made a surprising comeback in Syria, while in Egypt, as Geneive Abdo relates: “today’s anti-Islamist campaign helped turn many on campus against the authorities, fuelling the very religious revival it was meant to suppress.”

Repression is delaying change, forcing Islamists underground, or encouraging them to find ways, as the Egyptian example shows, to survive and succeed. It is in this context that local struggles draw strength from, and can be influenced by, developments in the larger Muslim zeitgeist.

Violent conflict is not the change, but rather an expression of its arrival. If the Jihadi “terrorists” play their role as sustainers of the power and the glory of the narrative, they remain neither its creator nor even its central substance. True, fighter groups have their own radical vision of the future, the driving expectations that they would fulfill. Nevertheless, the broader vision of change sought by Islamists, which so many Muslims have embraced as necessary, is being realized, as it were, on the ground, in small and everyday ways that do not register on the radar of big events. It is exactly this level of micro-historical change that we in the West are likely to miss entirely.

Likewise in Reformation Europe the change occurred congregation by congregation, parish by parish. The myriad fighting groups, rebel princes, shifting allegiances, political betrayals, and endless fighting all spoke to a larger narrative of change that could only be understood in terms of the stakes and possibilities of each moment. No single or corporate actor on the political scene ever encompassed the larger course of events. They each ruthlessly pursued their immediate agendas, and their smaller stories somehow came together into the bigger one. We can only suspect that it will be no different for us and for the Islamists.

In the fullness of the narrative, success can be failure, and failure, success. We say that we seek to bring to Islam the benefits of democracy as though it were the only “truth,” forgetting that democracy in the West arose precisely because the Reformation failed to replace a corrupt truth—the Roman Catholic system—with a new truth—a single Protestant religious conformity. As William McNeil wrote, “It was the failure of Europeans to agree upon the truths of religion, within as well as across state boundaries, that opened the door to secularism and modern science.”

Thus puritanical (or fundamentalist or radical) Islamism may succeed even if, or perhaps even because it is defeated. It will succeed if it opens up space for creative change within Islam and if it prevents the imposition of Western values on the Muslim World. Likewise, American success in the mid-term in bringing democratic change to Islam may in fact be the catalyst for renewed resistance, and resistance not confined simply to radical groups, but a universal rising against us. It was, after all, Hapsburg-Catholic success in the Counter-Reformation that ultimately forced the new Protestant North to come together, brought conflict to a head, and ensured the survival of the very cause it sought so strenuously to eradicate.

External intervention can encourage change but not control it. The West has already inspired and suppressed Muslim insurgencies three times. First they defeated the cause of reform and Arab self-rule by overthrowing Muhammad Ali, thus preserving Ottoman tyranny. Second, when the Ottoman Empire no longer served their purpose, they divvied it up as spoils and inspired a struggle against European colonial rule. When the Europeans finally left, a new tyranny based on Western models took charge—hence the charge: “neo-colonialism.” It was out of the failure of these rulers that the Islamist insurgency emerged.

The West has truly helped to “disorder” the Muslim World, giving and then taking away several times in the past 180 years. The Islamist insurgency is built on a prolonged legacy of disastrous, if not always conscious, interventions by non-Muslims. We should be wary in trying to impose our own cultural “truth” on peoples highly disposed to resist us and furthermore who are so disposed to resist simply because of who we are and what we represent.

Moreover, what we offer, or insist upon, is essentially a new conformity, which is even less congenial to what is now a highly volatile and diverse cultural environment. We believe that we offer not merely a
successful model but the only successful model for human society. To Islamists, however, it remains an alien and unacceptable cultural solution. This structural-cultural dissonance alone might indicate that our apparent initial success could, over historical time, presage ultimate failure.

In the end what we get will be both messy and divisive. If we can even fairly posit a historical “outcome”—à la Westphalia in 1648 for the Reformation—then we must also accept both its likely muddiness and clarity. The participants have only clear expectations, and an insistence on clarity can be maintained for as long as its realization is still a possibility. But ultimately a future reality will emerge, whatever the actual course of big change, that will in contrast represent something mixed and unsatisfying. There may, for example, be a big loser, but even the loser will have achieved something, and the winners may also feel less than triumphant.

Even the Catholic cause, apparently defeated in its struggle with the Protestant North, managed to reclaim and hold on to the South: “The cause of medieval empire was indeed utterly lost … but the papacy and Catholicism made a spectacular comeback from the religious slackness and political weakness of the early 16th century, thanks very largely to Spanish religiosity and to Spanish policy.”

The only real “achievement” of that bloody era was to divide Europe and destroy forever the medieval ideal of imperial unity coterminous with a Church Universal. But it was precisely that outcome that laid the groundwork for Western pluralism and ultimately of our contemporary ideal of Democracy Universal. Again, as McNeill said of the Protestant outcome: “The difficulty of establishing consensus on a biblical basis tended therefore to widen the areas of tolerance within Protestant states.”

The United States should therefore be wary about whether it can ultimately achieve its stated war aim, i.e., the establishment of a democratic consensus among Muslim states, and also about the long-term historical impact of its intervention in the Muslim World. Historical comparison might indicate that the likely “best outcome” for Muslims and Islam will be both messy and divisive, but it also is most likely to be driven—and in ways we might not altogether relish—by American actions.

What Is the Role of the United States in This Prospective Big Change?

The model of world-historical Islamism is a hypothesis. Perhaps future reality will be very different. Perhaps the Islamist challenge will subside, country by county. New Islamists will make their peace with entrenched regimes while radical Jihadists are hunted down, at the last losing heart in the struggle.

If in contrast the Islamist trajectory continues, in its elusive intertwining of violent and nonviolent forms, then America’s intervention in the Muslim World will become increasingly wrapped up in Islamist issues. The decisive factor in the Muslim future will in fact be the relationship between the United States and Islamism.

America is critically shaping this relationship:

- By supporting corrupt regimes
- By occupying the heart of Islam
- By missing the meaning of the broader Islamist movement

The first of these has been longstanding U.S. policy and might be understood by New Islamists as necessary realism. The United States is a status quo power and has had little interest in Muslim politics, especially political movements that threaten that status quo.

New Islamists might accept even the second of these as long as the United States fulfills its promise of an appropriate withdrawal from Iraq. There is a sort of “wait and see” quality to the patience of Iraqi Shi‘a and the absence of general Muslim protests over U.S. occupation.

It is the third of these that threatens to lay the groundwork for a conflicted relationship between the United States and Islamists. If U.S. war aims seek to create a democratic consensus in the Muslim World, there is little room in this vision even for the New Islamist. The current U.S. paradigm of democracy demands the creation of a secular civil society in the American manner. There is absolutely no room in U.S. Iraq planning for an Islamic republic, even along the relatively tolerant and pluralistic lines of New Islamist thought.

Furthermore, current U.S. policy seems unaware that its secular democratic paradigm is unacceptable to Islamists. To them it represents a form of religious conversion and threatens the very possibility of achieving a “rightly guided” Islamic way of life in Muslim societies. To the contrary, American policymakers and strategists tend to see all Islamists as unreconstructed medieval men. What is missing is an ability to properly differentiate between fiery radicals and very much more thoughtful New Islamists.

Thus threatened by its own fears of a Muslim renova-
tio, U.S. support of corrupt regimes and continuing U.S.

22 McNeill, 580.
23 McNeill, 590.
military occupation in the heart of Islam could harden and become entrenched in the face of Islamist demand. If Egypt, for example, were to move toward Islamist governance, if a Saudi coming-apart or regime change led to popular Islamist solutions, if a Shi’a Islamic republic is declared in post-occupation Iraq: the United States is unready to meet such developments openly.

An America that continues to decry Islamist hopes, even those of nonviolent New Islamists, could lead History in the direction of another severe, long-term adversary relationship in world affairs.

(This essay originally appeared in the online journal TechCentralStation.com on April 27, 2004.)
Exhuming the “War of Ideas”

The lost message of this war is an urgent problem for the U.S. government. Thus, with some of the same spirit of urgency, is this paper offered.

All conflicts are at some level "wars of ideas." Even archaic, almost forgotten ones, like the brief war between France and Austria in 1859 over Italian national emergence, convey some sense of a struggle for “hearts and minds.” That war was a short, glorious episode, in contrast to darker traditions of European bloodletting. In two neat engagements, Magenta and Solferino, the French defeated the Austrian army and thus ensured the ultimate reunification of Italy.

Certainly there was no state strategic communications effort to rival our trinity of Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy, and PSYOPS (“psychological operations”). But this hardly mattered to European opinion, and especially to Italians—despite Louis Napoleon’s cynical calculus to acquire large bits of alpine Piedmont as Italy’s reward for French help. That was because the French “idea” in that war of ideas had natural authority. Everyone knew the context for French intervention and understood their legacy of revolutionary ideals and Napoleon Bonaparte’s vision of heroic nationalism. Even as a faux emperor, Napoleon III was nonetheless the recognizable inheritor of a positive tradition that, in propaganda terms, he could play to the hilt, which of course he did.

In this war America’s ideas, and the U.S. story of the war, have no such authority. Indeed, in the past year Muslim support, which was widespread in the wake of 9-11, has evaporated. Attitudes toward the United States across the world of Islam are now highly negative and continue to harden. Furthermore, the various ideas and stories from the other side—the enemy—are sympathetically transmitted and disseminated, not merely by enemy public affairs, but by the mainstream Muslim media itself.

We find ourselves in a particularly arduous strategic information environment. In our example, Napoleon III operated comfortably in the still-received context of a glorious French ideological tradition, with an instantly recognized “idea brand.” Frankly, France was also up against a very weak (even a “loser”) competitor in European civilization, i.e., the Austrian Empire. In stark contrast, the United States finds itself waging a war of ideas within an alien civilization that it has managed to further, and almost irreparably, alienate.

The strategic information situation today represents a threefold challenge to America’s “info-warriors.” Addressing this predicament, let alone countering it, is arguably beyond the reach of honest self-appraisal—going through a thorough checklist of things not done or done badly. In truth, the U.S. propaganda campaign in this war has failed because:

- It was too self-referent: It’s all about us, and what we want.
- Its vision of the situation and cultural context was just plain wrong. It permitted the enemy to turn our own work against us.
- The situation requires that the United States explicitly address the fundamental problem of “message authority” rather than continue to pretend that the normal (and initially expected) prescription for a war of ideas still applies. It doesn’t.
Right now, there is no war of ideas because American ideas have no authority among Muslims. The U.S. strategic information enterprise must undertake an effort that is both unexamined in and orthogonal to its traditions. These traditions stressed argumentation and presentation, but assumed a shared context within which this war of ideas would be played out. That is, the enemy and the larger cultural context in which they operated could understand and relate to American ideas; there was enough of a shared worldview and belief system that U.S. propaganda arguments would at least be received and discussed. In World War II, the ETO offered a familiar and receptive landscape for the strategic information campaign, especially outside of Germany. But even Japan, which on the surface looked like a completely closed world, had been a member with serious standing in the orbit of Western civilization long enough so that channels for our message still existed, and these channels would open considerably and play a considerably positive role in the post-war transformation of Japan.

Likewise, in the Muslim World, many societies like Indonesia, Turkey, and the Gulf states seemed to have inclined decisively toward the West in recent decades. But this environment has three aspects that distinguish it from all World War II information venues:

- It is not simply a question of Muslim attitudes turning sharply against the United States in the past year. More significantly, these attitudes have gelled into an *Ummah*-wide worldview whose very anti-Americanism is now a symbol of Muslim identity and the Muslim future. In other words, a shared negative vision of the United States has become a passionate rallying point for collective Muslim purpose.
- Furthermore, any locally targeted U.S. information effort is almost instantly shared across the Muslim World and becomes yet another call to action in the face of an urgent external threat. Radical Islamists, moreover, do not have to make this case. Muslims who share a collective vision of what is going on and what needs to be done—and yet who may not be active supporters of the “terrorists”—are the ones making the case.
- Finally, the emerging center of gravity within Islam is not where the United States has invested its support; rather, America continues to invest in the old-line Muslim establishment. But the dynamic center is among the “New” Islamists, who represent a growing movement across the Muslim World. Their vision is not distinctly understood by the U.S. information campaign, which tends to lump all Islamists together as “radicals.” By not seriously parsing Islamism, and by choosing which Islamists it can support, the United States is driving positive elements in the Muslim revival, if not directly into the arms of the Jihadis, then to an ever-stronger vision of the United States as the enemy of Islam.

At this point in the conflict, the U.S. strategic information effort is essentially supporting the narrative of the Jihadis. If this effort is to have a hope of conveying its own message, we must first create the conditions where that message can be heard on its own terms. This means deconstructing the mental architecture that immediately turns the American message into yet another daily motivational element in the narrative of Muslim struggle. The only way to do this is to find a way to speak to Muslims with “authority”—that is, the authority of their language and their ideas.

How do we create this foundation for message authority or get them to listen to us, rather than simply letting them plug what we say, like unexamined artifacts, into their story?

We must remember that entering a propaganda situation in which we lack message authority is something historically new to us. Mythic American experiences like World War II (or even most of the Cold War) encourage us to assume, a priori, the existence of pre-dominant authority in our message of human freedom and democracy, not unlike the example of France in the 19th century believing that it naturally represented progressive nationalist ideas. The fact that we have no com-

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1 The most recent Zogby poll, commissioned by the University of Maryland in May, 2004, shows for the first time that a majority of Arabs believe that the United States is intent on “dominating” and “weakening” Islam itself: http://www.bsos.umd.edu/sadat/pub/Arab%20Attitudes%20Towards%20Political%20and%20Social%20Issues,%20Foreign%20Policy%20and%20the%20Media.htm. There are many other recent indicators of this. For example, see “A Year After Iraq War: Mistrust of America in Europe Even Higher, Muslim Anger Persists,” The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, March 16, 2004. Or, from the vantage of late 2003: favorable attitudes have plunged from 61% to 15% in Indonesia, 52% to 15% in Turkey, and 25% to 1% in Jordan. In Iraq, in an August 2003 survey by Zogby International, Iraqis responded 50% to 35% in affirming that “over the next five years the United States will hurt Iraq.” Patrick Coburn of the British daily *The Independent* reports: “Just after the invasion, 43 per cent saw the U.S. fed Allies as ‘liberating forces.’ A poll earlier this month showed that 15 per cent now see the Americans as liberators. Iraqis who see them as occupiers have risen from 46 per cent to 67 per cent.” Ahmed Rashid, correspondent for the Far Eastern Economic Review and the Daily Telegraph, made the following comment about current Pakistani opinion on the October 28, 2003 Diane Rehm Show: “The Iraq war is generating a much wider anti-Americanism. . . . This widespread anti-Americanism in the middle classes in Pakistan, for example, has been quite stunning to see in the last few months. The war in Iraq has probably generated more anti-Americanism in South Asia than the war in Afghanistan ever did.” (Sources: http://www.economist.com/World/afira/displayStory.cfm?story_id=2155924, http://www.taemag.com/ docLib/20030905_IraqpollFrequencies.pdf; http://www.wamu.org/dr/2003/drarc_031027html#tuesday, http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/story.jsp?story_num=457997. (Note: all URLs throughout the publication were valid when this monograph went to press.)
parable message authority in this war means that before we attempt to gain authority we must try to understand why we have no authority in the first place. This means understanding the message that we are actually conveying, not the message we think we are conveying.

So the first order of business is to do a rigorous self-appraisal. Is our message too self-referent? By assuming message authority, are we simply reliving past triumphs, while in reality speaking only to ourselves? Has the propaganda campaign, in fact, become all about us?

The second step is to unflinchingly approach the enemy and their social and cultural orbit. Part of the problem with being unconsciously self-referent is that we project some of what we want to see in the world of the enemy and call the desired result “reality.” We need urgently to know their world as they know it, and that calls for an exercise in cultural empathy that is unfamiliar, even uncomfortable, for most Americans.

Third, once we truly take their measure, we must decide what constituency in the world of the enemy is its true center of gravity. With whom do we really need to establish message authority? Arguably we can do this only with a part of the spectrum of the broader belief system within which the enemy resides. Moreover, this choice must be our positive propaganda choice. We need to deliver our most encouraging and hopeful good news to the very center of gravity in the enemy’s world.

Finally, the enemy himself must be addressed, not to try to sway or even to diminish him, but to limit the damage he does by turning our messages against us. We must acknowledge that this is exactly what enemy groups have managed to do so adroitly and unerringly up to now. Thus the message authority that we establish with the actual enemy must be all about stripping them of the enormous authority that they have acquired, in part by effectively turning our former authority against us.

It’s All About Us

The Ideology of Our War

The deep goals and assumptions upon which this war is based tend to be uncritically, even unconsciously, accepted by us. But our existential belief in their “rightness” may come across to others who inhabit a different belief system as an almost religious ideology that we will unbendingly impose on them.

For example, the ways we talk about “freedom” and “democracy” can send the message that there is only one sort of freedom and democracy—our own. Furthermore, we often fail to realize that these terms are seen by others as code words for the entire sum of the American way of life and its complete value system, which many in Islam view as debased and corrupt, and certainly inimical to theirs.

Beyond our unwitting use of language, however, is our conveyance of an implicit existential narrative that Muslims find at best troubling and at worst terrifying. The American Story has powerful components of the messianic, the millenarian, and the apocalyptic. These are so familiar and natural a part of our history that what we see as heroic and exemplary may be perceived quite differently by others. Americans believe without ever voicing it that we exist to redeem the world. The Civil War and World War II were very explicit about redemption and about the role of God’s Will in its realization. The speeches of Presidents Lincoln, Wilson, and Roosevelt echo across time as a lineage that is enunciated just as clearly and forcefully in the words of President Bush.

This highly charged public language suggests to Muslims that America will visit upon them the very sort of violent dramaturgy experienced, say, by Germany and Japan during and after World War II. Thus the kinder and gentler words officially broadcast to assuage Muslim anxiety are seen as weak and insincere, a form of damage-limitation. This approach is self-serving and wholly insufficient to overcome the passionate intensity and authenticity of national war speeches.

Telling the Domestic Story

This difficulty continues as Americans discuss the war and as the administration works to persuade its constituencies and opponents of the rightness of its cause. The arguments and justifications for domestic consumption may end up at odds with the message of U.S. public diplomacy. Moreover there is a wider domestic discourse about administration policy motivation. Both conversations focus on domestic eyes and ears, but the whole world is watching with intent. Thus the domestic discourse creates problems for the official U.S. presentation to the Muslim World. There are four themes here that weaken the U.S. message—not in the realm of our reality, but in Muslim perception.

1. Neoconservative orchestration. Perhaps the most persistent neoliberalism of Muslims’ perception of U.S. motives is the assumption that America and Israel are inseparable and that the war on terrorism, but most especially the invasion of Iraq, is all about ensuring the security of Israel. The back-and-forth in the American media about the role of “neoconservatives” in the making of U.S. strategy on Iraq is simply a reaffirmation of accumulated Muslim prejudice on this theme. What is important here is that our understanding of this topos is practically irrel-
In the wake of 9-11 the administration deception.

The debacle over WMD is just a part of this particular problem; the bigger issue is the interminable exchange over justification for the invasion of Iraq. The entire run up to the war was an energetic exercise in salesmanship and storytelling. But what exactly was the story? Was it WMDs? Was it Saddam’s intimate links to Al Qaeda? Was it the bigger vision of establishing a precedent for democracy in the Muslim Middle East? The confusion and ambiguity of this domestic message actually contributed to a suspicion of conscious deception in that there was never a steadfast message to Americans about the changing course of the war. Most significant here for broader Muslim perceptions: If the administration was willing to deceive its own electorate, how could any message to the world of Islam be taken seriously?

Islam–American war. In the wake of 9-11 the administration was careful to decry any construction of the war that might suggest a twilight struggle between Christianity and Islam, or the West and Islam, or America and Islam. Officially, Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations became a sort of literary persona non grata. Yet, over time, unmistakably sympathetic emanations were recorded at the very center of the Washington establishment. The president himself misspoke—although only once—about a “Crusade.” But then Jim Woolsey and William Cohen, both top figures from the former administration, further enunciated this metaphor of high struggle, lending the impression that the entire Washington establishment generally accepted the notion of a great historical struggle.

Both have spoken in public about a “world war” of generations, perhaps a century. To Muslims this is not commensurate with a more contained war against terrorism, but speaks more ominously of a more majestic, and terrifying, conflict of world-historical proportions.

American weakness. In the midst of all this talk, however, is an American electorate whose commitment seems finite. It is not as though Americans do not support the administration’s war on terrorism or its war in Iraq, it is simply that Muslims perceive that American support for the war is not infinitely elastic. They get the sense that this is not World War II. They sense also that there is a threshold at which the electorate will potentially withdraw its support. This is not merely a received mythology from the Vietnam era, either. It is reinforced daily by what Muslims see on the American media: a society that is not wholly committed to the messianic goals of the administration.

The point here is not to say that the administration’s actions are bad, in fact, they may be the best thing ever for the Muslim Middle East. But we need to understand how our intended message is inflected, distorted, and in the end, undercut by us—strikes against us that we must try ever harder to overcome.

Bureaucratic Food Fights

Part of the message problem lies in the fact that the entire U.S. propaganda effort was institutionalized, even routinized, during the Cold War. There are thus many competing organizations, each seeking to advance its interests in pursuit of claimed authority. This is not authority with the world of our enemy, but rather in the world of the “imperial court” where jockeying for status has been the goal for many decades. In normal times (even “normal” Cold War times) this would not be such a big deal. The strategic information campaign became understood as something that went on daily, and it became equally understood as simply not critical to a strategic outcome. Today, government organizations still seek to jockey and jostle to maximize their own standing within an administration.

We can thus propose a set of exemplary, if hypothetical, questions. What if the White House Office of Global Communications were turned into nothing more than a press office, sending presidential quotes out to foreign media and calling that “strategy”? What if the State Department’s Public Diplomacy effort was nothing more than business as usual, that is, doing goodwill exchanges and sending out well-meaning missives with titles like “The United States did not ‘create’ Osama bin Laden,” or “Al-Qa’idi-style terrorists are Weirdoes, not Heroes,”
or “AQ-style terrorism causes great harm to Muslims”? What if the Pentagon’s prefrontal lobe, OSDP, admitted that it had retreated from doing even operational propaganda and was now mud-deep in the tactical “fighting alligators”? What if the PCC for strategic information had been deliberately terminated from on high so that there could be no interagency thinking about the propaganda campaign? What would that say about our seriousness to really face up to the problem? These are not normal times,

**Who Are They?**

*What Is the Real Change Situation?*

For two years and more, this war has had only two definitions. Think of them as working models to explain what is going on, and thus frameworks for strategy and policy. Most Americans, and their president, subscribe to the explanatory model of “terrorism.” The terrorism model describes the enemy as small groups that are marginal in their own world—generally accepted at this point as the Muslim World. They may have political objectives but within their own societies they are considered no more than criminal. They can thus be addressed as criminals through eradication. However, their persistence suggests that broader societal ills are responsible for their emergence. Thus, encouraging democratic reform within societies that produce terrorism is indicated.

Others in contrast describe a Muslim “civil war.” This explanatory model says that terrorism is the expression of a broad struggle within Islam between moderates and radicals. Radicals have chosen the path of violence—hence, terrorism—while moderates, including most governments in the Muslim World, would prefer to pursue political contention peacefully. Thus, the United States should oppose “radical Islam” generally and support moderate Muslim regimes. This model by implication suggests that U.S. strategy cannot merely encourage, but must insist upon the adoption of Western civic values in order to successfully defeat the vision of radical Islam.

But there is a third explanatory model, and it exposes what is wrong with the two prevailing frameworks. This model describes neither terrorism nor civil war, but rather a “world-historical” movement of Islamic revival. Terrorism in this reality-framework is an expression neither of criminal evil nor of an evil vision. Rather, violent radical elements are only a small part of a much broader movement for Islamic “restoration,” which speaks more directly to Islamist visions than words like “revival,” which in the Western consciousness at least refer more narrowly to simpler religious “awakenings.” For Muslims at least, their vision is one of an entire order restored, of not simply religion but of an entire “rightly guided” way of life brought back as it should be. For a generation and more the drive for this Islamic restoration has been gathering strength and asserting itself.

This alternative model suggests that terrorism cannot be truly abstracted as a separate phenomenon within the Muslim World, but instead must be seen as part of a bigger change movement within that world. Likewise, there is no civil war between mythical “moderates”—meaning “reasonable” Muslims who just want to live and let live—and wild-eyed “radicals” who would burn it all down. In contrast, the larger Islamist restoration movement seeks to purify the Muslim World of corrupt and apostate tyrants. The movement has many elements and agendas, and thus many paths to this goal. Like many broad movements with revolutionary goals, most are non-violent. The example of Islamists in Egypt and Turkey suggests that the majority of Islamists seek their goals through peaceful means, and the world they would create is couched in surprisingly moderate and tolerant terms.

But the goal shared by all Islamists is nonetheless a radical goal. The restoration of Islam would mean an end to Western-style secular civil society in the Muslim World, even if it led to an Islamic civil society that Westerners might not find uncomfortable.

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4 This is an excerpt from the author’s “The Muslim Renovatio and U.S. Strategy,” in the online journal TechCentralStation (http://techcentralstation.com/042704D.html). Even if its long-term hypotheses in terms of change are not realized, it is nonetheless vitally important to approach the Muslim World in terms of change and its key change groups.
and the United States to date has lost not simply hearts and minds, but the possibility even of reaching those hearts and minds ever again. But neither the bureaucrats nor the administration can seem to face this reality.

**What Is the Historical Change Group?**

The dominant historical change group is unmistakably the New Islamist movement, not from the vantage point of Western perception, but rather from the dynamics of change within the Muslim World. Yet this reality is still unacknowledged within the administration or, more generally, among the Washington establishment. Nonetheless, the movement is the seat of ferment today in Islam, the place from which we should expect new things to emanate, and the font from which the future societies of the Muslim World will arise.5

The administration has erred in its presentation of the situation, not merely by failing to distinguish between New Islamists and Radical Jihadis, but by not recognizing that the larger strategic environment cannot be managed over historical time. Instead, the world of Islam is a world in flux in which change must be accepted, if not encouraged. The question is what source of change, and what authority to change, will the United States support? Clearly, the terrorists are the expression of a vision of Islam’s future that is insupportable. But the New Islamists offer a vision, arguably, that Americans should find acceptable, if somewhat variant to our homegrown notions of freedom and democracy.

It is, in fact, remarkable that so little attention has been paid to the nonviolent, pluralistic, and yet nonetheless radical New Islamists. We should understand that here, “radical” means a new basis for society in places like Egypt and Arabia where corrupt regimes have played havoc on their own people. We must in good conscience look at what these very authentic movements for Islamic restoration have to offer, and at the same time be able to distinguish between them and the violent radicals that seek our destruction.

**Does This Mean the Message Must Change?**

It is incumbent upon the United States to reach out to the prospective historical change group and begin to distance itself from the ancien régime that it has backed since the end of World War II. This means in essence not only a change in message—as in the message of “strategic communications”—but potentially if not surely, a change in national strategy.

The change need not be orthogonal or discontinuous. A subtle shift in U.S. strategy to support nonviolent, pluralistic change in Islam could be set into motion without announcing the end of American support for Egypt, Arabia, Pakistan, etc. At the same time, however, such a reworked message cannot be contained within the discredited blandishments of reform offered by recent administration announcements. No one in the Muslim World believes in that sort of hortatory window dressing.

Thus, there is something decisively implicit in creating a message with authority from the United States to the new Muslim World. Such a message need not cross the political Rubicon today, but it must show its sincere intent. To date this has not been done. The United States demonstrates every day and in every way how it seeks to maintain the status quo in the world of Islam. To create message authority with Muslims, the United States must find a way to demonstrate that it believes in change—real change that Muslims seek and that Muslims will create.

How can the United States even begin to do this? Craft a surprising and unexpected message of Good News.

**Approaching the Center of Gravity**

**What Constitutes Good News?**

Good News constitutes a promise of change for the better, and furthermore, change that meets the needs and the yearnings of Muslims. This change of course does not fit neatly into American expectations of recreating our democracy in the secular-civil sense. Nevertheless, in a very important way, it does fit into the broader framework of the original American promise for the world. The Founders were supremely confident that the American example would eventually spread throughout the world, but they were also adamant that every society must find its own way to republican virtue. Jefferson even expected that North America would eventually be populated by many variant republics (“eaglets”) and not by a single state. The revolutions in Central and South America were welcomed, not as homage to the United States, but as an inspired expression of a vision that America had ignited. Their path, however, was their own.

This message is missing in our discourse with the Ummah. Our stated vision for Iraq, in contrast, has been one of implicit imposition—perhaps not consciously, but according to Muslim perception, incontrovertibly.

**Re-establishing American Message Authority**

Is it possible to show we approve of non-violent Islamism, even if this suggests the prospect of some

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radical changes in societies where our support hitherto has been reflexively in favor of oppressive regimes? It is possible, but it will require the use of Muslim discourse, not American. American language is unusable in Islam and has failed miserably as a starting point for either dialogue or argumentation. A working channel of communication, in contrast, requires a level of easy sophistication in speaking to the many Muslim Worlds that is almost wholly lacking in contemporary American worldview. This is not so much to say that Arabic speakers are unavailable, but rather that a higher-level ability to conceptualize venues that speak to Muslims is absent in us.

For example, the current U.S.–Muslim broadcasting effort—al Iraqiyah, al Hurra, Radio Sawa, Radio Farda—has been called timid and without content. As Stephen Schwartz writes:

Yet al-Hurra, like Radio Sawa and Radio Farda before it, has failed to gain credibility with Arab or Muslim viewers. Here the “Lebanese problem” present in the Iraqi operation also plays a role, for Lebanese influence is obvious, down to the Arabic dialect spoken on al-Hurra’s programming. In a caustic article titled “The Giant American Media Tiger Labored and Brought Forth a Weak Kitten,” Arab journalist Muhammad Abdullah Nab commented as follows on the London-based website www.elaph.com:

“Before al-Hurra began broadcasting, we thought of it as a huge media wave... We waited eagerly for this channel, to learn the principles of leading global media and to see how it would capture the Arab audience and embarrass Arab media professionals by, more than ever, exposing their backwardness. But the tiger we awaited was only a kitten [the word hurra is similar to the Arabic word for kitten].”

Nab continued,

“We believed al-Hurra would offer a mighty challenge to [al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya], which could never compete with the colossal American media machine. ... [But] neither the prince of Qatar, who owns al-Jazeera, or Abd al-Rahman al-Rashid, boss of al-Arabiya, found any reason to be concerned with the “competition from the American kitten channel.”

Accepting Near-Term Message Limits with Good Grace

In a recent policy forum at the Cato Institute, two Muslim scholars laid out a boundary framework for successful American involvement in the world of Islam. Their cautionary limits serve as a practical reminder of where not to go in our conversation with Muslims. Remember, these are both very moderate Muslim-Americans speaking, not even moderate Islamists, but they tell us much about how to craft a potential “Islamist strategy”:

“The Pentagon cannot give lectures about what moderate Islam should be.”

“The United States cannot do this in the name of democracy and freedom.”

“The United States must develop dissidence in the Muslim World in order to have a discourse.”

“Do not delegitimate the modernizers.”

“The struggle between Muslims and their extremists should be decided by Muslims, not by the United States.”

“The United States must be content to be a secondary player if it is to succeed.”

Heeling the Enemy

What the Enemy Has Done

The enemy—the violent Jihadi elements directly attacking us—are sustained within an Ummah-wide milieu of emotional approbation. Thus, since 9-11 and even more so since Iraq, the enemy has been able to seamlessly use broader Muslim sentiment, especially through Muslim media, to transmit and disseminate its message. The enemy has essentially let its larger audience and its media do its work. And we conspire to make their work easier for them.

One simple but symbolic example is the new U.S.-designed Iraqi flag. From the American standpoint, what’s not to like about it? It’s tasteful, with a lovely blue on white that we would consider quite nice. But to Iraqis, this hue of blue is not only an insult, it is an injury. As one Muslim scholar told me, no Islamic flag has ever had blue in it—and none has ever been lacking either black, or red, or green. A major Iraqi blog had a discussion of local reactions to the U.S. design: Iraqis immediately assumed that the United States was forcing the blue of the Israeli flag on them!

This example of course does not really represent the constant efforts of Arab (and to some extent broader Muslim) media in the indirect service of the enemy. Rather, it suggests the nature of a pervasive cultural
milieu where American missteps only reinforce an ingrained worldview.

In this environment the enemy needs only to offer occasional heroic messages on tape. Meanwhile the struggle is sustained daily for them through the mainstream media. This is what we are up against.

Is the Enemy’s Message Strategy Vulnerable at Any Point?

The enemy has an unexploited vulnerability: they cannot imagine that the United States would support the forces of change within the Muslim World. Furthermore, the unreconstructed Jihadis cannot even entertain the possibility that Americans might empathize and understand what the world of Islam is going through. Fortunately for them so far, almost every American act and initiative, and especially those of the U.S. government, reaffirms their assumptions.

A very different, authentic, and sincere American outreach to the Muslim World could overturn all of this and potentially marginalize the Jihadis by deconstructing their narrative paradigm of History. This narrative has perversely and unwittingly been supported by American actions but need not be. If the United States were able to show Muslims that change can come to their world—change that Muslims make for themselves—and that America will support such change, even if it is Islamist, then the whole reason d’etre of the Jihadis will disappear in an instant.

It would be naïve to suggest that the United States could do this quickly through a substantially reworked strategic information campaign. But the administration could lay the groundwork for such a campaign and launch it as a sort of strategic surprise if it also decided to revise its strategy on the ground. The point is that the enemy is vulnerable, but to take advantage of this vulnerability the United States must take actions that are currently outside of the American reality paradigm.

Attacking Vulnerabilities, Limiting Damage

In the short term, absent the commitment to a dramatic—if essentially philosophical and public—shift in strategy, can the United States still act at the operational level to limit the continual damage done to our message by the enemy? Damage limitation here is the stepchild of a broader, bigger shift in message strategy. In other words, damage-limiting stratagems must be part of a coherent strategy that marginalizes the Jihadis by shifting U.S. support to the New Islamists. Any hortatory move in that direction without sincere and bankable commitments would be instantly disallowed and universally disbelieved. This suggests some conclusions about the American strategic communications message in this war:

- Gaining message authority is the only path to getting a message—and this means any U.S. message—across.
- The war of ideas is the war—i.e., the war will be won or lost there, and not on the ground.
- Here, any definition of “winning” means supporting the change forces within Islam.
- There is no recognition in the United States that these three truths rule. Until that recognition attains, the U.S. war effort will continue to lose ground, no matter how relentlessly we apply our predominant military to the task.

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