

THE BROOKINGS PROJECT ON  
U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE ISLAMIC WORLD

PROCEEDINGS  
Number 1, May 2003

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION:  
THE 2002 DOHA CONFERENCE ON  
U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD

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# INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION? ISLAMISM IN POLITICS

## OPENING SPEAKERS:

**Martin Kramer**, *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*; *Editor, Middle East Quarterly*

**Nasr Taha Mustafa**, *Editor-In-Chief, Saba, National News Agency of Yemen*

## MARTIN KRAMER:

In the title of this panel, we have been given these two alternatives of inclusion and exclusion for the Islamist movements.

The choice of words already tends to prejudge the issue: How can one possibly oppose inclusion? Isn't the essence of democracy and equality summarized by the word "inclusion"? Isn't exclusion something fundamentally undemocratic and discriminatory? How is it possible to advocate the exclusion of anyone from politics? After all, the inclusion of everyone, men and women, black and white, rich and poor, is considered the fundamental condition of democracy and one could argue also of modernity.

Needless to say, I'm sympathetic also to the arguments in favor of inclusion. In the Middle East I think many of us would agree that the authoritarian state has failed to fulfill its self-appointed role of bringing modernity to the masses and the authori-

tarian state. This state will always be limited in the public goods it can deliver. So eventually the state will have to find a way to accommodate the growing desire for wider participation.

But let me also state my own unequivocal view: The inclusion of Islamists has not represented a progressive step forward where it has been taken and in some cases it may actually constitute a dangerous step backward. It would be a mistake for the United States to press for the inclusion of Islamists even if democracy promotion becomes a feature of its Middle East policy.

Similarly, I think it would be a mistake to rush to the defense of Islamists whose conduct has brought the wrath of the state down upon their heads. Where Islamists have been tainted by terrorism the United States should not be bound by the fact that these same Islamists may sit in parliaments.

Anyone familiar with U.S. policy already knows that it does not include support for the inclusion of Islamists. I'm not stating anything but the obvious. Yet no one who speaks for U.S. policy has been prepared to rationalize it. So allow me to rationalize it. I'm not an official or prospective official; I speak only for myself. But since 9/11 the views that I hold are held much more widely than they were before. It's an approach to Islamism that I should stress has nothing to do with

Islam per se and everything to do with the actual conduct of the Islamist movements themselves.

Let me not put too fine a point on it. To date almost every political order that has included Islamists and given them a space in which to operate has become a trouble spot or a breeding ground for terrorism. Some say, "include the Islamists," include them in the game and they will moderate. The actual evidence to date is that the more space Islamists are given, the more threatening they become in the first instance to their fellow Muslims, including many secularists, but also to the United States.

Now, let me illustrate the point by a number of examples. In an earlier session someone mentioned Lebanon as being very exceptional in the Arab world. I too think unique in the Arab world. It actually has a measure of political pluralism, it has political parties, a relatively open press, it has elections. Lebanon's predisposition is to include everyone and the Islamists of Hezbollah have been included in the system for a decade now. Hezbollah is formally recognized, its representatives sit in the parliament, and it has a standing invitation to join the cabinet of the Lebanese government.

Yet this has not deterred the Islamists. To the contrary, they have established a virtual state within the state. Hezbollah remains armed. It has taken over some of the most sensitive parts of the country. And it operates with minimal regard for the Lebanese state. It periodically nudges both Lebanon and the region to the brink of war.

Now, I know that some of you will say, "But they're a resistance movement," to which I would answer, perhaps they were a resistance movement but now they are a power unto themselves. Much like the PLO was in the 1970s, one could argue even more than the PLO because Hezbollah actually has strategic capabilities. I think this bodes ill for the future prospects of Lebanon as a state.

And what of the Palestinian Authority? Even under the less than ideal rule of Yasser Arafat, it has been less oppressive than any other Arab state. It tolerates a wider range of political expression than Syria, Jordan, or Egypt. And, of course, it tolerates the Islamists as well. The result here again is the Islamists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad have gained an influence, which is far in excess of their numbers. If Hamas is not formally part of the Palestinian government it's only because Hamas chooses to remain outside, but they are entirely free to organize, preach, and demonstrate.

How have they used that freedom? They are armed to the teeth, they have grown terrorist appendages, which answer only to themselves and whose violence has infected the entire Palestinian body politic. But beyond issues related to their stance towards Israel, they have become an authority within the authority and they are a law unto themselves.

Now, you might say the two instances I just gave are exacerbated by the Arab-Israeli conflict and so they aren't genuine tests. So let's look beyond the Arab-Israeli arena. Is the situation any different in the Arabian Peninsula, for example? It would be presumptuous of me to speak about Yemen, given the fact that my colleague on this panel will do so, so I won't. I would simply ask this: Did the opening of Yemeni politics a decade ago not create the space in which extreme Islamism now flourishes today? Is it a coincidence that in the 1990s Yemen pioneered the inclusion of Islamists and that today Yemen is regarded as a breeding ground for extreme Islamist terror?

Last night, one of our Kuwaiti participants drew a line between Kuwait's relative political openness and the spread to that country of al-Qaeda, and I take that as a suggestion that perhaps Kuwait drew the line in the wrong place when it drew it to include the Islamists.

And how can we forget the political order that is the most inclusive of Islamists? I'm speaking of Saudi Arabia, which is a regime built upon an institutionalized inclusion of Islamists in the political order. No,

there are no elections in Saudi Arabia but the Islamist element, which is to say much of the Saudi religious establishment, has an allotted share of power. For a long time it was believed that the Saudi royal house had found the perfect formula for neutralizing the religious zealotry that created the Saudi state: bring the zealots into the tent, make them complicit in the modernizing project of the Al Saud, tempt them, co-opt them, and harvest those fatwahas of compliance with the ruling order.

I think we all know what has become of this experiment now that we've taken a closer look at it since 9/11. It's not certain who has co-opted whom. The Islamists who are within the system have subverted it, using the immunities they enjoy to spread extremism and its terrorist offshoots across the world. The Saudi symbiosis has become an extremism machine. "Our Islamists," the ones who were supposed to be safely under control, have been running amok.

So in short, political inclusion has not been an antidote to extremism. Quite the opposite: The more inclusive the system, the more likely it is to become the host of some cancerous Islamist movement, which combines both incitement and terrorism.

What about the moderate Islamist? Surely you realize that all Islamists are not alike, you will say. I do realize it. Obviously there must be differences among Islamists. A well-known American scholar has made a career of repeatedly urging that the U.S. government, "distinguish between Islamic movements that are a threat and those that represent legitimate indigenous attempts to reform and redirect their societies."

This seems an eminently reasonable objective on paper, but in practice it means going out and measuring each movement and classifying it. Let's admit the truth: The record of Arab and Western governments in classifying Islamist moderates has been a very patchy one indeed. Time and again Islamists who are regarded as moderates have turned out to be anything but that. That is because the idea of Islamism as a spectrum

from extremism through moderation is a misleading analogy. Islamism is not a spectrum; it is more like an orbit. At times Islamists appear to be approaching us. At other times they appear to be moving away from us. But the thing to remember is that they are always in motion and that they will not defy the gravity of their idea. In particular, they can't be expected to exit the orbit of the ideal Islamic state and slip into the orbit of liberal democracy. This is as likely as the conversion of these Islamists to another religion.

There are governments in the region that may decide to include Islamists. They may feel that the risks of exclusion are greater than the risks of inclusion. This might be particularly true in the monarchies, where there are certain agreed limits to the process of political change. In these settings a ruler may feel that Islamists can be compelled to play strictly according to the rules of the ruler. It's hard for me to second-guess these decisions, even though many of them have gone wrong in the past.

The problem is that when the inclusiveness bargain goes wrong, when Islamists begin to violate the rules of their contract they often begin by assailing the contract of these rulers with the United States. In fact, it's now happening across the region. The stability of the region and with it the discourse of live and let live are not being undermined by Islamists who have been excluded in places like Syria, Iraq, Libya or Tunisia; it's being undermined by the most included of the Islamists. Where these Islamists have acquired certain immunities, they are wary about criticizing their rulers head-on. So the discourse of dissent has taken the form of a particularly virulent anti-Americanism and its main theme has been that the United States is waging a war on Islam itself. Those who make this claim are in a cynical way seeking to continue the work begun on 9/11.

There is little that the United States can do to dissuade governments from giving these Islamists space or a platform. But it should be understood that the U.S. isn't obligated by such decisions, and when the U.S.

succeeds in linking these Islamists with terrorism and the support for terrorism, it is perfectly within its rights to insist that governments choose.

The United States is not at war with Islam or even with Islamism but it can no longer be complacent about Islamists who have abused their inclusion to engage in or support a clandestine war against the United States. Inclusion cannot be bought at the price of America's own interests and the lives of its own citizens at home and abroad.

Sometimes I hear the United States discussed in the Middle East as though it were some abstract principle, a set of philosophical assumptions that should be entirely consistent and free of all contradictions. The United States has pretensions to change the world. But it's also a country like any other in that it has a number of people, some 280 million Americans of all faiths, creeds and races, whose security and well-being are the very first priority of the United States government. On their behalf the United States must sometimes follow policies abroad that contradict some generally enunciated principle by which Americans govern themselves, and frankly I see no fault in that.

The late Elie Kedourie used to say that hypocrisy cannot characterize a government. It can characterize an individual but not a government. A government must protect its people and their interests. The policies it pursues to achieve this may complement one another on a practical level even though they contradict one another on a philosophical level. In an individual it is a virtue to live consistently by principle; in a government it's a dangerous indulgence. The most harmful regimes in the 20th Century ignored the interests of their own peoples, instead pursuing some self-appointed mission in the world.

So in conclusion I say this: By all means let the United States promote the idea of inclusion. That is the half of policy that is idealistic and, if you will, missionary. And let it at the same time accept the exclusion of the Islamists. That is the half of policy that is practical and

legitimately self-interested. To promote any other policy would be an irresponsible gamble unbecoming of the world's only superpower.

### **NASR TAHA MUSTAFA:**

Regarding today's subject, we must first understand the difficulty of defining and understanding many concepts of Islamism. Before talking about inclusion or exclusion of Islamic movements, we must explore the reasons behind problems in Islamic understandings. This means that we have a problem in the Islamic world concerning the absence of freedom and the culture of authority is deeply rooted in the Islamic world and left its fingerprints on all ways of our life—social, economic, cultural.

Dictatorship: We suffer from it at the level of the state, the tribe, the school, the university, the family, in all aspects of life. One of the most important impacts is extremism and extremism on all its ways, not only religious or Islamic extremism. We had too many types of extremism—right, left, Islamic, et cetera.

We also suffer from backwardness in all its forms—scientific, political, cultural, economic. This also reflects on our daily life.

From the backwardness and extremism we have a distorted comprehension of some principles of our religion. This lack stems from the history, the recent history and its effect on our educational systems, especially in our religious education.

This also led to differences between all the sects and trends in Islam and if we take, for example, the political action, the political parties, human rights, Jihad, terrorism, dialogue, relationships with the West, elections, and economics we will find that we have too many views across the spectrum of the society and the gaps are very wide between the factions.

To that we can add that we have the problem of

Palestine, which also impacted on our lives as Muslims. Therefore, a just cause like the Palestinian cause, people suffering from occupation of their land, transformed outside to a pretext for political parties or the regimes to impose their own agendas.

I would like to ask how as Muslims we can be frank with ourselves regarding these questions. How can we review our traditional concepts, how we can modernize these concepts without hurting our deep belief in the Koran? How can we tackle the question of haram, the forbidden in our daily life? Extremism and violence no doubt are the result of all these things, and the lack of understanding, and of dictatorship and also of the occupation suffered by the Palestinians.

When we come to the Islamic movement and their experience in our region we will have two options, either inclusion or exclusion, but if we take the exclusion where will we end? I think that the result is the future is bleak, very bleak. If we choose inclusion, on what basis and what are the principles upon which we can build such an inclusion? We cannot discuss this thing in abstract. If we don't discuss all the things that I mentioned before—education, dictatorship, especially education, we have a huge problem regarding education. But after the element of September when the United States started to tackle the question of education maybe we can reach a state of an absence of a dialogue. Maybe there is a problem regarding education and this bad understanding of Islam and Islamism is the result of a heritage of backwardness and a lack of understanding of the modern world. All these things need to be modernized and to be reviewed that will be adapted into our modern life.

Since I'm coming from Yemen, if we take the Yemeni experience, in fact, when it is said that Yemen is a hotbed of terrorism, it is not true. This means that Yemen has a long experience and dialogue with the Islamism and Islamists.

Since the 1970s the Islamist movement in Yemen is part of the dialogue sometimes within the govern-

ment, sometimes outside the government, but always without any kind of violence or political disturbance.

The phenomenon of extremism is very limited in Yemen. What this means is that all the extremist elements, their influence is very limited, but if ten extremists will lead their attack on the Cole this doesn't mean that extremism and violence is the rule in Yemen.

The political regime in Yemen is based on pluralism and democracy since 1990. Since the reunification of Yemen, it was able to absorb Islamists through the Islah government for four years in the government. After the 1997 elections, the Islah Party left the government. This means that this experience is good and mature and could be followed up. I know is that there is a dialogue between the representatives of the United States and the Islamist movement in Yemen, and the United States always encourages the Islamists in Yemen to participate in the government and to be part of the democratic process.

If we look to the example of Kuwait, because I think it's also a mature experience, yesterday the Emir of Kuwait called for the confrontation of extremism and asked that of the members of the Islamist movements in the parliament. The phenomenon of extremism is not very important and does not dominate the country, but we can also discuss what are the reasons behind this extremism. Maybe it's in part because the people do not understand really what's going on. If al-Qaeda says that the infidels should be out of the Arabian Peninsula this means a shortcoming in their methodology and their comprehension of modern life and all things that we witness today.

So what's the solution for these people: To wipe them out or to have a dialogue? I think should be discussed and we as Islamic countries are more concerned by this than the United States.

The criteria of inclusion is democracy, elections and legitimacy. This criteria should be the basis for dialogue with the Islamists.

Egypt has suffered from extremism, but those who follow the current dialogue in Egypt, within the Jama'ah Islamiya think this was a very good experience to a certain extent and it could reflect positively on the political life in Egypt. I think that the Egyptian government is part of this experience, if not sponsoring it, and it could lead to the elimination of the idea of violence in political life.

At the level of the Arab and Islamic world we have still a lot of time before Islamist reach power through elections or through violence. The reason is because the Islamist movement could not till now present themselves to the people or to the Islamic world. They could not convince the people of their methods because these movements are still absorbed by the heritage of backwardness and the indecision concerning their views in politics, economy and social efforts. No one can accept these Islamists as their legitimate government without having a clear understanding of the methods they would apply.

Finally, before going to discussion, I would like to talk about the United States and its relationship with the Islamic world. I think that the United States and the people of the United States do not have any conflict with or intend to wage a "civilizational war" against the Islamic world. There is no heritage of enmity or revenge between the United States and the Islamic world.

The second thing is that the American people are a loving optimistic, and positive people. They don't have the vision or belief of superiority towards others. This is very good and could be considered a basis for dialogue with the Islamic world.

One thing must be clarified: the bias towards Israel, and against the Palestinians. This could endanger the interests of the United States in a vital region like the Arab and Islamic world. I think that the United States can play an active role in resolving this issue and avoid many problems that might occur. The United States is not the victim of the element of September 11th,

which was the result of many factors. The United States should not hold the entire Islamic world responsible for what happened on the 11th of September because of the actions of some individuals.

We also need a dialogue among us, the Muslims, to study these extremist movements and to prevent them from developing. We need to adopt to what we can call the development of moderation in the Islamic world. And finally, we also need a dialogue with the United States in this regard, a responsible dialogue with no bias and prejudice.

Thank you very much.

*Note: Transcript by Federal News Service*