America and Political Islam

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Abstract

The study aimed at reconnoitering the thinking of the responsible elite of the American Foreign Policy towards Political Islam, for the policy of the United States after the cold war appear to be affected by the danger of Islam-Phobia. The responsible elite of the American Foreign Policy considers the good Islamists are those who Shum politics and those who represent model Islam following of the west.

Introduction

Political Islam, or Islamism is an academic, political and media expression used to describe the change of political movements, which believe in Islam as a political system for governance, meaning belief in Islam not only a religion, but a political, social, legal and economic system qualified to build associations of the state. And from the point of view of the Islamists, using this expression is considered springing from deeply misunderstanding of the philosophy of Islam, for they believe that Islam is the mere religion that in its first spread era could form the nucleus of the social, service and political associations, on both internal and external levels, opposite of other religions that their founders could not form the beginnings of a state.

The concept of applying the Islamic legislation (Asharia) with al "outs and ins" in politics meets disagreement from liberal trends, or secular movements. Also propagandists of organized political Islam in accordance with groups and parties do not differ from others with authorities, except by adopting Islam as an invocation of God and state.

Almost nine years after the attacks of September 11th; 2001 the United States is still struggling to define its relationship with Islam. No shortage of ink has been spilled on the subject. Some pundits claim that a clash of civilizations is upon us, and say that the U.S. is at war with Islam itself. Others argue that violent Islamic extremism is a fringe phenomenon; the vast majority of Muslims are peace loving people who abhor terrorism. Some see the Islamic religion as responsible for the stagnant development and autocratic governance in Muslim countries; while others believe Islam can be a progressive force for change. Some advocate engaging with political Islam, others advocate containing it, and still others advocate fighting it head – on. The average American is trapped in the middle of these fierce debates, with little certain knowledge and only media stereotypes to navigate by.

Significance of study

In this research I do attempt to shed light on the following sides of the topic "political Islam" The idiomatic meaning of the concept of the Political Islam. I try to show the beginnings of the Political Islam expression. Mentioning some Islamic movements and identifying them in a consize from. And I endeavour to display the point of view of the west and their stand towards this concept and attempting to find the necessary solutions and suggestions to deface the misshaped and negative image about Islam.

Problem of study

The problem of study concentrates on Americas struggle to define its relationship with Islam. A group of politicians claim that there is a clash of civilizations prevailing.i.e America is at war with Islam, because of Islamic extremism and violence which became a fringe phenomenon.

In spite of that the majority of Muslims are peace loving people who hate and shun terrorism. Some critics see Islamic religion as responsible for the stagnant development and autocratic governance in Muslim countries, mean while others believe Islam con be progressive force for change. Some advocate engaging with political Islam, other advocate containing it and still others advocate fighting it head on. Americans are really trapped in the middle of these violent debates, while media stereotypes to navigate by.

Methodology of Study

This research sticks to the historical methodology in collecting information and different sources.

Hypotheses of Study

- political Islam is a danger against the American and Western interests.
- The Islamic Revolution in Iran has a role in changing the political Islam track.
- The economic factor has a role in showing the Islamic Awakening.
- Do the incidents of September 11th, 2001 have a role in the negative look to the political Islam and Islamic Movements?

Americans cherish principles of individual liberty and freedom of religion, and the pride themselves on their tolerant, pluralistic culture. Even in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, many Americans triad to demonstrate sensitivity to and tolerance fore Muslim culture. President George W. Bush insisted that United States was not at war with Islam, but instead was aggressively waging war against a handful of violent extremists who had hijacked what was essentially a good and peaceful faith. [1]Even though some Americans hate crimes against Muslims, other Americans worked hard to reach across the gap between their civilizations. Americans consumed books to better understand Islam, outreach programs, and the US government sought to soften its Global War on Terror with sensitivity training and better relationships with the American Muslim Community.
Despite these efforts, the rift between non-Muslim Americans and the Muslim world is growing. The relationship is still characterized by mutual fear and misunderstanding. A 2006 USA Today / Gallup poll found that American Muslims are loyal to the United States . [2]When asked what they most admired about Muslim societies, the two most common answer were "Nothing" and "I don't Know". These accounted for 57% of the responses. [3]Suspicions of Muslims has actually increased in the years since September 11th. In 2002 only 14% of Americans believed that Islam helped stoke violence against non-Muslims; by 2006 that percentage had more than doubled to 36%[4]

What has gone wrong? Why are most Americans so uncomfortable with Islam?

This paper suggests three reasons why Americans maintain so much hostility and skepticism toward Islam. First, Islam's close interdependence between faith and politics is fundamentally different than the Western concept of "separation of church and state." Second, Americans have an extremely low opinion of countries currently under purported Islamic rule. The underdevelopment, autocratic governance, and disregard for human rights in these countries make Americans wary of supporting any expression of political Islam. Third, every new act of violence committed in the name of Islam erodes the willingness of Americans to see Islam as a peaceful religion. Particularly damaging have been high-profile cases of violence or support for terrorism among supposedly peaceful organizations representative of mainstream Muslims.

How one interprets this data largely reflects one's boarder worldview, and largely coincides with One's political orientation. Conservatives tend to blame Islam itself for these three problems and generally believe that a firm, confrontational posture is necessary. Liberals are more likely to blame political factors for these problems, particularly western policies that have adversely impacted the Arab and Muslim worlds. Although they admit problems in the Muslim world, they are more likely to call for engagement with political Islam, and believe that, and believe that different Western policies might help bridge the gap between civilizations.

Different Foundations

Christianity and Islam followed remarkably different paths of political development. When the Christian religion was born, its followers were a tiny and persecuted minority within the vast and powerful Roman Empire .

Jesus was not a powerful leader or military commander; he was a poor Jewish carpenter who was executed by the religious and elite. Jesus himself had taught that the " Kingdom of God " was something totally separate from the kingdoms and powers of this world. He memorably said, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's" (Mattew 22:21) implying a fundamental separation of faith and politics. For approximately three hundred years, Christian experience reflected Jesus' teachings. Christians lived and worshipped in small, sometimes secretive communities and held no political power until the Emperor Constantine's dramatic conversion and the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. At that point Christianity became the official state religion, and everything changed.

The establishment of Christianity as a state religion dramatically increased its political power, but it also led to serious moral and spiritual compromise. The intermixing of politics and religion was arguably damaging to both. Monastic communities formed to escape from an institutional, politicized church that wax increasingly seen as corrupt and antithetical to true Christianity. Religion became a tool in the hand of the state, and the state a means for protecting religious elites. The union of politics and religion led to dark chapters of western history like the Crusades and bitter wars between Catholics and Protestants. When the Enlightenment came to Europe . Its key intellectuals looked back on the tragedy of the preceding millennium and saw a stark lesson: religion and politics function best if they are kept apart.

The Unites States was largely settled by refugees who had endured religious discrimination in Europe and sought a new homeland where they could worship freely. Numerous religious denominations found refuge in the United States , although most of them were Christian or Jewish. American culture and values were forged in this pluralistic and tolerant environment. The founding fathers codified enlightenment thought in the first amendment to the US constitution, which reads "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment or religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Thomas Jefferson was the first to use the phrase "separation of church and stat", which has since become a cornerstone of American government.

The United States is nevertheless a deeply religious country. Judaism and Christianity have a powerful influence on U.S. culture and government. Many Christians believe the United States was founded as a Christian nation, and polls show 44% of Americans believe that the Bible should inform the country's laws.[5] However, most Americans also believe to at least some degree in religious tolerance and the right to worship freely. The strong Christian impulse in the U.S. is tempered by its Enlightenment traditions, by liberal institutions and laws, and by secular Americans who believe that religion and state are best kept apart.

Islam's theology and history are rooted in a radically different context. From the beginning, religion and politics were inseparable. The Prophet Muhammad sought to create a political community on earth that would live in obedience to the will and laws of God. Unlike Christianity, Islam prescribed an entire body of law to rightly guide the ummah or Islamic community: sharia. Where as Christianity began as a powerless minority sect, the Prophet Muhammad oversaw the creation of a strong Muslim community in Medina that in very short order became an empire. Muslims remember the reign of the first four caliphs as a golden age, when devout and benevolent leaders oversaw a true Islamic civilization. Ever since that time, Muslims have sought to reestablish a political system that resembles this lost golden age. L. Carl Brown calls this idea "the centerpiece of Muslim political theory."[6] Most Muslims dream of the day when a just Islamic government, perfectly applying sharia law, will replace the secular autocracies that currently prevail in Muslim countries.

Westerners feel threatened by Islam's insistence on marrying religion with politics, because this undermines the "separation of church and state" that Western institutions are built on. The West learned through hard experience that the only way to prevent tyranny and discrimination by one group was to establish pluralistic institutions built, as much as possible, on universal human values. By definition, the Islamic vision of the ummah elevates the Islamic religion above all others.

Many Muslims argue that Islam is a religion of great tolerance, and point to the great Muslim civilization in medieval Spain , where Jews and Christians lived in relative freedom. The Islamic concept of religious tolerance is very different from the Western one, however. In the West, tolerance means that individuals can peacefully coexist and practice their respective religions equally within a pluralistic, secular political order. In Islam, tolerance means that minority religions enjoy rights under an Islamic government.

Most non-Muslims do not find this prospect attractive. They do not wish to live under Islamic rule, and do not expect that their rights will be fully respected within an Islamic system.

Westerners also worry about Islam because they see it encroaching on their secular, liberal institutions. Westerners have great respect for the rule of law, which is supposed to be universal and binding on all citizens in the same fashion, without regard to race, color, or creed. Throughout Europe and the U.S. , however, Muslim communities often try to establish parallel institutions build on sharia law. Western non-Muslims worry that these parallel Islamic institutions weaken the state, and lead to social and religious fragmentation within society.

Examples of Islamic Governance

The second reason that Americans are so wary of political Islam is the example of Islamic governance on display in countries like Iran , Saudi Arabia , and Afghanistan . When Americans look at these examples, they do not see peaceful political-religious orders that respect human dignity and protect freedom. On the contrary, they see the consolidation of power among religious elites and terrible injustice and suffering among the population.

The Iranian revolution in 1979 was the event that introduced most Americans to political Islam. Overnight, a country that had seemed progressive and westernizes was on fire with anti-American radicalism. Ayatollah Khomeini shouted inflammatory rhetoric about "the Great Satan", while the U.S. embassy hostage crisis humiliated President Carter and seized the attention of the country. Today Ira's government looks nothing like the enlightened, devout rule envisioned for the umman: President Amadenijad and the Revolutionary Guard seem determined to cling to power, using police crackdowns to crush demonstrations and wielding religious authority to maintain their rule.

Americans regard Saudi Arabia with fear and wonder. The Committee for the promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice reminds Christians of the Pharisees, religious leaders of Jesus' day who imposed their own concept of holiness on the people. Jesus had harsh words for the Pharisees, who he believed misunderstood true religion and forced the people to carry an unnecessarily heavy burden. Americans do not want to live under a system where self-appointed religious authorities can roam the streets, striking or beating citizens who do not conform to their idea of holiness. Americans also believe that Saudi Arabia does not respect basic rights for women. In the United States the burqa is a symbol of oppression. Meanwhile, Americans see Saudi princes fly to Europe or America to squander oil money in casinos and strip bars.

Afghanistan under the Taliban is one of the most terrible examples of theocracy. The Taliban robbed the Afghan people of simple joys like music and kites, blew up priceless historical treasures like the Buddhist statues in Bamiyan, and enforced rigid codes of behavior on the people. Taliban members committed terrible crimes, like throwing acid in the face of young girls simply trying to go to school. The organization also nurtured terrorists and had the self-declared intention of spreading their version of Islam throughout the world.

Non of these examples provide Americans with a good image of Islam. Although many Muslim commentators depict Muslim governance as a good and beautiful thing that would respect justice and human dignity, Americans see few examples of this in practice. Most Americans are deeply distrustful of attempts to build utopian communities, because they have seen other ideologies – like communism or Christian theocracies – fail to deliver good governance. They believe that political Islam will generally lead to governments like those in Iran , Saudi Arabia , and Afghanistan – not to enlightened rule.

Americans also see problems with autocratic governments and underdevelopment throughout the Arab world. They also see systematic discrimination against religious minorities. Some Americans associate these problems with Islam itself.

Violence in the Name of Islam

The third reason Americans often distrust Islam is the violence done in its name. many Americans recognize that the terrorism perpetrated by organizations like al-Qa'eda represents only a tiny minority of Muslims, and that mot of them are largely quiet, peace-loving people. Even after the September 11th attacks, many Americans were willing to give Islam the benefit of the doubt. The above-mentioned poll showed that in 2002 only 11% of Americans held Islam responsible for provoking violence.

The problem is that new links to terrorism and violence keep emerging, even within allegedly peaceful organizations that are supposed to represent the Muslim mainstream. The United States government spent the better part of the 1190s and 2000s trying to prosecute the Holy Land Foundation, the largest Muslim charity in the United States , because it funneled millions of dollars to Hamas. In 1993 Hamas fundraisers met for a secret meeting in Philadelphia , which unbeknownst to them was wiretapped by the FBI. The first US case against the Holy Land Foundation ended in a mistrial, but in 2007 the governmet won its case and the Holy Land Foundation was shut down. The Holy Land Foundation was the central hub in a vast, far-reaching network of Muslim fundraising in the U.S. that existed to support Hamas.

Recently the Council on American-Islamic Relations, or CAIR, has garnered much media attention. CAIR is the largest Muslim civil rights organization in the United States and claims to speak on behalf of more than six million Muslims. It has campaigned tirelessly to promote a better image of Muslims. CAIR leaders have met with U.S. Presidents, Congressmen, and military and intelligence leaders. They conduct sensitivity training for law enforcement organizations and have tried to show that most Muslims are peaceful, innocent people. The problem is that CAIR itself has terrorist links. Two of its founding members were at the secret Hamas meeting in 1993, and started CAIR as a front to support their Hamas fundraising efforts. They also have relationships with Sheik Omar Abder Rahman and Hamas leader Mousa Abu Marzouk, and have connections with a number of other convicted terrorists. The FBI has refused to work with CAIR since 2008 because of its terror ties. Even many Muslims are distancing themselves from the organization because it is so thoroughly entwined with terrorism.

Other examples have damaged the reputation of Muslims in America . Mussammil "Mo" Ahmed is a Pakistani immigrant who founded a Muslim cable network called Bridges to "portray Muslims in a more positive light." However, Ahmad repeatedly beat his wife Aasiya. When she filed for a divorce and a restraining order, Ahmed sawed off her head with a knife. This horrific honor crime seemed to confirm the worst stereotypes about the Muslim world.

To cite a final example, the U.S. government turned to Abduraham Alamoudi to improve its relationship with the American Muslim community. As the head of the Washington-based American Muslim Council, he was well positioned to form relationships with government leaders and spent extensive time at the White House. He served as a State Department goodwill ambassador to Muslim countries and helped create a Muslim chaplain corps for the Defense Department. The problem is that he was secretly raising funds for al-Qa'eda at the same time. He is now serving a 23 year prison sentence for terror ties.

What makes these examples so disturbing is that these individuals and organization supposedly represented the broader Muslim mainstream. Their mission was to show that Muslims are peaceful and tolerant, so their links to violence and terrorism have caused great damage to the Muslim image in America .

Rival Interpretations

Americans are sharply divided regarding how they should understand these phenomena.

Some Americans, most often on the political right, believe that Islam itself is to blame for these problems. They believe that Islam's insistence on uniting religion and politics, the poor conditions in much of the Muslim world, and the apparent relationship between Muslims and violence make Islam fundamentally incompatible with Western society. These Americans are likely to say that Islam is an intolerant, violent religion that promotes hate and discrimination. They are leading the attack on Muslim organizations like CAIR and are wary of any attempts by Muslims in the West to form parallel Islamic institutions. They worry about the creeping of sharia into Western societies, they worry about the demographic rise of Muslims in Europe and the U.S. because of high birth rates, and they worry that Muslims are not integrating into Western culture and are not loyal to it.

At the other end of the spectrum are Americans who do not blame Islam. They might admit that these problems exist, but they do not believe that Islam -or at least Islam alone- is responsible. They believe that the more radical and violent expressions of Islam are a recent historical development, and came primarily in response to political and economic factors like Western colonialism, the dislocation caused by Israel's establishment, and U.S. policy, particularly during the Global War on Terror. They believe that the violent actions of some Muslims are limited to a tiny minority, and that the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful people with whom they can be good neighbors.

They believe that Muslims are badly misunderstood in the West, and that the media and Hollywood perpetrate harmful stereotypes of Muslims.

Between these two extremes lie a variety of viewpoints. Many Americans simply don't know what to think. They receive mixed messages from their society about Islam, but don't know what they should really believe.

Bridging the GAP

What will it take to bridge the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims Americans? Each of these concerns must be addressed.

First, both Muslims and non-Muslims need to explore ways that Islamic theology and political philosophy can be reconciled to Western concepts of individual liberty, pluralism, and democracy. This is not an easy undertaking, but conflict will continue between the West and the Islamic world so long as they are built on such different political and religious foundations. Many Islamic scholars have already begun the brave work of exploring how Islam and Western liberal institutions might interact. They must continue this research, and they must work alongside Western non-Muslims to identify possible solutions that are mutually agreeable.

Second, Muslims must champion reform in both Muslim-dominant countries and in their own communities in the West. They must honestly admit and confront the shortcomings that exist in their societies. Such as underdevelopment, poor governance, and human rights violations. They must demonstrate through practical action that Islam is not responsible for and does not tolerate these shortcomings; instead, they must show that Islam motivates dedicated Muslims to address and heal them. At the same time, Americans must recognize the political and economic factors that contribute to social problems, and admit the own role that American policy can play in shaping these factors. They must challenge their own stereotypes and preconceptions by listening to Muslim grievances and considering ways to improve their own policy toward the Muslim world.

Third, Muslims need a credible and unified voice to show the U.S. public that they do not support terrorism. They need to demonstrate that theirs is a rich and varied culture, which respects human rights and tolerates religious diversity. Unfortunately, this credible and unified voice does not currently exist in the United States, the largest Muslim advocacy organizations in the country have destroyed their credibility and tarnished the images of all Muslims through their relationships with terrorist organizations that can clearly articulate or speeches. They must also actively partner with the American government, law enforcement agencies, and other civic society organizations to combat extremist ideology and dismantle terrorist networks. Muslims must demonstrate through actions as well as words that they are dedicated citizens who wish to safeguard the peacefulness of their Communities and their country. Non-Muslim American, in turn, must dialogue with and cooperate with these organizations; instead, they should continue a process of cross-cultural engagement to facilitate mutual learning, understanding, and cooperation.

The challenging of cross-cultural dialog are always immense, but these are challenges that must be overcome. The relationship between Muslims and the West has always been fraught with difficulties and the advent of modern Islamic terrorism and the West's heavy-handed responses have only heightened the danger. Those who care about peace must strive to overcome these challenges and prevent the situation from escalating into a full-blown clash of civilizations.

Conclusion

The research proposes reasons of the Americans' hostility and skepticism of political Islam, especially Islam's. Close interdependence between religion and politics. It is fundamentally different from the Western concept of "separation of church and state." Secondly America has pretty low opinion of countries prevailing under a claimed Islamic rule. The underdevelopment, autocratic governance, and disregard for human rights in these countries make America wary of supporting any esepression of political Islam. Thirdly, every new act of violence committed in the name of Islam erodes the willingness of America to see Islam as a peaceful religion. Particularly damaging have been highprofile cases of violence or support for terrorism among supposedly peaceful organizations representative of mainstream Muslims.

This data immensely reflects one's broader worldview, and coincides with one's political orientation. Conservtives tend to blame Islam itsell for these problems and generally belief that a firm, confrontational posture is necessary. Liberals are more likely to blame political factors for these problems, particularly worlds. Although they admit problems in the Muslim world, they are more likely to call for engagement with political Islam, and believe that different Western policies might help bridge the gap between civilizations.

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[1] Bush, George w. {XXX}
[2] Esposito. John. "who Speaks for Islam?" 2007, p.x
[3] Ibid, p.1
[4] Ibid, p.46
[5] Esposito. John. "who Speaks for Islam?" 2007, 49
[6] Brown, L. Carl. Religion and state. 2000. p.36