

UC-BERKELEY

Center on Institutions and Governance Presentation No. 6



Democracy and Global Islam Conference Notes

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February 2005

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Center for Institutions and Governance Working Papers Series:
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Given the declared geostrategic purpose of your seminar; and given the fact that I belong to a movement that, though non-violent, rubs shoulders with a very violent reality, and does more than merely think it out; I'll go straight to the point, and will make my contribution a testimony stemming from the heart of the Muslim world rather than a purely academic reflection.

I'll start by asserting that the Muslim world is far from being a monolithic block and that its history with the USA didn't start on September 11. The sociopolitical dynamic is much more complicated than that binary image that has been developed for the needs of Mr. Bush's realpolitik.

However, we can extract a somehow caricatured, yet pedagogic truth for the American pragmatism:

The Muslim world is a ground for two growing spheres of influence, which are the appointed political mediators in a society that critically lacks one:

- 1) The first one issues from a diffuse and heteroclitic yet profound intelligentsia, a lucid one that keeps with a tradition of reflection and adaptation which is at the heart of the Islamic teaching, a moderate teaching by definition (for me the expression moderate Islam is odd and euphemistic). I call it sphere of influence for it makes use of various means, going from generating a political movement to writing in an aside a book that has no social commitment whatsoever.
- 2) The other one is rather contemporary and is made worse by globalization that abrades all identities along with the Muslim one. Its main characteristics are shallowness, subjectivity, emotionalism, and refusal of change; Islam for this school is seen as a refuge-identity and radicalism as the ultimate response to the other radicalism. I can't recall who once said that Mr. Bush is the best recruiting agent for Ben Laden and that Ben Laden is Bush's best sergeant.

And between these two minority poles wavers a human mass more likely, if nothing is done, to choose the extremist side of the range, driven by endogenous as well as international political reasons.

The endogenous elements are:

- 1- The autocratic tradition has transferred the frustration and the social unrest it causes to the "enemy", and traded the universalistic tradition of Islam for a xenophobic but subservient interpretation.
- 2- Virulent illiteracy provides no intellectual immunity and gives room for emotion, reaction and manipulation.
- 3- Indigence: nothing to lose, nothing to gain.
- 4- Mass-media combined with the petrodollar reveal a dualistic (Manichean) discourse widely popular considering the above cited reasons.

Exogenous elements:

- 1- The inequitable American policy in the Middle East.
- 2- the colonialist trauma
- 3- the Gulf war
- 4- Globalization that engenders more and more exclusion.
- 5- Mass media (once again) that makes youth daydream and triggers enormous frustration.

Remedy:

- 1- Stop supporting dictatorships and instead promoting truly democratic dynamics, "make the bet on democracy" (Oliver Roy).
- 2- Work out an actual Marshall plan for a Muslim world stricken by all kinds of policies.
- 3- Bet on education, without any cultural aggression.
- 4- Opt for a more evenhanded policy in the Middle East.